

City of Toronto – Parks, Forestry & Recreation

# Don Mills Community Recreation Centre

## Indigenous Advisory Group Meeting 2

Meeting Summary

October 4, 2023

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## Introduction

This document provides a summary of the Indigenous Advisory Group (IAG) meeting that was held virtually on Thursday, October 4, 2023 from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

More information about the project can be found on the [project webpage](#).

## Meeting Purpose

The purpose of this meeting was to:

- Present a project updates.
- Seek participants' input into design options.
- Share next steps.

## Attendance

### IAG Members Present

- Valerie V.
- Katherine G.
- Brandy S.
- [Anonymous]
- Amanda P.
- Madison J.
- Tanya LR. (via written responses to question prompts)

### Project Staff Present

- Ashley Wilson, Senior Project Coordinator, City of Toronto
- William Skura, Senior Public Coordinator, City of Toronto

## Presentation

Project staff presented:

- An overview of the Don Mills Community Recreation Centre (CRC) project design options, including features open to input.

## Questions and Discussion: Main Floor

Following the presentation of the main floor of the Don Mills CRC, IAG members were asked for feedback concerning particular design options. Guiding discussion questions included:

- How can the common areas and lobby be designed to feel welcoming and encourage community members to visit? What events or programming might these spaces need to accommodate?
- What types of food-related programming would you like to see in the larger multi-purpose space with attached community kitchen?

- How can the interior and exterior of the CRC be designed to feel welcoming and encourage integration between the CRC and the future park?
  - For example: If the future park were to include a sacred fire space, what types of features or amenities should be included in a multi-purpose room that opens out onto the park?
- Any comments or suggestions on the twin ice pads, aquatics, change rooms or other spaces on the main floor?

The participants suggested incorporating indoor greenery (e.g., plants, shrubs, herbs, flowers) and to have the CRC be a bright and open space, with as many windows as possible. The use of natural materials like wood was recommended. Bringing the outside was seen as a great idea (e.g., living wall, small tress, water). Playing light music in the background was suggested by one participant. The CRC should be child safe and open 24-hours a day (if there will be sacred fire ceremonies in the adjacent park, fire keepers will need 24-hour access to the CRC). The CRC should incorporate Indigenous languages and artwork where possible. It was recommended to avoid blank white walls in the CRC. There should be ample outdoor access to allow Indigenous community members to partake in land-based programming (e.g., full moon ceremony).

When asked about food programming, the participants suggested having both structured nutrition/cooking classes, as well as social uses for the CRC kitchen. It would be ideal for a community garden to be close to the kitchen. This would make it feel like home and allow easy access for gardeners to cook their food. One participant suggested food programming around harvesting a moose. A moose could be brought to the kitchen and program participants would learn how to harvest all the meat and use the hide and bones. There is not a lot of this type of programming in Toronto and Indigenous youth must travel north to learn these skills and knowledge.

The interior/exterior considerations focused on having a washroom close to the park doors to provide ease of access. There were suggestions for seating under the awning of the CRC and for a storage area for the sacred fire supplies. There should be resources for people to learn more about the sacred fire (e.g., meaning, restrictions – no photography). Other suggestions included allowing smudging inside and having multiple murals painted by Elders, children, and other Indigenous community members.

There were some concerns raised with the double ice rinks. Some participants felt that families taking part in hockey leagues tend to come from affluent families who may not be sensitive to the needs of others in the space. The participants suggested keeping the on-ice and off-ice areas separate, so that people at the CRC for non-hockey related activities have a separate area. Participants recommended ensuring there is a variety of on-ice activities available, rather than hockey. There are fears that hockey leagues will monopolize the on-ice activities, thereby excluding all those who cannot participate in them. There were suggestions for reserving one ice pad for non-hockey activities. It was suggested that Indigenous peoples be given priority in booking the rinks, as well as the multipurpose rooms. It was also recommended that the ice rinks be utilized for lacrosse. It was felt that all programming should be free to remove barriers to access. Participants also stressed the needed for family and gender-neutral change rooms.

There was a suggestion to have a “walk-in” shallow end of the pool for those who may have mobility challenges.

## Q & A

During the discussion, several questions were raised by the IAG. Questions received from IAG members (Q) and responses from staff (R) include the following. These are not verbatim:

Q: Will this be a priority/free centre?

R: Not sure, that is a question for recreation. Will ask and find out the answer.

Q: Will the underground parking be free?

R: We do not know yet.

Comment from Participant: One of the issues is parking is not free everywhere. The City may want to consider having free parking. There will be families who will have to drive and will not want to pay for parking a couple of times a week.

Q: In terms of the two hockey rinks, is one for league use and one for everyone else? Why are there two of them?

R: There is a need for two. They can be used for other ice related activities (e.g., leisure skates). We anticipate league use, but it would be available for other users. One of the ice rinks is meant to replace the one that is closing at Don Mills and Lawrence.

Q: Will there be a community garden at this location?

A: The community gardens are run through parks instead of recreation. The community garden would be suited to the park project, which is separate. There's certainly a possibility. The park will be about 3 acres.

Comment from Participant: Some community centres have gardens, where the staff tend them and harvest the food for the CRC.

A: I am not sure. We will investigate.

Comment from Participant: There could be two. One for a community garden and one where the staff harvests and uses the food for cooking programs. It is important to get back to traditional harvesting for Indigenous peoples. The cost of food is high. Indigenous peoples need to return to traditional ways. Food is medicine in my teachings. I would also recommend having a medicine garden at the CRC for the community and teachings could be provided.

## Questions & Discussion: Second Floor

Following the presentation of the second floor of the Don Mills CRC, IAG members were asked for feedback concerning particular design options. Guiding discussion questions included:

- What features, activities and programs should the outdoor terrace have or accommodate?
- What features, activities and programs should the double gym and fitness studios have or accommodate?
  - For example: Are there design considerations you'd like to see included to accommodate non fitness use of the double gym?
- Any comments or suggestions on the open gym / fitness area, change rooms or other spaces on the second floor?

The participants recommended that the room adjoining the terrace should be multipurpose and could even serve as the kitchen. Currently the room is designated for fitness and IAG members felt that this could be moved to the first floor facing the park, to allow connection to nature whilst performing fitness activities.

There were recommendations to reserve space for early-years programming, where the CRC could function as a networking hub for Indigenous families. Providing space to grassroots Indigenous organizations would enhance this networking aspect of the CRC. There were also suggestions to provide space for Indigenous cultural practices (e.g., drumming).

For the terrace it was recommended to have ample seating and an area for activities (e.g., painting, singing circles, crafts). There could also be small planters where the children can learn to plant flowers and herbs.

In terms of fitness activities and gym use, the participants recommended the gym be available for bookings (e.g., basketball, films). The gym should also be used as a gathering place. Fitness equipment and women-only and co-ed classes are needed in the area, as there are not many gyms around the CRC. Indigenous-specific fitness programming (e.g., lacrosse training) could also be held at the CRC. One participant suggested having a woodshop in the CRC for youth and adults to develop their skills.

The participants also provided additional comments, not covered in the questions. There were concerns about the safety around the Don Mill's CRC as it is a high-traffic area. There were suggestions to increase the amount of parking available and to ensure it is shared equitably. It was also suggested that a ceremony take place when ground is broken for the construction of the Don Mills CRC.

## Q & A

During the discussion, several questions were raised by the IAG. Questions received from IAG members (Q) and responses from staff (R) include the following. These are not verbatim:

Q: Will the fitness studio and gym be free?

A: Not sure, will have to check with recreation. I think it might be specific to the community.

## Next Steps

- Members can send additional ideas, comments, or suggestions to [Elijah.Bawuah@toronto.ca](mailto:Elijah.Bawuah@toronto.ca) and/or [abirioukovbrant@theridgeroad.com](mailto:abirioukovbrant@theridgeroad.com)
- 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.
- The third IAG meeting is planned to take place in 2024.
  - Members will receive an email to confirm a meeting date and time.

## Contact Us

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

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