

Environmental assessment engagement event #3: Summary report

June 29, 2023



Background

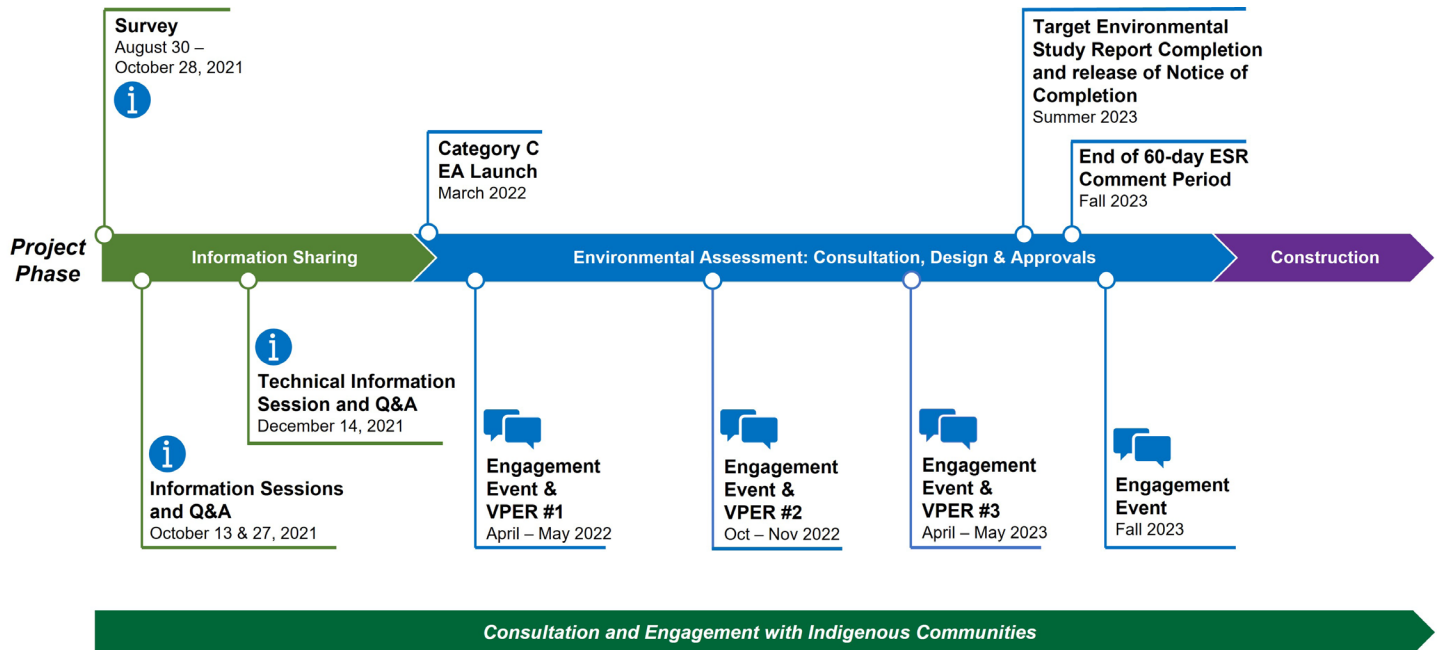
The Ontario government is bringing Ontario Place back to life, making it a world-class, year-round destination that will include family-friendly entertainment, public and event spaces, parkland, and waterfront access. Ontario Place will provide people of all ages with something to enjoy, including enhanced public spaces and parkland, increased access to the waterfront, beaches, pools, health and wellness services, as well as an indoor-outdoor live music and performance venue.

As part of making the site ready for redevelopment, the government is undertaking a Public Work Category C Class Environmental Assessment (EA) for the government-led site-servicing updates, as well as the design and development of the future public realm. On March 16, 2022, a Category C Environmental Assessment was launched with a Notice of Commencement posted on the Environmental Registry of Ontario and the Ontario Place project website (EngageOntarioPlace.ca). As part of the EA process, the government is engaging with Indigenous communities, the public, and stakeholders to ensure their perspectives are recognized and considered in the EA and public realm design process. The government will continue to seek input from Indigenous communities, the public and stakeholders, and work with the City of Toronto to bring Ontario Place back to life.

The third public consultation event as part of the EA and public realm design process for Ontario Place was held on April 27, 2023.

Overview

Between April 2022 and May 2023, a series of public consultation events were held where the public was able to learn more about and provide input on design of the public spaces and the EA process for Ontario Place:



On April 27, 2023, members of the public joined a two-hour virtual public consultation event focused on Ontario Place's public realm. The goals of the session were to (1) share information and project updates on the Ontario Place redevelopment, (2) engage with members of the public as part of the Category C EA process, and (3) receive public feedback on the recommended design for the public realm spaces. Members of the public were advised that the designs presented during the session were "recommended" by the EA process, and were not final.

The virtual event was facilitated by Christina Bagatavicius, Founder and Principal of Bespoke Collective. Presenters from the technical consultant team included Pat Becker from P. Becker Consulting working on behalf of Jacobs, and Patrick Morello, Principal from LANDinc. The feedback collected from the event will inform the work of Jacobs, the technical consultants leading the EA and LANDinc and Martha Schwartz Partners, the public realm consultants, on behalf of Infrastructure Ontario (IO) and the Ministry of Infrastructure (MOI).

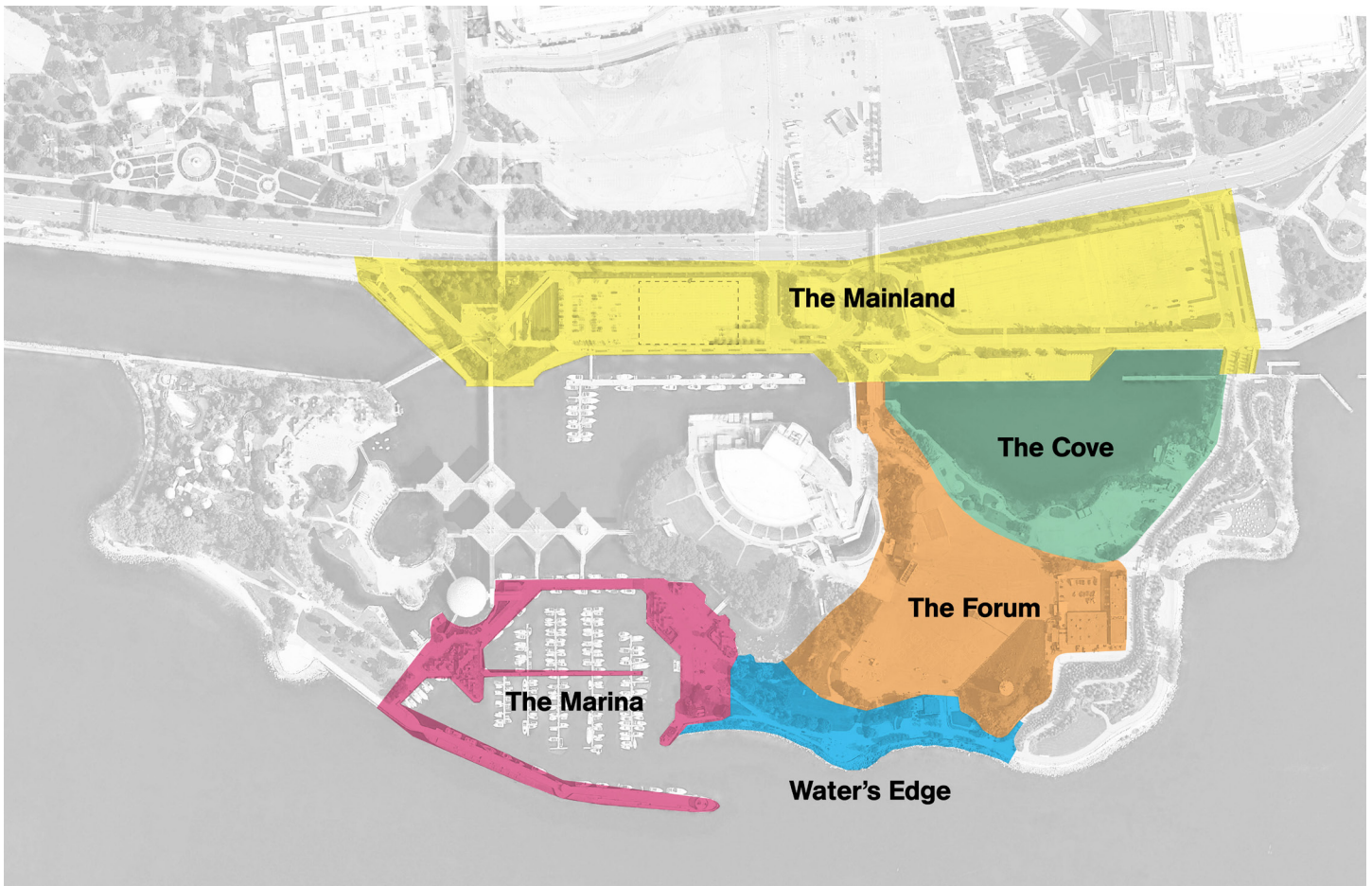
Attendance

A total of 683 people registered for the event, with 265 members of the public attending.

Engagement event agenda

The following agenda was used for the two-hour public consultation event:

- 1. Setup and Bold New Vision (10 min.)**
The host provided a land acknowledgment, the agenda and goals for the session, the vision and objectives of the Ontario Place redevelopment project, and information on the public consultation process.
- 2. Category C Class Environmental Assessment (20 min.)**
A general overview of the Category C Class EA, the design development and EA process, the five public realm zones in Ontario Place, and the EA evaluation process were provided to participants.
- 3. Recommended Public Realm Design (40 min.)**
Participants were presented with the recommended design for each of the five public realm zones, including key insights from the past consultation event and the evaluation process that informed the recommended design.
- 4. Breakout Session (35 min.)**
Participants were introduced to the methodology and format of the breakout session and instructed on how to provide feedback on the public realm design concepts.
- 5. Upcoming Work and Wrap Up (15 min.)**
The session closed with an overview of project updates and upcoming work, and information on how to provide additional feedback on the recommended designs through the Virtual Public Engagement Room.



Facilitation approach for the breakout session

Prior to the breakout session, the overall Ontario Place redevelopment preliminary design was presented to participating members of the public. The recommended designs were shared in further detail for each of the following five zones within the public realm:

- Zone 1: Water's Edge
- Zone 2: Marina
- Zone 3: Brigantine Cove
- Zone 4: Mainland
- Zone 5: Forum

After presenting the recommended design for each zone, the overall EA recommended design was shown, including all publicly accessible connections and proposed activities for all seasons. Notable topics of discussion during the breakout session were the proposed Ontario Science Centre (OSC) relocation and parking in Zone 4: Mainland, which are synthesized separately below in the key findings section.

Participants were directed to one of 11 breakout rooms where they provided input on the presented recommended design. Participants were able to provide input verbally or by using the chat feature. Each group consisted of a facilitator and a note-taker from the project team who guided conversations and recorded public feedback. Subject matter experts from IO and consultant design teams were also scattered throughout breakout rooms to help answer project-related questions.

During the breakout sessions, facilitators asked participants what design elements they liked the most, what design elements they liked the least, what they thought was missing in the recommended design, and if they had other ideas for how they would like to use the public space. The primary aim of the workshop was to enable participants to consider the holistic view of the overall redevelopment preliminary design, and to obtain public input on any and all elements of the presented recommended designs.

The consultation approach for the virtual event was informed by public input from the previous consultation events held on December 14, 2021, April 12, 2022, and October 27, 2022. When asked in December 2021 about public consultation preferences, participants stated that they wanted digital participation and the opportunity to participate in small groups.

Key findings

Please note that these key findings capture both the public's perspectives as shared in breakout group conversations, as well as in the written comments submitted in the chat. This synthesis reflects a long list of key findings that emerged across the 11 breakout groups. Feedback has been organized by comments on the overall redevelopment preliminary design, on each zone, and on key topics such as the OSC and parking. More general comments and topics of interest have also been documented.

Overall redevelopment preliminary design

Likes

- Overall design and landscaping
- Green and naturalized spaces
- Environmental protection
- Multi-use public spaces
- Refinements from the last iteration

Concerns

- Feels over-designed or over-programmed
- May attract large crowds of visitors
- Concern that public access may be retracted in the future
- There is also a perception that there will be an admission fee to access the public realm
- There were questions about who will be designated for security, maintenance and governance of the public realm
- Privatization of public realm
- Noise pollution from Live Nation concerts and events
- Environmental impact and carbon footprint of overall redevelopment preliminary design
- Impact on birds, insects and other wildlife
- Impact on vehicular traffic in the area
- Impact of construction on nearby residents and communities
- Removal of trees and mature trees
- Not enough naturalized areas; too much concrete or paving
- Negative impact of lighting on wildlife
- Overcrowding of the public realm during Live Nation events
- Perception of closure of Trillium Park during construction
- Views of the lake will be limited and obstructed by large built facilities such as the Therme development, Live Nation and the OSC
- Concerns regarding stormwater issues

- Safety concerns with water quality and areas may not be suitable for swimming
- Beaches appear “poor and narrow”
- Canoers and kayakers may not be able to access the areas underneath the bridges
- Casual and untrained kayak and canoe users can be a hazard for swimmers
- Too much emphasis on commercial development and food and beverage vendors
- Lack of clarity on Indigenous design features or elements
- No mention or consideration of the “pond behind Budweiser Stage”
- Impact of light pollution
- Waste disposal and waste management in the water
- Introduction of invasive non-native plant species
- Increased flooding due to climate change

Recommendations

- Prioritize the natural environment, i.e. clean air, trees/greenery, water, wildlife
- Provide an “immersive experience” with nature
- Prioritize the natural environment over built structures
- More open green spaces
- More green spaces outside of Trillium Park
- More quiet spaces for rest and relaxation
- Make a commitment to maintain free public access to the site
- Develop more green spaces to meet the perceived increase in usage and demand of public parks in Toronto
- Connected bicycle lanes across Ontario Place
- Walking trails
- More transit stops along the site
- Uber pick-up and drop-off area
- More bird outposts and habitats
- Security features such as security poles and increased lighting
- More iconic features, architecture or art
- Engage local artists
- Engage Indigenous designers and architects
- Consider volunteer groups or partnerships with other agencies in the maintenance of Ontario Place
- Fire pits
- Winter-proof design
- More lighting
- Spaces to look at the lake
- Picnic areas and tables
- Places to linger and spend an entire day
- Bike parking
- Year-round access to washrooms
- Change rooms
- Connection to Martin Goodman Trail
- Increase shade and canopy coverage
- Preserve existing canopy coverage
- Accessibility for seniors and families
- Multi-use pathways for bicycles, strollers, wheelchairs, etc.
- Rentals of canoes, kayaks and bicycles
- Provide access to the water for swimming
- Wind and sun mitigation measures
- Planting that can withstand the wind and sun conditions of the site
- More bird outposts and habitats
- Create a solution to minimize or block noise from Live Nation, e.g. “build a large wall between the park and the concert area”
- Conserve mature trees
- Solar panels

- Flexible programming for markets
- Planting of trees with consideration to the four seasons
- Integration with Exhibition Place
- Energy-efficient and climate-resilient buildings
- Pursue green or blue water certification to help combat the negative public perception of the water quality of Lake Ontario
- Consider planting “productive plants” over ornamental plant species
- Maintain 24-hour or late-night public access to Ontario Place
- Affordable and accessible licensing agreements for commercial spaces
- Create solutions to sustain fish habitat
- Places for gathering and powwows
- Commercial spaces for restaurants and retail
- Integrate educational programming across the site, e.g. the south of the Forum and the underside of The Pods
- Provide information on how Indigenous groups and communities are consulted in the project
- Provide information on the amount of public space compared to private space
- Provide information on the budget and costs of the Ontario Place redevelopment

Zone 1: Water’s Edge

Likes

- Access to the shoreline
- Stone seating and steps

Concerns

- Safety and accessibility concerns with stone seating and steps for all, including children, seniors, individuals with strollers, wheelchair users, and people of all abilities; there were concerns about sharp edges, lack of lighting, the tiered design and the height of the steps
- Concern with slippery stone seating and steps with algae growth and winter conditions
- Lack of access to swimming on the water’s edge
- Proposed design does not seem to provide “180-degree views” to the lake

Recommendations

- Safe entry-point into the water for swimmers
- Smaller or child-friendly design for stone seating and steps
- Railing for stone seating and steps
- Skateboard park
- Areas designated for fishing
- More plantings
- Consider wood (or seasonal/removable wooden slats) as a material for the seating and steps
- Provide provisions for fish habitat

Zone 2: Marina

Likes

- Spaces for new vendors and small businesses

Concerns

- Pollution and emissions from the marina

Recommendations

- Eliminate the marina and prioritize swimming and water activities in the area
- Public canoeing and kayaking
- Provide public access to the larger marina docks and make them an attraction; put gates on individual tributaries/smaller docks
- Provide electric boat rental options
- Provide opportunities for people to take the boating test to get their license
- Maintain commercial spaces for small and local businesses

Zone 3: Brigantine Cove

Likes

- Floating Wetlands

Concerns

- Sand beach may not work
- Brigantine Cove water seems shallow and not suitable for swimming
- Concern with water quality

Recommendations

- Consider access to different types of watercrafts with the design of the East Gateway bridge

Zone 4: Mainland

Likes

- Zeidler-inspired design for Central and East Gateways
- Connection to TTC

Concerns

- Too many built structures
- Shipping containers may not be suitable for winter conditions
- Safety concern with floating boardwalks

Recommendations

- Winter-proof floating boardwalks
- Child-friendly design for floating boardwalks
- Heat insulation in shipping containers for winter seasons
- Volleyball mats
- Improve connection to parking at Exhibition GO Station
- Railing on floating boardwalks

Parking

Likes

- Removal of above ground structure
- More green space

Concerns

- Too much space dedicated to parking
- Surface parking takes up usable land
- Parking will increase traffic congestion, pollution and noise
- Cost of proposed parking design
- Impact of climate change and regular flooding of underground parking

- Environmental impact of underground parking, i.e., impact of groundwater, stormwater management, environmental conservation, issues around wildlife habitat and landscape/habitat protection

Recommendations

- Eliminate parking lots
- Solar panels on surface parking
- Provide protection from inclement weather
- Conduct traffic studies to support decision-making
- Investigate alternative off-site parking alternatives
- Prioritize public transportation over parking
- Elevated parking
- Underground parking with green roof
- Build a “small entrance building” with parking to the new OSC building
- Consider relocating the parking lot up at the GO Train and LRT stations with connections to Ontario Place via elevated transit
- Convert parking into green spaces
- Maintain parking for people with accessibility issues
- Provide information on the budget and costs for the proposed parking
- Provide information on any studies conducted related to traffic and congestion, public transportation and parking

Ontario Science Centre

Concerns

- Many participants expressed dissent against OSC relocation
- Proposed OSC structure is inferior to the original building
- Too many built structures in the area with the addition of OSC
- Lack of consultation with OSC employees and members of the public
- Lack of transparency on decision-making and projected costs with the OSC relocation
- Concern that the OSC relocation will open up the original site for private development
- The closing of the original OSC will be a loss for nearby communities such as Scarborough
- Current OSC has outdoor amenities and connections to the ravine and trails, which cannot be replicated with the relocation
- Relocation of OSC to Ontario Place will increase traffic congestion in the area
- Proposed OSC structure has a significantly reduced footprint from its current building, and may impact staffing and the quality of exhibitions
- There is a perception that the announced OSC relocation is a “political move”
- There is a perception that tearing down the current OSC building would be working against the City of Toronto’s climate targets
- Proposed four-storey structure will obstruct viewpoints to Ontario Place and the lake

Recommendations

- Strong support for maintaining the current building and location of OSC
- Conduct a cost-benefit analysis of OSC relocation vs. maintaining existing OSC
- Transform other existing buildings such as the Cinesphere and the Pods as satellites or extensions of the original OSC and provide educational programming on topics such as water; sustainability; green energy, innovation and technology; climate change; environmental studies; Indigenous knowledge; or the ecological features of the site and the region (e.g., wetlands, water ecology, wildlife, the Great Lakes, role of the Oak Ridges Moraine as an aquifer).

- Transform the Cinesphere as a planetarium for the OSC
- OSC should highlight the Ontario Place site in its educational programming
- Create a “Science Pavilion” that is connected to the Pods
- Provide information on the budget and costs of the proposed OSC in Ontario Place
- Provide information on the decision-making process behind the proposed OSC relocation

Zone 5: Forum

Likes

- Play Fountain
- Natural stone seating
- Moveable benches
- Ice skating rink

Concerns

- Some participants expressed their dislike for the precedents shown for the moveable planters/seating
- Many participants expressed their dislike for the Play Fountain; one participated stated that it is unnecessary and another did not see a clear purpose for it other than for aesthetic reasons
- Play Fountain will not look appealing during the winter season
- The Market Alley and other commercial activities may not be suited to Ontario Place as other areas in the city

Recommendations

- Minimize the footprint of the Play Fountain
- Eliminate the Play Fountain
- Consider moving the Play Fountain to Brigantine Cove
- Transform the Play Fountain into an ice skating rink during the winter season
- Replace Play Fountain with a natural water cove
- Add water mist to the Play Fountain design
- More washrooms
- Prioritize green spaces over concrete/paving
- Repurpose the Lookout Tower

Next steps

Indigenous input from a variety of First Nations and Indigenous organizations have been heard throughout the Ontario Place public realm design and EA process. The input is diverse in cultures, lived experiences, Traditional Knowledge, education and interests; all bringing unique perspectives to the project. Feedback received from the April 27th engagement event, as well as at previous public engagement events and engagement with Indigenous communities, will be used to inform the preferred design for Ontario Place’s public spaces as part of the EA process.

The draft Environmental Study Report (ESR) documenting the EA process, the preferred design and mitigation measures will be posted for a 60-day public comment period in Summer 2023. A final Ontario Place public realm Engagement Event will be held in Fall 2023 to review the conclusion of the ESR and provide updates on project implementation.