

Toronto Parks & Trails Wayfinding Strategy (Phase Two)

April 2015 Stakeholder Meeting Summary

April 1, 2015

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

7:00 – 9:00 pm

Overview

On April 1, 2015, the City of Toronto's Parks, Forestry, and Recreation Division hosted the second Stakeholder Meeting for Phase Two of the Toronto Parks & Trails Wayfinding Strategy. The purpose of the meeting was to: explain how participant feedback from the first workshop had influenced the work done since January, present and seek feedback on three sign design options, and present and seek feedback on a future Digital Wayfinding Service for the city.

Approximately 15 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 Craig Nelson of Steer Davies Gleave, interactive, rotating group discussions, and plenary reports back. Participants also submitted written feedback via workbooks and email.

Ian Malczewski, a facilitator with Swerhun Facilitation, wrote this Meeting Summary and shared it with participants to review before finalizing it.

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.

The use of natural materials in some of the sign designs is a nice touch. It's important to know if these materials (such as wood or concrete) have any environmental impacts.

Interpretive information and information about municipal addresses is very important. Participants preferred concepts that included information about environmentally sensitive areas, local heritage, and municipal addresses.

Explain how the designs consider accessibility. Some participants were concerned that accessibility did not appear to be considered in the sign design options. They were particularly concerned about the positioning of content on signs, the contrast and colour palette, and ensuring that the signs themselves don't become trip hazards.

The parks identifier icon needs some more thought. Most participants liked the concept of a parks identifier and asked the team to give thought to options other than a maple leaf.

The Digital Wayfinding Service should include information about accessibility, park facilities, exploration, and education. Participants suggested the Digital Wayfinding Service should include information to help people navigate parks, make use of park facilities, and explore and learn about natural and environmental history.

The Digital Wayfinding Service should provide people with information based on where they are, what they are doing, and what's happening in the park. Participants suggested tools like geo-located or time-based push notifications could tell people things like when a washroom is closing or how far they are from an exit.

The Digital Wayfinding Service should be available to people without smartphones since people use other devices and smartphones are expensive (and require data plans).

Detailed Summary of Feedback

Participants shared feedback about four different topics:

- General feedback about the sign design options;
- Feedback about each of the sign design options;
- Feedback about the information needs of the Digital Wayfinding System's future users; and
- Other feedback

General feedback about the sign design options

Participants shared general feedback about all of the sign design options. Several people were concerned that none of the sign design options appeared to consider accessibility, saying it looked like some of the information was positioned too high for people in wheelchairs or children to see and that the colours and contrast could be difficult for people with visual impairments to read. Others said it would be important for the signs to be positioned near trails so that people didn't need to go "off-road" to read them. Many people liked the use of materials that age naturally, though a few were concerned that these materials could negatively impact the natural environment.

Participants suggested that the signs could include a 4-sided option, solar panels to power any digital component, and some kind of tactile element (such as braille) to help visually-impaired people. Others suggested that colour-coding on the signs would be useful to help people identify different kinds of trails (using different colours to identify trails of varying difficulty levels). Participants also felt that all of the options should include emergency information. *Janette Harvey explained that the City is undertaking an Emergency Wayfinding Strategy that will add unique location identifiers on easy-to-read signs in Toronto's parks and trails. She explained that the Emergency Wayfinding Strategy will connect to and complement the Parks & Trail Wayfinding Strategy.*

Finally, participants shared feedback about the parks identifier that appeared on some sign design concepts as a maple leaf. Most participants liked the idea of having a parks identifier. A few liked the maple leaf, though many felt the maple leaf was more of a national symbol than a Toronto symbol. Other suggested identifiers included: a squirrel,

a City of Toronto logo, a maple key, a hog, a silhouette of a white pine, an “i,” and a silhouette of the city’s ravine system(s).

Feedback about the three sign design concepts

Participants expressed likes, concerns, and mixed opinions about each of the sign design options.

Concept A

- **Likes:** Participants liked the simplicity of Concept A, its green colour, its heritage notes, and the fact that it included a separate panel for rules and etiquette (though one person was concerned that the rules might be at eye-level for children, and would therefore be the only thing they would see).
- **Concerns:** Several participants said Concept A was boring, too 2-dimensional, and that it might not stand out enough. They were also concerned that the yellow-on-green might be very difficult to read for people with lower vision.
- **Mixed opinions:** People had different opinions about the schematic map illustrated in Concept A. Some people liked its minimalism and simplicity, while others thought it could be confusing or too abstract.

Concept B

- **Likes:** Generally, people liked the use of Corten in Concept B, saying that its colour was natural for a parks environment and seemed rustic. Others liked that the sign design included the option for a community bulletin board, though they said it was important this option only appear deep inside parks and trails so that they don’t get covered with too much information.
- **Concerns:** Participants were concerned that this Concept B might not work well year-round, particularly the perforated footer. Others thought the perforated footer could be susceptible to abuse from vandals. Accessibility was a big concern, with participants saying the positioning of text was too high, the light text on a dark background could be difficult to read, and the size of text could be challenging to read. One participant was concerned that, if the design used hardwood, it might attract invasive insects that could also damage trees.
- **Mixed opinions:** Participants shared mixed opinions about the trail markers. Some like the trail marker, saying it was simple and legible. Others were concerned that it might be too low and could be buried in snow for half the year.

Concept C

- **Likes:** Participants liked that Concept C appeared contemporary. They liked its sloped cap, saying it had a nice connection to the TO360 signage and would help snow slide off the sign in winter. Several participants liked the yellow colour at the top of the sign, saying it acted as a beacon. Finally, participants liked that Concept C included a municipal address on it.
- **Concerns:** A number of participants were concerned that Concept C was “too urban” and “too dark” for Toronto’s parks and trails. One person didn’t like that the illustrations didn’t include any interpretive information. Others were worried

that the light text on dark background would be an accessibility issue. Finally, some felt that the removable panels could be easily stolen. *Phil Berczuk of SDG explained that the panels would require a special tool to be able to remove.*

- **Mixed opinions:** Some participants liked the use of concrete, saying it was durable and natural, while others felt it could pose an environmental risk (by leaking calcium into parks and trails). Some liked the short trail marker, saying it was discreet, while others felt it could be a trip hazard or buried in snow half the year. Some suggested making it bigger so that it could double as a bench.

Feedback about the information needs of users of the future Digital Wayfinding Service

The Consultant Team presented participants with a hypothetical user journey and asked them to identify what information the user needed, where he needed, and how it could be delivered to him. This hypothetical user, Chris, was a 60 year old man with a hip replacement taking his dog for a walk. Participants gave feedback about Chris' needs, other users' information needs, how people should receive that information, and general advice about the future Digital Wayfinding Service.

Chris' needs

Participants identified different kinds of information Chris would need on his journey, including:

- **Trail information**, such as trail conditions, the last time the trail was maintained (after a storm, for example), the length of the trail he is on, the distance to the next exit from the trail and the amount of time it would take him to walk any given trail or trail segment.
- **Pre set walks**, including their difficulty, how much time each walk would take, and whether he can bring his dog on the walk.
- **Stories**, similar to the [murmur] project, in which told people stories about different places in the city and helped them explore.
- **Major points of interest or destinations.**
- **On-leash and off-leash dog areas**, as well as a warning not to go to an off-leash area if he wants to avoid it.
- **Barriers**, like if there's a tree on the path or construction ahead.

Other users' needs

Participants also discussed other users and what their information needs might be, including:

- **Runners** would need information about distance, pre-set running routes (both short and long routes), the locations of emergency stops, surface types (gravel vs asphalt), the location of off-leash areas (to avoid), events (to know how busy a park or area is), water fountain locations, and transit stops.
- **Cyclists** would need information about distance of a route, different surface types (asphalt vs natural), whether a trail is shared between cyclists and

- pedestrians or not, slopes and grades, and a pre-trip planner (since it's tough to use a smartphone on a bike).
- **Kids** would need a game that could encourage them to explore. Some people thought there shouldn't be anything for kids in the Digital Wayfinding System since kids should be exploring the park, not technology.
 - **Tourists** would need a simple map that identified park amenities and public transit locations.
 - **All users** would need information about park amenities and their respective closing times (like washrooms, tennis courts, playing fields, soccer pitches, baseball diamonds) and a trip planner. Participants also said it would be important not to overwhelm people with too much information in the Digital Wayfinding Service. Finally, people said the system shouldn't be overly prescriptive: many people grew up without wayfinding and learned to navigate just fine.

How information could be delivered

Participants identified a few different ways that information could be delivered to the Digital Wayfinding Service's various users. One suggestion was to use push notifications that are time and location aware (letting people in a park know that the washrooms are going to close in 20 minutes, for example). They said it would be important for the information to be accessible to people without smartphones, too, such as via the City's website. Others thought the information could be delivered through an app that provided additional information if required (such as an app with historical or interpretive information).

Participants also noted that many people rely on non-digital queues for wayfinding, like the location of buildings, water features, physical maps, and other signage. Participants suggested the City use crowd-sourcing to identify other information needs for the Digital Wayfinding System.

One person asked whether the source data developed for the Digital Wayfinding System would be open. *Phil Berczuk replied that yes, this is the intention.*

Other feedback

A few participants said the contrast on the panels wasn't strong enough and suggested panels at future Stakeholder Meetings should have a higher contrast. They also said it would be useful to include a sense of scale in images to understand the relative size of the sign options.

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 Toronto: Bernita Lee

City of Toronto: Janette Harvey

City of Mississauga: Michael Gusche

Cycle Toronto: Robert Pylypiw

Don Watershed Regeneration Council: Peter Heinz

Evergreen: Nicola Hives

High Park Resource Group: Leslie Gooding

Highland Creek Green Team: Brian MacFarlane

Park People: Kyle Baptista

PFR Disability Committee: Elizabeth Hurdman

Steer Davies Gleave: James Brown

Steer Davies Gleave: Craig Nelson

Steer Davies Gleave: Phil Berczuk

Swerhun Facilitation: Ian Malczewski

Swerhun Facilitation: Yulia Pak

Toronto Field Naturalists: Bruce Thompson

Toronto Parks and Trees Foundation: Jayne Fry

Walk Toronto: Mike Jones