

Focus Group Summary Report: Parks, Trees & Nature

Queen's Park North Revitalization

Community Engagement Phase 2: Exploring Design Options

November 19, 2025



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Introduction

On November 19, 2025, the City hosted a focus group online with representatives of organizations interested in the parks, trees, and nature as part of the Queen's Park North Revitalization project. The meeting was part of Community Engagement Phase 2.. It focused on presenting and seeking feedback on the draft big moves and emerging design ideas.

Feedback from participant is summarized below.

Attendance

Park, Trees, and Nature organizations: Toronto Field Naturalists, Toronto Public Space Committee, Friends of Queen's Park North.

Queen's Park North Revitalization Project team: City of Toronto, Janet Rosenberg & Studio (JRS), Trophic Design, Third Party Public.

For more information about the project and to review summaries from previous community engagement activities, visit the project webpage:

toronto.ca/QueensParkNorth

Meeting Summary

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

Participants thanked the team for the presentation and said they particularly liked the efforts being made to protect and enhance the trees, particularly the native species. They also encouraged the team to share more precedents going forward to help people better visualize and understand how the proposed design elements could be implemented. Participants discussed and shared feedback on several of the proposed design ideas, sharing support for some as well as concerns and suggestions for the City, donor, and design team to consider moving forward.

A summary of the feedback is below. The numbers do not reflect an order of importance.

Topics	Participant Comments/Feedback
1. Support for protecting native species through veteranisation	<p>The idea of veteranisation (i.e., the process of intentionally damaging / managing invasive species to accelerate their decline and at the same time creating microhabitats naturally found in older trees) is an interesting and creative way to improve the habitat for native tree species and wildlife. This technique should be treated as a transitional or bridge strategy rather than a long-term solution.</p> <p>Veteranisation does not mitigate the allelopathic impacts of Norway Maple trees on soil conditions or understory suppression, and therefore should be paired with a phased, long-term plan for eventual replacement with native canopy species. Long term strategies should also include soil remediation where Norway Maples are eventually removed, since the soil has been altered by decades of leaf litter and root chemistry. While veteranisation creates habitat features, it does not address the underlying ecological pressures caused by Norway Maples, such as shading, root competition, and long-term soil chemistry impacts. Therefore, it should not be considered an ecological substitute for eventual canopy transformation.</p> <p>If this is done, it will be important to use a public awareness campaign with clear visual and other materials to help</p>

	<p>people understand the ecological rationale of why Norway Maples require long-term management or eventual phased removal including education on how it connects to Indigenous teachings and placekeeping stories and the overall benefits of the approach. There is likely to be pushback if there is a perception that any trees are being cut down. Consider revising the Vision and Guiding Principles to speak specifically to preserving all “native trees”.</p> <p>Additionally, Norway Maple trees that eventually fall or are felled could be preserved on site by use in design elements such as furniture, or the treewalk, or other structural elements. Or they could even be left on site as the fall, such as is the practice in London, England in the borough of Kensington.</p> <p>From the project team, Jessica from Janet Rosenberg & Studio (JRS) explained that there is no intention to remove mature, healthy, native trees. Rather, the team (including ecologists, arborists, and the City’s Urban Forestry division) is working together to take a long-term outlook on how the living ecosystem within the park can be actively managed to improve the health of native species and increase biodiversity. This would include introducing more understory plantings and preventing the reproduction of Norway Maples.</p> <p>Shannon from the City also explained that any changes to trees in the park would be guided by Urban Forestry and the City’s tree protection by-law.</p>
2. Support for understory plantings, need a balance	<p>Support for adding understory plantings and reducing some of the existing lawn areas to restore the ecosystem to a White Oak Savannah. This will need to be balanced with people’s desire to walk and gather on the lawn area.</p>
3. Concerns about a café	<p>Concerns about a proposed café persist, including the garbage it would create and doubts about whether it would be a sustainable business in the centre of the park. It was noted that at the Brickworks/Weston Family Quarry Garden they’re doing a good job with garbage management, which could help inspire thinking about garbage management in Queen’s Park North.</p>

	<p>The need for the café was questioned, given that there are already several food options in the area, including the cafeteria in the Legislative Building, which is open to the public. The Friends of Queen's Park North is planning to put together a list of food options already available in the area. It was suggested that a café would likely do better outside of the park (e.g., at the corner of Wellesley St and Queen's Park Cres, or another intersection, or somewhere in relationship to Hart House) where there is more foot traffic. An Indigenous themed café could be an option, potentially in University Park.</p> <p>Jessica from JRS explained that the café building and other interventions in the heart of the park allows for a level of liveliness with options for all. Successful public spaces have a layered offering of things to do, and that overlap created vibrancy. Queen's Park North is a tough site because there are so few places where trees don't exist, so the design team focused on where there would be the least impact on trees.</p>
<p>4. Support and some concern about the treewalk</p>	<p>Love the idea of the treewalk as a way to help connect people to the trees and as an educational tool. Some have concerns about negative impacts of the footings on tree roots. It would be helpful to share precedents from similar projects (e.g., the Clifford Perry Boardwalk in Newmarket) to help people better understand what is being proposed and to potentially alleviate concerns.</p>
<p>5. Commemorative</p>	<p>The commemorative garden has a lot of potential. If you are doing it, do it big and bold.</p> <p>Consider options to re-think the Floyd fountain at the southern end of the park and establish it as a heritage feature in the proposed commemorative garden. It has good bones, there are existing water and electrical lines that run to the fountain, and it's probably bird-friendly. Look at other fountains and sculptures around the City for inspiration (e.g., Three Graces Sculpture by Gerard Gladstone and/or features on Centre Island where gardens and fountains are combined).</p> <p>Consider having a butterfly garden as part of the commemorative garden. There would be a natural</p>

	connection to the Weston family given their support for the Meadoway funded by the Weston Family Foundation.
6. Proposed	<p>Share more information about if/how the Indigenous components being proposed in Queen's Park North are differentiated from and could connect to other Indigenous areas around the park (e.g., Ziibiing, located on the University of Toronto campus).</p> <p>From the design team, James, from Trophic design, explained that what is being proposed for Queen's Park North and Ziibiing, at the University of Toronto, are fundamentally quite different. Ziibiing has been designed as a ceremonial space specifically for students and faculty, not the public at large. What is being proposed for Queen's Park North is a larger Council Fire site that would be used to facilitate gatherings and dialogue (e.g., nation to nation dialogue, events being held by the Province for Indigenous People's Day and National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, and for a former Indigenous leader to "lie in state" after they pass away).</p>
7. Add something	<p>It would be good to have something for kids in the park. The water feature is good, but there could be more. For example, programming in the commemorative garden could align well with Hilary Weston's past advocacy work with children with autism and who are visually impaired.</p>
8. Running Track	<p>Support for understory plantings around the running track. The understory plantings could make the track a more interesting experience. Again, it would be helpful if the team could share more precedents of what it could look like.</p>
9. Lighting	<p>Any new lighting in the park should be bird-friendly.</p>
10. Enhancing	<p>Consider ways to improve the experience on Wellesley Street between the park and the Legislative Building. Options could include a series of statues (as was suggested at the focus group with leaders from Resident and Community Associations), banners on both sides of the street, improved pedestrian crossings, etc. Bryant Park in New York is a good example of how the edge of park can be well animated, with lawn in the centre. It would be great to</p>

	have a hands on workshop with the community to explore options for this, including precedents.
11. Draw on past	The World Wildlife Fund and the Westons have worked together on a native plant program that could be inspiring for Queen's Park North.
12. Use of funding	<p>The proposed donation has the potential to be a transformative gift for the park. It would be better to prioritize trees and the long-term care for the park, rather than front-loading capital expenditures, some of which are controversial.</p> <p>Consider presenting different scenarios for use of the funds, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A scenario where long-term maintenance (e.g. 100+ years) is prioritized through a conservancy, then the remaining funds can be allocated to structural changes / additions. • A scenario with an assumed decay rate for the Norway Maples along with the biodiversity gains the City is hoping to accrue, with a minimum of 60 years of maintenance funding. <p>These scenarios should explicitly account for the cost of transitioning from invasive canopy dominance to resilient native canopy over several decades (as opposed to only maintaining the existing tree population).</p>

Next Steps

The project team thanked participants for their ongoing interest and participation in the process and committed to sharing a draft summary of the discussion with participants for review before it is finalized and published online.