

CAC Meeting #4 Design Workshop Summary Report

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

City of Toronto – Parks and Recreation
September 23, 2025





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Introduction

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.

Meeting Format

The meeting was hosted in person at The 519 located at 519 Church Street on September 23, 2025 from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. The meeting was focused on engaging members of the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) and gathering their insights on the latest three proposed design options. 11 CAC members attended, representing the following organizations:

- City of Toronto Park Operations Staff
- Meeting with the Dog Park Association
- Meetings with Patrick Fahn (AIDS Memorial Architect)
- The 519 and EarlyON
- The Trans Women's Association
- The AIDS Memorial Community Workshop
- The Trans+ Community Workshop

The feedback and information generated from this meeting will inform the preferred design of the Barbara Hall Park Improvements, which will be shared with the community for further input in Phase 3 of the community engagement process.

The meeting consisted of one voting 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 broken into two rounds. In the first round, table groups were asked to rank their preferred draft design options based on how well they believe the options apply the vision, guiding principles, and big moves. Tables were then asked to deliberate on and record their top six preferred features within all draft design options. In round two, CAC members moved tables and were asked to discuss park comfort at night, and whether closing the park at night is suitable considering the community's diverse culture and needs.

Initial Plenary Discussion

Before the workshop activities began, the three design options were presented in greater detail to the participants. Once the design options were shown, the floor was open to CAC members for initial clarifications and feedback. The summary of the question answer period is as follows:

Community identity

CAC members emphasized that Barbara Hall Park is recognized as “the queer park”—a core space for the surrounding 2SLGBTQ+ community that includes, but is not limited to, the AIDS and Trans Memorials. Some felt that the draft design concepts over emphasize the memorial elements, suggesting that the memorial's presence could be conveyed through alternative gestures rather than overt symbolism such as the red ribbon paved motif.

Questions were raised about the origin of the ribbon concept, to which the design team noted it had been a recurring theme in prior community engagement. Concerns were expressed that the red pathway may not be legible as a ribbon from ground level, limiting its interpretive value. It was suggested that an informational or interpretive plaque could help communicate the park's history and meaning to visitors unfamiliar with the AIDS Memorial.

Several participants also shared that the red ribbon remains an important and emotionally resonant symbol for those who experienced the AIDS epidemic firsthand. It represents remembrance, loss, and resilience, and its inclusion continues to hold deep meaning for older generations. The conversation highlighted a generational difference in how the AIDS Memorial, and its symbolism, are understood and valued within the community. While the older generation expressed the importance of the red ribbon as a wayfinding design tool to lead people to the AIDS Memorial, a fixture of Barbara Hall Park, some CAC members noted that some people living with HIV and AIDS, such as youth, want to be celebrated in the park while respecting and providing space for people to commemorate their loved ones at the AIDS Memorial.

Park design and programming

Clarification was requested regarding the consistency of materials and amenities across the three draft design options. The design team confirmed that all options feature the same metal fence meeting the existing brick wall. The proposed café and washroom area are currently shown at their smallest footprint but could be expanded, referencing Rainbow Park in Vancouver as a precedent.

Landscape and tree preservation

Feedback also focused on the balance between hardscape and greenspace. While some participants supported the clarity and openness of Option 2, there were concerns about the potential loss of tree canopy and the resulting shift toward a more urban, hardscaped environment. The consultant team explained that accessibility improvements require grade adjustments, which will inevitably impact tree retention, however, it was noted that efforts will be made to preserve existing healthy trees wherever possible.

Planting decisions will be made in later phases once soil conditions are better understood. It was noted that many existing canopy trees along the southern edge are in poor condition or are invasive species and may need to be removed to accommodate new fencing.

City Staff noted that a site walk with Urban Forestry is being planned to assess the health of key trees, including the large birch, to determine feasible retention strategies. The City committed to updating CAC members on Urban Forestry's analysis and decisions regarding tree removal. The City's replacement policy will guide mitigation, requiring a 3:1 replacement ratio for park trees and 1:1 for private trees—with compensation funds directed to new plantings on- or off-site.

Workshop Activities

Initial design reactions

Each design option was displayed on the screen with the goal being to have participants move towards the design option that resonated with them the most. The objective of this initial round was to have participants move instinctively and not overthink their decision. The following was identified:

- One (1) participant selected design Option 1
- Three (3) participants selected design Option 2
- Four (4) participants selected design Option 3
- A few participants were unsure and did not vote, wanting to review the draft designs further and deliberate with CAC members before choosing the preferred option

World café

The world café activity was broken into two rounds, with round one focusing on how effectively each design option achieved the overall vision and guiding principles. Round two of the world café activity focused on facilitating a discussion about an idea to close the park at night to get the CAC's recommendation on whether or not this idea is appropriate to explore further.

Round one began with a two-minute group discussion to review how effectively each design option achieved the overall vision and guiding principles. This was followed by a 15-minute deliberation period, during which participants ranked the three design options from most to least preferred. Next, participants engaged in a three-minute discussion to identify their preferred park features across all design options. Building on this, groups spent 15 minutes identifying their top six features, noting which design option each feature came from. Each group then selected a representative to record their table's rankings and priorities on the chart paper provided. The collected feedback from this session would help guide the refinement of design options in the next phase of engagement. Once this was complete, participants were encouraged to change tables to engage and deliberate with other CAC members. After round one, the following information was identified:

Preferred features

In no particular order, the following were the overall results of preferred features from all CAC participants:

- Small dog park space
- Lighting and comfort
- Cultural and identity
- Open space and layout
- Amenities
- Play and recreation

CAC members highlighted a strong desire for both recreation opportunities and installations to share the neighbourhood's cultural identity in the park.

The proposed new small dog park stood out as a common priority as an addition to the existing dog-off leash area located in the south corridor of the park. Lighting was also prioritized by every table group as a key safety feature to ensure activity at night is visible. All table groups valued open space, green space to spend long periods of time in the park to host picnics and catch up with friends, (i.e., picnics and friend catchups), as well as accessible pathways and wayfinding throughout the park.

World café round one

Across the three table groups, participants discussed their preferred design options and park features, ranking each option based on how well it aligned with the project's vision, guiding principles, and big moves.

Group 1 summary

Group 1 ranked the design options in the following order:

1. Design Option 2
2. Design Option 3
3. Design Option 1

Their preferred features included:

- open lawn and lighting from Option 2
- playground from Option 2
- North East corner from Option 2
- dog off-leash area from Option 2

- heritage elements from Option 2
- 2SLGBTQ+ identity elements Option 2

Group 2 summary

Group 2 ranked the design options in the following order:

1. Design Option 2
2. Design Option 1
3. Design Option 3

Their preferred features included:

- open lawn and lighting from Option 2
- playground from Option 2
- North East corner from Option 2
- dog off-leash area from Option 2
- heritage elements from Option 2
- 2SLGBTQ+ identity elements Option 2

Group 3 summary

Group 3 ranked the design options in the following order:

1. Design Option 1
2. Design Option 3
3. Design Option 2

Their preferred features included:

- unobstructed open space on the North side from Option 2
- splitting the South side between 2SLGBTQ+ art piece entrances and a new small dog park from Option 2
- small dog park from Option 2
- garbage to stay where it is from Options 1 and 3
- consistent lighting and maintained lighting
- improved seating and sidewalks from Option 2 from all design options
- activations from all design options

Overall outcomes

Across all groups, the following shared outcomes emerged:

Design option preferences

- **Design Option 2** was the most consistently preferred choice, ranking first in Groups 1 and 2.
- **Design Option 1** had mixed support, ranking first for Group 3 but *third* for Group 1 and *second* for Group 2.
- **Design Option 3** was consistently ranked in the middle or lowest positions; however, it was seen as a source of desirable identity and memorial elements.

Widely supported park features

Whether open-area lighting or catenary lighting, there was strong agreement that lighting must be consistent, well-maintained, and contribute to both safety and atmosphere. The proposed new small dog park, extending from the existing dog-off leash area, were referenced in all three groups, though taken from different design options. Identity-affirming features were supported across all three groups, including 2SLGBTQ+ heritage interpretation elements from Options 1 and 3, the trans art piece, and the red ribbon, demonstrating a strong desire to maintain and enhance the park's 2SLGBTQ+ identity. There was strong support for open and unobstructed spaces, particularly on the North side, with multiple groups valuing the openness and flexibility offered in Option 2. Heritage and memorial protection were identified as priorities, including interest in the AIDS Memorial buffer in Option 3 and general heritage elements in Option 2. Activation and amenities, such as seating, sidewalks, washrooms, café elements, and recreation features like ping-pong tables were noted across groups.

Emotional and social context

Group 2 explicitly raised concerns about social issues and displacement, highlighting feelings of loss. One participant noted, "it feels like my queer park has been taken away from me". Even though other groups did not explicitly state this, the shared emphasis on identity, safety (lighting), and inclusive programming suggests a broader consensus that the park must respond to social conditions impacting 2SLGBTQ+ communities.

World café round two

For the second round of the world café activity, the project team introduced an idea to gate the park and close it at night. The goal of the discussion was to develop a collective recommendation on whether to further explore this idea as a viable solution for Barbara Hall Park. Prior to the group discussion period, CAC members raised

immediately strong concern about the negative symbolism associated with closing a space for 2SLGBTQ+ people considering that the community culture strives to be welcoming and inclusive, as well as the socio-political climate surrounding 2SLGBTQ+ policies in North America in 2025-2026. Another top concern was raised about support for the unhoused community in the park and emergency operations. After CAC members shared their initial concerns, table groups engaged in further discussion on the topic, reviewing the considerations to bring forward in a collective recommendation. During the final 15-minute recommendation writing activity, each group drafted a short paragraph stating their support or opposition to closing the park at night, referencing the key considerations that informed their position. A representative from each group was assigned to share their recommendation and supporting rationale in the report back to all CAC members and the project team. The feedback gathered from this activity will help inform the next phase of decision-making on park operations and design. After round 2, the following was discussed with regards to gating the Park:

The CAC members unanimously recommended against gating Barbara Hall Park, expressing deep concern that such a measure would undermine the park's role as a vital refuge and gathering space for the 2SLGBTQ+ community, unhoused individuals, and others facing social vulnerability. Drawing from lived experiences and community anecdotes such as early morning running groups cheering each other on and nighttime vigils held by 2SLGBTQ+ residents. They emphasized that the park is animated by informal, inclusive interactions that a fence would disrupt. Members highlighted that the proposed gate would not only create symbolic and physical barriers, but also introduce troubling power dynamics around access and control, contradicting the welcoming ethos of nearby institutions like The 519. They stressed that fencing would reduce equity, shift vulnerable behaviours to surrounding streets, and alienate those seeking safety and connection, including newcomers from the U.S. seeking refuge. The proposal was seen as incompatible with the park's vision and the broader values of love, openness, and community care. As part of their recommendation, the CAC decided that this idea should not be explored any further or raised again in future public consultation meetings.

Next Steps

The City appreciates all of the CAC members for their commitment, candidness, lived and professional experience, and collective deliberation during Meeting 4, and throughout this engagement process.

The City is currently in the process of coordinating with the external design team to update and revise the three (3) design options for Barbara Hall 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 to explore design options (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 Phase 3 of the engagement process.

Acknowledgements

City of Toronto

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- Celina Chong, Senior Coordinator, Public Consultation
- Jose Marti, Coordinator, Public Consultation
- Emily Ricketts, Conservator

Consulting team

DIALOG Design

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Ambit Gender Diversity Consulting

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

GBCA Architects

- Emad Ghattas, Principal, GBCA Cultural Heritage Advisor

Community Advisory Committee

CAC Representatives

- Curran Stikuts, Director, Advocacy & Strategic Communications, The 519
- Connie Langille, Chair, Placemaking Committee, Church Wellesley Neighbourhood Association
- Jaret Serada, Executive Director, Church-Wellesley Village BIA
- Larry Rubin, Barbara Hall Park Dog Park Association Member
- Brian Martin, Progress Place Resident

- Monica Forrester, Circle of Cedar Singers Member
- Sam Katz, AIDS Memorial Advocate
- Frank Hull, Participant in Rainbow Seniors Program
- Kelvin Kung, Board Member, ArQuives
- Jaipreet Kohli, Gerstein Crisis Centre
- Less Brown, Gerstein Crisis Centre

Appendix A: World Café Activity Table Group Chart Paper

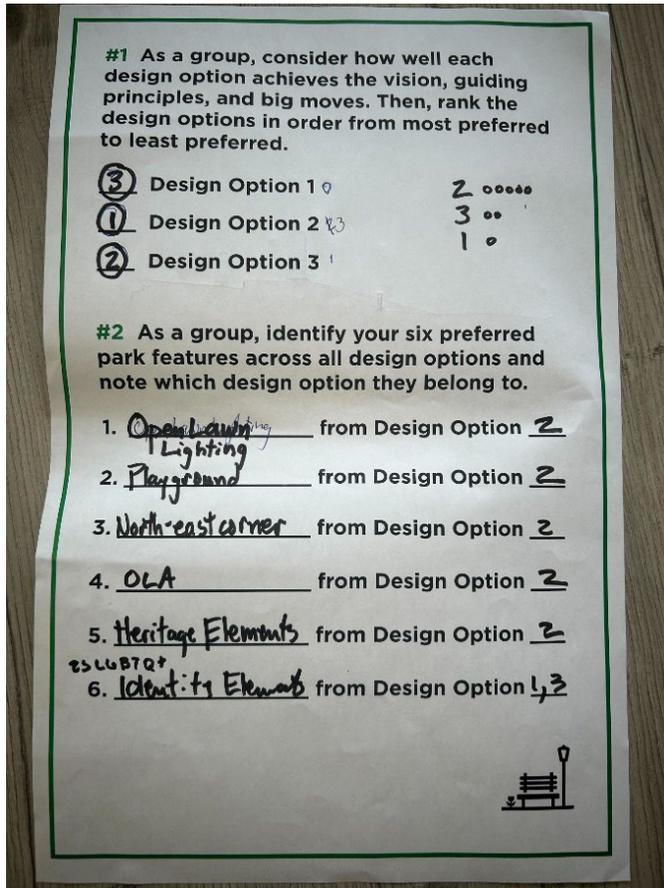


Figure 1: Group 1 chart paper, World Café round one

Question 1: As a group, consider how well each design option achieves the vision, guiding principles, and big moves. Then, rank the design options in order from most preferred to least preferred.

- Rank 1st: Design Option 2
- Rank 2nd: Design Option 3
- Rank 3rd: Design Option 1

Question 2: As a group, identify your six preferred park features across all design options and note which design option they belong to.

- 1: Open lawn lighting from Design Option 2

- 2: Playground from Design Option 2
- 3: Northeast corner from Design Option 2
- 4: OLA from Design Option 2
- 5: Heritage Elements from Design Option 2
- 6: 2SLGBTQ+ Identity Elements from Design Option 1 and 3

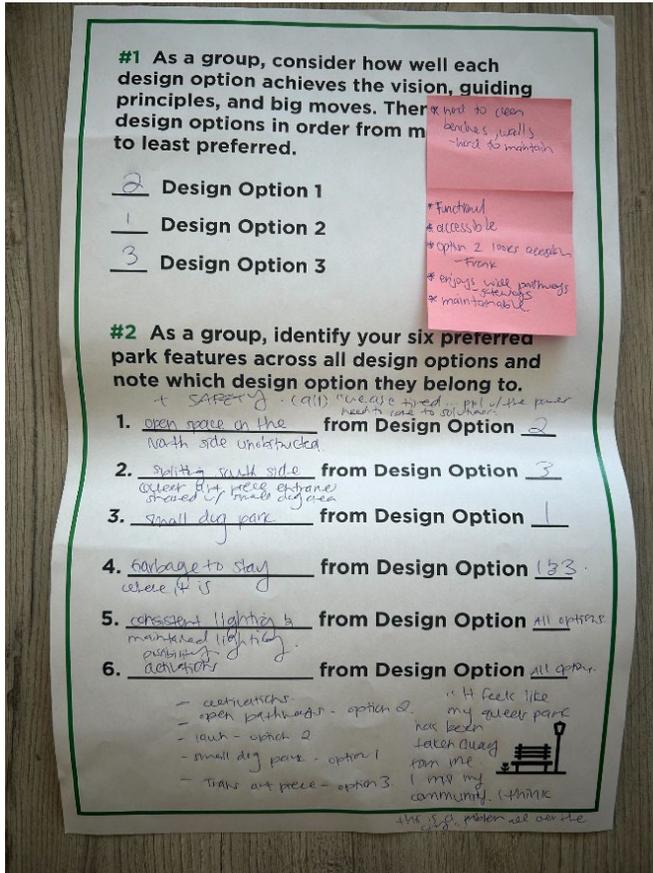


Figure 2: Group 2 chart paper, World Café round one

Question 1: As a group, consider how well each design option achieves the vision, guiding principles, and big moves. Then, rank the design options in order from most preferred to least preferred.

- Rank 1st: Design Option 2
- Rank 2nd: Design Option 1
- Rank 3rd: Design Option 3

Question 2: As a group, identify your six preferred park features across all design options and note which design option they belong to.

- 1: Open Space from Design Option 2
- 2: Splitting South Side from Design Option 3
- 3: Small Dog Park from Design Option 1
- 4: Garbage to say from Design Option 3
- 5: Consistent lighting from Design Option (All Options)
- 6: Activations from Design Option (All Options)

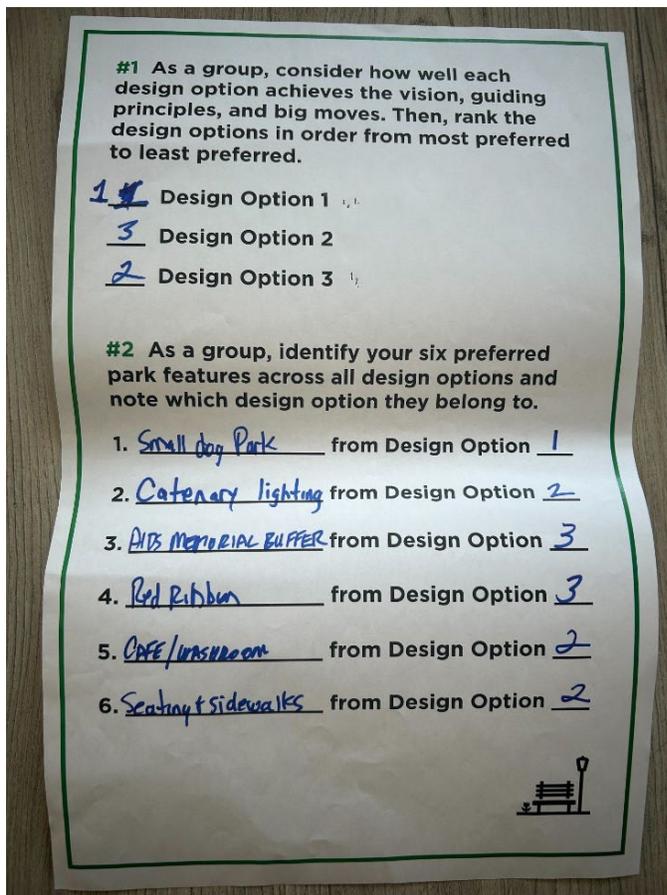


Figure 3: Group 3 chart paper, World Café round one

Question 1: As a group, consider how well each design option achieves the vision, guiding principles, and big moves. Then, rank the design options in order from most preferred to least preferred.

- Rank 1st: Design Option 1
- Rank 2nd: Design Option 3
- Rank 3rd: Design Option 2

Question 2: As a group, identify your six preferred park features across all design options and note which design option they belong to.

- 1: Small Dog Park from Design Option 1
- 2: Catenary Lighting from Design Option 2
- 3: AIDS Memorial buffer from Design Option 3
- 4: Red Ribbon from Design Option 3
- 5: Café/Washroom from Design Option 2
- 6: Seating and Sidewalks from Design Option 2

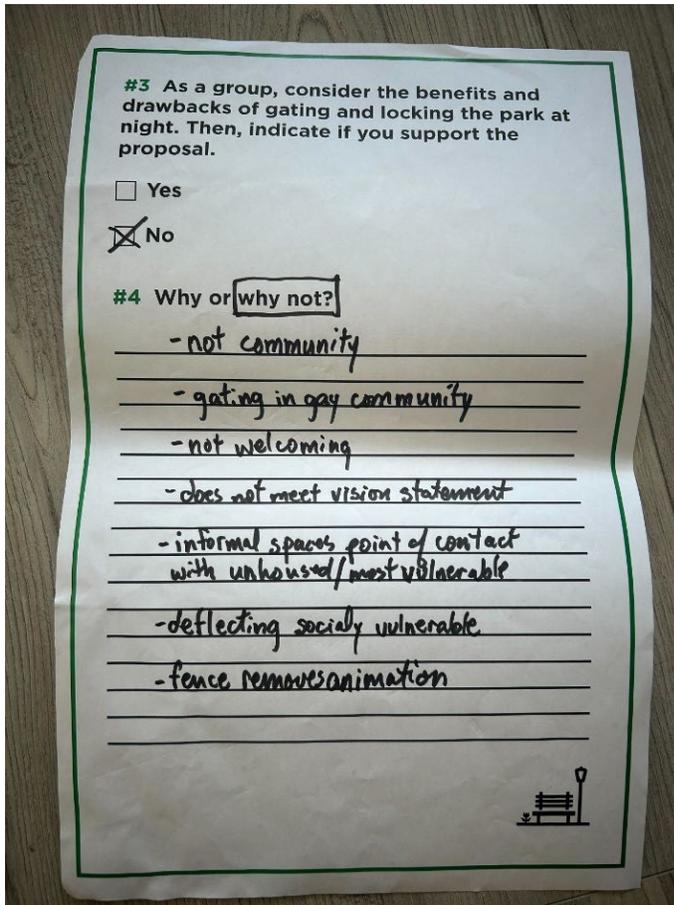


Figure 4: Group 1 chart paper, World Café round two

Question 3: As a group, consider the benefits and drawbacks of gating and locking the park at night. Then, indicate if you support the proposal:

- Yes: ()
- No: (X) – “No” was selected

Question 4: Why or why not?

- Not community
- Gating in gay community

- Not welcoming
- Does not meet vision statement
- Informal spaces point of contact with unhoused/most vulnerable
- Deflecting socially vulnerable
- Fence removes animation

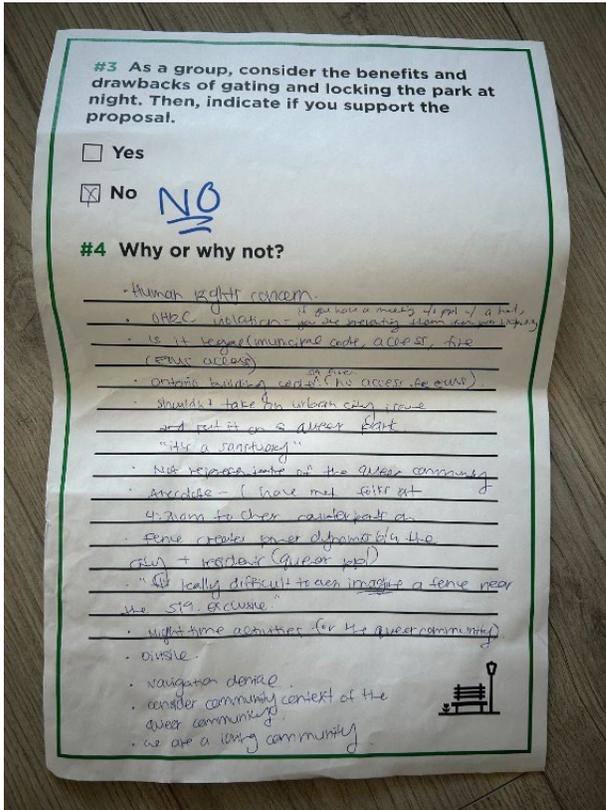


Figure 5: Group 2 chart paper, World Café round two
Question 3: As a group, consider the benefits and drawbacks of gating and locking the park at night. Then, indicate if you support the proposal:

- Yes: ()
- No: (X) – “No” was selected

Question 4: Why or why not?

- Human Rights concern
- OHRC violation
- Is it legal
- Shouldn't take an urban city issue and put it on a queer park. “it's a sanctuary”
- Not representative of the queer community

- Fence creates power dynamic

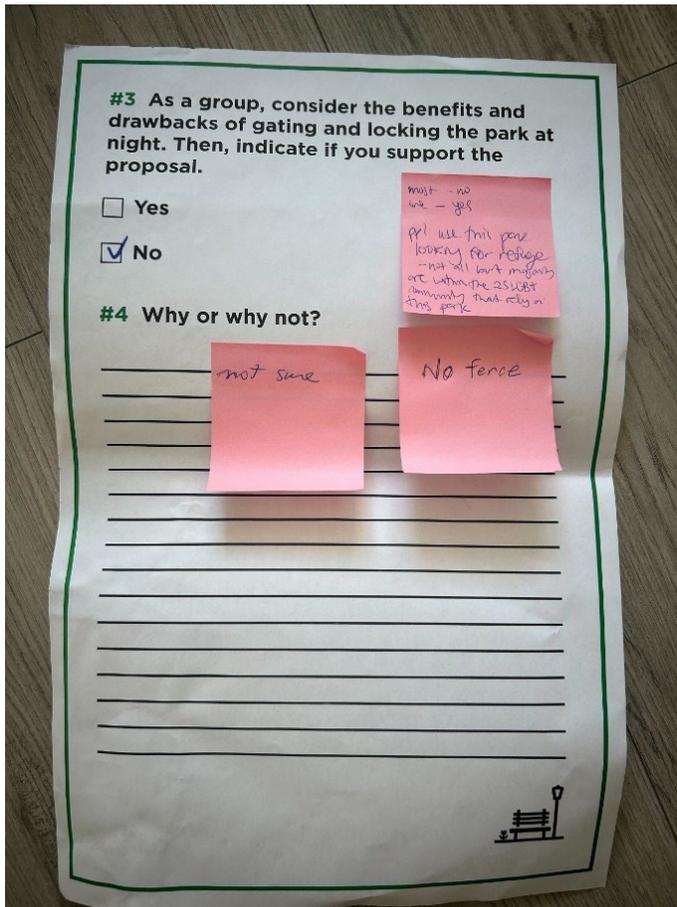


Figure 6: Group 3 chart paper, World Café round two
Question 3: As a group, consider the benefits and drawbacks of gating and locking the park at night. Then, indicate if you support the proposal:

- Yes: ()
- No: (X) – “No” was selected

Question 4: Why or why not?

- People use this park looking for refuge
 - Not all but majority are within the 2SLGBTQ+ community that rely on this park
- No Fence
- Not Sure

Appendix B: Meeting Agenda

Date: Tuesday, September 23, 2025

Time: 6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

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

Event Objectives:

1. To go over the presentation deck with the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) and establish a shared understanding of the current and overall process.
2. To discuss the three (3) design options in further detail with the CAC for additional comments. The comments received on the three (3) design options will further inform future revisions to the latest design options.

Agenda

1. **Welcome and Introductions** – 6:00 p.m. to 6:05 p.m.
 - Land Acknowledgement
 - African Ancestral Acknowledgement
2. **Icebreaker** – 6:05 p.m. to 6:10 p.m.
3. **Timeline and Project Overview** – 6:00 p.m. to 6:15 p.m.
4. **What We Heard in Phase 2 to Date** – 6:15 p.m. to 6:20 p.m.
5. **Design Options and Precedent Images** – 6:20 p.m. to 6:50 p.m.
6. **Initial Reactions and Questions on Proposed Design Options** – 6:50 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.
7. **Break** – 7:00 p.m. to 7:05 p.m.
8. **World Café Round 1** – 7:05 p.m. to 7:45 p.m.
9. **Report Back: World Café Round 1** – 7:45 p.m. to 7:55 p.m.
10. **World Café Round 2** – 7:55 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
11. **Report Back: World Café Round 2** – 8:30 p.m. to 8:55 p.m.
12. **Final Remark and Next Steps** – 8:55 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.