

City of Toronto

Moss Park Park Improvements and
John Innes Community Recreation
Centre Replacement

**Phase 2: Exploring Design Options
Community Engagement
Summary Report**

March 2023



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1.0 About the Project

Introduction & Overview

The City of Toronto is leading a redesign of Moss Park and replacement of the 70-year-old John Innes Community Recreation Centre. The goal is for these spaces to serve the current and future needs of all of the diverse Moss Park communities, including vulnerable and equity-deserving populations in the area, and support the population growth in the area.

The redesigned Park and Community Recreation Centre will serve as a gathering place for an array of people, communities, and experiences. Through the engagement process we have heard that the project will be a success if the diversity of community members who use the Park and Community Recreation Centre today – as well as future community members – feel interested, welcome, and safe to use these amenities in the future.

Improvements and revitalization of the Park and Community Recreation Centre were first explored in 2015, and this project seeks to build from insights gleaned throughout that process.

About this Report

This document provides an overview of the Project's Phase 2: Exploring Design Options engagement activities to-date and summarizes the key insights that will inform the project and subsequent phases.

More detailed summaries of the engagement activities that were completed during Phase 2 are linked to in the appendix and can be found on the [project webpage](#).

Project Goals

Replace the John Innes Community Recreation Centre (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:

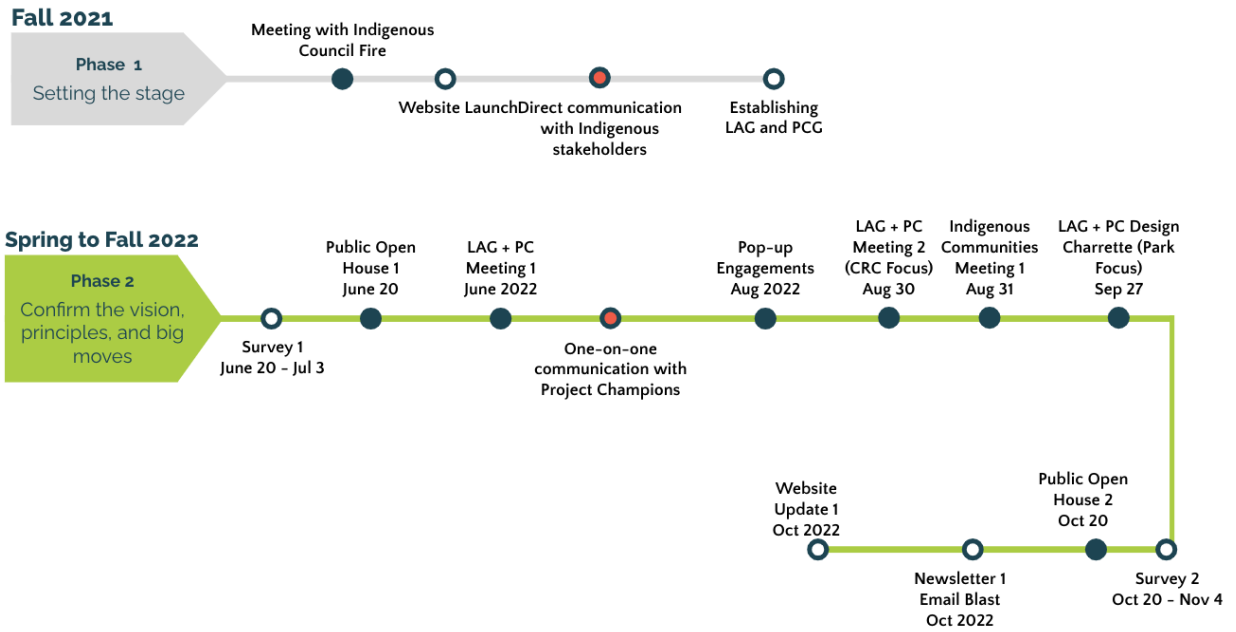
John Innes Community Recreation Centre replacement

- 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 create 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 Timeline



Legend:

- Synchronous Engagement
- Asynchronous Engagement
- Beginning of Ongoing Engagement

Figure 1: Timeline of engagement activities for Phase 1 and Phase 2

Project Team

As a City of Toronto asset, the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division of the City of Toronto 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)

2.0 Engagement Overview

The goal of this Phase of engagement is to collaborate with residents and stakeholders to confirm an overall vision for the project, including Design Principles and Big Moves, which will guide the redesign of both the park and the Community Recreation Centre.

The project builds on the relevant insights collected through the More Moss Park project (2015) which had a different focus, scope and program and was deemed not feasible. The current project team recognizes that in recent history, the local community has been consulted regarding multiple projects and initiatives in the Downtown East area. For this reason, the engagement plan has been tailored to suit the local community through targeted engagement events and advisory groups made of local residents. The team has made an effort to connect with community groups, service providers and attend events hosted in the neighbourhood, as well as reduce barriers for participation. Participants in the local advisory group have also received honoraria where possible. To be clear and transparent about the project, the City is releasing periodic newsletters, and using social media, to communicate engagement opportunities and outcomes. The overall goal is to provide multiple entry points for the community and create a process that is equity-focused and iterative.



Figure 2: (Left) Photo of a project team member talking to Pop-Up attendees in front of a project information board.

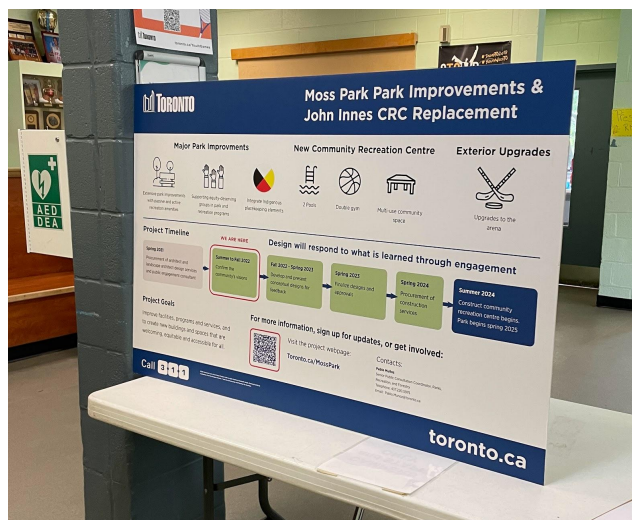


Figure 3: (Left) Photo of a project information board displayed inside the John Innes Community Recreation Centre. .

Engagement by the Numbers

To date, over 300+ people, including the public, key stakeholders, park users and community members have been engaged.

Local Advisory Group (LAG)

- 18 Members
- 1 Kick-Off Survey
- 2 Meetings

Project Champions

- 6 Champions
- 1 Kick-Off Survey
- 2 Meetings

Open House #1

- 30 members of the public
- Virtual meeting

Public Survey

- 211 respondents
- Online Survey

Indigenous Communities Meeting #1

- 13 participants
- Virtual meeting

Youth Workshop (Ages 10-16)

- 15 youth
- In-person meeting

Park Pop-Ups

- 45 park users and local community members
- 5 Pop-Up events over 5 days

Engagement Demographics

Engagement seeks to include diverse perspectives representative of the community members and users of the park space and reflective of the demographics of the surrounding neighbourhoods. Though demographic data is not captured at every engagement event, here we outline known and self-identified demographic information collected during the public survey, and applications for the Local Advisory Group and Project Champions.

Public Survey (211 Respondents)

- **Adults (30-55): 65%**
- **Older Adults (55-74): 21%**
- **Youth and Young Adults (0-29): 11%**
- **Indigenous, Black, People of Colour: 18%**
- **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, or Two Spirit: 37%**
- **English as a preferred language: 94%**

Local Advisory Group (18 members)

The Local Advisory Group (LAG) is a group of Torontonians that broadly represents the park and community recreation centre's current and future community: The Local Advisory Group provides 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 (25-54): 61%**
- **Older Adults (55 and older): 20%**
- **Youth and Young Adults (0-24): 19%**
- **Indigenous, Black, People of Colour: 45%**

Project Champions (6 champions)

Project Champions are "peer-to-peer" researchers that connect community members to the project outside of public meetings and other City-led consultation events.

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

3.0 What We Learned

Key insights from the engagement to-date will inform the project and support the City project team and designers as the design of the Community Recreation Centre and park progresses. Community members will continue to be informed in subsequent phases of design.

In this section we outline five (5) *Key Insights* for the Moss Park park improvements, and five (5) key insights for the John Innes Community Recreation Centre replacement. These *Key Insights* are drawn from the analysis of all consultation and engagement data gathered throughout Phase 2 activities. In the section titled **Big Moves** and **Design Principles**, we outline how the Phase 2 engagement data analysis has helped to refine and shape the project's Big Moves and Design Principles.

For full detail about each Phase 2 engagement activity, and the specific stakeholder and public feedback collected in Phase 2, please see the Phase 2 engagement activities summaries in [Appendices](#).

Key Insights - Moss Park Park Improvements

Insight 1: The built environment and programming can increase safety. Safety has been a recurring theme throughout engagement, raised by many community members, staff and the public. Diverse communities experience and identify safety in different ways, which requires a thoughtful and considered design approach. Some groups, for example, have identified that too much surveillance could hinder their feelings of safety, particularly for racialized people or people experiencing homelessness.

Physical features such as fencing, lighting, emergency buttons have been broadly identified as tools and approaches that can help ensure safety of park users. Most participants agree that Moss Park needs to have more “eyes on the park” and be designed in a way that facilitates this outcome such as playground amenities, evening sports, dog-off leash, dedicated BBQ space, and universal games tables. Increased “eyes on the park” encourages design and programming considerations to activate space in ways that increase public presence and collective, collaborative building of safe and inclusive spaces.

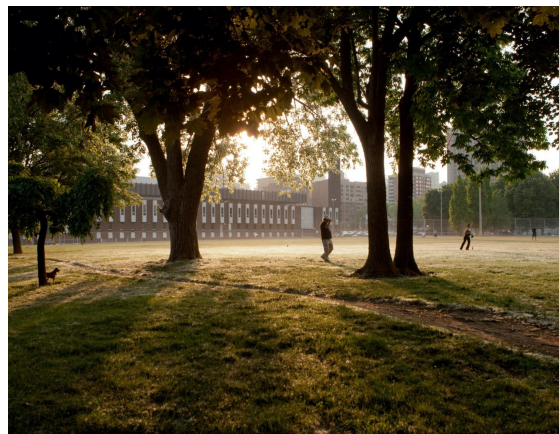


Figure 4: Photo of Moss Park

Insight 2: Keeping the Community Recreation Centre accessible by keeping it free of charge

Many participants identified that there are few spaces that are free of charge in the city, in that, financial barriers impact accessibility. Accessibility has been highlighted as an important principle in the Moss Park redevelopment, and preserving this principle when it comes to financial accessibility for those from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, including those experiencing homelessness, is important to the health of the park and Community Recreation Centre and overall success of this project. Displacement and the interruption of unhoused community daily activities has also been identified as a concern, and consideration for how to address this interruption during the construction period will be important.

Insight 3: Honour the Indigenous history of the site

Indigenous inclusion and representation on the site has been deemed important, with recommendations and ideas such as incorporating Indigenous art into the design. It will be important to continue to work with Indigenous communities and local indigenous residents to develop placekeeping elements in a meaningful way.

Insight 4: Food Security is important

Access to food is a high priority for many communities in and around Moss Park. Community gardens, food forests, diverse opportunities to grow food – and the amenities to support these activities like places to cook and eat in the park and community recreation centre – were identified as very important by people in the community.

Insight 5: Environmental Sustainability

Participants identified that efforts towards environmental protection, waste reduction and prioritizing green spaces in Moss Park should be increased. They also expressed that natural materials should be used to build the park and that the park should integrate technology that supports clean energy (i.e., charging stations for phones and ebikes). Many indicated that Park improvements should protect and enhance the tree canopy throughout the park and site, and there was a general appreciation for thoughtful and environmentally sustainable materials and design choices.

Key Insights - John Innes Community Recreation Centre Replacement

Insight 1 - Programming needs should reflect community needs

The Community Recreation Centre offers a variety of spaces and specialized programming, and there is a desire to see culturally specific programming and programming that better reflects the neighbourhood's demographics. The community kitchen, youth lounge and woodshop, specifically food and art programming, were seen as key opportunities to incorporate culturally specific programming.

Participants also indicated a desire to see Indigenous-centred programming, gatherings and spaces for ceremony that are stewarded by Indigenous-led services and organizations. There was a call for improved access to popular programs at the existing centre to accommodate a larger number of users. These popular programs include: indoor badminton and soccer,

basketball, woodworking, group fitness, weight conditioning, cooking, seniors programming, aqua fitness, and lane swim

Insight 2 - Improve user experience

Engagement revealed the need to create a user-friendly online platform that allows community members to manage bookings for multi-purpose community spaces on their own. We also heard that there was a desire for programming that ran later into the evening—particularly youth programming.. Additional suggestions included hiring Indigenous staff and stewards in the park and community centre to ensure cultural competency in recreation programs and service delivery.

Insight 3 - Open to all ages, genders, and abilities

We learned that community spaces and programs should accommodate people with different mobility needs and be accessible to people of all ages and genders. Spaces such as the fitness rooms, woodshop, aquatics centre and youth lounge should have dedicated programming and times for specific demographic groups including women, 2SLGBTQ+ and people with disabilities.

Insight 4 - Ensure Proper Ventilation, Public Hygiene and Safety

Materials that prioritize and facilitate cleanliness were highlighted as a consideration. Common areas such as washrooms, change rooms and seating areas have materials that are easy to clean and maintain so that they last a long time and are safe to use. The community indicated that the design should include windows that are able to be opened to the outside to ensure cross ventilation and alternative access to air. Participants want to ensure the recreation centre has adequate reception areas and sightlines to ensure proactive and passive monitoring for the facility by staff and visitors.

Insight 5 - Create Artful, Flexible, Multi-purpose spaces

Through engagement we heard that all spaces should be flexible to accommodate a wide range of uses. For example, the youth lounge could be a computer space, co-working space or a prayer space. Participants highlighted that the design should incorporate sufficient storage space throughout the recreation centre for programs and safekeeping personal belongings such as backpacks and bikes. They also shared that they would like to see the rooftop be animated with a community garden or greenhouse that could have a link to the food programming in the community kitchen and cooking classes. There was a desire to see common areas that are cohesive and connected, and suggestions that artworks and installations could help bridge and connect these spaces. Additionally, there is a desire for a legacy space within the Community Recreation Centre to incorporate Indigenous history and art.

Big Moves

The project team developed a set of thirteen (13) initial Big Moves to drive the project. These initial Big Moves were developed based on data gathered through the More Moss Park process

(2015) as well as from insights from staff and pre-engagement interviews with the local community. Through Phase 2, these initial Big Moves were put out to the community to be refined and further developed.

BIG MOVE 1: Maintain a large area of open parkland with frontages onto Queen and Shuter by building the new Community Recreation Centre along Sherbourne St., over the existing footprint.

BIG MOVE 2: Establish a strong and cohesive design language between the Community Recreation Centre and the Arena buildings as well as the public realm.

BIG MOVE 3: Optimize opportunities for rooftop access to the new Community Recreation Centre.

BIG MOVE 4: Incorporate spaces for prayer and ceremony in flexible spaces.

BIG MOVE 5: Ensure washroom access from the outside of the building.

BIG MOVE 6: Create pedestrian connectivity to the park, arena and the Community Recreation Centre from the new Moss Park station in anticipation of a large volume of new users.

BIG MOVE 7: Work with local indigenous partners and first nations to ensure that indigenous placekeeping, knowledge, ways of knowing are reflected in the process and design, park improvements and Community Recreation Centre redevelopment.

BIG MOVE 8: Establish a renewed urban canopy and *increase the number of trees* on Queen Street to match the Shuter edge. *Wood from trees removed during construction will be used in the project in various ways.*

BIG MOVE 9: Maintain and enhance key pedestrian pathways and access points into the park with lighting and sightlines.

BIG MOVE 10: Maintain and enhance existing permeable park edges and protect the existing urban canopy along Shuter Street.

BIG MOVE 11: Maintain the strong Sherbourne St. urban built edge and enhance the relationship between the Community Recreation Centre /Arena/Park and Metrolinx Station with improved visual and physical connectivity and accessibility.

BIG MOVE 12: Remove the baseball diamond to accommodate a wider range of park uses.

BIG MOVE 13: Add a fenced, dedicated dogs off leash area to the park to support the growing number of residents with dogs in the intensifying neighbourhood, and to protect other park amenities and park users from conflict with dogs.

Design Principles

Like the Big Moves that describe priority actions that the City intends to take, the Project Team developed *Design Principles that serve* as guidance to steer the vision of the project. The following Design Principles were presented to stakeholders and the public throughout Phase 2 activities. There have been no required changes to the Design Principles.

DESIGN PRINCIPLE 1: Ensure the design of the Community Recreation Centre and park supports equity, belonging and inclusion.

DESIGN PRINCIPLE 2: Ensure the Community Recreation Centre and Park are accessible to all.

DESIGN PRINCIPLE 3: Create a space that makes safety for all users a priority.

DESIGN PRINCIPLE 4: Design an open, permeable, and transparent environment.

DESIGN PRINCIPLE 5: Maximize, enhance, and improve green spaces.

DESIGN PRINCIPLE 6: Celebrate and share information about the Indigenous history and character of Moss Park.

DESIGN PRINCIPLE 7: Contribute to food security.

DESIGN PRINCIPLE 8: Be sustainable and carbon neutral.

4.0 Next Steps

Current anticipated next steps:

The project team will use what was learned in Phase 2 to start developing ideas for park amenities and concepts for the new Community Recreation Centre. The team will review ideas through design options presented to the community and revise ideas based on feedback.

Winter 2023

Phase 3 - Design Options

The City will present the preferred designs for both Moss Park Park and John Innes Community Recreation Centre, for further refinement through community engagement.

Spring 2023

Phase 4 - Preferred Concept

The City will refine the concept plans for the Park and John Innes Community Recreation Centre based on feedback and present the preferred concept to the community. Review ideas with the community and revise plans and designs based on feedback.

Spring 2024

The City will hire a construction team for the Community Recreation Centre.

Spring 2024 to Fall 2027

Community Recreation Centre construction

Spring 2027 to Fall 2029

Park improvement construction

These next steps are subject to change and are separate from the Metrolinx Ontario Line Moss Park station and subway line construction scheduled to happen from 2023 to 2030.

The project has faced some minor delays. In the fall of 2021, the project was paused while the local ward Councillor, City staff and Metrolinx worked to resolve technical issues in relation to the construction of the new Ontario Line station.

For more information and to sign up for email updates, visit toronto.ca/MossPark.

5.0 Appendix

See the community engagement summary reports for Phase 2 linked below:

- [Indigenous Communities' Meeting #1](#)
- [Indigenous Communities' Meeting #2](#)
- [Local Advisory Group and Project Champions Meeting #1](#)
- [Local Advisory Group and Project Champions Meeting #2](#)
- [Public Meeting #1 and Online Survey #1](#)
- [Phase 2 Pop-up Engagements](#)
- [Public Meeting #2](#)
- [Online Survey #2](#)