

# Trans+ Community Design Workshop Summary Report

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

City of Toronto – Parks and Recreation  
September 20, 2025





VISION

WHO?

NEXT STEPS

WHY?



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# Introduction

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The City of Toronto is working with the Church-Wellesley Village community to revitalize Barbara Hall Park into an inclusive, welcoming, and highly accessible space that serves as the green focal point of this neighbourhood. The improved park will be a place to gather, celebrate, and heal, balancing everyday use with calm spaces for reflection at the AIDS and Trans Memorials, while also celebrating 2SLGBTQ+ community history and resilience through art, culture, and heritage interpretation. Improvements will enhance safety, accessibility, and programming, ensuring the park is a vibrant, year-round destination for people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds.

Community consultation has been very important to developing the design, features, and experience of the Barbara Hall Park Improvements project. The detailed design and engagement process for the park improvements is following a three-phase approach:

Phase 1 ran from Spring 2023 to Spring 2024 and focused on creating a new community-led vision, guiding principles, and big moves to guide the design.

Phase 2, the current phase, is running from Summer to Fall 2025, focused on sharing and refining three draft design options based on the feedback from Phase 1.

Phase 3, which will be from Winter 2025 to Spring 2026, will focus on setting the direction for the Barbara Hall Park preferred plan.

## How We Reached People

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### Print media

### Signage on-site

Notice boards placed near the park displayed information about the project, detailed instructions about participating in the Trans+ Community Workshop and guidance on accessing additional information on the project webpage.

## Digital media

### Project webpage

Instructions about participating in the Trans+ Community Workshop was available on the [Barbara Hall Park Improvement webpage](#) between September 11 to September 20, 2025.

### Email blasts

Email notifications were sent to project update subscribers and stakeholder lists – specifically to those engaged in past AIDS Memorial Workshop activities and AIDS and HIV community organizations. The correspondence provided survey dates and included a hyperlink to access the survey.

### Social media and digital ads

Paid and organic social media content were promoted on Parks and Recreation Facebook and Instagram accounts. The campaign was active from September 11 to September 20, 2025.

### Flyers and e-flyers

Physical flyers were posted consistently throughout the Church-Wellesley Village and at Barbara Hall Park from September 1 to September 20, 2025. City staff handed out flyers to residents in the neighbourhood, park and The 519. Digital flyers were distributed through email blasts to our subscriber list, Community Advisory Committee and local community groups. The e-flyers included an interactive link to the project webpage.

## Meeting Format

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This meeting was hosted at the Wellesley Community Centre on September 20, 2025. Six participants attended the in-person session, scheduled from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. The meeting focused on engaging members of the broader Trans+ Community in reviewing a presentation deck and gathering their insights on three proposed design options, with particular attention to the Trans Memorial. The feedback generated from this meeting will directly support the ongoing refinement of the Barbara Hall Park project, ensuring that updates meaningfully address community priorities and memorial

site needs. The workshop activities were conducted as one large table group to enable open dialogue and diverse perspective sharing. It is important to note that there was trans representation at the meeting, however, not all participants self-identified as trans. Participants were mindful to provide more space and time for trans participants to provide their feedback.

The meeting began with a light meal and welcome from Celina Chong of the City of Toronto, who was the facilitator for the evening. A Land Acknowledgment and African Ancestral Acknowledgement was followed by introductions to the project team and an overview of the workshop agenda.

The meeting consisted of two rounds of a voting activity, called a sociometry activity, on a preferred design option and a world café activity. The voting was broken into two rounds, with the first round occurring early in the process to get the participants' initial reaction and preferred design option immediately after reviewing the draft design options presentation, before deliberating with fellow CAC members.

The world café activity was also broken into two rounds and consisted of groups discussing how the experiences of trans, gender-diverse and Two-Spirit people at Barbara Hall Park could be improved while applying the vision, guiding principles and big moves. The goal was to see what works and what does not work in each design option from the perspective of the trans community members, and how could they be made stronger to serve community needs.

Celina concluded the meeting by outlining the next steps in the community engagement process, including the October online survey and open house.

# What We Heard

## Initial Plenary Discussion

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The workshop began with a detailed presentation by the project’s lead design consultant to walk participants through each of the draft design options’ distinct features, technical details, precedent images and background context on cultural significance. Once the draft design options were shown, the floor was open to participants to clarify details about the draft designs and receive first-instinct initial feedback. Highlights from the discussion period are as follows:

### Design options and ribbons

Option 3 emerged as the most popular draft design option, praised for its organic circulation that guides visitors through the site in a way that feels welcoming and meaningful. Some described it as evoking a “Wizard of Oz yellow brick road” pathway, with the ribbon breaking up the rigid rectangular lines. The intertwining of ribbons was interpreted as powerful symbolism, representing both the AIDS Memorial and Trans Memorial distinctly existing while reflecting unity and solidarity amongst communities by sharing the park space. Suggestions to enhance the ribbons’ wayfinding and practical elements included expanding the Trans Memorial ribbon from various entrances and having the ribbon itself rise vertically to create seating opportunities.

Option 2 was acknowledged for its triangular form. Lighting in this option was received well, but potentially challenging, with concerns about accessibility and visual barriers.

Option 1 had little support, though some noted the memorial designs conveyed distinct and equal importance between the ribbons.

### Planting and symbolism

Many participants saw plants as central to the transformation of the park. Ideas included plants and garden elements that symbolically represented various groups within the 2SLGBTQ+ community such as white cedars, sensory gardens, strawberry flowers, butterfly gardens, roses with thorns, and self-pollinating trees. Participants emphasized care for soil health, horticulture, and planting practices as a vital aspect in stewarding the space.

## Heritage interpretation

The permanence of the AIDS Memorial and Trans Memorial was seen as critical, along with new mechanisms to showcase evolving stories. Ideas included stained glass features, rotating memorials or artist residencies, and archives that highlight names and histories (e.g., Jackie Shane, Julie Berman).

Feedback received showed that the park should represent, teach and echo the vibrancy, solidarity and resilience of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, and specifically the trans community, using heritage interpretation to blend history with future vision. The memorial spaces should allow for evolution and flexibility, with strong emphasis on planting, a design that has natural pedestrian circulation and cultural storytelling. Participants expressed a desire for a space that is not only commemorative, but also joyful, accessible, and a place that loved ones can visit as a 2SLGBTQ+ community destination.

Participants stressed the need to include the histories of Indigenous, Black and equity-deserving 2SLGBTQ+ communities and to recognize the connections between drag, trans identities, and community histories from the 1970s and 80s. A participant noted that the drag queens they were friends with in the 1970s and 80s were oftentimes trans, but presented cisgendered publicly due to hegemonic social pressures.

The south entrance was noted as underutilized and could benefit from heritage interpretation elements such as educational installations, murals and activations like temporary activities.

A “stopping points” concept was suggested which invite park patrons into a moment of reflection via a poem, image, phase, piece of art, etcetera.

## Programming and amenities

The lack of seating, picnic opportunities, and inclusive gathering spaces around the Trans Memorial was a common concern. More benches, shaded spots, and flexible programming were recommended. The café was seen as a positive addition for animating the park, provided it does not create economic exclusion by offering unaffordable items. A small dog park was not supported due to concerns about risking the health of the trees located near the south corridor.

## Park safety

Drug use and waste management were identified as ongoing social issues. Participants recognized that these social issues are beyond the scope of the park improvement project. Mechanisms for hiding waste and better waste stewardship were

recommended. Concerns were raised about fencing the park at night, with many emphasizing the park must remain welcoming.

## World Café Activity and Report Back Summary

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The world cafe activity was conducted as one large table group of six participants. In round one of the world café activity, participants were asked, “Thinking about the vision, guiding principles, and big moves, what works and doesn’t work in each design option, and how could they be made stronger?” Participants were given a few minutes to review the project’s vision, guiding principles and big moves as a team and discuss what their experience may be like in the improved park designs as a trans person. Once internal discussions were completed, participants spent 10 minutes going through a quick round robin discussion, asking each participant to briefly (in under a minute) share their immediate reaction to the draft concept options and to the question. An additional 10 minutes was provided to further clarify and expand on the new comments received from the participants. Once all the feedback was received, the top pieces of feedback were recorded on chart paper.

For round two, the facilitator asked, “Imagine moving through these designs one year after construction. As a Trans+ person, how would each space feel? What would make it more welcoming, safe, and affirming for you as an individual?” Participants went through the same process of a round robin discussion, followed by in-depth conversation about their feedback and recording the top comments on the chart paper. The following themes emerged from the world café activity:

### **Option preferences**

Option 3 received the strongest overall support for its fluidity, symbolism, and dynamic entrances. Participants appreciated how it “breaks up the rectangle” and guides visitors through the site, describing it as “organic, smooth, and having a nice flow.” Option 1 was valued for its sense of balance and equal importance given to each memorial, while Option 2 was appreciated for its spatial definition and triangle motif, though it was less favoured overall.

### **Sharing Trans and 2SLGBTQ+ stories**

Participants emphasized the importance of embedding 2SLGBTQ+ (with a focus on trans) histories, physical and visual symbolism, and cultural representation into the park’s design while ensuring the space remains joyful and welcoming. Participants expressed strong support for integrating symbols, motifs, and storytelling features that

resonate with trans communities to create a park that feels celebratory in addition to commemorative. A recurring theme was the need for visible markers of identity, heritage interpretation, and collective history that connect visitors to the site's past.

### **Cultivating joy**

Participants stressed that the park should be a place of joy, where community members can gather in a lively way. It should be a space where people can connect, walk, have picnics, and share experiences while continuing to honour those commemorated in the AIDS Memorial and Trans Memorial. People expressed that they want the park to feel safe, open, and inviting. One participant described their desire for the improved park to be “a destination I would be proud to bring my family and friends from out of town to share Toronto’s 2SLGBTQ+ culture and history.”

### **Design symbolism and motifs**

#### **Ribbon motif flow**

The ribbon motif, featured in Options 1 and 3, drew the strongest support from workshop participants. They described the ribbon as powerful, organic, and symbolic of unity and intersection across 2SLGBTQ+ communities. Participants suggested that the trans and AIDS ribbons could emerge from both entrances of the park, intertwining to symbolize intersectionality and community solidarity. Ideas included twisting or looping the ribbons vertically to form sculptural seating elements or shade structures, and mirroring the trans-coloured ribbons across the Cawthra entrance to frame both the AIDS Memorial and Trans Memorial. The ribbon was also compared to a “yellow brick road,” evoking 2SLGBTQ+ coded references such as “friends of Dorothy,” and participants appreciated how its flowing form “guides you through the park” and “breaks up the rigidity” of the existing rectangular layout.

#### **Triangle motif**

Participants appreciated the triangle motif in Option 2 for its balance and symbolism, noting that “the triangle is a uniting shape and holds strong significance to the 2SLGBTQ+ community.” A discussion was held about the meaning of the pink triangle, a part of the original design of the AIDS Memorial. City staff explained that including it in all three designs is an intentional decision supported by those who participated in the engagement process to date, who identify as being a part of HIV and AIDS as well as trans communities. Suggestions included extending the triangle pattern throughout the park, making the motif the specific shade of pink the symbol usually is, to emphasize its historic significance as a reclaimed 2SLGBTQ+ symbol, and using lighting to create an overhead “canopy effect.” While some noted potential challenges with lighting access routes to the AIDS Memorial and Trans Memorial, others felt that the illuminated structure could enhance programming and nighttime safety.

## **Colour and visual expression**

There was strong support for maintaining a vibrant colour palette. Some participants supported the use of trans and pride flag colours to reinforce the park's identity, while other participants expressed that the flag colours did not personally align with their sense of identity or community. Option 3 was particularly praised by many participants for its dynamic entrance design and the idea of extending trans flag colours toward Cawthra Avenue. Participants also encouraged layering colours that represent various 2SLGBTQ+ communities in plantings and paving using LED lighting to create visual rhythm and emotional resonance.

## **Horticultural symbolism**

### **Cultural planting and environmental stewardship**

Participants viewed planting as a major storytelling opportunity, connecting 2SLGBTQ+ (and specifically trans) identities to the landscape itself. They recommended using species with 2SLGBTQ+ cultural symbolism such as strawberry flowers (representing love and community in some Indigenous and 2SLGBTQ+ traditions), butterfly gardens (which symbolized the experience of being trans for some participants as the caterpillar transforms into a butterfly), and roses with thorns (acknowledging beauty, strength, and resilience of trans and 2SLGBTQ+ communities). Suggestions included planting white cedars as a significant plant in Indigenous communities, including the Anishinaabeg, to also symbolize a trans perspective with the bark shedding, and to symbolize grounding. Therapeutic sensory gardens that ignite the five senses were also suggested, as well as incorporating self-pollinating species to support biodiversity. Some participants also noted that roses could serve a practical function in catching debris around the AIDS Memorial and Trans Memorial. Some participants expressed interest in connecting horticultural symbolism with care for the soil, growth, and regeneration, linking ecological health to community healing and resilience.

## **Interactive heritage interpretation features**

Participants supported embedding storytelling throughout the park in permanent and interactive ways. Ideas included inlaid ground plaques guiding visitors between the AIDS Memorial and Trans Memorial, interpretive signage explaining the meaning of design elements and plantings, QR codes linking to oral histories, and digital projections on adjacent walls to activate digital storytelling of 2SLGBTQ+ historical and current figures and events. The inclusion of plaques was seen as critical for contextualizing heritage interpretation elements and ensuring that history remains visible and ongoing education occurs for future generations.

A participant who represented [The ArQuives](#), the largest independent 2SLGBTQ+ Archives in the world, offered their support in future heritage interpretation initiatives at Barbara Hall Park, given the organization's extensive collection of 2SLGBTQ+ and specifically trans oral and written histories. Participants also suggested collaboration

with the 519 and community artists to co-develop interpretive content that reflects Toronto's diverse 2SLGBTQ+ and trans histories.

## **Representation and commemoration**

### **Two-Spirit and Trans representation**

Representation of Two-Spirit, trans and non-binary communities was emphasized as essential. Participants agreed with the suggestion to have a prominent trans art piece and for the recognition of trailblazers such as Marsha P. Johnson, Jackie Shane, Wendy Carlos, Julie Berman, and Lynn Conway. It was noted that many drag performers from the 1970s and 1980s identified as trans or gender-diverse, and their stories should also be represented within the park's commemorative narrative.

### **Taking an intersectional approach to 2SLGBTQ+ histories**

Participants expressed a desire to integrate stories of Indigenous, Black and equity-deserving 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, acknowledging their foundational roles in Toronto's 2SLGBTQ+ history and activism. Suggestions included annually rotating art features or artist-in-residence programs highlighting the stories and legacies of racialized 2SLGBTQ+ artists from Toronto. Participants referenced examples like sculpture gardens or experiential booths where visitors engage with digital storytelling or empathy-building experiences. These evolving displays would allow the park to continually reflect current voices and issues while maintaining a sense of living memory.

## **Accessible park use**

### **Everyday gathering**

Participants highlighted the need for more seating, picnic spaces, and shaded rest areas, particularly around the AIDS Memorial and Trans Memorial where comfort and reflection were deemed as important to prioritize. Expanding pedestrian pathways and flexible open spaces was recommended to encourage walking, gathering, and community programming.

### **Universal accessibility**

Universal accessibility was a priority for all users. Participants recommended a universally accessible washroom within the park, innovative waste-management systems (such as concealed waste bins like those in Amsterdam or Barcelona), and better organization of the 519's waste area. The lack of current seating was also noted as a barrier to physical accessibility for park users.

### **Animating the park**

The big move to incorporate a café into the park was seen as an opportunity to animate the park and foster community interaction, provided it remains inclusive of local Toronto businesses and not economically exclusive with commercial corporations. Participants viewed the café as a space that could help maintain vibrancy, support programming, and provide passive surveillance for social comfort.

## **Atmosphere and park stewardship**

### **Balancing sacredness and joy**

While the AIDS Memorial and Trans Memorial are recognized as sacred spaces for mourning, participants shared that the overall park should also embody joy, resilience, and collective pride. The design should balance solemnity with celebration and ensure that permanent memorial elements coexist with spaces for daily activities, art, and gathering.

### **Stewardship and permanence**

Participants expressed the importance of permanence and community stewardship, particularly in light of anti-trans political movements and discourse globally. Maintaining permanent spaces and visible representation for trans and 2SLGBTQ+ communities was viewed by participants as both protective and empowering. Participants also noted that new adjacent developments (such as the planned 63-storey tower) would increase park use, underscoring the need for durable materials, thoughtful programming, and ongoing care.

## **Next Steps**

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The City appreciates all of the community members who engaged with us for the Trans+ Community Workshop. Participant questions, insights, and feedback have been invaluable in refining our materials and enhancing the overall experience for all participants.

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

Throughout this phase, additional engagement sessions will occur and are as follows:

- Public Open House (October 2025)
- Public survey to explore design options (October 2025)

Once Phase 2 is complete and all feedback is received, the comments will inform the design options and will lead to one draft design option for the engagement component during Phase 3.

# Acknowledgements

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## City of Toronto

### **Parks and Recreation and Public Art and Monuments**

- Tonya Crawford, Senior Project Coordinator
- Daniel Fusca, Manager, Public Consultation
- Celina Chong, Senior Coordinator, Public Consultation
- Jose Marti, Coordinator, Public Consultation
- Emily Ricketts, Conservator

## Consulting team

### **DIALOG Design**

- Bryce Miranda, Landscape Lead, Partner
- Gabi Boucher, Landscape Designer, Associate
- Kav Wahdat, Intermediate Urban Planner
- Xushan Liu, Landscape Designer

### **Ambit Gender Diversity Consulting**

- Kingsley Strudwick, Founder + Lead Consultant, Ambit Gender Diversity Consulting

### **GBCA Architects**

- Emad Ghattas, Principal, GBCA Cultural Heritage Advisor

# Appendix A: Workshop Chart Paper

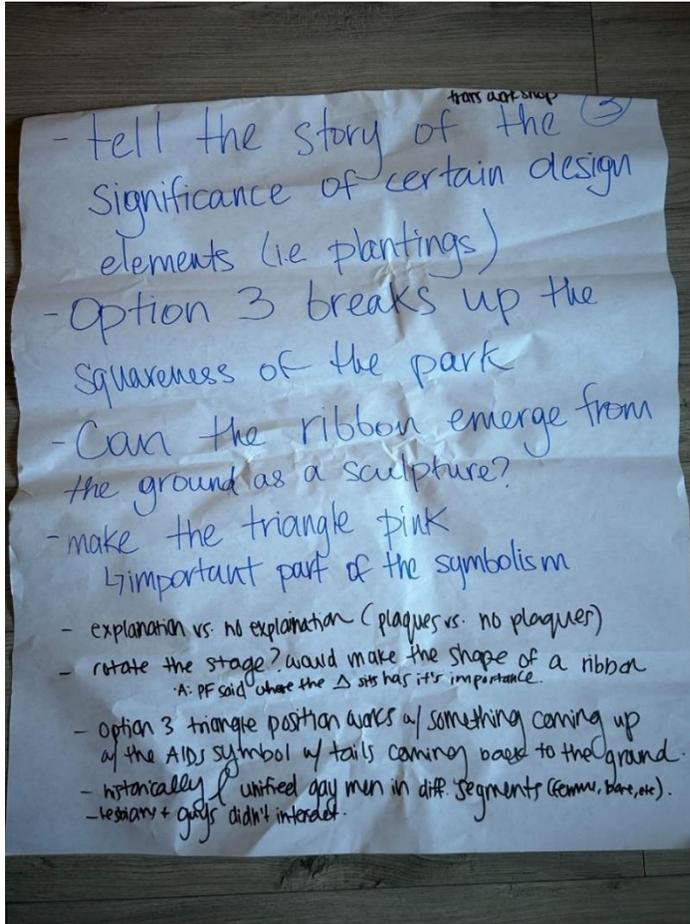
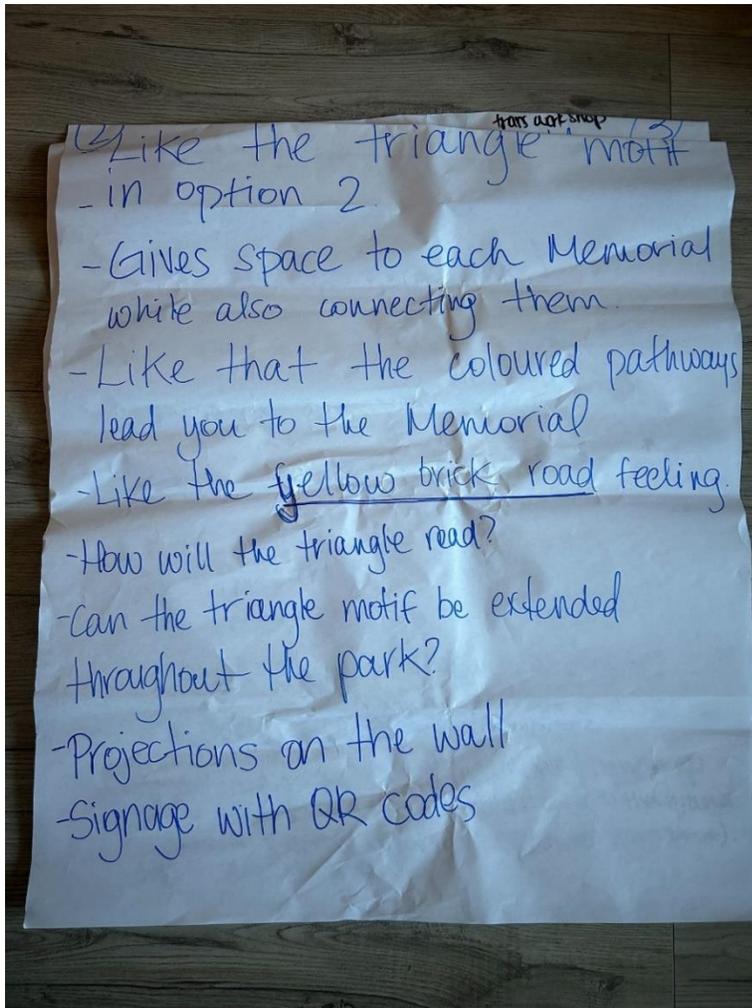


Figure 1: Trans Community Workshop Chart Paper 1

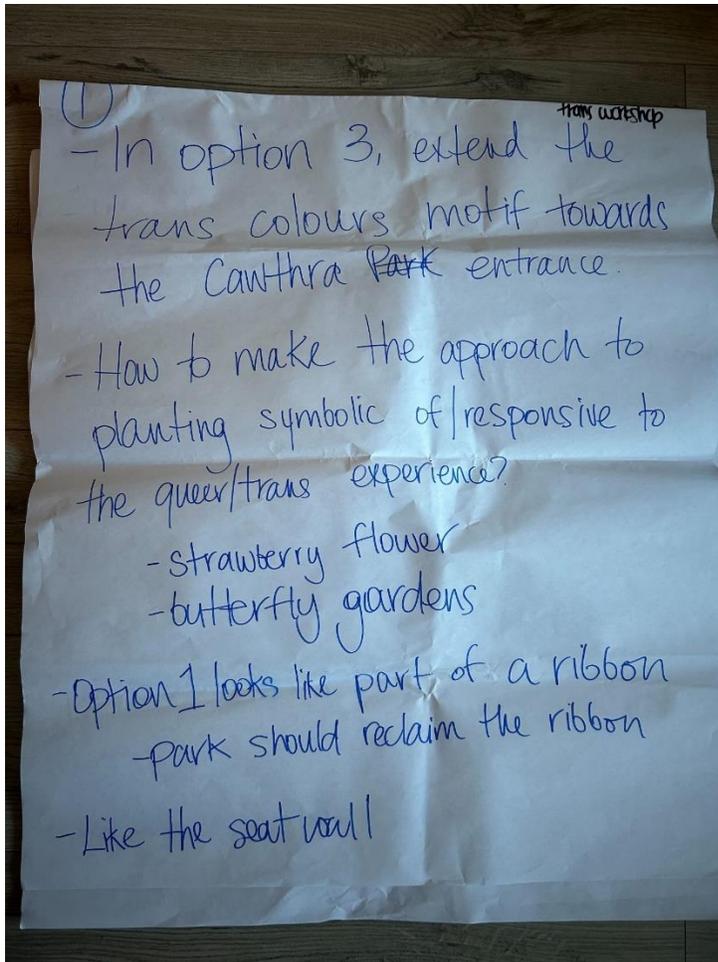
- Tell the story of the significance of certain design elements (i.e. plantings)
- Option 3 breaks up the squareness of the park
- Can the ribbon emerge from the group as a sculpture?
- Make the triangle pink
- Important part of the symbolism
- Explanation vs no explanation (plaques vs no plaques)
- Rotate the stage? Would make the shape of a ribbon
- Option 3 triangle position works with something coming up with the AIDS symbol with tails coming back to the ground

- Historically unified gay men in different segments (Lesbians and gays may not have interacted)



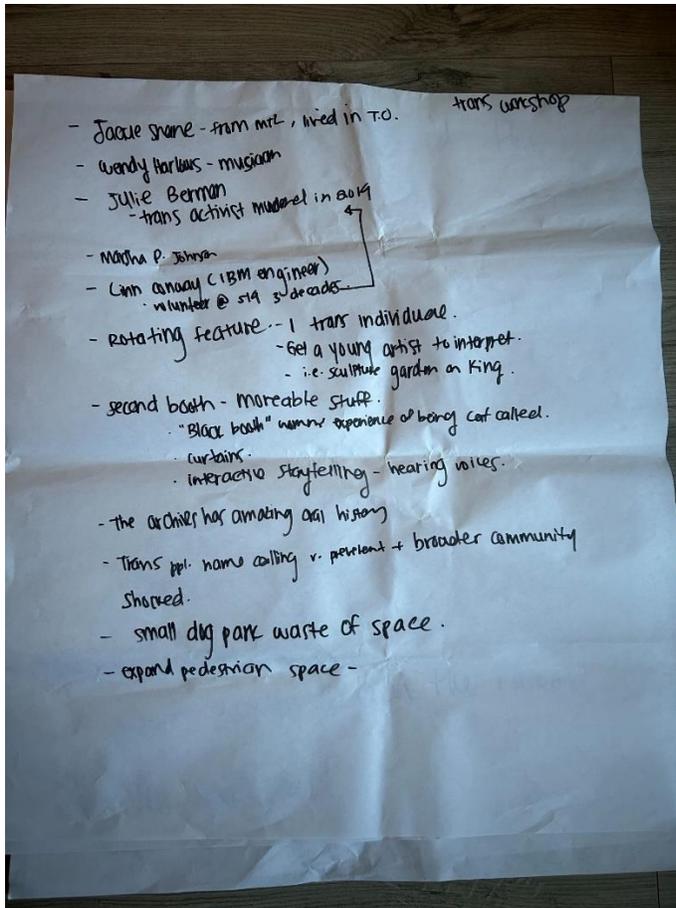
**Figure 2: Trans Community Workshop Chart Paper 2**

- Like the triangle motif in option 2
- Gives space to each Memorial while also connecting them
- Like that the coloured pathways lead you to the memorial
- Like the yellow brick road feeling
- How will the triangle read?
- Can the triangle motif be extended throughout the park?
- Projections on the wall
- Signage with QR codes



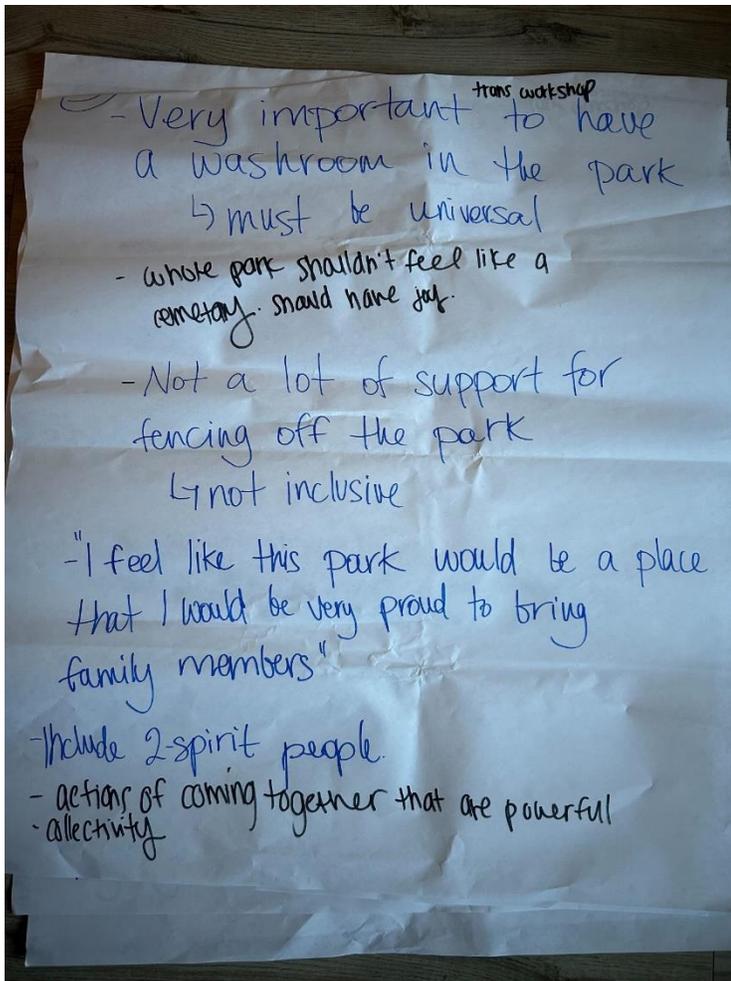
**Figure 3: Trans Community Workshop Chart Paper 3**

- In option 3, extend the trans colours motif towards the Cawthra entrance
- How to make the approach to planning symbolic of/responsive to the queer/trans experience?
- Strawberry Flower
- Butterfly Gardens
- Option 1 looks like park of a ribbon
- Park should reclaim the ribbon
- Like the seat wall



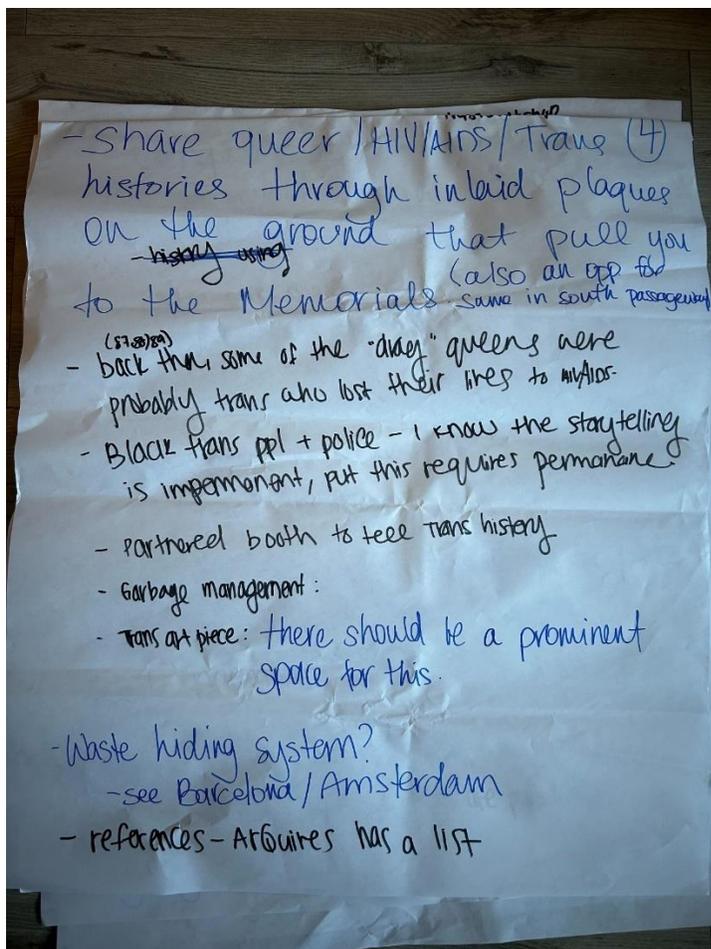
**Figure 4: Trans Community Workshop Chart Paper 4**

- Jackie Shane – from Montreal, lived in Toronto
- Wendy Harlows – musician
- Julie Berman
- Trans activist – murdered in 2019
- Marsha P. Johnson
- Linn Conaway (IBM Engineer)
- Volunteer at 519 for 3 decades
- Rotating feature – Trans individuals
- Get a young artist to interpret
- i.e. sculpture garden on King
- Second booth – moveable stuff
- The archives has amazing oral history
- Trans people, name calling, v. prevalent + broader community shocked
- Small dog park waste of space
- Expand pedestrian space



**Figure 5: Trans Community Workshop Chart Paper 5**

- Very important to have a washroom in the park
- Must be universal
- Whole park shouldn't feel like a cemetery. Should have joy.
- Not a lot of support for fencing of the park
- Not inclusive
- "I feel like this park would be a place that I would be very proud to bring family members"
- Include 2-Spirit people
- Actions of coming together that are powerful
- Collectivity



**Figure 6: Trans Community Workshop Chart Paper 6**

- Share queer/HIV and AIDS/Trans histories through inlaid plaques on the ground that pull you to the memorials
- Back then, some of the “drag” queens were probably trans who lost their lives to HIV and AIDS.
- Black trans people + police – I know the story telling is important, but this requires permanence.
- Partnered booth to tell Trans History
- Garbage Management
- Trans art piece: There should be a prominent space for this
- Waste hiding system?
- See Barcelona/Amsterdam
- References – ArQuives has a list

# Appendix B: Meeting Agenda

**Date:** Saturday, September 20, 2025

**Time:** 3:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

**Location:** In Person at Meeting Room MPR B, Wellesley Community Centre - 495 Sherbourne St, Toronto, ON, M4X1K7

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## Event Objectives:

1. To go over the presentation deck for the broader trans community.
2. To collect detailed feedback on the three (3) design options with the broader Trans Community.
3. The comments received on the three (3) design options will further inform future revisions to the latest design options that will help ensure the preferred design is trans-inclusive and trans-affirming.

## Agenda

1. **Welcome and Introductions** – 3:00 p.m. to 3:05 p.m.
  - Land Acknowledgement
  - African Ancestral Acknowledgement
  - Notes on creating a safe space
2. **Icebreaker** – 3:05 p.m. to 3:10 p.m.
3. **Timeline and Project Overview** – 3:10 p.m. to 3:20 p.m.
4. **What We Heard in Phase 2 to Date** – 3:20 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.
5. **Design Options and Precedent Images** – 3:30 p.m. to 4:05 p.m.
6. **Questions of Clarification**– 4:05 p.m. to 4:15 p.m.
7. **Break** – 4:15 p.m. to 4:20 p.m.
8. **World Café Round 1** – 4:20 p.m. to 4:50 p.m.
9. **World Café Round 2** – 4:50 p.m. to 5:25 p.m.
10. **Report Back** – 5:25 p.m. to 5:55 p.m.
11. **Final Remark and Next Steps** – 5:55 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.