

Phase 2

Equity Deserving Advisory Group - Meetings 2 and 3 Summary Report

Parkland Strategy and Parks and Recreation Facilities Plan

Phase 2 Engagement: Setting the Direction

June 25, 2025, and January 22, 2026

Parks & Recreation Division

City of Toronto





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Overview

About this report

This report provides a high-level overview of the second and third Equity-Deserving Advisory Group (EDAG) meetings. The EDAG was established for the update of the City's Parks and Recreation Facilities Plan (PRFP) and the Parkland Strategy (PLS).

The meetings brought together representatives from organizations serving racialized communities, Black communities, women, girls, gender-diverse people, children and youth, seniors, people with disabilities, 2SLGBTQ+ communities, newcomers, and lower income residents.

Insights from EDAG members are essential in identifying and addressing barriers to equitable access in Toronto's parks and recreation facilities. The insights gathered will directly inform the ongoing update of these plans, ensuring that future investments reflect the needs of Indigenous, Black and equity-deserving communities.

How we reached people

A wide range of organizations serving equity-deserving groups were invited to join the EDAG to help ensure the development of the PLS and PRFP are informed by, and reflective of, the needs of Black, and equity-deserving communities.

Email invitations were sent (with follow-up) to approximately 45 groups and organizations that serve a range of Black and equity-deserving communities, including youth, older adults, newcomers, people with disabilities, racialized communities, women, girls, gender-diverse people, people with low income, and 2SLGBTQ+ communities.

Groups and organizations with larger service areas were invited over organizations with a hyper-local focus, as both the PLS and PPRFP are city-wide planning documents.

EDAG Meeting 2

Meeting details

The second EDAG meeting took place on June 25, 2025, from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. via Teams. 14 EDAG members attended the meeting representing the following organizations or groups:

- **8 80 Cities**
- **Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services**
- **Building Roots**
- **For Youth Initiative**
- **Girls', Youth & Family Programs, YWCA Toronto**
- **Lived Experience Advisory Group – Poverty Reduction Strategy**
- **North York Community House**
- **OutSport Toronto**
- **Parasport Ontario**
- **Park People**
- **Seniors Forum**
- **Social Planning Toronto**
- **Toronto Accessible Sports Council**
- **United Way Greater Toronto**

The presentation to the EDAG included:

- A high-level review of “what we heard” through Phase 1 engagements
- Potential actions to include in the updated PLS and PRFP, which were informed, in-part, through the Phase 1 engagements.

Discussion highlights

The following section offers a summary of feedback received during the meeting. The overarching discussion questions for both the PLS and PRFP were:

- Is there anything we missed in any areas?
 - What we heard
 - Key themes to address
 - Potential actions
- Did more people feel like the actions were on the right track?
- Is there anything you would like to share before the start of Phase 2 community engagements?

Although not all items discussed during the meeting fall within the scope of the PLS or PRFP, all discussion has been captured and will be shared with the relevant teams within the Parks and Recreation Division.

Addressing food insecurity and green infrastructure

Participants supported leveraging City-owned facilities as multi-functional assets by integrating green roofs that also function as community garden spaces. This approach was framed as a method to advance multiple City objectives including improving access to fresh and affordable food, strengthening climate resilience, and supporting community connection, particularly in neighbourhoods experiencing higher levels of food insecurity.

City staff noted that this idea has emerged consistently through engagement and aligns well with the City's broader food security and sustainability commitments. There is an opportunity to further reflect this concept within future planning and policy directions, including as part of the Parks and Recreation Facilities Plan, where infrastructure investments can support layered social, environmental, and community outcomes.

Adding equity index variables

Data governance and considerations

Participants raised questions about the scope and limitations of the Parks and Recreation Socio-Demographic Equity Index ("Equity Index"), particularly the absence of variables related to gender identity, sexual orientation, and sex. City staff explained that the Equity Index relies on variables available through the Statistics Canada Census (census data), and census-tract level data for sexual orientation is not currently collected or available. A question on sexual orientation will be included in the 2026 Census, for the first time, after which this data would be possible to integrate into the Index. Data on gender identity is available, however there is no notable difference in

gender distribution across the city, so the inclusion of gender in the index would not have any real impact.

Questions were also raised about the currency and completeness of data used to inform parkland priority areas. Participants noted that income data from the 2016 census data may not fully reflect recent neighbourhood changes, including gentrification, and highlighted that physical conditions, such as ravine topography, can significantly affect accessibility. Participants expressed interest in incorporating additional layers of data to better capture on-the-ground realities, including terrain variations. Another participant supported use of the Equity Index and was encouraged that physical accessibility is also top of mind. Participants expressed a desire for accessibility considerations to become the norm in design guidelines and building codes moving forward.

More broadly, participants cautioned against over-reliance on geographic information system (GIS) mapping without sufficient ground-truthing. While mapping tools may identify areas as having parkland or greenspace, lived experience related to safety, accessibility, and quality can differ. Participants emphasized the importance of integrating experiential and community-based input to better inform investment priorities, particularly in Indigenous, Black, and equity-deserving neighbourhoods and in areas with a history of underinvestment.

City staff noted that the Neighbourhood Improvement Area Index is currently under review, which is why the Parks and Recreation Equity Index with more current data is being proposed for use. Staff acknowledged that qualitative information is more challenging to apply directly to city-wide prioritization models and that parkland quality is not currently captured within provision mapping. One of the primary ways quality considerations are addressed is through the identification of priority areas for more detailed parkland studies. These studies involve community engagement and on-the-ground validation, helping to balance quantitative mapping with qualitative insights and to better inform future investment decisions.

Balancing state of good repair and new facilities to meet population growth

Participants raised questions about how the City prioritizes investments between requests for improvements from local residents, addressing state of good repair needs, and addressing underused facilities. City staff noted that historic investment patterns tended to follow growth, which contributed to uneven outcomes across the city. The PRFP is intended to shift this approach by placing greater emphasis on need, equity, and renewal in areas that have experienced underinvestment over time.

Participants also highlighted disparities between newer and older recreation facilities and questioned whether there is a consistent standard guiding improvements. City staff acknowledged this concern, noting that facilities built decades ago, were built to very different standards than modern facilities. Staff emphasized modern facilities are focused on flexible, multi-purpose designs. This modern approach aims to ensure new and renewed facilities are accessible, flexible, and of high quality for users.

Support for co-location

Participants expressed strong support for co-location as a positive direction, emphasizing the value of integrating recreation facilities with libraries and cultural spaces. Participants supported the use of lobbies and other open, shared-use and drop-in spaces as informal “community living rooms.” Co-located spaces were described as opportunities to foster belonging by offering welcoming, everyday amenities such as access to food, free Wi-Fi, flexible seating, and free or low-barrier programming. These elements were seen as critical to enabling social connection and community life beyond structured recreation.

City staff noted alignment with this approach within current planning directions, recognizing the role of recreation facilities as multi-purpose community hubs. They highlighted the importance of balancing evolving community needs such as introducing new and emerging activities while managing equitable access for both existing and new users.

Food and beverage options

Participants emphasized that access to affordable food and beverage options in community recreation centres and park spaces is essential to supporting longer stays and making co-located hubs welcoming and functional for families and diverse communities.

Safety concerns in parks

Participants highlighted concerns about limited parkland in high-density areas, where small parks serve a large quantity of residents and play a critical role in daily life. Safety and security challenges were raised as significant barriers to use, particularly for seniors and other residents who may otherwise rely on nearby parks for recreation, social connection, and well-being. Encampments were noted as a factor that may impact resident’s perception of park safety.

Participants emphasized the importance of reflecting these realities within future park planning and policy directions, including the PLS, to better acknowledge park conditions and clarify how parks intersect with housing, health, and social supports. There was also strong support for continued trauma-informed training for community centre staff, recognizing that relationship-building and de-escalation skills can help improve shared use of park spaces and contribute to safer, more welcoming environments for all users.

Support for “protect” as a guiding principle for the Parkland Strategy

Participants were generally supportive of the additional principle “Protect” to reflect reconciliation and land stewardship.

Proposal to include hydro lands that have park uses, in the Parkland Strategy

In addition to hydro corridors, a participant encouraged the City to explore more adaptive re-use sites including railway corridors and other industrial sites that could be re-naturalized.

EDAG Meeting 3

Meeting details

The third EDAG meeting took place on January 22, 2026, from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. via Teams. 14 EDAG members attended the meeting representing the following organizations or groups:

- **8 80 Cities**
- **Holland Bloorview**
- **Lived Experience Advisory Group – Poverty Reduction Strategy**
- **North York Community House**
- **Parasport Ontario**
- **Park People**
- **Parks and Recreation Disability Steering Committee**
- **Seniors Forum**
- **Social Planning Toronto**
- **The Neighbourhood Link**
- **Toronto Accessible Sports Council**
- **Tropicana Community Services**
- **United Way Greater Toronto**
- **YMCA**

The presentation to the EDAG included:

- Refined potential actions to include in the updated PLS and PRFP, which were informed, in-part, through the Phase 1 and Phase 2 engagements.

Discussion highlights

The following section offers a summary of feedback received during the meeting. The overarching discussion questions for both the PLS and PRFP were:

- Is there anything we missed related to?

- What we heard
- Key themes to address
- Potential actions we're proposing
 - Did more people feel like the actions were on the right track?

Participants asked how cash-in-lieu parkland funds are allocated when land is not dedicated through development, including what portion must remain near the development site and how “vicinity” is defined. City staff explained that the framework for parkland dedication is governed by provincial legislation, with some discretion at the municipal level. Funds received are divided into different allocation categories, including portions that must remain near the development and portions that can be used more broadly across districts or citywide.

City staff clarified that “vicinity” is generally interpreted as within approximately two kilometres of the development site. This approach is intended to balance growth-related impacts locally while also allowing investment in areas of the city with lower growth but significant parkland needs. Remaining funds may be directed toward parkland acquisition, park improvements, or facility development in accordance with established allocation rules.

Accessibility considerations in parkland analysis

Participants asked whether accessibility, particularly for people using mobility devices, is explicitly considered in parkland access and priority mapping, noting concerns about steep slopes and ravine conditions. City staff confirmed that accessibility is factored into the analysis, including slope thresholds that determine whether a park entrance can reasonably be considered accessible within the standard walking or rolling distance.

City staff noted that access is not solely based on proximity but also on whether the physical conditions allow safe and usable entry. They further indicated that refinements to parkland access analysis are being explored as part of the strategy update to better reflect these considerations.

Improving utilizations of existing space

Participants questioned why recreation spaces remain unavailable to community groups even when facilities appear underused at certain times. City staff acknowledged this concern and agreed that improving utilization of existing space is a priority, particularly in the context of limited capital funding and growing demand.

City staff noted that updating how space is scheduled and accessed during non-peak hours is an important operational consideration and aligns with broader directions in the PRFP to maximize year-round and full-day use of facilities.

Awareness and communication of programs and services

Participants observed that many residents and community groups lack awareness of available programs, facilities, and opportunities to access recreation space; a clear promotional plan from the City would help increase awareness. City staff confirmed that limited awareness emerged as a significant theme through engagement, particularly among communities not traditionally reached through standard City communication channels.

City staff indicated that improving wayfinding, signage, outreach, and program communication are key areas of focus moving forward. This includes making it easier for residents to understand how to access facilities, programs, and equipment by increasing supports for online and in-person program registration.

Co-location and proactive partnerships

Participants asked about the City's approach to co-location and partnerships, particularly whether the City intends to proactively pursue partnerships rather than relying on external organizations to initiate requests. City staff confirmed that this represents a deliberate shift in direction, emphasizing a more proactive role for the City in identifying and advancing partnership opportunities.

City staff noted that co-location, whether programmatic or physical, is increasingly important given funding constraints, land scarcity, and the need to maximize community benefit from public assets. The PRFP is intended to support this shift by embedding partnership considerations earlier in planning and decision-making processes.

Equitable allocation of facility space

Participants raised questions about how access to facilities is prioritized, particularly where long-standing users dominate space permitting, which may lead some equity-deserving community groups to experience barriers to permit facility space.

City staff explained that while the PRFP does not directly change permit fee structures or allocation policies, it is intended to surface these issues and support future operational updates. Staff noted that efforts are underway within recreation operations to improve utilization during underused daytime hours and to make processes to access recreation spaces more user-friendly.

Project Team

City of Toronto

Parks and Recreation Division-Strategic Project Implementation and Community Engagement Branch

- Annely Zonena - Director

Parks and Recreation Facilities Plan Unit

- Matt Bentley - Sr. Project Manager
- Alex Lavasidis - Project Officer
- Vanessa Cipriani - Project Officer
- Amanda Rooney - Planner

Parkland Strategy Unit

- Danielle DeMarsh - Sr. Project Manager
- Toni Papa - Planner
- Erica Beasley - Planner

Community Engagement Unit

- Celina Chong – Sr. Public Consultation Coordinator

Consulting Teams

- **Monteith Brown Planning Consultants**, Technical Consulting Team
- **Ridge Road Training and Consulting**, Indigenous Communities Engagement Lead

EDAG Members Attendance Meeting 2

- **8 80 Cities**, Amanda O'Rourke
- **Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services**, Chimu Titi
- **Building Roots**, Amy Rumbolt
- **For Youth Initiative**, Jasmine Indradarshini
- **Girls', Youth & Family Programs, YWCA Toronto**, Rachael Lawrence
- **Lived Experience Advisory Group – Poverty Reduction Strategy**, Erim Yalcin
- **North York Community House**, Cutty Duncan
- **OutSport Toronto**, Shawn Sheridan
- **Parasport Ontario**, James Murphy
- **Park People**, Sarah Munro
- **Seniors Forum**, Rama Fayaz
- **Social Planning Toronto**, Melissa Wong
- **Toronto Accessible Sports Council**, Jonathan Wood
- **United Way Greater Toronto**, Sidhra Yakub

EDAG Members Attendance Meeting 3

- **8 80 Cities**, Amanda O'Rourke
- **Holland Bloorview**, Timothy Ross
- **Lived Experience Advisory Group – Poverty Reduction Strategy**, Erim Yalcin
- **North York Community House**, Cutty Duncan
- **Parasport Ontario**, James Murphy
- **Park People**, Sarah Munro
- **Parks and Recreation Disability Steering Committee**, Keith Rashid
- **Seniors Forum**, Rama Fayaz
- **Social Planning Toronto**, Melissa Wong
- **The Neighbourhood Link**, Khalid Barra
- **Toronto Accessible Sports Council**, Jonathan Wood
- **Tropicana Community Services**, Chigozirim (Chigo) Nkwo
- **United Way Greater Toronto**, Stephon Nibbs
- **YMCA**, Janie Romoff