



# York Street Park + Rees Street Park Community Consultation Summary

## March 2018

### Overview

York Street Park and Rees Street Park are two new parks being planned for Toronto's waterfront along the north side of Queens Quay. The aim for these parks is to set new standards for inclusive design, sustainability, and climate resilience. Located at the southern foot of York Street and Rees Street respectively, these two parks will be designed to respond to the pressing issues of our growing city and the Central Waterfront and South Core neighbourhoods. At only 650 metres apart, the planning for these two parks are being coordinated by Waterfront Toronto and the City of Toronto, so that they serve the diverse needs of residents, office workers, and visitors as part of Toronto's vibrant waterfront parks system.

Several objectives will help to guide the design of these two parks. They will take into consideration the wider context of the waterfront parks system to:

- Offer compelling new park experiences and support a range of social activities for a diverse group of people and community groups
- Provide opportunities to incorporate innovative public art and art programs
- Act as key gateways and arrival points to the waterfront by welcoming visitors and creating memorable experiences
- Strive to uphold a high standard of design excellence and quality of place that has been achieved across the waterfront

### Public Consultation & Engagement

Since 2016, the City of Toronto's Parks, Forestry & Recreation division has hosted two public meetings to get feedback from stakeholders and members of the public on the Rees Street park site (318 Queens Quay West). See the City's website for [more details](#). Prior to the launch of the York Street and Rees Street project, there had been no formal consultation on the York Street park site.

Understanding the larger need to plan these two parks as additions to an existing system of waterfront parks and public spaces, Waterfront Toronto and Parks, Forestry & Recreation embarked on a new round of public consultation and engagement to help inform an international design competition and the evaluation criteria for selecting the winning designs for these two parks.

### Public Meeting & Open House – January 2018

Approximately 170 people joined us at Harbourfront Centre's Brigantine Room and Marilyn Brewer Community Space (235 Queens Quay West) on January 22, 2018 for our first combined meeting to consider York Street Park and Rees

Street Park. Those in attendance heard brief presentations from local city Councillors Joe Cressy (Ward 20) and Lucy Troisi (Ward 28), as well as project team members from Waterfront Toronto and the City of Toronto.

The focus of the meeting was to provide background information and context on the two parks and to receive feedback on the guiding principles proposed by the project team.

*Guiding principles for the design of York Street Park and Rees Street Park:*

1. **21<sup>st</sup> Century Parks** – Addressing the issues of a growing city and welcoming its diverse residents, workers and visitors.
2. **New Standards for Sustainability** – Setting new standards for sustainability and climate resilience in both park design and operations.
3. **Gateway to the Waterfront** – Both parks are located at arrival points to the waterfront and should fulfill the role of welcoming people as they arrive at this key destination.
4. **Complementary and Contextual** – Both parks should complement the existing set of park experiences already provided on the waterfront by proposing new uses, environments, and experiences beyond those already available. Each park should respond to the urban form and users in each area.
5. **Diverse Community of Users** – Both parks should support animation and social activities by a diversity of local people, agencies and organizations.
6. **Design Excellence** – Both parks should strive to maintain the standard of design excellence, quality of place, and attention to detail that has been delivered on the waterfront. High-quality, durable materials, innovative technologies and good design should be combined with careful attention to the operating parameters of Parks, Forestry and Recreation.
7. **Public Art** – Art is a fundamental part of the vision for York Street Park and Rees Street Park. The design, program and use of the parks will be considered with a view to an innovative art program unique to each site.

*Meeting materials and documentation:*

- **Presentation** – York Street and Rees Street Parks Community Consultation – [January 22, 2018 \(PDF, 9MB\)](#)
- **Display Panels** – York Street and Rees Street Parks Community Consultation – [January 22, 2018 \(PDF, 8.5MB\)](#)

*Public feedback and activities:*

The project team, in collaboration with Bespoke Cultural Collective and Groundswell Projects, designed a series of engagement activities to build a deeper understanding of how residents and nearby workers wanted to experience these two new parks. A few guiding questions inspired the activities:

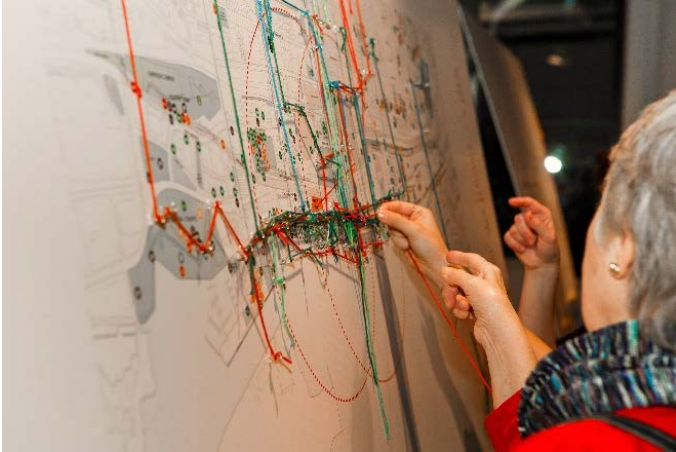
- How can we collectively prioritize and make decisions about what kinds of experiences should be included in these parks?
- What are the ways that nature can be enjoyed in the city through all seasons?
- How do we think of individual parks as distinct spaces but also part of a waterfront-wide park system?
- What makes parks accessible and inaccessible?
- Who is involved and not involved in conversations about parks?

**Review Groundswell Projects' full report [here](#).**

### *Activity 1: String Mapping*

Using a large map of Toronto's downtown waterfront that noted the locations of key community assets and amenities—from public washrooms to public art, dogs off-leash areas to children's playgrounds, and seasonal markets and attractions—participants were asked to plot out their most common routes through the waterfront. Each with a different colour of string, participants were instructed to highlight whether their route was a daily work/school

commute, a typical journey to run errands, or a pathway for recreation or fun.



*Participants use coloured string to map out how they travel along the waterfront. The activity both calls out amenities and points of interest near the two new parks, and also helps to identify the most common routes that people take.*

## Results

A key objective of this exercise was to help participants think about the Central Waterfront and what amenities, attractions and destinations exist in the wider network of parks and public spaces. This was intended to help participants consider the broader context for these two new parks. The results—based on journeys mapped by 70 participants and coded by purpose, i.e. commute, errands, or fun—also describe how people move through the Central Waterfront. For instance, significantly more east-west movement was reported, as compared to north-south movement. This east-west movement is primarily along Queens Quay, with Front Street and Lake Shore Boulevard being the next most heavily travelled. North-south movement was heaviest on Simcoe Street and York Street, but with only about half as many journeys as along Queens Quay. The top five destinations recorded were the Jack Layton Ferry Terminal, Harbourfront Centre, Coronation Park, Harbour Square Park and Roundhouse Park. The journeys and routes recorded were often complex, combining both north-south and east-west movement through the waterfront, connecting to a wide variety of destinations. See Tables 1 and 2 on the following page.

**Review the route data and analysis from the String Mapping exercise [here](#).**

Table 1: Key Routes				
North-South Routes	Errands	Fun	Commute	Total
Bathurst Street	1	1	0	2
Bay Street	0	3	5	8
Cherry Street	0	4	0	4
Dan Leckie Way	1	0	0	1
Jarvis Street	1	1	1	3
Parliament Street	2	0	2	4
Rees Street	2	2	4	8
Sherbourne Street	0	2	2	4
Simcoe Street	4	8	4	16
Spadina Street	4	4	2	10
Stadium Road	0	4	2	6
Strachan Avenue	0	2	3	5
Sumach Street	1	1	2	4
University Avenue	0	0	1	1
Yonge Street	2	2	3	7
York Street	3	4	8	15
East-West Routes	Errands	Fun	Commute	Total
Gardiner Expressway	1	0	1	2
Queens Quay	11	18	19	48
King Street	3	2	3	8
Wellington Street	2	0	0	2
Front Street	5	8	3	16
Queen Street	0	1	1	2
Fort York Boulevard	1	0	1	2
Bremner Boulevard	1	0	1	2
The Esplanade	2	0	3	5
Lake Shore Boulevard	0	6	7	13
Mill Street	0	0	1	1

Table 2: Most Common Destinations	
Jack Layton Ferry Terminal	13
Harbourfront Centre	10
Coronation Park	9
Harbour Square Park	8
Roundhouse Park	8
Canada Square	5
Simcoe WaveDeck	5
Yonge Street Slip	4
Cherry Beach Dog Off Leash Area	4
Peter St Basin	4
RBC Waterpark Place	4
Rees Street Park	3
Stadium Road Park	3
Spadina Wetlands	3
Water's Edge Promenade	3
Spadina WaveDeck	3
Sherbourne Common	3
Union Station	2
Sugar Beach	2
Rogers Centre	2
Ontario Square	2
HTO Park	2
Toronto Music Garden	2
David Pecaut Square	1
Canoe Landing Park	1
Rees WaveDeck	1
Toronto Police Marine Station	1
Corktown Common	1
Ireland Park	1
June Callwood Park	1
Queen's Quay Terminal	1
Amsterdam Brewhouse	1
Billy Bishop Airport	1

## Activity 2: Dotmocracy

Participants were given ten adhesive dots to vote for the park experiences that were most important to them. The colour of the dots corresponded to participants' age range, helping us to get a better sense of whether or not demographic differences correspond to different preferences for park experiences.



Participants were given an opportunity to use stickers to demonstrate which kinds of experiences and qualities were most important to them as park users.

### Results

Across all age groups, strong common themes emerged around the desire for both York Street Park and Rees Street Park to be places where people can disconnect from the hustle and bustle of the city, and to unwind and relax. Notions of access to fresh air and getting outdoors to connect with nature were strong across all groups.

**Table 3: Top Ten Desired Experiences in York Street and Rees Street Parks**

Desired Experiences	Rees Street Park	York Street Park	Total for Both Parks	< 18 years	18-34 years	35-54 years	> 54 years
Disconnecting, unwinding, and relaxing	31	33	64	1	18	15	30
Enjoying public art	25	26	51	-	14	18	19
Enjoying the outdoors/fresh air	24	25	49	-	13	15	21
Connecting with nature and wildlife	21	21	42	-	11	16	15
Taking my dog to play and socialize	20	17	37	1	7	15	14
Using the park at night	17	19	36	1	6	11	18
Enjoying views of the lake	22	11	33	1	10	9	13
Enjoying music	17	16	33	1	6	8	18
Accessing washrooms	19	11	30	-	11	8	11
Feeling safe	15	15	30	2	6	8	14

Review the raw data from the Dotmocracy exercise [here](#).

### Activity 3: Meet Your Neighbours



Participants paired up and used a conversation guide to interview each other about how they experience parks and what they like and dislike most. Based on the conversation guide, 26 participants completed the "People in Parks" story template and posted their story on a community bulletin board. A thematic analysis of the stories found several themes emerging repeatedly. The need for accommodations for cyclists, pedestrians and runners were among the most common themes, as were comfortable seating, green space and desires for both relaxation and socializing. Shelter, comfort and safety were also popular themes, with participants describing a desire for

park designs that would permit the enjoyment of these spaces at all hours of the day and through all seasons. It is worth noting that the considerations of families visiting with children were central to a number of participants' stories.

**Table 4: Most Common Themes in Meet Your Neighbours Exercise**

THEME	COUNT
Accommodation for cycling / cyclists	10
Space for socializing	8
Lots of seating	8
More green / natural space	8
Place for relaxation	7
Trails and paths for walking, running and cycling	7
Accommodation for walking / strolling	6
Good lighting for night-time use & safety	5
Accommodations for family, visiting with kids	5
Shade in the hot summer months	5
Warmth or shelter in the cold winter months	5
Free public washrooms	5

Review the anonymized summaries and thematic analysis for the Meet Your Neighbours exercise [here](#).

#### Activity 4: Story Circle



Participants joined the circle to share stories about a time "when I felt connected to nature in the city." A talking stick was used to guide the flow of the conversation. Some key insights that emerged from the stories shared included:

- Participants' desire for nature and green space related to "escaping the city" without needing to actually leave the city
- Words and phrases like "refuge" and "disconnect from the city" were common
- There was a recurring theme of having an "immersive experience of nature"
- Experiences were described in a highly sensory way through sight, touch and smell, e.g. "Walking barefoot on the grass"
- There was a strong desire to see parks with naturalized areas, trees, landscaping and native plants, as well as a fear that the parks might be filled with concrete or would be marred by the negative aspects of city life, such as noise or congestion

#### Activity 5: Envelope Wall



Participants were invited to write a message on cards in response to one of three prompts (see below). Messages were then placed into envelopes that are posted on the wall. Participants were encouraged to look at others' anonymous messages and discuss with each other and with the facilitators.

The submissions reflected many of the same major themes that emerged in the other activities.

**Prompt 1: My fear is...**

Fears expressed related to noise, loud music, littering, clean up, servicing and maintenance of the parks. Some submissions feared that the parks would be designed with too much concrete, or that the concrete bents (remnants of the Gardiner Expressway off-ramp) at York Street would be maintained. Some were concerned that the parks would be too active and crowded, while others worried that they would not have enough programming or activity to make them lively places for people. The question of dogs in the park drew fears from both sides – with some worried that dogs would not be accommodated in the parks, while others worried that dogs would overrun the parks and make it impossible for others to enjoy.

**Prompt 2: My wish is...**

Wishes expressed related to green space, natural settings, less concrete and more spaces for relaxation, contemplation and people watching. Some expressed a desire for musical performances and other kinds of active programming that would make the parks enjoyable. There were many calls for play spaces for children and people of all ages, as well as calls for a dogs' off leash area or other accommodations for dogs and their owners. Commemoration of the waterfront's unique history and heritage and a connection to the water emerged as important themes, alongside desires for strong design and bold public art. Many responses spoke to a desire to have the parks serve many different kinds of users, from parents with young children to skateboarders, from sports enthusiasts to dog owners, and seniors who want to connect with a community in the space. Within this, there was also an acknowledgement that catering too heavily to any one group of park users should be avoided to ensure that everyone would feel safe and welcome.

**Prompt 3: The most important thing is...**

The most important things identified by participants related to comfort – from providing plenty of seating to designing features that would provide shelter from wind, heat and cold to extend the usable season of the park spaces and allow for safe use after dark. Many reiterated a sense that there is a dire need for more play space for both dogs and children (but not together) as the adjacent waterfront neighbourhoods grow and become more densely populated. A number of respondents noted that the parks should embrace the philosophy of universal design, so that the parks would be accessible for all, especially people with disabilities and older people who may not be as mobile. Finally, more public toilets were a common request.

Review the full Envelope Wall transcripts [here](#).



## Focus Groups with Community & Stakeholders

### Community & Park Programming Focus Group – March 2018

Members of the project team from Waterfront Toronto and Parks, Forestry & Recreation hosted a focus group for 16 participants representing local neighbourhood associations, the Waterfront BIA, parks staff, the Toronto Skateboard Committee, the Waterfront Neighbourhood Centre, adjacent commercial property owners, and not-for-profit community organizations that run programming in parks. The group worked collaboratively to brainstorm ideas for programming in York Street and Rees Street Parks, to articulate considerations for enabling or implementing various kinds of programming, and to understand the space and maintenance requirements associated with different types of park programming. The resulting conversations focused on the potential character of each park.

**Table 5: Summary of Focus Group Discussions on Park Programming**

Rees Street Park	York Street Park
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food or food service – e.g. a restaurant, café or small food stalls</li> <li>• Playground or play area that is inclusive and accessible for all ages and abilities – especially for youth 12 to 18 years old, who don't usually have spaces designed with their needs in mind</li> <li>• A skate park or other park elements designed to be used for skateboarding or to attract skateboarders</li> <li>• A dog run or facilities designed for dogs and their owners</li> <li>• Contact with water – e.g. views of Lake Ontario, interactive water play like a splash pad, sprinkler or fountain</li> <li>• Art, public art installations – e.g. large interactive installations or something that might interact with the Gardiner Expressway</li> <li>• Vertical planters, raised garden beds, greenhouses – opportunities for community gardening and interaction, creating a sense of lushness, providing shade and a sense of place</li> <li>• Music events, entertainment – may require a flexible stage space fitted out with electrical and other requirements</li> <li>• Drinking fountains and public washrooms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Places to eat lunch, a range of seating options (lots of benches, picnic tables, Muskoka chairs, grassy picnic spots), spaces to work together collaboratively (for those who work in the nearby offices), shade and shelter from the elements</li> <li>• A fountain or water feature – as well as other park elements that help to mask noise pollution from the Gardiner Expressway and other nearby roadways</li> <li>• Lots of trees, three levels of green (plantings that create interest at the ground, mid-height and canopy) that help to frame views of the city and views to Lake Ontario, native plantings of fruit trees and pollinator plants</li> <li>• Participants were divided on whether or not to keep the concrete “bents” left behind after the removal of the Gardiner Expressway off-ramp</li> <li>• A public art program was contemplated – either permanent or rotating (temporary) that could contribute to the unique character of the park</li> <li>• Creating spaces to support vendors with seasonal items, arts and crafts, book fairs, market stalls, a book pod or farmers market</li> <li>• Community programming space for classes like yoga, tai chi, meditation, or fitness</li> </ul>

## Youth Focus Group

Waterfront Toronto partnered with the Waterfront Neighborhood Centre's children's after school program to run a focus group with 11 young people between the ages of 6 and 12 years old. The discussion focused on imagining the future of Rees Street Park, since it is close to the participants' homes and to the Waterfront Neighborhood Centre. The children were keen to speak on behalf of others their own age, as well as for kids both younger and older.

Participants were split into pairs and were asked to work together to answer the following questions:

- When you're in a park, how would you like to feel?
- Why do you visit parks?
- How do you get to parks?
- What types of programming would you want to do in a park?
- What's your favorite feature of a park?

To start the conversation, we asked the participants to tell us about how they feel in the parks they visit and how they would like to feel in Rees Street Park. Themes about feeling safe and confident came up when the group spoke about how they want to feel. The group's priority was to ensure everyone feels a sense of security and belonging in the future park.

Participants discussed the reasons they visit parks. They noted that when they are bored, they will visit parks to play, relax, and spend time with the people in their lives (family and friends). In addition to describing the usual kinds of play equipment found in parks (swings, teeter totters, etc.), they expressed interest in play structures and activities that are not exclusively designed as a playground. They also talked about opportunities for skateboarding, the possibility of outdoor trampolines (they like jumping high), and a splash pad.

**Table 6: How Youth Get to Parks**

MODE OF TRANSPORTATION	COUNT (out of 11)
Walk	10
Drive	4
Bike	3
Skateboard	3

The participants identified that once built, Rees Street Park will be within walking distance from their homes. The majority of the young people who participated in the focus group walk to waterfront parks near their home and they drive, bike, or skateboard to parks outside of the waterfront neighborhood to visit friends and family.

**Table 7: What types of programming would you like to do in Rees Street park?**

- Help clean the park (referenced earth day)
- Swim
- Run
- Play basketball
- Sleep
- Physical Education
- Trampoline
- Skateboard

**Table 8: What's your favorite park feature?**

- Grassy hills
- Fountain
- Slide
- Teeter totter
- Splash pad
- Baseball area
- Basketball area
- Monkey bars

In addition to the feedback collected above, youth felt that having access to free WiFi in the park, a food/ice cream truck, and a grassy area to enjoy these amenities would greatly enhance their experiences in the new park.

## Pop-up consultation in office building lobbies

Waterfront Toronto partnered with the property managers of two commercial office buildings next to the site of York Street Park. Pop-up consultations were held over the lunch hour at One York Street and RBC WaterPark Place. Project team members set up display boards and engaged office workers in a series of scaled down activities similar to those conducted at the public meeting on January 22, 2018. Participants could ask questions about the project, do a string mapping exercise to orient themselves to the locations of the two parks, cast votes on the dotmocracy board, and share their wishes, fears and most important ideas on the envelope wall (see full activity descriptions above in the section on the public meeting).

The results from the dotmocracy activity were consistent at each of the pop-up consultations and are summarized below. Similar to the feedback provided at the public meeting, participants tended to prioritize connecting with nature and “disconnecting from the city” in order to relax or unwind. With this group, the prominence of arts and cultural activity in the parks was a somewhat higher priority.

**Table 9: Top Desired Experiences**

Desired Experiences	Rees Street Park	York Street Park	Total	< 18 years	18-34 years	35-54 years	> 54 years
Connecting with nature and wildlife	86	261	347	5	145	157	40
Arts and culture	75	257	332	4	114	179	35
Disconnecting, unwinding, and relaxing	74	255	329	1	117	171	40
Socializing	61	213	274	6	116	133	19
Safety and comfort	56	178	234	3	90	107	34
Enjoying physical activity and being healthy	55	137	192	6	80	87	19
Infrastructure and connectivity	23	63	86	2	37	39	8
Learning and teaching	10	54	64	4	18	34	8

Submissions to the envelope wall also reflected many of the same major themes that emerged at the public meeting. As

One York Street and RBC WaterPark Place are geographically much closer to the York Street Park site, the majority of the comments submitted relate specifically to that park.

**Table 10: Desired features and experiences from pop-up consultations with office workers**

Desired features or experiences	Mentions
Green space	154
Eating area (patio/benches/tables)	98
Benches	76
Concerns about litter/garbage and recycling facilities/noise pollution from traffic	52
Shade and shelter from elements	44
Opportunities for active recreation	36
Remove the pillars/bents	28
Keep pillars/bents	26
Create a food hall	22
Public safety	22

## “How to Make a Great Park” online survey

Working with Bespoke Collective, Park People and City of Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation, Waterfront Toronto developed an online survey to gather opinions about what makes a great park. The survey was promoted throughout the City of Toronto and the Greater Toronto-Hamilton Area (GTHA). Between December 2017 and April 2018 over 750 responses were received. The majority of respondents were locals from Toronto’s Central Waterfront neighbourhood, however there were responses from neighbourhoods across the city and as far away as Quebec and New Brunswick. The survey results have informed the project team’s work in developing the design brief (request for proposals) for the York Street Park and Rees Street Park international design competition and will be provided to the shortlisted design teams to inform their design submissions.

Click [here](#) to read the survey results.

## Social media reach and engagement

### Twitter

- 28,646 people reached by tweets promoting the public meeting and design competition announcement.

### Facebook

- 27,600 people reached by the Facebook event promoting the meeting
- 1,777 people reached by promoting a news release announcing the international design competition.
- 16,639 people reached by promoting a blog post with a public meeting recap and online feedback form.
- Total reach: 46,016

### Breakdown by gender

- 44.1% women
- 55.9% men

### Breakdown by age group

- 5% aged 18 to 24
- 22% aged 25 to 34
- 24% aged 35 to 44
- 19% aged 45 to 54
- 14% aged 65+

## Media coverage

### [Toronto is getting two new waterfront parks](#)

Blog TO

Date: Jan 24, 2018

Keywords: Gardiner, "queens quay", Waterfront, "Queens Quay", Wavedecks

The City of Toronto held its first public meeting this week for members of the waterfront community to weigh in on two new parks along Queens Quay West.

### [Design Proposals Sought for York and Rees Street Parks](#)

Urban Toronto

Date: Mar 05, 2018

Keywords: "Toronto's waterfront", Gardiner, Waterfront, "Waterfront Toronto"

Waterfront Toronto, in partnership with the City of Toronto Parks Forestry and Recreation Department is calling international design professionals to develop visions for the York Street and Rees Street parks.

### [Competition: York and Rees Street Parks, Toronto](#)

Architects Journal-Mar. 6, 2018

According to the brief: 'York Street Park and Rees Street Park will be the two newest additions to the Toronto waterfront's growing collection of bold and ... Waterfront Toronto welcomes participants from a diversity of backgrounds, from local to international firms, small- to large-sized firms, and young to ...

### [Our weekly wrap-up of new design competitions worth checking out](#)

Architect-Mar. 2, 2018

Waterfront Toronto, in partnership with the City of Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation, is calling on international design professionals to develop a ... design teams to pre-qualify for a competition that will seek design proposals for Toronto's York Street Park and Rees Street Park, integrating them into a ...

## Next Steps

This draft community consultation summary is published for public review and comment. Send questions, concerns and additional feedback by mail or email:

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The international design competition for York Street Park and Rees Street Park continues through the month of May. Shortlisted design teams were announced on [May 11, 2018](#).

Waterfront Toronto is seeking additional members for this project's **Stakeholder Advisory Committee**. If you are interested in serving on this volunteer committee, please see the updated [call for submissions](#). Applications are due no later than June 11, 2018 at noon EST.

A public exhibition of the design proposals will take place in late June to mid-July of 2018.

## Project Schedule

