

Community Advisory Committee Meeting 1 Summary Report

Western Beaches Public Realm Plan Updates
Community Engagement Phase 1: Towards a Vision
June 26, 2025







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Introduction

The City of Toronto is working closely with local residents, community groups, and waterfront users to refresh the Western Beaches Public Realm Plan—a long-term vision for how this cherished stretch of the waterfront can better serve the people who live, work, and play here. Meaningful community engagement is an important part of this process. The City has launched a three-phase engagement strategy to renew the vision, guiding principles, and design options for the Western Beaches.

The first phase of engagement focused on refreshing the community-led vision that will inform the development of design options in Phase 2. Engagement activities included two gatherings of the Community Advisory Committee, and one Indigenous Advisory Circle meeting, pop-ups in the Western Beaches parks, and an online survey to reach the broader community.

This summary report includes feedback shared during the first Community Advisory Committee (CAC) meeting, held on June 26, 2025, at the Masaryk-Cowan Community Recreation Centre. The purpose of the first CAC meeting was to:

- Introduce the CAC members to the project team
- Provide an overview of the project, including purpose, objectives and timelines
- Provide an orientation to the role of CAC members and the engagement process
- Review and sign the Terms of Reference

Meeting Format

The meeting was hosted in person at the Masaryk-Cowan Community Recreation Centre, and was attended by 22 Community Advisory Committee members, including 17 community members and five representatives of local community organizations: Oceah Oceah Paddling Club, West End Beaches Stakeholders Association, Parkdale Residents Association, Palais Royale and Swim Drink Fish.

The meeting began with a light meal and welcome from Jill MacLachlan of the City of Toronto, who was the facilitator for the evening. City staff offered a Land Acknowledgment and African Ancestral Acknowledgement, which was followed by introductions to the project team and an overview of the evening's agenda. See Appendix A for the meeting agenda.

As it was the group's first meeting, the session began with an icebreaker exercise. CAC members were asked to think of a memory where they felt a strong sense of community, belonging or joy in a public space. With that memory in mind, CAC members were given 10 minutes to create a model of this memory using items of their choosing from a table of random household and craft objects. Once completed, every CAC member shared a brief story about their memory and the group was prompted to identify common themes among the stories.

Following the ice breaker activity, Jill provided a short presentation on the purpose and the mandate of the CAC. CAC members were then given an opportunity to ask questions of clarification about their role and the process.

Kaly Tobe, of the City of Toronto, provided a presentation introducing the project, including the project purpose, objectives and timeline. CAC members were once again given the opportunity to ask questions of clarification.

The CAC then worked at their tables to come up with a short list of norms, values and expectations that they will bring to this work. As a group, the CAC identified five or six of these that they felt should be reflected in the group's Terms of Reference.

Jill then reviewed and discussed key aspects of the Terms of Reference with the CAC members before the meeting was adjourned.

What We Heard

Discussion Highlights

The tone of the meeting was collaborative, reflective, and community-centered, with a strong emphasis on transparency, inclusivity, and respect for diverse perspectives. While participants expressed enthusiasm for shaping the future of the Western Beaches, there were also moments of critical reflection and constructive skepticism, particularly around decision-making processes and the expectations placed on volunteers.

The meeting fostered a sense of shared purpose, but also acknowledged the complexities of balancing community input with technical feasibility and policy constraints. The facilitators maintained a welcoming and open atmosphere, encouraging dialogue and validating concerns.

Detailed Discussion Points

Place it! Found Objects Workshop

Over the course of the 22 stories shared, several major themes appeared to connect the community members:

- **Water and nature as central memories**
 - Ocean-side community festivals in India with local artists and decorations.
 - Sunnyside Beach stones and flowers serving as a point of fascination upon arriving in Canada.
 - Ice fishing in Northern Ontario after snowfall, cooking fish on a wood burning stove on the lake.
 - Strong connection to water through childhood camping, paddleboarding, and living between parks.
 - A family garden and connection to natural rhythms
 - Wetland frogs as a sign of seasonal change.
 - Symbolic of Algonquin Park and community care.

- **Shared Play & Recreation**
 - Years at camp, fire-making under trees.
 - Made early community connections on the soccer field.
 - Cycling through water-adjacent trails.
 - Teaching son how to fish and play ball.
 - Community gatherings with music and togetherness in Montreal parks
- **International inspiration**
 - Live music and communal joy in Italian parks.
 - Ocean-side community festivals in India with local artists and decorations
 - Fun events with performers at the London Pavilion.
- **Intergenerational & Inclusive Community**
 - Fire on the beach, place for all ages/abilities
 - Community laughter sparked by a dog's antics at Sunnyside Beach.
 - Bluejays, blackbirds, and encouraging children's voices in planning.
 - Community-led traffic calming; impact of committees on policy.

See images and full stories from the Place It workshop:

https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVJePVCDc=/?share_link_id=264004184099

Questions of Clarification

CAC members were invited to ask questions of clarification following both the CAC roles and responsibilities presentation and the project overview presentation. The following is a summary of the questions and answers from these discussions. It captures the main points but is not a word-for-word record of the meeting:

Q1: Do we have people (on the CAC) who are in the water? People who swim? I have people who are disabled. They can only go to H2O park now. Are we missing someone here?

A1: approximately eight CAC members raise their hands to identify as individuals that swim in the water at the Western Beaches. The CAC also includes a representative from Drink, Swim Fish.

Q2: Are you going to have all key drivers in all of the parks and beaches? Some of the parks and beaches are smaller than others.

A2: No, we would be looking at where the most appropriate uses are. i.e., the goal of food and beverage would not be to have it in every park space. If one area is more

passive and reflective we would honour that, whereas others are livelier and could have more programming.

Q3: Are there different organizations responsible for different parts of the plan?

A3: Yes, different City Division (like Parks Operations, Transportation, Waterfront Secretariat, etc.) with different operations, plans and objectives. We are all getting them into a technical advisory table to make decisions and seek opportunities for them to be integrated.

Q4: Are the 8-10 priorities ranked?

A4: No, everything presented today were in no particular order.

Q5: Has this been budgeted?

A5: No. One of the key outcomes is to create an implementation approach and costing strategy so individual projects can be created, studied closely and budget designed properly. We are not looking towards a particular overall budget; we are just working on what the context as to what we can see in 20 years.

Q6: Any other stakeholders to be considered? Will there be any private entities i.e., Ontario place.

A6: We did invite more community organizations and stakeholders to participate in the CAC. Five have responded and are here tonight. It's important we include stakeholders in this group so they can hear from other stakeholders and community members can hear from them, and decisions are made together. We aim for our CACs to be 2/3 community members and 1/3 stakeholders, although there are currently less stakeholders currently (may come on later). Outside of this room, there will be other advisory bodies such as the technical advisory committee and Indigenous Advisory Circle. There are recommendations made to the project team where the technical committee may say "that's not feasible". Their role is implementation based on policy. Our job is to tell you how to work within those boundaries as best as we can.

Our conversations with the technical advisory committee are always very representative of the feedback from these sessions and vice-versa. We are trying to make this process as transparent as possible. Sometimes, there are constraints. We want it to be a plan that everyone has had input on and embraced recommendations because that gives us more leverage towards implementation.

This is the engagement for the Public Realm Plan itself. When we are implementing the projects we will do additional engagement on those specific projects.

No private interests on this project. To be transparent, there are private entities along the Western Beaches that have leases to operate i.e., paddle board, food and

beverage, etc. this is not like Ontario place where we are reaching out to a private corporation to redevelop the western beaches. The businesses along the beaches have a finite amount of time. If we are having conversations, there are not secret deals happening. It is governed by a transparent process.

Q7: In 2008 when the first planning was done, Ontario place still had ownership of the beach. So now all the people that used to go there now go to the western beaches. Do we have the capacity to accommodate?

A7: absolutely, not just in the context of Ontario place, but anticipated growth in the broader community.

Q8: It is my understanding that the food and beverage lacks diversity on the lakeshore because it's owned by one group, the Grenadier Group. As a part of this plan, can we open opportunities to small businesses and cultural.

A8: as a part of this plan, one of the project goals is to visit the visitor experience which includes food and beverage. Food and beverage is an essential component to making it a better place to visit. How that gets implemented will be something in the plan. At the end of this, we will be able to make specific budget requests related to the projects in the plan. This plan is looking at it holistically so that it's meaningful from west to east. And then we make those bite sized components. This is the right way to do it so it's meaningful in the end and not appear like a patch of quilted ideas. It will be a cohesive approach that will change overtime.

Q9: is there anyone representing climate change and resilience?

A9: yes, working with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority

Q10: will the pebble beach be reproduced?

A10: there are certainly no plans at this time. That can be what we discuss.

Q11: I was a busser at the Grenadier Group. Will these businesses have a living wage just like the city does. We should encourage these companies who have long leases. Besides private weddings, what else can they do? Can they winterize the café? There weren't that many people going there on a Wednesday at 10 p.m. How can we encourage them? The living wage thing is a big thing – because they hire people across High Park.

My second question is about erosion – pebble beach and trillium park, humber bay east project, a lot of residents were upset because the erosion plan took out the beach even though it wasn't licensed. What is the bigger vision that the City has? Are we just talking about pavement and bike trails? Are we keeping all the beaches? What is the big picture?

A11: Big Moves is the core focus of next week's workshop. We will talk about vision, guiding principles, then big moves will be where we talk about different services, pebble beach and other great ideas.

Q12: As far as I can understand, overall its about the experience of visitors. At the base level, the experience at the beaches or high park, and my quality of life there is not being spoken about us much. We need to work on improving the water quality at the beaches. It is very important. When we have wildlife and conservation we can enjoy these natural experiences. I see architects and transportation planners, but I don't see anyone from the conservation area coming in.

A12: Wildlife, certainly, is going to be a focus. I think it's good feedback you don't feel like it's being showcased. I hope next week we will see that as a strong value.

Q13: is DIALOG the prime consultant?

A13: Yes, architecture, design, planning. Toronto and Region Conservation Authority is doing work in parallel. As a part of our technical advisory committee, we have a very strong urban forestry department that thinks about the shoreline. The City of Toronto also has our Net Zero and Green Standard. When we come to assess a park, we are putting nature first – land and water.

Q14: to clarify, nothing has been set in stone? We're not commenting on plans in place and looking for tweaks? We are here to advise on big moves and they have not been set in stone?

A14: that's correct, next week we will workshop ideas with all of the various groups. Then we will be using all of what we heard to inform plan options. Then the plan options will be brought to yourselves and other groups in the Fall to see what is resonating with you, if there is something missing etc. to all come together for the draft plan brought to committee and then city council.

Q15: We have a problem in Ontario place where they will cut off all of the flow and put screens up to catch the excrement that float. The sewage overflow process – I'm concerned about that.

Terms of Reference

Consensus Decision-Making

Participants shared a range of perspectives on how consensus should be approached within the group. One participant emphasized that true consensus involves either reaching agreement or following formal procedures like Robert's Rules of Order and expressed concern that the current structure felt overly formal and demanding for volunteers. They noted that expectations such as codes of conduct and voting procedures felt burdensome for community members donating their time.

There was general agreement that quorum and consensus are distinct concepts. Several participants voiced concern about using a simple majority (50% +1) for decision-making, suggesting it could lead to division rather than unity. Instead, a stronger threshold—such as a two-thirds majority—was proposed and supported by others as a more meaningful indicator of group agreement.

However, some participants acknowledged the challenge of consistently reaching a two-thirds majority and raised questions about what happens when consensus cannot be achieved. It was suggested that if a proposal is defeated, it should be considered closed unless formally reintroduced, rather than allowing informal “do-overs.”

In the end, to groups expressed a strong preference for **2/3 majority** over 50% +1, and agreed that defeated proposals need re-evaluation before reintroduction.

Code of Conduct

The committee expressed general agreement with the code of conduct terms. One participant request “Be transparent and tell the truth”, and the committee was in favour of this.

Freedom of Information & Privacy

Participants expressed mixed feelings about the proposal to publicly share photos and identities of CAC members. One participant questioned its value, noting that in their experience, people typically opt out of being photographed with a simple sticker at events. They raised concerns about increasing vulnerability and the formal nature of the process, which felt more like a contract than a community initiative.

In response, the City team explained that this approach is being piloted to enhance public transparency by helping the broader community understand who is contributing to the project. While this hasn't been done before in City-led processes, it is common in

the private sector. The team emphasized that participation is optional and offered to send out a short survey to gather input from members.

Concerns were also raised about associating individual identities with decisions, especially if consensus isn't reached. One participant suggested that decisions made by a two-thirds majority could still leave dissenting voices feeling exposed. The team agreed to take this concern back for further consideration.

To help guide decision-making when consensus is difficult, a participant proposed using a shared set of values—similar to a previous exercise—to evaluate design options. This approach could help align decisions with community priorities even when full agreement isn't possible.

Another participant supported the idea of transparency but cautioned that vulnerability can arise unexpectedly and should be handled with care.

Next Steps

The second Community Advisory Committee meeting is scheduled to take place on July 3, 2025.

Acknowledgements

City of Toronto

Parks, Forestry & Recreation

Kaly Tobe, Senior Project Coordinator, Parks Planning and Strategic Initiatives

Lori Ellis, Senior Project Manager, Parks Planning and Strategic Initiatives

Danny Brown, Project Development Officer, Parks Planning and Strategic Initiatives

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Transportation Services

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Community Members

We appreciate all the community members who engaged with us during the first Community Advisory Committee for the Western Beaches Public Realm Plan Update. Your questions, insights, and feedback have been invaluable in refining our materials and enhancing the overall experience for all participants.

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

Appendix



Agenda

Western Beaches Public Realm Plan Orientation Meeting

Date: June 26, 2025

Time: 2 hours 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.

Location: Masaryk-Cowan Community Centre

Item
1. Welcome & Introductions
2. Ice Breaker – Place It! Found Objects Model-Building Workshop
3. Ice Breaker – Plenary Reflection
4. Presentation: Purpose and Mandate of the CA
5. Questions & Answers
6. Presentation: Project Overview
7. Questions & Answers
8. Working Together: Norms, Values & Expectations
9. Working Together: Terms of Reference
10. Wrap-up and Next Steps