

# Community Engagement Phase 3 Summary Report

New Park at 229 Richmond Street West  
Phase 3: Setting the Direction  
City of Toronto – Parks and Recreation  
December 2024



# Contents

Introduction.....	2
Phase 3: Setting the Direction.....	2
How We Reached People .....	3
Report Glossary .....	3
Public Engagement Timeline .....	4
Public Engagement Groups and Events .....	5
Community Advisory Committee.....	5
Goals of the CAC .....	5
CAC Meeting #4: August 19, 2024 .....	6
CAC Meeting #5: October 30, 2024.....	6
Indigenous Advisory Circle.....	7
Goals of the IAC.....	7
IAC Meeting #1: September 19, 2024 .....	8
IAC Meeting #2: November 6, 2024 .....	8
Public Events and Outreach.....	9
Survey: September 26 to October 8, 2024.....	9
Pop-Up Event: September 26, 2024.....	11
Open House: December 9, 2024 .....	12
Inter-Committee Feast: December 10, 2024 .....	14
Next Steps .....	14

# Introduction

---

A new 2,600 m<sup>2</sup> park is coming to 229 Richmond Street West. The site is currently leased to a restaurant and used as an outdoor patio. Waawaatesi, the proposed design by West 8 Urban Design and Landscape Architecture and team was selected as the winning design through a two-stage design competition. From June through December of 2024, West 8 have refined the design concept in collaboration with members of the public, key city stakeholders, and advisory committees made up of community members and Indigenous stakeholders.

## Phase 3: Setting the Direction

The objective of this phase of engagement was to present the winning design for the park in a series of engagement events to inform the development of a detailed design. The themes focused on during these events included refining park features such as seating, pathways, and gathering spaces; enhancing Indigenous Placekeeping, sustainability, and accessibility; and ensuring that the park will be safe, functional, and well-integrated into its downtown setting.

This phase included two engagements with the Community Advisory Committee (CAC), two engagements with the Indigenous Advisory Circle (IAC), and one phase-concluding Inter-Committee Feast with these groups. The phase also included two public outreach events and one public survey. The outcomes of these engagements are summarized in this report. As part of this phase:

- The Community Advisory Committee (CAC) was expanded to include local residents, ensuring broader input in shaping the park.
- Key park features, such as seating, pathways, and gathering spaces, are being refined based on community feedback.
- Indigenous placekeeping, sustainability, and accessibility are being enhanced in the updated design.
- Thoughtful design adjustments are being made to balance the park's features with its downtown setting, ensuring safety, functionality, and connectivity.

The City has incorporated community feedback into the updated design, ensuring it reflects local priorities as the project moves toward construction.

# How We Reached People

## Project Webpage

A webpage ([toronto.ca/229RichmondPark](https://toronto.ca/229RichmondPark)) was set up to act as a communications portal to inform the public about the engagement activities for the new park. The webpage hosts all up to date information regarding the project.

## Email Blasts

Email notifications have been dispatched to our subscribers, marking the initiation of the current engagement phase. The correspondence provided engagement dates and included a hyperlink to access the engagement tools.

## Social Media and Digital Ads

The City of Toronto used its Facebook and Instagram accounts to promote the online survey through a paid advertisement campaign and organic posts on the Parks and Recreation division's Facebook, Instagram, and X accounts.

## E-Flyers

Digital flyers were distributed through email blasts to our subscriber list and from the Councillor's office. The e-flyers included interactive links to the project webpage to access the survey.

## Report Glossary

This report uses terms related to Landscape Architecture and Urban Design concepts. To help clarify these terms, a short glossary is below.

- **Placekeeping:** The long-term management of public spaces, especially in the context of Indigenous care for and value of new parks and the capacity for Indigenous-led events, land management practices, and connection to the land.
- **CPTED:** "Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design". This industry-standard set of guidelines helps public space designers ensure that new public spaces are safe and secure without relying heavily on standard crime prevention tactics (such as active policing of spaces). Instead, CPTED principles encourage designers to make spaces that can be more naturally watched-over by the public, reinforcing a sense of safety and deterring criminal activity through high levels of activity and space use. Examples of CPTED principles in practice include making

sure that a park can be visible from the street, reducing blind corners and hiding places, and maintaining an active calendar of events that keeps public spaces busy both night and day.

- **Didactic Elements:** Elements of the design that support learning and knowledge about a place. These elements can be obvious (such as plaques and signs that tell visitors about the park and its inspiration) or subtle (like the use of Indigenous plants in key areas to create layers of meaning that can be discovered by curious visitors).
- **Dynamic Project Programming:** “Programming” refers to elements of a public space design that encourage use. These can be passive (such as play areas, benches, and washrooms – elements that have defined uses and are always available in the space) or active (such as farmers’ markets, performance events, or other “activations” of the space on a temporary or seasonal basis). Dynamic Project Programming refers to the desire for a project to incorporate lots of (appropriate) programming elements, both active and passive, to create a thriving and vibrant public realm.
- **Intergenerational Play:** One of the most important factors in making public spaces successful is fostering community in those spaces. Intergenerational play, or the ability for people of all ages to connect, laugh, and play actively together, helps support community and lets people interact and learn with other people who might be very different from themselves.
- **Topography:** The arrangement of natural and artificial physical features of an area. Here, topography frequently refers to the design of the park’s ground surface: slopes, hills, dips, and flat areas in a park, which together make up its topography. This is sometimes referred to in more technical contexts as “site grading”.

## Public Engagement Timeline

---

The engagement for this project began in 2022, led by City of Toronto Parks and Recreation. The image below highlights the engagement timeline from 2022 through the end of the project. In earlier phases, PFR worked with members of the public to define a brief for the design of the new park and to evaluate design proposals in the form of competition entries. In Phase 3 of the project, the goal of the public engagement was “Setting the Direction”, working collaboratively with the public to refine the concept chosen in prior phases with the help of public input.

The park’s design team (led by West 8) met with committee members and the general public at key points throughout the six months of Phase 3.

# Public Engagement Groups and Events

---

The project team worked with four key groups in this phase of engagement:

1. The Technical Advisory Committee, made up of representatives from City of Toronto departments with input and insight into the design, including Parks Operations, Urban Design, and Urban Forestry (two meetings);
2. The Community Advisory Committee, made up of members of the public from the nearby community (two meetings);
3. The Indigenous Advisory Circle, made up of eight Indigenous members of the public (two meetings);
4. And the General Public, who gave input on the design via a public survey, a pop-up event, and a public open house event.

## Community Advisory Committee

---

### Goals of the CAC

- Review updates to the winning design through a community lens, representing local insights and needs
- Particular areas of focus:
  - o Park features and amenities
  - o Ongoing public programming and activation
  - o Local resident needs and concerns
  - o Local business needs and concerns
  - o Resources for unhoused people and marginalized communities

The Community Advisory Committee (CAC) for the new park at 229 Richmond Street West was initially formed as a stakeholder advisory group composed of representatives from local organizations with relevant expertise. These stakeholders played a crucial role in Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the project, particularly in shaping and informing the technical aspects of the design competition. In Phase 3 (Design Development), we expanded the CAC to include local residents, ensuring broader community input on park features and usability. This shift brought in firsthand perspectives that were required to shape the final design.

## CAC Meeting #4: August 19, 2024

At the fourth meeting of the CAC, the winning design was presented, with full feedback recorded in the meeting summary and available publicly on the project website.

Comments were broad and touched on furnishings, plantings, inclusivity and accessibility, aesthetics, and programming including events and recreational opportunities. Comments were integrated by the Design Team and shared with Parks and Recreation for approval.

### Key takeaways from the meeting:

1. Maintenance and upkeep is crucial to the overall success of the park in the eyes of the community. The Design Team and the City are aware of this and have modified the topography and washroom building elements to respond to this in the concept refinement phase. In the design development phase, this feedback will continue to inform choices of materials, fixtures, and maintenance methods including waste disposal and cigarette waste control.
2. Accessibility is very important to the community. The Design Team have added additional accessible entrances to ensure that all four sides of the park are fully accessible and barrier-free. The Design Team will continue to work with best-practice accessibility standards as the design is detailed and developed for construction.
3. Year-round access and programming is of strong interest to the community. The Design is tailored to accommodate this, and the Design Team will continue to work with the City to determine exactly how and when the park will be maintained and programmed through the winter months and year round.
4. Storytelling about the history of the site, including the presence of a lost creek, is important to community members. The Design Team has integrated subtle didactic elements in the form of planting and design details, and will continue to explore opportunities for overt and subtle narrative in the detailed design phase.

## CAC Meeting #5: October 30, 2024

At the fifth CAC meeting, the revised design was presented, with feedback recorded in the meeting summary and available publicly on the project website. Comments focused on accessibility, project narrative and approach, maintenance, implementation, public safety questions, and lighting. Feedback was integrated into the updated design shared with the public in December, following approval from Parks and Recreation.

## Key takeaways from the meeting:

1. Lighting is important, both in the context of safety and in its overall impact on the park experience. The Design Team has integrated colorful LED lighting underneath the balcony to provide safe and atmospheric illumination that works synergistically with the overall public art concept, and will be conducting a complete photometric study of the site to ensure that lighting adheres to best practice in the design development phase.
2. Art Projections are broadly supported both in the Aki Illuminations concept piece and in the opportunities for potential future activation and programming. The Design Team will detail the technical system in the design development phase, with special care paid to maintenance, upkeep, and lifespan of the system for long-term operation, partnering with the City to ensure that the proper systems are in place for this to be achieved.
3. Safety is a high priority for the community. The Design Team has undertaken extensive quantitative and qualitative visibility studies of the park to ensure adherence to CPTED best practices as a direct result of CAC feedback. The City has also done a safety review of the design with the Toronto Police Service.
4. Furnishings must be high quality and cohesive with the design intent, and the community has suggested that the project deviate from the CoT standard benches. This will be explored in detail in the next phase.

## Indigenous Advisory Circle

---

### Goals of the IAC

- Review updates to the winning design through an Indigenous Placekeeping and reconciliation lens.
- Particular areas of focus:
  - o Seven Stepping Stones and underpinnings of park philosophy
  - o Park naming and terminology
  - o Ongoing Indigenous programming and art
  - o Habitat value
  - o Public art
  - o Heritage requirements and feasibility
  - o Seasonal park programming approach
  - o Other topics at the discretion of the advising Elder on this project



The IAC was selected at the beginning of Phase 3 following a public application process managed by the City of Toronto, with input from Indigenous Engagement consultant Minokamik Collective.

## **IAC Meeting #1: September 19, 2024**

At the first meeting of the IAC, the winning design was presented, with feedback recorded in the meeting minutes and available publicly on the project website. Comments centered around maintenance, furnishings, accessibility, ecology, and programmatic opportunities for Indigenous placekeeping. Feedback was integrated into the revised design and shared with Parks and Recreation for approval.

### **Key takeaways from the meeting:**

1. Indigenous community programming is a major opportunity in the park, and feasibility for planning, permitting, and hosting these events should be studied. The design has been created with event programming and capacities in mind, and the Design Team will work closely with CoT to address programming opportunities for the park.
2. Safety and maintenance are high-priority concerns for the IAC, with a particular emphasis on ensuring that public safety officers are trained for cultural safety and are able to respond effectively to address park issues while relying on this training. The training of safety officers is outside the scope for this project, but the Design Team has used the IAC's comments together with those from the CAC and the City Encampments group to refine sightlines, improve visibility, and confirm CPTED best practices throughout the park.
3. Water was identified as a key design element to have onsite, whether in the form of The Source washroom building or in another form. Water element feedback will continue to inform the design and detailing of both washroom buildings in the next phase.
4. Accessibility and inclusivity were also identified as important themes for the IAC, with particular emphasis on accessibility for those with sensory processing disorders, given the lighting scheme of the park. This feedback will be addressed as the technical scheme progresses.

## **IAC Meeting #2: November 6, 2024**

At the second meeting of the IAC, the revised design was presented, with feedback recorded in the meeting minutes and available publicly on the project website. Comments centered on accessibility and inclusivity, public art installation, opportunities

for Indigenous programming and temporary supportive features in the park, park naming, and placekeeping narrative. Feedback was integrated into the updated design shared with the public in December.

## **Key takeaways from the meeting:**

1. Indigenous placekeeping should be integrated into the design in various ways. While the design does this well currently, IAC members identified additional opportunities to include details that support placekeeping subtly, such as using the four lighting poles in the park to help indicate the four-directional thinking underlying many Anishinaabe value systems.
2. Dynamic projection programming is another opportunity for placekeeping, and IAC members identified events such as Orange Shirt Day as key times for utilizing the projection system for placekeeping and Indigenous cultural activities.
3. Park naming is an important opportunity for cultural visibility, and the park's name (Waawaatesi) was approved of as a compelling and appropriate choice. The Design Team will be proceeding with having this name evaluated as part of the official park naming process at the City of Toronto.
4. Ceremonial components such as fire and water were stressed as useful if programming will include Indigenous ceremonies of any kind. Multiple options for “eternal flame” installations were discussed, and the Design Team will be exploring the appropriateness of a flame element in this park together with the City of Toronto in the next phase of design.

## **Public Events and Outreach**

---

### **Survey: September 26 to October 8, 2024**

The survey informed the public of the latest design changes and solicited feedback on specific areas of design related to programming and park amenities. See the following pages for a summary of the survey results and key takeaways. Refer to appendix A for full survey results.

### **Survey Summary of Comments and Concerns**

The survey contained multiple opportunities for open commentary and response, and several common themes emerged.

Respondents expressed support for:

- Green spaces and natural features in the park, including The Green lawn space and the natural forested areas
- Native plantings and the inclusion of many trees
- Diverse programming and events, and the opportunities for year-round use of the park

Respondents expressed concern about:

- Public safety and the risk of encampments impeding access to the park
- The need for regular and effective maintenance to preserve the park's design and functionality
- The impact of climate change on the park, including urban heat island effects
- The importance of balancing events with daily use and ensuring that the park remains accessible during events

These points of feedback and concern have informed the updated design, resulting in the following:

- A detailed study of the park's compliance with CPTED best practices including extensive sightline and visibility studies to confirm safety;
- Close discussion with Parks Operations staff regarding maintenance;
- Intent to expand the park's native plantings as the planting design is developed

Further questions about programming, maintenance, and events in the park will be addressed by the Design and City teams together as the park's design and implementation progresses.

## Survey Key Metrics

- Respondents:
  - o 121 complete responses and 62 partial responses
  - o 85% of respondents live and/or work within 5 km of the park
  - o 91% of respondents are between ages 19 and 55
- Core Values and Uses:
  - o 79% resonated with the park's core values
  - o 74% of respondents would use the park to relax alone
  - o 17% would come with pets and 11% would come with children
- Events and Performances:
  - o 78% would attend performances and arts events in the park
  - o 71% would attend large arts events (TIFF, Nuit Blanche, Etc)
  - o 69% would attend small arts events from local groups

- 44% would attend proposed solstice and equinox ceremonies
- 35% would attend other Indigenous events in the park
- 9% would actively perform in the park (busking or other type)

## Pop-Up Event: September 26, 2024

The first design revision was presented to the public via signage to accompany the public survey. Consultant Team members from ERA Architects Inc. were present to answer questions and engage the public along with members of the Client team. The pop-up was intended to spontaneously capture the interest of passersby in the neighborhood to gather community feedback on the design. On the day of the event, Client and Design team members engaged passing members of the public by helping to explain the graphic boards present onsite, directing them to fill out the public survey, recording comments and answering any questions and concerns.

## Pop-Up Reach and Impact

220 people engaged with the park boards and staff during the event. Display panels were available to view during the event, and fliers were distributed in adjacent condominium buildings and businesses.

## Suggested Features and Amenities

Attendees suggested a variety of features that cater to different age groups and interests, including:

- Children's play area and slide in a shaded place to prevent overheating
- A fenced dog park dedicated to canine use
- Lots of seating options, including chairs and tables
- A broad array of dedicated sports and fitness facilities
- Community activities including festivals, markets, local performances, and movie screenings
- Nature and gardening-focused features like a woodland garden, seed-sharing initiatives, and native plantings

The Design Team has integrated play, seating, natural features, and opportunities for cultural programming into the park and has taken some of these pop-up suggestions back to incorporate in the updated design. The updated design includes expanded seating options, native plantings, a firefly habitat area, a children's play area and slide in a shaded area, and the opportunity to host a wide array of community activities. Given

that the park is a small urban pocket park, some other features are better accommodated at nearby facilities.

## Priorities and Themes

Feedback from the pop-up also introduced several key themes and concerns from the community that emerged across responses and engagements during the event. They are:

1. **Safety and Accessibility:** Safety is a priority, with calls for well-lit paths and fixtures to illuminate below them, ensuring no blind spots. The park should be pedestrian-friendly and accessible to all age groups, with clear delineation between activity areas. *Response: The Updated Design has been carefully reviewed to ensure that it is a leader in CPTED best practices, and visibility studies have been conducted to ensure clear sightlines across the park. The park's design has always ensured that all paved routes through the park are AODA-compliant.*
2. **Iconic and Unique:** The community is interested in having an “iconic” piece to draw people to the park, to reinforce the identity of the neighborhood and to establish the area as a world-class and unique place. *Response: The planned Balcony feature for the park is designed to serve as an iconic piece that draws visitors in, with further technical developments to the balcony and projection system planned for the Detailed Design phase.*
3. **Seasonal and Flexible:** The park should accommodate seasonal activities, especially in the winter, and should provide flexible spaces that can adapt to various uses. *Response: Seasonal change is designed to be a centrepiece of the park, with plantings chosen to emphasize color and character changes year-round. The design has enhanced flexibility with more seating options and a more accessible central lawn, and the hardscaped spaces are being detailed to provide a range of opportunities for programming and activity.*

## Open House: December 9, 2024

The updated design was presented to the public. Consultant Team members from West 8, Minokamik, ERA, Arup, and AW Hooker were present to present, answer questions, and engage the public. After the design presentation, attendees were able to place targeted feedback on the graphic presentation boards via post-it notes, ask questions of the design team in both a formal Q+A session and informal post-presentation discussion, and share feedback directly with the City team.

## Open House Event Details

The Open House was held on Monday December 9th, 2024, at 6 pm in the Rotunda of Metro Hall. After a 15-minute design presentation and a formal Q&A session, attendees were able to chat casually with Design Team members and leave targeted feedback directly on presentation boards.

## Sticky-Note Comments

- "I like the central green lawn as well as it's maintained."
- "Explore ideas in making the central lawn more interesting."
- "I'm excited to learn more about the firefly habitat."
- "I like the walkway with interlocking stones."
- "It would be great if there were spaces for performances like the Toronto Fringe Festival venue."
- "The seasonal aspect of the art is great!"
- "Love the seating options."
- "Love all the greenery!"
- "Add more seating elements throughout the park so people aren't just expected to gather in the middle of the park."

## Questions & Answers

### **Will the custom benches included in the renderings stay in the design?**

In the next phase, we will be selecting and finalizing the furnishing options for the park and we will explore including benches that complement the design.

### **Will you grow vegetation underneath the balcony?**

The under-balcony area is designed to have a rocky fern garden.

### **Will the park be open 24/7?**

The park's hours of operation will be determined in collaboration with Parks Operations staff, but the space would be accessible 24/7. The City's bylaws related to operating hours of parks will also be taken into consideration.

### **Who are you consulting regarding safety in the park?**

The team is working with the City's Encampments Task force and the Toronto Police to ensure that the park will be safe and welcoming for all.

### **Is the park carbon-neutral?**

The park's carbon impact is being tested and measured at each stage of the design,

and the team is exploring integrating innovative materials and methods to achieve the City's goal of carbon net-neutrality by 2040.

**Are the pavements permeable? How is stormwater handled?**

Approximately 73% of the park is covered in softscape, gravel, or boulders. The remaining park area must be paved for accessibility, and the team is working to ensure proper drainage and infiltration across the park. The park will capture and retain stormwater via an underground retention basin.

## Inter-Committee Feast: December 10, 2024

To conclude the Engagement phase, members from the TAC, IAC, and CAC gathered at the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto to celebrate, connect, and come together as a community. Led by Elder Shelley Charles of the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation, the event brought together traditional Anishinaabe ritual, singing, food, and discussion about the design and engagement process. This unique event was an exciting step in the City's engagement efforts toward an integrated, inclusive, and reciprocal way of working.

## Next Steps

---

Phase 3 has concluded, and the design team is embarking on Phase 4: Detailed Design from January to June of 2025. Phase 5: Construction Documentation will take place between July and December of 2025. Construction of the park is planned between 2026 and 2028 pending permitting and procurement timelines.