

City of Toronto – Parks, Forestry & Recreation

Centennial Park Playground and Water Play Improvements

Indigenous Community Circle Meeting 2

January 2024



Project Team

City of Toronto

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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 Community Circle meeting held virtually on Wednesday, January 24, 2024 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. The Indigenous Community Circle was formed through outreach to members of the Indigenous Community Circle struck for the Centennial Park Master Plan Update. Additional grassroots outreach, including the circulation of a PDF flyer, led by Ridge Road Training and Consulting, and engagement with 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:

- Review the Centennial Park Master Plan Overview & the Centennial Park Overview
- Present Indigenous placemaking concepts and design options.
- Discuss the design options and ideas for Indigenous placemaking.
- Question and answer period.
- Share next steps.

Attendance

Indigenous Community Circle Project Staff Present

Members Present

- 10

- City of Toronto
 - Tonya Crawford, Senior Project Coordinator
 - Mark Goulart, Senior Project Manager
- PMO
 - Myles Mackenzie, Associate and Senior Project Manager
 - Catherine Tammaro, Indigenous Design Advisor
 - Patricia Robles, Landscape Designer
- SAFFY
 - Casey, Senior Strategist
- Ridge Road Training & Consulting
 - Karissa Maracle, Project Manager
 - Anton Birioukov-Brant, Director

Presentation

Project staff presented:

- An overview of the Centennial Park Master Plan and the Centennial Park Play Area.
- Designs for the Playground and Water Play area.
- Ideas for Indigenous placemaking.

Questions and Discussion

The project team presented the Centennial Park Master Plan and the Centennial Park Play Area designs, which were discussed with the IAC. In addition, the participants were asked to provide feedback on four Indigenous placekeeping elements in the playground and water play area.

Guiding discussion questions included:

1. Do you have any questions/comments regarding the Playground and Water Play Area Design?
2. Tree of Peace Garden
 - a. Does this resonate with you as an Indigenous placekeeping element?
 - b. Are there additional plants/species you'd like to see accompanying this Tree of Peace?
 - c. The Tree of Peace idea came from some of the conversations at our last meeting about the power of trees for healing and improving mental wellbeing, do you feel this could accomplish that?
3. Metallic Wave Screen
 - a. We heard so much about the importance of the creek and the desire for a rainwater feature. Does this resonate with you as something that connects the site to natural water?
 - b. Are there ideas you have to change or improve it?
4. Constellation Canopy
 - a. Does this concept resonate with you? Why or why not?
 - b. We talked at our last meeting about sky-earth connections. Are there constellations or patterns important for your culture that you would like to see reflected here?
 - c. Are there ideas you would have to change or improve it?
5. Onkwehonwe Wall Panel
 - a. Does this concept resonate with you? Why or why not?
 - b. If we think about natural patterns, like feathers, or traditional pottery patterns, is there one you would prefer to see represented here? Are there other patterns you'd like to see represented here?
 - c. Are there ideas you would have to change or improve it?

The participants provided comments and questions both orally and in writing via the chat function. General oral and written comments have been consolidated into narrative text. Questions and responses are presented separately.

Questions & Comments Concerning Design

One of the participants was glad to hear that accessibility was prioritized as they use a walker and scooter. There were suggestions to have representations of the Seven Grandfather Teachings, as well as colours of the four directions circle incorporated into the playground and water play area design. Including the animals native to the area was also recommended. There are possibilities for developing spaces to welcome seniors and Elders to the area. A participant recommended having a covered space for small Pow Wows. A teetertotter with flying eagle wings and a dream catcher web rope climber were also suggested. There was an idea for having an Indigenous-themed skatepark (e.g., smudge bowl, turtle shell speed bump, canoe half pipe). There was a recommendation to cover the large slide to enhance safety and to incorporate "Every Child Matters" messaging and colours (i.e., orange). Another participant

suggested planting fruit trees for shade and edible fruit, as well as planting berry bushes instead of non-edible plants.

Oral Questions

Question: Will there be sledding on the hill in the playground?

Response: The northwest corner of Centennial Park has a toboggan hill. The playground hill is often an introductory hill before the children progress to the larger designated toboggan hill. The design has left the playground hill clear and open to allow for sledding. The darker playground colours, along with the use of rubber, will help reduce the amount of snow and increase access to the playground during winter months.

Question: Will the accessibility path be wide enough to accommodate multiple people and vehicles (e.g., bicycles)? Are there any plans to incorporate the natural environment and/or art around the path?

Response: There will be some planting around the accessibility path. The accessibility path is not connected to any other park paths, thereby reducing potential congestion.

Question: In addition of the pavilion area near the entrance, are there any shade/rain shelters with different rooftop materials to make sounds with the rain?

Response: The pavilion roof will be metal. There are no designated shelters, aside from the umbrellas near the water play area. There used to be a shade structure nearby, but there were resident concerns about people occupying the area and playing loud music. This structure has been moved deeper into the park. In terms of shade, a lot of the mature trees are being kept and they are part of the shade plan.

Written Questions

These are verbatim questions posted in the chat. Ridge Road Training & Consulting, Inc. (RRTC) has made minor alterations to ensure grammatical accuracy, as well as removing participants' names.

Question: Are there going to be water fountains?

Response: If water fountains are drinking fountains – yes.

Question: Accessible washrooms?

Response: Yes there will be accessible washrooms.

Question: In consideration to the park goers/local community people, for the picnic area-- would a "Little Free Pantry" be allowed?

Response: Interesting idea! Probably not with the playground, but perhaps something the City could consider for broader park consideration. Food security is important!

Question: What about a sacred fire area for cultural events?

Response: We have heard a desire for sacred fire areas and cultural events, so this will be a part of the continued conversations about the park - but not the playground.

Question: It looks like you've elected to define these areas by structures and hard surfaces that are comprised of "straight line" segments. Was there any thought to make them more curvilinear?

Oral Response [not verbatim]: The linear design feature is considered to be the "Folds" geometry, which was one of the two original design options of the playground/water play area. More wavy design features were considered, but there was a felt need to maximize the space of the playground, which would fit better with the "Folds" design. The designers have tried to

ensure the playground/water play area are nestled in the natural environment, even though they have some straight-line qualities.

Tree of Peace Garden

One of the participants remarked that the four directionality of the roots is a great anchor point in the entryway/pavilion area as it directs the rest of the way to the park. It would be ideal to make references to this anchor point in other parts of the park. However, which direction the compass faces must be considered (i.e., in western societies it is traditionally oriented to the north, in some Indigenous societies it is traditionally oriented to the east).

The selection of the white pine tree was well-received by many participants, who spoke about its size and magnificence. Trees have considerable significance and meaning in many Indigenous cultures. For example, a participant mentioned having a tree as the center of the Sundance ceremony. Some participants questioned the selection of the white pine and suggested that a cedar can be considered as an alternative. Cedar is a medicine in many Indigenous cultures and having ready access to cedar would be beneficial to the Indigenous community in the area. There were also suggestions for making an Elder's Garden near the Tree of Peace. The participants also had several planting suggestions, including lavender, sweetgrass, maple groves, and a medicine garden.

Oral Questions

Question: What is the tallest white pine tree you have been successful in planting? Trying to get an understanding of the size of tree when it will be planted.

Response: We will be looking for a bigger tree than a usual nurse stock. We need to establish a balance between having a larger tree, but a young enough tree to ensure its survival. The tree will be approximately 15 feet in height when planted.

Wave Screen

A participant was concerned about the potential of the wave screen to disrupt the line of sight from the playground to the washroom. Some families may have multiple children at the playground and some older children may need to go to the washroom unaccompanied. Being able to clearly see the child's progression to/from the washroom is important for safety.

The participants were receptive to the interplay of water. The awing would also provide needed shade on hot summer days.

Written Questions

These are verbatim questions posted in the chat. RRTC has made minor alterations to ensure grammatical accuracy, as well as removing participants' names.

Question: Where is the screen located? Between the playground and washrooms?

Response: Yes, the screen is located between building and the plaza/playground.

Question: How does the water off the roof get from the base of the scupper to the natural creek? Will it be visible or conveyed in an underground pipe?

Oral Response [not verbatim]: The visibility of the water will be down from the sky to the ground, but not to the creek. The water will likely be moved with a pipe.

Constellation Canopy

There was a recommendation to incorporate the Pleiades constellation, as there are Anishinaabe creation stories associated with it. It would be ideal to have representation of different nations' stories of stars. Constellations could be arranged as they would appear at

different times of year (e.g., solstice), along with explanations of the traditional Indigenous practices at these times of year. The connection of the stars to tracking the passage of time could also be explored. The directionality of the Milky Way could be woven into the overall narrative of the playground. The underside of the canopy could have solar powered LED lights with night sky/stars/constellations. There was a suggestion to have greetings in different Indigenous languages on the canopy.

Written Questions

These are verbatim questions posted in the chat. RRTC has made minor alterations to ensure grammatical accuracy, as well as removing participants' names.

Question: Sorry, also meant to ask if these would be open cut outs made from the roof or did you plan to insert any clear materials in the opening?

Response: Currently cut-outs is the plan, but nothing is yet set in stone.

Onkwehonwe Wall Panels

A participant suggested having visual representations of different kinds of buildings from each nation. This would build a basic understanding of the original buildings of this land. Since Indigenous peoples have interconnections throughout the Americas, it may be interesting to bring in those buildings as well (e.g., igloos, pyramids, wigwams, lodges, etc.).

The connection to clay as a metaphor is a good anchor point that could be brought up in other parts of the park (i.e., references to the patterns in other places of the park). Since many different First Nations have different ways of doing linework, this can serve as an open invitation to the different nations to share their linework style(s).

The wall panels can be a great place to discuss Indigenous science and connections to nature. The leaf and feather can be representations of interdependence.

Further Communication

An Indigenous community circle participant contacted the project team via email raising several concerns outlined below. The project team reflected on these concerns and crafted a response (see Appendix A). The project team will aim to provide greater transparency to the consultation, engagement, and design processes.

1. Representation of the Mississauga of the Credit First Nation and Haudenosaunee Confederacy.
2. Lack of incorporation of traditional Indigenous storytelling discussed at the first Indigenous community circle meeting held in May, 2023.
3. The use of clay bricks and tiles on park structures, as this may spark conversations concerning previous settler practices of gathering clay from Anishinaabe burial grounds.
4. Lack of transparency in selecting the lead artist (seated) utrihot Catherine Tamaro and a lack of representation of all nations with ties to traditional area on which Centennial Park is now located on.

Next Steps

- Staff shared that members could send additional ideas, comments, or suggestions to Tonya.Crawford@toronto.ca, Alex.Lavasidis@toronto.ca, and/or abirioukovbrant@theridgeroad.com
- Staff compiled a written summary of the meeting and distributed it to members for review.

- Members had one week to provide suggested edits to the draft summary, after which the summary was finalized.

Contact Us

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

Anton Birioukov-Brant

Director | Ridge Road Training & Consulting, Inc.

Phone: 778-998-1611 | Email: abirioukovbrant@theridgeroad.com

Appendix A: City of Toronto Response to Concerns

Below is the verbatim email sent to the Indigenous community circle participant who raised some concerns.

Hello [name removed for confidentiality],

Thank you for taking the time to provide additional comments on the project and questions on the project's Indigenous engagement process. We appreciate you taking the time to provide feedback and we value the opportunity for our team to continue to learn.

The project's Indigenous Design Advisor, Catherine Tamarro, was included as a team member by the selected design team through the 'request for proposal' (RFP) process for the project.

The RFP process sets out required criteria on the scope of work, proposed team members, project references of similar scale, proposed schedule, and fees.

The RFP required that Indigenous Sharing Circles be established to collaborate on the Indigenous placekeeping for the project. Sharing Circles are mainly comprised of urban Indigenous community members to ensure that many Indigenous cultures are represented in the process. The Mississauga's of the Credit First Nation (MCFN) and the Huron-Wendat encourages the city to connect with urban Indigenous community members, as they will be the ones accessing the space more regularly.

The first Sharing Circle meeting was held on Monday, May 1, 2023 from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. At this meeting two playground concepts and the proposed Indigenous theming was shared. The theming includes, sky-earth connections, traditional earthworks, connection to the natural world and role of water and was based on the site context with the topography, proximity to Elmcrest Creek and the open sky feeling experienced at the site. These themes were also shared through an online survey to gain feedback from members of Indigenous communities.

We also shared the concepts and proposed placekeeping through an online meeting and email communication with the MCFN – which is our commonly held practice, as they are the treaty holders to this land. We also received feedback from an Elder from the Mississauga Nation who participated in the Online Virtual Meeting for the Centennial Park Playground and Water Play Area improvements on May 3, 2023. Currently, our process does not always include direct consultation with other Nations (such as Six Nations of the Grand River), though our common consultation practices can evolve as we learn more.

The conversations at the first Indigenous Advisory Circle on the natural environment inspired the proposed placekeeping elements. The four proposed placekeeping elements invoke the natural environment by use of gardens and a feature pine tree, highlighting water relationships by capturing rainwater through a river screen, connecting to the sky through constellation stories and providing wall image displaying a natural element, like the feather.

The insightful feedback received at the sharing circle on Jan. 24th will be used to develop the detail design of the placekeeping elements. Once the detail designs are finalized, we will share them on the project website and provide an email update to the sharing circle participants.

Your note on the use of clay bricks and how it might start conversations about bricks settlers made from Anishinaabe burial ground is something that we have not considered or made aware of as a potential issue. We appreciate you bringing this to our attention and is something that we can consider as we advance other placekeeping opportunities.

Unfortunately, not all the wonderful ideas from our conversations can be included at the playground. For example, there were suggestions for ceremonial fire locations which can't be in proximity to playgrounds and other suggestions for orchard plantings which might be best suited for larger tree grove areas in the park. Fruit bearing trees can be difficult for park staff to maintain in playgrounds as the fruit can stain the rubber surfacing and cause the wood fibre surface area to degrade faster. The additional ideas heard at the Advisory Circle meetings will inspire future placekeeping opportunities within the park. We would like to continue these conversations with Indigenous communities as future projects within the park come to fruition. Thank you again for your time and feedback on the project. Your input is very much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Tonya Crawford.