

# Victoria Memorial Square Park Improvements

Public Meeting

June 12, 2023



# Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the land we are meeting on is the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit.



# African Ancestral Acknowledgement

The City of Toronto acknowledges all Treaty peoples – including those who came here as settlers – as migrants either in this generation or in generations past - and those of us who came here involuntarily, particularly those brought to these lands as a result of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and Slavery. We pay tribute to those ancestors of African origin and descent.



# Codes of Conduct

## As a meeting participant, you agree to:

- Be an active listener and keep an open mind by valuing a diversity of views and opinions.
- Treat all participants with kindness and respect.
- Critique ideas, not individuals.
- Avoid cursing as well as language or behaviours that could otherwise be considered rude or offensive.
- Abide by the City's Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination policy by refraining from making racist, xenophobic, misogynist, homophobic, transphobic, anti-Indigenous, ableist, ageist, or other forms of discriminatory, prejudicial, exclusionary or hateful comments and questions. These will not be tolerated and may result in expulsion from the meeting and/or process.

## As City staff & process stewards, we commit to:

- Providing fair and equal access to the public engagement process to all who are interested in participating.
- Maintaining an atmosphere that is respectful of all participants and other staff members.
- Ensuring that that project outcomes and/or staff recommendations are informed by participants' concerns, interests, and desires.
- Being advocates for the integrity of the public process and ensuring it reflects as much as possible directions contained in relevant Council-approved strategies, including but not limited to the Reconciliation Action Plan, the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Action Plan, the Seniors Strategy, ChildFriendlyTO, and the Newcomer Strategy.
- Undertaking and encouraging actions by other City staff that build trust and credibility for the process among all participants.
- Providing the information participants need to meaningfully participate.



# Agenda

- 1. Introductions**
- 2. Purpose of the Meeting**
- 3. Project Timeline and Engagement Plan**
- 4. Site Background and Context**
- 5. Site Observations**
- 6. Drivers of Change**
- 7. What We've Heard So Far**
- 8. Vision Statement and Design Principles**
- 9. The Two Concepts**
- 10. Discussion**
- 11. Next Steps**

# Project Timeline and Engagement Plan

# Project Timeline

## Pre-Design:

- Determine needs based on **demographic** data, City Policies & Strategies
- Consult with local stakeholders
- Prepare RFP to hire design team

Hire Design Team

Winter 2022

Community Engagement and Design Development



Summer 2022 – Summer 2023

WE ARE HERE

Detailed Design and Hire a Construction Team



Summer 2023 – Spring 2024

Construction



Spring 2024  
(hire construction team)

Summer 2024  
(anticipated construction start)

\*The timeline is subject to change.

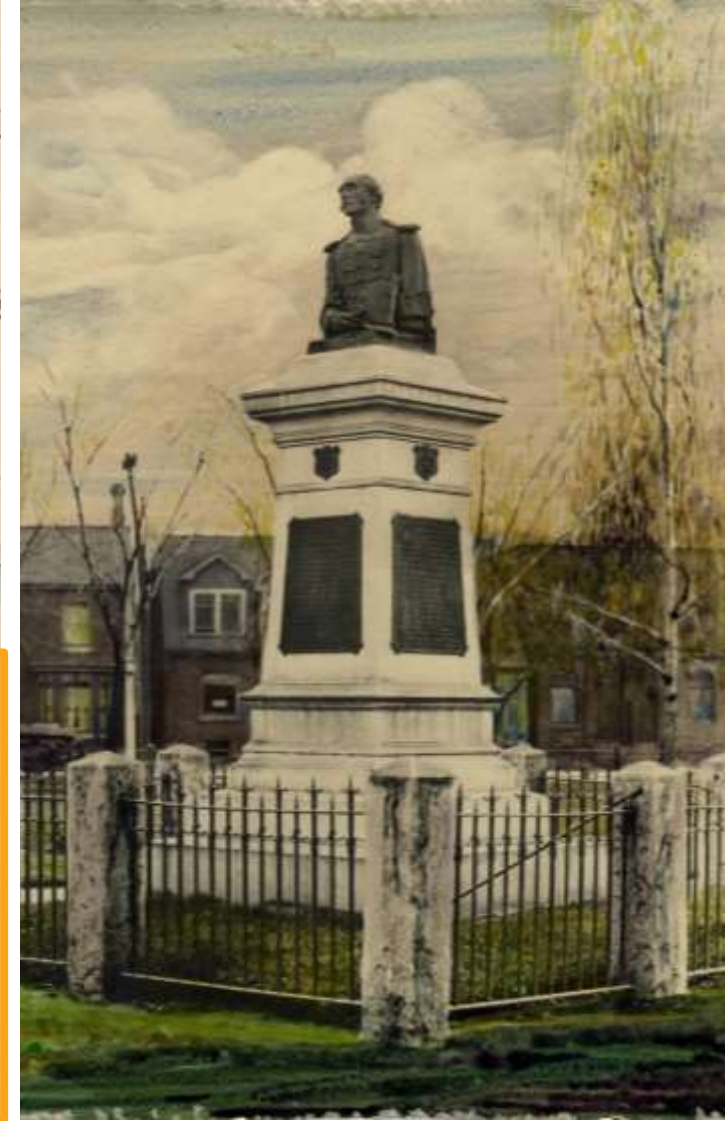
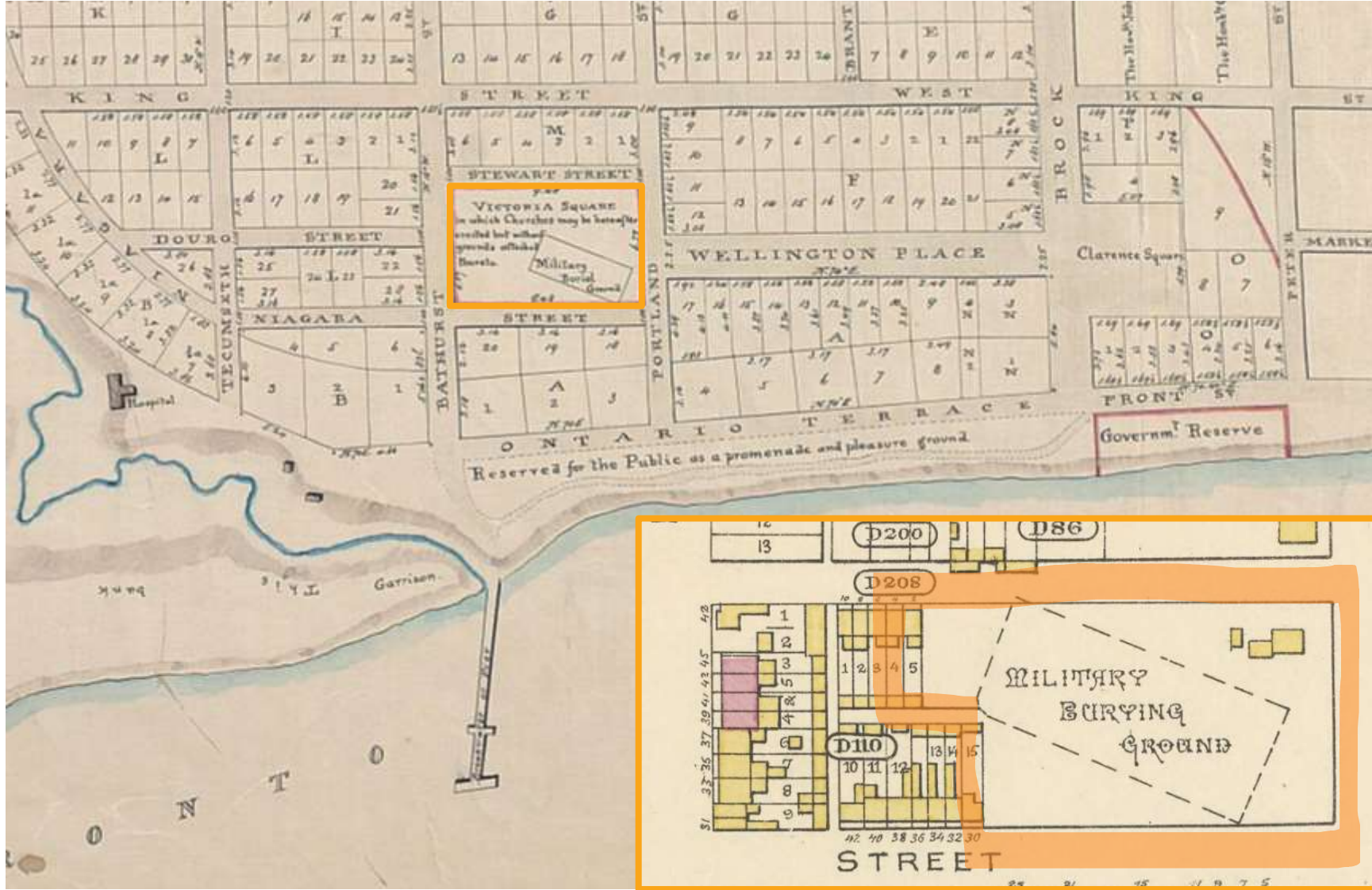
# Engagement Plan



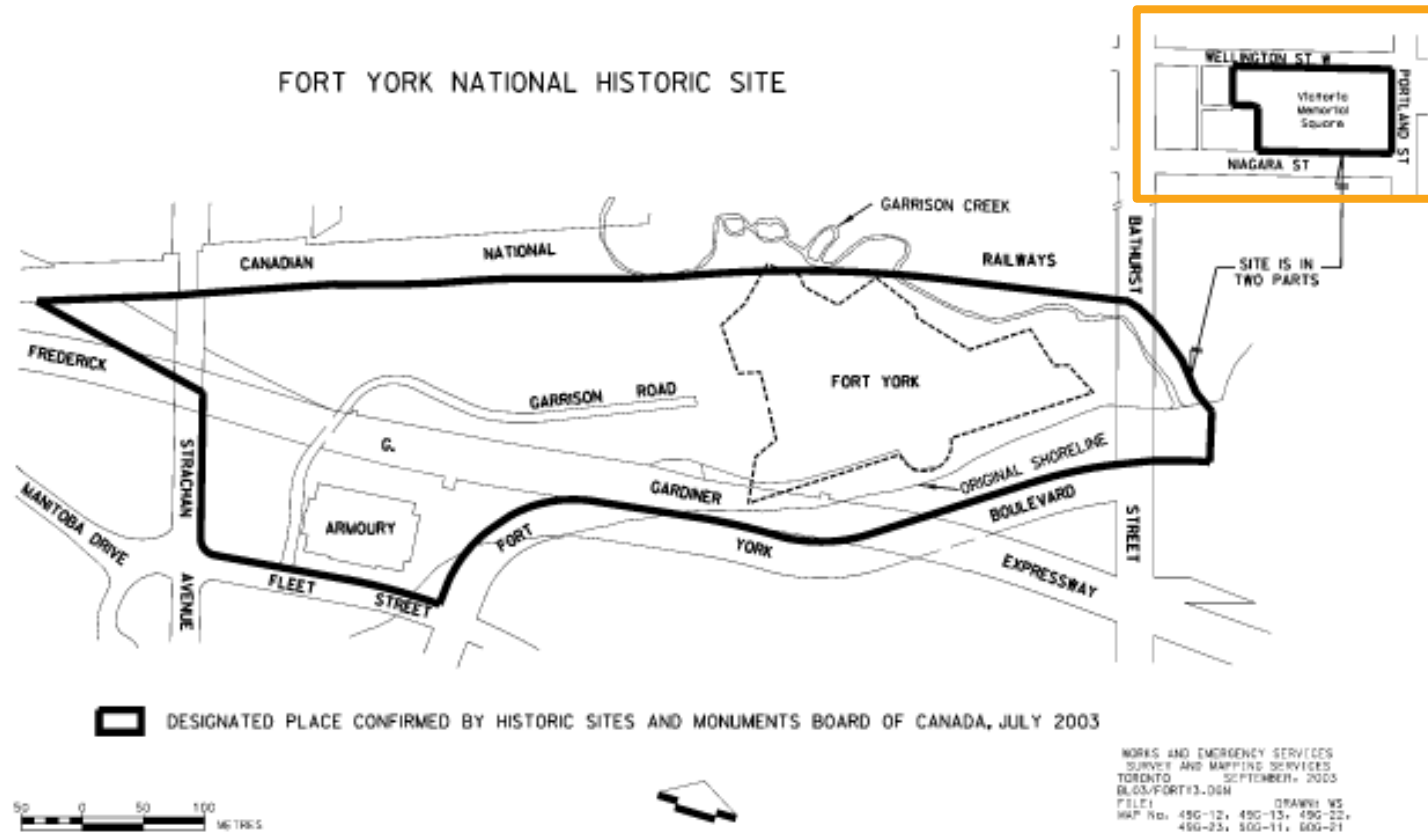


# Site Background and Context

# Site Background: Colonial History



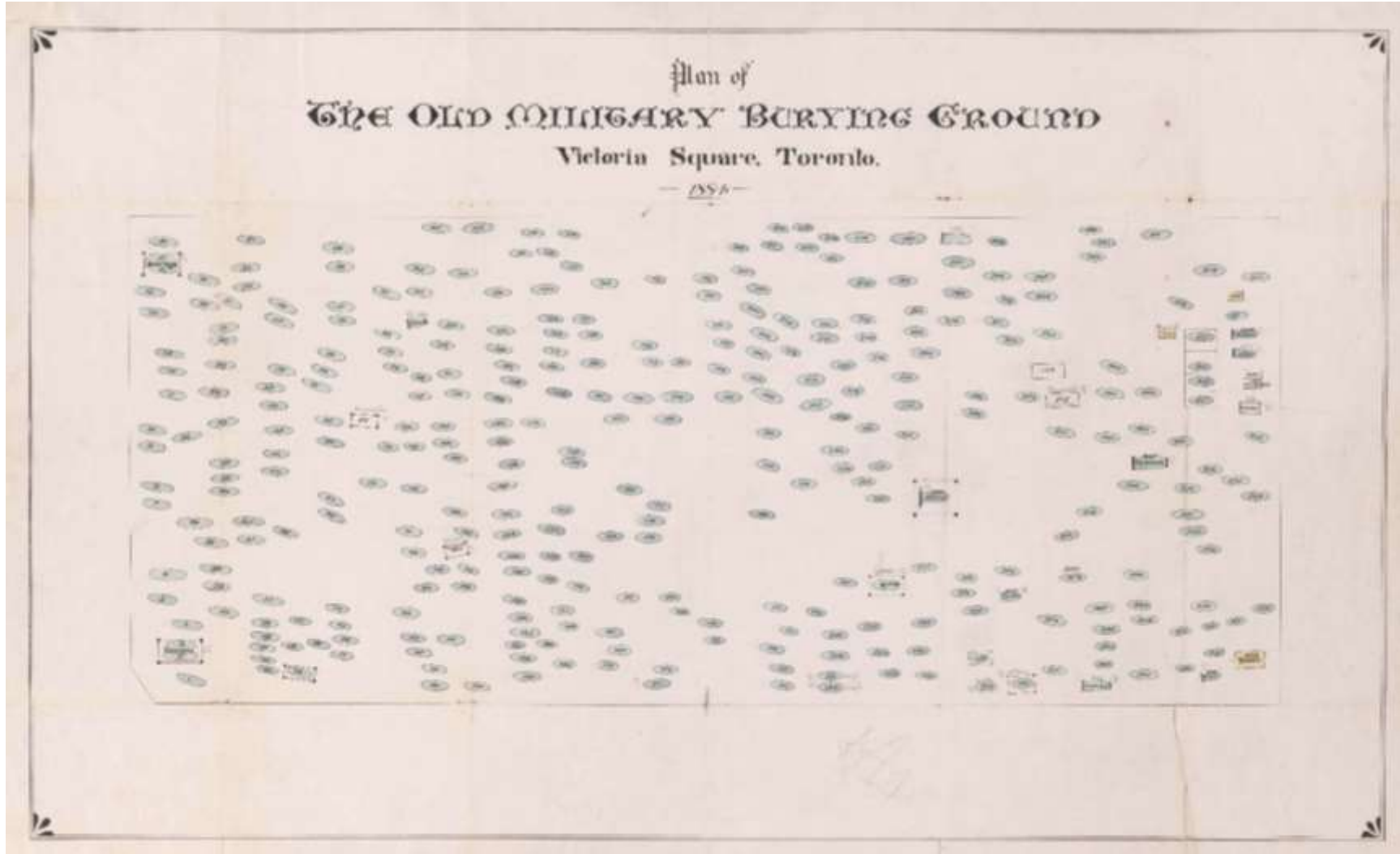
# Site Background: Colonial History



## Fort York National Historic Site

Victoria Memorial Square is ***Toronto's first European cemetery***, opened in 1793 as the military cemetery for Fort York. The last burial in Victoria Memorial Square occurred in 1863, and since the 1880s the site has been maintained by the City as a public park.

# Site Background: Colonial History



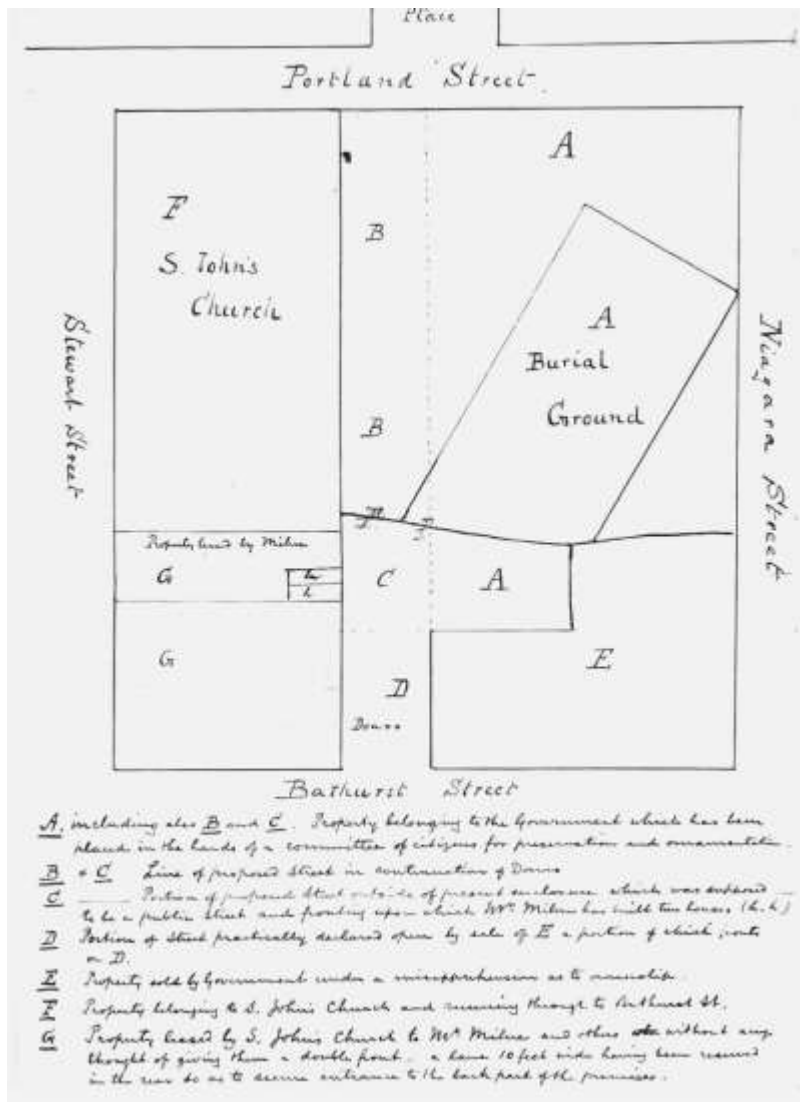
## The Old Military Burial Ground

As many as **400 burials** may have been made at the site before it was closed. An archaeological assessment carried out within the park demonstrated that human burials and scattered human remains were to be found as little as 20cm below the ground surface at that time.





# Site Background: Colonial History



# Site Context: Planning Documents



## Wellington Place Public Realm Plan

Within the study area there are two parks that provide for a variety of community uses: **Victoria Memorial (0.82 ha)** and Clarence Square (0.76 ha). These existing parks are cherished and ***intensively used by the community***. The pressure on these parks has been steadily increasing over the past decade and will continue to increase as the residential population increases.

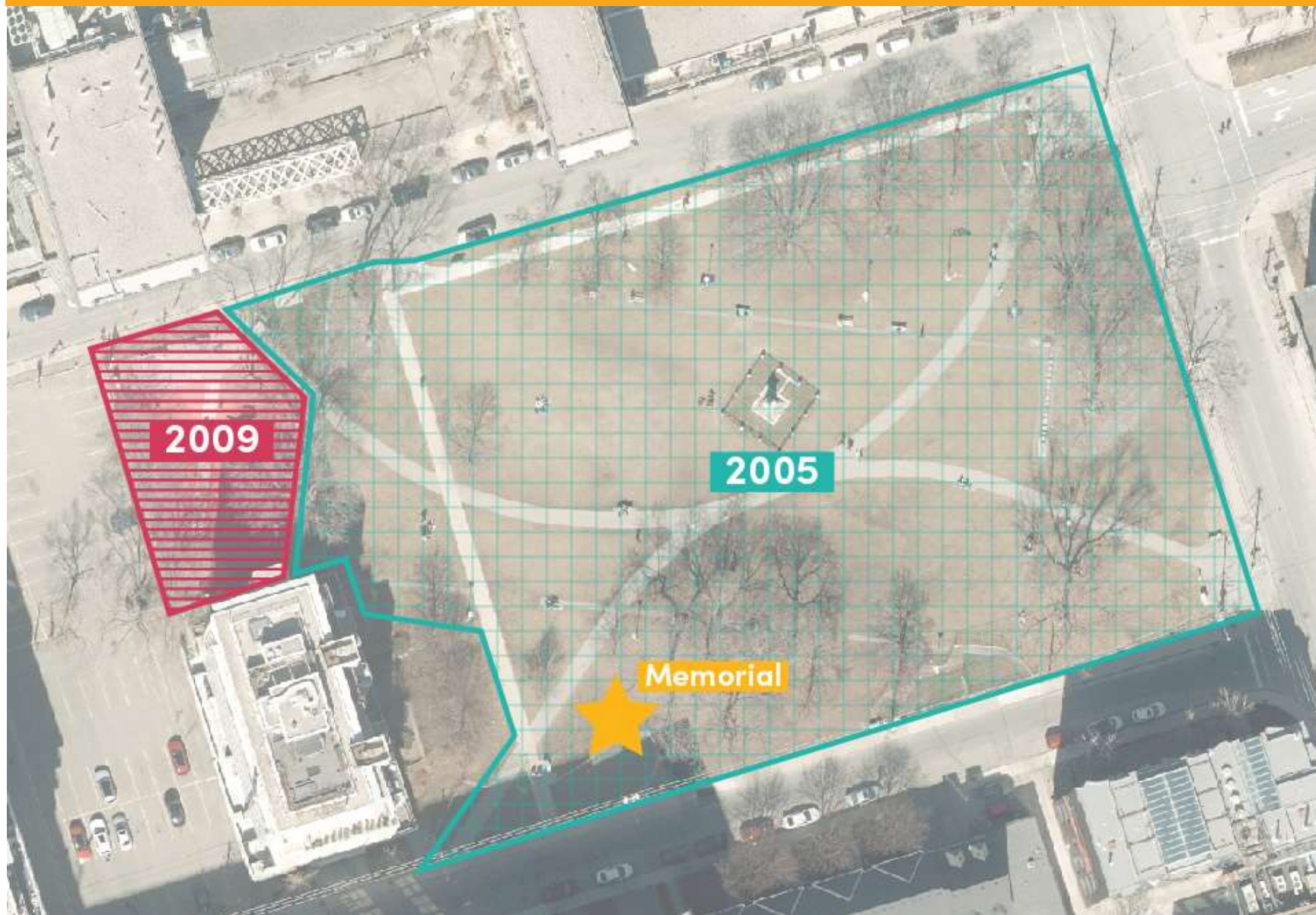


# Site Context: Connecting Projects – “The Well”



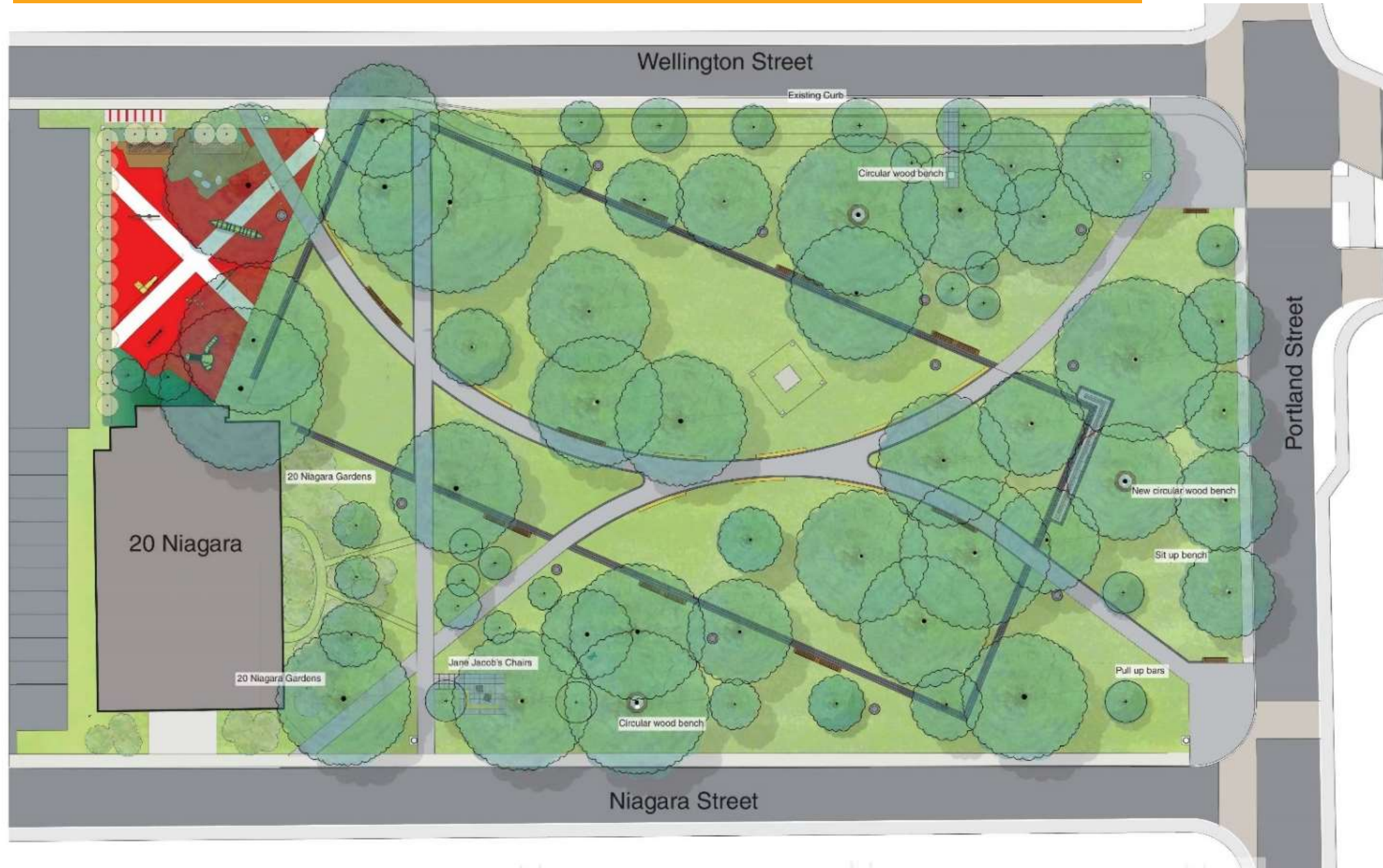


# Site Context: Previous Park Projects





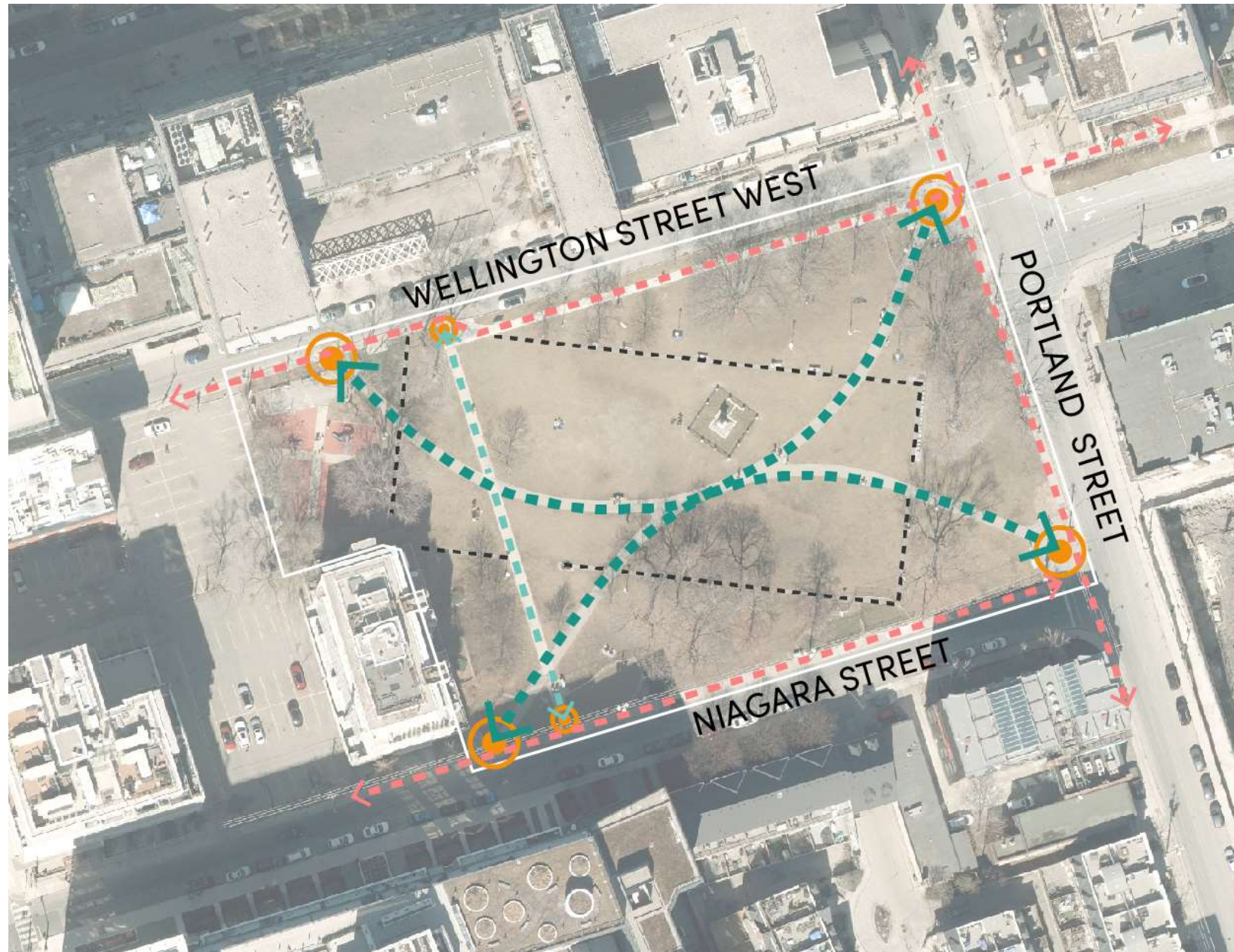
# Site Context: Previous Park Projects



# Site Observations



# Site Observations: *Circulation*

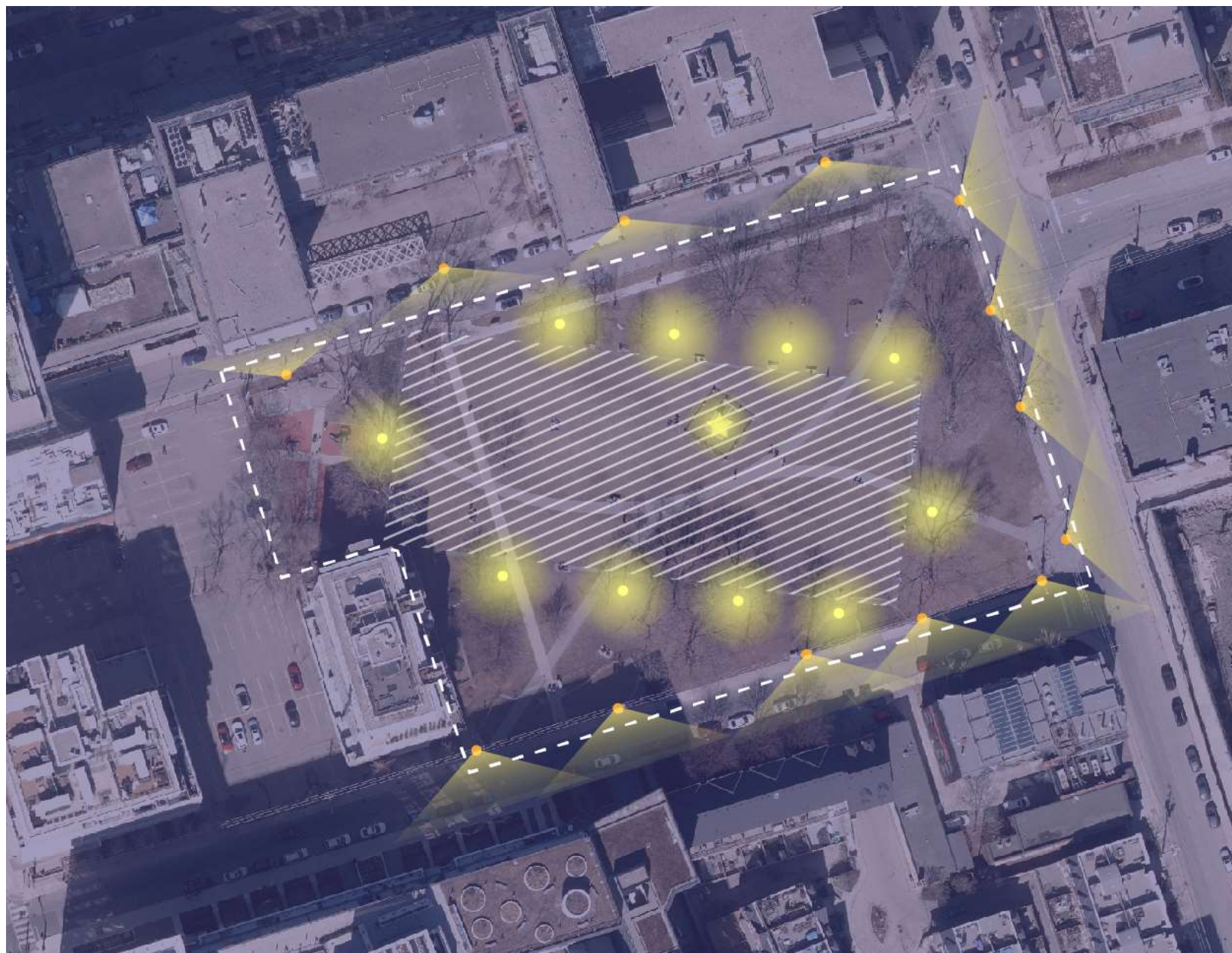


## LEGEND

- Primary Circulation through park
- Secondary Circulation through park
- Circulation around park perimeter
- Main Park Entrances
- Other Park Entrances



# Site Observations: *Lighting*





# Site observations: *Softscape*



SOIL COMPACTION – LIMITED TREE DIVERSITY – NON-NATIVE INVASIVE SPECIES



# Site observations: *Tree Species & General Health*



# Drivers of Change

## A rich colonial history

Victoria Memorial Square is a unique park site with a rich cultural heritage that dates back to the founding of the city of York. It is part of the Fort York National Historic Site and the King-Spadina Heritage Conservation District and is the site of Toronto's first settler cemetery, which includes burials of military personnel and their family members. There is an opportunity to further enhance the heritage of this site while bringing forward new heritage interpretations.



## A rich Indigenous history

Victoria Memorial Square is a site steeped in colonial history, but the story does not start there. There is also a rich and ancient Indigenous history to the site that is tied to its adjacency to Garrison Creek and the former Lake Ontario shoreline, in addition to the roles of First Nations in the War of 1812. This presence is not adequately represented in the current space.



## A protected commemorative landscape

Despite its heritage significance. The park has become damaged and spoiled by heavy use. In addition, many of the graves are relatively shallow, and are at constant risk of being compromised by dog activity. The park improvements must preserve and protect the site's historic cemetery and other heritage resources from further deterioration and should reflect respect for the importance of this commemorative landscape.





## A growing and evolving neighbourhood

The neighbourhood surrounding the park has seen dramatic increases in population growth in recent years, thanks to new development. There is a need for the park to support changing demographics as well as intensified use in this rapidly-changing area of the city. This will mean making park improvements that allow for a wider range of uses at various times of the day, and that are durable, sustainable and can withstand high traffic usage patterns.

## Out-of-balance park uses

As the community has grown around the park, the balance of users has changed. This has led to conflicts between user groups, including dogs and their owners, children and their caregivers, and others who use the space as a place to rest or hang out. There is a need for park improvements that enhance the existing park programs through the lenses of inclusivity, safety and accessibility to ensure that all park users are able to enjoy this public space.

# What We've Heard So Far

**Complete the following statement:  
“After the park improvement  
project, Victoria Memorial Square  
will be a place to/that...”**



**270**  
Participants



**259**  
Thoughts



**8,500**  
Ratings

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## Thought Exchange Summary: Word Cloud





# Thought Exchange Summary: Themes

A green oasis

A meeting place

A place without  
dogs/dog poop

A cozy place

A place to relax/  
hang out/sit

A place for honouring/  
remembering/learning

A place of respite (from  
noise, concrete, etc)

A safe place

A flexible/multi-use/  
year-round space

A welcoming,  
accessible place

A clean/well-  
maintained place

A place to walk/stroll

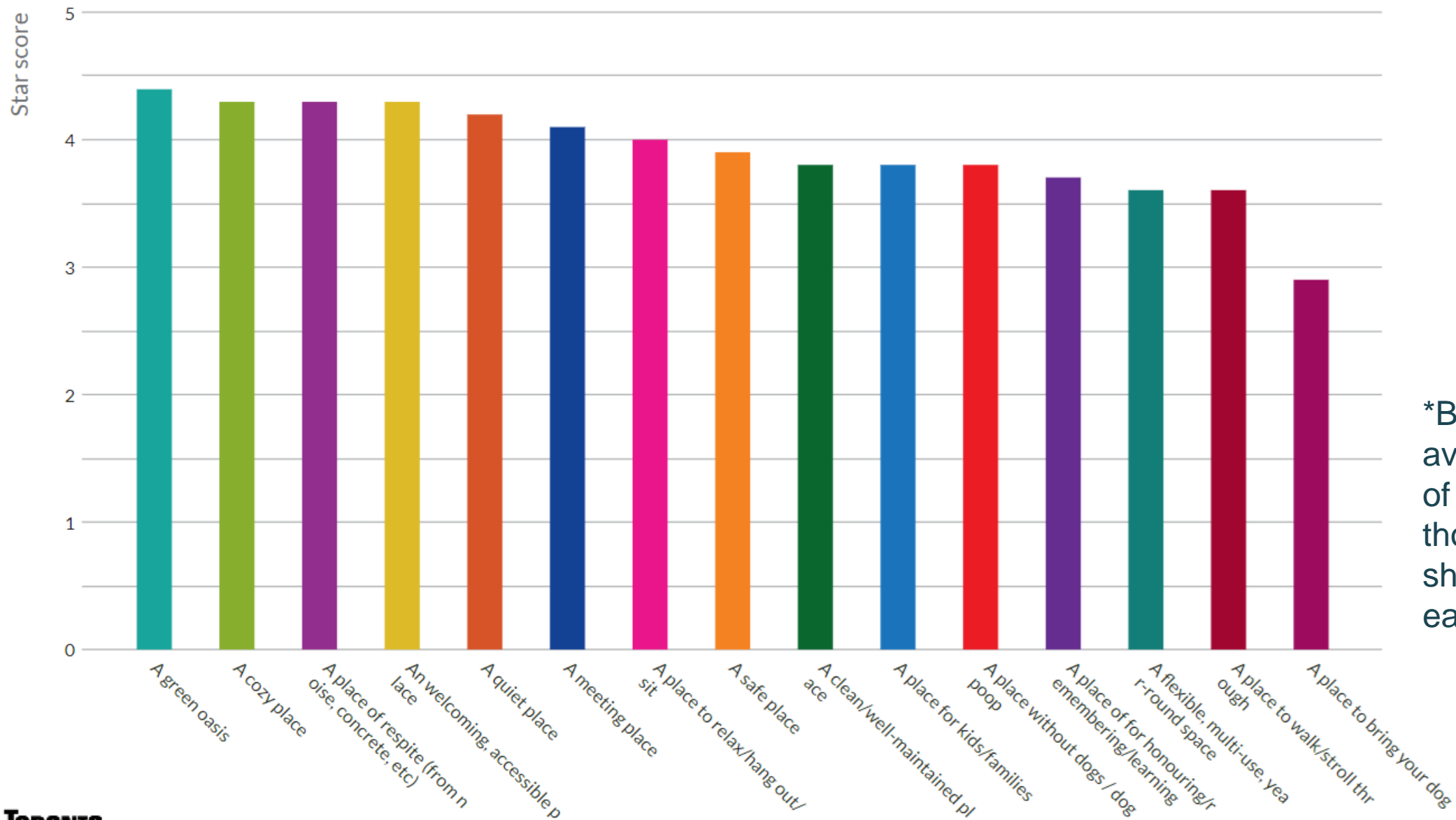
A quiet place

A place for  
kids/families

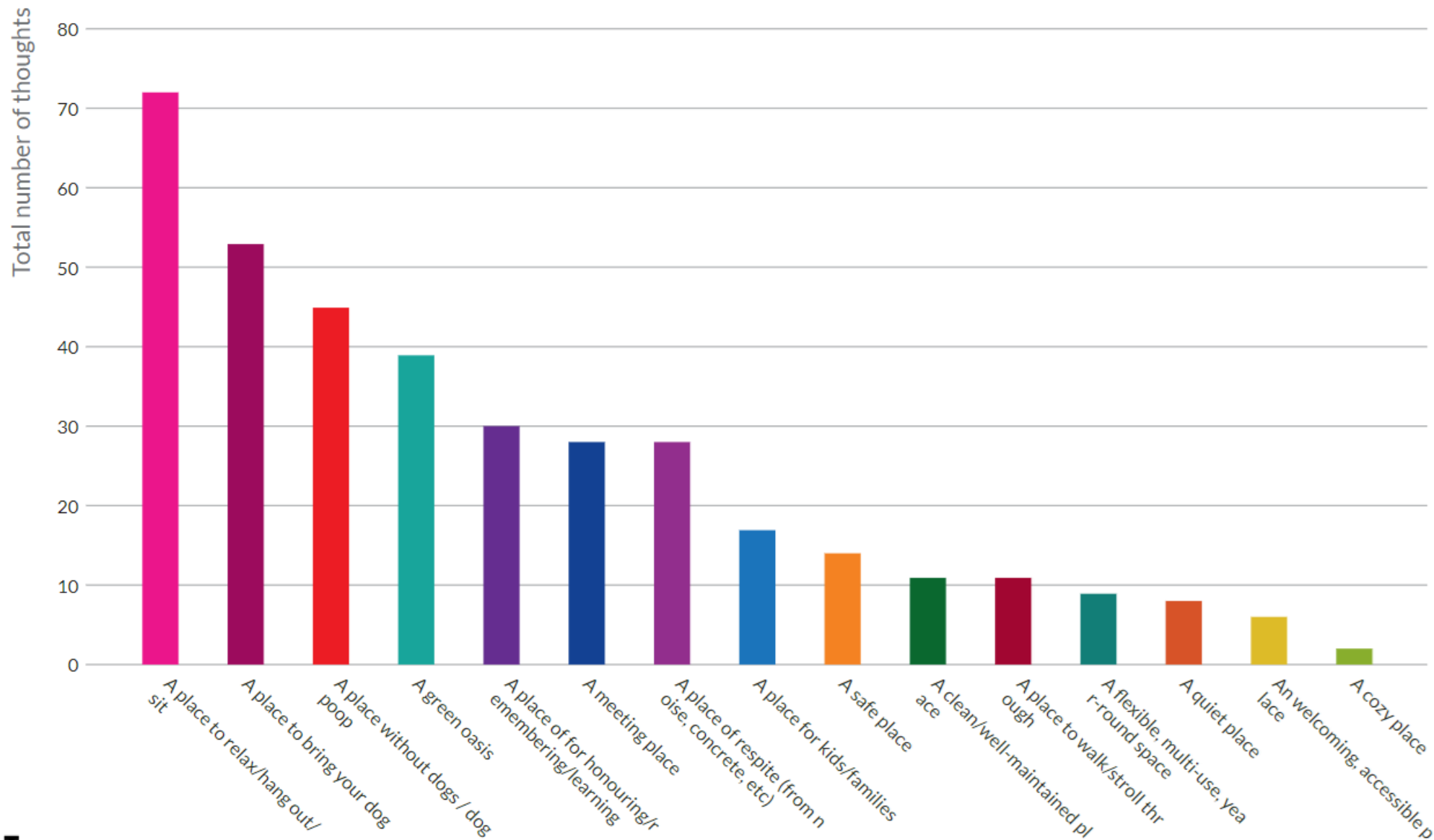
A place to bring your  
dog



# Thought Exchange Summary: Top themes by average score



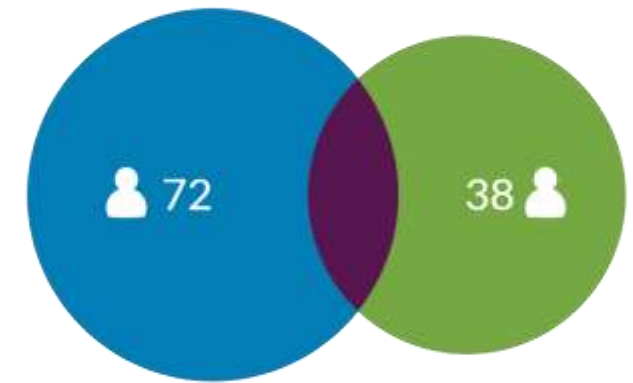
# Thought Exchange Summary: Top themes by total thoughts



\*Based on the total number of thoughts per theme

# Thought Exchange Summary: Differences

Dog | Park Space [72 | 38]



## Side A

Our family can enjoy without being overwhelmed by off leash dogs and dodging dog excrement. This is important because we do not have access to private green space and want to see a safe area for dogs that allows others to enjoy the space.

★ 4.9 ★ 1.0

**More enforcement of on-leash rules** This is a wonderful space to take our dog, but there are far too many off leash dogs and very little enforcement of the on-leash bylaw.

★ 4.7 ★ 1.0

## Side A/B Common (high)

**sit and lounge** to have inviting, calm, green space

★ 4.7 ★ 4.7

**Enjoy nature and trees** Good for soul

★ 4.6 ★ 4.4

## Side B

**Dog owners and families with kids can feel comfortable sharing the park**

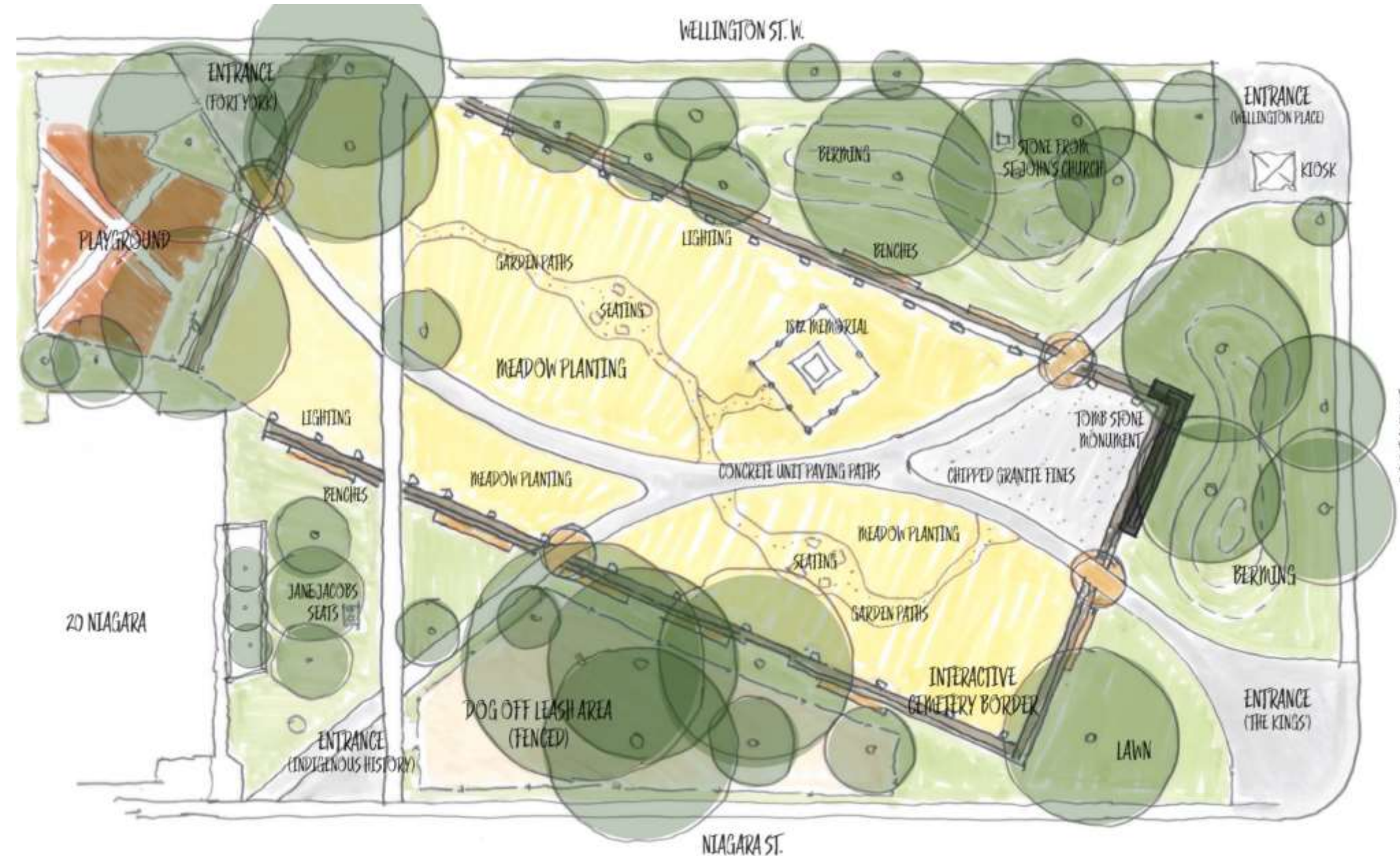
Everyone should feel safe sharing the limited park space

★ 1.5 ★ 4.8

**I hope dogs are allowed in the park but with the leash on.** Dog owners should be included in the community, but we should be responsible as well to creat a park that is for everyone.

★ 1.4 ★ 4.7

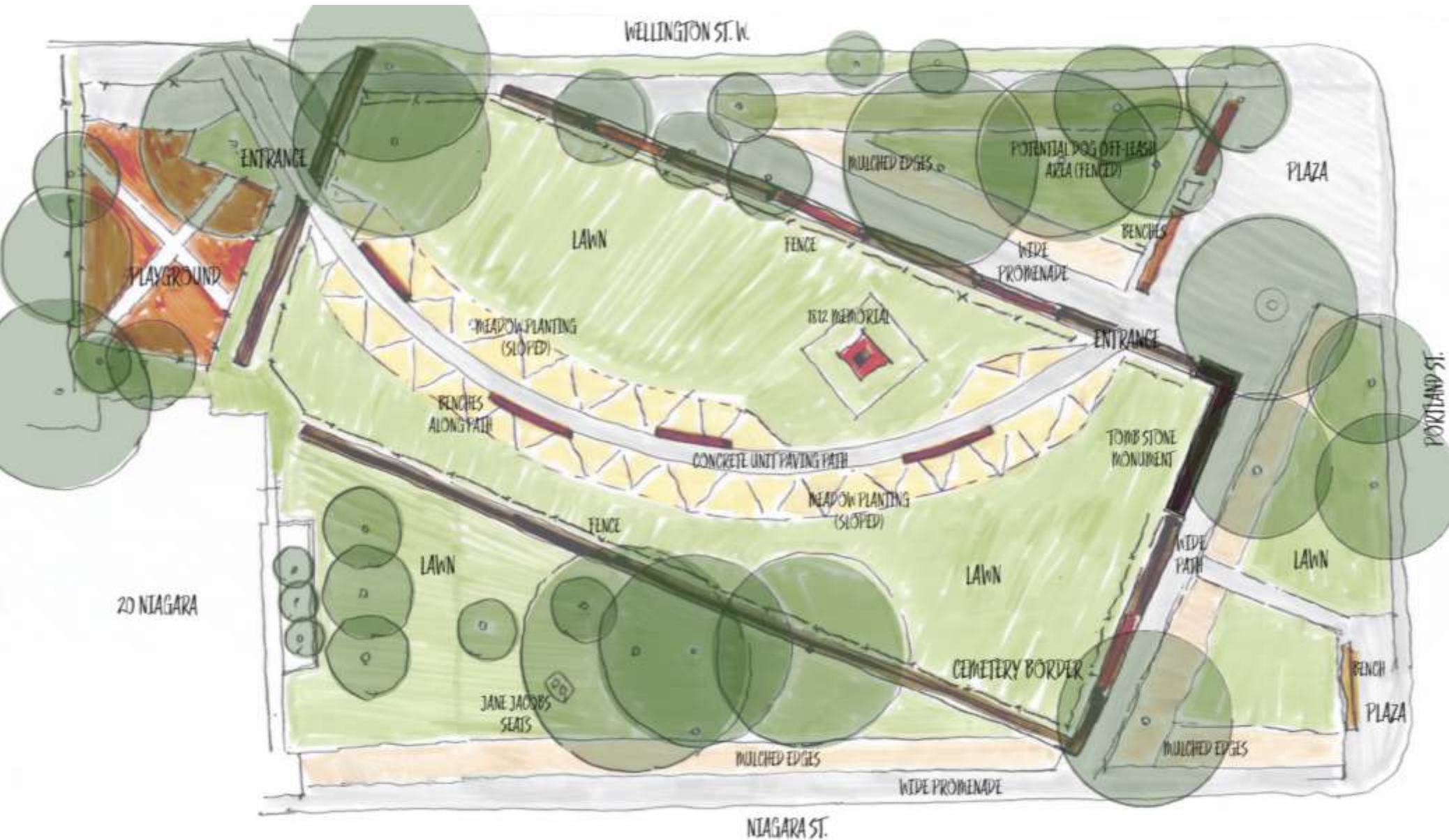
# Design Charrette - Group A



- Reimagine the cemetery
- An interactive cemetery edge
- Create a stronger historical presence
- Enhance the corners and introduce storytelling
- Introduce organic forms and topography
- Keep the wishbone configuration
- Space for public art
- Off leash area (could be temporary)



# Design Charrette - Group B



- Help the cemetery read as a cemetery
- Reduce number of park entrances
- Re-route circulation
- Discouraging cut-through traffic
- Widen perimeter sidewalks
- Protecting the cemetery
- Fence/strategic walls
- Raising topography

# What We've Heard: Key Engagement Insights

## THOUGHT EXCHANGE:

### Top Thoughts:

1. **An outdoor space that the neighbourhood is proud of.**

King west is a vibrant neighbourhood with a community requiring beautiful outdoor spaces for mental health. (4.6 rating)

2. **Has plenty of well kept, green grass to lounge and relax on, trees for shade, and some public seating like benches to sit and read a book.**

There are so many condos and buildings in the area but not enough green spaces where everyone can relax in and enjoy the outdoors. (4.6 rating)

3. **Green.** Need a place to rest (4.5 rating)

4. **Relax and hang out.**

There are few downtown parks that offer the same sort of quiet and relaxing atmosphere as VMS. It is a gem. (4.5 rating)

5. **Is a green oasis in the city.**

Open green spaces are scarce in these areas. (4.5 rating)

6. **Relax in a calm, green oasis.**

Because this is a special and sacred space within the city. (4.5 rating)

7. **Sit and lounge.**

To have inviting, calm, green space. (4.5 rating)

### Top Themes by average rating:

1. A green oasis (4.4 rating)
2. A cozy place (4.3 rating)
3. A place of respite (from noise, concrete, etc) (4.3 rating)
4. A welcoming, accessible place (4.3 rating)
5. A quiet place (4.2 rating)

## CAC DESIGN CHARRETTE:

- It's important to keep Victoria Memorial Square in the context of Wellington Place, part of an ensemble, not on its own
- In the vision, add a reference to the national historic site and the 1834 plan (maybe a principle)
- With construction of the Ontario Line at King and Bathurst, there will be increased pressure on use of the park, which should be considered
- Not a typical park; it's a square and needs a different approach
- There is a need to enhance the visibility of the cemetery and better protect its graves from potentially being compromised by activity in the park, especially as a result of dogs
- Late night crowds also cause damage to the park
- St Andrew's Park is a great precedent in terms of site organization, etc.
- Increase hard surfacing and plantings
- Do a better job of telling the site's story through signage, markers, or public art
- Introduce play elements that have also help tell the history of the site
- Increase seating

# What We've Heard: Key Engagement Insights

## TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

1. Ensure mature tree canopy is protected.
2. Coordinate park design and circulation with surrounding public realm (i.e. new bike lanes and ROW); northeast corner particularly important.
3. Ensure layers of history are interpreted in the park design.
4. Provide spaces for people to enjoy sun in the park.
5. Enhanced perimeter treatment.
6. Maintain circulation through the site.
7. Enhancements and design treatments should be sympathetic to overall setting and history of site.
8. Consider impact on site heritage attributes.

## COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

### 1. Balance of Uses:

- Balance needs of people and dogs
- Balance site's historic features (i.e. cemetery) with contemporary use as public park
- Consider activities and uses of park space and balance these with needs of community

### 2. Site Circulation:

- Consider how people move through site; design must reflect desire paths
- Wider pathways around perimeter

### 3. Maintenance:

- Provide waste bins in convenient locations
- Protect lawn/meadow areas; consider low fence or barrier
- Consider winter use and pathway surfaces

### 4. Dogs:

- Consider dogs in final design
- Consider adding small off-leash area or add signage to indicate dogs must be kept on-leash

### 5. Site Program:

- Add more seating areas and types
- Animate peripheral areas (i.e. edges) of park
- Add hard surfaces to make this more of a square than a park
- Consider park as part of larger park network when considering park uses and program

# Vision Statement and Design Principles



# Vision Statement



Victoria Memorial Square is a **green oasis** and **cultural gem** in a fast-changing neighbourhood. It is valued as both a **meeting place** and a **sanctuary**: a cozy place to retreat to; a place to gather, sit, and relax.

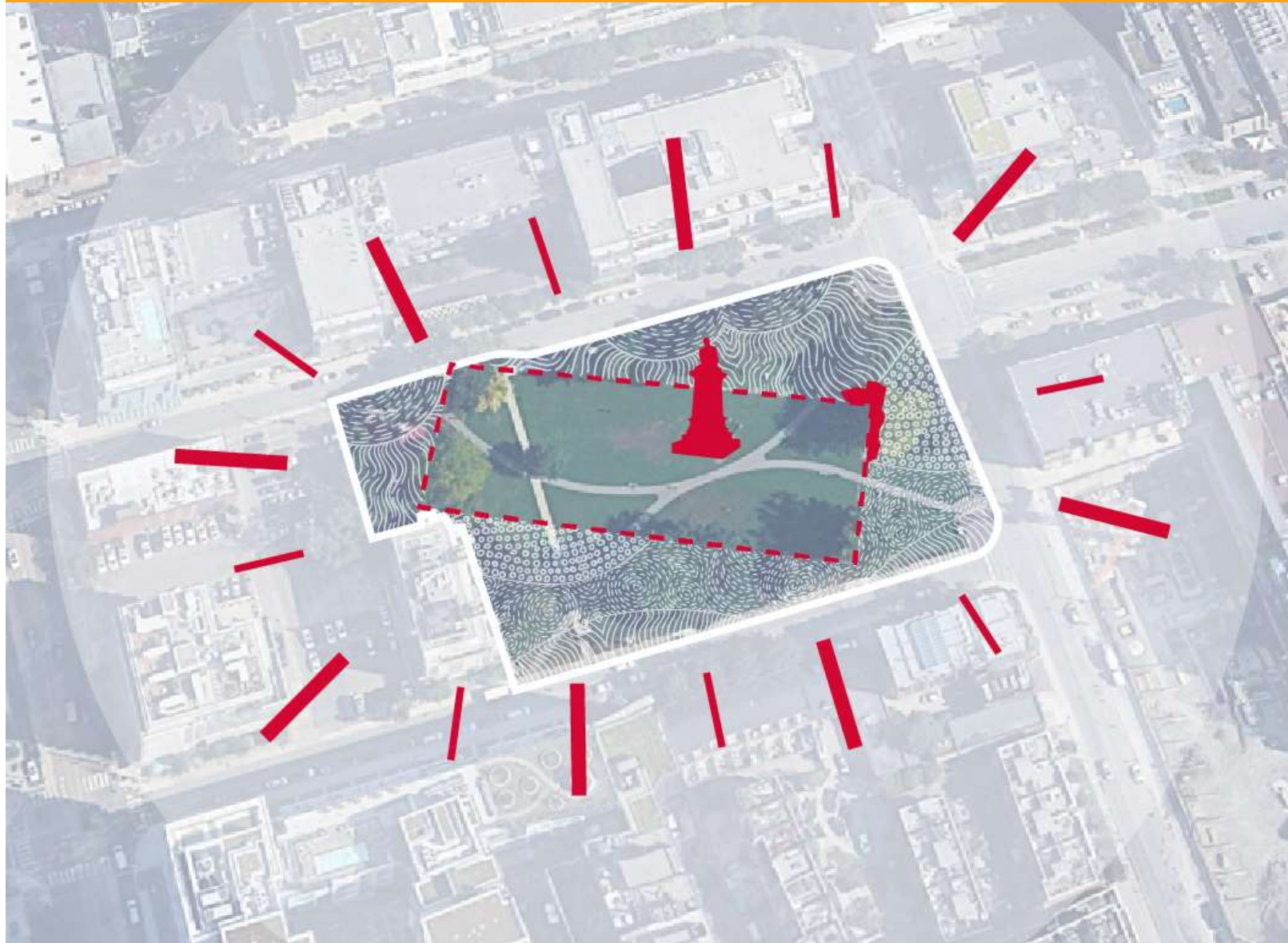
# Vision Statement



The park works well for a lot of different people: families picnicking, friends relaxing, people walking their pets, and so many others just passing through. It's an ***inclusive, accessible, clean, and safe place*** for everyone.



# Vision Statement

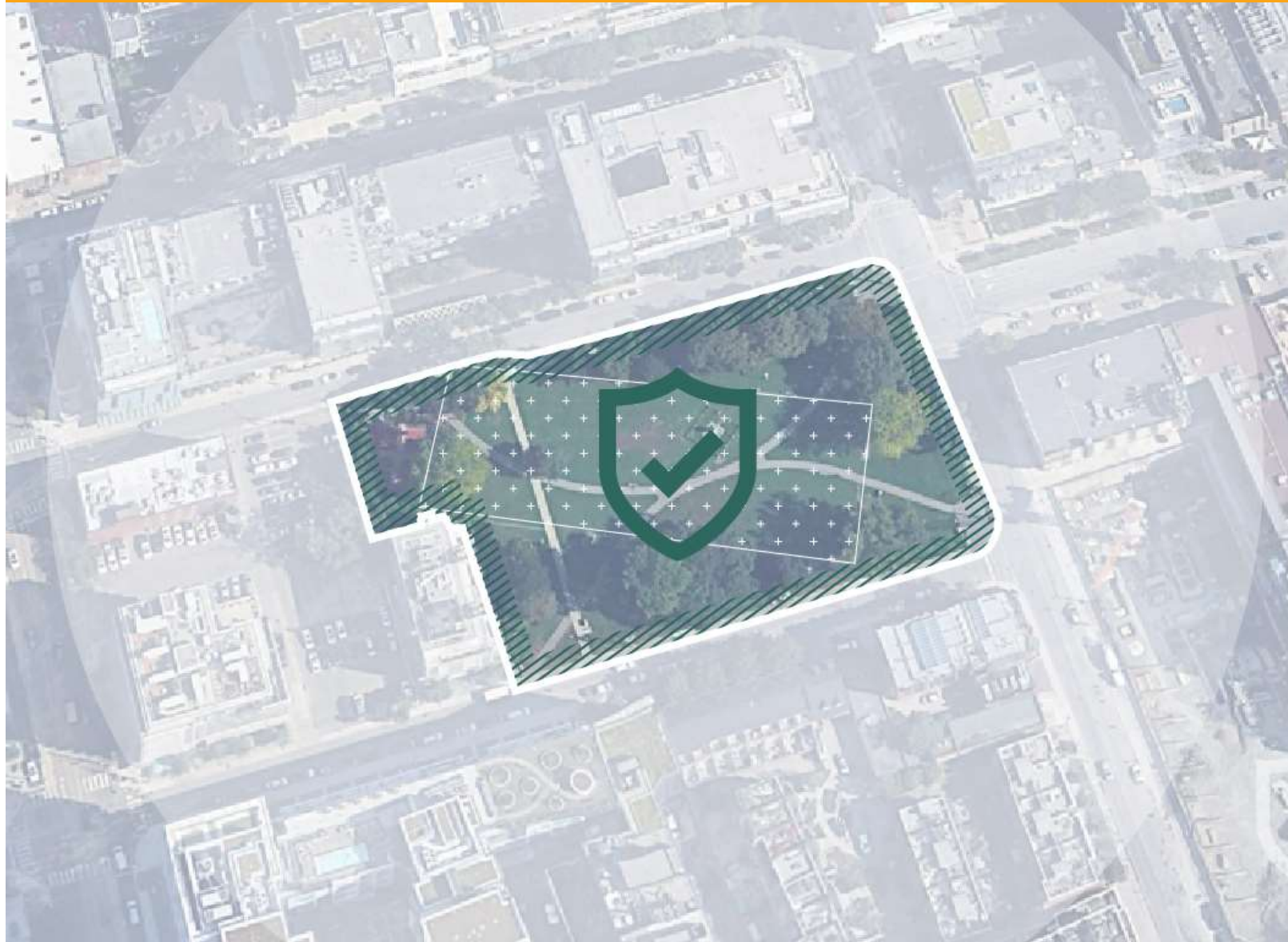


The park is also a place of discovery that both honours and celebrates its **rich heritage**, from centuries of use by Indigenous people living in settlements along Garrison Creek and the Lake Ontario shoreline, to its colonial uses as a **Military Cemetery**, **War of 1812 Memorial** and **public park**. *The park's role in the larger context of the historic Wellington Place plan, and its relationship to nearby Clarence Square via Wellington Street, is reflected in the enhanced park design.*

Other, more contemporary memorials are equally celebrated, including the park's Jane Jacobs benches and tree and bench dedications.



# Vision Statement



Activities or uses that might damage this cherished cultural heritage or disrupt the park's delicate balance of users, including off-leash dog walking, are both managed and limited.

# Design Principles



Balance the needs of a wide range of users.



Manage and limit off leash dog use within the cemetery and park.



Ensure a healthy and thriving tree canopy and landscape.



Integrate and celebrate Indigenous placekeeping into the heritage narrative and park design.



Preserve and celebrate the colonial heritage including the Military Cemetery and War of 1812 Memorial.



Preserve and celebrate the contemporary heritage of the park including the Jane Jacobs benches, memorial benches and trees.



Recognize and tie the park restoration design to the Wellington Street revitalization and Clarence Square.



Ensure the park is well lit and safe and feature lighting is integrated to amplify the cultural heritage elements.



Integrate heritage interpretation at key entrances and within the park.



Include green space and plantings to create an oasis where people can relax and lounge in a place of respite.



Integrate a variety of seating types to make this a welcoming and accessible space where people can hang out and gather.



Provide park infrastructure that can withstand increased pressure due to growing population and future transit infrastructure and development coming to the area.

# The Two Concepts



# Concept 1



- An interactive cemetery edge with seating
- Less movement through cemetery
- Themed entrances
- Flowering meadow
- Undulating mounds
- New pathway treatment through cemetery
- Widened sidewalk



# Concept 1: Precedents





# Concept 1: Rendered Views



*Birds eye view from North East*



# Concept 1: Rendered Views





# Concept 1: Rendered Views

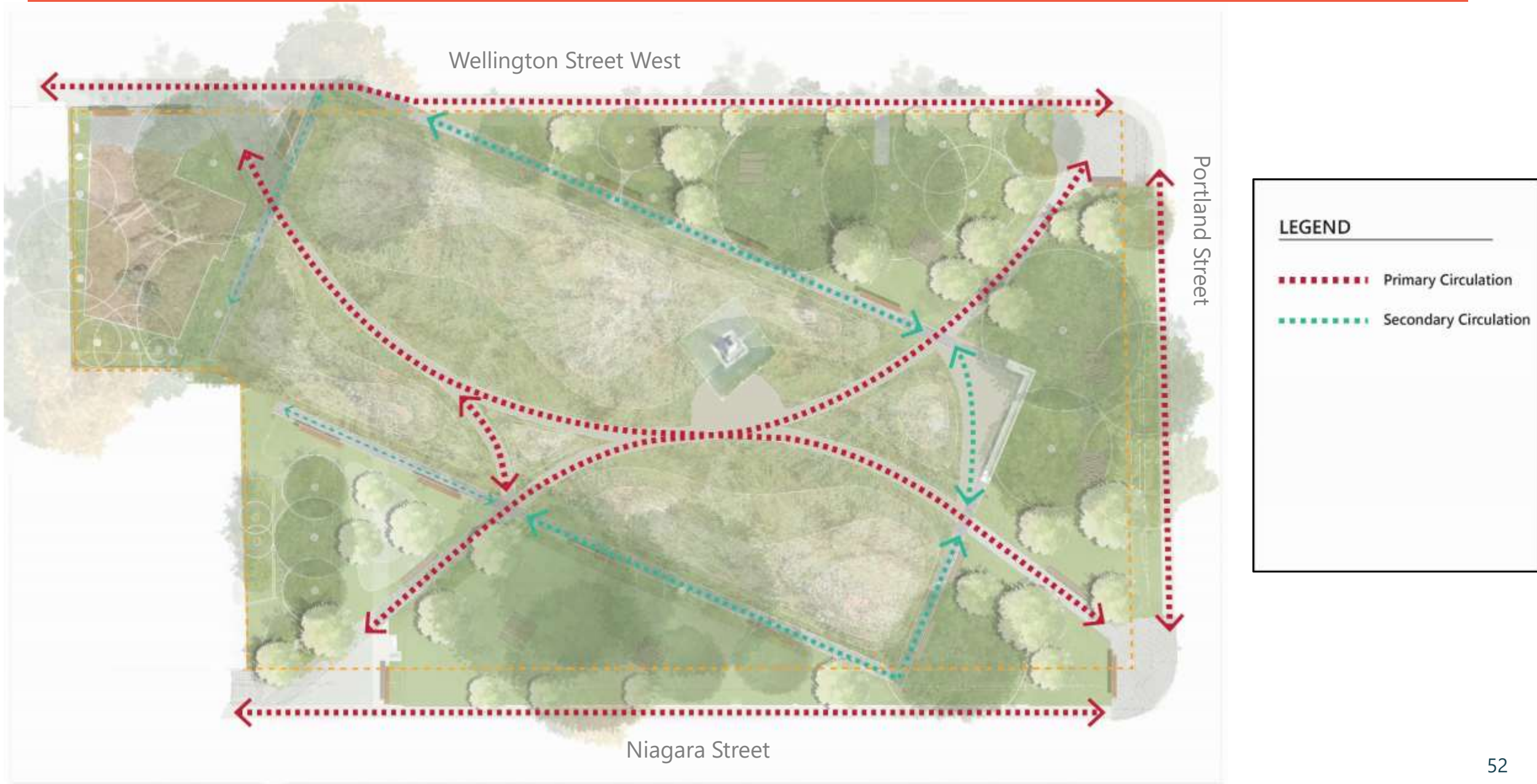


KEY PLAN





# Concept 1: Circulation





# Concept 1: Lighting



# Concept 1: Activity Diagrams





# Concept 1: Activity Diagrams



## Contemplate:

- Low pace movement
- Green sanctuary
- Resting place

## Gather:

- Picnic
- Yoga
- Lounging
- Seating

## Learn:

- Memorials
- Historical references
- Multi-layered site information



# Concept 1: Activity Diagrams



## CURRENT:

- 12 standard benches + 2 in playground
- Park activities on lawn, including, yoga, picnic, sunbathing etc.

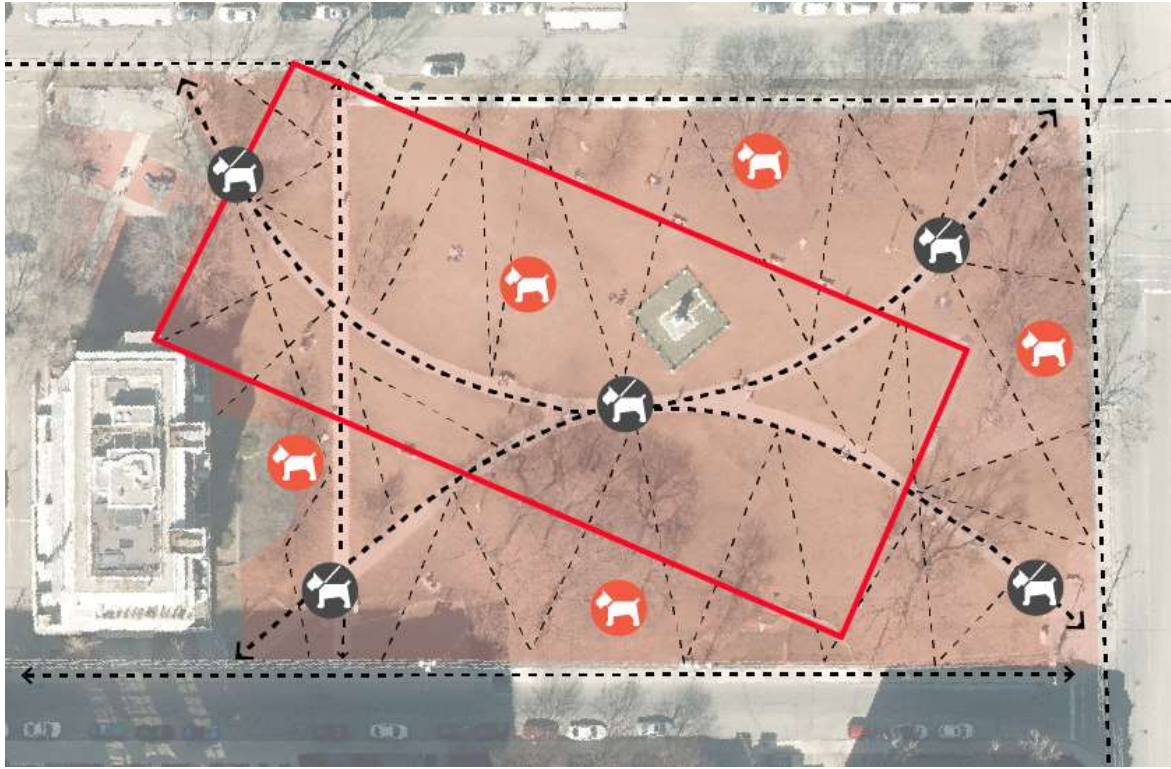


## PROPOSED:

- 10 long benches + 2 in playground
- 13 picnic tables for picnic
- 2 lawn areas for activities such as yoga

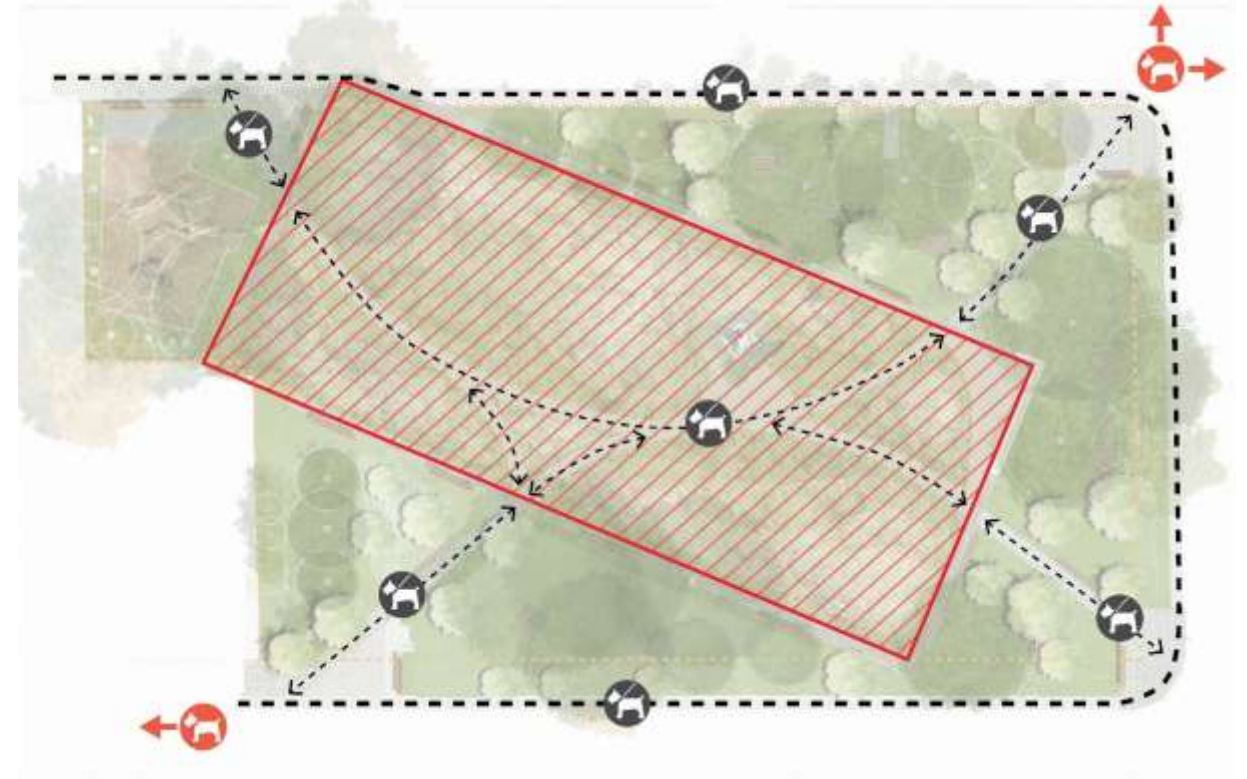


# Concept 1: Activity Diagrams



## CURRENT:

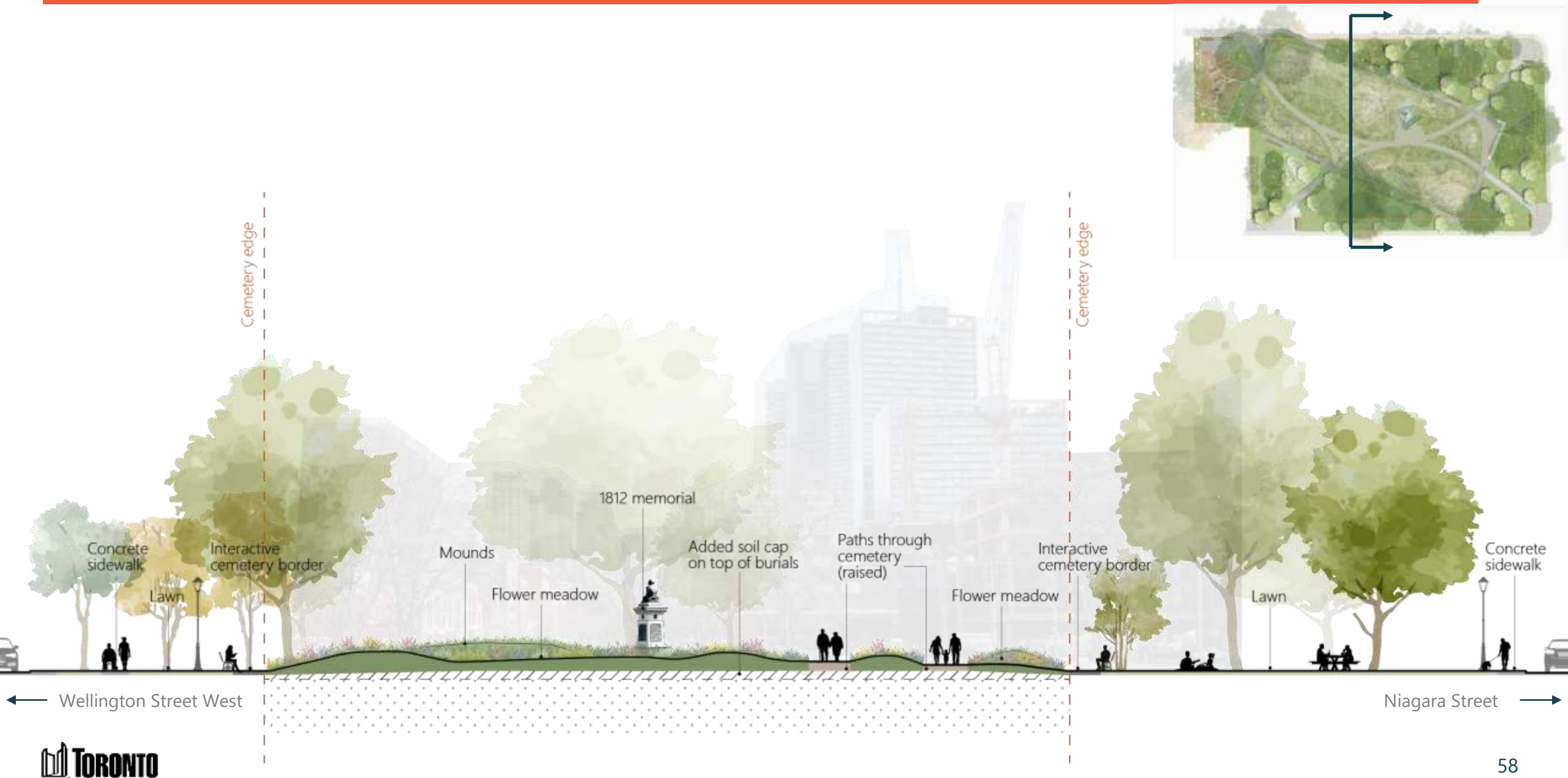
- Both on-leash and off-leash activities occur
- Movement across the entire site, including within the burial site



## PROPOSED:

- Promote dog walking
- Encourage on-leash activities within the park
- Provide information about off-leash areas nearby
- Keep dogs on dedicated paths within the burial site

# Concept 1: Section





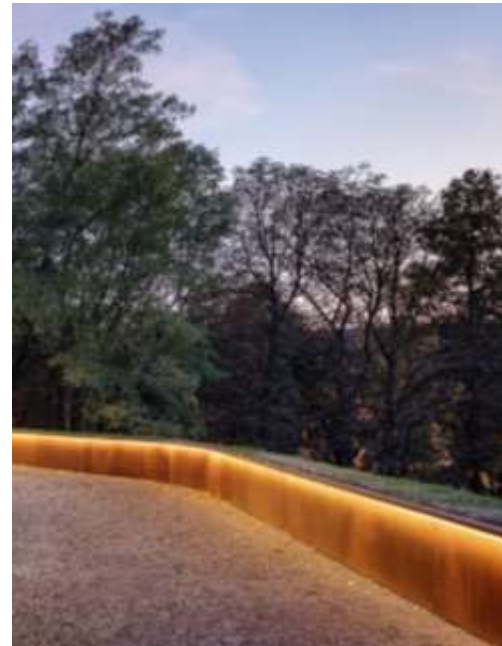
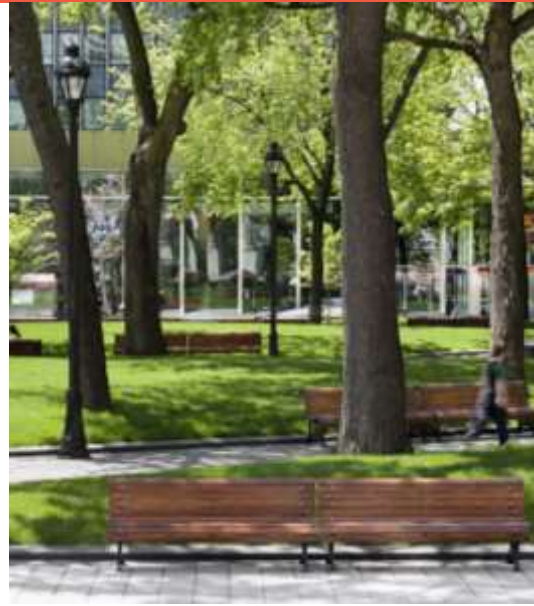
# Concept 2



- Activating the edges
- Strong connection to Wellington
- Wide paths and varied seating around perimeter
- Parisian treatment
- Minimal movement through cemetery
- Elevated border
- Themed entrances
- Geometrical mounds
- Relocation of 1812 memorial



# Concept 2: Precedents





## Concept 2: Rendered Views



*Birds eye view from North East*



# Concept 2: Rendered Views



KEY PLAN





## Concept 2: Rendered Views

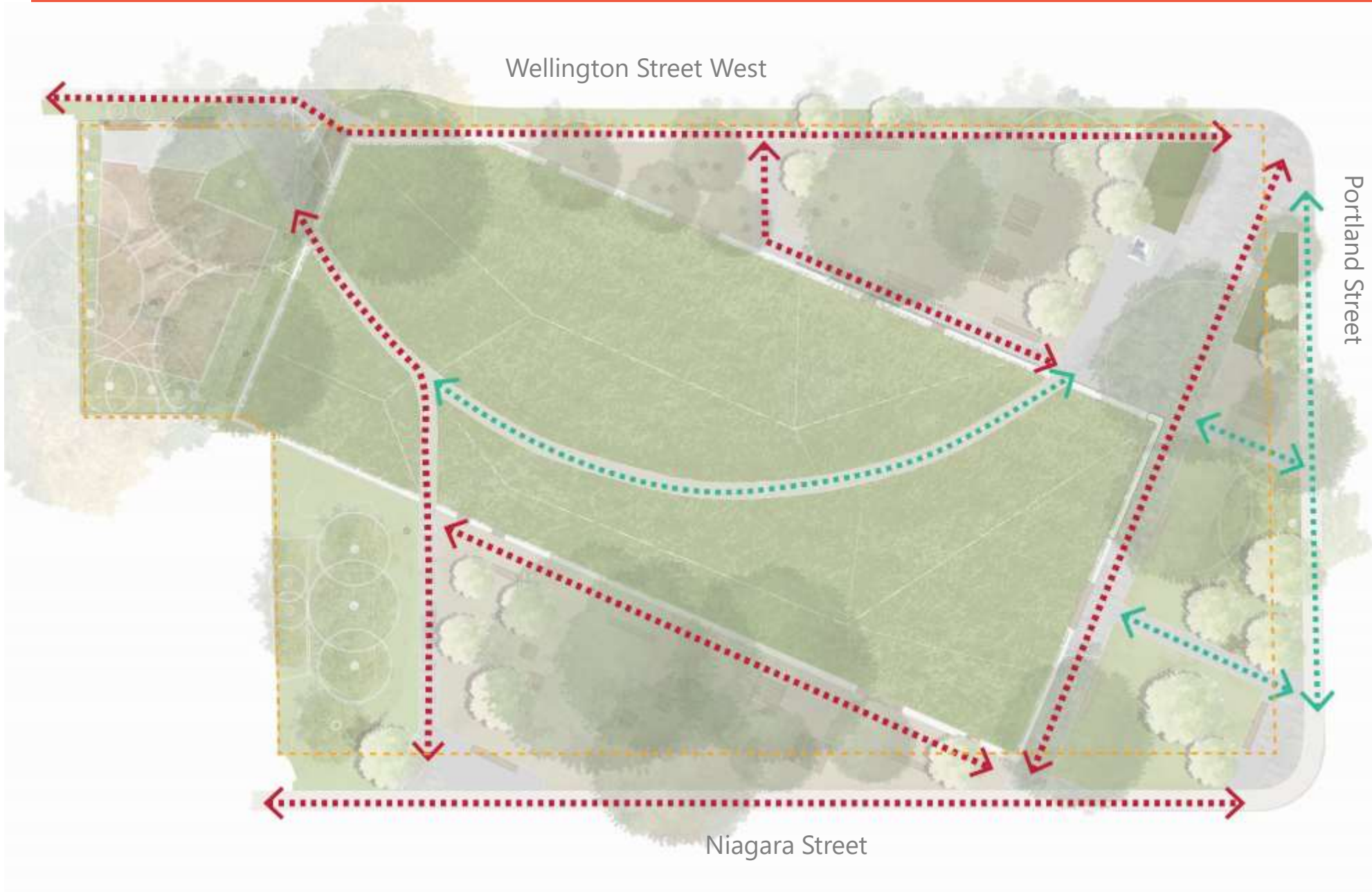


KEY PLAN





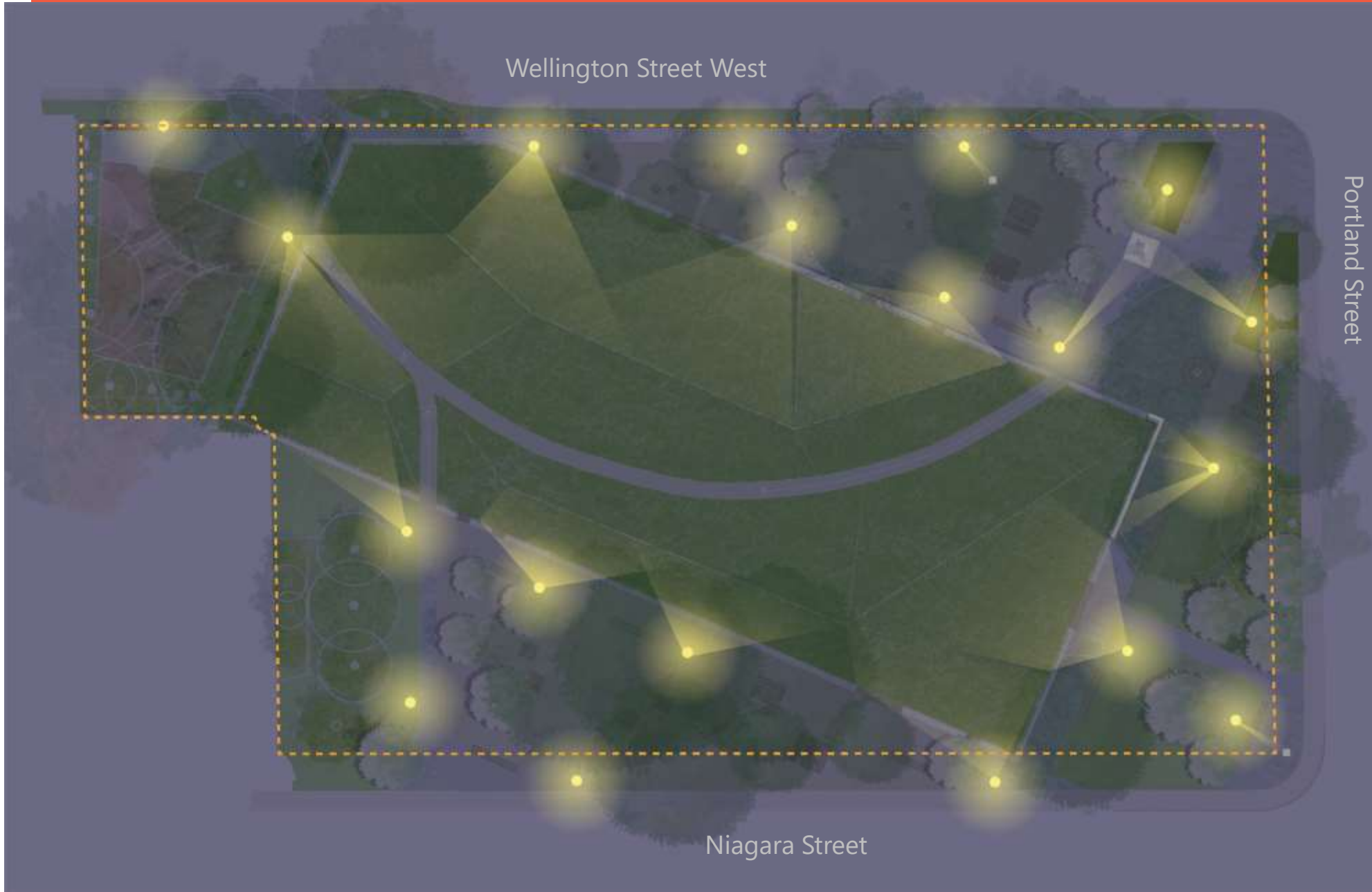
# Concept 2: Circulation



## LEGEND

- Primary Circulation
- Secondary Circulation

# Concept 2: Lighting





## Concept 2: Activity Diagrams



## Concept 2: Activity Diagrams



### **Contemplate:**

- Low pace movement
- Green sanctuary
- Resting place

### **Gather:**

- Picnic
- Lounging
- Seating

### **Ceremony:**

- Open Plaza
- Seating

### **Learn:**

- Memorials
- Historical references
- Multi-layered site information



## Concept 2: Activity Diagrams



### CURRENT:

- 12 standard benches + 2 in playground
- Park activities on lawn, including, yoga, picnic, sunbathing etc.

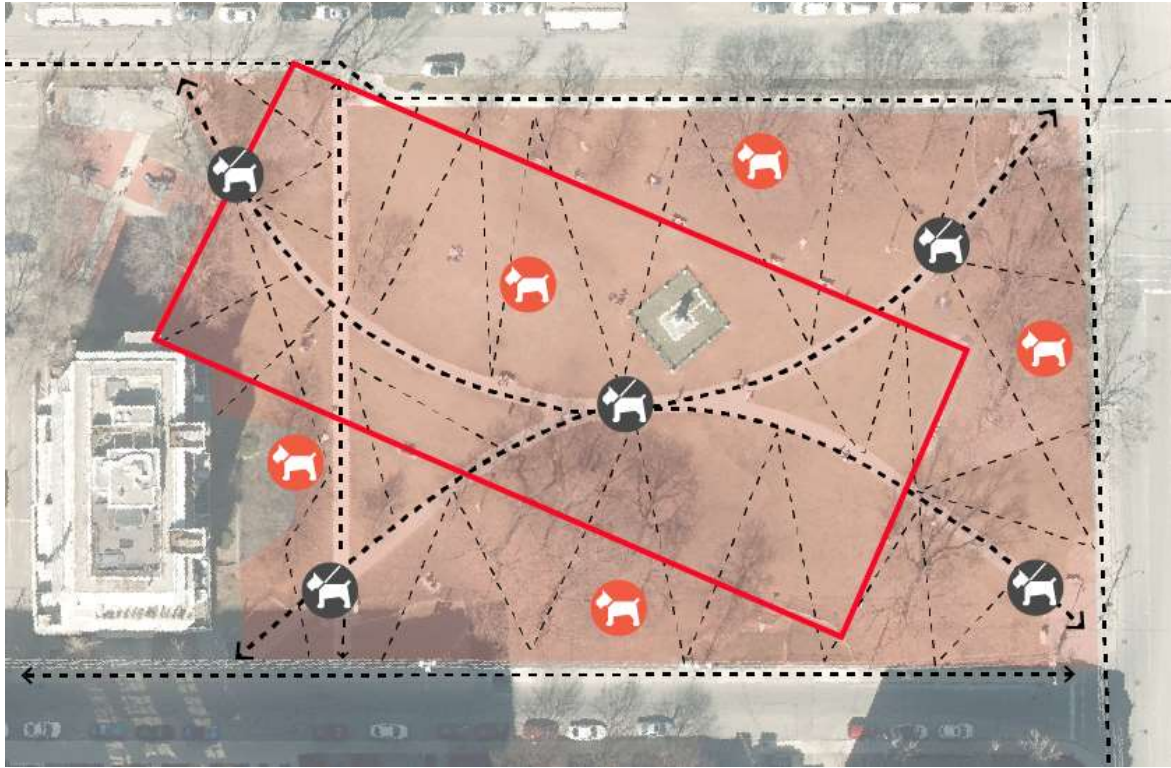


### PROPOSED:

- 13 long benches + 2 in playground
- Seating on wall around cemetery border
- Lounge chairs for reading/relaxing
- 8 picnic tables for picnic
- 2 lawn areas for activities such as yoga

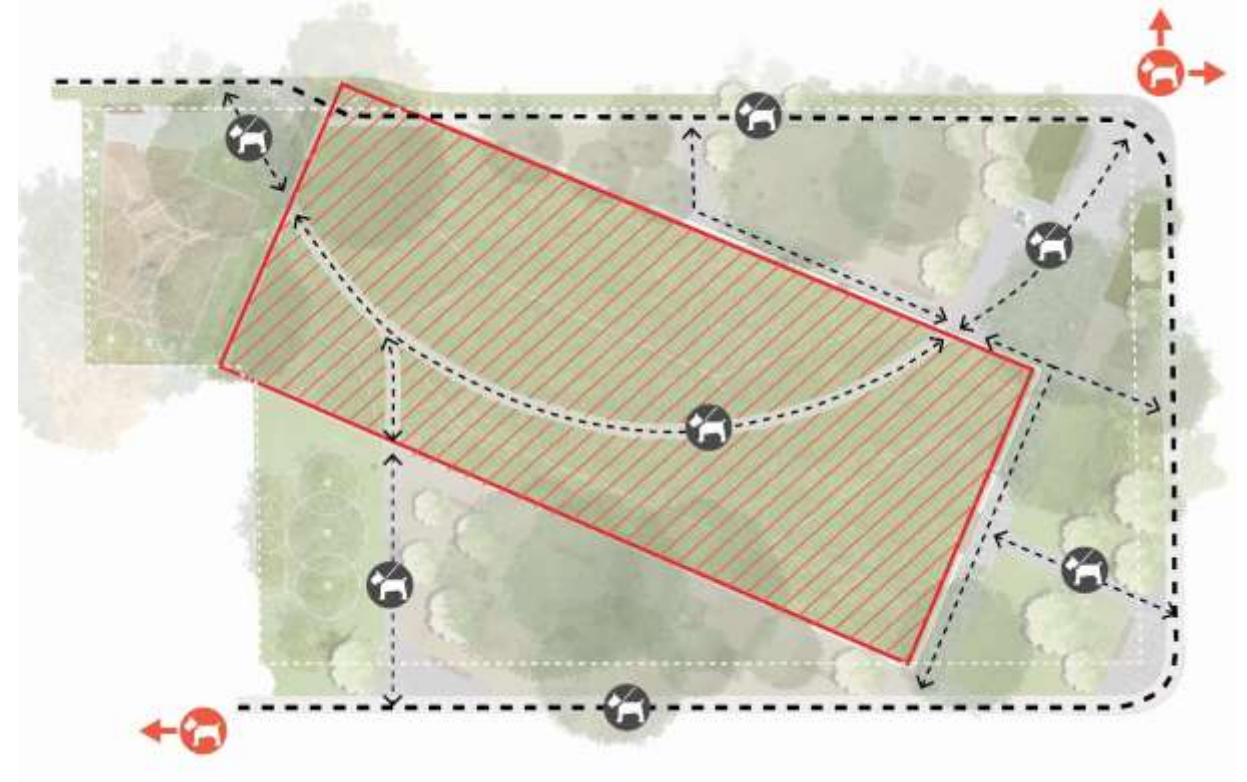


## Concept 2: Activity Diagrams



### CURRENT:

- Both on-leash and off-leash activities occur
- Movement across the entire site, including within the burial site

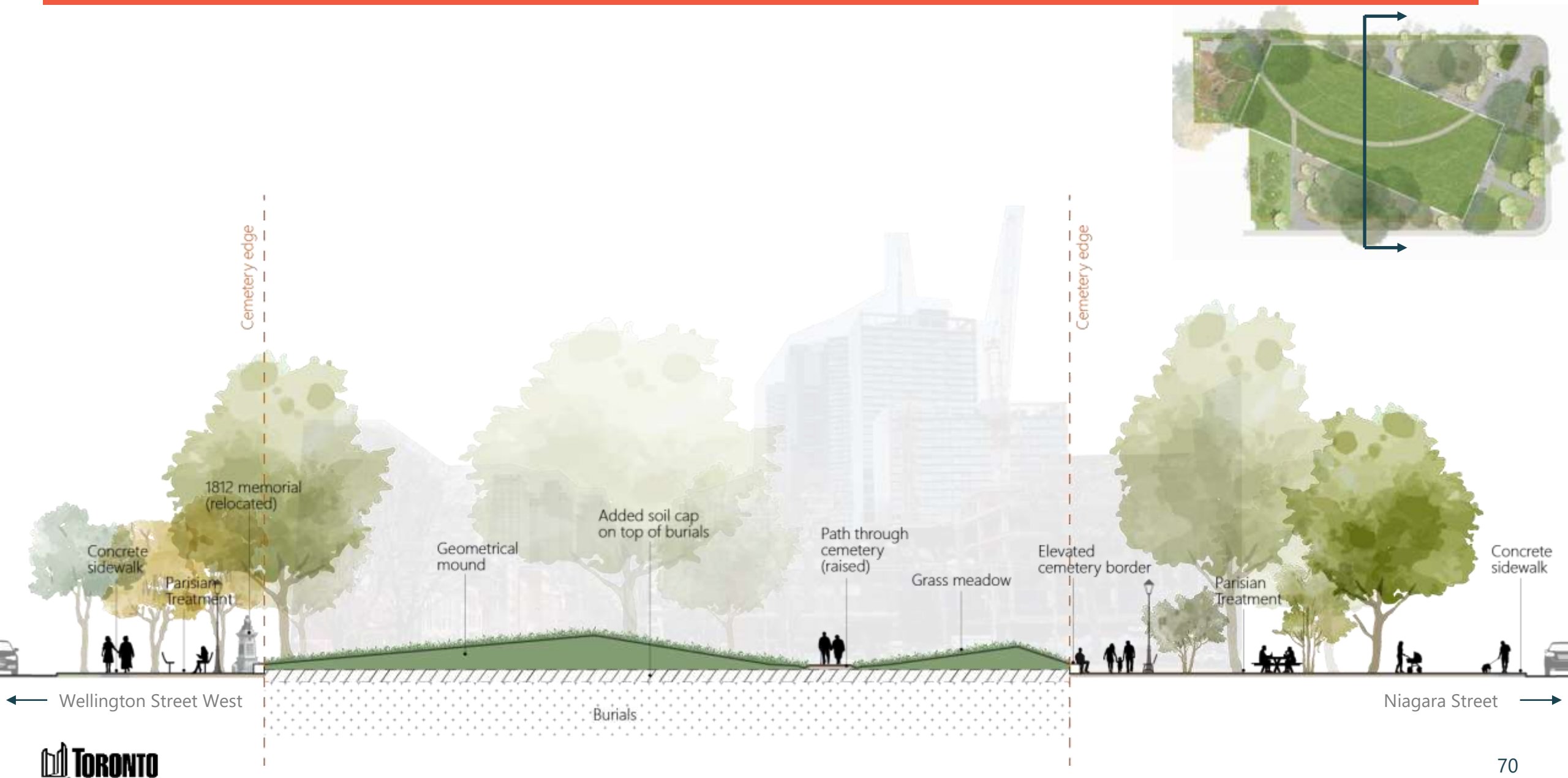


### PROPOSED:

- Promote dog walking
- Encourage on-leash activities within the park
- Provide information about off-leash areas nearby
- Keep dogs on dedicated paths within the burial site



# Concept 2: Section



# Dog Off-Leash Area Study





# Dog Off-Leash Area Study



# Dog Off-Leash Area Study





# Dog Off-Leash Areas Nearby



# Discussion



# Concept 1



Trees and  
Horticulture

Use of Space

Dogs

Circulation

# Concept 2

Trees and  
Horticulture

Use of Space

Dogs

Circulation





# Next Steps



