

City of Toronto – Parks, Forestry & Recreation

Centennial Park Playground and Water Play Improvements

Indigenous Advisory Circle Meeting 1 Summary Report

May 2023

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Project Team

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This report has been prepared by SAFFY, a third-party strategy, research, and engagement consultant and The Ridge Road Indigenous Training & Consulting for the City of Toronto Parks, Forestry & Recreation.

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Introduction

This document provides a summary of the Indigenous Advisory Circle (IAC) meeting that was held virtually on Monday, May 1, 2023 from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. The IAC was formed through outreach to members of the IAC struck for the Centennial Park Master Plan Update. Additional grassroots outreach, including the circulation of a PDF flyer, led by The Ridge Road Indigenous Training and Consulting and engagement to local Indigenous organizations and Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council (TASSC) sought to expand the opportunity to participate to relevant and interested Indigenous communities. More information about the project can be found on the [project webpage](#).

Meeting Purpose

The purpose of this meeting was to:

- Welcome and introduce IAC members & the project team.
- Review the Centennial Park Master Plan Overview & the Centennial Park Play Area Overview.
- Present Indigenous Placekeeping concepts design options.
- Discuss the design options and ideas for Indigenous Placekeeping.
- Question and answer period.
- Share next steps.

Attendance

IAC Members

Present: 4

Project Staff Present

- City of Toronto
 - Alex Lavasidis, Senior Public Consultation Coordinator
 - Tonya Crawford, Senior Project Coordinator
 - Mark Goulart, Senior Project Manager
- Ridge Road
 - Karissa Yehnentawaks Maracle, Project Manager
 - Dr. Anton Birioukov-Brant, Director
- SAFFY
 - Casey Hinton, Senior Strategist
- PMA
 - Leslie Morton, Principle
 - Dylan Cassidy, Project Manager

Presentation

Project staff presented:

- An overview of the Centennial Park Master Plan and the Centennial Park Play Area.
- Two design options for the Play Area.
- Ideas for Indigenous Placekeeping, proposed by Elder Catherine Tamaro, a member of the Design Team for the project.

Questions and Discussion

As the Centennial Park Master Plan and the Centennial Park Play Area were presented, they were discussed with the IAC. In addition, the IAC discussed how Indigenous worldviews, cultures, and histories can be reflected in the play area. Guiding discussion questions included:

1. Is there a theme or idea [of the design concepts] that resonates with you, or one(s) you prefer?
2. Are there particular histories or narratives you'd like to see included?
3. Do you have ideas for how Indigenous Placekeeping elements can be represented through the site?
4. Are there elements you like/dislike from this first concept FOLDS?
5. Are there elements you like/dislike from this second concept WAVES?
6. Do you have suggestions for incorporating Indigenous Placekeeping?
7. Do you have any questions about the concepts? Is there one you prefer?

Q & A

Questions received from IAC members (Q), responses (R) and comments (C) from staff include the following. These are not verbatim:

Q: Is it possible to have a Scared Fire or just a regular fire? Maybe to cook food?

R: There are areas to have fires. The City and project partners are deciding where an appropriate location can be. There's a larger hill in the park. It's human-made, but it gives us an opportunity to be closer to the sky so that is an option under consideration. The City will be in touch as they move forward.

C: Include a ceremony before the creek work begins.

Q (Staff): Would it be appropriate to have multiple ceremonies for different parts of the creek being freed? Or is it more appropriate once all the work is completed?

R (Participant): It would be good to do one at the beginning. The City could find people who are related to that creek and invite them to be part of the ceremony.

Q: (Participant) Are any trees going to be removed as part of this work?

R: (Staff) A lot of the species near the creek are invasive (Manitoba Maples). The City will be removing some of those trees, but will also be doing a lot of planting of local native species.

Q: (Participant) What types of plants/trees will be planted?

R: (Staff) Still considering what types of plants. Will plant smaller trees and let them grow in the ground.

C (Participant): Plant older trees to make the landscape look more natural faster (rather than planting saplings).

Q: (Participant) Will the park be affected by the LRT?

R: (Staff) The park will not be impacted by the LRT.

Resonating Themes

The following provides a summary of the IAC members' discussion about the resonating themes used to guide the design of the playground and water play areas. The preliminary themes included:

- **Sky-Earth Connections:** The playground is located at the top of a hill overlooking the park with a great view of the sky, and inspires celestial connections based on Indigenous narratives that emphasize the interconnectedness between earth and sky.
- **Traditional Earthworks:** Inspired by the preserved earthworks in Ontario, such as the Southwold Earthworks and Serpent Mounds Park, there is interest in exploring this sacred connection with the land through the sculpting of the new park?
- **Connection to the Natural World:** Building from traditional knowledges and experiential learning of the Natural World through Two Eyed Seeing, an approach which examines both western and Indigenous ways of knowing, there is a desire to emphasize the reciprocal relationship between people and plants.
- **Role of Water:** Given that the new playground sits next to Elmcrest Creek, there is an opportunity to explore the significance of water and emphasize the importance of respecting and protecting this natural feature.

The participants focused on the connection of the playground and water play area to the land and waters. Suggestions were made to incorporate natural water into the playground beyond the water play area, (eg. rainwater sculpture) paired with native plantings. It was suggested that connections be made to the adjacent creek by sharing its history (e.g. through signage). There is an opportunity to use the natural hill to serve as an amphitheater.

- **Rainfall sculpture:** One of the participants suggested the possibility of incorporating a rainfall sculpture. The sculpture could play with the rainwater through auditory methods, as well as channeling the rainwater to feed nearby plants. Through this process, people are invited to interact with the water. Covered seating near the sculpture can be a way for people to escape the rain and enjoy the sculpture in action. Participants suggested the possibility of having the rainwater join the adjacent creek. This would raise everyone's consciousness of the creek and its significance to the park and the land.

Histories & Narratives

The following provides a summary of the IAC members' discussion about how Indigenous histories and narratives can be reflected at the Centennial Park Playground and Water Park:

- The participants spoke about the importance of the natural environment to people's physical and mental health. One of the participants has spent a considerable amount of time exploring nearby urban park trails and noticed that many other people do this as well. Trees and the natural environment are seen to be beneficial for all people. It is important Centennial Park provide a natural landscape for people to enjoy.

Indigenous Placekeeping

The following provides a summary of the IAC members' discussion about how Indigenous Placekeeping can be incorporated in the Centennial Park Playground and Water Park: Participants focused on the integration of Indigenous languages, as well as natural elements into the playground and water park.

- **Indigenous Languages:** It is important to embed Indigenous languages where possible. Include Indigenous languages on the park signage, on interpretive signage naming plants in the space, as well as naming paths and parts of the park using Indigenous names.

- **Walking in Water:** Develop a space where people can walk barefoot in the creek water. It could be a meditative space, where people can reflect on the water and the natural environment. Indigenous programming (e.g., guided walks) could be included in this area.
- **Washroom:** Although there is only one building (i.e., washroom), it was recommended that the building could be imagined as a key visual feature of the space, be made aesthetically pleasing, and green (e.g., green roof),
- **Embedding Environment:** It was recommended that natural environment features be included in the park. Some features of the water park can be plant-shaped. Pictures and words can be painted into the park using paint that is only visible when wet (e.g. of animals in the area, or their prints). After-hours programming could be developed (e.g., storytelling after dark). Stamps and signage around the playground and water park about the local plants and animals in Indigenous languages was suggested.
- **Honouring Trees:** Participants spoke of the importance of trees and their potential for narrative connection, expressing a desire to see trees honoured in the play area. 1. Narrative of connection to and honoring trees through this process.

Feedback on Design Concepts

The following provides a summary of the IAC members' discussion on the FOLDS and WAVES concepts used to guide the design of the Centennial Park Playground and Water Park.

- **General Summary:** The participants liked both designs and we were relatively evenly split between them (one person liked FOLDS, one liked WAVES, and one liked both – slightly leaning towards WAVES). The adult swings were popular and recommended for both options. There were suggestions to allow for breathing space between the features. There was a suggestion to include the Moccasin ID project in the park. These markers can be engraved into the ground, along the pathways, or in the playground/water park structures.
- **FOLDS:** The participants enjoyed the lookout option of FOLDS. The adult swings were also popular amongst all participants. There were concerns about the amount of metal used in the design and there were recommendations to soften this by making it look more natural (e.g., misting poles could be designed as trees). There were also suggestions to include history plaques, which could have QR codes containing Indigenous languages.
- **WAVES:** The participants felt the design used too much rubber, which is not aligned to the environmental principles discussed. It was suggested that the rubber bumps be painted to look like turtles to reflect Turtle Island. The backs of the turtles could have the 13 moons painted on them. A shaded structure could be created that has openings in the ceiling to allow for the observation of the sun and stars. It was felt that the curved shapes and lines of the design were more in line with the natural environment, rather than the more linear shapes found in the FOLDS design. It was suggested to install curving paths to provide for a more natural and organic flow.

Final Discussion

The following provides a summary of the IAC members' final discussion and concluding thoughts.

- The park and playground/water park are seen as educational spaces, where the varying aspects of the park are opportunities to increase peoples' knowledge and understanding of Indigenous peoples' cultures, histories, and worldviews. There is a desire to keep the space active.
- It was suggested that a dedication to all children (including those lost to the Residential Schooling System) be added to the playground and water park.
- It was recommended that fruit trees be planted to provide food for the community. Sacred medicines could also be grown.
- An Indigenous-inspired play structure was recommended <https://www.earthscapeplay.com/project/mcfn-hagersville-earlyon-child-care-centre-cano-e-river-playground/>.

Next Steps

- Staff shared that IAC members can send additional ideas, comments, or suggestions to the project team by email.
- Staff will compile a written summary of the meeting and distribute to members for review.
 - Members will have one week to provide suggested edits to the draft summary, after which the summary will be finalized.

Contact Us

For questions or comments related to this project, please contact:

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