

Focus Group Summary: Cultural Heritage

Queen's Park North Revitalization

Community Engagement Phase 3: Setting the Direction

March 23, 2026



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Introduction

On March 23, 2026, the City hosted the third focus group with representatives of organizations with heritage 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 and informing the role of cultural heritage in informing the revitalization of Queen's Park North, specifically the Statement of Significance, Heritage Impact Assessment, connection to natural heritage, including trees and nature, and statues. Key points shared by participants are summarized below. Text *in italics* reflects responses from the QPN Project Team, where provided.

Attendance

Participating organizations: 48th Highlanders of Canada, Annex Residents' Association, Harbord Village Residents' Association, Church Wellesley Neighbourhood Association, Friends of Queen's Park North, Victoria University.

Queen's Park North Revitalization Project team: City of Toronto, Janet Rosenberg & Studio, ERA Architects, Trophic Design, 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 before being finalized.

Overall sentiment

- **Strong support for the information shared by the project team and appreciation for the respectful tone and thoughtful discussion.** Participants were very positive about the meeting, and described it as highly constructive, informative, and exemplary of how the project's engagement should be. They said it was the best meeting they have taken part in for this project. Overall, people felt their knowledge and concerns were genuinely heard and taken seriously.

Feedback on the Statement of Significance

- **The Statement of Significance should clearly articulate forest character as a defining feature of Queen's Park North, with particular attention to old growth trees and the forest systems that create glades and openings.** Participants said that character lies not in individual trees alone, but in the broader forest systems and conditions that shape these spaces over time. They cautioned that weak or incomplete language in the Statement of Significance could undermine long-term decision-making, particularly given that policy wording will guide management and design long after individual trees change. Participants connected this to the importance of a long-term Forest Management Plan and to evaluating design elements through a forest-based lens rather than a tree-by-tree approach, recognizing that forests evolve and that old growth trees "have companions" within a larger, changing structure. *The project team acknowledged that the importance of trees and nature has been raised consistently and agreed that reference to trees and natural elements could be strengthened within the list of character-defining elements, while also noting that the space is referred to as a park, not a forest, and this emphasis must be calibrated to fit with the park's historical definition as a public park. They also said that discussions with Urban Forestry will be helpful.*
- **There was a question as to whether the order of character-defining elements was intentional.** It was asked whether the sequence implied priority or meaning and suggested that restructuring could help clarify what matters most. *The project team clarified that the ordering largely followed the 2018 report, that no strong organizing principle guided it, and invited recommendations for re-ordering or restructuring.*

Feedback on the Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) example

- **The proposed HIA approach was thorough, appropriate, and responsive to the significance of the site.** Participants supported the level of rigor being applied and appreciated seeing the assessment logic explained transparently.
- **Think ahead about how heritage impacts would be considered and managed over the longer term.**

It would be helpful to reflect on how future changes (particularly 10 to 20 years out) might be reviewed, and how heritage review could be triggered for more gradual or landscape-based changes rather than only obvious interventions like moving a statue. Participants raised the value of having clear governance, stewardship, and tracking systems in place to support continuity over time and to help ensure that heritage values are maintained as staff, priorities, or departments change, rather than relying solely on good intentions or informal practices. *The project team will further reflect on the identification of future triggers.*

Feedback related to statues and monuments

- **Caution about adding new statues or monuments to Queen's Park North.** Participants want to keep the park relatively uncluttered, particularly in comparison to Queen's Park South, which was described as overcrowded and problematically commemorative. *The project team shared this caution and confirmed a reluctance to recommend additional statues.*
- **Question about if the Irish Volunteers Monument should be considered as part of rehabilitation discussions, given its listing in the lease.** The monument does not appear on maps of Queen's Park North but is referenced in the lease. Participants asked if it should be included in rehabilitation considerations, particularly given its age and significance as the oldest monument in the city. The monument was described as being poorly located, difficult to access, and currently in deteriorated condition. *The project team clarified that the monument is located on University of Toronto land and lies outside the current Queen's Park North boundary, which is why it has not been part of the Queen's Park North discussions to date. City staff said that the monument is monitored as part of the City's overall collection but is not currently included in this rehabilitation process. They acknowledged the question about the lease and boundary history, said they would take a closer look at it, and said that while there is nothing definitive to share at this time, it is an issue that could be considered further, particularly in coordination with the University Park team.*
- **The unfinished Phase Two of the 48th Highlanders Memorial was raised and it was asked whether there may be an opportunity to advance it alongside the Queen's Park North project.** A participant explained that following restoration work completed on the Memorial around 2016, a second phase – approved and funded – was deferred due to concerns about the memorial's foundation, and to their

knowledge the follow-up investigation was never completed. With the Queen's Park North revitalization now underway, the participant suggested there may be an opportunity to revisit the possibility of completing Phase Two, recognizing that site conditions have since changed. *City staff confirmed the issue is on the radar and said that further discussion with the project team is planned.*

Feedback related to interpretation

- **Interpretation is a foundational part of how Queen's Park North is understood, experienced, and managed.** Participants emphasized that interpretation should not be optional or secondary, noting that much of the park's cultural and natural significance is currently invisible to visitors. They also described interpretation as a way to build resonance and connection with the park over time, helping people understand its value and, in turn, helping to protect it. Practical considerations were raised about how interpretation is implemented, including concerns about scattered or ad hoc approaches such as isolated QR codes, risks of vandalism, and visual clutter within a sensitive landscape. They expressed a preference for coordinated, durable, and respectful interpretive tools that communicate stories effectively without detracting from the park's character. *The project team agreed that interpretation is a critical element of the work and identified it as one of the most important components to be developed thoughtfully and cohesively.*
- **Support for the "Temple of Trees" concept as a comprehensive framework for interpretation, animation, and storytelling that brings together natural, cultural, and community narratives.** Participants described the concept as a compelling way for the park itself to tell its stories—using imaginative, technology-supported approaches rooted in natural history, cultural history, and individual tree stories. Suggested approaches included seasonal narratives, children's stories, and ongoing natural history programming, all intended to animate the park through learning and engagement rather than large-scale events. Participants viewed this storytelling-based activation as a way to deepen public understanding and care, reinforce the park's identity, and support its long-term protection. *The project team enthusiastically agreed, sharing that this type of programming- and learning-focused activation of the park has always been the intended vision for the project, and that earlier phases of the work may not have communicated this clearly enough. They said that the "Temple of Trees" concept aligns well with that long-standing intent and described it as well suited to informing the interpretation plan.*

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.