

Indigenous Advisory Circle Meeting #1 Summary Report

Parkland Strategy and the Parks and Recreation Facilities Plan
Phase 1: Indigenous Community Engagement
December 12, 2024

Dr. Kiera Brant-Birioukov, RRTC – Indigenous Engagement Lead
Dr. Anton Birioukov-Brant, RRTC – Indigenous Engagement Support
Gabrielle Ayotte, RRTC – Researcher and Writer





Attendees

City of Toronto Staff

Danielle DeMarsh (Host) (Parks Department)

Matt Bentley (Co-host) (Recreation Facilities)

Steve Langlois (Consultant)

Ridge Road Training & Consulting

Kiera Brant - Birioukov (Co-Host)

Gabrielle Ayotte (Note Taker)

Monteith Brown Planning Consultants – Technical Consulting Team

Steve Langlois (Consultant)

Indigenous Advisory Circle Members

Cindy M.

Crystal S.

Reggie M.

Overview of Indigenous Advisory Circle

The Indigenous Advisory Circle (IAC) consisted of 11 Indigenous members as of December 2024 – growing to 12 members in January 2025. It is comprised of individual Indigenous community members and Indigenous community members who also work with and represent Indigenous organizations in the City of Toronto. The purpose of the IAC was to bring together members and representatives from the City of Toronto's Parks & Recreation (P&R) division and Ridge Road Training & Consulting to provide comments, opinions, and suggestions for what features should be maintained, changed, and/or added to the Parkland Strategy and Parks and Recreation Facilities Plan. The IAC members' contributions help to ensure Indigenous peoples and communities feel represented, safe, and connected in recreation facilities and parks. The meeting was scheduled based on the availability of most IAC members. Honoraria was offered to each IAC member who attended the meeting.

[Learn more](#) about the Parkland & Recreation Facilities Strategies Community Engagement.

Parks & Recreation Presentation

Representatives from the City of Toronto's P&R division presented an overview of the Parkland Strategy and the Parks and Recreation Facilities Plan 5-year review, including:

- An introduction to the Parkland Strategy and Parks and Recreation Facilities Plan, including the Guiding Principles of these documents.
- The purpose and goals of the review process
- How feedback will help shape the new plans

Post-Presentation Discussion Questions

1. Are there existing recreation spaces or parks in the city that serve your Indigenous communities' needs well, and if so, how? Are there other locations where you would like to see something similar added?
2. What's your vision for Indigenous communities using and interacting with recreation facilities and parks in Toronto? What principles should guide this vision?
3. Are there changes to existing or proposed recreation facilities or parks that you would like to see?

Summary of Key Points/Themes Shared During Discussion at Meeting

General Message from City of Toronto Representative

The City clarified that feedback from this session will be documented and used to make recommendations for future facilities and parks across the city.

Points Shared by IAC Members

Maintenance and Accessibility

- concerns about the lack of well-maintained, inviting parks
- Poor lighting makes it feel less accessible.

- Stress the significance of using sustainable materials and ensuring parks are accessible year-round.
- some parks are too small or isolated, with few amenities
- expanding park options, but not by turning places like Humber Gate into a dog park
- Parks as places for people of all ages to gather, sit, and enjoy outdoor spaces, with attention to both functionality and cultural significance.

Practical Features to Include

- Adding more sheltered areas, like gazebos, to provide comfort and protection from weather.
- Many parks are poorly lit and lack spaces conducive to gatherings or meaningful conversations.
- Absence of facilities for adults, such as exercise equipment.
- need for more amenities in the Humber River area; while there are some facilities, such as washrooms, they are far from certain areas, requiring a 20- to 30-minute walk
- better park funding and development that include more amenities like splash pads or proper seating areas
- Humber Gate could have a farmer's market.
- Importance of creating designated lanes for e-bikes and pedestrians, as walking paths are expected to become more heavily used in the future.

Indigenous Ceremony and Relationship with the Land

- Desire for more traditional plants and sacred spaces, like fire pits, in public areas
- Creating medicine gardens in every district; they can be planted as ornamentals since people love them. They would look beautiful when it grows and it blooms and also help in many fashions
- Birch trees have medicinal benefits like lowering cholesterol, supporting immune function, and reducing blood pressure; Planting Birch trees that produce Chaga
- idea of a community-based food forest as a potential improvement, emphasizing the need for more open spaces
- Call for a vision that rethinks how public spaces can serve diverse cultural needs, fostering a deeper connection to the land for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people
- introduce fire pits in parks for Indigenous use
- Move need to go beyond symbolic land acknowledgements and incorporate these values into tangible actions, such as integrating Indigenous ceremonies and practices, like fire rituals for end-of-life ceremonies, into public spaces

Cultural Respect and Representation

- importance of inclusive and culturally respectful planning for public spaces
- parks need to be more inclusive by representing diverse communities, particularly Indigenous cultures
- collaboration with Indigenous communities to make these spaces more inclusive and culturally meaningful, particularly in areas where Indigenous people live
- need to recognize and honor Indigenous peoples, including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, in both the physical design and cultural representation of parks
- importance of naming spaces based on local history and Indigenous presence
- includes incorporating Indigenous language signage, acknowledging local wildlife and habitats, and prioritizing animal protection in park planning
- Recognize Indigenous culture in parks, like adding medicine wheel symbols on park signs
- propose exploring how the city could use parkland for funeral and burial services that align with Indigenous traditions, rather than relying on private funeral homes

Post-Meeting Process

During each IAC meeting, a representative from Ridge Road Training & Consulting (RRTC) records the comments and suggestions provided by the IAC members. These comments and suggestions are kept confidential (i.e., no names are attributed to specific comments, as shown in the previous section).

The notes are then formatted for easy readability and circulated to IAC members for review. They have one week to verify accuracy and suggest any additions. RRTC staff finalize the notes to ensure they accurately reflect the discussion before sharing them with the City's P&R representatives for public access.

While the notes are under review, P&R and RRTC representatives coordinate potential dates for the next IAC meeting. Once two to three options are selected, IAC indicate their availability within a week. The meeting is then scheduled based on majority preference and invitations are sent.