



Town Hall Summary

OVERVIEW

The City of Toronto hosted four public town halls on February 23rd and 24th and March 2nd and 3rd, 2016 as part of its Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan. These town halls were held across the city, with one each in Toronto-East York, Scarborough, Etobicoke-York and North York (see Attachment 1 for event details).

The purpose of these town halls was to share and seek feedback on what is working well, and to identify needs, gaps, challenges and opportunities with regard to the provision of parks and recreation facilities in Toronto. At each town hall, participants were provided with an overview of the Master Plan process and challenges that the Master Plan will seek to respond to. Following this presentation, participants engaged in facilitated discussions guided by a series of focus questions (see Attachment 2 – Agenda). All four town halls were live webcast, providing residents with the option to view and listen to the presentation and participate in the discussion either in-person or online. In total, approximately 140 people participated in in the town halls, with over 40 community, sports and interest groups represented (see Attachment 3 - Participant Lists).

Participant feedback has been summarized in two main sections within this report:

- I. High-level summary that synthesizes feedback received from all four town halls.
- II. Detailed summary, with feedback separated out for each of the four town halls as follows: Toronto-East York (Page 3); Scarborough (Page 5); Etobicoke-York (Page 7); North York (Page 8).

This summary was written by Swerhun Facilitation, a third-party facilitation firm that is part of the consultant team led by Monteith Brown Planning Consultants that has been retained by the City to assist with the development of the Master Plan. This report is not intended to provide a verbatim transcript of the meeting but instead provides a high level summary of the perspectives and advice provided by participants during the facilitated discussion.

If you have any questions about this summary, please contact Matthew Wheatley, Swerhun Facilitation, at mwheatley@swerhun.com or by phone at (416) 572-4365.

HIGH-LEVEL SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

The high-level summary in this section synthesizes participant feedback from all four town hall meetings and organizes it according to the six challenges presented by the Master Plan team at the town halls:

1. Responding to a Changing City
2. Reshaping Facilities to Fit Evolving Needs
3. Providing Quality Facilities
4. Working with Others to Meet Needs

5. Improving Accessibility for Everyone
6. The Funding Challenge

Responding to a Changing City

To respond to a changing city, participants at the Toronto-East York, Etobicoke-York and North York town halls suggested new facilities in locations that had recently grown (particularly higher density neighbourhoods) or were anticipated to grow in the near term, including:

- A new community centre in central Etobicoke
- New community centres serving Ward 20 (both in the south end in the Entertainment District which has experienced a high rate of growth and in the northern end, which has not experienced the same growth but does not have a community centre)
- A new community centre in the quarry lands at Victoria Park and Gerrard
- A new playground at Wynford Drive
- Additional ice pads at Goulding Park
- New community centres at Grand Avenue Park and/or at the site of the former Christie plant

Reshaping Facilities to Fit Evolving Needs

To reshape facilities to fit evolving needs, participants at the Toronto-East York, Scarborough and North York town halls suggested converting underutilized facilities to uses more in line with growing recreational activities (such as ball diamonds to cricket pitches or making temporary skateboard parks permanent, as was requested at Malvern Community Recreation Centre). Participants at the Etobicoke-York town hall suggested reshaping facilities by making spaces, fields and courts more flexible to accommodate a range of sports and balance grass roots and premium sports.

Providing Quality Facilities

Providing quality facilities was discussed in a number of ways by participants at the town halls. Toronto-East York and Scarborough participants suggested smaller-scale improvements to existing facilities to increase their usability. Participants in Etobicoke-York and North York expressed concerns about facility maintenance and a lack of supporting amenities causing a decline in sport organization membership, shortened playing seasons and potentially increasing the risk of injuries. They suggested that the City improve sports field maintenance and provide supporting amenities such as washrooms, lighting, sports bubbles and artificial turf (although there was some concern about the appropriateness of artificial turf for some sports).

Working with Others to Meet Needs

Participants identified many different types of organizations that the City of Toronto could work with to meet recreational needs. Participants at the Scarborough, Etobicoke-York and North York town halls suggested that the City work with schools and post-secondary institutions to provide facilities, with participants at the former two town halls emphasizing community hubs on vacated school sites and participants at the latter meeting suggesting facility sharing during off-peak times. Participants at these three town halls also suggested that the City consider partnering with community organizations to help animate and activate facilities and pursuing more corporate partnerships to increase funding and permit fee revenues.

Improving Accessibility for Everyone

Participants at all four town halls talked about improving accessibility to facilities in terms of ease of travel. While participants in Scarborough and Etobicoke-York shared stories about the need to drive to facilities and difficulties faced by those without access to cars, participants in Toronto-East York and North York suggested that the City also encourage access to facilities through public transit and active transportation. Participants also discussed accessibility in terms of program registration – suggesting that improvements to the registration system would result in greater access, and welcoming spaces – suggesting that efforts be made to improve the look and function of recreation centre lobbies to promote user-staff interaction.

The Funding Challenge

Participants at all four town halls offered a number of different ideas to respond to the funding challenge, including:

- Ensuring that parks acquired through section 42 or built through section 37 funds and other development-related funds are large enough to provide outdoor facilities
- Encouraging people to volunteer/make small donations
- Better advertising programs and services to bring in more users and revenue
- Seeking donations of space from faith-based groups and large land owners
- Working with community organizations and sports clubs to fund new facilities
- Undertaking site-specific planning for new facilities as soon as possible to better take advantage of funding opportunities with other levels of government

DETAILED FEEDBACK

This section provides a detailed summary of feedback from all four town halls. Each town hall is summarized in a separate sub-section. As with the high-level summary in the previous section, feedback in the detailed summary has been organized to correspond with the six challenges. Feedback that falls outside of the six challenges has been included as additional feedback. In certain instances, responses to participant feedback were provided by representatives of the Master Plan team, other City staff, and elected officials at the town halls. Where these responses are included, they are denoted in *italics*.

Toronto-East York

Responding to a Changing City

Both in-person and online participants identified areas of the city that are currently or have recently undergone population growth and which they felt are in need of new facilities. These areas included:

- The quarry lands at Victoria Park and Gerrard – there are some community centres in the area however, they are small and already highly used
- The Entertainment District (and the northern end of Ward 20, which has not been experiencing as much growth, but does not have a community centre at all).
- Wynford Drive – there are many condos along this street with young families and there is a need for a playground. The City's Director of Parks Development and Capital Projects, Michael Schreiner, noted that although playgrounds are not within the scope of the Master Plan, the City has been looking at bringing something forward in this area and has met with the local Councillor to discuss this issue

It was also suggested that as the population ages, the City should look to expand its range of programs for seniors – they currently are focused on older seniors and there could be more programs for younger and more active seniors. *A member of the Master Plan team noted that while programs are not within the scope of the plan, this feedback will be passed along to staff responsible for recreation services and programs.*

Reshaping Facilities to Fit Evolving Needs

It was suggested that community centres would benefit from additional meeting space that community members could use/program in an unstructured way without requiring staff resources.

One participant noted that their tennis club (Lawrence Park) has a waiting list of over 400 people and suggested that the adjacent lawn bowling club, which appears to be underutilized, could be converted to additional tennis courts. Another participant cautioned that utilization rates may not reflect actual demand. This participant noted that while a number of lawn bowling clubs in the city are facing declining membership, this decline has coincided with increases in permit fees, making club memberships less affordable.

Providing Quality Facilities

Some participants identified existing facilities that needed to be improved, like the cricket pitch in Dentonia Park which has a concrete path running through it.

Other participants felt that some parks needed specific amenities added to them, including more benches and pathways in EarlsCourt Park and outdoor storage space to support the bake oven and community gardens in Regent Park. *A member of the Master Plan team noted that while bake ovens and community gardens aren't specifically a part of the Master Plan, the Plan will describe the importance of support amenities.*

Working with Others to Meet Needs

The Toronto Pan Am Sports Centre was cited as one of the best things about parks and recreation facilities in Toronto – it was felt that the Centre functions as a big community builder that brings in lots of families and provides benefits for nearby University of Toronto Scarborough students.

One participant felt that while facilities provided by organizations other than the City of Toronto were beneficial to the community, they may not have the same permanence and once a space is lost, people have to quickly find new facilities and programs.

Improving Accessibility for Everyone

Several participants felt that the program registration system could be improved, with participants noting that they had to arrive at community centres very early in order to secure a spot, or have a difficult time accessing the registration system online, only to find that all classes are full once they are able to access the system. Other participants felt that many outdoor rinks are difficult to permit because most of the permit spaces are taken by private companies. *A member of the Master Plan team noted that while the registration and permitting systems are not within the scope of the Master Plan, planning for additional facilities is a part of the answer to a lack of programs and permit spaces.*

It was also suggested that the Master Plan take into account the routes and means of travel people use to get to facilities, particularly active transportation and synergies with the City's cycling plan.

The Funding Challenge

Participants suggested responding to the funding challenge by encouraging people to volunteer/make small donations and to better advertise the programs and services offered at facilities to help drive greater usage and as a result, bring in more money from fees.

It was also suggested that money received from developers for parkland acquisition could be put toward funding recreation facilities. *A member of the Master Plan team noted that these funds can only be used for acquiring and improving parkland, as per the Planning Act and related City of Toronto policies.*

Additional Feedback

At a high level, several participants felt that Toronto had a great system of parks and recreation centres that offer a range of great services and programs. Concerns were raised about some front desk staff, whom one participant felt were at times too young and provided insufficient service.

A participant suggested that the consultation process include the views of those who don't currently use facilities as well as input from seniors. *A member of the Master Plan team noted that an invitation has been extended to a city-wide senior's organization to participate on the Facilities Master Plan Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG), and that the full list of participating organizations is available on the Master Plan website: toronto.ca/parks/facilitiesplan.*

Scarborough

Responding to a Changing City

One participant felt that programs at community centres seem to be geared towards youth and "senior" seniors and further suggested that programs could be expanded to better accommodate the interests of adults who accompany youth to facilities and "just retired" seniors. *A member of the Master Plan team noted that while programs are not in scope for this Plan, the City had heard a lot about program variety and interior space design during the consultations for the 2012 Recreation Service Plan and that feedback on programs would be passed on to staff responsible for implementing that plan.*

Reshaping Facilities to Fit Evolving Needs

Several participants talked about creating new facilities or converting existing ones to fit evolving needs, including building more indoor ice rinks and pools in Scarborough, providing a permanent skateboard park at the Malvern Community Recreation Centre and converting underutilized baseball diamonds to cricket pitches (particularly in light of the Pan Am Sports Centre having replaced a number of pitches).

Providing Quality Facilities

Participants discussed improving facilities both in terms of making small renovations (e.g. improving service desks that have tiny windows that cut off users from staff) and by providing more supporting amenities to encourage usage.

Working with Others to Meet Needs

Several participants suggested that the City should work with other agencies (e.g. Toronto District and Toronto Catholic District School Boards, Toronto Public Library) to explore community hubs, particularly in light of the Toronto District School Board looking to divest some of their buildings and land.

Participants also discussed some existing facilities – like Berner Trail Community Centre, which is attached to a school and a daycare – which could be transformed into community hubs through partnerships with local community organizations that can animate and activate these spaces. It was felt that these types of partnerships would achieve a lot and have a lower cost to the City than building new facilities.

Improving Accessibility for Everyone

Participants discussed access in terms of ease of travel to facilities. It was noted that Scarborough's population is spread out tremendously and many of the local community centres are small and have limited programs. In order to access some programs, participants said they have to travel quite far (or take multiple bus transfers) and that some programs are inaccessible unless one has a car.

The Funding Challenge

Participants suggested working with communities to fund new facilities, with one person noting that a cricket pitch had been funded in equal thirds by the City, local community, and businesses. Should this model be followed more broadly, it was suggested that the City undertake site planning work to provide a price tag and then go to the local community to determine how to raise funding. Another participant noted that where community organizations contribute to the funding of new facilities, expectations may be raised that those organizations receive preferential permit use of the facility.

One participant felt that there could be a more equitable distribution of facilities resulting from funds raised through development. *A member of the Master Plan team noted that there are legislative limitations to how and where funds resulting from development can be spent.*

A participant expressed concern that the level of funding required to ultimately implement the Plan may be beyond what Council is willing to approve. This participant also felt that the 5 year reviews of the Plan may provide opportunities for new Councils to reject all or portions of the Plan. *A member of the Master Plan team noted that the Plan will include facility priorities, emphasize building new and state of good repair, and make the costs clear.*

Additional Feedback

It was suggested that public consultation should be a component of the Plan's implementation with community members, Councillors and staff working together to determine where different recreation components are located at the local level.

Etobicoke-York

Responding to a Changing City

Several participants spoke about the need for a community centre in central Etobicoke and close to Dixon Road to meet the needs of the large population in the area. They felt that a new community centre would make it easier for families to access sports and programming, provide job opportunities and training to local youth, and support a vulnerable area of the city. It was suggested that the City explore building a new community centre on the site of the West Mall Rink.

It was suggested that the City explore multi-use spaces to meet the needs of the growing senior population while still providing for the needs of youth.

One participant, citing an example from Sweden, suggested that the City build multi-story facilities in places where the cost of land is high or otherwise constrained.

Reshaping Facilities to Fit Evolving Needs

Participants had a number of suggestions with regards to reshaping facilities, including making fields more flexible to accommodate a range of sports and balance grass roots and premium sports.

Providing Quality Facilities

A few participants expressed concern about facility maintenance, with one participant reporting having been injured playing football on a poorly maintained field and another noting that the basketball court in Dixon is not well maintained. Another participant suggested that while artificial fields may provide for easier field maintenance, they can also increase the likelihood of injury with certain types of sports (e.g. rugby).

Working with Others to Meet Needs

Several participants suggested that the City work with the Toronto District School Board to repurpose closing schools into community hubs. The Alderwood Community Centre, with a school, library, skating rink and tennis courts, was cited as a great example of a community hub.

Participants also suggested that community centres could include offices and collaborative spaces that local community organizations could rent from the City.

Improving Accessibility for Everyone

Several participants felt that the registration process made accessing facilities and programming a challenge. They felt that the deadlines were too strict and too far in advance of the start of programs.

They suggested that the registration technology should be improved, the offerings extended, and that the system should be set up so that people in the immediate area of a facility are served first by that facilities' programs. *A member of the Master Plan team noted that while the Plan is focused on facilities, a refresh of the registration system is in progress and it will have opportunities for public input as well.*

Participants also discussed access in terms of ease of travel to facilities, noting that many families have to drive to several locations to access programs and that it can be challenging to access facilities unless one has a car.

The Funding Challenge

Some concern was expressed around the use of section 37 development funds to build a community centre at Humber Bay Shores. Some felt that the construction of this community centre undermined the previous Master Plan as the centre was not included in it, or in capital budgets resulting from that plan.

There was a suggestion that faith-based groups and large land owners could donate space to the City for new facilities.

Additional Feedback

Participants suggested that the Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy be considered as part of the Master Plan. A member of the Master Plan team confirmed that it will be considered, alongside the Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020, and other social development strategies.

A few participants were concerned that a piece of Provincially-owned land at 126 Elmvale Road was going to be sold and felt that it should be provided to the City of Toronto and added to Centennial Park. *The Etobicoke Centre Member of Provincial Parliament Yvan Baker noted that the land is owned by Infrastructure Ontario – an agency of the Province – whose mandate is maximizing the value of land. Infrastructure Ontario is proposing to change the land use designation for this land and this particular change must be approved by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. MPP Baker noted that he will discuss the proposal with the Minister when it is brought forward for his approval.*

One participant felt that natural surface trails should be included in the Master Plan as there are over 200km of trails within the city's ravines, they are very accessible to a large portion of the city, are open year round and provide services to a wide variety of groups. Another participant would like to see horticultural gardens included in the Master Plan as a facility-supporting resource.

North York

Responding to a Changing City

A few participants flagged the importance of keeping up with demographic shifts, highlighting specific areas and facilities that could be upgraded to respond to a changing city, including:

- Additional ice pads at Goulding Park
- New community centres at Grand Avenue Park and/or at the site of the former Christie plant along Lake Shore Boulevard West

Reshaping Facilities to Fit Evolving Needs

Participants mentioned a number of specific facilities that they thought were underutilized / not optimally utilized, including:

- The stadium at Esther Shiner Civic Stadium – it was suggested that it be replaced with an indoor facility for soccer / football training
- The tennis courts at Riverdale Park – it was suggested that they be covered to promote greater year-round use
- The Don Valley Golf Course – it was suggested that it would be better used as a park

Providing Quality Facilities

Several participants felt that maintenance of City facilities could be improved, particularly in comparison to nearby facilities in surrounding Greater Toronto Area municipalities. Some participants mentioned that they had seen declining membership in their sports clubs with people electing to use facilities outside of the city because of maintenance (e.g. holes and debris on fields) and a lack of supporting amenities (e.g. lack of washrooms, including at the Keele Reservoir).

Several participants talked about the importance of extending the playing season at outdoor facilities (particularly soccer fields). They suggested that the City further explore/increase the use of lighting, sports bubbles and artificial turf. There were some differing views on the value of these suggested facility upgrades, with some noting that they could lead to fee increases while others noted that winter prices are already very high given the level of demand and lack of available facilities.

Working with Others to Meet Needs

Several participants suggested the City work with schools and universities/colleges to use their facilities during off-peak times (e.g. evenings, weekends, summer). They also suggested that the City could work with schools to offer afterschool programs, with additional fees being raised from these new users.

Participants also suggested that the City pursue more corporate partnerships (e.g. with professional sports teams for funding, with sports clubs for permits), making it easier and more sustainable for corporate partners to invest in and offer programs through City facilities. One participant suggested a specific partnership opportunity where the City could help run a waterfront recreation site at Humber College's Lake Shore campus.

Participants suggested further pursuing outdoor facilities on hydro corridors, noting that there are soccer and football fields on the hydro corridor beside the Esther Shiner Civic Stadium and cricket pitches on the hydro corridor beside Thorncliffe Park.

Improving Accessibility for Everyone

Several participants discussed accessibility in terms of access to programs, noting that the City offers a wide variety of programs, services and amenities for a broad range of users. Some felt that the City's facilities were accessible in terms of the affordability of their programs. Others felt that while some programs were affordable, the affordability of other programs could be improved.

Accessibility in terms of ease of travel to facilities was also discussed, with one participant suggesting that sheltered and secure bike parking be offered to help encourage and provide greater access to facilities by active transportation.

The Funding Challenge

One participant was concerned that while a fair amount of money had been received through section 37 agreements from developments within the city, most of the new parks being built are not large enough to fit outdoor facilities such as baseball diamonds and soccer fields.

Another participant suggested that the City should strive to quickly undertake site-specific planning for new facilities identified in the Master Plan so that as many facilities as possible are shovel ready and able to take advantage of funding opportunities with other levels of government.

Additional Feedback

A participant suggested that all community centres should utilize solar panels to reduce their energy consumption, noting that there used to be a Provincial program that offered funding. *A member of the Master Plan team confirmed that the City had taken advantage of that program in the past to add solar panels to some community centres, and that the Master Plan will look to further opportunities to reduce facility energy consumption.*

NEXT STEPS

At the conclusion of each town hall, the Master Plan team provided participants with a brief overview of next steps in the process, including:

- All feedback received at the town halls will be included in a summary report
- The summary report will include feedback from all four town halls and will be made available on the Master Plan website: toronto.ca/parks/facilitiesplan and sent directly to participants who provided their email address when signing in at the town hall meetings
- Feedback from the town halls and other consultation activities will be included in an overall consultation report and this report will be used to help develop the Draft Master Plan
- Additional feedback will be sought on the Draft Master Plan in fall 2016

ATTACHMENT 1 – DATES/TIMES/LOCATIONS

The dates, times and locations of the four town halls are listed below.

Toronto-East York District Town Hall

Tuesday, February 23, 2016
7:00-9:00pm
Wallace Emerson Community Centre
1260 Dufferin Street

Scarborough District Town Hall

Wednesday, February 24, 2016
7:00-9:00pm
Warden Hilltop Community Centre
25 Mendelssohn Street

Etobicoke-York District Town Hall

Wednesday, March 2, 2016
7:00-9:00pm
Etobicoke Olympium
590 Rathburn Road

North York District Town Hall

Thursday, March 3, 2016
7:00-9:00pm
Edithvale Community Centre
131 Finch Avenue West

ATTACHMENT 2 – AGENDA

The below agenda was used at all four town halls. The focus questions included with this agenda were used to help guide town hall discussions.

7:00pm	Welcome Parks, Forestry and Recreation, City of Toronto
7:05	Introductions and Agenda Review Alex Heath – Swerhun Facilitation
7:10	Overview Presentation Matt Bentley, Project Manager – Parks, Forestry and Recreation, City of Toronto Steve Langlois – Monteith Brown Planning Consultants
7:40	Facilitated Discussion Focus Questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What is the <u>best thing</u> about the City's parks and recreation facilities?2. How can the City's parks and recreation facilities be <u>improved</u> (e.g. expanding existing facilities, constructing of new facilities)?3. Do you have any suggestions on how to address the challenges associated with providing parks and recreation facilities?
8:50	Wrap Up & Next Steps
9:00	Adjourn

ATTACHMENT 3 – PARTICIPANT LISTS

Toronto-East York District Town Hall

In-person participants: 20

Online participants: 12

Participating organizations:

- Cosburn Park Lawn Bowling
- CRC Regent Park Community Food Centre
- Lawrence Park Tennis Club
- Joseph J. Piccininni Community Centre Advisory Council
- Tennis Toronto - 15 community clubs
- Toronto Entertainment District Residents Association
- Toronto Observer

Scarborough District Town Hall

In-person participants: 20

Online participants: 4

Participating organizations:

- 42 Rides Youth Steering Committee
- Boys and Girls Clubs
- Crossroads of the Danforth BIA
- Hill Basketball League
- Malvern Family Resource Centre
- Malvern Skate Group
- Scarborough Baseball Assoc. and West
- Scarborough Cricket Association
- St. Paul's L'Amoreaux Centre

Etobicoke-York District Town Hall

In-person participants: 50

Online participants: 2

Participating organizations:

- BILD GTA
- East Mall Community
- Etobicoke Community Council (E.C.C.)
- Etobicoke Rugby
- Etobicoke Rugby Football Club
- Family Service Toronto / Options
- Friends of Centennial Park
- Friends of Silver Creek School
- Kingsview Village
- Kipling Collegiate HS
- Midaynta Community Services
- Our Place Initiative
- Pathways to Education
- Positive Change
- ridingfeelsgood.com
- TCHC - Tenant Representative
- VESA

North York District Town Hall

In-person participants: 25

Online participants: 10

Participating organizations:

- Big City Youth Services
- Black Creek Pioneer Village, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority
- CTV Toronto
- Friends of Dempsey Park
- Leaside Baseball
- North York Cosmos Soccer Club
- North York Hearts Soccer Club
- North York Soccer Association
- Weston Soccer Club
- York University