

# Toronto Parks & Trails Wayfinding Strategy (Phase Two)

January 2015 Stakeholder Meeting Summary For Participant Review

January 27, 2015

Metro Hall – 55 John St Toronto, ON M5V 3C6

6:00 – 8:45 pm

## Overview

On January 27, 2015, the City of Toronto's Parks, Forestry, and Recreation Division hosted the first Stakeholder Meeting for Phase Two of the Toronto Parks & Trails Wayfinding Strategy. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce Phase Two of the strategy and to seek feedback to inform the future system's content, product and function, identity, and materiality.

Over 20 people attended the meeting, including representatives of environmental advocacy groups, heritage groups, and park advocacy groups. Several City staff from Parks, Forestry, and Recreation and members of the consultant team (including Steer Davies Gleave and Swerhun Facilitation) also attended the meeting.

The meeting consisted of welcoming remarks from Janette Harvey, City of Toronto, an overview presentation delivered by James Brown and Juan Rioseco of Steer Davies Gleave, a number of interactive, small-group activities, and plenary reports back. Participants also submitted written feedback with workbooks and via email.

Ian Malczewski, a facilitator with Swerhun Facilitation, wrote this Meeting Summary, and shared it with participants for review before finalizing it. The purpose of this Summary is to identify key themes and to collect detailed feedback from the meeting; it is not intended as a verbatim transcript.

## Key Messages

These Key Messages reflect common themes that emerged in discussions at the meeting. They should be read in concert with the more detailed summary of feedback below.

**Toronto's parks and trails wayfinding signs need to be simple, beautiful, inviting, and accommodate different users needs.** People of different abilities, ages, and who speak different languages will use the signs. People in an emergency or people who are unfamiliar with or nervous in Toronto's parks may also use them. Sign design and content need to adapt to the needs of these (and other potential) users.

**It will be important to distinguish between the city's natural and manicured parks and trails.** These signs will go both in natural areas and in very urban parks, and one size will not fit all. The content and design need to respond to these different contexts.

**The signs need to achieve a balance of blending in and standing out.** They need to be noticeable so that people can find them, but not so much so that they detract from their surroundings.

**The system should combine rustic and manufactured materials.** The materials could include natural materials like wood and durable ones like steel or aluminum. The materials must be ones that age well when exposed to the elements.

## Detailed Summary of Feedback

Participants shared feedback about four different topics:

- The content they would like to see in future Parks & Trails wayfinding signage;
- Thoughts about how the future Parks & Trails wayfinding signage should look and function;
- Suggestions for the identity of future Parks & Trails wayfinding signage; and,
- Suggestions for the materiality of the future Parks & Trails wayfinding signage.

### Content for the Future System

The team asked participants to brainstorm the kinds of content that could be included in the Parks & Trails wayfinding signage and to organize them into “must have” and “nice-to-have” categories.

Participants suggested the must haves for the Parks & Trails wayfinding signage should be:

- **Accessibility information** like slopes or stairs;
- **Park features and amenities** like the name of the park, entrances, exits, rest areas, and washrooms (including washroom hours and seasons of operation);
- **Trail features** like trail heads, trail names, level of difficulty, and whether trails cross roads or transit systems, connections to other trails;
- **Emergency Services identifier** to help people identify their location;
- **Maps and symbols / pictograms** so that non-English speakers could use it;
- **Distances**, both within parks and trails (such as distances to park entrances and exits) and beyond (such as transit stops or city landmarks);
- **Key landmarks** in the city;
- **Education**, like the “what, where, and why” of Environmentally Sensitive Areas (including potentially a map of the Environmentally Sensitive Area).

Some participants felt that the Parks & Trails Wayfinding Strategy provided a broader city-building opportunity to connect Toronto’s parks and trails to the rest of the City, and suggested identifying **neighbourhoods** in the system, too.

Another participant felt it was important for the signs to provide people with **confidence** to explore the city’s parks and trails. Suggestions on how to do this included always showing an “escape route” with arrows to the nearest exit, a detailed map of an immediate 500 metre radius and a 2 km radius map, and trail and river names.

Participants suggested nice-to-haves should be:

- **Wifi or internet hotspots**, potentially solar-powered;

- **Broader context maps** that show the relationships between trails; and,
- **Touchscreens** or other tactile interfaces (such as magnets used by a company called Tactalis, or tactile touchscreens developed by a company called Tactus).

Participants had differing opinions on how much the system should include **regulatory information**. Some thought it was important to include etiquette or code of conduct, while others said “signs should not be doing what is the by-law officer’s responsibility.”

Participants also named content they thought should not be in the wayfinding system:

- **Excessive prohibitive text** telling people what they can’t do in the park.
- **Too much information** since people come to parks and trails to get away from information overload. Some interpretive text is appropriate in parks (such as natural heritage), but it might not belong specifically on wayfinding signs.

### Product and Function

The team presented participants with photographs of the TO 360 pedestrian wayfinding totem superimposed in different Toronto park and trail environments. Participants then answered questions about whether that totem would fit in Toronto’s parks and trails and, if not, how it could be refined to be more suitable.

Participants liked a few things about the TO 360 wayfinding totem:

- **Context map.** Several participants liked the walking radius, saying it could be tweaked to between a 5- and 15-minute walking radius focused on natural areas.
- **Heads-up map and two-sided totem.** Participants liked that the sign was two-sided and that the map was oriented in the direction people face.
- **Modern design.** Some participants liked the modern, simple design of the totem, saying something similar would bring Toronto’s parks into a more mature era.

Participants suggested a number of refinements, including:

- **Friendlier colours and materials.** Several participants felt the TO 360 totem was appropriate for the Financial District, but that, in parks and trails, signage needed to be friendlier. Many suggested using natural or nature-inspired materials.
- **Fonts and contrasts.** Light on dark contrasts may work well in urban settings, but in low light environments, it could be difficult to read. Participants suggested using a dark font on a light background instead.
- **Positioning information at a suitable level.** Some felt the TO 360 wayfinding totem positioned information too high for children or people in wheelchairs to see it, and suggested refining the design in parks and trails to meet their needs.
- **The size of the totem.** Some thought the sign should be wider in parks, especially at junctions, where it would need to get people’s attention.

- **Information for different modes.** Participants felt that the TO 360 totem was appropriate for a single mode of transportation – pedestrians – but that in parks and trails, it would need to accommodate cyclists, joggers, or people stopping to read. The parks and trails signage needs to consider the different speeds of these users move as well as the distances from which they’ll be seeing the sign.
- **Positioning the sign.** Several people noted said it would be important not to block trails and sidewalks or obstruct views (like at the beaches). They also said it would be important not to position signs so far off the sidewalk that people need to walk “into the bush” to get information. Signs should be placed so that the information faces the direction people are travelling in and so that people in wheelchairs don’t need to turn to see it.
- **Different designs for different places.** While people liked the size and content of the TO 360 totem at junctions and the “concrete edges” of urban parks (like Trinity-Bellwoods), they felt like it might be too big for trail spurs or more natural areas, where something subtler (like a finger post) would be more appropriate.
- **Sturdy design.** Some felt that the TO 360 sign might be too flimsy or unstable and could be knocked over if someone made an effort. They suggested designing something sturdier for parks and trails.
- **Too much text.** Some felt that the TO 360 signage had too much information. People come to parks to get away from information, so the parks and trails signs should be minimal and conservative with text (though it would be appropriate to have interpretive text on non-wayfinding signage in parks). For the same reason, people felt there should not be places for “user-generated” content (like notice boards).
- **Technology-aided communication.** Some participants thought the product should include interactive technology. Suggestions included QR Codes that point to trail guides or audio information, touchscreens that translate text into different languages, or screens that allow people to adjust text fonts and colours.
- **Size of the info icon.** Participants liked the “i” at the top of the TO 360 totem and suggested making it bigger in parks since people will approach it from a distance.

## Identity

The team distributed stacks of images to each of the groups and asked them to take inspiration from the images to generate words that represent their desired identity for parks and trails wayfinding signs.

Participants used words like “simple but bold” “restful,” “modern yet rustic,” “natural comfort,” “art,” “discovery,” “joyful,” “fun,” “playful,” “community expression,” “cultural inclusion,” “attractive,” “focus,” “accessible,” “sense of perspective,” and “durable.” They also identified some key things for the City and Consultant Team to consider when thinking about the system’s identity:

- **Simplicity.** The signs should be simple, easy-to-read, and resist vandalism.

- **Variability.** Toronto has a diverse range of parks and trails – some are very urban and manicured, while others are more wild. The signs need to reflect these different environments and should be customizable in different neighbourhoods.
- **Seasonality.** The parks and trails wayfinding system will need to accommodate all four seasons by fitting into their surroundings in different weather and showing content for different seasons (like skating or picnicking).
- **Merge versus contrast.** The parks and trails wayfinding signage must strike a careful balance between blending in while standing out to attract attention.
- **Forward-looking yet appropriate for all.** Some participants thought the system should use new technologies to attract a younger generation, while others thought it was more important to be low-tech for the growing senior population.

### Materiality

In the final activity in the meeting, the Consultant Team handed out more images and asked participants to use them to think about the kinds of materials they thought would be appropriate for parks and trails wayfinding signs. Participants suggested words like “stone,” “textured,” “tactile” (especially at junctions), and “durable.” They also shared some specific suggestions, including:

- **Beauty.** The signs and the materials used must reflect the city’s natural beauty.
- **Natural and durable.** Some of the signs will be in natural areas, so it’s important for them to reflect that environment while maintaining durability.
- **Materials that weather well.** The signs will face intense weather conditions, so they should be made of materials that weather well. One participant suggested the team consider wabi-sabi – beauty through imperfection – in the choice of materials, like materials that rust or express a whimsy over time.
- **Balance between crude and fine.** Some felt that the signs should incorporate both polished, sleek materials and rustic, natural materials. Specific suggestions included combining wood and metal, steel and aluminium, or copper oxide. One person suggested using corten as a way to reference Toronto’s railways.
- **Curves, not lines.** Since parks and trails are often non-linear, the materials and signs themselves should incorporate curves instead of lines.
- **Modular.** The signs should be easy to update or adapt to environmental changes.
- **Use what’s around you.** In some places, that might mean putting text on bricks, embedding signage on paths, or otherwise using the local environment.
- **Wayfinding on paths.** Some participants liked images that showed insets or painted directions on pathways, though these kinds of materials would need to be supplemented by others since they would be hidden in winter snow.
- **Touch and scent.** Since some visitors to Toronto’s parks and trails will be visually impaired, the materials should be pleasant to touch. One person suggested the team consider scent, such as flowers, at key gateways.

## **Next Steps**

The City of Toronto and Study Team thanked attendees for their participation, and Ian Malczewski committed to sharing a Draft Meeting Summary with participants for review in the coming weeks.

## List of Participants

- **City of Brampton:** Sam Bietenholz
- **City of Toronto:** Lorene Bodiam
- **City of Toronto:** Nell Chitty
- **City of Toronto:** Janette Harvey
- **Cycle Toronto:** Robert Pylypiw
- **Don Watershed Regeneration Council:** Peter Heinz
- **Evergreen:** Seana Irvine
- **Heritage Toronto:** Michelle Ridout
- **High Park Resource Group:** Leslie Gooding
- **Highland Creek Green Team:** Brian MacFarlane
- **Metrac:** Andooth Naushan
- **Park People:** Anna Hill
- **Steer Davies Gleave:** James Brown
- **Steer Davies Gleave:** Craig Nelson
- **Steer Davies Gleave:** Juan Rioseco
- **Swerhun Facilitation:** Ian Malczewski
- **Swerhun Facilitation:** Yulia Pak
- **Toronto Field Naturalists:** Bruce Thompson
- **Toronto Parks and Trees Foundation:** Jayne Fry
- **Toronto and Region Conservation Authority:** Brittany Reid
- **Walk Toronto:** Mike Jones