

AIDS Memorial Workshop Meeting Summary Report

Barbara Hall Park Vision and Improvement Plan
Phase 2A: Exploring Design Options

City of Toronto – Parks and Recreation
May 2025





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Introduction

The City of Toronto is collaborating with the local Church-Wellesley Village community to develop a new vision and improvement plan for Barbara Hall Park. The objectives of the park vision and improvement plan are to enhance the park's function for everyday use and as a central gathering space for the City's 2SLGBTQ+ community; better accommodate passive and active uses, special events, and moments of reflection; and improve park maintenance and safety for all.

About this Report

This report summarizes the AIDS Memorial Workshop meeting that was held on May 8, 2025. The workshop consisted of two separate charrette based activities/discussions which focused on the Big Moves, Community Priorities, and Heritage Themes. The goal of these workshops was to facilitate discussions with the AIDS community about the AIDS Memorial and test certain ideas that key stakeholders had suggested earlier in the process in Phase 1.

Meeting Summarized in this Report

1. AIDS Memorial Workshop Introduction Meeting

Location: Virtual Meeting (via Zoom)

Date: May 8th, 2025

Number of participants: Approx. 45

Previous Phase 1 Summary

In April 2024, a Phase 1 Summary Report was prepared which summarized various meetings which occurred from July 2023 to November 2023. From those meetings and workshops, key themes were identified and were as follows:

- The Memorial is sacred and should not be moved.
- The Memorial should not be changed or transformed but it can be enhanced or improved.
- The Memorial must be accessible.
- Maintenance of the Memorial is a major concern.
- “Safety” is also a concern.
- The Memorial is running out of space for additional names.
- There is an opportunity to do more to contextualize the AIDS Memorial.
- The AIDS Memorial doesn't resonate with younger people living with HIV.
- There is a sense the Memorial could benefit from community stewardship.
- Consult widely.

With the completion of Phase 1 (Towards the Vision) which focused on Pre-Engagement, Phase 2A (Exploring Options) has been underway which focuses on developing the design options. The section below in this summary report identifies what we heard during this respective phase.

What We Heard Summary (Phase 2A)

The following themes summarise the key feedback received about the AIDS Memorial during this phase of engagement across all meetings and workshops identified above. As previously mentioned, two separate charrette based workshops were completed during this meeting which focused on the Big Moves, Community Priorities, and Heritage Themes. The key themes we have heard are as follows:

Key Themes and Discussions From Part 1 Workshop

Safety

“Safety” is used here in quotations as participants previously expressed nuanced but also very contrary views on this issue. During this workshop, some participants expressed that visiting the Memorial makes them feel unsafe and noted the concerns of “safety” during both the day and night.

Accessibility and Wayfinding

Accessibility was a common theme discussed as the participants noted the difficulties in accessing the AIDS Memorial. Pathways were identified as “too narrow” and a current “lack of signage” were raised by the participants as these elements should be considered when preparing the future design options.

Maintenance and Community Stewardship

Participants suggested that community stewards could help in coordinating programming to get people involved in taking care of the Memorial, which could strengthen the wider community's connection to it. They could also develop programming to educate the public about the history of the Memorial and the early AIDS epidemic. Providing clarity to the broader community around the City's roles and responsibilities for maintenance and stewardship was also mentioned.

Key Themes and Discussions From Part 2 Workshop

Commemoration

Commemoration was a key theme raised by the participants as the park design should continue to be a place to reflect on and mourn the lives that have been lost to AIDS while also celebrating people living with HIV and AIDS today. The participants noted the importance of being able to mourn, reflect and grieve and through various means, such as reading names or lighting candles.

Recognition of AIDS Activists

Participants across our meeting and workshops consistently identified the importance of recognizing AIDS Activists. Participants noted that it is important to find ways to recognize and appreciate the people and groups that have pushed and gotten this far with the education of HIV and AIDS. The memorials serve as spaces for remembrance, education, and advocacy, ensuring that the legacy of AIDS activism is preserved and its lessons are learned.

Symbolism and Contextualization

Participants emphasized the importance of symbolism and how essential it is to incorporate elements in the park that tell the story of HIV and AIDS in Toronto, including the history of the Memorial and the stories of the people named on it. Participants felt that this could provide an opportunity to further honour the people named on the Memorial. Furthermore, participants expanded and identified that certain designs and symbols can further attract people to the park and serve as way to involve and educate the broader public with HIV and AIDS.

Importance of Grassroots

Across our meeting and workshops, participants discussed the importance of grassroots initiatives. They are crucial as they connect to the communities they serve, ensuring parks are responsive to local needs and preferences. Grassroots groups, often formed by neighborhood residents, can advocate for park improvements, mobilize volunteers for maintenance, and help raise funds, ultimately enhancing the park's value and overall accessibility.

Next Steps

We appreciate all the community members who engaged with us during the AIDS Memorial Workshop. Your questions, insights, and feedback have been invaluable in refining our materials and enhancing the overall experience for all participants.

The City is now in the process of coordinating with the external design team to prepare and develop three (3) design options for the Park from the feedback received to date. Additional refinements the design options will be made from additional collaboration.

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City of Toronto

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