Focus Group Summary: Parks, Trees & Nature

Queen’s Park North Revitalization

Community Engagement Phase 3: Setting the Direction March 24, 2026

TORONTO

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Introduction

On March 24, 2026, the City hosted the third focus group with representatives of organizations with trees and nature interests via Zoom. The meeting was part of Phase 3 (of 3) of the community engagement process to help inform the Queen's Park North Revitalization.

The purpose of the meeting was to respond to the community's interest in understanding the results of detailed tree impact analysis completed to date, show how this has informed the draft park design, and what work remains to be completed, including an update on the development of a forest management plan. Key points shared by participants are summarized below. Text *in italics* reflects responses from the QPN Project Team, where provided.

Attendance

Participating organizations: Annex Residents' Association, Bay Cloverhill Community Association, Church Wellesley Neighbourhood Association, Friends of Queen's Park North, Grange Community Association, Harbord Village Residents' Association, Toronto Field Naturalists, Toronto Public Space Committee, University of Toronto Forestry Faculty**,** independent consulting arborists.

Queen's Park North Revitalization Project team: City of Toronto, Janet Rosenberg & Studio, Dougan Ecology, Cohen & Master, 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 was shared with participants in draft for review before being finalized.

Big picture takeaway

1. **There was consistent emphasis that the Forest Management Plan (FMP) must be the foundational document that determines what design is appropriate, not one that adapts to design decisions already advanced.** Participants repeatedly described the FMP as "the key to this project" and stressed that without complete baseline information – tree condition, soil condition, appropriate Tree Protection Zones (TPZs) based on dripline and root structure – it is not possible to responsibly evaluate or endorse any design elements, locations, or construction impacts. They said that earlier stages of the project felt premature because design ideas advanced before this foundational work was completed. *The project team acknowledged the central role of the FMP and clarified that it is intended to inform design rather than fit a predetermined design. The team emphasized that work is iterative, that understanding continues to evolve, and that the design has shifted and will continue to shift as forest data improves.*
2. **There was appreciation for the seriousness being applied to tree and forest issues, alongside strong concerns about timing, alignment, and process clarity.** Many participants welcomed the strengthened focus on tree protection and forestry expertise – particularly the retention of Philip van Wassenaer as the Consulting Urban Forester – which they described as a critical and positive step for the project. His involvement was characterized as "heartening," with participants noting his dual expertise as an urban forester and arborist and his experience working in complex urban and construction contexts. Participants emphasized that having Philip involved early, alongside arborists, ecologists, and existing consultants, improves confidence that tree protection, root systems, soil health, and long-term forest resilience will be taken seriously, including planning 15–25 years into the future and beyond. They expressed a clear expectation that his expertise would meaningfully influence decisions before major project elements are approved. At the same time, participants stressed that this confidence depends on transparency, proper sequencing of analysis and design, and allowing sufficient time to "do this right."

Feedback related to timeline

1. **Strong concern that the April 22 staff reporting deadline and May 6 Infrastructure and Environment Committee meeting date do not allow sufficient time for the depth of work required (including meaningful forest analysis, scope development, and integration of community feedback), and emphasized that transparency and clear feedback loops are essential under these conditions.** Participants described the process as feeling rushed for no apparent reason and warned that current deadlines risk driving premature decisions that undermine long-term forest protection and trust. They called for slowing down or pursuing Council deferral (described as a common and appropriate mechanism to allow responsible analysis) and flagged that without sufficient forestry work completed, they would be forced to depute against the project. Participants also asked how input from different communities and stakeholder groups would be synthesized, reported back, and reflected in decisions, stressing that seeing how feedback is carried forward is critical to maintaining confidence in the process. *The project team explained that current timelines are based on existing Council direction and that staff must work toward those instructions. They explained that Council will be asked to consider a conceptual framework and core elements of the Forest Management Plan (not detailed or construction-ready designs) at the May 6 Committee meeting, with many decisions remaining subject to continued collaboration with the community. Engagement with this group is intended to be ongoing and iterative, extending beyond Committee and Council meetings.*

   Specifically, the project team committed to:

   a. ***Preparing and circulating a written summary of participant feedback from this meeting**, documenting what participants said should be included in the scope of work for the FMP.*

   b. ***Sharing a draft scope of work for the Forest Management Plan electronically** with this group, so participants can review it.*

   c. ***Reconvening with participants to present and discuss the emerging or "core" elements of the Forest Management Plan** (date TBD) and explain how early forest analysis, professional input, and emerging FMP directions are informing what staff will report to Committee, and to ensure participants understand what is, and what is not, being advanced at that stage.*

   d. ***Continuing engagement with this group beyond Council milestones**, including additional meetings as the FMP develops further, and during later stages such as detailed design, implementation planning, and long-term maintenance planning.*

2. **Conducting the work concurrently should not mean compromise.** While participants acknowledged that some work can occur concurrently, they emphasized that concurrency must not undermine the integrity of the FMP or allow irreversible impacts to proceed before proper analysis. *The project team said that advancing the*

Forest Management Plan (FMP) alongside other project work is intended to improve coordination and integration, not to shortcut analysis or diminish the role of forest data in decision-making. They acknowledged that the FMP will not be finalized before the May 6 Infrastructure & Environment Committee meeting but said that sufficient core elements can be developed to responsibly inform upcoming staff reporting. Council will be asked to consider conceptual frameworks rather than detailed or construction-ready designs.

Feedback related to the scope of work for the Urban Forest Management Plan

The following summarizes what participants said they would like to see reflected in the scope of work for the Forest Management Plan. There were participants who said that the starting point for the FMP scope should request assessment of the park as it exists today, not retrofit analysis to support the proposed park design. They said that these are two completely different things and that only the former is acceptable.

Advice for the City and project team on what to consider for the FMP Scope of Work included:

1. **Clearly explain and define the role of the consulting urban forester and ensure strong, coordinated involvement of qualified forestry and ecological professionals throughout the FMP process.** This includes clarity on how the consulting forester would relate to the City, existing consultants, arborists, and ecologists? What authority and influence the role would have? And how the FMP would support long-term forest integrity rather than short-term design outcomes. They stressed that professional foresters, arborists, and ecologists must be directly involved in defining, reviewing, and implementing the FMP, noting that without clear roles and early professional input, the process is fragile and risks irreversible impacts before problems are recognized.
2. **Deliver detailed baseline mapping.** Participants would like to see accurate mapping of drip lines, the true extent of tree roots, soil conditions, compaction, and tree condition as the first step. In terms of timing, they said this information must precede design decisions and form the basis for identifying where intervention is appropriate. They stressed that this information is necessary to clearly identify "no-go," "go," and conditional areas, noting that once elements appear in drawings, the project becomes perceived as committed and difficult to reverse.
3. **Determine the "appropriate" Tree Protection Zones (TPZs).** The bylaw TPZs represent minimum standards and are not appropriate for large, old, or senescing *(the biological aging process characterized by the gradual deterioration of functional characteristics)* trees. Participants said that roots extend far beyond drip lines and that feeder roots are easily damaged. The connection between TPZs, understory plantings, and the forest ecosystem and tree health should also be addressed, including how it will be protected over time.

4. **Complete a comprehensive construction impact analysis.** Protection is not only about where features are placed, but how they are built. Detailed assessment of construction methods, equipment access, staging areas, truck routes, excavation, and long-term impacts on roots and soils must also be considered.
5. **Assess soil health, structure, and long-term maintenance.** Participants raised specific concerns about ongoing soil compaction, loss of soil structure, and infrastructure impacts—particularly from subway tunnels—describing these factors as significant contributors to long-term tree stress that also affect soil aggregates, insects, and the broader soil ecosystem. They asked whether vibration-related stress and compaction have been analyzed and included in the plan. *The project team acknowledged that this has not yet been completed and said that the Forest Management Plan is intended to establish long-term protocols to address soil compaction, soil structure, and ongoing soil health over time.*
6. **Provide guidance related to tree planting, regeneration, and future canopy expansion.** Maintaining existing trees alone is insufficient – participants would like to see planting of additional trees and increasing forest density, particularly given the park's downtown context and the psychological and social value of greenspace.
7. **Identify what special considerations and protections are appropriate for the oldest and most sensitive trees, while balancing this with existing park use patterns.** The largest and oldest trees should receive enhanced protection, including possible physical barriers (e.g., ornamental fencing, planting buffers, interpretive signage) to keep people off sensitive root zone, while also acknowledging that Queen's Park North has established use patterns that need to be respected (e.g., a cruising destination for the queer community). Naturalization and restoration approaches could support both tree protection and existing community use. Consider giving the most valuable trees the highest level of protection and heritage tree designation. *City staff explained that there is currently no formal mechanism to designate heritage trees on City-owned land except when tied to heritage buildings. They said they are introducing a "distinctive tree" category to express intent and provide maximum protection through planning and bylaws.*
8. **Provide guidance related to education and interpretation in the FMP, including analysis of the tree walk.** Participants supported education, storytelling, and interpretation. There were questions about physical interventions like the tree walk or elevated paths and their potential impact on roots. One participant suggested there maybe benefit to an elevated walkway because it could provide protection to root zones. They suggested alternative approaches such as digital tools or remote canopy experiences to avoid root disturbance. *City staff said that feedback on the tree walk has been heard loud and clear and that any interpretive element causing unnecessary impact does not meet project principles.*
9. **Provide guidance on how the FMP will support long-term, intergenerational stewardship.** Participants stressed the need for mechanisms that endure beyond a

single planning cycle. They wanted to know how the project can be structured so that future governments and decision-makers continue to respect and protect the forest 25–30 years from now.

Next Steps

City staff and ERA Architects committed to sharing the draft Statement of Significance and the Framework for a Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) for feedback, with a deadline to submit comments two weeks after the meeting (Monday, April 6, 2026). They thanked participants for their time and thoughtful feedback. Third Party Public committed to sharing a draft summary of the discussion with participants for review before it is finalized.

Attachments

See following pages for additional comments shared by participants, which include:

- Comments from Sue Dexter on behalf of the FOQPN on the Forest Management Plan
- Urban Forest Management Plan Outline for RFP from Elizabeth Sisam

Comments from Sue Dexter on behalf of the FOQPN on the Forest Management Plan

March 17, 2026.

The Forest Management Plan must be completed before any interventions are considered.

We would welcome a collaboration between Janet Rosenberg and Associates with U of T Forestry.

The Management Plan findings will drive short, mid and long term planning for the health of the forest and the trees on the site. It can identify where opportunities exist for enhancements to growing conditions and where tree, vegetation, and soil conditions may be poor and survival predictably short.

Operating from checked inventories, using data from both JRS and University of Toronto, all trees are identified, classified as to condition, situation, soil status, and heritage.

Significant trees will need additional special consideration, particularly in light of anticipated bylaw changes.

A detailed inventory of all trees must be completed to identify their present condition and determine additional care each requires to ensure their long-term optimal health and structural integrity. Interventions could include soil remediation, treatment of disease, selective pruning and installation of cables or braces. The inventory would also identify trees that could eventually be removed and replaced due to declining condition or because they are an undesirable exotic invasive species.

The management plan should identify the required protection zones for each tree in the park. Considering the history and significance of these trees, their protection zones must be greater than the minimum distances outlined by the City of Toronto's Public Tree By-law. Instead, protection zones should be set at a tree's drip-line or double the minimum distance, whichever is greater. This is already the requirement for all trees in ravines. These enhanced guidelines will also plan for remediation and succession.

Survival timeframes for trees would be created within the forest management plan, to provide an ecological-based future direction, including recommendations to revisit the forest every 3-5 years to assess the impact of wind and ice storms and other natural and human disturbance events.

Understory vegetation (shrubs and herbaceous) will also be incorporated into the forest management plan to provide recommendations in consultation with Indigenous colleagues, for complementary ecological plantings in support of the significant heritage trees, their mycorrhizal networks, and enhanced site biodiversity.

Urban Forest Associates, owned by Stephen Smith, is well known for their ecological restoration work on native plantings and would be an excellent advisor.

Whenever possible, significant groupings of trees should be protected from foot traffic and disturbance by installing low decorative fences and/or complementary native plantings to protect roots and allow for nutrient cycling, soil aeration and rehabilitation. And water infiltration.

The Forest Management Plan should be used not just to inform, set clear objectives and direction for the health of the grove over the next 20-50 years I. t will determine where and what interventions need to be made to ensure the health of the forest going forward, minimizing disturbance that will keep the integrity of biodiversity and climate change mitigation for our future well-being.

Queen's Park North – Urban Forest Management Plan Outline for RFP
Background

Purpose: to ensure the best long term plan for the forest at Queen's Park North and allow its ongoing viability to remain the central test to changes that might be proposed

Forest Management Plan

Consultant team

1. Identify all team members and qualifications of those working on this undertaking.

Summary of Information and Analysis

1. Evaluate the recent impact and condition of trees and soil using the tree survey (July 2-29, 2014) prepared by Michael Ormston-Holloway and Tyler Bradt to the tree inventory prepared by Cohen and Master Tree and Shrub Services (October 21, 2024).

   The comparison will demonstrate any impact and decline to the trees during the 12 year period and decline to trees as a result of the 2+ year construction of the new subway entrance in Queen's Park North as well as recorded decline and change over the 10 year period.

2. Provide mapping to illustrate the trunk location and drip-line of all existing trees in the park.

3. Provide mapping to illustrate the extent of the estimated root spread of trees.

4. With information from the TTC, provide mapping to illustrate the zone of construction including staging space that was necessary for the subway entrance project to the north.

5. Determine required protection zones that will ensure no harm for all trees identified in the tree inventory. This will vary from the City of Toronto Minimal tree protection information guidelines including extended protection zones to the drip-lines or beyond for older trees.

6. Provide mapping that illustrates zones where there should be no interference: no construction, no additional pathways, no design alterations.

7. Identify ecologically sound tree care and maintenance practices, establish regular pruning cycles, pest control, yearly tree mitigation plantings, community involvement opportunities, and recommended policies and procedures.

8. Identify trees, that due to their history or condition, warrant permanent protection from foot traffic such as ornamental fences and/or dense native understory plantings.

9. Provide recommendations on the enhancement of the ecological health and functions of the urban forest considering opportunities and constraints evident in the QPN.

10. Complete a thorough investigation of the impacts to trees that could result from any and all aspects of proposed designs for the park, such as excavation, soil compaction, conversion from soft to hard surfaces, changes in grade, alteration of runoff patterns, etc.

11. Provide a management plan with key benchmark dates over the period of time of the maintenance agreement: 5/ 10/ 15/ and 20 years, with surveys every three years for unexpected events.

    This should include identified long term goals including staffing recommendations for:
    - the expansion of the tree canopy by setting achievable tree planting targets
    - the special protection and stewardship needed for the signature trees
    - and evaluation of soil conditions which may change because of increased activities in QPN.

Deliverables:

1. Draft report for review and comment, includes peer review by Forestry faculty from the University of Toronto - turn around 14 days.

2. Final report, digital version complete with appendices and maps and financial projections identifying the cost of required care.

3. Software training to City of Toronto Staff/ University of Toronto Staff responsible for administering the Urban Forestry Management Plan.

4. Dates of deliverables.