

Sensory Site Tour Summary

New Park at 15 Wellesley St. E.

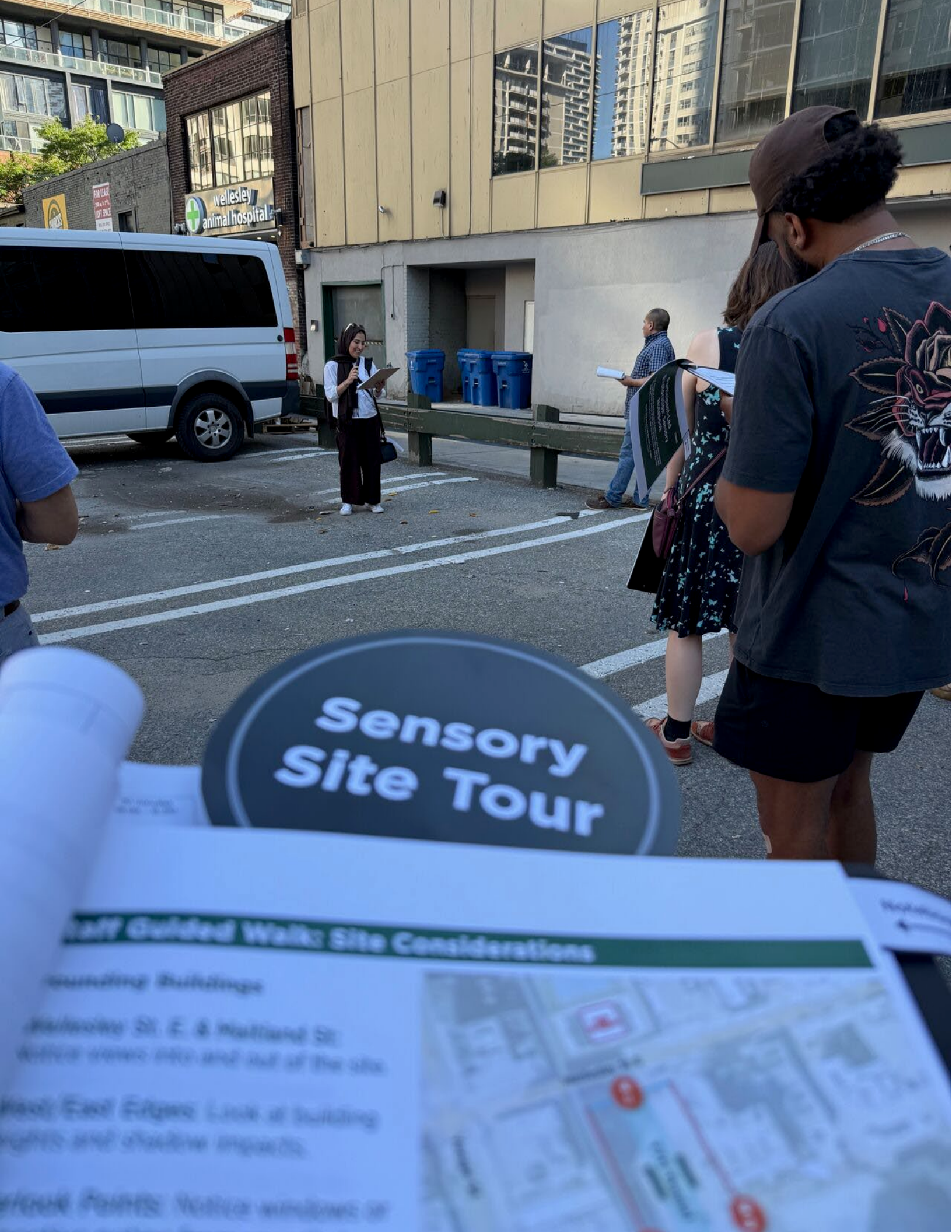
Phase 1: Towards a Vision

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Kim Behrouzian, Supervisor, Community Engagement

Nadia Galati, Senior Public Consultation Coordinator





Sensory Site Tour

Staff Guided Walk: Site Considerations

Surrounding Buildings

Wellesley St. E. & Mattland St.
Notice views into and out of the site.

West East Edges: Look at building
heights and shadow impacts.

View Points: Notice windows of
surrounding buildings.



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Introduction

On July 14, 2025, seventeen members of the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) participated in a Sensory Site Tour at the future park site at 15 Wellesley St. E.. This optional tour was offered in response to CAC interest expressed during Meeting #1 (Orientation), and was designed to support early-stage visioning.

The Sensory Site Tour focused on understanding sensory, emotional, and physical responses to the space, rather than generating design solutions or evaluating site conditions in detail. Participants explored how these lived experiences might inform the development of a vision statement, guiding principles, and high level design directions (“big moves”) for the new park.

Participants engaged in three activities:

- **Staff guided walk:** Introduced site considerations including access and entrances, surrounding building heights and overlook points, environmental factors such as wind tunnels, elevation changes, sunlight zones, and noise hotspots. Staff also highlighted opportunities (e.g., linear park continuity, community gathering spaces, sensory features) and constraints (e.g., underground utilities, TTC subway infrastructure, tree protection zones).
- **Participant-led sensory exploration:** Using sensory notebooks, participants conducted a self-guided walk through three focus areas, documenting their impressions and responses.
- **Group reflection and debrief:** Facilitated discussion to surface key themes and insights about individual experiences and reflections.

The following report summarizes findings from the tour, organized around thematic insights, focus area impressions, and future-oriented aspirations.

Participation

This tour was offered specifically to members of the project’s Community Advisory Committee (CAC), who represent a diverse cross-section of community perspectives and play a central role in shaping the vision for the site. Seventeen members attended the optional tour.

Focus Areas

To structure the Sensory Site Tour, the site was divided into three distinct focus areas each representing a different spatial condition and sensory experience. These areas were explored sequentially to surface how physical layout, environmental factors, and emotional responses shift across the site.

A map of the site (see image) outlines the three focus areas:

1. **North Section – Wellesley St. E. (Entrance / Streetside Edge)** The public-facing edge of the site, marked by heavy traffic, minimal greenery, and a prominent subway entrance. This area shaped participants' first impressions and raised questions about accessibility, exposure, and arrival experience.
2. **Middle Section – Laneway (Mid-site / Interior Space)** A transitional zone offering partial relief from noise and heat, with mixed impressions.
3. **South Section – Maitland St. (Rear / Shelter Zone)** A quieter, more enclosed area with the strongest potential for refuge and restoration.

These areas helped guide both staff-led and participant-led exploration, allowing for targeted observations and comparative insights across the site.

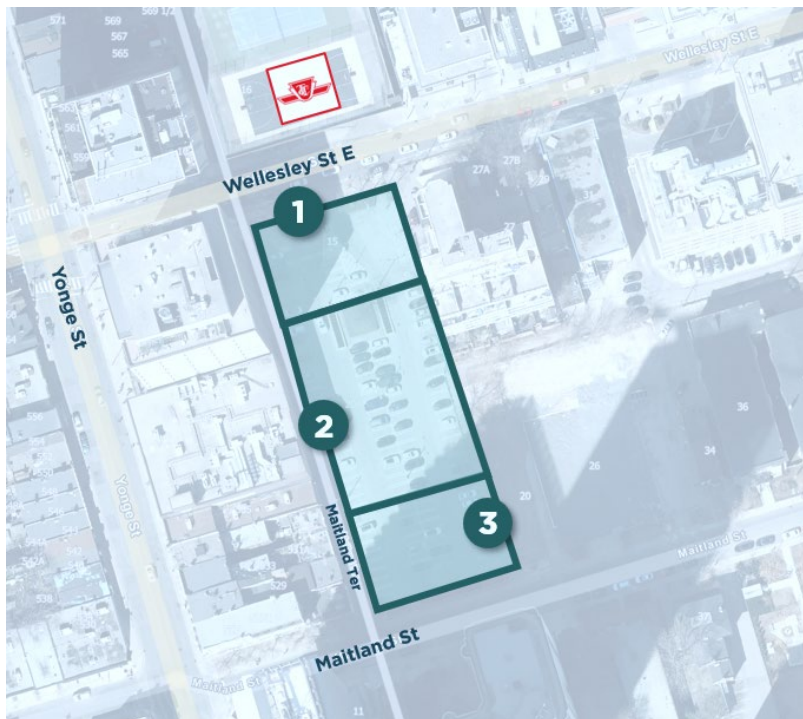


IMAGE DESCRIPTION: Map of the new park site (15 Wellesley St. E.) that outlines the Site Sensory Tour's three focus areas: 1) North Section; 2) Middle Section; and 3) South Section

Overview of Themes

The Sensory Site Tour surfaced several consistent themes that help explain how participants currently experience the site and where design interventions could have the greatest impact. These themes are not technical findings, but experiential insights grounded in sensory, emotional, and physical responses to the space. They provide a foundation for visioning and help contextualize the more detailed feedback captured in each focus area.

Key experiential themes

The following themes were reinforced through observations in each focus area:

- **Persistent noise pollution**
 - Traffic and mechanical sounds were described as constant and unpleasant, especially near the site's edge.
- **Absence of nature**
 - Across all areas, participants expressed a strong desire for more trees, plantings, and natural elements.
- **Dominance of hardscape**
 - Concrete and paved surfaces contributed to heat, discomfort, and a lack of sensory softness.
- **Barriers to safety and accessibility**
 - Narrow entrances, cracked pavement, and feelings of exposure were noted as limiting comfort and inclusion.

Focus Area 1

The entrance along Wellesley St. E. was the first point of contact and shaped participants' initial impressions of the site's welcome and accessibility.

Emotional responses

- Most participants reported feeling neutral to somewhat unhappy and somewhat tense.

Sensory observations

Sense	Observation
Sight	Dominated by concrete, cracked pavement, and minimal greenery. Entryways felt small and uninviting.
Sound	Overwhelmed by traffic, mechanical units, and street noise, frequently described as intrusive.
Smell	Exhaust fumes, dust, and general urban odors were noted.
Touch	Heat radiating from hard surfaces created discomfort; no softness or relief.

Key takeaways

- The entrance felt exposed and unwelcoming.
- Participants expressed a strong desire for a greener, more inviting threshold.
- Noise and mechanical intrusion were major detractors from comfort and accessibility.

Focus Area 2

This area offered a transition from the busy edge into the interior, with slightly more relief and complexity.

Emotional responses

- Participants felt marginally more relaxed than at the entrance, though impressions remained mixed.

Sensory observations

Sense	Observation
Sight	Some vegetation present but overshadowed by concrete and construction.
Sound	Quieter than the edge but still marked by traffic hum and building echoes.
Smell	Mostly neutral, with occasional unpleasant whiffs from nearby waste bins.
Touch	Breezes and shade offered intermittent relief; surfaces remained hard and industrial.

Key takeaways

- Mid-site conditions were more varied, offering glimpses of comfort.
- Participants saw potential for shaded seating, greenery, and softer materials.
- This area could serve as a transitional zone between the busy edge and restorative rear.

Focus Area 3

The final stop was the rear of the site along Maitland St., which presented a distinct character and stronger sense of enclosure.

Emotional responses

- Reported as the most comfortable area. Participants felt more relaxed and somewhat happy.

Sensory observations

Sense	Observation
Sight	Quieter and more enclosed, with greater potential for natural elements.
Sound	Traffic noise was reduced, contributing to a sense of peace.
Smell	Neutral to absent, with fewer negative triggers.
Touch	Cooler air and shade provided relief; softer surfaces enhanced comfort.

Key takeaways

- This area was perceived as a potential refuge.
- Participants envisioned a restorative zone with trees, seating, and sensory features.
- Design interventions here could anchor the park’s identity as a calming, inclusive space.

Emotional progression

Participants' emotional responses shifted noticeably across the three focus areas:

Focus Area	Happiness	Tension or Relaxation
1	Neutral to somewhat unhappy	Majority felt somewhat tense
2	Mixed, leaning neutral	Some felt more relaxed
3	Neutral to somewhat happy	Most felt relaxed

Together, these shifts point to a dual opportunity: to reframe the entrance experience from Wellesley Street East and to amplify the rear's restorative potential along Maitland Street.

Sensory highlights

The following chart synthesizes the most consistent sensory feedback across all areas:

Sense	Observation
Sight	Strong desire for greenery, visual softness, and inviting edges.
Sound	Need for noise mitigation through design and planting.
Smell	Reduce exposure to exhaust and waste; introduce positive scents.
Touch	Cooler surfaces, shaded zones, and soft textures were preferred.

Participants consistently called for a softer, more sensory-friendly park environment, highlighting the need for greenery, shade, and inviting edges to counteract noise, heat, and urban harshness. Design interventions should prioritize comfort, calm, and multisensory appeal.

Next Steps

The Sensory Site Tour invited CAC members to reflect on how the existing site feels and how it could be reimagined. Their observations and aspirations will help shape early visioning and design directions that will guide the next phase of work.

Key takeaways include:

- A strong desire for **greenery** to soften hardscape and improve air quality
- The need to **mitigate noise** through planting, berms, or water features
- Opportunities to **enhance comfort** with shaded seating, softer surfaces, and sensory-friendly design
- A clear vision for a **refuge zone** at the rear of the site, building on its restorative potential
- Calls to **improve accessibility and safety** through wide entrances, smooth pathways, and clear sightlines
- Aspirations for **inclusive gathering spaces** and **retreats** that support both community activity and personal reflection

These insights will inform the development of a vision statement, guiding principles, and big moves, which are the key outcomes of Phase 1. The CAC will work with the project team to shape these elements at the next meeting in Fall 2025.

To learn more about the project, visit toronto.ca/15Wellesley.

Acknowledgements

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City Council

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Nadia Galati, Senior Public Consultation Coordinator

Committee Advisory Committee

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