

Barbara Hall Public Open House Summary Report

Barbara Hall Park Improvement Plan
Phase 2: Exploring Design Options
October 22, 2025





Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Phase 2: Exploring Design Options.....	18
About this Report	5
Meeting format.....	5
Design Option Summaries	7
Design Option 1 (The Ribbons)	7
Description summary.....	7
What we heard	8
Design Option 2 (The Commons)	9
Description summary.....	9
What we heard	9
Design Option 3 (The Stage)	11
Description summary.....	11
What we heard	12
Feedback Themes.....	13
An Important Community Asset	13
Flexible and Inclusive Areas that Support Community Activity	13
Washrooms and Amenities.....	14
Access and Wayfinding	14
Park Improvements.....	15
Overall, participants emphasized community wellbeing, calling for design and maintenance improvements that support an inclusive park and ensure vulnerable communities are treated with empathy and humanity throughout planning, design, and construction. Consultation with Underhoused Residents	15
Expand Green Space and Natural Features.....	16
Design Flexible, Multi-Use Areas.....	16
Integrate Cultural Spaces	16
Enhance Amenities for Comfort and Convenience	17
Improving Park Connectivity and Evening Use	17
How We Reached People	18
Print Media	20

Digital Media	20
Next Steps.....	21
Acknowledgements	22
City of Toronto	22
Consulting Team.....	22
Appendix	23

Introduction

The City of Toronto is working with the Church-Wellesley Village community to create the Barabara Hall Park Improvement Plan that will uplift the park into an inclusive, welcoming, and highly accessible space that better serves the community. The improved park will be a place to gather, celebrate, and heal, balancing everyday use with calm spaces for reflection that honour the existing AIDS and Trans Memorials. The park will also celebrate 2SLGBTQ+ community history and resilience through art, culture, and heritage interpretation. Improvements will enhance well-being, accessibility, and programming, ensuring the park is a vibrant, year-round destination for people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds.

The Plan builds on nearly 2,500 community interactions so far, including participation from the Trans, and HIV and AIDS communities, service agencies working with the parks underhoused populations, as well as local residents, businesses, and organizations. It reflects what we have heard about the need for well-being, inclusion, connection, and respect for the park's social and cultural significance.

The objectives of the Public Open House were to share three draft design concepts that respond to community input gathered in Phases 1 and 2. These concepts are rooted in the collaboratively designed vision, guiding principles, and big moves for the park. The feedback gathered at the Open House will assist with refining park design elements into a single preferred design that will reflect the values, stories, and priorities of those who use and care about Barbara Hall Park.

About this Report

This report summarizes feedback gathered at the Public Open House event held on October 22, 2025 at The Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, 12 Alexander St, Toronto, Ontario. This report was written by DIALOG, the design consultants leading the City of Toronto's architectural design and community engagement on the design of Barbara Hall Park Improvements. The report provides a summary of the Phase 2 Public Open House.

Meeting format

The purpose of the Public Open House was to provide the community with an overview of the park improvement process, share what we heard during community engagement throughout Phase 2, and gather community feedback on the latest design options. Approximately 106 members of the public were in attendance along with representatives from the local councillor's office.

Twenty-three large-format information boards presented information on the park improvement process, a summary of community feedback heard to date, and details of the three design options to help participants understand the various design elements. Empty boards with sticky notes were provided to the attendees to allow for additional written feedback on the three design options. Postcards with QR codes were provided to the attendees, promoting both the project website and online survey to enable participants and those that were unable to attend to provide more detailed feedback on the three design options. The project team members were available to answer questions and explain design elements to participants.

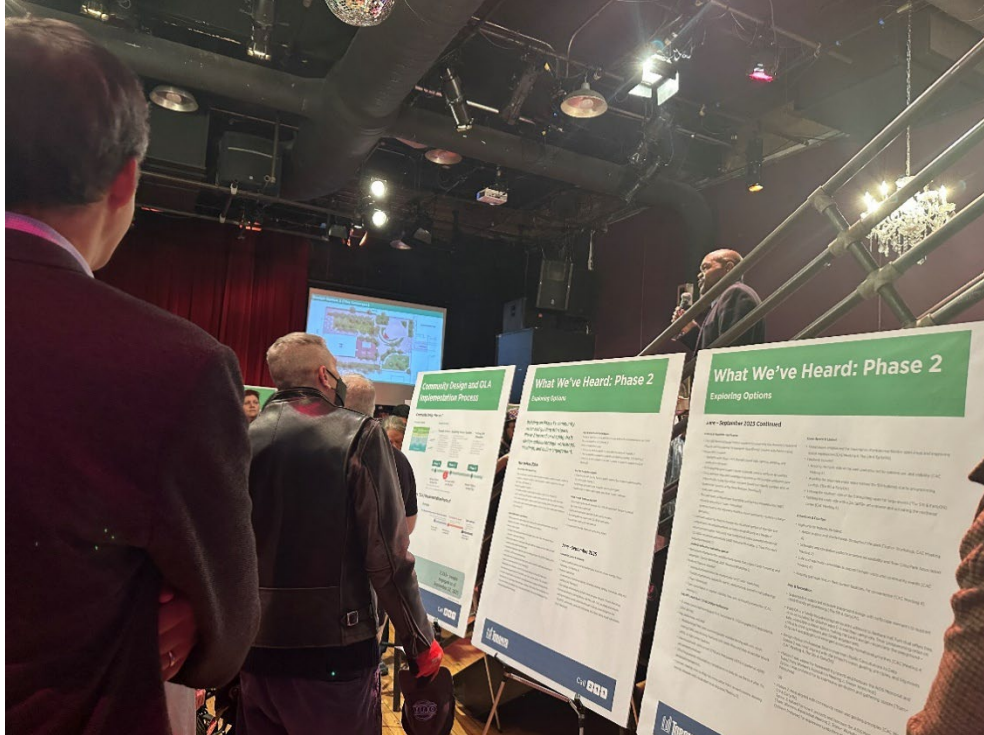


Figure 1: Image taken at the Public Open House at The Buddies in Bad Times Theatre showing the boards and participants.



Figure 2: Image taken at the Public Open House at The Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, during the opening presentation by Councillor Moise.

Design Option Summaries

The following section below provides a general overview of each respective design option, with information such as key feedback and takeaways. More information can be found on the Phase 2: Exploring Design Options Summary Report.

Design Option 1 (The Ribbons)

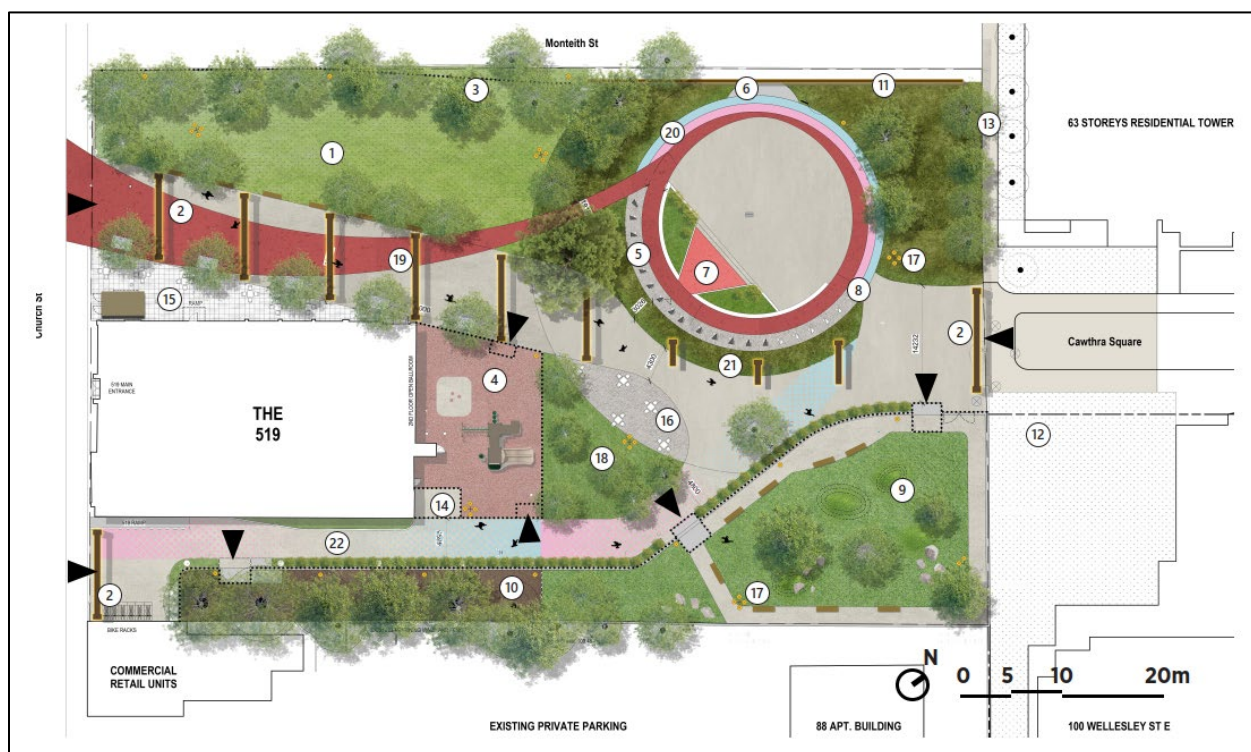


Figure 3: Design Option 1

Description summary

Design Option 1 features a large red ribbon pathway that begins from Church Street and flows through the park to the AIDS Memorial, where it forms a red circular feature around the memorial. A second ribbon, using the Trans flag colours (blue, pink and white), connects the southwest corner of the park to the Trans Memorial, highlighting both memorials' visual and spatial connection within the park. Keeping the pink triangle, a part of the original design of the AIDS Memorial, is an intentional design decision supported by those we spoke to in the HIV and AIDS as well as Trans communities. Initially, the pink triangle was a badge of shame used during the Holocaust primarily to

target gay men and transgender women. It has been re-appropriated by members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community as a symbol of self-identity.

What we heard

Participants generally felt that Design Option 1 was the strongest concept from an urban design and planning perspective, with strong support for the Red Ribbon pathway as a wayfinding element connecting AIDS and Trans Memorial landmarks and for honouring the existing stage and Trans Memorial as community-led spaces. Washrooms and amenities generated significant feedback, with many calling for free, public, 24/7 washrooms (and in some cases showers and laundry) that are not tied to a café, alongside mixed views on whether a café should exist and whether it should be privately run rather than City operated. Safety, dignity, and inclusion were recurring themes, with requests for better lighting, fewer dark corners, non-hostile seating, harm-reduction spaces, and less policing, alongside opposing calls for gates, fencing, night closures, and restrictions on encampments and drug use. Participants also expressed concern about large lawn areas becoming mud, advocating for less grass, more native planting and community gardens, and the removal of the dog park. Clearer and additional entrances, improved paving, and long-term maintenance support were identified as critical to keeping the park safe, accessible, and usable over time.

Design Option 2 (The Commons)

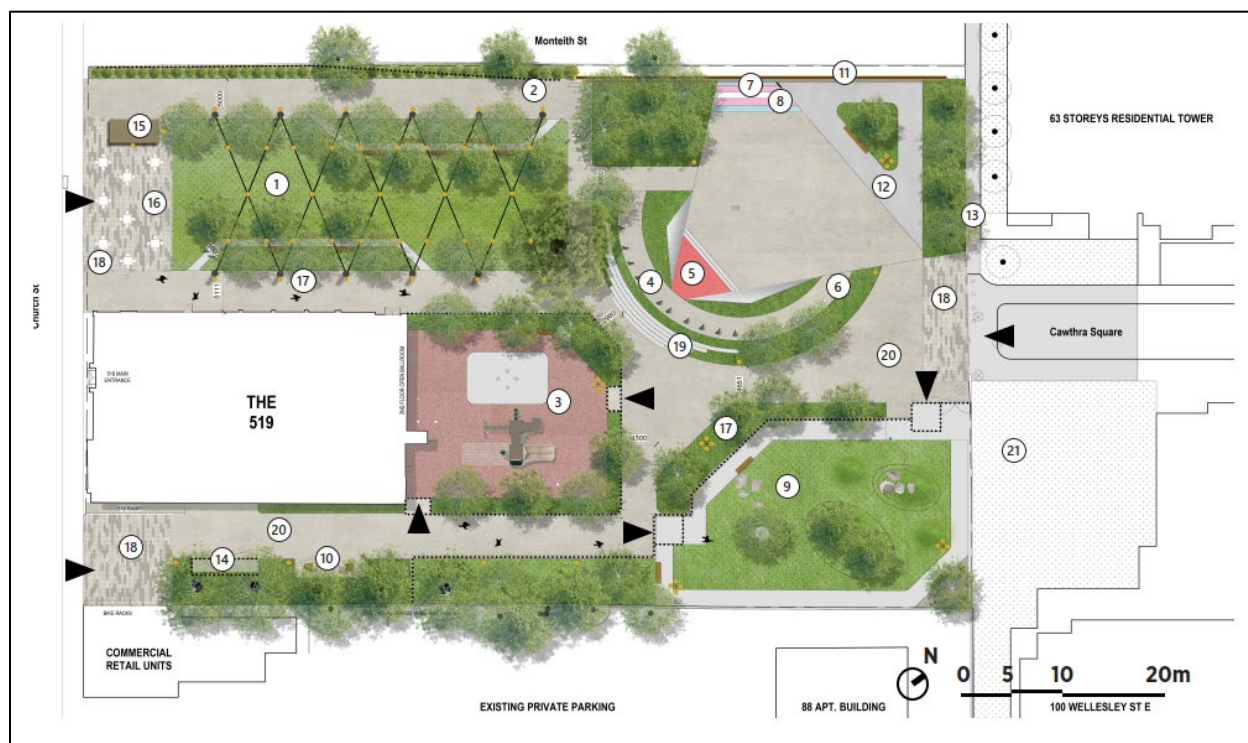


Figure 4: Design Option 2

Description summary

Design Option 2 creates a large open lawn and plaza that invites people into the park off Church Street. The plaza with a café and washroom leads to a rectangular green space with catenary lighting overhead, creating a welcoming atmosphere for gatherings and events.

What we heard

Participants generally appreciated Design Option 2 for its accessibility and simplicity, with support for expanded AIDS Memorial elements, pollinator gardens, native planting, and an open front lawn that could support gathering and community events. Strong and often opposing views were expressed about fencing, with many feeling it would be hostile to unhoused and 2SLGBTQ+ community members and undermine the park's public nature, while others suggested lockable gates at night similar to Central Park in New York City. Washrooms and basic services were a key concern, with calls for 24/7

public washrooms (and in some cases showers), clarity around monitoring and maintenance, and a strong sentiment that no new café was needed in an area already well served. Participants also raised concerns about memorial spaces feeling too exposed for quiet contemplation, and the need for more entrances, public seating, and culturally grounded elements such as Indigenous input and historic content from the ArQuives.

Design Option 3 (The Stage)

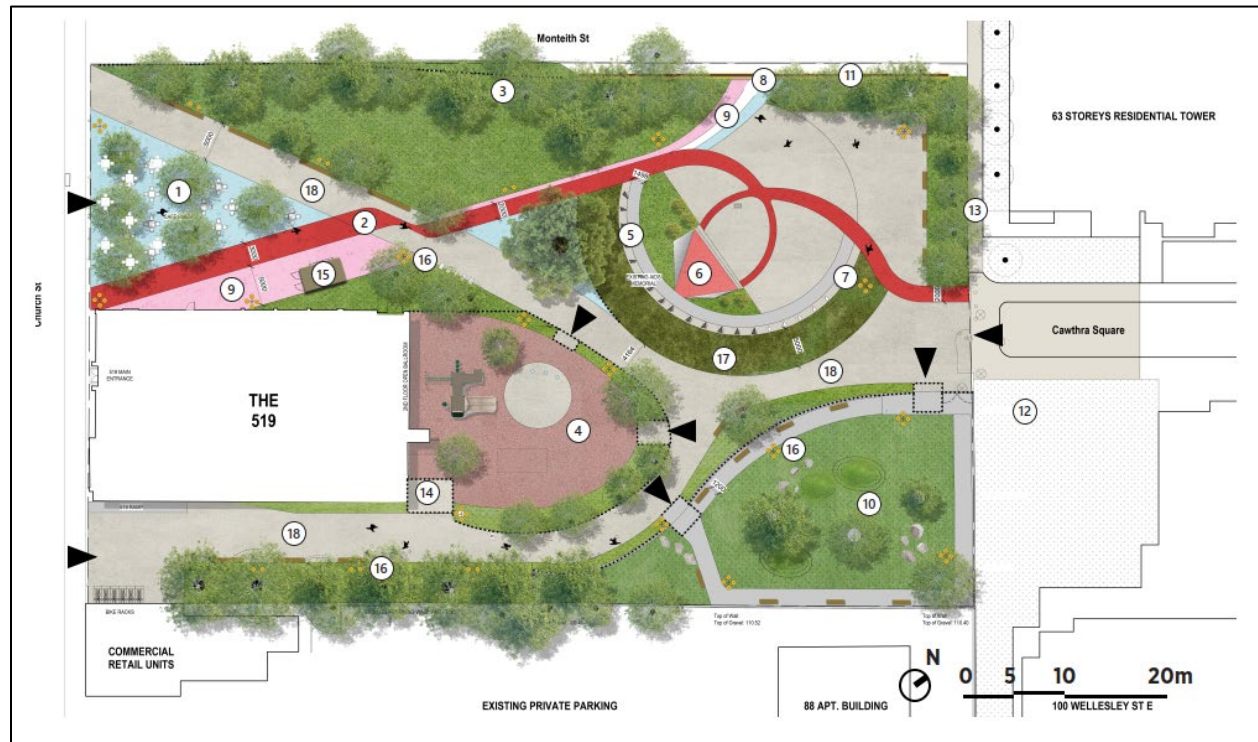


Figure 5: Design Option 3

Description summary

Design Option 3 features a bold red ribbon pathway that connects Church Street to Cawthra Square. A tree plaza is located at the Church street entrance, north of The 519, with tables and chairs serving a café and washroom area.

The ribbon loops through the triangular stage at the AIDS Memorial, symbolizing the traditional HIV and AIDS awareness ribbon. Keeping the pink triangle, a part of the original design of the AIDS Memorial, is an intentional design decision supported by those we spoke to in the HIV and AIDS as well as Trans communities. Initially, the pink triangle was a badge of shame used during the Holocaust primarily to target gay men and transgender women. It has been re-appropriated by some members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community as a symbol of self-identity. The existing stage is retained, with its steps and angled stone edges integrated into the new ribbon design to strengthen its visual connection.

What we heard

Participants responded positively to Design Option 3, with many identifying it as their preferred option due to the strong stage presence, opportunities for gathering, abundant seating. Washrooms and basic infrastructure were repeatedly emphasized, with clear calls for 24/7 public washrooms, drinking fountains, rain and sun cover, and concerns about large grass areas becoming muddy or creating unusable dead-end spaces. Feedback revealed deep and often conflicting views on well-being, homelessness, drug use, and fencing, with some advocating for gates, night closures, and reduced harm-reduction approaches, while others strongly opposed fencing and emphasized the park as a safe, inclusive space where unhoused residents are primary stakeholders who must be consulted. There was strong support for animation and gathering through the stage-focused design, abundant seating, and a café that encourages social interaction, with Option 3 often identified as a preferred concept.

Participants also raised concerns about synthetic turf, diagonal pathways limiting exploration, and the need to better acknowledge historic and cultural elements, lessons from George Hislop Park, and potential additions such as sacred fire space or integrating a café within heritage buildings.

Feedback Themes

The following section outlines the feedback received during the Open House by organizing comments into a series of themes.

During Phase 3, another round of broad community engagement is planned with the community to preview the updates on a preferred design concept and show how feedback has been incorporated into the updated design and planning process.

An Important Community Asset

Barabara Hall Park represents many things to many people. The park plays an important role for 2SLGBTQ+ communities and a diverse range of local residents. People expressed a wide variety of opinions on current and future state of the park based on their own experiences and points of view. Collectively, this input brought into focus the diverse communities that the public space needs to serve and the extent to which it is viewed as an essential everyday space in the neighbourhood.

The park serves as a vital community asset where 2SLGBTQ+ groups, local neighbourhood residents, and visitors connected to the AIDS Memorial and Trans Memorials feel a profound sense of belonging, commemorate loved ones and those lost, gather for events, participate in programming, attend pride celebrations, and experience nature in an urban setting.

There was an interest in how the designs complemented and supported the AIDS and Trans Memorials within the park, with comments appreciating design elements that preserve and increase the prominence of the AIDS Memorial and the Trans Memorial. There were expressions of deep personal connections to the AIDS and Trans Memorials as some people expressed increasing public awareness of the AIDS Memorial within the city through promotion, heritage interpretation, storytelling and educational programming so that the history the AIDS epidemic remains active in public memory.

Flexible and Inclusive Areas that Support Community Activity

There is strong interest in enhancing the park's current cultural and social activities that pay homage to the city's 2SLGBTQ+ communities and Church-Wellesley

neighbourhood. Participants noted a desire for open, multi-purpose spaces that can accommodate a variety of activities and community events. Suggestions included lawns for casual play and spaces that encourage spontaneous gatherings. A focused conversation on lawns was consistent across all design options. Comments both expressed support for the use of a lawn and concerns that grassy areas have become muddy in the past and caused maintenance and usability challenges during wet weather or large events.

Feedback also highlighted the importance of spaces for public art, performances and gatherings, including a new stage for community events such as farmers markets. People envision the park as a place where neighbours can come together, celebrate local culture, and enjoy shared experiences. The old stage has been removed, with the design options now illustrating new layouts. Overall, there is a clear desire to ensure that these recreational areas are accessible to people of all ages and abilities.

Washrooms and Amenities

Comfortable amenities was a recurring theme in the feedback, as well as broad support for 24/7 washrooms and drinking fountains that are open and accessible to the public. It was noted by the public during discussions and online survey that including additional public resources such as monitored washrooms would enhance the overall experience for park users.

The big move to add a café space was supported for animation and community activity but was not flagged an urgent need, as some felt the neighbourhood has enough access to cafés.

“make them [washrooms] beautiful spaces!”

Participants noted a desire for practical features such as seating, better lighting, and shaded rest areas to make the park enjoyable for longer stays. Several comments identified a desire for the park to have comfortable spaces during hot or rainy weather.

Additional comments expressed the potential to integrate a community garden within the park for its social and educational benefits.

Access and Wayfinding

User accessibility was a key point of conversation for park improvements. Suggestions included better lit pathways for evening use, clear routes for walking through the park with stronger connections to surrounding streets and transit options. These features

would make the park easier to navigate and safer for all users, encouraging more frequent and confident visits. Many community members suggested that the park would benefit from always being open and accessible to promote fully public access, and to serve as a place of refuge for the unhoused, while some community members noted the potential to gate the park during the night to protect the spaces, programs and amenities.

“Please make the park safe for **everyone** to enjoy!”

Park Improvements

Some participants noted that the Barabara Hall Park was renovated in the last 10 years and expressed concern that without proper maintenance, the park will fall into disrepair again. Community members noted the recent renovation of George Hislop Park as an example of a recently renovated park in the neighbourhood that is experiencing maintenance challenges. There was also discussion that the park improvement plan could lead to temporary or permanent displacement of those currently living within the park due to park construction and facility updates occupying new spaces of the park.

“Keep the park for the people”

Overall, participants emphasized community wellbeing, calling for design and maintenance improvements that support an inclusive park and ensure vulnerable communities are treated with empathy and humanity throughout planning, design, and construction.

Consultation with Underhoused Residents

Community members expressed that continued collaboration and consultation with local community organizations and the unhoused population living in the park would be a productive way to ensure that more voices are heard and community well-being is thoroughly considered. Some community members mentioned that the unhoused population are primary stakeholders, as they should be consulted as early in this process as possible and not towards the end of the consultation process.

Expand Green Space and Natural Features

The project team will consider the amount of soft landscaping and refine the preferred design so that it has a good balance of hardscape and native plantings that ensures an easily maintained space. The next phase of design will occur from Winter 2025 to Spring 2026 (Phase 3: Setting the Direction) as further design considerations and revisions will be made to ensure there is an adequate balance between the hardscape and softscape areas.

Design Flexible, Multi-Use Areas

The project team will revisit the functionality of open lawns, plazas and other adaptable spaces to ensure they can accommodate casual play and community gatherings in all weather conditions. These areas should be accessible for all ages and abilities, ensuring inclusivity in every design option.

“The red pathway is a great idea for wayfinding towards the memorial landmarks.”

Integrate Cultural Spaces

The project team will ensure the next phase of design considers and clearly identifies how the park will support performances and cultural programming. These features should be designed to blend with everyday park use, so they do not dominate the space when not in use and can be adapted for special or recurring events.

Enhance Amenities for Comfort and Convenience

The project team will revisit the design options to ensure there is an appropriate level of shading and all-weather protection. In the next phase of design, there will be more focus on seating, picnic tables, and other options to encourage community gathering along pathways and in gathering areas. The team will reiterate the need for accessible and improved washrooms and drinking fountains throughout the park in the next phase of design.

Improving Park Connectivity and Evening Use

Ensure well-lit pathways have strong connections to surrounding streets through clear sightlines that directly connect key points of access into the park. The design team will continue to review and update the plan to ensure walkways are easily maintainable in winter, well lit, and provide direct access to make the park safer and easier to navigate for all users.

“What support can the City provide for maintenance, ensuring the spaces are actually usable?”

Phase 2: Exploring Design Options

Building on the vision, guiding principles and big moves from Phase 1, Phase 2 focused on shaping draft design options. In Phase 2, key themes from Phase 1 engagements and meetings with stakeholders were presented for feedback through workshops, meetings, and online engagements. The input and feedback collected in Phase 2 was used to develop three draft designs for the park.

The community engagement activities in this phase include:

- Community Advisory Committee (CAC) Meeting #3
- Community stakeholder meetings
- Dog off-leash area survey
- AIDS Memorial workshops
- Trans+ community workshop
- Community Advisory Committee (CAC) Meeting #4
- Public open house
- Online public survey

The anticipated outcome of this phase was the selection of park design elements that would be implemented into a preferred design option. The summaries of key engagement activities in Phase 2 are as follows:

April 2025 - Community Advisory Committee (CAC) Meeting #3

On April 9, the project team met with the CAC to begin developing design options for Barbara Hall Park and to explore how to tell the story of the park and its significance to 2SLGBTQ+ communities in the new park design. The summary of this meeting will be shared on the City's webpage.

May 2025 - AIDS Memorial Community Workshop

On May 8, over 35 community members attended an online workshop to consider potential enhancements to the AIDS Memorial and its immediate surroundings. Workshop participants also explored ways the new park design will tell the park's story and its significance to HIV and AIDS and 2SLGBTQ+ communities. The summary of this meeting will be shared on the City's webpage.

September 2025 - Online Survey

From August 19 to September 8, an online survey collected feedback from 326 community members to help shape improvements to the dog off-leash area in the park. The summary of the survey results will be posted on the City's webpage.

September 2025 - AIDS Memorial Community Workshop

On September 20, 27 community members attended an in-person workshop to provide feedback on three draft design options for the park improvements, with a focus on the AIDS Memorial. Workshop participants also explored how the redesigned park could honour the AIDS Memorial as a place of mourning and remembrance, while making space for elements that celebrate people living with HIV and AIDS. The summary of this meeting will be shared on the City's webpage.

September 2025 - Trans+ Community Workshop

On September 20, six community members attended an in-person workshop to provide feedback on three draft design options for the park improvements, with a focus on the accessibility, preservation and prominence of the Trans Memorial. Workshop participants also explored how the redesigned park could honour and celebrate the history of Trans people and create a welcoming, comfortable and affirming place for Trans communities. The summary of this meeting will be shared on the City's webpage.

September 2025 - Community Advisory Committee (CAC) Meeting #4

On September 23, the project team met with the CAC to review and gather feedback on three draft design options for the park improvements. The summary of this meeting will be shared on the City's webpage.

October 2025 - Open House

On October 22, the project team held an open house at the Buddies in Bad Times Theatre to gather community feedback on three draft design options for the park improvements. Approximately 106 community members attended the event. The summary of this public open house is outlined within this summary report.

October 2025 – Online Survey

An online survey was open between October 22 to November 5 to obtain further feedback on the three design options. The summary of the survey results will be posted on the City's webpage.

How We Reached People

Print Media

Signage on-site

Notice boards were placed near the park displayed information about the project, detailed instructions about participating in the online survey and guidance on accessing additional information on the project webpage.

Digital Media

Project webpage

The survey was available on the [Barbara Hall Park Improvement webpage](#) between August 19 and to September 8, 2025.

Email blasts

Email notifications were dispatched to our subscribers and stakeholder lists. 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 August 19 to September 8, 2025.

E-flyers

Digital flyers were distributed through email blasts to our subscriber list, Community Advisory Committee and local community groups. The e-flyers included interactive links to the project webpage and the online survey.

Next Steps

The feedback received through the Public Open House will help to inform the preferred design for the Barbara Hall Park Improvements Plan. The community design process will be moving towards Phase 3 (Setting the Direction), where additional engagement activities will occur with various key stakeholder groups, the Community Advisory Committee and members of the public to continue to address the vision, guiding principles and big moves, and receive feedback on the preferred design option

We appreciate all of the community members who engaged with us at the Public Open House. Your questions, insights, and feedback have been invaluable and will help us to further refine the Barbara Hall Park Improvement Plan. Visit the [project webpage](#) to learn more.

Acknowledgements

City of Toronto

Parks and Recreation

Tonya Crawford, Senior Project Coordinator
Daniel Fusca, Manager, Public Consultation
Celina Chong, Senior Public Consultation Coordinator
Rosemary McManus, Senior Public Consultation Coordinator
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Emily Ricketts, Conservator

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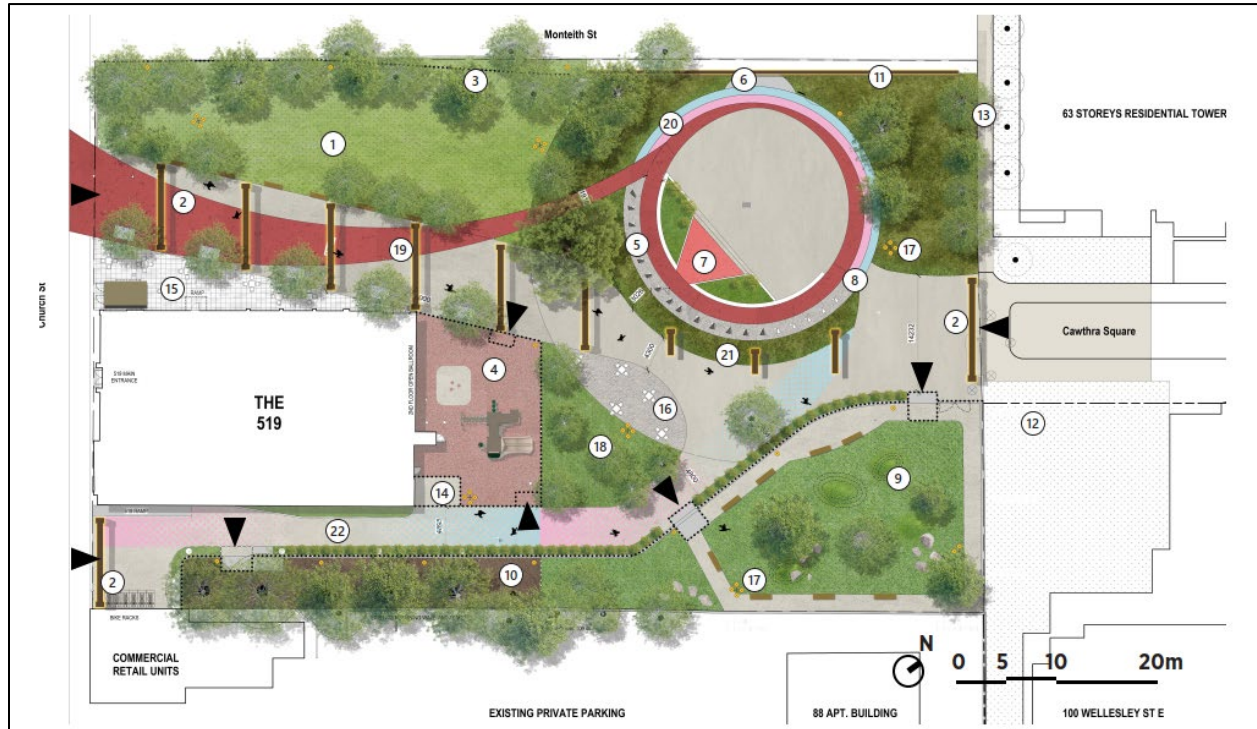
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Appendix

Design Option 1: The Ribbons

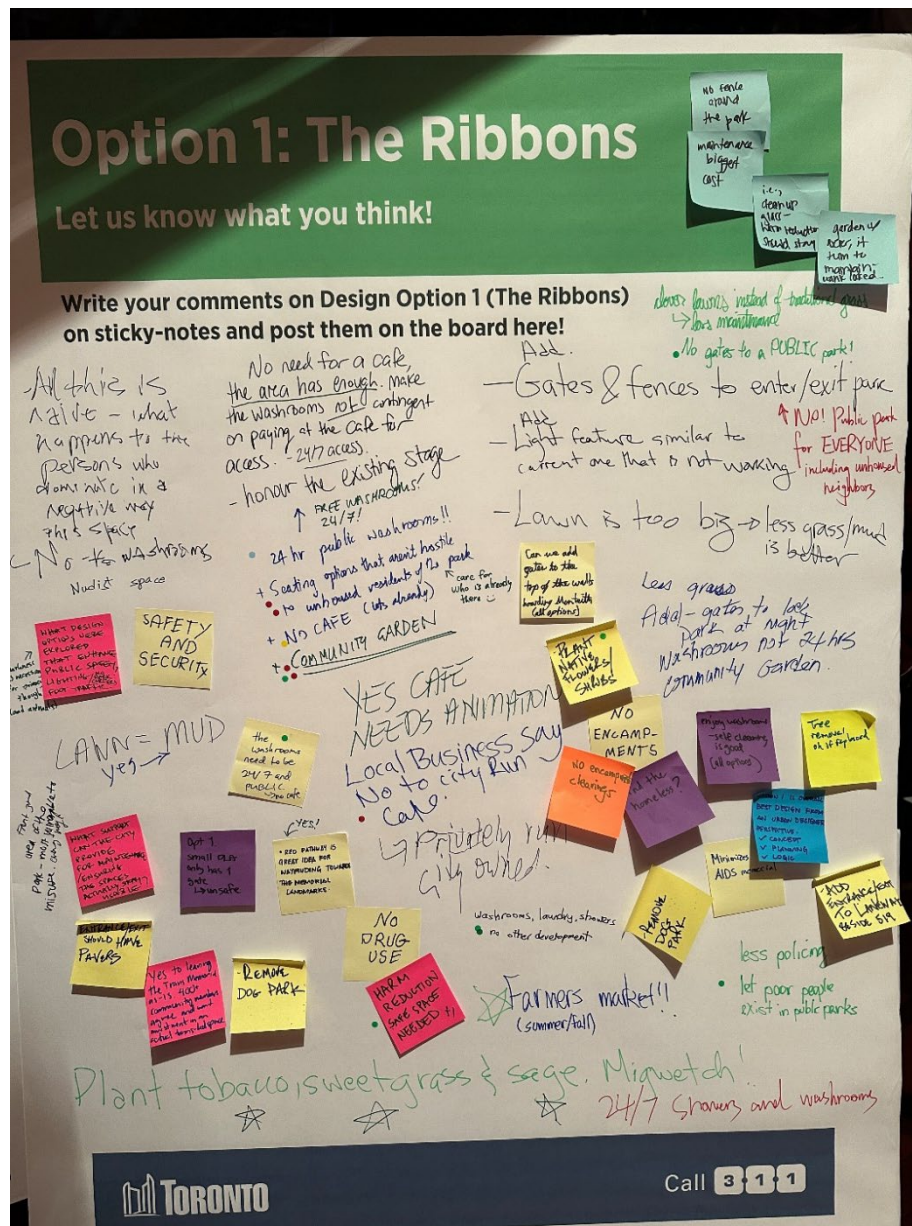


Appendix Figure 1: Design Option 1

Legend (Design Option 1):

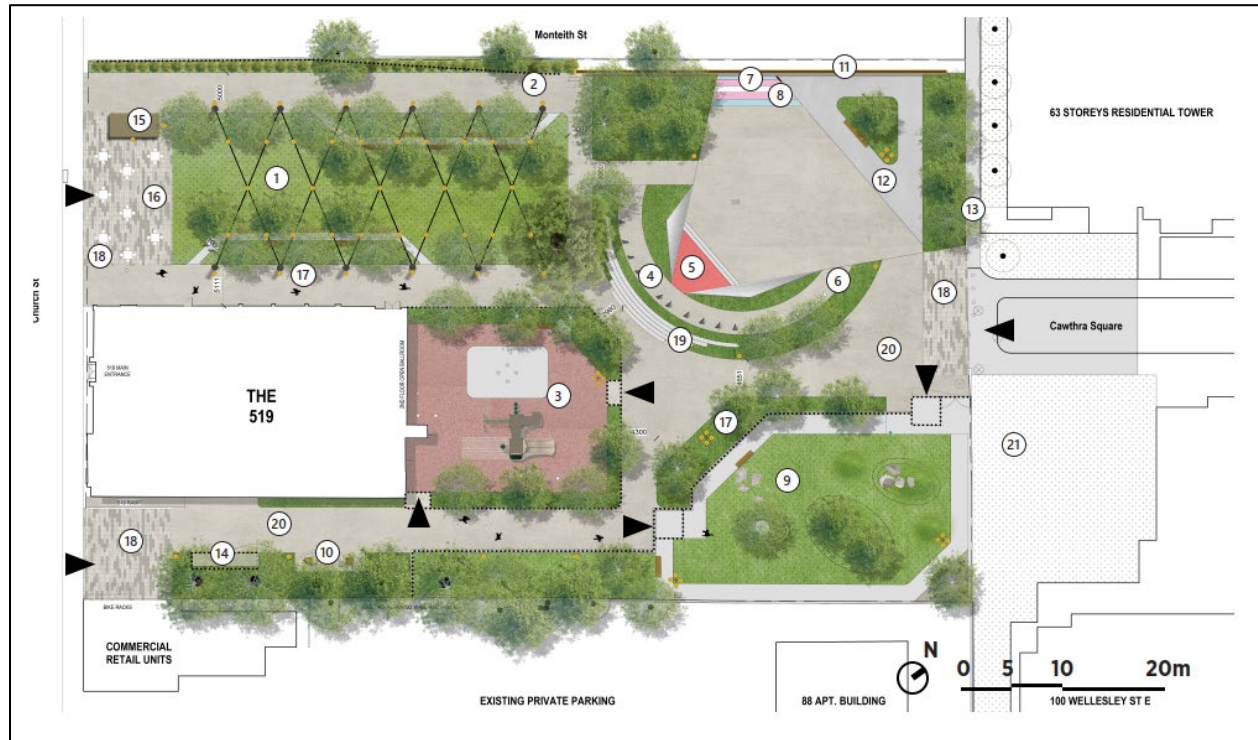
1. Open lawn
2. Gateway feature
3. Existing decorative north metal fence
4. Fenced playground with splash pad
5. AIDS memorial
6. Trans memorial
7. AIDS memorial existing triangle stage
8. Potential AIDS memorial pillar expansion
9. Dog off-leash area
10. Small dog off-leash area
11. Existing heritage brick wall
12. Potential future park extended plaza
13. Pathway for 2-12 Cawthra Sq condo
14. 519 waste area
15. Washroom and cafe
16. Plaza area with site furnishings

17. Lighting
18. Garden beds
19. Decorative red ribbon paving
20. Decorative Trans flag colour paving
21. Steeped sloped garden bed
22. Park pathways with Trans flag pattern



Appendix Figure 2: Image of the public comments board for Design Option 1. Various comments are shown through sticky notes.

Design Option 2: The Commons

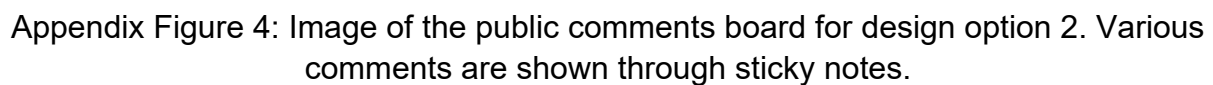


Appendix Figure 3: Design Option 2

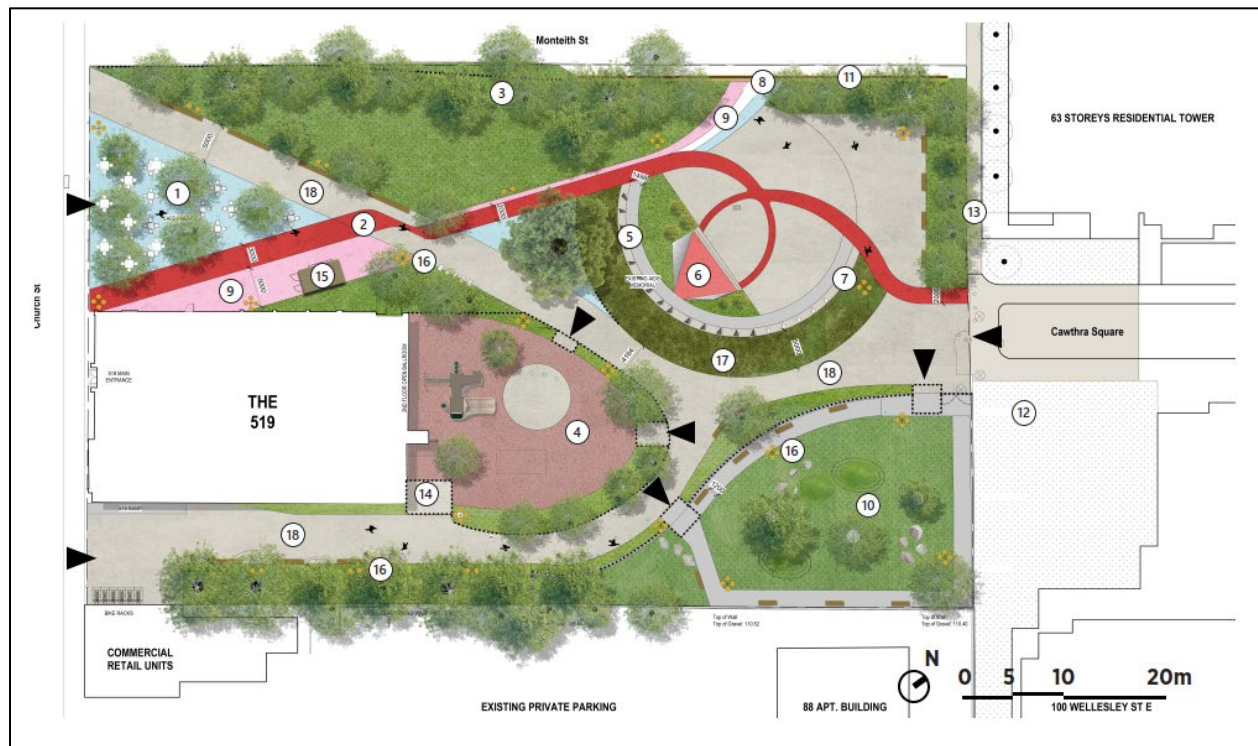
Legend (Design Option 2):

1. Open lawn with catenary lighting
2. Existing decorative north metal fence
3. Fenced playground with splash pad
4. AIDS memorial
5. AIDS memorial existing triangle stage
6. Potential AIDS memorial pillar expansion
7. Trans memorial
8. Trans flag colour paving
9. Dog off-leash area
10. Games tables
11. Existing heritage brick wall
12. Plaza with planter
13. Pathway for 2-12 Cawthra Sq condo
14. 519 waste area
15. Washroom and café
16. Plaza area with site furnishing
17. Lighting
18. Entrance paving
19. Terrace seating

21. Potential future park extended plaza



Design Option 3: The Stage



Appendix Figure 5: Design Option 3

Legend (Design Option 3):

1. Tree plaza with site furniture
2. Decorative red ribbon paving
3. Existing decorative north metal fence
4. Fenced playground with splash pad
5. AIDS memorial
6. AIDS memorial existing triangle stage
7. Potential AIDS memorial pillar expansion
8. Trans memorial
9. Decorative Trans flag colour paving
10. Dog off-leash area
11. Existing heritage brick wall
12. Potential future park extended plaza
13. Pathway for 2-12 Cawthra Sq condo
14. 519 waste area
15. Washroom and cafe
16. Lighting
17. Sloped garden bed
18. Park pathways

