

# Phase 1 Engagement Report

## Parkland Strategy Review

October 18, 2024, to February 20, 2025





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# Overview

## Parkland Strategy review

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The City of Toronto's [Parkland Strategy](#) was adopted in 2019 to guide the long-term planning for Toronto's parks, including where the City adds new parkland and improves existing parks. The Parkland Strategy sets a 20-year vision and planning framework guided by the principles of: Expand, Improve, Connect, and Include. It fulfills the Ontario *Planning Act*'s requirement for a parks plan, enabling the municipality to apply the alternative requirement, under Section 42 of the *Planning Act*, to development and redevelopment that is eligible for parkland dedication. This is a tool that Toronto and other municipalities use to help address the increasing need for parks and recreational facilities as populations grow. There are over 1,500 parks owned and/or operated by the City throughout Toronto and the system is expanding with new parks added every year.

The City periodically reviews the Parkland Strategy to ensure it reflects:

- Changing resident needs and priorities (e.g. changes in work and leisure patterns, such as those influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic)
- A growing population
- Provincial legislation changes
- New city-wide priorities and policy directions (e.g. the Net Zero Strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the Indigenous Reconciliation Action Plan, the Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism, and more)
- Changing financial tools that have resulted in less funding
- Updated accessibility and environmental standards

## How we engaged

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Between October 18, 2024, and February 20, 2025, the City's Parks and Recreation Division conducted a multi-phase, city-wide community engagement process to inform joint reviews of the City of Toronto's Parks and Recreation Facilities Plan and the Parkland Strategy, as well as to create the City's new Ice Facilities Strategy. The following list provides an overview of the different ways the public were invited to participate in this process. Individual reports will be available that summarize the input

received through the various engagement activities, which provide a greater level of detail on the themes covered in this report.

- **Online survey**

From October 18 to December 19, 2024, over 8,800 members of the public participated in an online survey that collected feedback on a wide range of topics relating to the City's recreation facilities and parks. The survey consisted of a mix of multiple choice and open-text questions.

- **Virtual public meetings**

On December 3 and 4, 2024, a total of 18 participants attended two virtual public meeting sessions to share their feedback on and priorities for the future of the City's parks and green spaces. The presentation and discussion questions were the same at both sessions.

- **In-person city-wide pop-ups**

From October 19 to November 30, 2024, approximately 2,775 people attended pop-up engagement booths at locations in each of Toronto's 25 wards. The goal of the pop-ups was to raise community awareness about the launch of the review process and promote the online survey, as well as capture input through several high-level engagement questions on displays at the booths.

- **DIY community-led workshops**

Between October 18 to December 18, 2024, 16 organizations engaged a total of 332 community members in discussions about the future of their recreation spaces and parks using a do-it-yourself workshop kit. The kit included a presentation, a discussion guide, and an online submission form to help groups host their own community conversations and share feedback with the City.

Of the 16 organizations, 12 were part of the City's Social Development, Finance and Administration Division's Community Coordination Plan Cluster partnerships. This model ensures communication with more than 400 community-based organizations and implements localized solutions to meet the needs of Toronto's equity-deserving communities. The clusters include 10 geographic cluster areas and two city-wide clusters that focus on newcomers and Black resilience. Self-selected organizations in each cluster were paid to host their own community-led engagements. Learn more about the [Community Coordination Plan Clusters](#).

- **DIY classroom workshops**

From October 18 to December 18, 2024, approximately 210 students from grades 5 to 11 were engaged through a classroom engagement kit available for

download on the project webpage. The kits were available in French and English and were shared with the Toronto District School Board and Toronto Catholic District School Board for distribution to teachers. In total, 4 schools located in Scarborough, North York, Toronto, and East York and one Youth Council located in Thorncliffe submitted results.

- **City of Toronto Seniors' Forum meeting**

On September 30, 2024, the project team delivered a presentation at a meeting of the City of Toronto's Seniors' Forum. A discussion followed where the project team received feedback on challenges, opportunities, and priorities for future investment in recreation facilities and parks, from the perspectives of seniors.

- **City of Toronto Lived Experience Advisory Group meeting**

On January 15, 2025, the project team delivered a presentation at a meeting of the City's Lived Experience Advisory Group (LEAG). A discussion followed where the project team received feedback on challenges, opportunities, and priorities for future investment in City recreation facilities and parks, from the perspectives of people with lived experience.

- **Parks and Recreation Division Community Disability Steering Committee meeting**

On February 20, 2025, the project team delivered a presentation at a meeting of the Parks and Recreation Division's Community Disability Steering Committee (CDSC). A discussion followed where the project team received feedback on the challenges, opportunities, and priorities for future investment in recreation facilities and parks, from the perspectives of people with disabilities.

- **Equity-Deserving Advisory Group meeting**

On January 23, 2025, the first meeting of the Equity-Deserving Advisory Group (EDAG) took place. The project team presented to the EDAG to gather feedback on priorities for future investment in recreation facilities and parks.

Representatives from 20 organizations participated in the first meeting.

The EDAG was formed to ensure the Parks and Recreation Facilities Plan and Parkland Strategy reviews are informed by and reflective of the needs and interests of equity-deserving communities. These communities include: racialized communities; Black communities; women, girls, and gender-diverse people; children and youth; seniors; people with disabilities; 2SLGBTQ+ communities; newcomers; and people with low income. It is understood that these and other

identities are often overlapping and intersecting, and people often identify as part of multiple communities.

## How we reached people

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The project team promoted community engagement activities to audiences across the city through the following channels:

- **Kick-off media event**  
On October 18, 2024, a kick-off event with media availability was held to announce the review and public engagement process and promote the upcoming engagement activities. Remarks were made by Mayor Chow, Deputy Mayor McKelvie, and the Parks and Recreation General Manager. Three media outlets featured stories about the engagement process.
- **Organic social media promotion**  
Between October 18 and December 19, 2024, video and image posts were shared on Parks and Recreation social media channels (Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn) to promote the pop-ups, online survey, and public meetings.
- **Paid social media promotion**  
Between October 18 and December 19, 2024, paid social media advertisements ran on Parks and Recreation Instagram and Facebook to boost promotion of public meetings and the online survey.
- **Communications through Councillor Offices**  
Promotional material was provided to all 25 Councillor Offices, with a request that they share it via their respective newsletters and email distribution.
- **Posters in community locations**  
Community recreation centres, public libraries, and Toronto Community Housing sites across the city displayed posters promoting the engagement process.
- **Email notifications**  
Email notifications were sent to over 90,000 members of the public through City email distribution lists, including recreation program registrants and permit holders. Emails were also sent to community organizations, schoolboards, Business Improvement Areas, and more.

# About this report

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This report provides a high-level overview of community input received across all engagement channels during Phase 1 of public engagement for the Parkland Strategy Review. It summarizes what we have heard so far in the review process about the public's experiences with City of Toronto parks and the public's priorities for future investments in improving parks and creating new parkland.

The intent of this summary is to capture the wide range of feedback shared and is not intended to assess the merit or accuracy of the feedback received.

Individual summary reports are being prepared for each type of engagement that has occurred, including a summary report focused on Indigenous engagement. These reports will be available on the [Parkland & Recreation Facilities Strategies: Community Engagement](#) webpages.

Acronyms frequently used in this report include:

- **EDAG** – the Equity-Deserving Advisory Group, established to help inform the review process for the Parks and Recreation Facilities Plan and Parkland Strategy.
- **CDSC** – the Community Disability Steering Committee, which regularly advises the City's Parks and Recreation Division on ongoing parks and recreation topics and projects.
- **LEAG** – the Lived Experience Advisory Group, which regularly advise the City of Toronto on ongoing topics relating to unemployment, housing, poverty reduction, impacts of violence, and other related issues.
- **2SLGBTQ+** – referring to Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and other non-cisgender and non-straight identifies and communities.



# By the Numbers

These numbers represent joint engagement on both the Parkland Strategy and the Parks and Recreation Facilities Plan.

**4** online public meetings

**1** Equity-Deserving Advisory Group meeting

Several visits to City advisory bodies including Seniors' Forum, Lived Experience Advisory Group, and P&R Community Disability Advisory Committee



**12+** community-led do-it-yourself engagements with an equity focus

**1** online survey with **8,800+** interactions

**25** pop-ups across the city (1 in each ward)  
with **3,000+** interactions



**3** meetings with the Indigenous Advisory Circle

**5** pop-ups in Indigenous community spaces

**2** interviews and **1** tour with Indigenous organizations

**96** respondents identified as Indigenous in the online survey



# What We Heard

## Community input summary

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Overall, participants in engagements activities shared a clear and consistent message: parks are essential public infrastructure that support physical and mental wellbeing, social connection, climate resilience, and equity. While there is deep pride in Toronto's parks system, it was expressed that there is also a need for improvements to ensure that parks are safe, accessible, inclusive, and responsive to the diverse needs of all residents.

### Access to parks

Across all engagements, participants shared that having a network of walkable, local parks across the city is important to supporting health, inclusion, and quality of life for all Toronto residents.

- When asked where new parks should go, most survey respondents supported prioritizing new parks in neighbourhoods lacking walkable park access (77% of respondents), high-rise residential communities (73% of respondents), areas with few existing parks (68% of respondents), and equity-deserving areas (48% of respondents).
- Racialized, low-income, and newcomer survey participants — particularly Black, Latin American, and South Asian residents — reported greater challenges in accessing walkable, high-quality parks. Barriers mentioned were concentrated in high-rise and under-served neighbourhoods in areas such as Jane-Finch, Scarborough, and parts of East York.
- 2SLGBTQ+ survey participants, particularly non-binary respondents, indicated the need for walkable, nearby parks and culturally safe spaces at rates higher than the general population.
- Participants in the EDAG workshop, community-led DIY sessions, and pop-ups mentioned that physical proximity alone does not guarantee access to parks — unsafe crossings, time constraints, and mobility limitations were cited as barriers.

- Black survey participants frequently linked equitable park access to both residential and workplace locations, highlighting broader patterns of spatial inequity across the city.
- Weekday access to parks was identified in survey responses as a particular challenge for workers in low-wage, shift work, or car-dependent jobs, who described limited time or unsafe routes preventing regular park use.
- Some survey participants noted difficulties in determining if a particular piece of green space is a public park versus private land, and therefore not knowing if they are welcome to use the space.
- Through the classroom engagement kits, students shared the importance of having parks nearby, especially for those living in vertical communities without private outdoor space. They associated proximity to parks with physical health, social connection, and mental well-being.
- Across all engagement formats, participants agreed that expanding walkable, local parks — particularly in equity-deserving neighbourhoods — fosters improved health, inclusion, and quality of life.
- Input from LEAG indicated that lack of awareness for some people about parks outside of their district and what is offered at different parks across the city is a barrier to access and use. It was suggested that more could be done to promote parks and the amenities available.

## Top priorities:

- Reduced walkability gaps (areas of the city that do not have a park within a 5-to-10-minute walk), and maintained walkable access to parks
- Priority for new parks to be created in high-rise, under-served areas of Toronto (e.g. Liberty Village, CityPlace, Jane-Finch, Thorncliffe, and Malvern)
- Preserved and expanded natural green spaces, especially in dense neighbourhoods
- Investments focused on Indigenous, Black, and equity-deserving neighbourhoods (i.e. racialized, low-income, and newcomer communities)
- Improved safety of pedestrian and cycling routes to accessing parks (e.g. safe crossings, lighting, and bike lanes)
- Parks located near homes as well as workplaces

- More mid-sized, multi-use community parks
- Parks that are usable year-round — including winter trail access and washroom availability
- Clearly delineated public/private greenspace boundaries
- Promotion of parks and amenities

## Safety and security

Across engagement activities, participants said that safety is foundational to park access and use. Concerns were consistently heard about lighting, encampments, off-leash dogs, and enforcement gaps. Participants shared that parks must be safe, comfortable, and accessible to fulfill their role in supporting community wellbeing.

- According to the survey, the most common safety-related barriers were insufficient lighting (19%), feeling unsafe or uncomfortable (13%), and unsafe walking or other mobility routes (11%).
- Indigenous, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse survey respondents reported feeling particularly unsafe in parks — citing experiences of surveillance, discrimination, and lack of cultural safety. These issues were expressed through “Other” open-text survey responses.
- In the EDAG workshop and pop-up events, participants called for safety strategies, such as improved lighting, staff presence, and culturally safe approaches to by-law enforcement.
- Participants in the virtual public meetings and community-led sessions reported the need for emergency call buttons, clearer signage, and harm reduction strategies that improve instead of compromise general safety.
- Through the classroom engagement kits and youth input, participants said safety is a precondition for fun, creativity, and social gathering. Students described well-lit, clean, and socially safe spaces as important to feeling welcome in parks.
- Homeless encampments were frequently mentioned by survey respondents and meeting participants regarding how their presence can impact sense of safety in parks. In particular, respondents referenced not wanting to bring children to parks with encampments and expressed concern about the amount and type of garbage generated from encampments. Some respondents provided feedback

that the City's calculation of parkland provision rates should not include parks with encampments because these spaces feel inaccessible.

- Other perspectives on encampments expressed through survey responses and meetings indicated concern for unhoused people living in parks, and expressed that City staff should take a compassionate approach towards helping people in encampments. Some respondents noted that given Toronto's housing crisis, people living in parks often have nowhere else to go, and it can therefore be futile and/or unethical to forcefully remove unhoused people from these public spaces.

## Top priorities:

- Lighting across parks, trails, and entrances
- Work to address encampments in partnership with other City Divisions
- Clearer signage and by-law enforcement regarding off-leash dogs and off-leash areas
- Culturally safe enforcement practices
- Emergency call buttons and safety signage in high-use parks
- Security presence in parks with known safety concerns
- Improved safety for pedestrians and cyclists (e.g. separate paths and safer crossings)
- Enhanced nighttime visibility and maintenance (e.g. lighting, waste collection)
- Harm reduction strategies that maintain public safety for all users
- Improved cleanliness, waste removal, and general maintenance to reduce perceived risks

## Comfort and inclusivity

Participants said that a welcoming park means incorporating culturally relevant and emotionally safe elements to create a sense of belonging for the diverse groups that use parks. Participants called for more clean, year-round washrooms, shaded seating, multilingual signage, and cultural representation to create welcoming, inclusive environments.

- EDAG members noted that comfort includes emotional and psychological safety. They raised concerns about the surveillance of Indigenous, Black, and equity-deserving communities, and called for a shift towards welcoming, community-based park staffing and programming.

- Survey participants with disabilities and seniors reported the need for rest areas, clear signage, and smooth, navigable pathways. Without these, even physically close parks were described as unusable.
- Participants in classroom engagements and pop-ups highlighted the importance of culturally reflective elements, such as public art, multilingual signage, and park histories. These features were seen as helping to foster a sense of community pride.
- 2SLGBTQ+ survey participants — particularly non-binary and Two-Spirit individuals — emphasized the need for safe, visible, and culturally welcoming spaces. This included gender-neutral washrooms, diverse visual representation, and the reduction of police presence.
- Participants across community-led and youth-focused engagements said that parks should feel relaxed, informal, and unhurried — with seating, gathering areas, and flexibility for how space can be used by different cultural groups and age cohorts.

## Top priorities:

- Clean, year-round washrooms
- Shaded seating, shelters, and rest areas
- Gender-inclusive and family-inclusive facilities
- Multilingual signage and wayfinding
- Public art, murals, and cultural representation
- Community gardens and shared food spaces
- Benches and gathering areas near play zones and trails
- Culturally inclusive programming and activation
- A reduction in general police presence while increasing the presence of supportive staff
- Welcoming dog parks that are separated from playgrounds

## Accessibility for all

Across all engagement activities, participants mentioned that accessibility to a park means more than physical proximity to parks — it requires thoughtful, inclusive design, seasonal usability, and affordability. Participants highlighted the need for accessible and year-round paths, seating, washrooms, parking, and transportation options.

- In survey responses, people with disabilities, older adults, and caregivers identified multiple physical barriers, including uneven or unpaved paths, closed or inaccessible washrooms, and a lack of seating — all of which limited safe, independent use.
- Survey participants with disabilities shared specific concerns about physical access and design, highlighting that steep or poorly maintained entrances and trails limited safe use.
- Survey results showed that over 40% of Latin American, Southeast Asian, and First Nations respondents identified poor lighting and mobility challenges as barriers — among the highest rates across all groups.
- EDAG participants shared that many parks — especially in the downtown core — lack benches and other forms of seating, which are important for people with mobility limitations, and energy limiting illnesses.
- All season parks — including with snow clearing on trails, sidewalks, and near washrooms — was a primary concern across the EDAG workshop and survey participants.
- In classroom engagements and youth survey responses, participants living in high-density or vertical communities prioritized inclusive play structures, shaded rest areas, and open lawns.
- Limited parking and transit access — particularly to large destination parks like High Park — was repeatedly noted across engagements as a barrier by seniors, low-income residents, and people with disabilities. Some respondents indicated that they often have to rely on local parks over destination parks due to transit access and parking challenges. In tandem, accessibility features within parks must continue to be a key consideration.
- Affordability was also highlighted as part of the accessibility equation. Participants recommended eliminating user fees for core amenities and expanding free programming to make them more accessible, particularly for youth and newcomers.
- Members of the CDSC indicated that some surfacing materials considered to be “accessible” are not actually, and the City should strive for standards higher than the legislated minimums. Woodchips were mentioned as an example of an unsuitable material, with preference indicated for rubberized surfaces, especially for ensuring that playgrounds are accessible to children as well as caregivers.

- Members of CDSC also indicated that some parks with diamonds and sports fields lack accessible seating for spectators, making it difficult for people with disabilities to watch outdoor sports in parks.

## Top priorities:

- Accessible park entrances, pathways, and gathering areas
- Year-round access to clean accessible, washrooms
- Improved parking and transit access to major parks
- Shuttle or mobility service options for residents with limited access
- Winter snow clearing on trails, near washrooms, and key pathways
- Accessible and inclusive playgrounds and recreation features
- Shaded seating areas and accessible resting points
- Disability-informed park design and planning practices
- Senior-friendly design, including ramps, benches, and washroom access
- Free or low-cost programming and facility access
- Higher standards for accessible surfacing
- Accessible seating near outdoor sports features

## Infrastructure priorities

Well-maintained, functional amenities are viewed as essential to park enjoyment and inclusion. Participants prioritized year-round washrooms, seating, lighting, and clean, accessible trails as the backbone of a positive park experience. It was expressed that investing in core infrastructure is fundamental to ensuring parks are safe, welcoming, and resilient public spaces. Gaps in infrastructure maintenance were indicated to be a form of disinvestment in lower-income and racialized neighbourhoods, reinforcing broader spatial inequities.

Well-maintained, functional infrastructure was identified as essential to a safe and enjoyable park experience. Participants consistently prioritized investments that support day-to-day use and accessibility over large-scale expansion.

- In the survey and across pop-up activities, participants emphasized the need for clean, year-round washrooms, shaded picnic areas, working drinking fountains, and regular waste collection. These were often described as baseline expectations for equitable park access.



- Among open-text suggestions, participants emphasized clean washrooms available year-round, seating for elders and caregivers, working water fountains, and visible maintenance staff as top improvements.
- EDAG members and seniors noted that poor maintenance — such as broken equipment, unclean facilities, or inaccessible washrooms — creates a sense of neglect and exclusion, especially in parks serving equity-deserving communities.
- Youth and families in classroom engagements and DIY workshops stressed that small improvements — such as more benches, shaded spaces, and garbage bins — go a long way in making parks feel usable, safe, and inviting.
- Youth participants also emphasized the need for accessible splash pads, multi-use courts, and free public Wi-Fi in parks as part of basic infrastructure.
- Many participants highlighted the need for lighting that supports both safety and comfort, as well as durable materials that can withstand heavy use without rapid degradation. In some meetings, concerns were raised about long timelines for repairs — particularly in parks located in historically under-resourced neighbourhoods. These delays contributed to a perception of neglect and reinforced feelings of exclusion.
- Across multiple engagement types, there was a consistent response that before building new features, the City must ensure that existing park infrastructure is functional, accessible, and well-maintained.

## Top priorities:

- Open, clean washrooms available year-round
- Shaded seating and accessible picnic areas
- Reliable waste management (bins and regular collection)
- Well-maintained, accessible pathways (resurfacing and repairs)
- Working and accessible drinking fountains
- Timely repairs and inspections for equipment and amenities
- Adequate lighting to support safety and nighttime use
- Winterized recreation features (e.g. trails, rinks, and washrooms)
- Accessible splash pads and wading pools
- Community-requested amenities like skateparks and basketball courts

# Naturalization, biodiversity, and climate resilience

Naturalized, biodiverse parks were preferred across all demographics. Participants consistently mentioned that investing in trees, wetlands, pollinator gardens, and naturalized landscapes supports climate resilience, mental health, and environmental stewardship. Preserving and expanding Toronto's green infrastructure were seen as important to participants in all engagement activities.

- Participants across engagements supported investments in naturalized landscapes and biodiverse ecosystems. These elements were seen as central to health, climate resilience, and cultural connection.
- In the survey, participants prioritized native tree planting, pollinator gardens, wetland restoration, and nature-based stormwater solutions. Ravines, urban forests, and tree canopies were highlighted as priorities
- In classroom engagements and open-text survey feedback, youth and families described naturalized parks as calming and inspiring, particularly when contrasted with spaces dominated by pavement or commercial features.
- Participants across the EDAG workshop and community-led sessions noted that natural spaces support social connection, intergenerational gathering, and opportunities for learning.

## Top priorities:

- Native tree planting
- Pollinator and butterfly gardens
- Wetland and ravine restoration
- Nature-based stormwater management
- Wildlife habitat protection
- Natural trails and green corridors
- Preserve mature trees
- Culturally grounded ecological design (e.g. traditional Indigenous stewardship)
- Shade canopy expansion

## Community use

Participants emphasized the importance of having parks designed and managed for community use through free, drop-in, and culturally relevant outdoor features and programming that brings diverse groups together. Outdoor recreational spaces for informal play, physical activity, arts, and cultural expression were prioritized as key elements for making parks welcoming and inclusive.

- In the survey and EDAG discussions, there was support for free, drop-in, outdoor programming that reflects the cultural, recreational, and linguistic needs of diverse communities. This included festivals, dance classes, fitness groups, and food-based events.
- Youth engagement and classroom feedback highlighted the need for spaces that support informal play, active recreation, and creative expression — including basketball courts, skateparks, music areas, and outdoor fitness stations.
- Across community-led workshops, participants expressed a desire for more seasonal and evening programming, especially in under-served neighbourhoods and during times that accommodate working families.
- Pop-up participants and online respondents shared that accessible programming helps make parks feel safer and more inclusive — particularly when events are co-created with community partners and reflect the people who live nearby.
- Survey responses showed increased reliance on parks during and after COVID-19, particularly among racialized, newcomer, low-income, and younger residents, highlighting the vital role of parks in supporting health, connection, and resilience.
- Some survey respondents indicated concern for the commercialization of public parks, for example through permitted events and private or ticketed events, and called for parks to remain as free, publicly accessible spaces. Emphasis was placed on preserving informal, community driven uses of parks.
- Some survey respondents referenced the opportunity to merge the need to increase park spaces in the city with the desire for more community and allotment gardens, given the need for more food growing spaces in the city.
- Input from LEAG suggested that more information could be shared with schoolboards and schools about programming and projects in local parks to encourage class participation and volunteering.

## Top priorities:

- Youth-specific outdoor recreation spaces (e.g. basketball courts, and skateparks)
- Gender-inclusive outdoor recreation opportunities
- Outdoor fitness circuits and calisthenics stations
- Cultural festivals and arts-based events hosted in parks
- Accessible splash pads and skating rinks in outdoor settings
- Activation of parks through music, dance, and visual art spaces
- Markets, community gardens, and seasonal pop-up programming
- Free, drop-in outdoor programming designed with community input
- Extended park programming into evenings and weekends to support working families
- Programs that reflect the cultural, linguistic, and recreational needs of local communities
- Information sharing with schoolboards and schools for participation and volunteering

## Community anchors

Many participants shared a vision of parks as holistic neighbourhood hubs, serving as social anchors for community — places where public life, cultural identity, and essential services come together in a safe, inclusive, and accessible way, complementary to leisure and recreation uses.

- In the EDAG workshop and classroom engagement kits, there was support for locating services within parks, such as libraries, settlement and newcomer supports, childcare, mental health outreach, and food security initiatives. These were seen as tools to reduce barriers and foster a deeper sense of belonging.
- Community members described parks as natural gathering places for both informal connection and intentional care. This included space for ceremony, storytelling, quiet reflection, healing gardens, community markets, and pop-up service delivery (e.g. public health information).
- Participants across engagement activities emphasized that the design of these park hubs should be community-informed and flexible — enabling daily use, intergenerational gathering, and cultural activity, including ceremonial use, while also being able to support larger community gatherings and events.

- There was a consistent desire to ensure that parks remain as free and open spaces, rooted in the values of public good. The idea of community hubs was especially supported when tied to equity, wellbeing, and cultural safety.
- Some survey respondents spoke to the need for preserving the character and identities of long-standing parks for their historic and social heritage, and the role of these parks in supporting and maintaining broader neighbourhood identity. Some suggested that upgrades to parks should respect their existing character.

## Top priorities:

- Parks designed as community gathering spaces, accessible to all
- Natural gathering spaces integrated with access to cultural events and festivals
- Outdoor food security initiatives (e.g. community gardens and fresh markets)
- Spaces for youth-focused outdoor activities and programming
- Informal mental health and wellness gatherings outdoors (e.g. community yoga, healing circles, and cultural ceremonies)
- Flexible outdoor spaces that can accommodate pop-up health, newcomer, or cultural outreach
- Parks co-located with public services where feasible (e.g. libraries, childcare, and newcomer supports)
- Culturally relevant and accessible public art and wayfinding in parks
- Storytelling, intergenerational learning, and ceremony through design
- Parks that remain free and open to support equity of access across communities
- Respect for the existing character of parks during upgrade processes

## Spaces for youth

Youth participants envisioned parks as lively, safe, and creative spaces for gathering, play, and expression. They communicated the need for flexible recreation spaces, outdoor amenities, and social hubs that are welcoming to young people of diverse ages and backgrounds. Youth stressed that well-lit, clean, and active park environments are essential to feeling safe and welcomed.

- In classroom engagement kits and survey responses, youth consistently prioritized large, multi-use parks with basketball courts, skateparks, splash pads, and open “chill-out” zones for casual gathering.
- In the “design-your-own-park” DIY kit activity, 81% of students favoured a large park bigger than a soccer field, compared to 17% of students who favoured a

park the size of a soccer field and 3% of students who favoured a park smaller than a soccer field.

- Through classroom kits, students noted the importance of safety, lighting, and cleanliness to allow them to be able to use the park during all times of the day, including after dark.
- Youth survey respondents aged 19 to 29 identified safety, lighting, and maintenance as very important conditions for park use. Over 40% of this age group cited unsafe infrastructure as a barrier, particularly in high-density areas that require repairs.
- Many youth survey respondents — particularly from racialized, newcomer, and low-income backgrounds — described facing barriers to inclusive park use. Their feedback highlighted the need for low-cost, welcoming, and well-maintained outdoor spaces in their communities.
- Across youth-focused engagement activities, there was an interest in seeing more youth-specific programming, input opportunities, and design features that reflect how young people actually use parks. Youth also expressed high interest in informal programming opportunities, suggesting outdoor music spaces, pop-up events, and youth-led installations as ways to activate parks and support self-expression.

## Top priorities:

- Large, multi-use parks for flexible gathering and recreation
- Basketball courts and skateparks
- Free Wi-Fi zones and charging areas
- Safe nighttime lighting and visibility
- Music spaces and informal performance zones
- Drop-in, youth-led programming
- “Chill-out” zones with benches, trees, and open lawns
- Outdoor splash pads and pools
- Food kiosks or affordable vendors
- Accessible transit to parks from youth-dense areas

## Spaces for seniors

Members of the Seniors' Forum echoed many of the access and accessibility barriers heard throughout other engagement activities and indicated that seniors need opportunities within their local parks to maintain an active lifestyle. Insights on park use and recommendations for how to make parks more inviting and useable for seniors were provided.

- Interest was mentioned in having outdoor walking tracks or looped trails, allowing seniors to exercise while staying close to park buildings, such as washrooms, and being able to easily step away from the activity when tired.
- Seniors indicated that off-leash dogs can create tripping hazards (from digging holes and running around), and this has reduced park comfort and safety for some seniors. Having designated and separated spaces for off-leash dogs was mentioned as a strategy for reducing the hazard.
- It was mentioned that some parks have staircases that are narrow or have tall steps and sometimes without handrails, which makes it difficult for seniors to navigate through these parks and makes some parks inaccessible to seniors.
- Using some vehicle parking spaces was mentioned as a challenge, and it was suggested that well-located parking and clear ground markings in parking lots would support seniors who need to drive in order to access parks.
- Having well-lit spaces was indicated to be essential for seniors to enjoy parks in later hours of the day.
- Seating throughout parks was mentioned to be important for seniors to be able to use parks.

### Top priorities:

- Accessible and looped walking paths
- Dedicated spaces for off-leash dogs
- Clear markings in parking areas
- No stairways, or stairs designed with accessible steps and hand railings
- Ample lighting
- Ample seating

## Ideas for park innovation

Participants drew inspiration from creative and inspirational park models around the world, sharing examples of what they found innovative, and would want to see in Toronto parks. From urban forests to floating pools, to commemorative art and naturalized design, respondents encouraged Toronto to think creatively about the future of its parks.

Participants were inspired by the following park features and uses in other cities:

- New York's High Line, which reclaims urban railway infrastructure
- Copenhagen's floating pools
- Paris's urban forests
- San Francisco's Dolores Park, a vibrant gathering space for LGBTQ+ communities
- Berlin's Tiergarten Park, which features the Memorial to Homosexuals Persecuted Under Nazism
- Emergency response kits in park benches in Japan
- Outdoor pianos and musical gardens
- Food trucks and coffee bikes in parks
- Creative gathering spaces
- Natural playgrounds
- Green roofs and rooftop gardens
- Immersive naturalized play
- More art installations in parks
- Year-round flexible amenities
- Different forms of community engagement