

Revitalization of Queen's Park North

Focus Group with Students from Victoria University – University of Toronto

Summary of Discussion

Goldring Student Centre – 150 Charles Street

Tuesday, August 26, 2025; 12:00 – 1:30 pm

Participants: Approximately 20 Student Dons from the University of Toronto – Victoria University.

Purpose: The focus group was held to share and seek feedback on the Draft Vision and Draft Guiding Principles for Queen's Park and to brief students on feedback to date, share insights into how the City and project team are thinking about park revitalization, and to brainstorm opportunities for the future of Queen's Park North.

This summary was written by Third Party Public and was shared with participants for review prior to being finalized.

1. What students said they LIKE about Queen's Park North

- **TREES AND CALM.** Students value the park as a place of calm and for the trees, noting there are few comparable green spaces in Toronto.
- **CONNECTION.** Many enjoy using the park as a walking route to and from classes.
- **BEAUTY.** The beauty of the park, especially in the fall.
- **OPEN.** The park is open and welcoming, offering space to relax, study, and take breaks.
- **WALKING TRACK.** The walking track is popular for exercise. However, it needs better maintenance, especially during the winter.
- **SUBWAY ACCESS.** The Museum subway entrance provides a scenic and convenient entry point into the park, though its naming is confusing since it leads directly to Queen's Park but is not called Queen's Park.

2. What students said they DON'T LIKE about Queen's Park North

- **TRACK.** The track around the park needs better winter upkeep (suggestions: gravel instead of salt, or softer runner-friendly material).
- **FOUNTAIN.** The fountain at the south end is broken. It would be great to have a working fountain or water feature where people can gather.
- **PORTABLE WASHROOMS.** Portable washrooms are unpleasant, they smell, not very well maintained, and are too close to pathways. Consider moving them away from where people walk and/or installing better washroom facilities.
- **BENCHES.** Benches are sometimes vandalized or broken.
- **FEELING UNSAFE.** Students feel unsafe at night due to poor lighting along paths and in central areas of the park away from paths.
- **DANGEROUS PATHS.** Flooding and freezing make certain areas dangerous and unpleasant (mud, ice, odor). Specific areas include the path from Hart House to the centre of the park, the crosswalk at the north end of the park, and the northeast section of the park.
- **GARBAGE.** Trash and litter are persistent due to a lack of garbage bins.

- **TREE DEBRIS.** Acorns and other tree debris make it difficult for people to walk/run in the park and use it for different activities.
- **STATUE.** The statue in the centre of the park is problematic due to its colonial symbolism and its location. It blocks people from seeing each other across the space and limits human connection. The area could be better used as a gathering space.

3. Opportunities identified for Queen's Park North

- **LIGHTING.** Add more lighting along pathways to improve nighttime safety. Students often ask us if it is safe to walk through the park at night and we can't tell them that it is safe. Lighting could be located on the ground or at knee/hip height to increase visibility without increasing light pollution. Also don't only light the paths, but also the areas beyond the paths – because it still feels unsafe if you can't see what's happening beyond the path. These could also be ground lights. Consider extending the "Blue pole" (blue light safety pole) system from the university grounds into the park.
- **WIDER PATHS.** Widen diagonal paths to better accommodate multiple users. Is it possible to make the running path more runner friendly?
- **MORE BINS.** Not enough places to put garbage.
- **LONGER CROSSING TIMES.** Increase crosswalk times at surrounding intersections, especially the crosswalk at the north end of the park.
- **EDUCATION.** Install educational boards on trees and wildlife.
- **ECOLOGICAL DIVERSITY.** Encourage pollinators and ecological diversity.
- **INDIGENOUS PLACEKEEPING.** Integrate Indigenous knowledge and ecological perspectives into park signage and features. Introduce art tied to Indigenous values and culture.
- **SEATING AND MOVEABLE TABLES.** Add more seating (benches, tables, picnic areas) in central spaces, near the subway, and throughout the park. Consider grouping picnic tables in one area of the park (so not so isolated) and seating where people can sit facing each other.
- **WASHROOMS.** Provide more water fountains and washrooms.
- **FLOWERS.** Introduce more planting of flowers, bushes, and ensuring the ongoing maintenance of the flowers.
- **WAYFINDING.** Develop wayfinding signage to make it easier for visitors to connect with nearby amenities like the ROM.
- **FOOD.** Mixed opinions about places to buy food in the park. Some said they would like to see a small space where people can grab a coffee or something small to eat. Others said there are lots of places around the park to buy food but said it would be good to have more clean water fountains. Be open to what "food" means, for example a community fridge could be in the park which would engage people in the park and get resources to people who need them.
- **ACCESS TO SPACE.** Make it easier for groups to book park space for programs.
- **PROGRAMMABLE SPACE.** Introduce programmable spaces such as a central place for music, artwork near the central area where there could be some hustle and bustle. Consider a natural skating rink (that could have other uses when the area is not frozen) or amphitheatre to foster year-round community use. Students would definitely use an amphitheatre space, if available. The amphitheatre at High Park is a great example. Also, would be nice to be able to attend movies in the park (right now students walk to other parks for this).

- PETS. Consider creating a dedicated pet area. Many people bring their pets to the park, which can be harmful to the natural ecosystem and make the park dirty. A dedicated space may help reduce these issues.
- WATER FEATURE. Add a working fountain or water feature with gathering space, inspired by Washington Square Park.
- ONGOING FEEDBACK. Build a system for ongoing community feedback with quick response mechanisms (the system in the cafeteria at Victoria University works well).

4. Feedback on the Draft Vision:

“Queen’s Park North is an extraordinary place for people and nature throughout the seasons, that respects the existing beauty of Queen’s Park and showcases excellence in design, ecological stewardship, programming and partnerships.”

- Not sure why the park is there. Think about how the vision could signal the purpose of the park.
- Integrate “inviting” into the vision – it brings warmth.
- Add “safety” to the vision. Making the park feel safer is very important for students.
- Add a reference to defining a specific purpose or focus of the park. Currently it seems to lack a central purpose or focus.
- Add language around “art”, specifically Indigenous art and ways of connecting people through art in the park.
- The language of “existing beauty” is concerning. This could be interpreted as the park will not change. There needs to be flexibility to accommodate evolving interests and needs. Queen’s Park North will always change and that’s good – it will need to meet different needs in the future.

5. Feedback on the Draft Guiding Principles

- Need to think about and be able to explain how the principle “maintain Queen’s Park as a public space and place for gathering and civic life, welcoming to all” relates to people living in encampments in the park. Does “welcoming to all” include people in encampments?
- Safety is missing from the principles. Consider adding it to the “Enhance visitor experience...” principle or making it its own principle.
- It’s unclear what the principle “address outstanding priorities from the 2019 project” means. What was the 2019 project and what are the outstanding priorities?
- Further explain what “celebrate the trees” means in practice.

Other thoughts

- It would be great if some of the \$50 million could go to helping connect people living in encampments to housing, not just redevelopment of the park. *The City explained that the \$50 million donation is specifically for park improvements. However, there are other city programs (e.g. Streets to Homes) that work specifically to connect people living in encampments to more permanent housing.*
- How the \$50 million dollars is spent should be public. *The City also explained that staff will be reporting publicly through reports to Council how the money will be spent.*