

City of Toronto – Parks, Forestry & Recreation

Moss Park Park Improvements and John Innes Community Recreation Centre Replacements

Phase 3: Setting the Direction Community Engagement Summary Report

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About the Project

Introduction and Overview

In 2015, an initial reimagining of Moss Park began as a partnership between the City of Toronto, The 519, and a philanthropic partner. The project, titled More Moss Park, aimed to redevelop the park and replace the Community Recreation Centre (CRC) with a new facility that centred 2SLGBTQ+ communities and expanded the services offered. After a community and stakeholder engagement program and feasibility study, culminating in the More Moss Park Report in 2016, the project was deemed not feasible.

In 2019, City Council adopted the implementation strategy for the Parks & Recreation Facilities Master Plan with amendments. The plan made recommendations for the replacement of the John Innes Community Recreation Centre, facade improvements for the Moss Park Arena, as well as park improvements.

While the scope of the current Moss Park park improvements and John Innes Community Recreation Centre replacement project is now focused on park and recreation facilities for the community, the insights, knowledge and data gathered through the More Moss Park consultation and engagement laid valuable groundwork for this project.

The new and bigger facilities of the John Innes Community Recreation Centre and the park improvements will serve local communities by building on the assets of the park and community, in response to the needs of the diverse array of community members who enjoy the park and recreation amenities today.

This report builds on reports previously published, such as those for past surveys, open houses and advisory group meetings, all of which can be found on [the project webpage](#).

Project Goals

The main project goal is to replace the John Innes Community Recreation Centre with a new building and make extensive improvements to the park informed by the community through a meaningful consultation process. The project also draws from the insights collected during the 2015 More Moss Park project.

What will be included in this project:

John Innes Community Recreation Centre Replacement

- A 25-metre, six-lane lap pool
- A leisure/tot pool
- Community, multi-use spaces
- Double gymnasium with a mezzanine running track
- Fitness studios
- Dance studio

- Common and administrative areas, including a large lobby
- WIFI access throughout
- Universal washrooms and change rooms
- A green roof or rooftop community access (to be determined)
- Service spaces
- Main entrance remaining on Sherbourne
- Current plan for some parking spaces between Community Recreation Centre and the arena

Moss Park Park Improvements

- Passive and active recreation amenities including playground, splash pad, community gardens and walking paths, with other features to be determined such as tennis, basketball, etc.
- Safety such as sight lines, lighting and animation to allow more eyes on the park
- Flexible, multi-use spaces for different activities
- Consider food security and urban agriculture
- Indigenous place-keeping approach and elements
- Input from local Indigenous communities
- Enhance ecological and social sustainability and resilience of the park
- Broader connectivity to parks and public realm network

Project Team

As a municipal asset, the City of Toronto’s Parks, Forestry & Recreation Division is overseeing this project, but working closely with the engagement and design teams with a collaborative and equity informed approach.

The project team includes:

- City of Toronto – Parks, Forestry & Recreation Division
- SAFFY (Public and Stakeholder Engagement)
- The Planning Partnership (Landscape Architecture)
- Two Row Architect (Landscape Architecture & Indigenous Lens)
- MJMA (Community Recreation Centre Architecture & Design)

Community Engagement Process Overview

- Phase 1: Building a Vision (Summer to Fall 2022)
- Phase 2: Exploring Design Options (Fall 2022 to Spring 2023)
- Phase 3: Setting the Direction (Spring to Summer 2023)

Phase 3 Engagement Activities

Phase 3: Setting the Direction began in June 2023. As part of the engagement process for Phase 3, five primary consultation activities were conducted:

1. **Local Advisory Group (LAG) and Project Champions (PC) Meeting #3** (June 13, 2023): LAG members and PCs met in person at Regent Park Community Centre to discuss and refine preferred designs for the John Innes Community Recreation Centre and Moss Park. They split into discussion tables focusing on park and CRC plans.
2. **Public Survey #4: Preferred Designs** (June 27 to July 17, 2023): An online survey gathered public feedback on design preferences. In addition to the preferred CRC design, it covered park improvements including seating, a planting plan, the splash pad, the play area, the off-leash area and the pedestrian pathway.
3. **In-Person Public Meeting** (June 29, 2023): The public meeting took place at the John Innes Community Recreation Centre, where a comprehensive presentation of the preferred designs was delivered. Attendees actively participated by providing feedback, facilitated by members of the project team.
4. **Preferred Designs Pop-Ups** (July 29 and August 1, 2023): Members of the engagement team conducted two pop-up events at which community members reviewed renderings of the preferred park and CRC designs and shared feedback.
5. **Youth Mentorship** (April 2023 to August 2023): With the project's youth mentorship component, three local youth mentees ages 15 to 24 were hired. They worked with the project team to develop an art or design component for the project. Mentored by multi-disciplinary artist and educator Melanie Billark, youth mentees learned about storyboarding and digital storytelling, and they each created a short video about the project and the engagement process.

Engagement by the Numbers

By the end of Phase 3, a total of more than 1,140 people, including key stakeholders, park users and Moss Park community members had been engaged throughout the course of the entire project.

In Phase 3 alone, approximately 357 people were consulted.

Local Advisory Group (LAG) and Project Champions (PC) Meeting #3

- Nine LAG members and Project Champions attended
- One final meeting in person

Public Survey #4: Preferred Designs

- 242 survey respondents
- One online survey

In-Person Public Meeting

- Session #1 (1:30 to 3:30 p.m.): 14 attendees

- Session #2 (6:00 to 8:00 p.m.): 23 attendees
- Sessions held at John Innes CRC

Preferred Designs Pop-ups

- Approximately 75 park users and community members
- Two pop-up events at Moss Park Market (260 Queen St. East), Moss Park, and at John Innes CRC

Youth Mentorship

- Three youth mentees
- Three video projects, each created in their unique style

Engagement Demographics

Public Survey #4: Preferred Designs

Nearly all survey respondents were Moss Park community members. Only 4% of respondents represented local groups or service provider, such as Toronto Community Housing, resident/tenant associations, recreation and sports, housing or shelter services and youth services.

- Adults (ages 30 to 55): 56%
- Older Adults (ages 56 to 74): 23%
- Youth and Young Adults (ages 0 to 29): 13%
- Indigenous: 3%
- Black: 7%
- People of Colour: 24%
- 2SLGBTQ+: 32%
- Homeowners: 48%
- Renters: 42%
- People living with a disability: 17%
- English as a preferred language: 93%

Local Advisory Group

The Local Advisory Group (LAG) was a group of 18 Torontonians that broadly represented the park and CRC's current and future community. The LAG provided a forum for the City to learn about and from a diversity of experiences of the park and neighbourhood, co-create project elements and discuss ideas.

- Women: 45%
- Adults (ages 25 to 54): 61%
- Older Adults (55 and older): 20%
- Youth and Young Adults (ages 0 to 24): 19%
- Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour: 45%

Project Champions

Project Champions were six “peer-to-peer” researchers that connected community members to the project outside of public meetings and other City-led consultation events.

- Indigenous: 20%
- Black: 20%
- People of Colour: 20%
- White: 20%
- Ages 0 to 19: 20%
- Ages 19 to 29: 10%
- Ages 30 to 39: 10%
- Ages 40 to 55: 10%
- Ages 56 to 64: 10%

Youth Mentorship

The youth mentorship hired three youth from the Moss Park community to build their storytelling skills. They supported pop-ups and created videos about Moss Park and the engagement process.

- Indigenous: 1 youth
- Black: 1 youth
- People of Colour: 1 youth
- White: 1 youth
- Ages 0 to 19: 2 youth
- Ages 19 to 29: 1 youth
- 2SLGBTQ+: 1 youth

What We Heard

The following section contains a summary of the feedback on the preferred designs through all engagement activities in Phase 3.

Opinions on the preferred CRC and park designs were generally positive, with participants endorsing the proposed designs while providing valuable suggestions for utilization and programming.

For a detailed summary of the engagement activities in Phase 3, including all the feedback collected, see the summary reports linked in the appendix.

Key Insights Related to Preferred Park Design

Based on community feedback gathered during the three phases of community engagement, "The Creek" park design option was selected as the preferred design. This design option includes curved spaces and pathways, with a primary curved

diagonal north-south path that reflects the route of the former Moss Creek which ran through this site. Park program areas are arranged around the large central oval-shaped lawn area.

Safety and maintenance were top priorities for many engagement participants. Increased maintenance for cleanliness and security to prevent vandalism and unsafe conditions were recommended. Some suggestions included increasing the number of lights and the installation of emergency buzzers and pillars. These pillars serve not only as a form of wayfinding but also incorporate technological features, functioning as a means to quickly call for assistance in case of emergencies.

Participants supported showcasing the creek, emphasizing its historical and current significance. Suggestions included integrating water elements and creek-inspired materials and furnishings. The need for a versatile open space that accommodates various activities, including sports and arts, was highlighted. Suggestions included creating quiet reading spaces, shade structures, and designated areas for movie nights and gatherings. The community gardens received strong support. Concerns centered on ensuring a smooth transition for existing plot users and selecting trees that provide ample sunlight for the gardens.

Opinions on the west pathway were mixed. Emphasis was placed on ensuring pathways had sufficient lighting, clear sight lines, proper year-round maintenance and the space to accommodate various users, including pedestrians, cyclists, and skateboarders. Wider sidewalks and gathering areas on Queen Street were also supported, especially for service providers aiding vulnerable and street-involved people.

Ensuring the park caters to seniors, children, families, and the unhoused population was a central theme. Participants appreciated the consultation process and emphasized the need for accessible seating, pathways and tables, with a focus on communal seating options. The addition of a public washroom was recommended by participants across different engagement activities. There was an emphasis on accessible or universal design, and strict maintenance or the ability to self-clean.

Concerns about tree removal were addressed by clarifying that any removed trees would be replaced with native species, resulting in a net increase in trees and more native species in the park upon project completion.

Key Insights Related to Preferred CRC Design

The preferred design for the new John Innes CRC is a four-storey, 75,000-square-foot facility providing a six-lane, 25-metre lap pool, leisure/tot pool, double gymnasium, fitness and weight rooms, multi-purpose community space, a woodshop, social service agency space and a publicly accessible roof terrace.

There was strong interest in increasing Indigenous placekeeping visibility, including educational signage and ceremonial plantings. Participants suggested incorporating these elements both inside and outside the CRC. Participants stressed the importance of designs that cater to all ages, including seniors, teenagers, and children. Barrier-free

access to washrooms and showers, intergenerational programming, and senior play structures were key considerations.

Discussions highlighted the importance of showers for the unhoused population. Participants proposed integrating laundry facilities and emphasized maintenance concerns. There was a preference for a mix of universal and private gendered showers, with references to the York Recreation Centre as a good model.

Suggestions included 24/7 security, well-maintained washrooms and showers and ensuring safety features like emergency buzzers and lighting. Safety in pool areas, well-maintained gyms and clear lobby sightlines were also important considerations.

Participants supported the idea of sharing CRC office space with local support organizations, enhancing service delivery for the unhoused population. Suggestions included creating spaces for collaboration among support workers and providing adequate lighting, storage and multi-functional areas. Creating inclusive spaces for the diverse community of Moss Park, including people experiencing homelessness, was a significant theme. Participants emphasized the value of integrating areas for service providers within the park and CRC, supporting the unhoused population with essential services and amenities.

Attendees highlighted the importance of preserving historical elements like the Fred Denning commemorative plaque and the lion statue, suggesting their inclusion in the new designs to honor the site's history.

A dedicated staff lounge and a fully equipped staff kitchen were suggested. CRC staff also recommended adding staff lockers. There were suggestions for activating the rooftop terrace, such as growing food that can be used to support programming in the community kitchen. Community members recommended designated flexible workspaces, which would be useful to people of all ages.

Recommendations were put forth to optimize the layout of the basketball courts, particularly by enhancing corner shot visibility. Additionally, weight room users reported the need for sufficient space within the weight room. In terms of equipment, recommendations were made for purchasing and maintaining new equipment, ensuring proper storage for fitness equipment and expanding equipment availability. The dance room must be soundproof and should also be flexible to accommodate music programming.

Appendix

See the community engagement summary reports for Phase 3 linked below:

- [Local Advisory Group and Project Champions Meeting #3](#)
- [Public Meeting #4](#)
- [Community Pop-Ups](#)
- [Online Survey #4](#)