TORONTO

High Park Public Life Study

November 2025


Public
Life
urveyor
TORONTO
Zone D

Acknowledgements

Land Acknowledgement

The City gratefully acknowledges that the area covered by High Park is the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of New Credit, the Anishinaabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat people and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. The City also acknowledges that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of New Credit, and the Williams Treaty signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands.

Volunteer Acknowledgement

This study was made possible by the contributions of our volunteers, who recorded 48 hours of public life observations in High Park. We thank them for their time, expertise, and commitment.

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Introduction

Introduction

Why study High Park?

High Park is one of Toronto's largest public spaces, drawing visitors from across the city and beyond. It offers a unique blend of natural landscapes, recreational amenities, and cultural heritage, all within a heavily used urban park setting. As part of the upcoming implementation of the High Park Movement Strategy, the City is focusing on improving circulation and access along key corridors, including West Road, Colborne Lodge Drive, and the section of Spring Road near the duck ponds and playground. This public life study provides foundational insight into how these areas are currently used, helping to inform design and operational decisions.

What is a public life study?

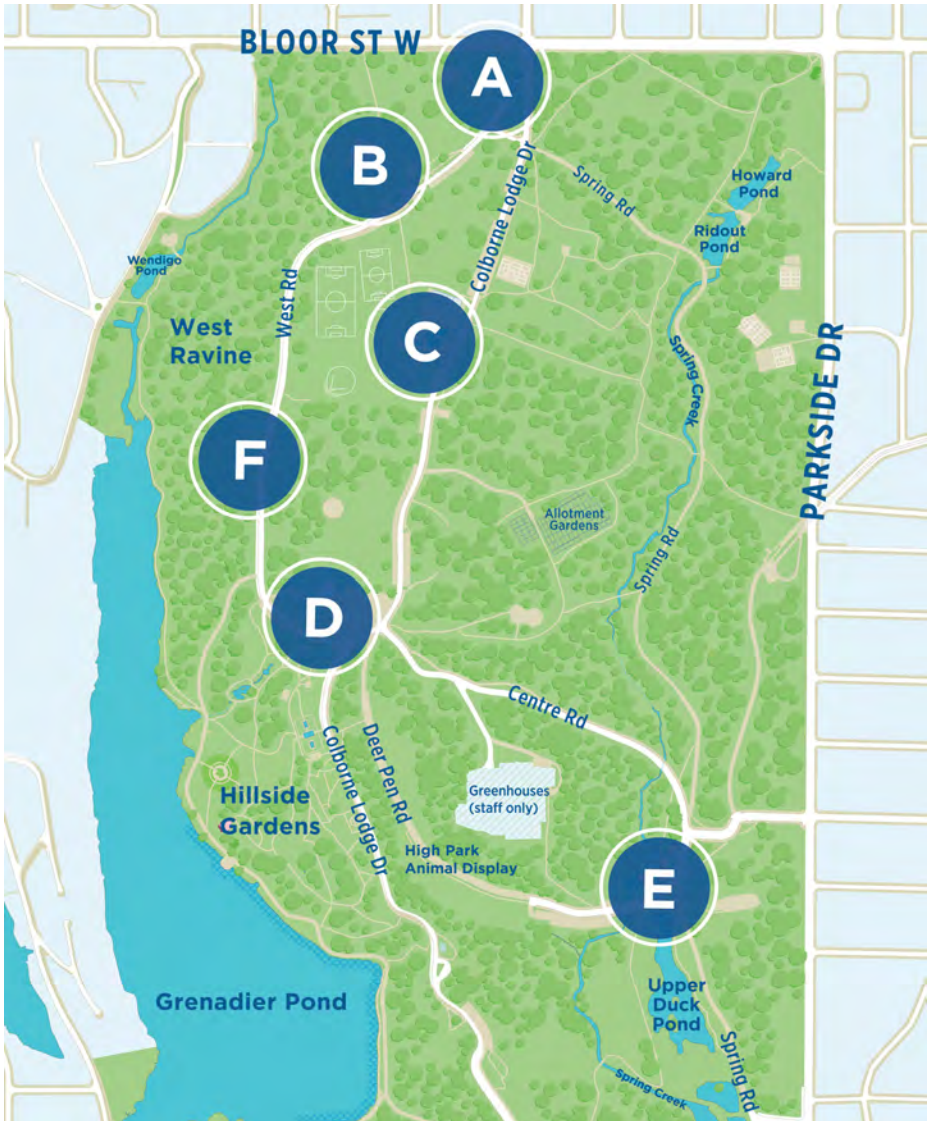
A public life study is a systematic approach to understanding how people use public space. It focuses on real-time observation of movement, behavior, and social interaction to reveal patterns that are often missed in traditional planning processes. By documenting consistent snapshots of who is present, how they move, and how they occupy space, the study helps identify opportunities to improve equity, usability, and the overall experience of public life in the park.

How we build insight from observation

Observations were gathered and analyzed through a four-step process. First, data was collected using standardized sheets. Then information was organized to identify patterns in how people use the space. Next, visuals were created to help compare different areas and activities. Finally, these patterns were interpreted to see how easily people move around, how comfortable and welcoming the spaces feel and how well each area supports different types of use. Observations were collected in spring and summer, consistently spanning a weekday (Tuesday) and a weekend day (Saturday).

Observation Zones

This study focused on six observation zones along corridors slated for improvements through the High Park Movement Strategy, including West Road, Colborne Lodge Drive, and the section of Spring Road near the duck ponds and playground. These zones were selected for their proximity to major entrances, pathways, and park features. Observations were conducted during three time periods: 8am to 12pm, 12pm to 4pm, and 4pm to 8pm, capturing activity from morning through afternoon and into the early evening. Within each block, travel counts were recorded during short intervals at the start of every hour, while demographic and stationary mapping occurred during alternating hours.



Zones include:

A. North entrance

B. Northwest playground

C. Recreation area

D. Grenadier Café

E. Southeast playground

F. Natural area

Methods

Travel Counts

To capture movement patterns and mobility diversity, surveyors recorded the number of people passing a designated point over a 10-minute period. This included individuals using mobility aids (e.g. wheelchairs), caregivers with babies in strollers, recreational cyclists, and other micro-mobility users such as rollerbladers and skateboarders.

Observed Age & Gender Counts

To understand who felt comfortable using the spaces, surveyors recorded perceived age and gender presentation of passersby at designated points. These observations were based on visual perception, not self-identification. Individuals perceived as nonbinary or whose presentation did not clearly align with binary categories were recorded as 'Gender Non Conforming'. Gender was not recorded for babies and toddlers. We acknowledge the limitations of visual estimation and the potential for misclassification.

Observed Stationary Activities & Postures

To understand how people engaged with the space, surveyors mapped the location of stationary individuals and recorded their activities and postures. Activities included eating/drinking, socializing, active recreation, and passive recreation (e.g. reading, photography). Postures were recorded as standing, formal sitting (on designed seating), informal sitting (on surfaces not intended for seating), and lying down.

Volunteer Recruitment & Training

To support seasonal observation efforts across zones, volunteers were recruited through targeted outreach to post-secondary institutions in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA), including Toronto Metropolitan University, University of Toronto, George Brown College, and Seneca Polytechnic. This approach reflects standard practice in other public life studies, where student volunteers contribute to short-term observational research in public spaces.

Mandatory training sessions were held ahead of each seasonal observation period to ensure consistency in how observations were recorded. Each volunteer was paired with a City staff member for support before and during the study days. Volunteers received an honorarium in recognition of their time and contributions.

All synthesis, interpretation, and visualization were conducted by City staff.

Limitations

This study offers valuable insights into public life in the park, but several constraints may have influenced the results, including:

- **Seasonal timing:** Observations were limited to spring and summer, and do not reflect year-round use or long-term trends.
- **Weather conditions:** Cooler-than-average temperatures and light rainfall during spring observations may have led to lower turnout in evening periods.
- **Event-based activity:**
    - Spring observations took place prior to cherry blossom season, which typically draws large crowds to the park. As a result, the study does not capture the elevated visitor activity associated with this annual event.
    - No other major events occurred during the study period beyond expected seasonal programming, such as camps, sports and recreation, and group gatherings.
- **Methodological constraints:** Short observation periods and limited user representation may constrain the scope of insights.

These factors will be considered when interpreting results or applying recommendations.

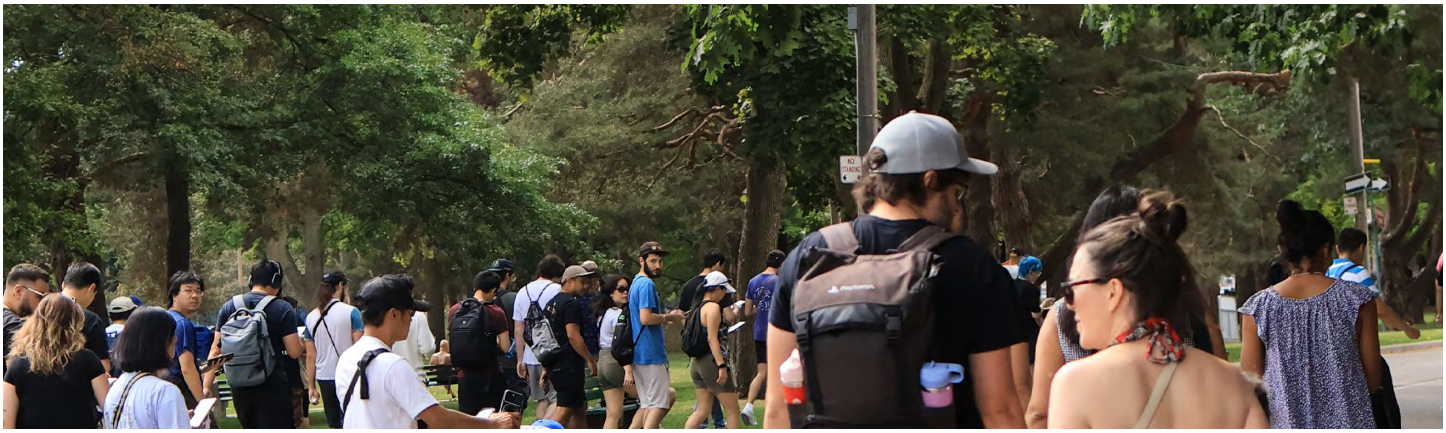

203 HIGH PARK
via COLBORNE LODGE DRIVE

Key Insights

TORONTO

A park that starts on foot

Method: Travel counts



Walking is the leading mobility choice

While multiple travel modes[1] were observed, pedestrian activity was by far the most common across the park. In both spring and summer, pedestrian volumes far exceeded other travel modes across every zone. Walking remained the dominant way people moved through the park, even as recreational cycling increased in summer. This pattern held across both weekday and weekend counts, underscoring walking as the primary mode of movement.

Zone A, the main entrance from Bloor Street West, saw more than twice as many pedestrians as any other zone in both seasons. It drew 2,320 visitors in spring and 2,212 in summer, reinforcing its role as the park's primary gateway. Zone B followed in spring with 1,874 pedestrians but dropped to 1,164 in summer, suggesting a seasonal shift in use.

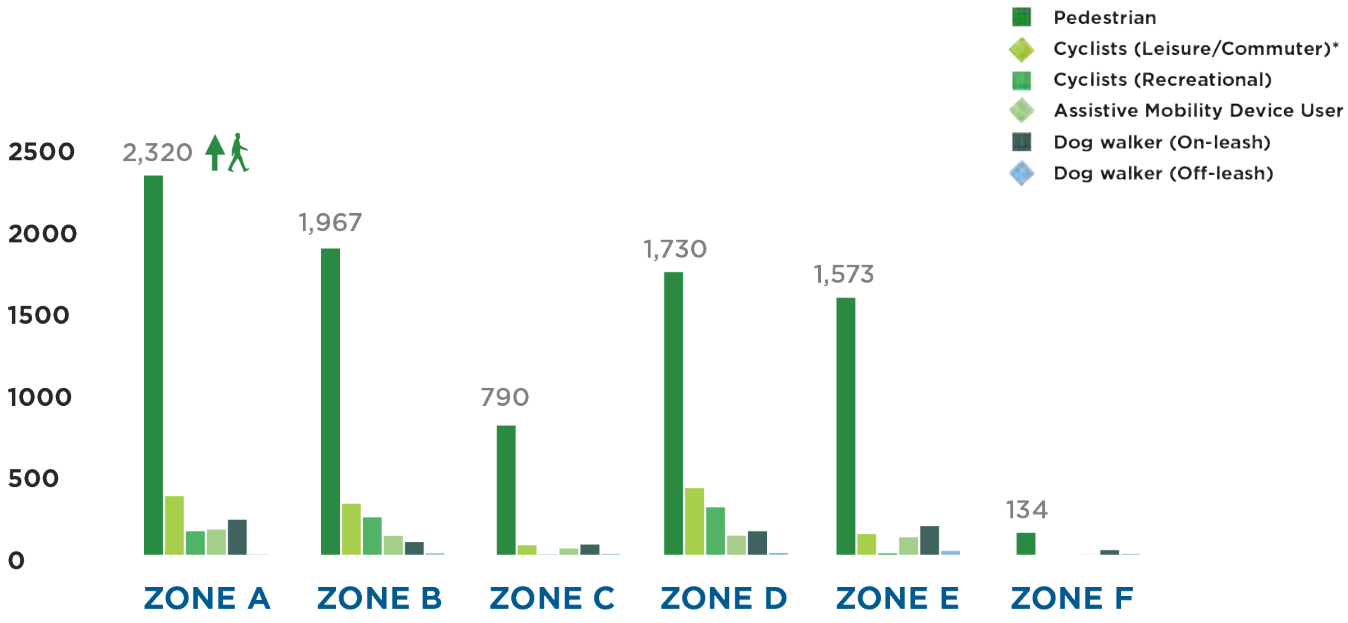
Zone D, home to Grenadier Café, held steady across both seasons, reflecting its role as a social and recreational destination. Zone E, which includes the duck pond and entrance to Jamie Bell Playground, declined slightly from 1,573 to 1,412 but remained one of the park's more active areas. Zone F, the Natural Area entrance, saw consistently low counts, with 134 pedestrians in spring and 118 in summer, suggesting it functions as a peripheral zone.

These patterns affirm High Park's identity as a pedestrian-first space. Walking is the primary way people engage with the park's landscape, amenities, and each other. Zones A and B serve as social and spatial anchors, drawing both movement and gathering.

[1] Counts reflect pedestrian, cycling, and micro-transportation activity (e.g., skateboards, scooters); cars were not recorded as part of this Public Life Study.

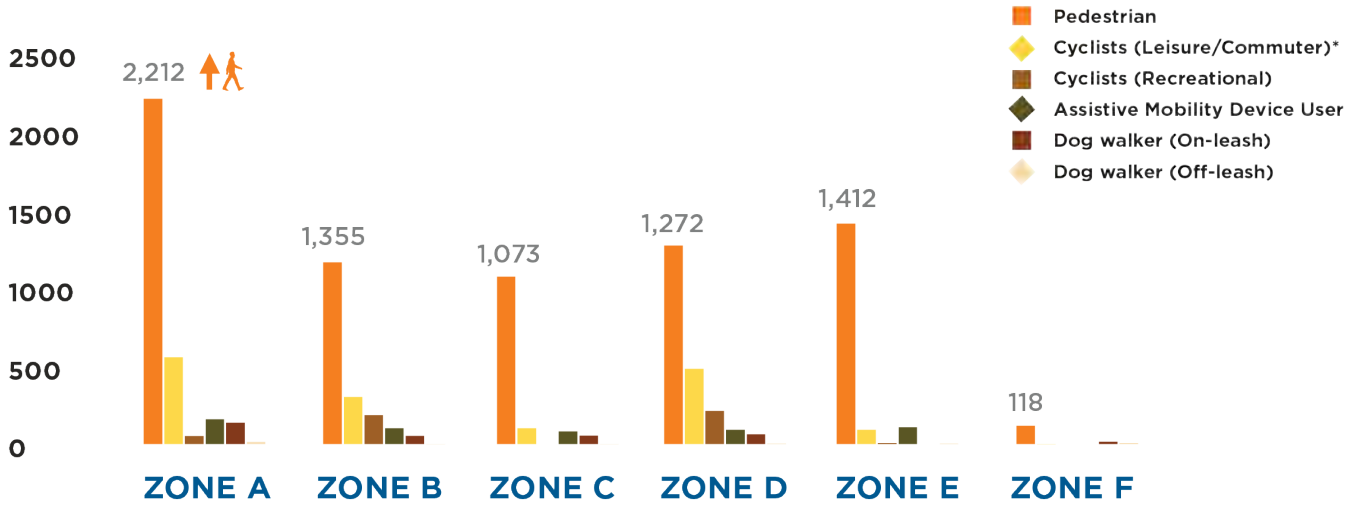
A park that starts on foot

Moving in spring



*includes micro-mobility users such as rollerbladers and skateboarders.

Moving in summer



*includes micro-mobility users such as rollerbladers and skateboarders.

Shifting gears

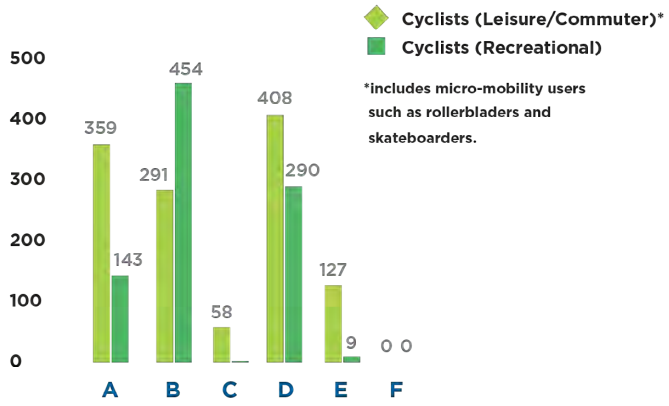
Method: Travel counts

Cycling shifts from performance to pleasure between spring and summer

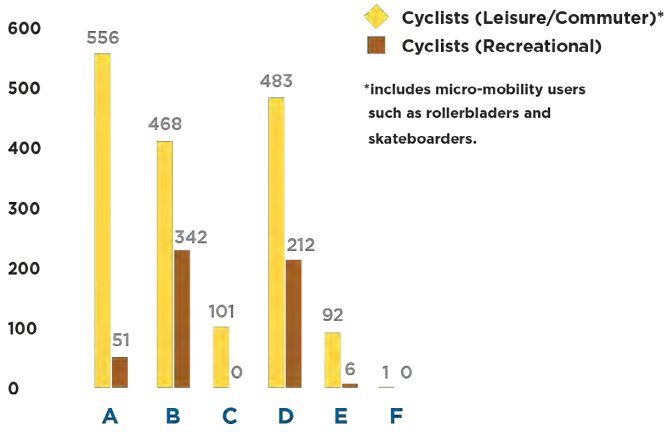
In spring, cyclists were observed most in in Zones A, B, and D, which recorded 143, 454, and 290 riders, respectively. Spring counts had a higher number of faster-paced recreational cyclists using the longer, uninterrupted stretches of park road. By summer, counts climbed to 556, 468, and 483 in the same zones, reflecting a marked rise in leisure and commuter cycling, with slower-paced riders using the park for casual travel and enjoyment.

Leisure and commuter cycling consistently saw higher counts across all zones. This pattern reinforces the need for infrastructure that supports a broad range of riders, including slower-paced cyclists, families, and those new to biking.

Cyclists in spring



Cyclists in summer



Mobility gaps

Method: Travel counts

Uneven accessibility across zones

Use of assistive mobility devices varied widely across High Park, revealing clear gaps in accessibility. Zone F, the West Ravine, showed near-zero use in both seasons, confirming that this area remains largely inaccessible. Zone C, part of the recreational area, also saw low counts despite being a high-traffic zone overall. This contrast suggests that assistive mobility users may avoid the area due to congestion, uneven surfacing, or a lack of supportive infrastructure.

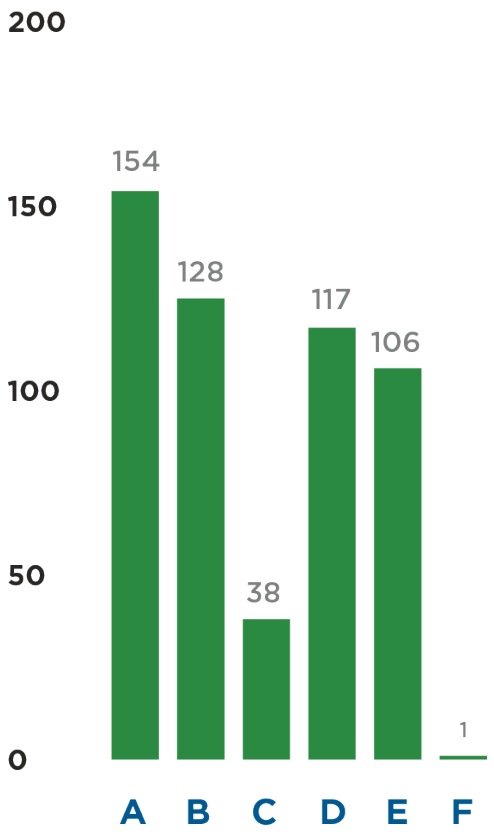
In spring, Zones A and D saw the highest counts, while Zone C recorded just 38 users and Zone F only one. In summer, Zone A led again with 158 users, followed by Zone B with 149, while Zone F remained at the bottom with zero use.

These patterns point to environmental and infrastructural barriers in Zones F and C, where path conditions, seating, and gradients may not support safe or comfortable access.

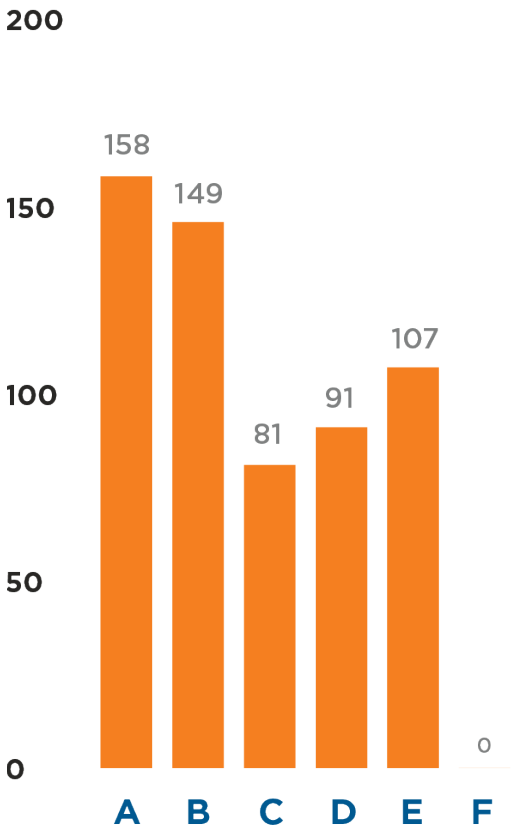
Zones with higher mobility use likely offer smoother surfaces, better circulation, and more accessible entry points. But the low presence of users in Zones F and C highlights the need for targeted improvements to ensure that all areas of High Park are welcoming and navigable for people with mobility challenges.

Mobility gaps

Assistive mobility patterns in spring



Assistive mobility patterns in summer



Low assistive mobility use in Zones F and C signals a need for improvements to make these areas more accessible

Gender presence as a proxy

Method: Observed gender counts

No clear barriers, but subtle patterns worth watching

Across both seasons, gender counts were relatively balanced in most zones, with female and gender non-conforming visitors often matching or exceeding male-presenting counts. Zone C, the recreational area, followed this general pattern in summer, with 168 female and gender non-conforming visitors compared to 149 male-presenting. In spring, however, Zone C recorded the second-lowest count for female and gender non-conforming visitors (96), suggesting a seasonal low.

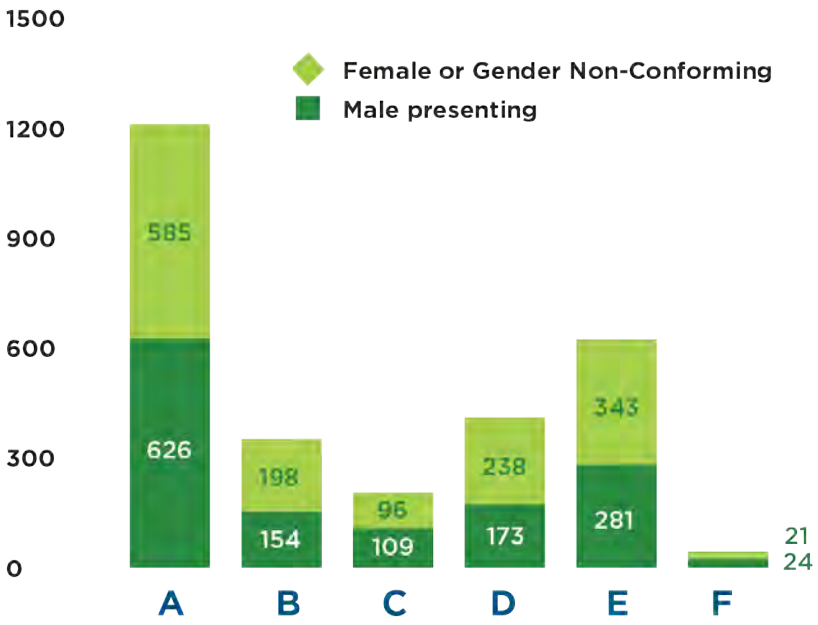
Zone F, the west ravine, had the lowest counts overall, with just 21 female and gender non-conforming visitors in spring and 16 in summer. Zone F, while consistently low across all groups, doesn't offer enough volume to support a gender-specific insight. The disparity is minimal and likely reflects broader underuse. These patterns stand out against zones like E and D, which saw over 300 female and gender non-conforming visitors in summer alone.

While these differences are modest, they offer a useful baseline for future tracking. In Prospect Park, Brooklyn, planners have used femme-presenting individuals as an indicator, a way to assess whether a space feels socially supported, safe, and inclusive. Their presence can be seen as a proxy for broader comfort and accessibility.

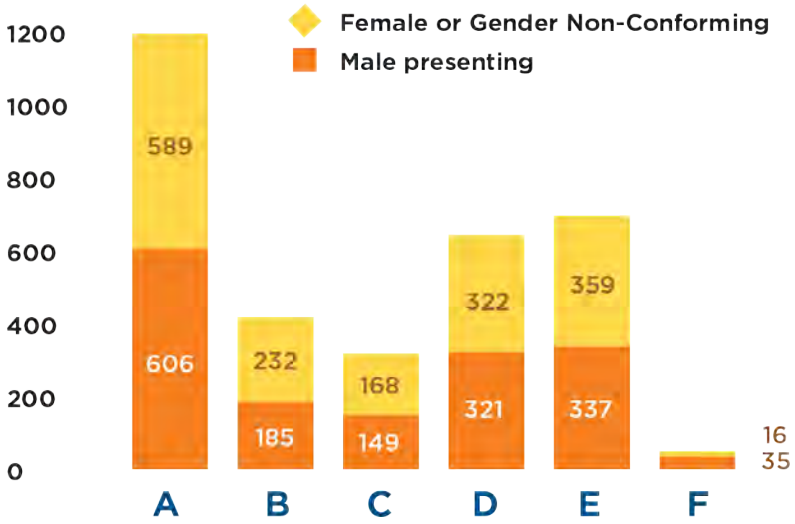
Applying that lens to High Park, the low turnout in Zones F and C may reflect subtle barriers that shape who feels comfortable spending time in these areas.

Gender presence as a proxy

Observed gender counts in spring



Observed gender counts in summer



Designed to dwell

Method: Observed stationary activity & postures

Standing dominates in spring, sitting surges in summer

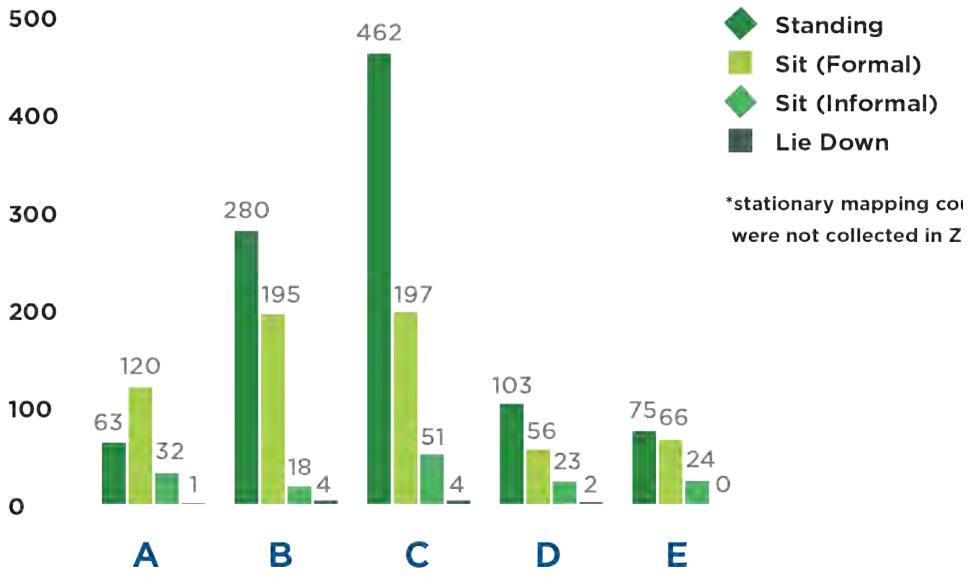
In spring, standing was the most common posture across all zones. Zones C and B recorded 462 and 280 standing visitors respectively. These zones include active recreation areas such as the baseball diamond, soccer field, and pool (Zone C), and the playground and splash pad (Zone B), which support short visits and engaged participation. By summer, sitting increased dramatically, especially in Zones A, B, and C, each recording over 500 seated visitors. Zone A includes the main entrance and picnic lawn, which offer more opportunities for lingering. This seasonal shift suggests that warmer weather encourages longer stays and more relaxed inhabitation, but only in areas where comfort features exist or where visitors can improvise.

Informal sitting rises sharply in summer, a sign of adaptation

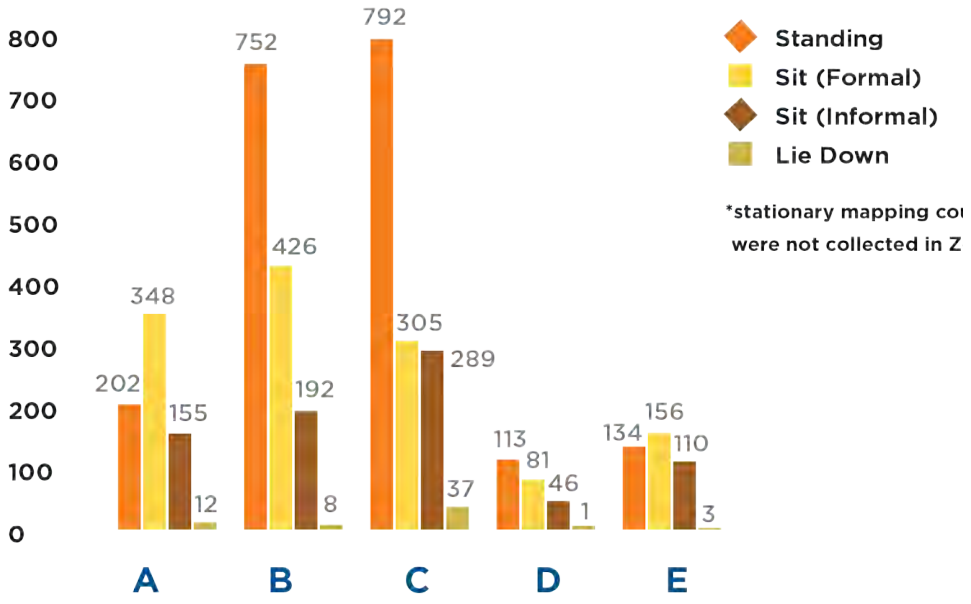
When people linger, they show what works. When they adapt, they reveal what is missing. Informal sitting increased significantly in high-use zones. In Zone C, counts rose from 51 in spring to 289 in summer. In Zone A, informal sitting grew from 32 to 155. These improvised postures, on ledges, grass, or other surfaces, indicate that formal seating is insufficient. Visitors are adapting to what is available, which reveals unmet demand for flexible and abundant seating. Zone A's open lawn and Zone C's sports fields may lack dedicated seating, prompting these adaptations.

Designed to dwell

Observed stationary postures in spring



Observed stationary postures in summer



Play zones support activity, but not rest

Zones B and C consistently recorded the highest active behaviours across both seasons. Zone B rose from 191 active visitors in spring to 660 in summer, while Zone C shifted from 308 to 543. These zones are home to the park's most dynamic programming, including splash pad, playground, and sports facilities, and maintained high standing counts. However, sitting and lying remained comparatively low, which suggests limited infrastructure for rest or spectatorship. These zones support movement and interaction, but not comfort. This gap could be addressed through shaded viewing areas, seating edges, and soft surfaces.

Posture is a proxy for comfort and a diagnostic tool

Across all zones, posture patterns reveal not only how people use space but also how they adapt when comfort features are lacking. The rise in informal sitting, the persistence of standing in high-activity zones, and the modest posture counts in quieter areas such as Zones D and E, which include wooded trails and secondary lawns, all point to a mismatch between spatial appeal and design support.

Activity patterns confirm spatial roles, and reveal missed opportunities

Observed activity shows the functional identity of each zone. Zones B and C consistently recorded the highest active behaviours, with Zone B increasing from 191 active visitors in spring to 660 in summer, and Zone C from 308 to 543. These zones are clearly functioning as play and recreation hubs, supporting movement, interaction, and short-duration use.

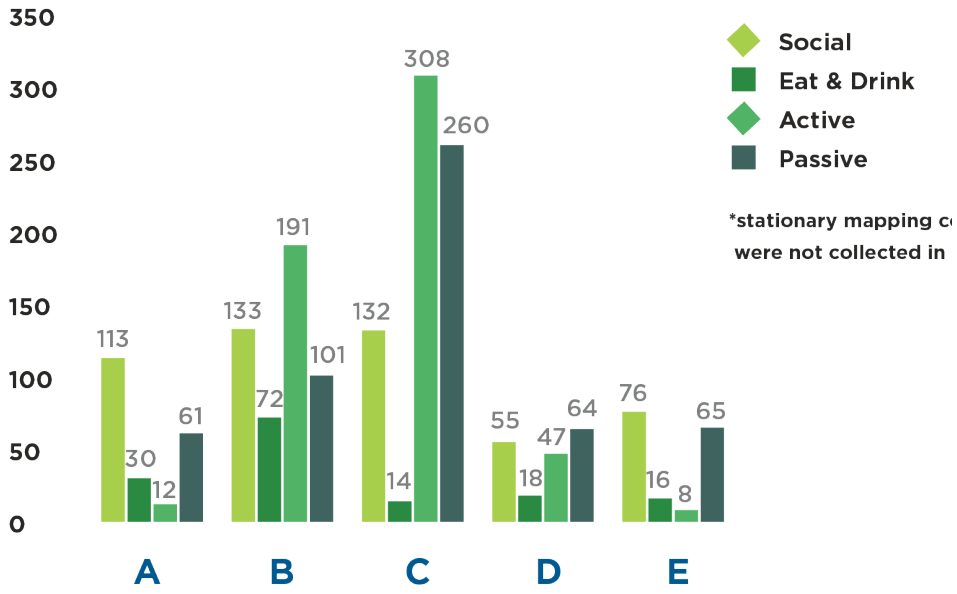
Zones A and C also saw the highest social activity counts in summer, with Zone A rising from 113 to 424 and Zone C from 132 to 308. This suggests that these areas are not only busy, but socially magnetic, yet the rise in informal sitting indicates that infrastructure may not be keeping pace with demand.

Passive activities remained modest across all zones, with only slight increases in Zones D and E. This suggests that while some areas invite quieter use, few are fully equipped to support deep rest or contemplation. The low lying posture counts across all zones reinforce this.

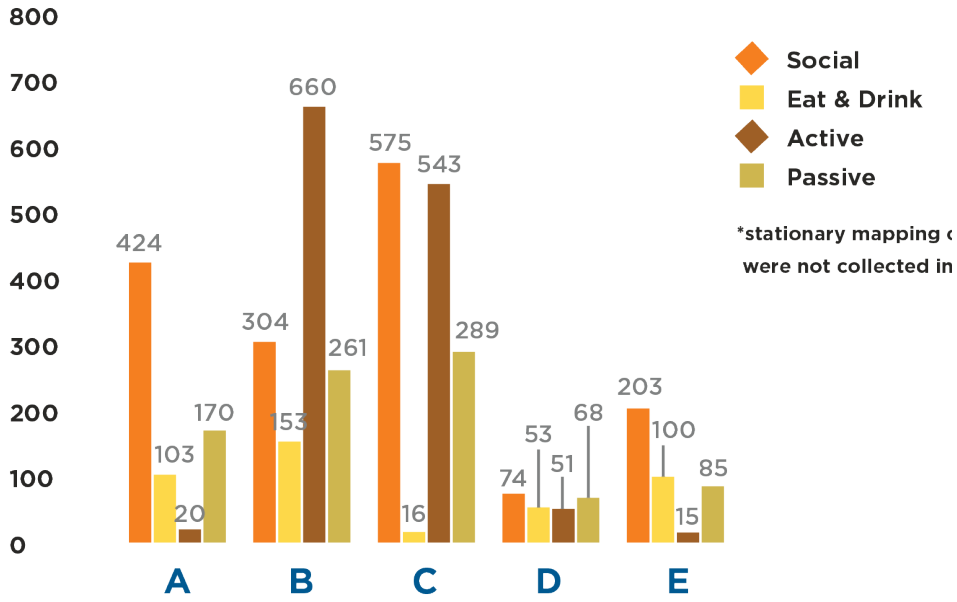
Taken together, activity patterns confirm that High Park's busiest zones are working, but also reveal where comfort and capacity may be lagging behind use. They show where people are engaging, where they're adapting, and where they're not staying long enough to engage at all.

Designed to dwell

Observed stationary activities in spring



Observed stationary activities in summer



Who's missing, and where?

Method: Observed age counts

Limited visibility of older adults aged 65+ in Zones C, D, and F

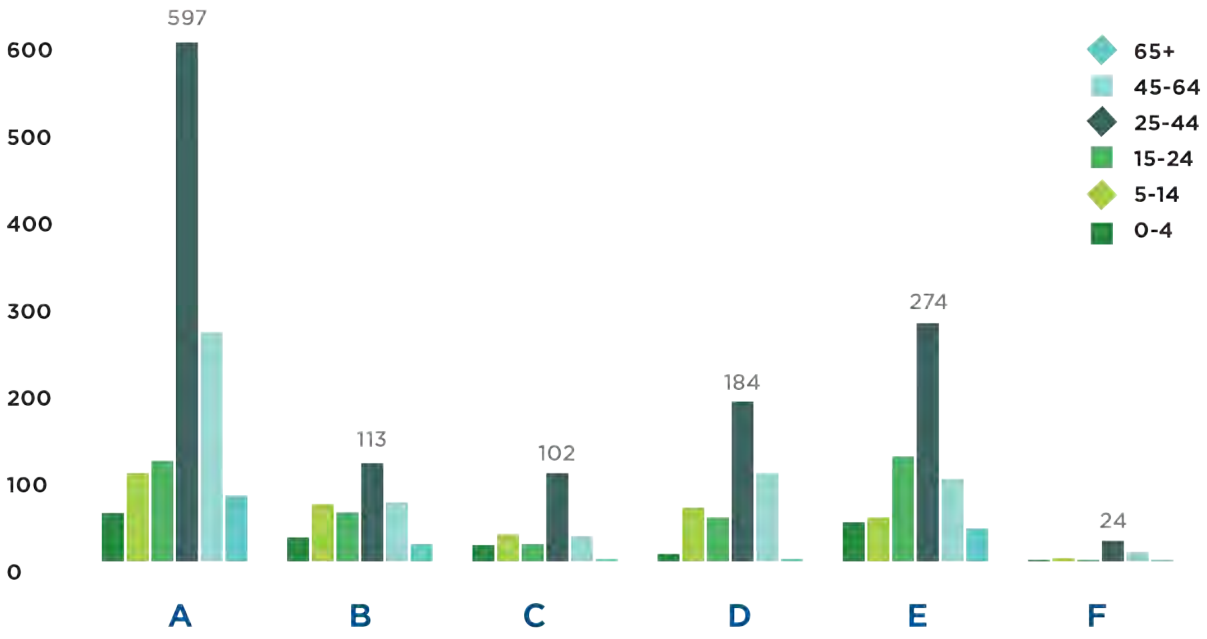
Visitors aged 65 and older were observed in the lowest numbers overall, especially in Zones C, D, and F. In spring, only three older adults were recorded in Zones C and D, and just two in Zone F. Summer counts rose slightly, but remained low: 23 in Zone C, 54 in Zone D, and 6 in Zone F. While Zone C includes active recreation areas that may be less used by older visitors for activity, Zone D surrounds Grenadier Café, which could benefit from outdoor comfort features such as seating, shade, in the overall zone. Zone F's steep terrain likely contributes to its low counts.

Teens and young adults are underrepresented in active zones

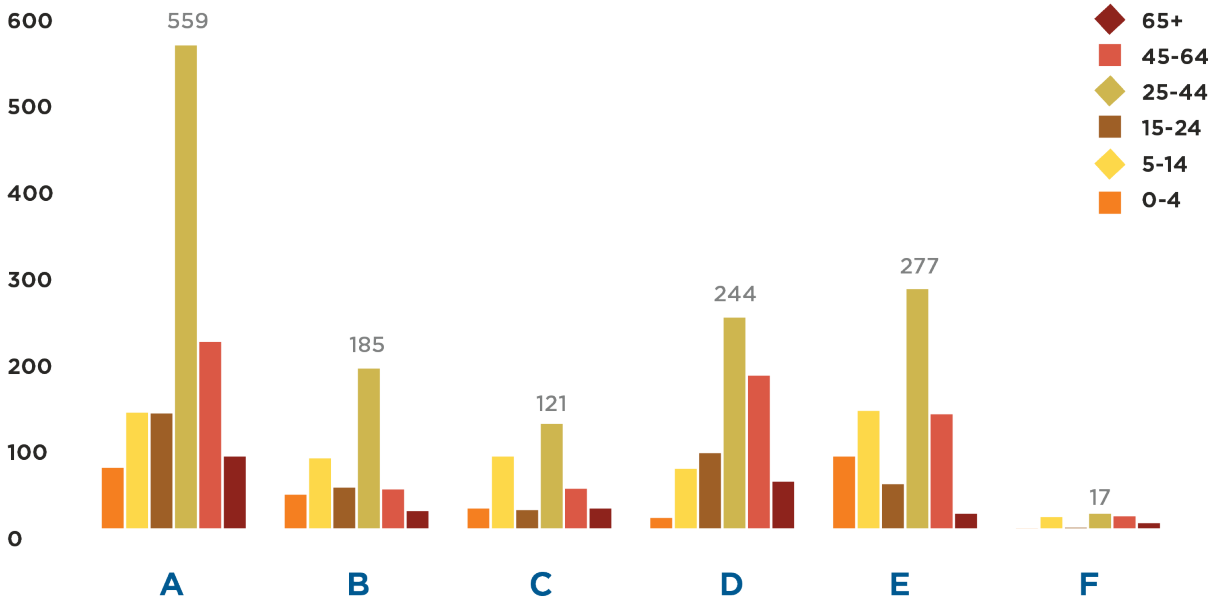
Despite hosting sports fields and a pool, Zone C recorded only 20 visitors aged 15–24 in spring and 21 in summer. Zone B, home to the playground and splash pad, saw similarly low counts: 57 in spring and 47 in summer. These numbers are modest given the active programming in these zones and may reflect a lack of teen-friendly infrastructure or social cues that signal welcome. Zone F recorded just two individuals aged 15–24 in spring and one in summer, confirming its limited role in attracting independent youth use.

Who's missing, and where?

Observed age counts in spring



Observed age counts in summer



Young children are present but not evenly distributed

Children aged 0-4 were most often observed in Zones A, B, and E, which include open lawns, play features, and key access points for families. Zone A recorded 56 young children in spring and 70 in summer, reflecting its role as a social and picnic hub. Zone E, located at the circulation point leading toward Jamie Bell Playground, showed the most dramatic increase from 45 to 83, confirming its importance as a family gateway. These counts were not taken inside the playground itself, and actual numbers at Jamie Bell may be higher.

Zone B, home to the playground and splash pad, did see an increase from 28 to 39, but the overall counts for children aged 0-4 and 5-14 are lower than expected given its programming. This may reflect short dwell times, limited comfort features for caregivers, or crowding that discourages prolonged use. In contrast, Zones C, D, and F recorded very few young children, likely due to steep terrain, limited amenities, or programming geared toward older users.

From a public life perspective, the observations suggests that young children are present where infrastructure supports them, but even in play-focused zones, comfort and accessibility may shape how long families stay.


30
AREA
BEGINS

Zone Profiles

TORONTO

Zone A: North entrance

Located on the south side of Bloor St. W., near High Park Station

Highlights

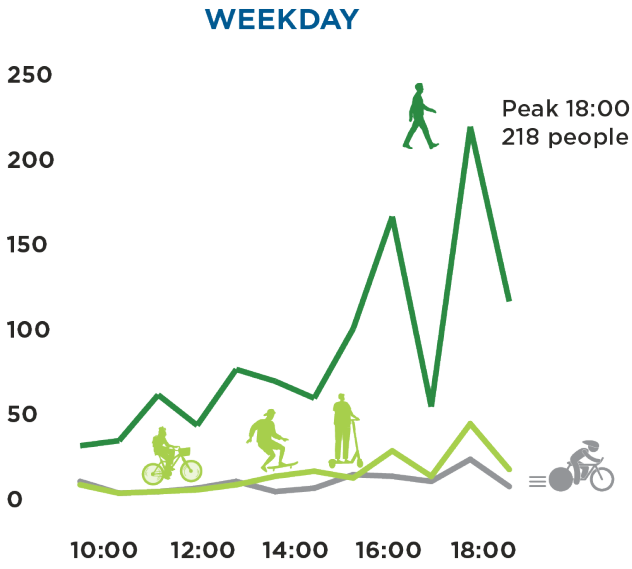
- This is a highly social zone, dominating across the weekday and the weekend.
- Movement peaked midday across seasons, but staying behaviour intensified on the summer weekend, reaching 161 people in the afternoon.
- Sitting-to-standing ratios dropped from spring to summer, suggesting seating was more actively used earlier in the season.
- Informal sitting and standing surged on the summer weekend, signaling strong demand for more places to sit.

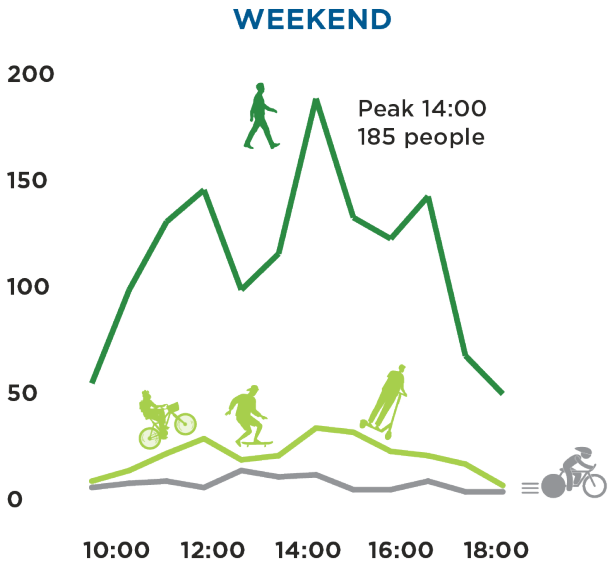
Top activities in spring

Top activities in summer

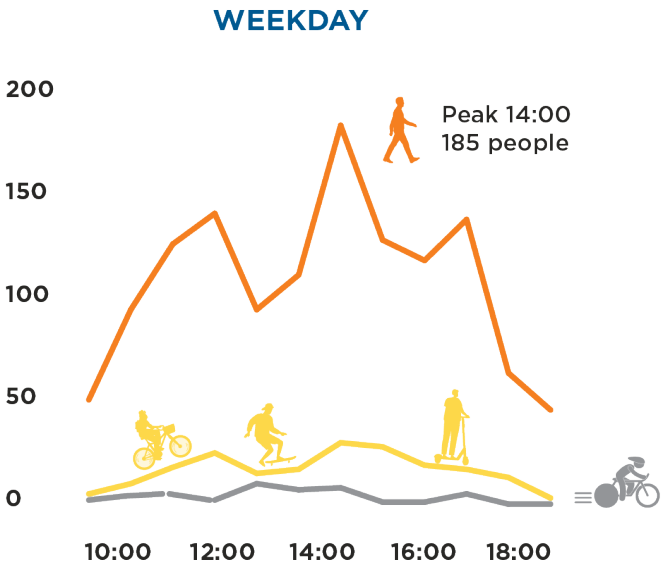
Zone A: North entrance

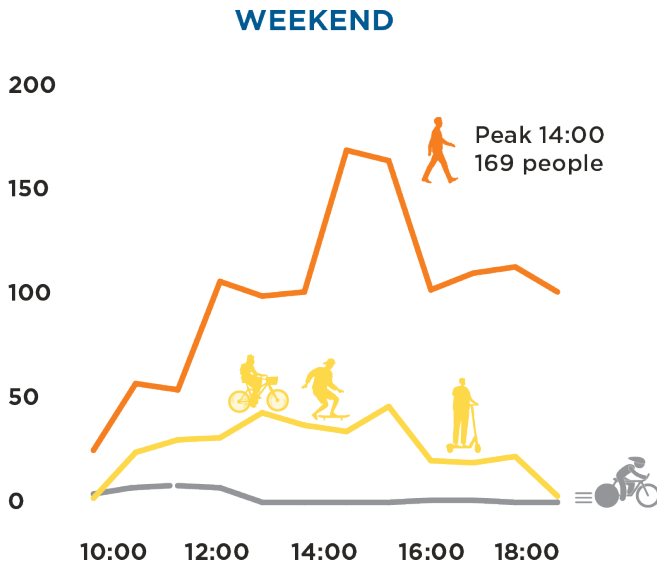
Moving in spring





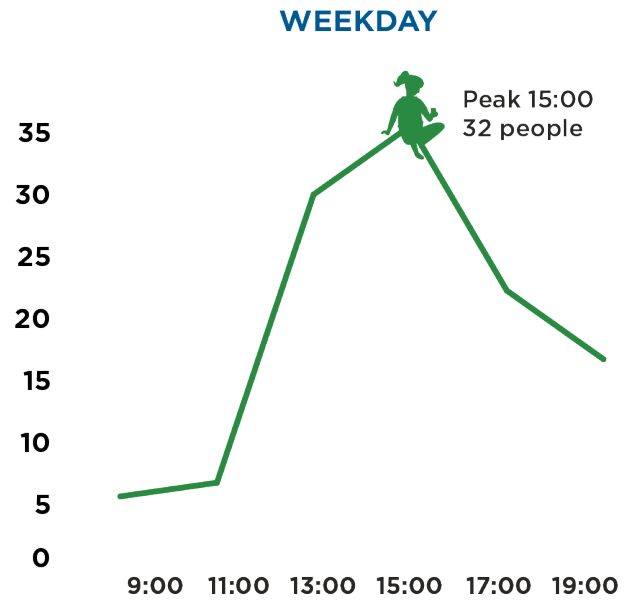
Moving in summer

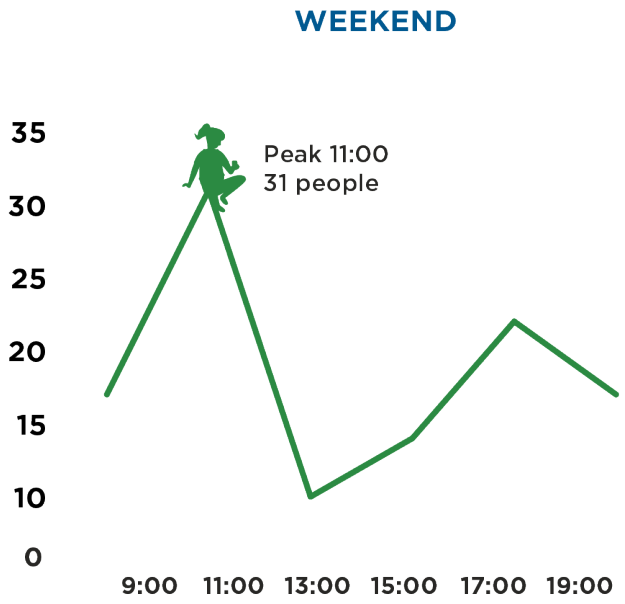




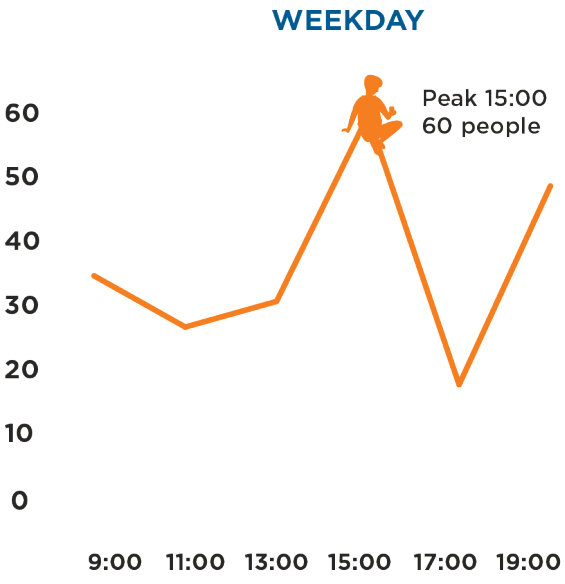
Zone A: North entrance

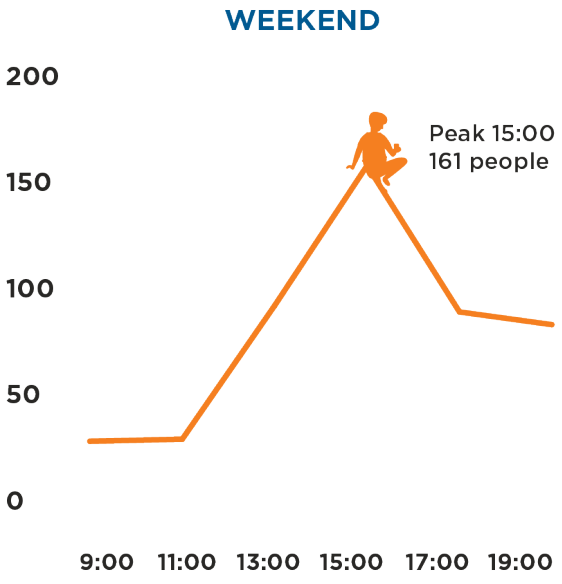
Staying in spring





Staying in summer





Zone A: North entrance

Seating in spring

WEEKDAY

For every **10 people standing,** there were...

106

people sitting

WEEKEND

For every **10 people standing,** there were...

11

people sitting

Seating in summer

WEEKDAY

For every **10 people standing,** there were...

38

people sitting

WEEKEND

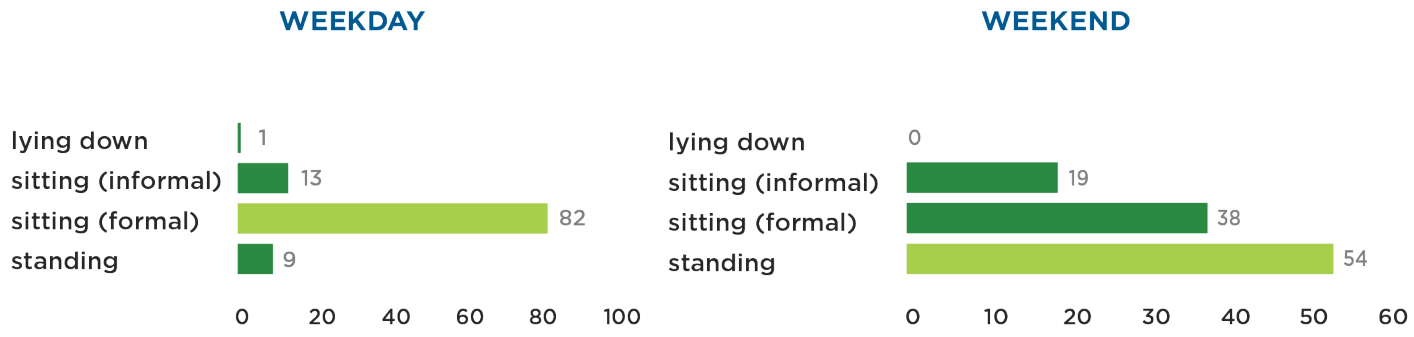
For every **10 people standing,** there were...

21

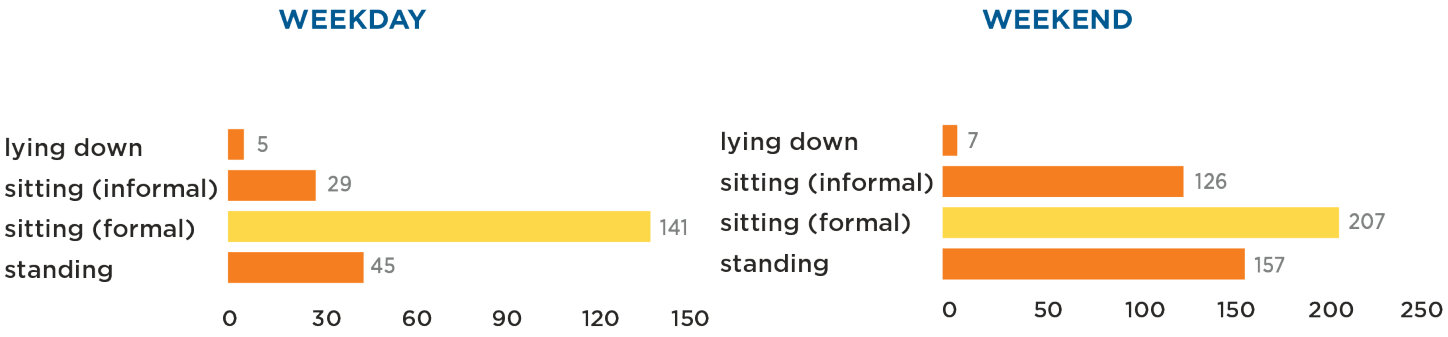
people sitting

Zone A: North entrance

Positions in spring

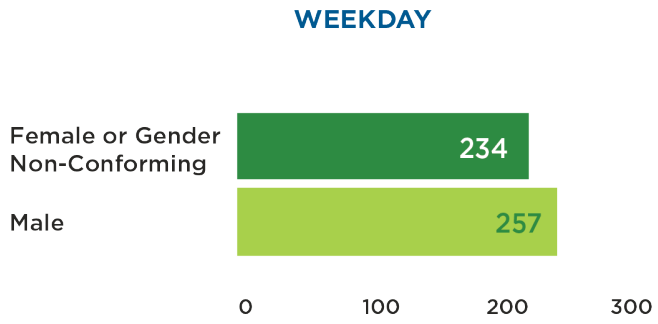


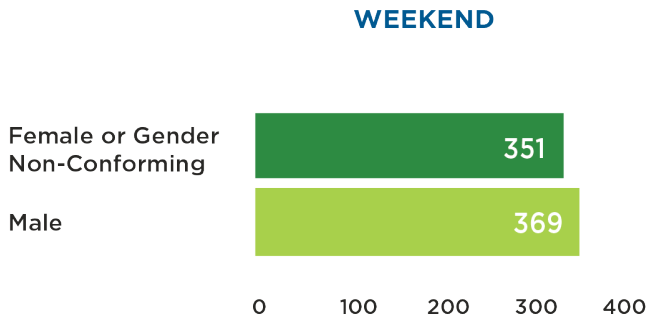
Positions in summer



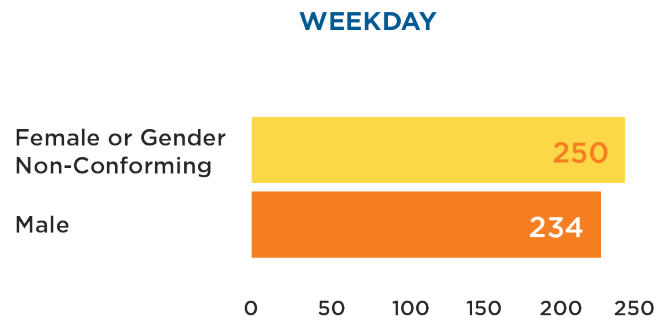
Zone A: North entrance

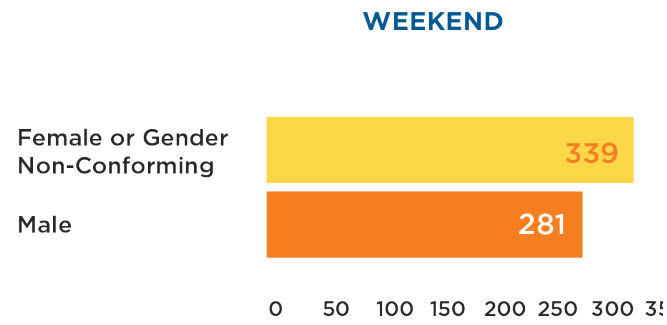
Observed gender presentation in spring





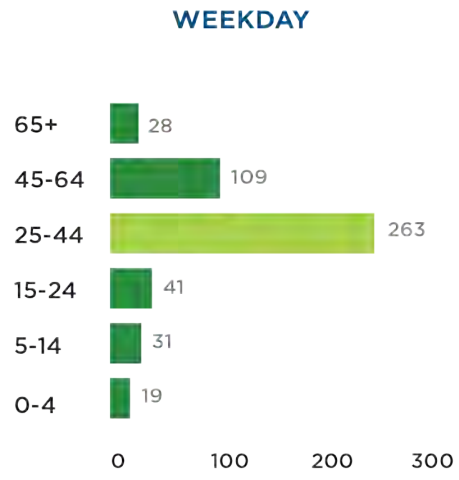
Observed gender presentation in Summer

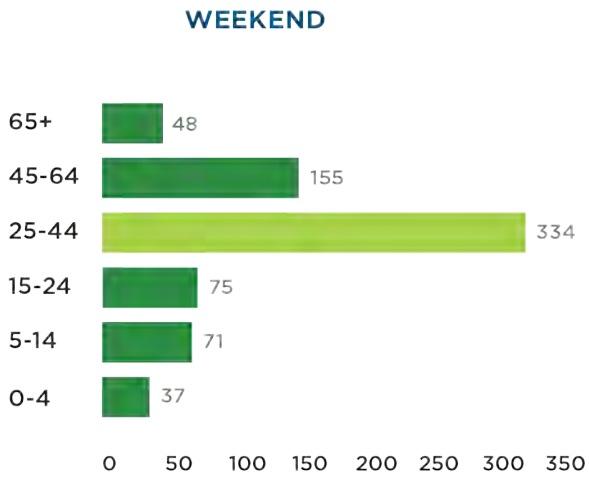




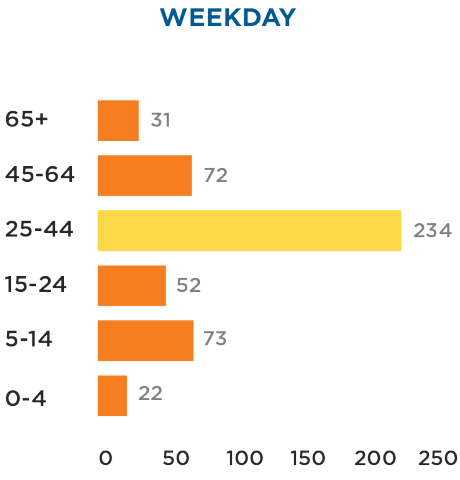
Zone A: North entrance

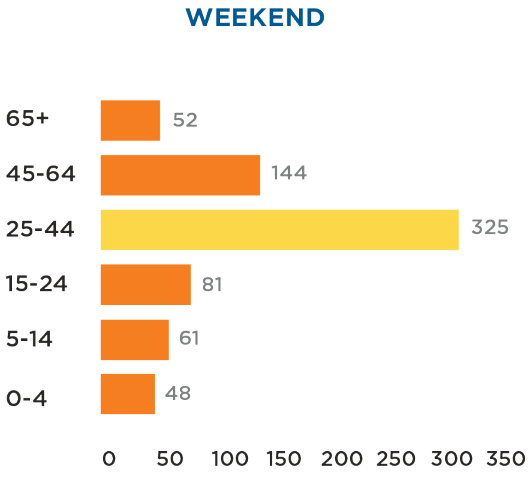
Observed age presentation in spring





Observed age presentation in summer





Zone B: Northwest playground

Located on the northwest side of West Road

Highlights

- Active recreation dominated across spring and summer, suggesting this zone draws steady movement and physical activity.
- On weekdays, cycling shifted from fast-paced spring riders to slower, leisure-focused use in summer, marking a change from performance to recreational presence.
- Informal sitting rose from just 11 on the spring weekend to 104 in summer suggesting a lack of formal seating.
- Low participation among 0–4 year olds points to potential barriers, including limited stroller-friendly access to the washroom and drinking fountain.

Top activities in spring

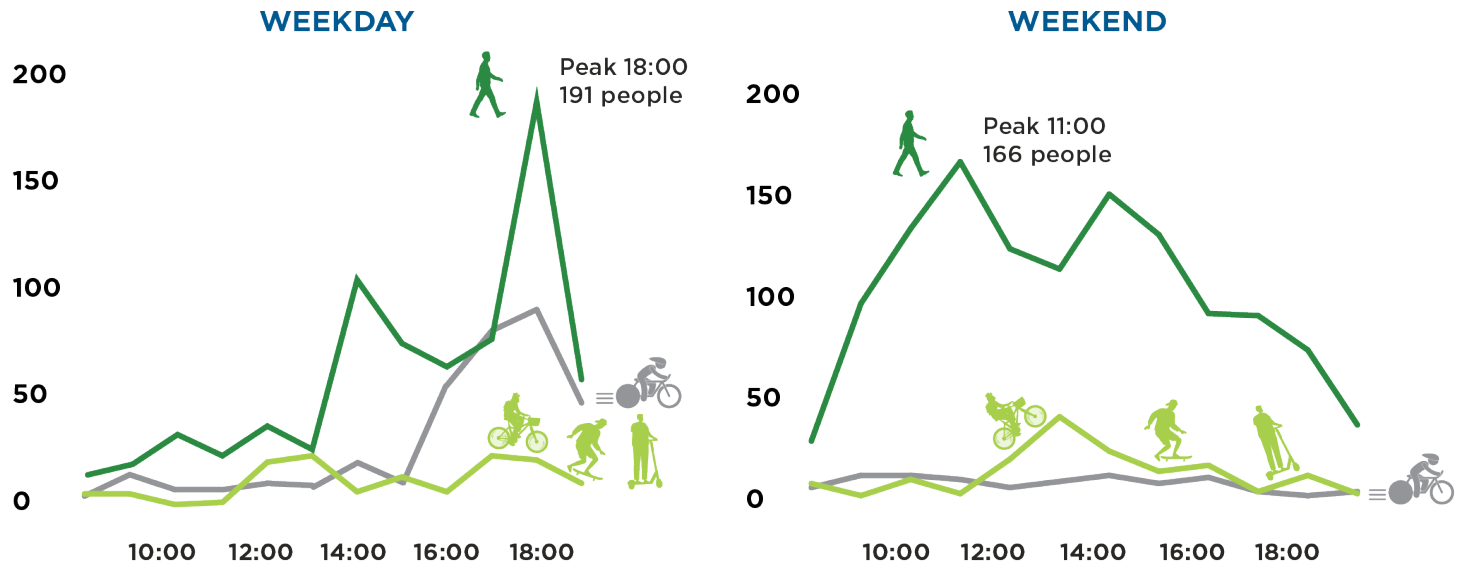
	active recreation	passive recreation	eating + drinking	socializing
WEEKDAY	38%	26%	15%	22%
WEEKEND	40%	13%	14%	33%

Top activities in summer

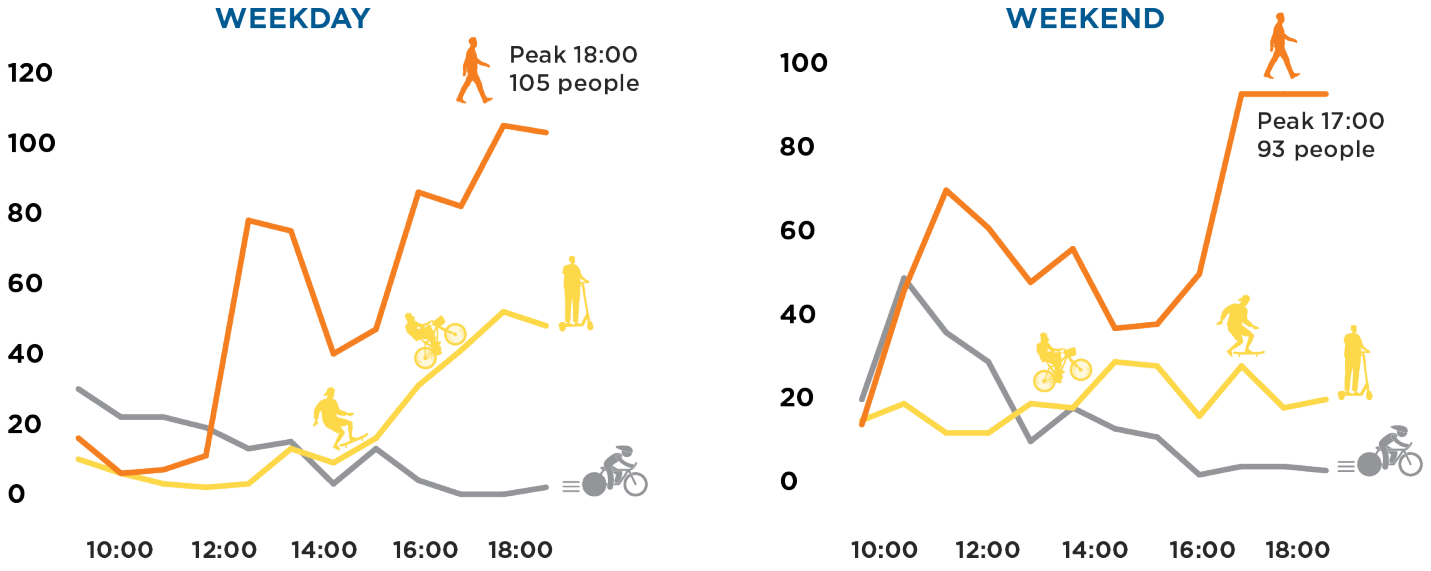
	active recreation	passive recreation	eating + drinking	socializing
WEEKDAY	49%	20%	12%	19%
WEEKEND	47%	18%	11%	24%

Zone B: Northwest playground

Moving in spring

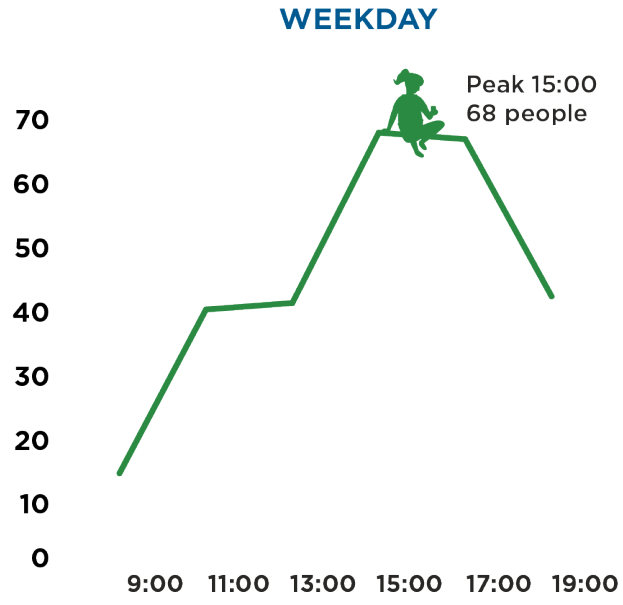


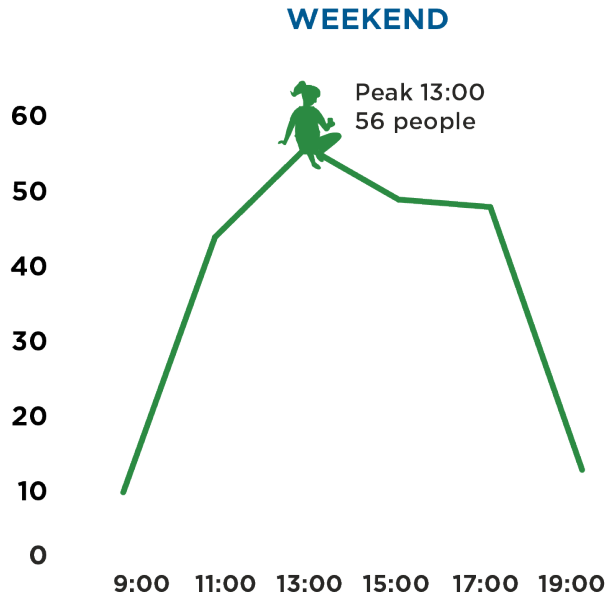
Moving in summer



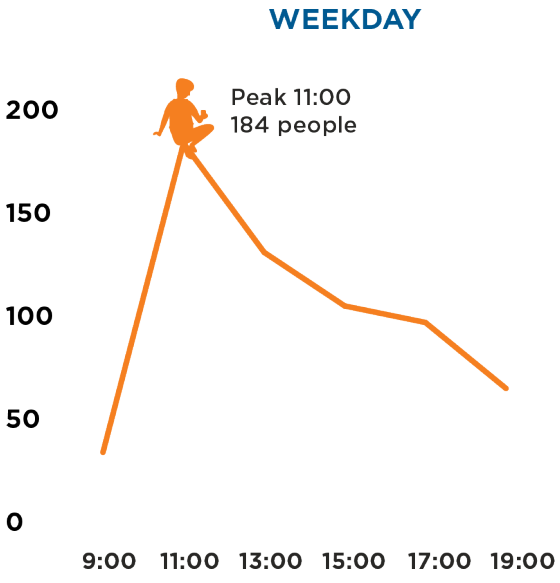
Zone B: Northwest playground

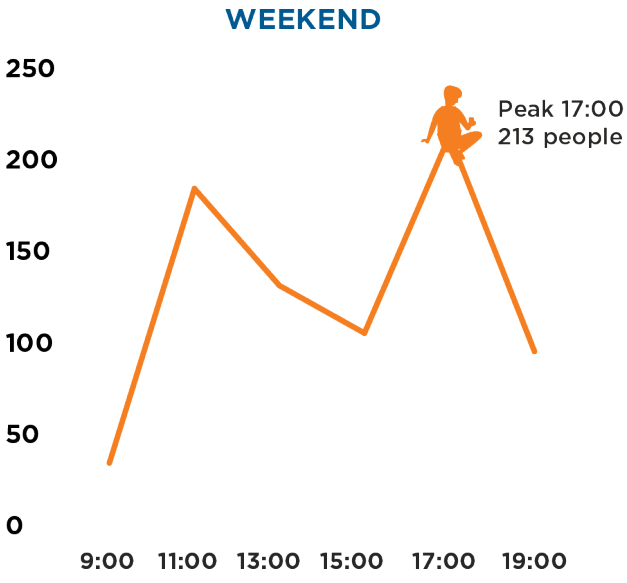
Staying in spring





Staying in summer





Zone B: Northwest playground

Seating in spring

WEEKDAY

For every **10 people standing,** there were...

9

people sitting

WEEKEND

For every **10 people standing,** there were...

6

people sitting

Seating in summer

WEEKDAY

For every **10 people standing,** there were...

8

people sitting

WEEKEND

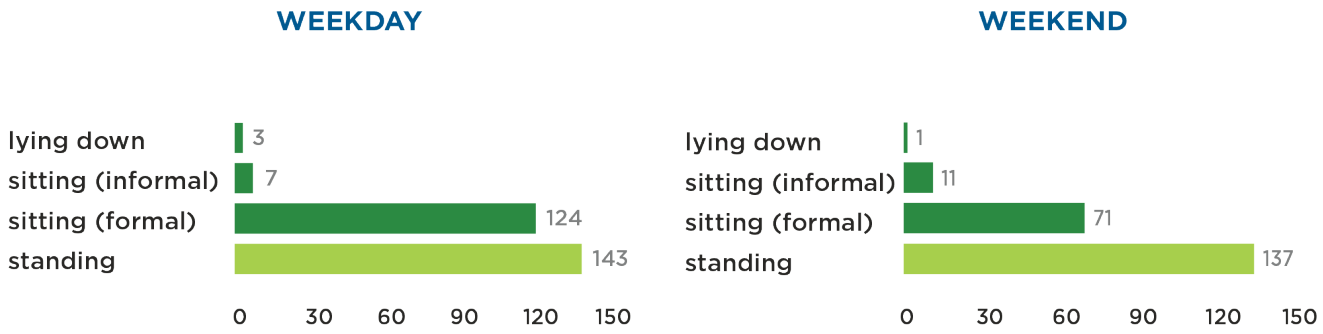
For every **10 people standing,** there were...

9

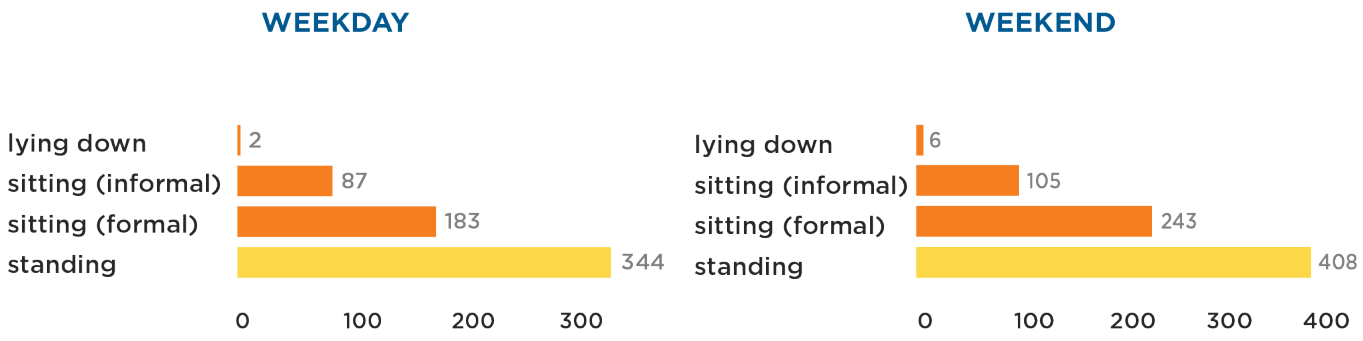
people sitting

Zone B: Northwest playground

Positions in spring

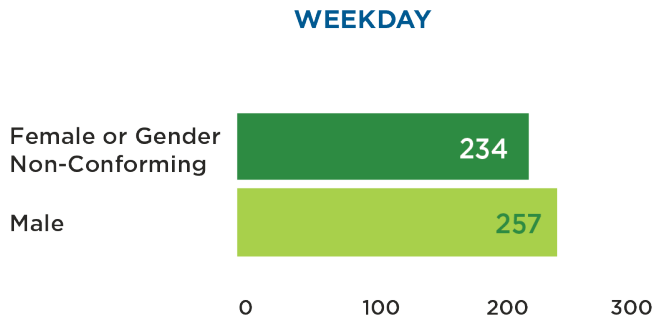


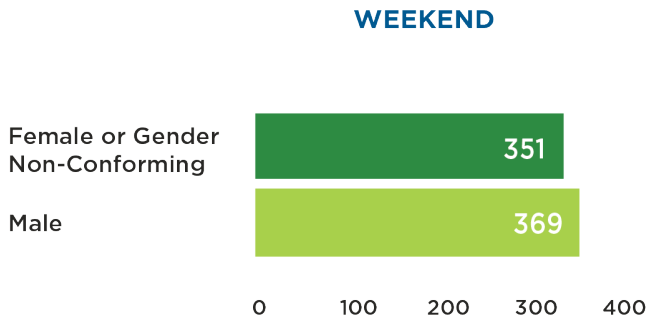
Positions in summer



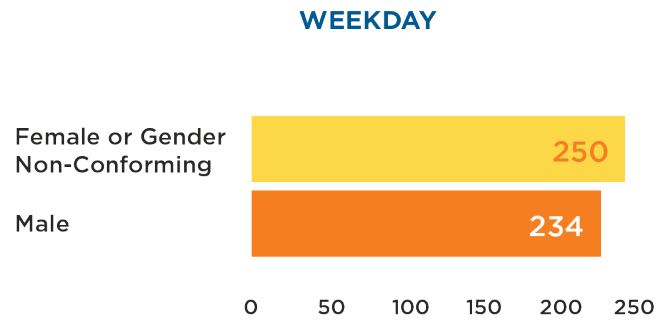
Zone B: Northwest playground

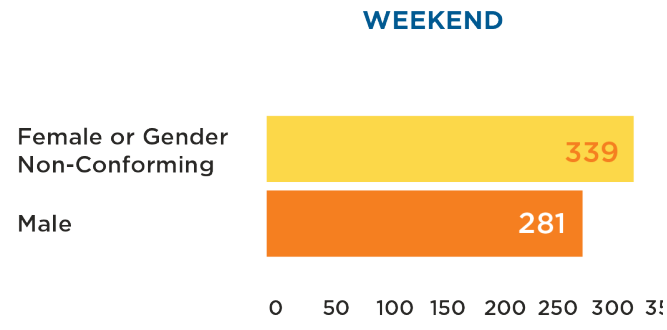
Observed gender presentation in spring





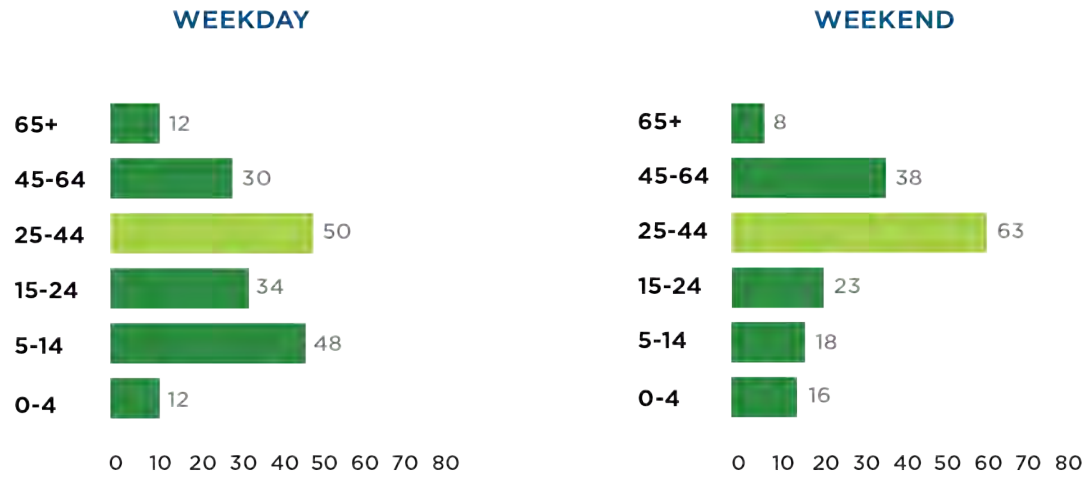
Observed gender presentation in summer



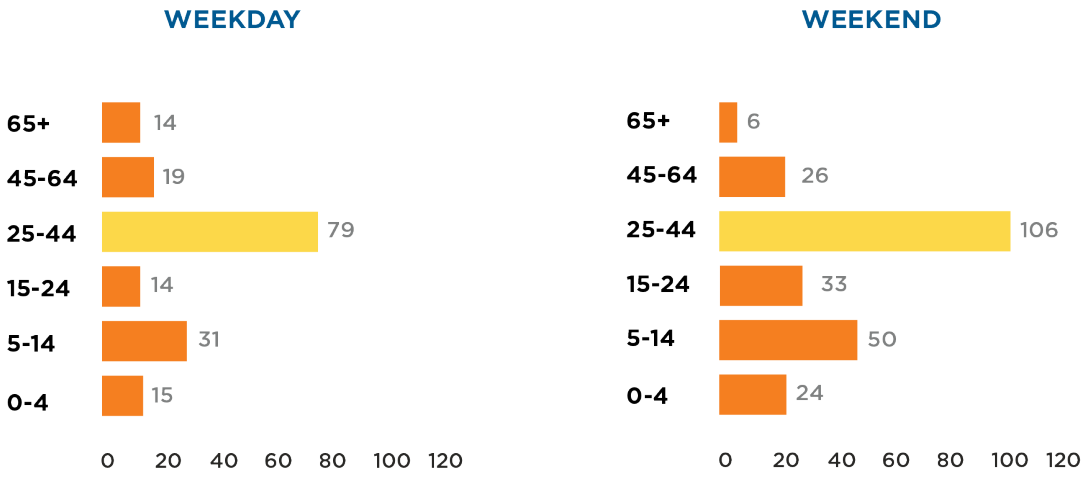


Zone B: Northwest playground

Observed age presentation in spring



Observed age presentation in summer



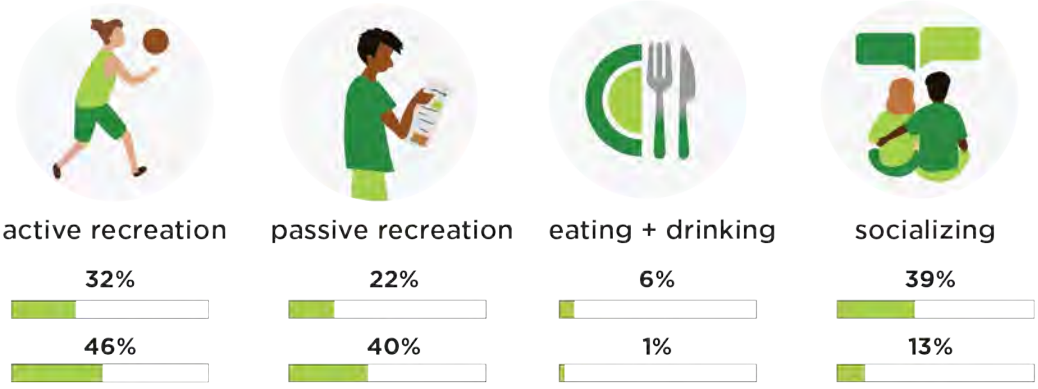
Zone C: Recreation area

Located between West Road and Colbourne Lodge Road

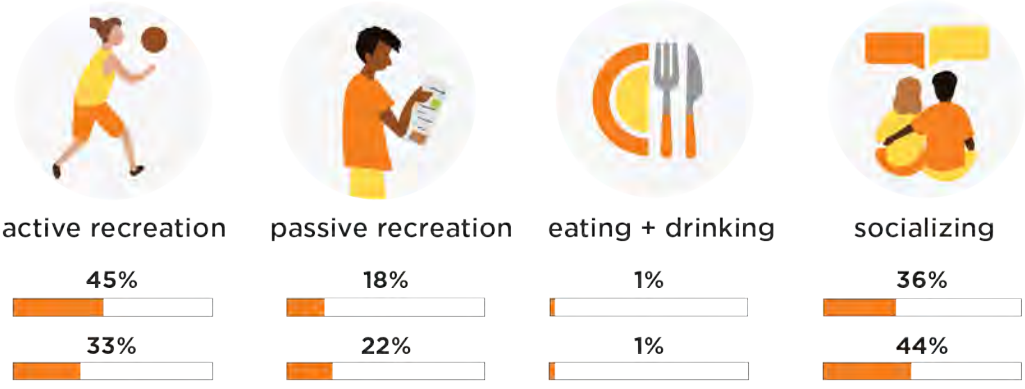
Highlights

- Active recreation dominated year-round, but summer weekends saw a sharp rise in socializing, marking a shift from solo activity to group gathering.
- Eating and drinking were minimal across seasons, suggesting this zone isn't used for meals or lingering over food.
- Spring weekday staying peaked modestly at 17:00 (44 people), while summer weekday surged much higher and later, peaking at 19:00 with 183 people.
- In summer, informal sitting and standing rose sharply, suggesting visitors adapted to limited formal seating by improvising, often while socializing in groups.

Top activities in spring

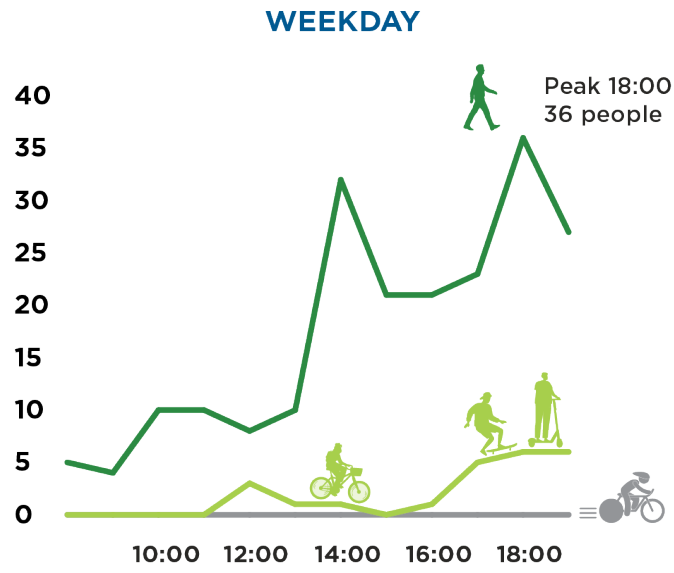


Top activities in summer

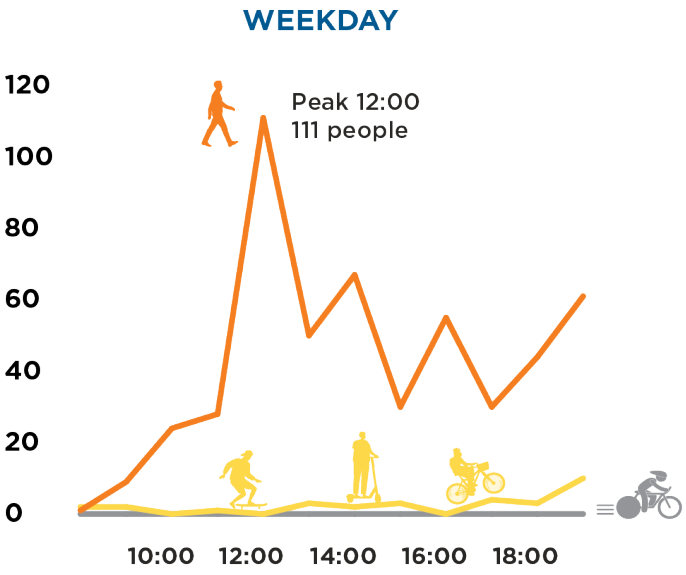


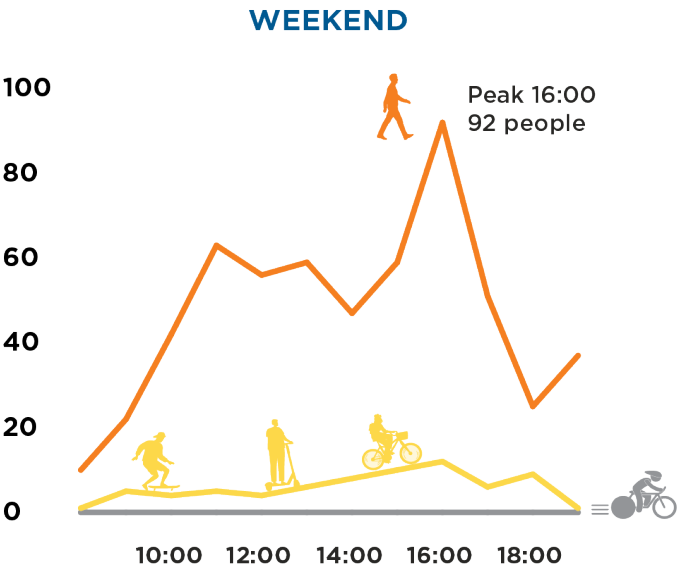
Zone C: Recreation area

Moving in spring



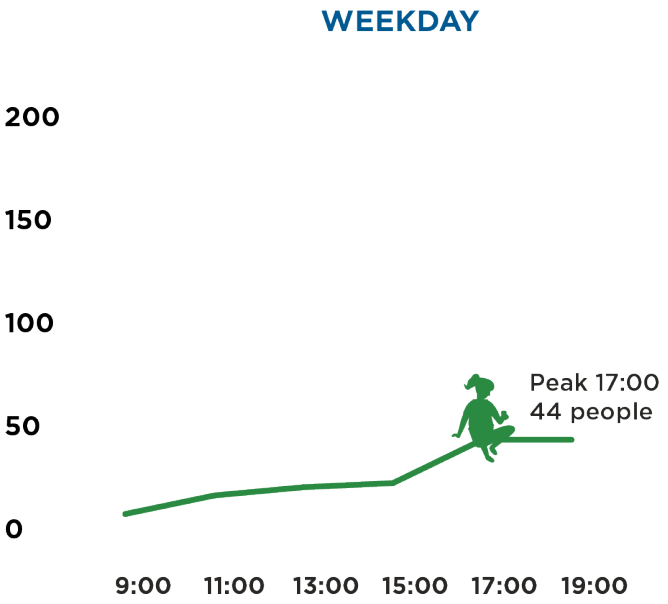
Moving in summer

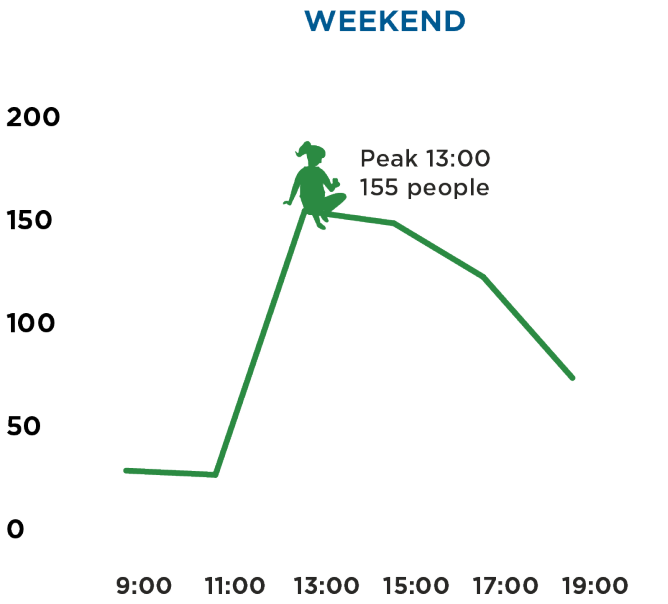




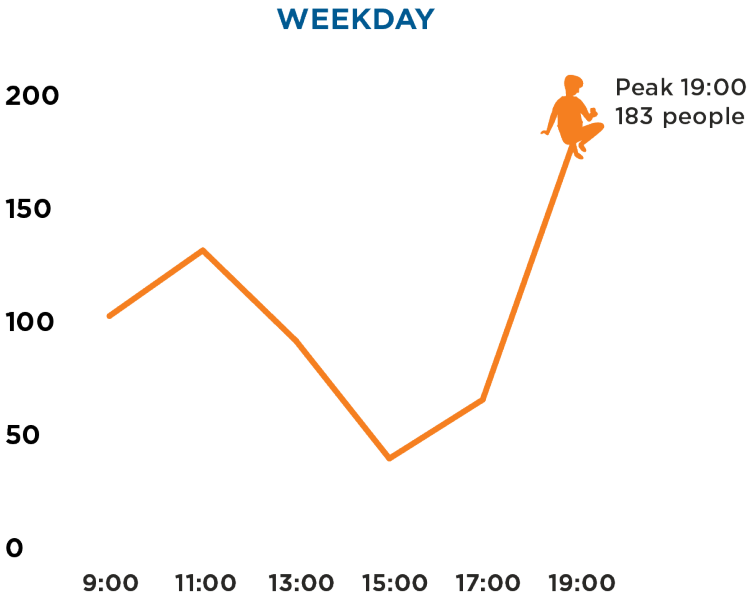
Zone C: Recreation area

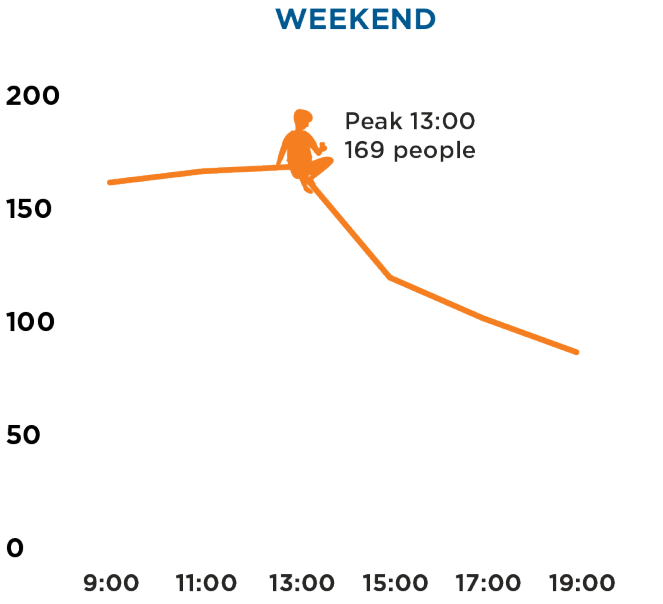
Staying in spring





Staying in summer





Zone C: Recreation area

Seating in spring

WEEKDAY

For every **10 people standing,** there were...

12

people sitting

WEEKEND

For every **10 people standing,** there were...

4

people sitting

Seating in summer

WEEKDAY

For every **10 people standing,** there were...

5

people sitting

WEEKEND

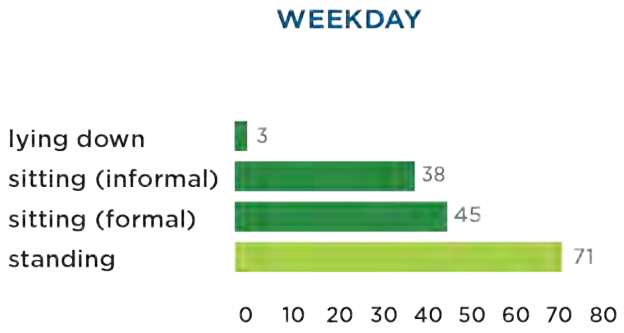
For every **10 people standing,** there were...

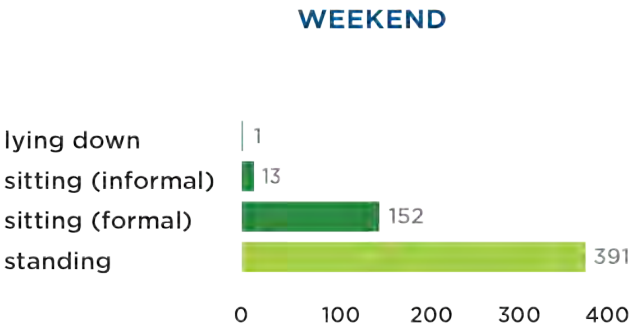
10

people sitting

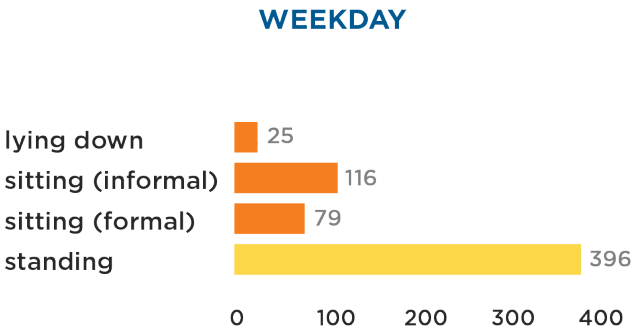
Zone C: Recreation area

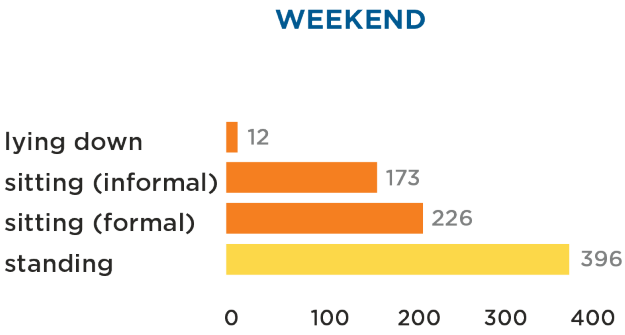
Positions in spring





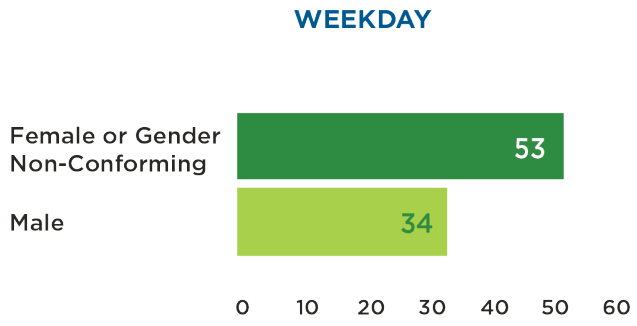
Positions in summer

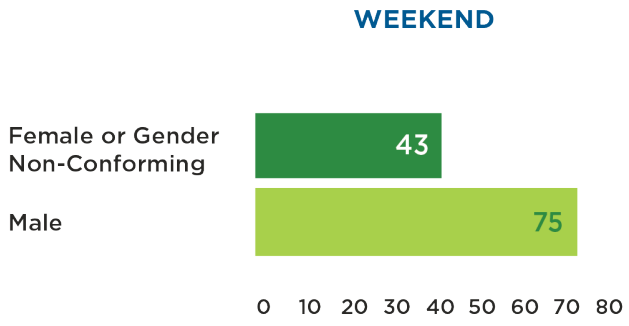




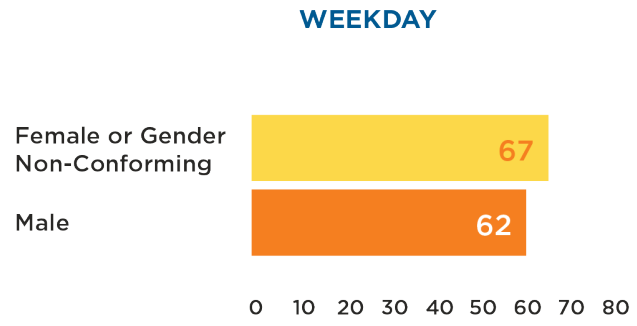
Zone C: Recreation area

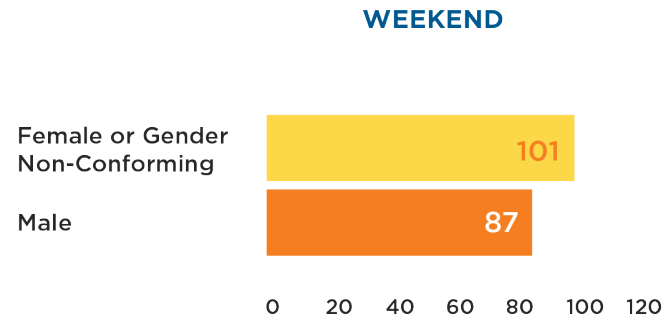
Observed gender presentation in spring





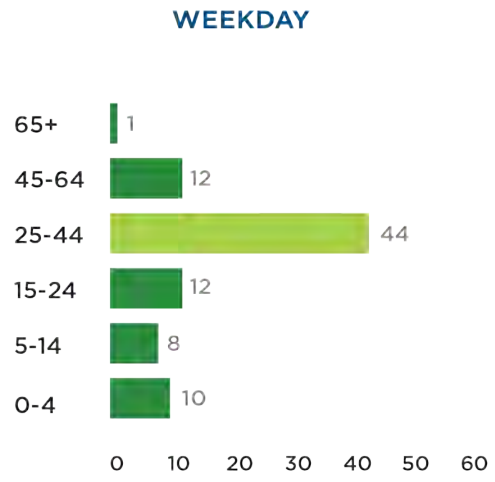
Observed gender presentation in Summer

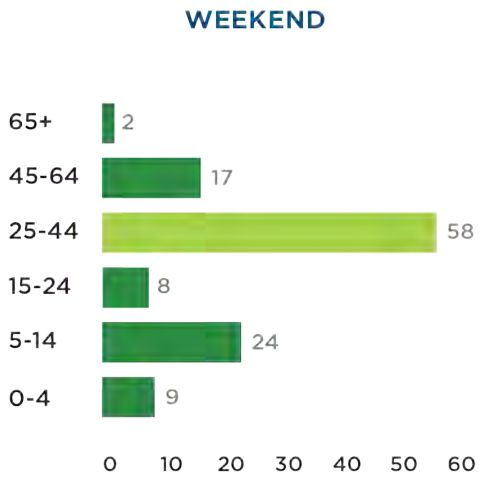




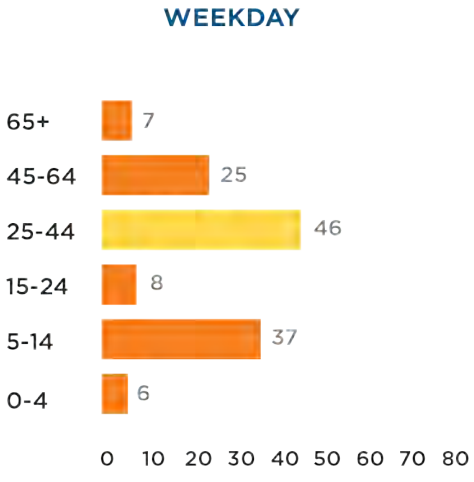
Zone C: Recreation area

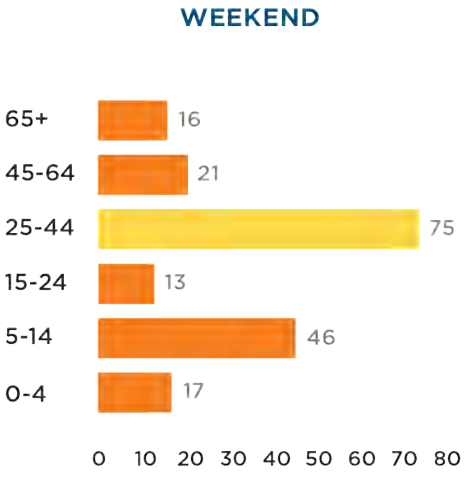
Observed age presentation in spring





Observed age presentation in summer





Zone D: Grenadier Café

Located between West Road and Colborne Lodge Drive

Highlights

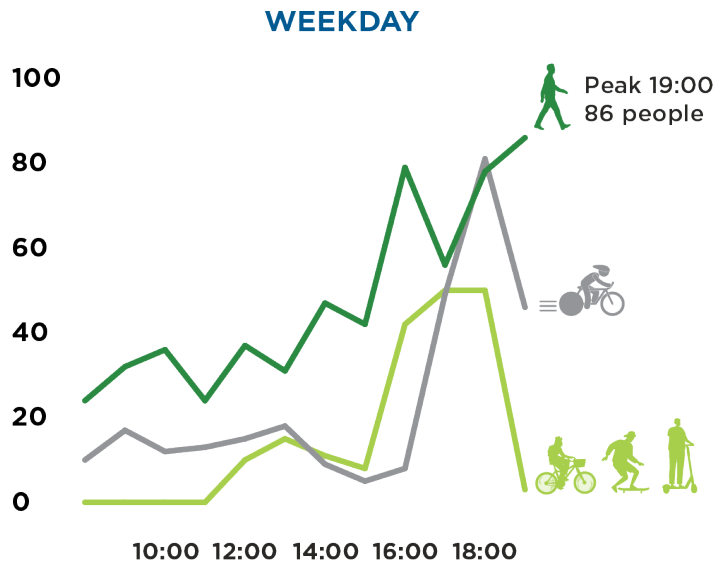
- The café anchors steady social and passive uses, with active recreation following. In summer, eating and drinking spiked, likely reflecting visitors taking food outdoors.
- Recreational cycling sees a weekday surge in spring, while summer patterns suggest a steadier mix of leisure and commuting riders.
- Standing dominates in spring, suggesting transient or social activity near the café. Summer weekends flip: formal sitting jumps to 49, while standing drops from 61 to 34 hinting at longer stays. Informal sitting surges on summer weekdays (40 people), possibly reflecting more relaxed use by visitors.

Top activities in spring

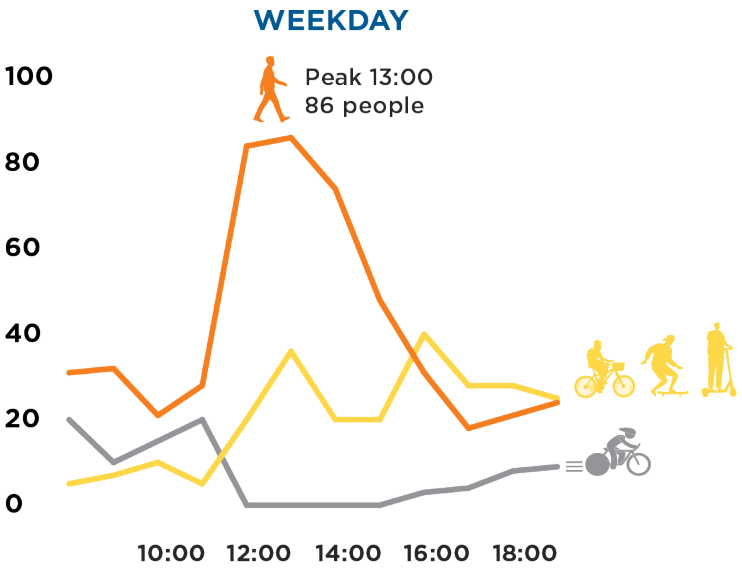
Top activities in summer

Zone D: Grenadier Café

Moving in spring



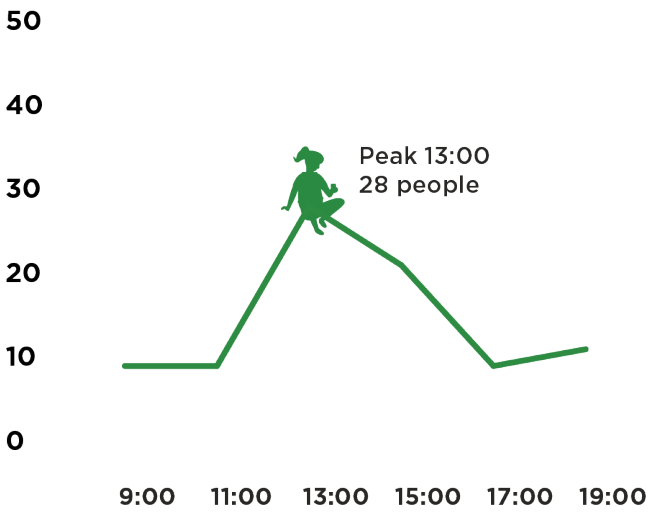
Moving in summer



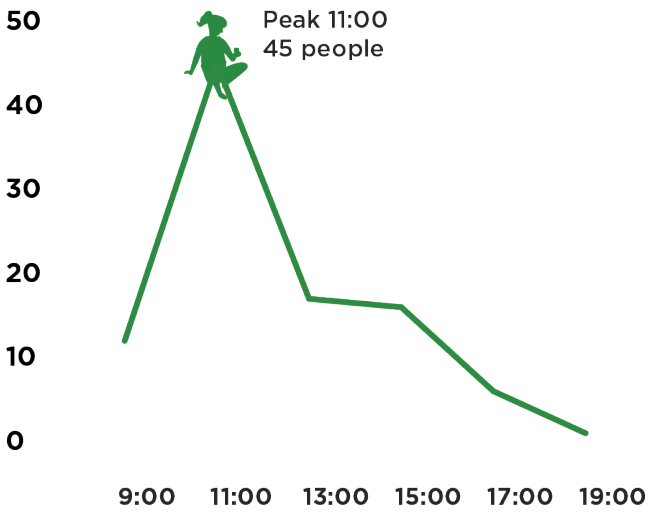
Zone D: Grenadier Café

Staying in spring

WEEKDAY

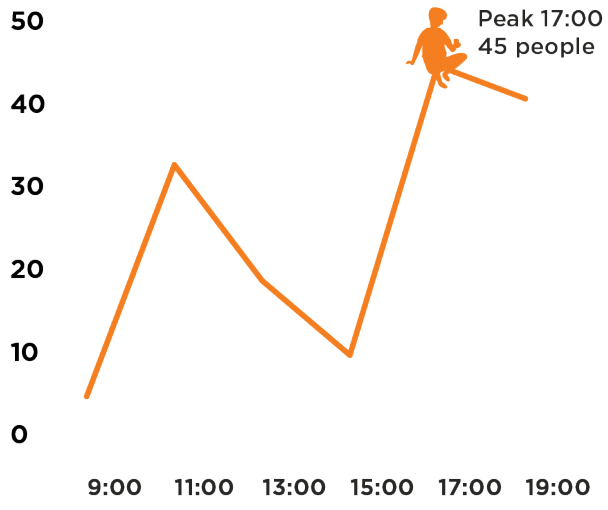


WEEKEND

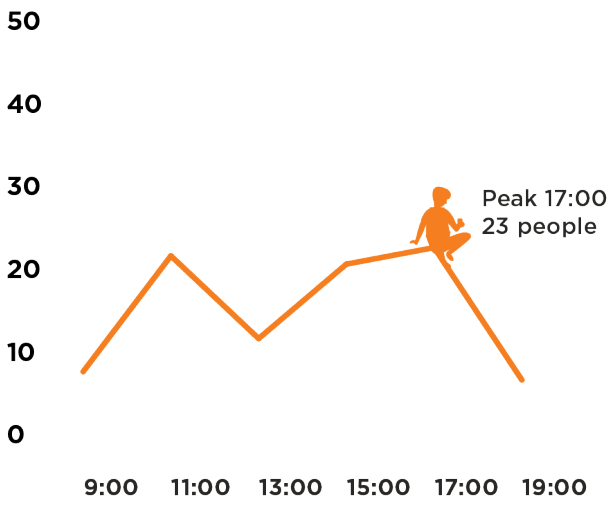


Staying in summer

WEEKDAY



WEEKEND



Zone D: Grenadier Café

Seating in spring

WEEKDAY

For every **10 people standing,** there were...

10

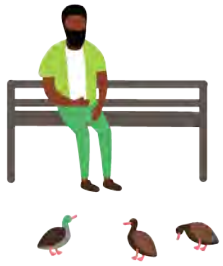
people sitting

WEEKEND

For every **10 people standing,** there were...

6

people sitting



Seating in summer

WEEKDAY

For every **10 people standing,** there were...

9

people sitting

WEEKEND

For every **10 people standing,** there were...

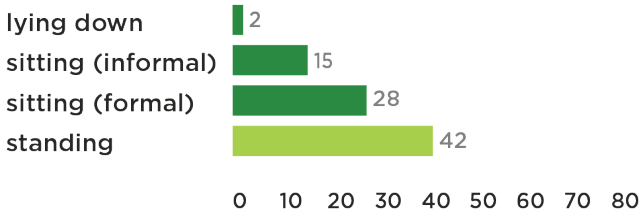
16

people sitting

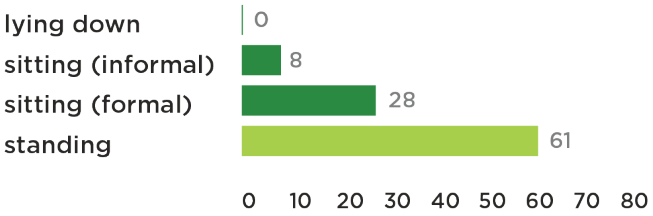
Zone D: Grenadier Café

Positions in spring

WEEKDAY

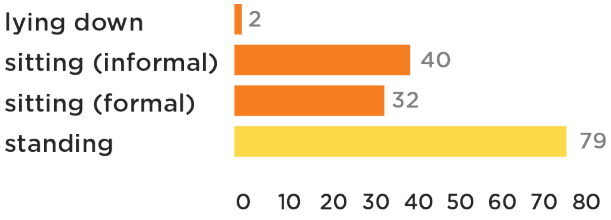


WEEKEND

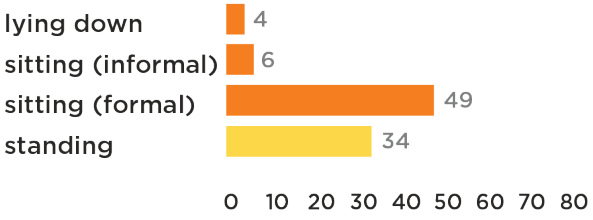


Positions in summer

WEEKDAY

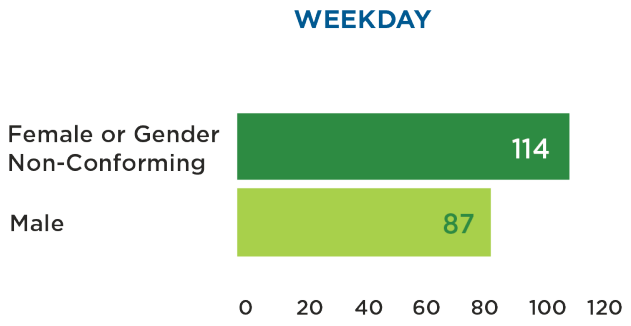


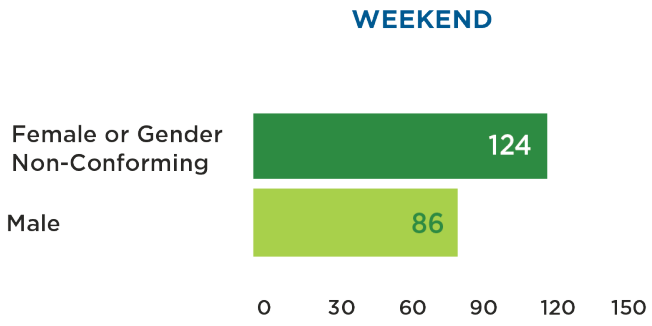
WEEKEND



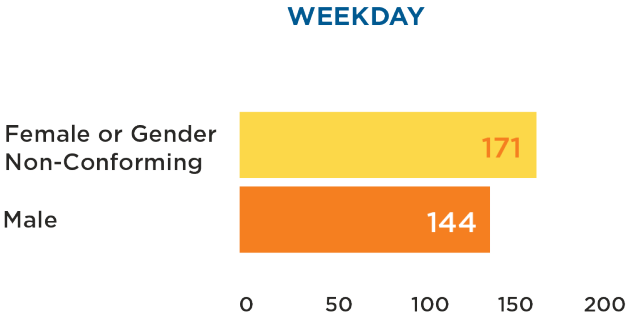
Zone D: Grenadier Café

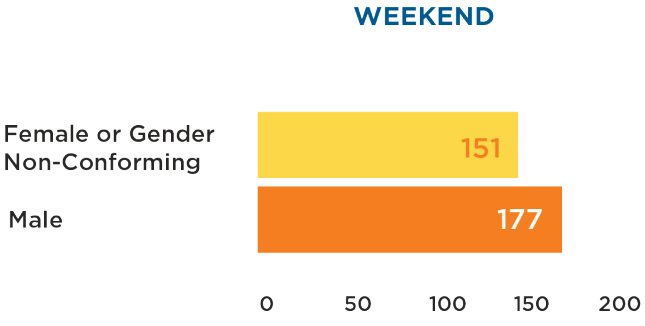
Observed gender presentation in spring





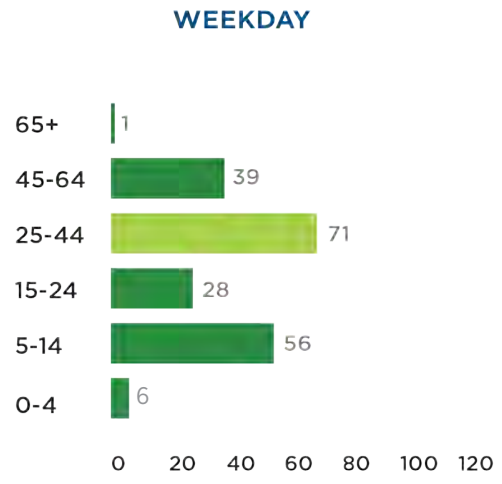
Observed gender presentation in summer

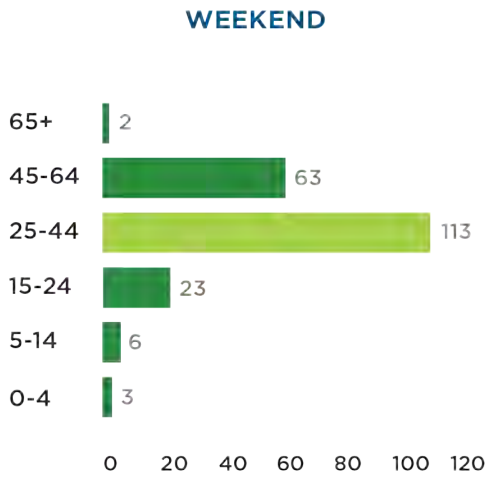




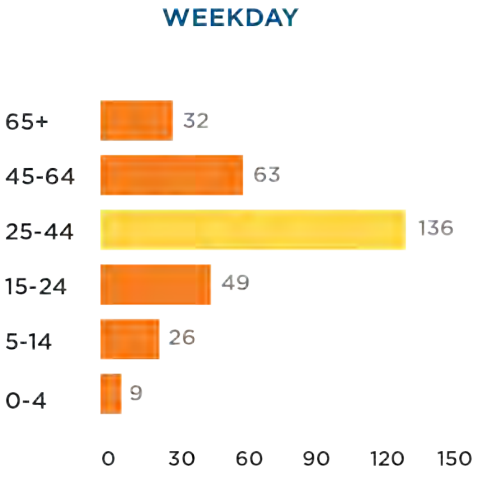
Zone D: Grenadier Café

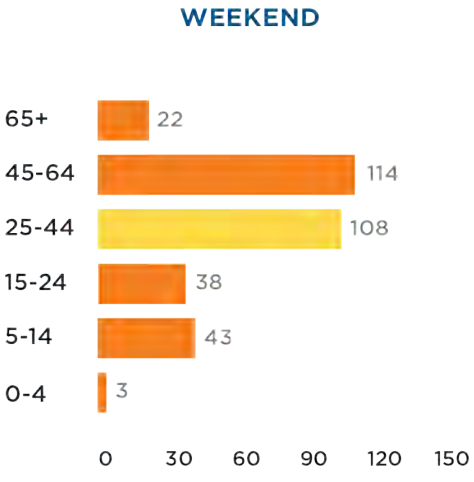
Observed age presentation in spring





Observed age presentation in summer





Zone E: Southeast playground

Located along Spring Road near the Duck Pond

Highlights

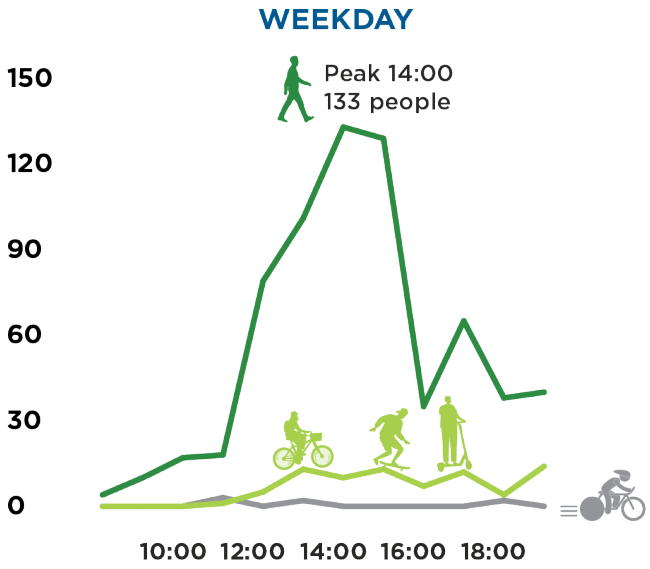
- Socializing and passive recreation dominated spring and summer weekdays, with eating and drinking spiking in summer.
- Weekday use leaned on formal seating on the spring weekday, with high sitting-to-standing ratios suggesting lingering and stationary presence. Weekend use flipped from transient in spring, where standing dominated, to more settled in summer, with informal and formal seating rising sharply.
- Adults aged 25–44 were most present across all time periods, with younger children more visible in summer, especially on the weekend, suggesting family-oriented use.

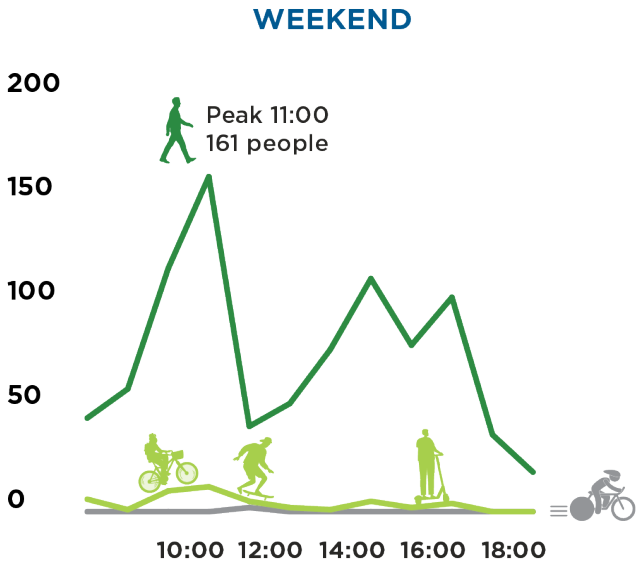
Top activities in spring

Top activities in Summer

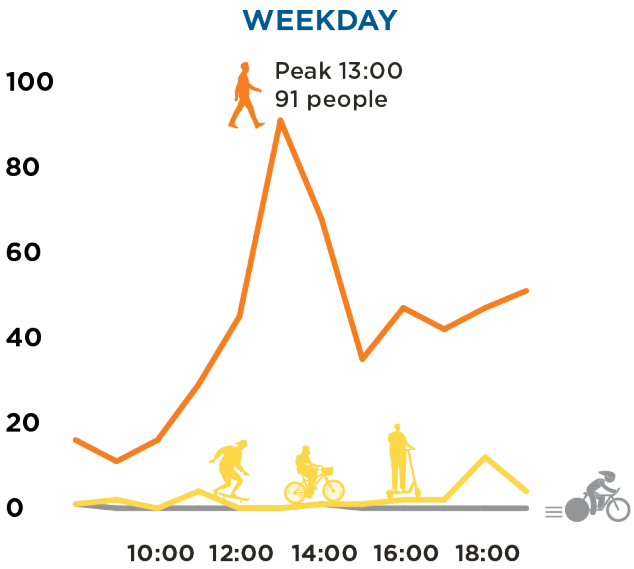
Zone E: Southeast playground

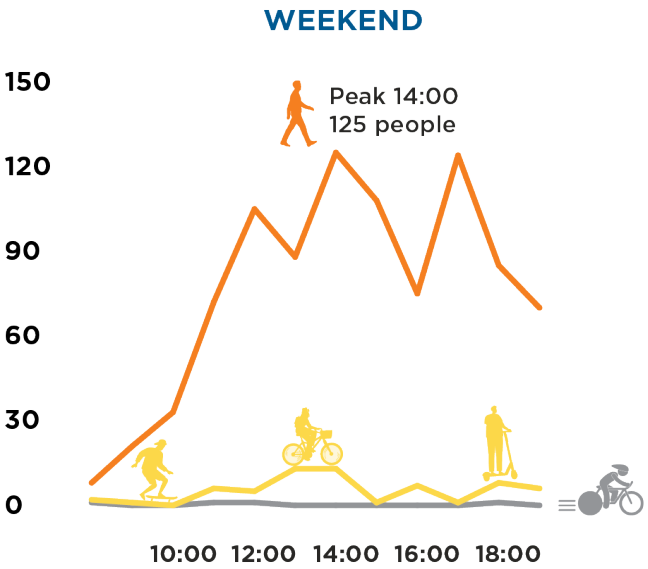
Moving in spring





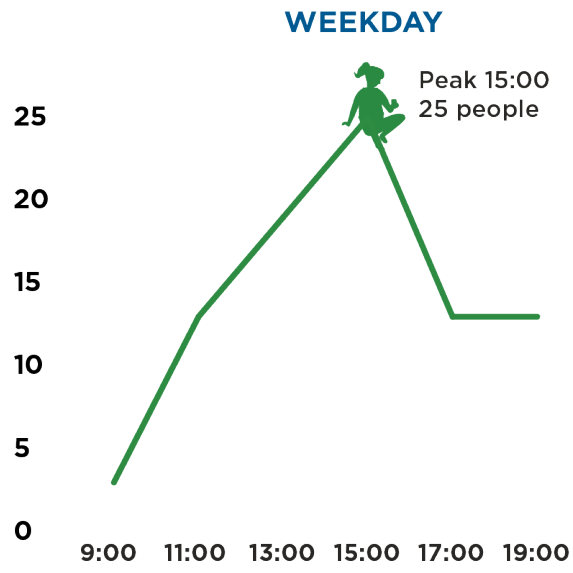
Moving in summer

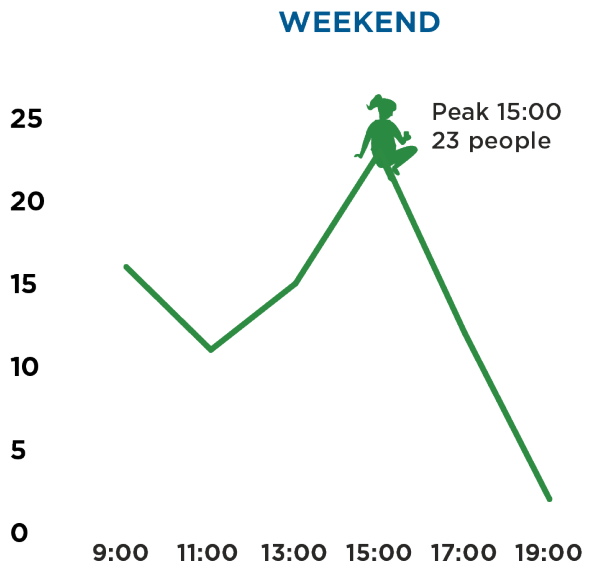




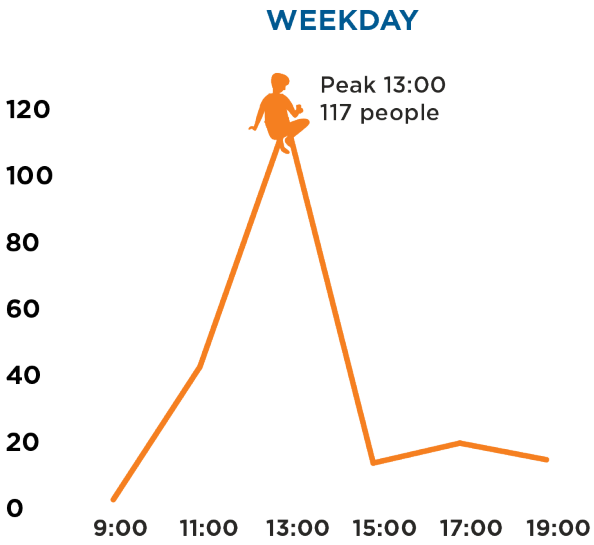
Zone E: Southeast playground

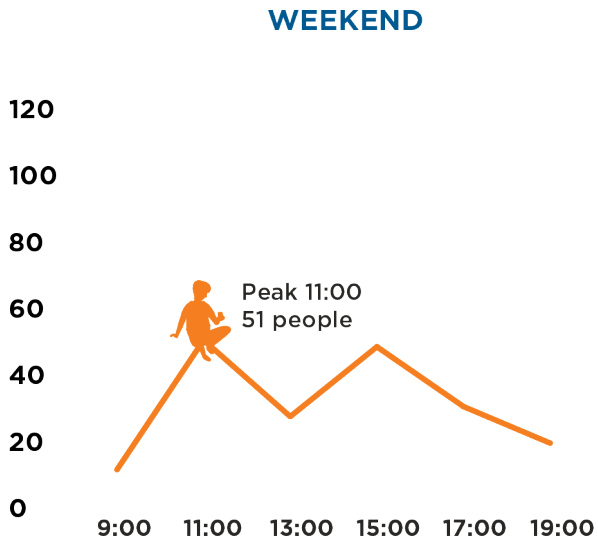
Staying in spring





Staying in summer





Zone E: Southeast playground

Seating in spring

WEEKDAY

For every **10 people standing,** there were...

27

people sitting

WEEKEND

For every **10 people standing,** there were...

5

people sitting

Seating in summer

WEEKDAY

For every **10 people standing,** there were...

17

people sitting

WEEKEND

For every **10 people standing,** there were...

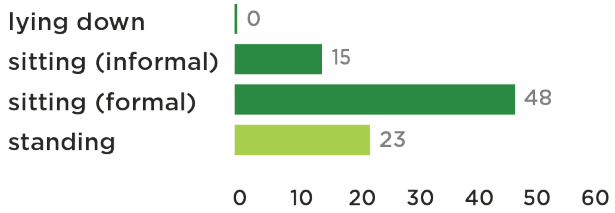
25

people sitting

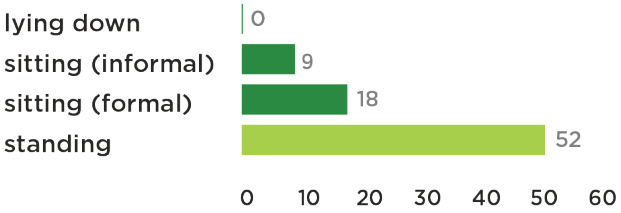
Zone E: Southeast playground

Positions in spring

WEEKDAY

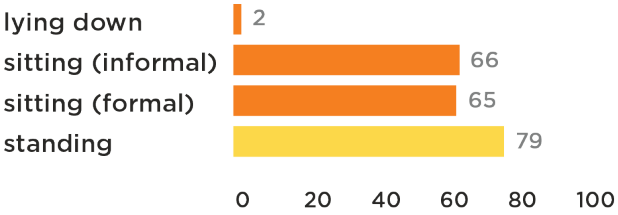


WEEKEND

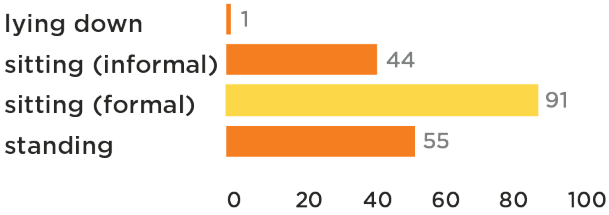


Positions in summer

WEEKDAY

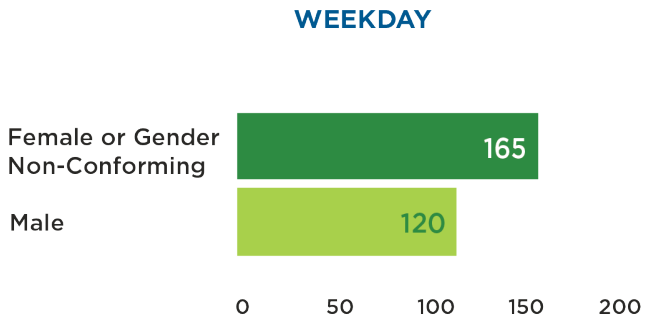


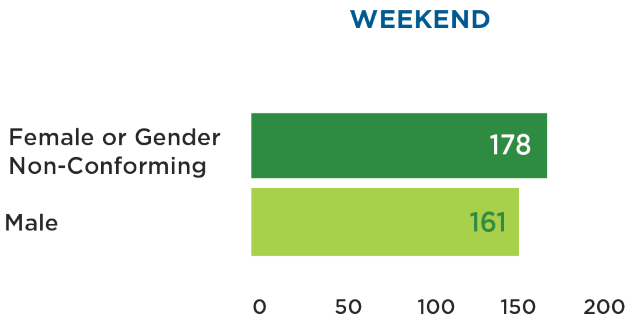
WEEKEND



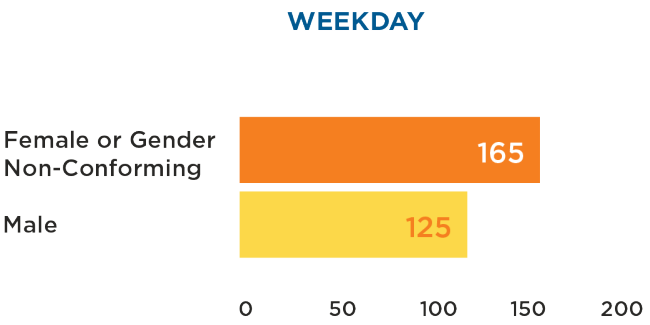
Zone E: Southeast playground

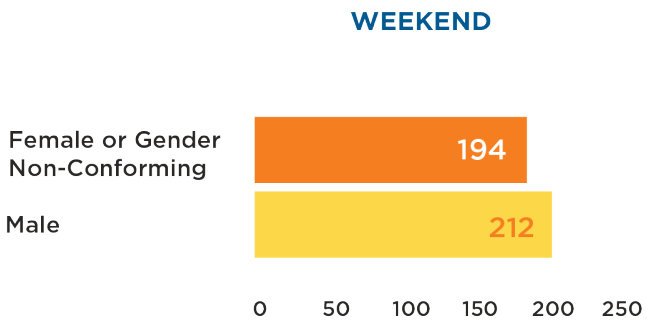
Observed gender presentation in spring





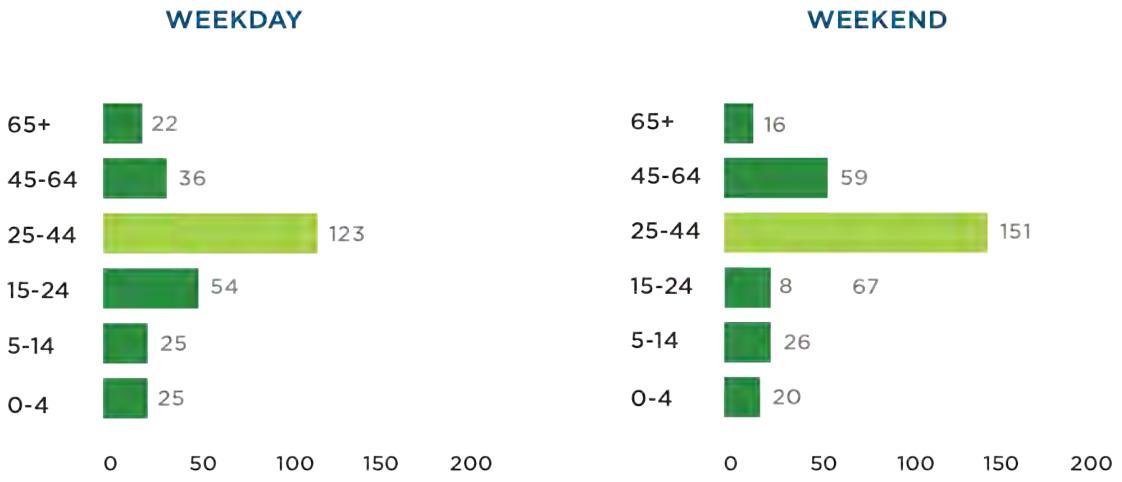
Observed gender presentation in Summer



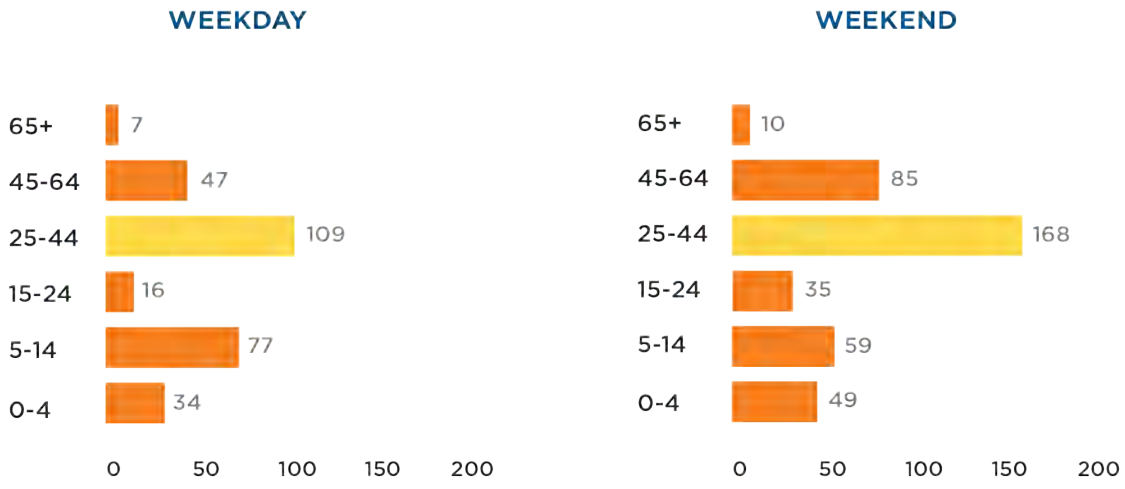


Zone E: Southeast playground

Observed age presentation in spring



Observed age presentation in summer



Zone F: Natural Area

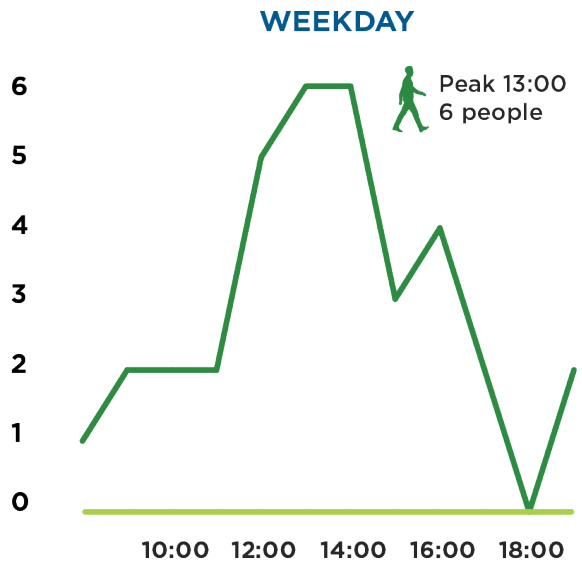
Located in the naturalized area west of West Road

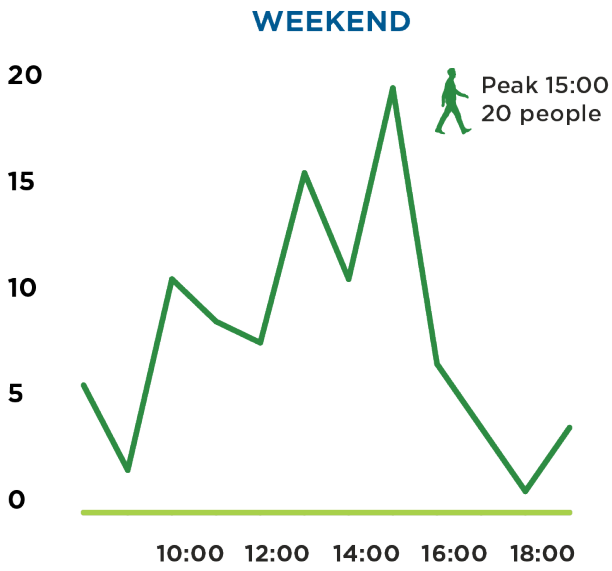
Highlights

- As a Natural Area, Zone F was observed through travel patterns, gender, and age counts, captured from several entrances off West Road. These observations offer a snapshot to support potential upgrades with the Toronto Regional Conservation Authority.
- Counts were captured at multiple entrances off West Road, reflecting through-movement rather than destination-based activity. This zone did not include stationary mapping of activity or postures.
- Pedestrian movement was low overall, with peaks in summer, especially on the weekend, suggesting light but steady travel use.
- Gender presentation was relatively balanced across seasons and weekdays, with a rise in male-presenting visitors on summer weekends.
- Very few seniors, younger adults (15–24), or children under 5 were observed, suggesting that travel through this natural area may be less accessible to those with mobility needs or caregivers with small children.

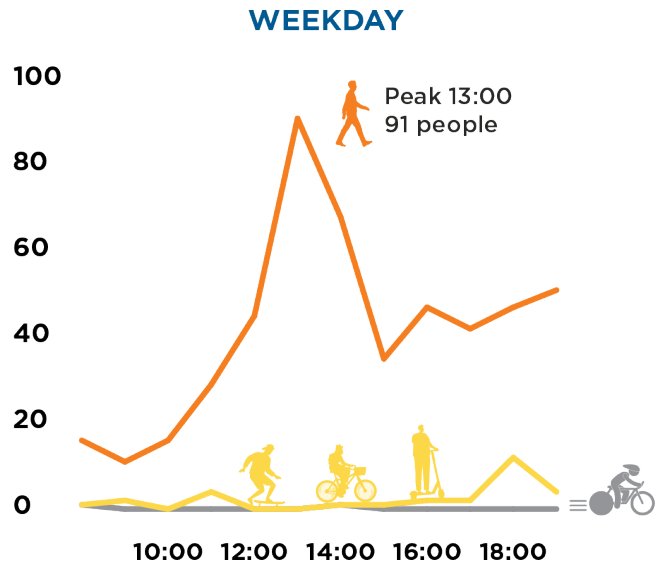
Zone F: Natural Area

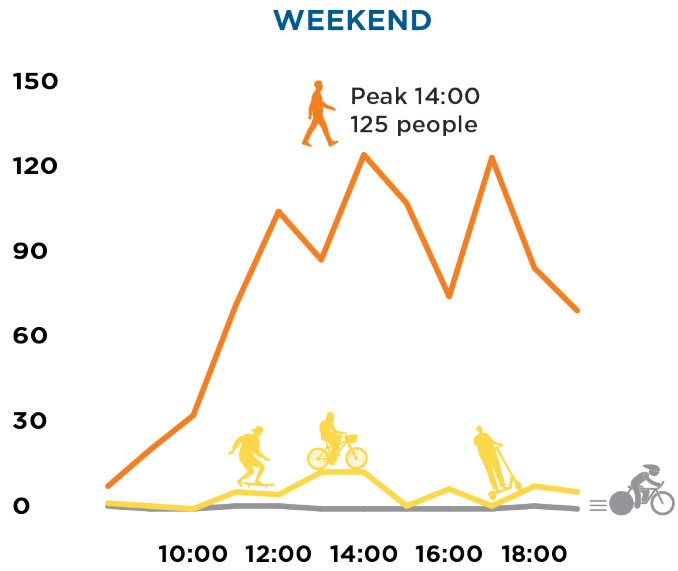
Moving in spring





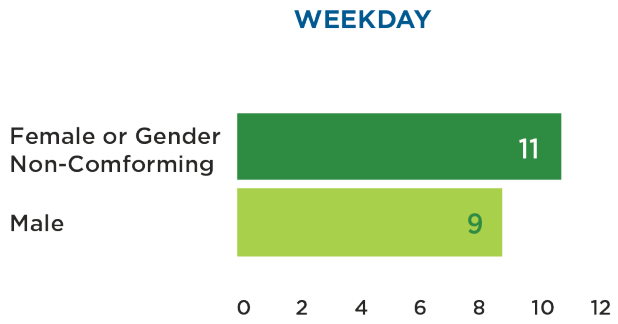
Moving in summer

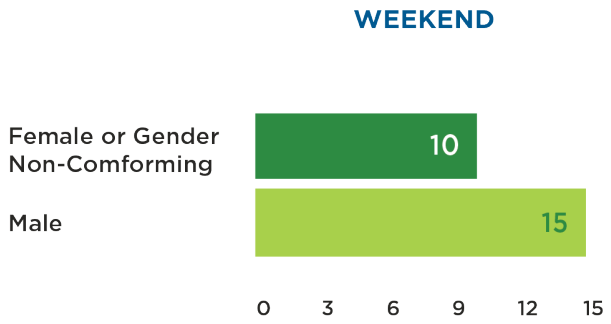




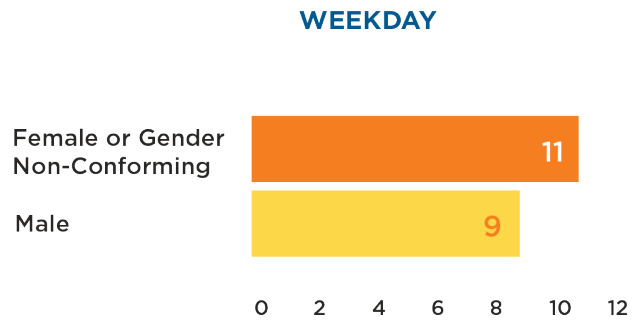
Zone F: Natural Area

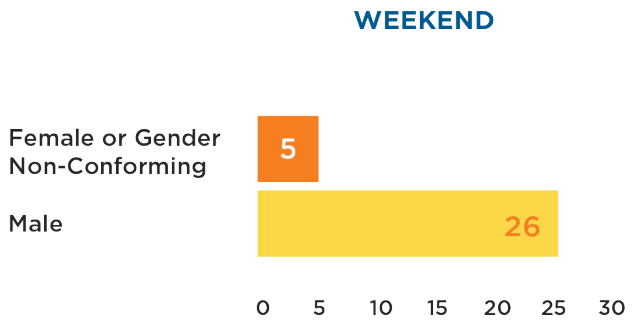
Observed gender presentation in spring





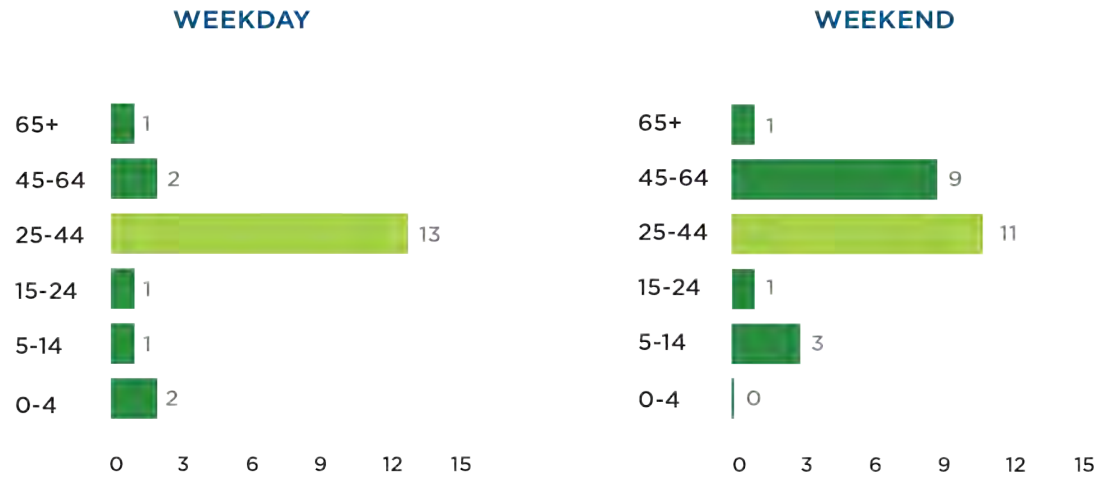
Observed gender presentation in summer



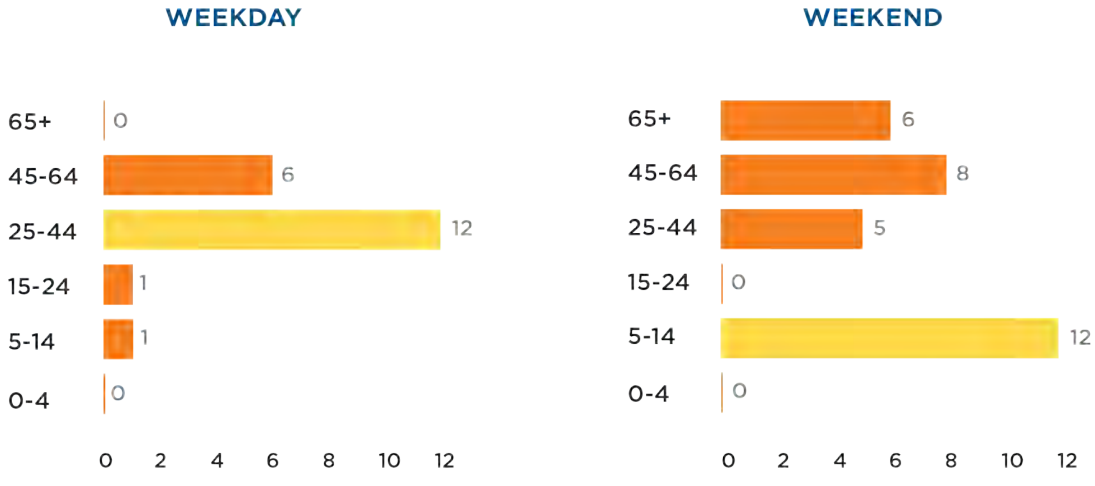


Zone F: Natural Area

Observed age presentation in spring



Observed age presentation in summer



Design Implications

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Adaptation signals demand

What are the design implications from this study?

Across High Park, posture and activity patterns suggest that people may want to stay longer in summer. Yet not all zones seem to support that comfortably. The rise in informal sitting, especially in Zones A and C, hints at a mismatch between demand and infrastructure. Visitors often make do with what's available using edges, grass, or other surfaces when formal seating feels insufficient.

These adaptations can be read as design signals. They point toward places where seating might be lacking and where shade could be welcomed. Standing remains common in play zones, not necessarily because people prefer to stand, but perhaps because comfortable alternatives are limited. Posture is more than a behaviour; it can serve as a diagnostic tool. When people adapt and improvise, they may be quietly revealing what is missing.

Zone A: Social magnet with seating under pressure

Located near the main entrance and picnic lawn, Zone A saw a dramatic rise in sitting postures from spring (152 combined formal and informal) to summer (503), alongside a surge in social activity (from 113 to 424). The increase in informal sitting, from 32 to 155, suggests that existing seating does not meet seasonal demand. Visitors are adapting by sitting on grass, ledges, or other surfaces.

Design response: Expand and diversify seating options to support social use, especially during peak seasons.

Zones B and C: High activity, low comfort

Zones B and C function as recreation hubs, hosting the playground, splash pad, baseball diamond, soccer field, and pool. They recorded the highest standing and active counts across both seasons. Zone B rose from 280 standing postures in spring to 752 in summer, and Zone C from 462 to 792. Active behaviours also surged, with Zone B increasing from 191 to 660 and Zone C from 308 to 543. Despite this engagement, sitting and lying remained low, indicating limited opportunities to rest or spectate comfortably.

Design response: Introduce shaded viewing areas, formal seating along edges, and soft surfaces to support short breaks and spectatorship without interrupting play.

Zone D: Quiet refuge with constrained capacity

Zone D includes wooded trails and quieter paths surrounding Grenadier Café. It showed modest increases in passive activity, rising from 64 in spring to 68 in summer, and sitting postures increased from 79 to 127. Lying postures remained rare, with only six recorded in summer. These patterns suggest that the zone invites rest, but lacks the comfort features needed to support it more fully. Currently, nearly all seating in this area is concentrated within the café itself, with few opportunities to sit or linger in the surrounding landscape. This limits the zone's capacity to function as a passive refuge, especially for those not dining or seeking a quieter experience outdoors.

Design response: Expand seating and shade opportunities outside the café footprint to support passive use. Consider soft surfaces and low-intervention enhancements that preserve the contemplative character of the zone while making it more inviting to linger.

Zone E: Mixed use with modest engagement

Zone E, which includes secondary lawns and circulation paths, showed moderate posture and activity counts across both seasons. Sitting and passive use increased slightly, but the zone does not yet function as a destination, compared to other zones.

Design response: Consider low-intervention upgrades such as shade, seating edges, or light programming to support lingering and strengthen its role as a secondary rest zone.

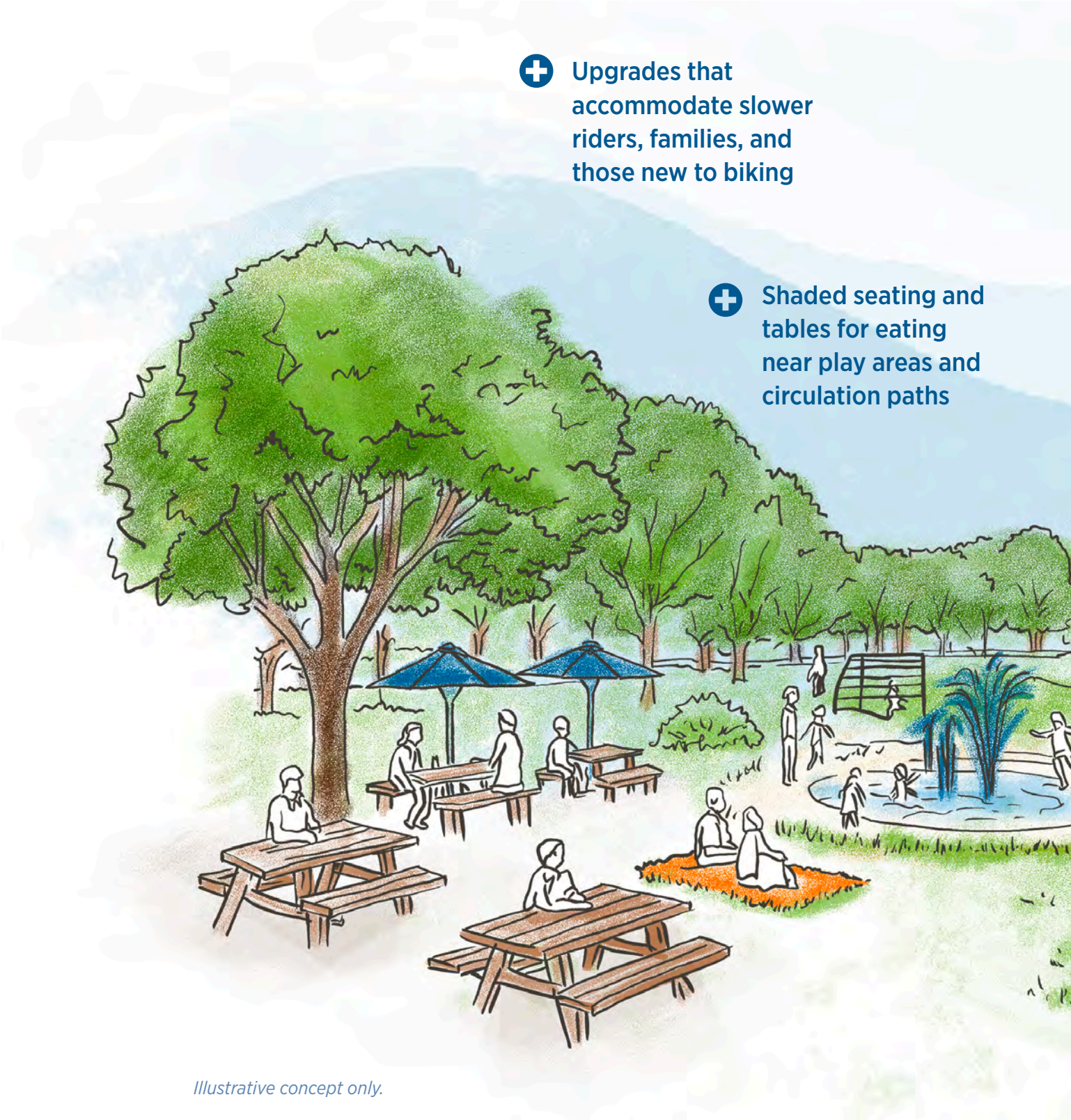
Zone F: Low-use Natural Area

Zone F includes the Natural Area, a steep and ecologically sensitive area where only travel counts and demographic observations were conducted. No stationary mapping was completed in this zone due to its terrain and limited dwell opportunities. The observations confirm low visitor volumes, offering the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority a baseline for current use patterns. Any future considerations should prioritize protection of ecological function and limit human impact. Improvements, if pursued, should be minimal and carefully designed to balance safe access with conservation.

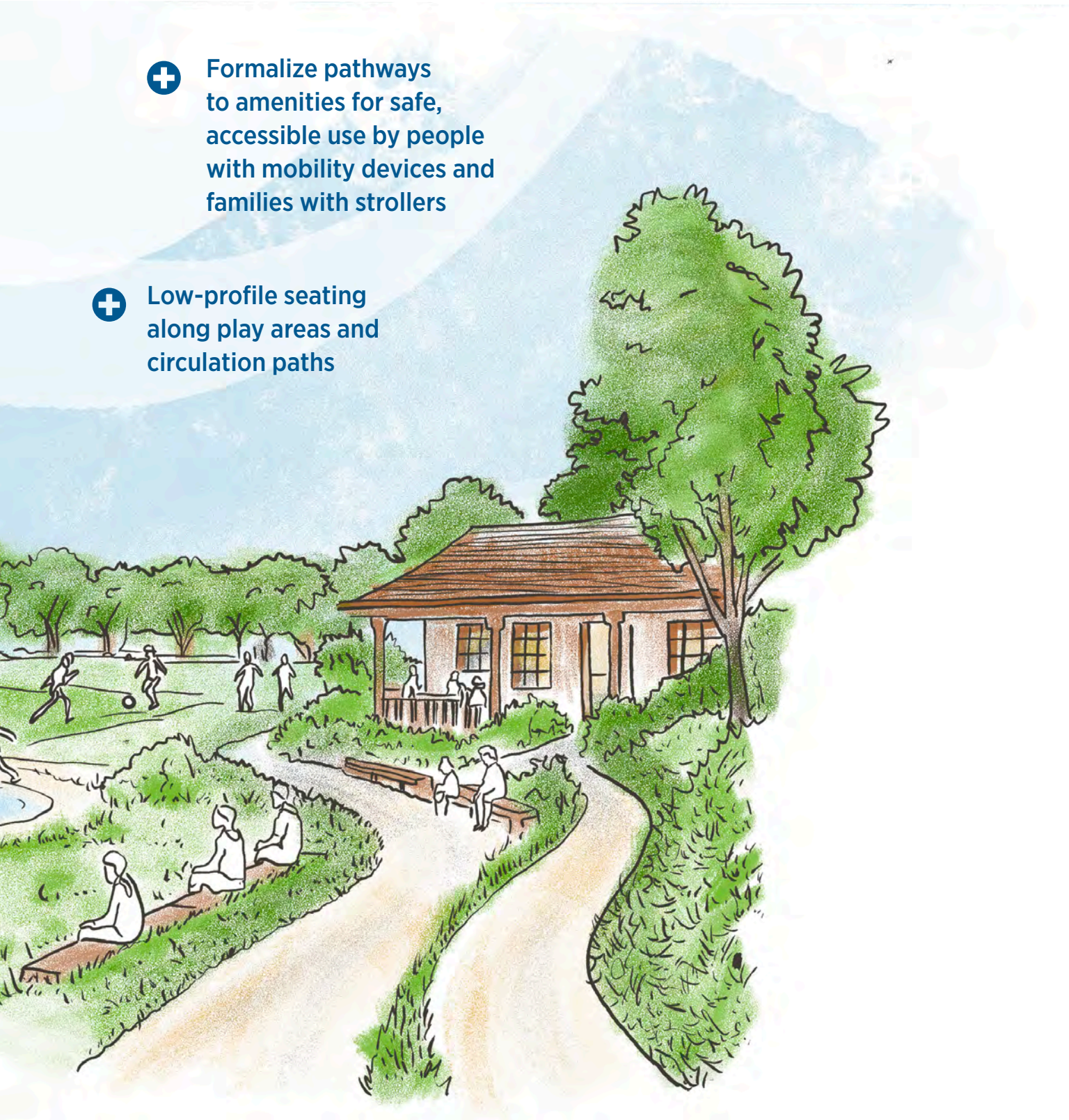
Design response: Maintain the zone's ecological integrity as the foremost priority. Consider only low-impact measures such as trail improvements, slope mitigation, or signage and ensure these are developed in consultation with Urban Forestry and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority to support safe movement without compromising the ravine's ecological functions.

Design responses in action

Illustrated interventions based on posture, activity, and comfort patterns



Illustrative concept only.


Formalize pathways to amenities for safe, accessible use by people with mobility devices and families with strollers
Low-profile seating along play areas and circulation paths

Next Steps

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Next steps

What will happen with the results?

The findings from this study will directly inform the next phase of improvements along West Road, Colborne Lodge Drive, and Spring Road, including the adjacent areas. As part of the City's High Park Movement Strategy, a design consultant has been retained to lead the planning and implementation of upgrades throughout this corridor.

The travel, activity, posture, age, and gender observations presented here will guide where investment is prioritized, and what types of improvements are most needed. Zones with high use but low comfort, such as A, B, and C, may see expanded seating, shade, and rest infrastructure. Areas with untapped potential, like Zones D and E, may benefit from low-intervention enhancements that support lingering and passive use. In Zone F, any accessibility upgrades would be limited to the road corridor and considered with ecological sensitivity in mind, ensuring that improvements do not extend into the Environmentally Sensitive Area or compromise its ecological function.

This public life evidence ensures that future design decisions respond to how people actually use the park and where they're telling us, through adaptation and absence, that something is missing. In these patterns, we find not just gaps, but opportunities: to design with greater care, creativity, and connection to the lives unfolding within these spaces.


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