



Sir John A. Macdonald Riverfront Park Plan

Public Consultation Report
March 23, 2016

Sir John A. Macdonald Parkway Riverfront Park – Land Use Plan

Public Consultation Report

I – Project Description

Background

The National Capital Commission (NCC) has begun a land use plan for the John A. Macdonald Parkway Riverfront Park that spans the south shoreline of the Ottawa River between LeBreton Flats to the east and Mud Lake to the west. The plan will provide a vision and principles to guide the development of this part of the National Capital while determining its most suitable activities and uses.

Objective

The goal of creating a riverfront park along the Sir John A. Macdonald Parkway is to increase use of this sector by:

- Showcasing the corridor’s spectacular scenery and views
- Showcasing the Ottawa River’s heritage and ecology
- Reconnecting people with the river.

The sector’s many uses (walking, cycling, contemplative activities, etc.) enhance quality of life for residents and improve the visitor experience.

Planning Phases

Phase 1: Existing Conditions and Issues

Phase 2: Draft Concept and Planning Principles

Phase 3: Final Plan

II – Consultation Process

Overview

The goal of this third public workshop was to obtain public feedback on the draft concept for the overall park and the preliminary concept for the section between Westboro Beach and Woodroffe Avenue (2.4 km).

The concept proposes short- and long-term measures and a medium- and long-term strategy to beautify the park. It takes into account public feedback from the May 2015 consultations as well as input from professional expertise in land use planning, landscape architecture, and engineering. Its key ideas and aims are to:

- Improve connectivity with the river by adding safe crossings
- Create public spaces
- Showcase the river’s history

- Restore shorelines, protect ecological environments, and create new aquatic habitats
- Build a boardwalk in the Deschênes Rapids sector (along the river between Mud Lake and Woodroffe Avenue)
- Offer a range of activity and event areas in the Rochester Field and Westboro sectors, as well as more amenities and facilities (restaurants, bike racks, water fountains, etc.)
- Configure the Parkway, bike paths, and pedestrian trails
- Enhance the landscape with a revegetation strategy
- Showcase the area’s scenery and views.

During the consultation, the NCC presented demonstration plans for Rochester Field and Westboro Beach/Atlantis that include proposals to improve walking and cycling connectivity. The concept would also propose safe Parkway crossings, lower speed limit, and possibly parkway configuration for two traffic lane function.

Process

1. **In-person consultation:** Wednesday March 23, 2016, 100 Sparks Street, Ottawa, 4th Floor
Time: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Using an open door format, the public consultation session presented planning concepts and addressed participants’ questions. People were invited to complete a questionnaire and offer feedback. More than 100 people took part.

2. **Online consultation:** Wednesday March 23 to Wednesday April 13, 2016

The online consultation allowed participants to learn about the proposed planning concepts, answer the questionnaire, and provide feedback. More than 2,000 respondents shared their comments and suggestions. The questionnaire is in Appendix 1 and the reference documents are in Appendix 2.

3. **Telephone survey:** This survey took place between March 16 and April 1st, 2016.

The NCC commissioned the Nielsen research firm to gauge public opinion on the potential Parkway reconfiguration via a quantitative telephone survey. Target respondents were Ottawa residents who live west of Island Park Drive and regularly or frequently travel on the Sir John A. Macdonald Parkway. A total of 1,174 respondents took part in the survey, of whom 676 (58%) were considered “regular Parkway users”. Survey findings are in Appendix 3.

Invitation and Promotion

- Electronic invitations were sent to the following stakeholders:
 - Interest groups (residents, business people, environmental and tourism stakeholders, etc.)
 - Municipal, provincial, and federal elected officials
- The media were invited to take part
- The workshop was announced in local newspapers
- The workshop was promoted in social media (Facebook and Twitter)

III – Public Consultation Findings

Riverfront Park – Draft Concept

Participants were asked to indicate whether they agreed, were neutral, or disagreed with each statement in the questionnaire. They were also free to make comments and suggestions.

This section contains a statistical compilation and a summary of comments for each statement.

Respondents support concept objectives on the whole (restoring access to the river, etc.), though the reduction of traffic lanes seemed to raise the most concerns.

Statement 1: The concept provides a safer environment for cyclists and pedestrians.

Agree: 59% / Neutral: 17.7% / Disagree: 23.4%

Comments and Feedback:

- Improve the safety of paths for various user types (high speed cyclists, recreational cyclists, roller bladers, walkers, families, seniors, etc.)
- Ensure bike paths are lighted
- Separate different user types
- Enforce speed limits on Parkway and bike paths
- Provide various bike path connections. Respondents noted a need for the following links:
 - From north Churchill to the bike path
 - From the north and south Parkway to adjacent neighbourhoods
 - Up to the War Museum and Wellington Street
- It is possible to develop a safe environment for all users without reducing the number of Parkway lanes
- Some respondents say there are already enough safe amenities for cyclists and pedestrians, and that we need only restore and expand existing paths

Statement 2: The concept showcases aquatic habitat and provides adequate protection for ecosystems and shorelines.

Agree: 48.8% / Neutral: 32.7% / Disagree: 18.4%

Comments and Feedback:

- The present condition of shorelines does not require more protection
- The concept can only worsen their condition
 - Adding the proposed facilities and amenities will disturb land and water ecosystems
 - Increasing the number of visitors will gradually destroy the natural environment, and the proposed concept is too disruptive to plant and animal life
 - The proposed removal of two Parkway lanes could increase traffic and lead to higher pollution levels (visual, air, water, etc.)
- A number of respondents found it hard to comment:
 - There are no conclusive environmental studies on the subject
 - Many feel it is a matter for professionals rather than the general public
- There must be a balance between access, use, and ecosystems so the integrity of the water and its natural environment is not compromised
- Respondents had a range of views about the environmental impact of the Deschênes Rapids sector boardwalk
 - A boardwalk in the Deschênes Rapids sector would disturb the ecosystem and could damage shorelines during the winter freeze-up
 - The boardwalk is a good initiative because it can serve as a buffer between the shoreline and the Parkway
- To better protect and showcase the environment, respondents suggest:
 - Halting shoreline development
 - Relocating the boardwalk
 - Planting evergreens near the shorelines to keep away ducks and geese and protect existing trees
 - Reducing the number of bushes and fences that block the view of the river
 - Adding interpretive panels
 - Adopting a sustainable approach
 - Addressing the problems of pollution from the Quebec side and wastewater discharge into the river before proceeding with the project
- Some respondents suggest we not develop the following locations:

- Mud Lake
- Atlantis Woods
- Island Park Bridge sector
- Champlain Bridge sector
- Behind Tunney's Pasture

Statement 3: The concept will improve public access to the river.

Agree: 59.5% / Neutral: 19% / Disagree: 21.5%

Comments and Feedback:

- The concept will improve access to the river and facilitate pedestrian and cyclist traffic
 - Respondents feel access to the water relates mainly to nearby residents, as the small number of parking spaces limits prospects for those who live further away and have no access to public transit
- The park will be hard to access, since crossing the Parkway will remain an obstacle
- Access to the park and the river is currently sufficient
- Pedestrian crossings could be made safer by:
 - Being built under (tunnels) or over (bridges) the Parkway
 - Reducing traffic disruptions
 - Protecting wildlife and restricting its access to the Parkway
- The concept and notion of public access were hard to grasp, perhaps due to lack of information
- The public should have access throughout the year
- There would need to be certified universally accessible facilities
- There would need to be separate trails for cyclists and pedestrians
- The Mud Lake facilities should be renovated
- There should be direct links from Wellington Street and Richmond Road
- The Parkway should have additional exits
- The Prince of Wales Bridge should be accessible to pedestrians and cyclists
- There should be more parking spaces
- There should be additional facilities (restaurants, toilets, equipment, etc.)

Statement 4: The concept offers a good balance between the park’s activity zones and quiet spaces.

Agree: 48.6% / Neutral: 28.9% / Disagree: 22.5%

Comments and Feedback:

- There is currently a good balance between facilities.
- The concept tends to offer a good balance.
 - There should be more attractions to ensure optimal use of the site.
 - Activity zones that generate a lot of noise should be kept apart from residential areas.
 - Keep the park as it is until major development projects are finished (LeBreton Flats redevelopment, light rail construction, etc.). Facilities and furnishings are a more immediate concern, with respondents citing the need for more covered picnic tables, BBQ areas, lockers, better bike paths, etc.
 - Improve Mud Lake facilities.
- The concept would lead to an imbalance because:
 - Activity zones should be more widely distributed, as they seem concentrated in the Champlain, Westboro, Remic, and Rochester sectors. The park’s main attraction should be its natural beauty.
 - A park bordering a parkway will never be a quiet environment.
- An imbalance is desirable.
 - A number of respondents would prefer to have more natural spaces with minimal or no activity.
 - Balance will depend on projects like the LeBreton Flats redevelopment, light rail construction, etc.
- For some, the terms “activity zones” and “quiet areas” are ambiguous and should be better defined.

Statement 5: The proposed boardwalk in the Deschênes Rapids sector would add an experiential quality to the park.

Agree: 62.7% / Neutral: 19.6% / Disagree: 17.7%

Comments and Feedback:

- Most respondents like this idea and say we would need to:
 - Increase the number of parking spaces
 - Add restaurants, washrooms, fitness equipment, and signage
 - Limit boardwalk access to pedestrians only
 - Limit bicycle speed on the boardwalk
 - Allow fishing along the boardwalk
- A number of respondents raised concerns about the boardwalk:
 - The new infrastructure would disturb the ecosystem, drive away wildlife, and pollute the water
 - It would block the natural view of the river
 - Recreational boaters could no longer put their craft in the water at this location
 - Criminal activity could increase
 - There could be conflicts between boardwalk users
 - There could be a risk to visitor safety
 - Costs are very high, and the infrastructure will likely not last long if it stays in place for the winter

Statement 6: The Parkway is more important as a scenic route than a commuter route¹.

Agree: 44.6% / Neutral: 10.2% / Disagree: 45.2%

Comments and Feedback:

- The Parkway is more important as a scenic route
 - It should never have become a route for commuters², since it is very close to the water
 - The speed limit must be respected (adding curves could help achieve this)
 - Light rail users, cyclists, and pedestrians should have a better view than motorists

¹ Commute: regular use of Parkway to travel to work.

² Commuter: regular Parkway user who commutes between work and home.

- The Parkway is more important as a commuter route
 - The Parkway is an important east-west thoroughfare for nearly 9,000 daily commuters, for whom increased traffic would be catastrophic
 - Unlike a scenic route, this commuter route helps the region's economy
- The Parkway's view is also important for commuters. During the week its traffic consists of regular users, while on weekends it is used as a scenic route. During rush hour traffic, the view helps relax drivers who may otherwise be stressed or anxious.
- Other suggestions
 - Remove the Parkway, as it's a relic from an earlier time
 - Lower the speed limit

Statement 7: Other suggestions for the overall concept?

Respondent suggestions include the following:

- Parkway
 - Move the Parkway closer to the river while keeping four lanes and as much green space as possible
 - Set aside an existing lane for light rail
 - Expand the lanes alongside the Parkway to take additional traffic
 - Alternate lane use between motorists and cyclists based on time of day and day of the week
 - Build a Parkway with three lanes, one of which can change direction in peak hours
 - Increase the number of lanes and raise the speed limit
 - Take more steps to enforce the speed limit
 - Add parking areas
 - Extend the Parkway to the 417
 - Improve access to public transit
 - Reduce traffic noise
- Separate bike paths from walking trails
 - Reserve a lane for each type of user (pedestrians, cyclists, skateboarders, roller bladers, etc.)
 - Reserve the lanes closest to the river for pedestrians
 - Have a path for high speed cyclists, another for slower cyclists, and another for pedestrians
 - Have bike and walking paths all along the shoreline

- Safety
 - Keep cyclists separate from motorists by having two different levels or building a physical barrier
 - Maintain the bike lane year round
 - Double the proposed width and surface of the bike path and walking trail
 - Install traffic lights at pedestrian crossings
 - Add a passing lane to the bike paths
 - Install signs at intersections indicating that vehicles must yield to cyclists and pedestrians
- Commercial activity
 - Have riverfront attractions (shops, restaurants, water activity equipment rental centres, etc.)
 - Allow street food
 - Inhibit animation at sites
- Continuity
 - Ensure continuity between various design elements
 - Build complementary and non-redundant facilities
- Development
 - Create art facilities all along the riverfront park
 - Develop community gardens
 - Showcase the area’s historical and archeological heritage with interpretative panels
 - Take the section between Wellington and Island Park Drive into account when developing scenic facilities
 - Stop using stone dust on the forest trail
 - Ask “Ottawa Riverkeeper” to manage the conservation centre
 - Install year-round public washrooms, water fountains, and emergency telephones
 - Install more benches, picnic tables, etc.
 - Provide a water area (swimming pool, water play area, fountain, etc.) so visitors can enjoy the water without going in the river
 - Provide access for dogs, and create a safe and secure dog park
 - Develop Bate Island
 - Evoke the old restaurant that burned down in the 1980s or 1990s by setting up a business
 - Seasonal rentals
 - Children’s climbing equipment
 - Aerial park

- Bike racks
- Support active lifestyles
 - Take future sporting events into account (marathons, or bicycle races, etc.)
 - Improve existing fitness equipment and include more sport facilities (soccer fields, volleyball courts, etc.), children’s play areas, surfing facilities, sunset yoga sessions, etc.
 - Develop more beach areas
 - Provide canoe and kayak runs with lockers for personal effects
- General concept
 - Develop the park for young people and families
 - Create a concept that can evolve over time and reflect the season or target clientele
 - Propose more options for winter
 - Provide nautical charts for the river

Demonstration Plans

The concept for the John A. Macdonald Parkway Riverfront Park covers a nine-kilometre corridor along the Ottawa River. However, due to the agreement and time frame with the City of Ottawa for the light rail rapid transit system, the immediate focus has been on the 2.4 kilometre corridor between Woodroffe Avenue and Westboro Beach. Demonstration plans for Rochester Field and Westboro Beach/Atlantis have thus been presented to the public for feedback.

These plans highlight activity zones using more detailed representative images and concepts that include new landscaping, infrastructure, and facilities that better reflect a park’s functions.

Respondents provided feedback on demonstration plans for the Rochester Field and Westboro Beach/Atlantis sites and various Parkway redesign scenarios.

1- Rochester Field

Respondent opinions are nuanced regarding the use of Rochester Field, as demonstrated by their suggestions. For some the priority is to preserve as much natural and green space as possible, while for others the site is ripe for development. This division is evident in all components (development, activities and events, commerce, etc.).

- For all scenarios, the top five concerns of respondents are:
 - Pedestrian access and experience
 - Protecting and maximizing green space
 - User safety
 - View of the river

- Year-round facilities

Scenario 1 – Rochester Green Space

Agree: 24% / Neutral: 50.5% / Disagree: 25.4%

Respondents:

- Would like an entrance that opens on to a green space and connects to the river
- Support this scenario, which has more natural spaces and fewer negative effects on the environment
- Agree that it is important to have pedestrian crossings that lead to the river
- Note the impact of the Parkway's proximity on safety in the sector
- Note that buildings and structures are too close to the water

Scenario 2 – Rochester Axis

Agree: 21.7% / Neutral: 53% / Disagree: 25.4%

Respondents:

- Support this scenario, which promotes riverfront activities and includes a footpath that connects to the park and the water
- Like the notion of a central plaza for the north-south axis (including the waterfront and business component), which helps create an outstanding site entrance
- Understand that the proposed land use plan would link the Parkway to Richmond Road, the neighbourhood, and the built environment
- Pleased that water is included in the concept
- Like the idea of a skating rink in the central plaza
- Note the access to equipment and facilities that aren't available in the neighbourhood
- Say the concept is imbued with community spirit, while others say access to local communities will be reduced
- Point out the following issues with the water play area: safety, potential vandalism, too large an area, and possible harm to the natural environment
- Concerned that structures would be too close to the water and to homes, and are not pleased with the way they would be arranged

Scenario 3 – Rochester Square

Agree: 23.4%/ Neutral: 44.4%/Disagree: 32.2%

Respondents:

- Say the density of buildings and infrastructure along Richmond Road would block the view of the river and hide the footpaths that lead to the water
- Note an unequal proportion between the built area and that reserved for vacant spaces
- Note that the proposed area could ensure continuity of green space and be used for informal activities and events (the area, located far from the traffic on Richmond Road, appears to be safe)
- Say they do not favour increasing developments and locating them behind Maplelawn
- Like the concept's relation to public art, gardens, and water play areas (some suggest preparing an architecture and design guide)
- Favour the growth of urbanization, and see Rochester Square as a focal point between eventual light rail stations and access to the river
- Favour having most of the construction on Richmond Road to help preserve green space
- Feel the built area would be too large and suggest planting trees to address this
- Feel the high concentration of structures would limit pedestrian access to the beach
- Suggest creating a dog park
- Say the parking area should be modified (some feel it has sufficient space while others do not)

2- Westboro Beach/Atlantis

After a breakdown of statistics, Scenario 1A received the highest rate of satisfaction followed by 2A, 1B, and 2B. In the four scenarios, respondents pointed out six main areas of concern:

- Conservation centre: What is its use, and where would it be built?
- Separation of cycle and walking paths: More paths should be built, and existing ones separated, expanded, and made safer
- Year-round facilities and amenities: Buildings should be open throughout the year (the hill should remain accessible in winter for tobogganing)
- Environmental damage: Respondents feel the proposed measures would disturb the environment
- Equipment rental and development of storage space

- Breaks and gaps: Provide a sufficient buffer between the Parkway, the paths and trails, and the beach

Scenario 1A – 4 Traffic Lanes

Agree: 40.2%/Neutral: 19%/Disagree: 40.8%

Respondents:

- Agree on this concept, which would ease downtown traffic congestion
- Are interested in this concept, which would make the Parkway safer, ease traffic, and reduce pollution
- Suggest adding curves to the Parkway alignment to reduce speed, while others would increase the speed limit and the number of lanes
- Recommend reserving two lanes for vehicles and another for light rail
- Like the suggestions about patios, the lookout point, public use of shorelines, artistic activities, and storage and rental services for canoes, kayaks, and other water activities
- Consider the multi-functional building too large, while others feel it is consistent with site activities
- Suggest adding a buffer zone between the Parkway, the trails, and the beach
- Feel that a four-lane Parkway would devalue the natural riverfront linear park
- Present option of creating new spaces for wildlife
- Believe a restaurant near the shoreline would encourage visitors to stay longer
- Would like to have a venue for arts performances with a wall that can serve as a film projection screen, as well as a telescope

Scenario 1B – 2 Traffic Lanes

Agree: 37.2%/Neutral: 13%/Disagree: 49.8%

Respondents:

- Like the suggestions about patios, the lookout point, public use of shorelines, and artistic activities
- Suggest relocating the conservation centre so it can be seen from the Parkway

- Consider the multi-functional building too large, while others feel it is consistent with site activities (the buildings should be open all day long, 12 months a year)
- Feel that reserving two lanes for motorists would increase traffic considerably and make the sector less safe, while others think removing two lanes would provide more green space for reforestation and the expansion of trails or public activity areas
- Would like to increase the speed limit and the number of Parkway lanes
- Make a number of other suggestions (an exterior wall to use as a film projection screen at night, a dance floor, a learning centre, a telescope, the building of igloos by local artists, use of the hill for tobogganing in winter, etc.)
- Have differing views on parking areas (some want them closer to the beach, while others want them further away)
- Recommend replacing the four-way intersection with a traffic circle to make left turns easier

Scenario 2A – 4 Traffic Lanes

Agree: 38.4%/Neutral: 19%/Disagree: 42.6%

Respondents:

- Feel that tiered access to the beach is inappropriate in a natural setting and would prevent winter tobogganing
- Have mixed views about the grassed area
- Prefer the multi-functional building in scenarios 1A and 1B, since it could be used only in summer as a beach building vs. the one proposed in this scenario

Scenario 2B – 2 Traffic Lanes

Agree: 33%/Neutral: 16.9%/Disagree: 50.2%

Respondents:

- Feel that tiered access to the beach is inappropriate in a natural setting and would prevent winter tobogganing
- Prefer the multi-functional building, accessible year-round, to the beach building that can only be used in summer
- Have mixed views about the grassed area

- Suggest the new structures be located on the hill, far from the beach (the smaller buildings seem more appropriate, and the washrooms and restaurant could be replaced)
- Disapprove of the proposed parking area near the beach and the Atlantis site
- Would like more night-time activities and events

3- Parkway and Pathway Configuration

Views are divided on whether the Parkway should have 4 lanes or 2. Participants cited the following concerns most often:

- The current Parkway configuration works well despite daily traffic levels (others feel it is dangerous, especially for cyclists and pedestrians)
- Motorists use the Parkway chiefly for its beauty and its calming environment

Scenario 1 – 4 Traffic Lanes

Agree: 49.9%/Neutral: 11.6%/Disagree: 38.5%

- Most respondents prefer the proposed four-lane configuration, for the following reasons:
 - The Parkway's east-west axis is important for all users (Ontario/Quebec), since no alternate route exists
 - Safety and functionality (for snowstorms, emergency services, passing, etc.)
 - Better traffic management
 - River access without a lane reduction

Scenario 2 – 2 Traffic Lanes

Agree: 46.4%/Neutral: 7.2%/Disagree: 46.4%

- The Parkway's proposed two-lane configuration would:
 - Promote physical activity and the use and integration of alternate modes of transport
 - Reduce pollution and noise and preserve natural habitat
 - Make it popular with commuters and sightseers alike
 - Provide a riverfront route for 800,000 residents and visitors (at any given time) and a commuter route for 9,000 users (2 to 3 p.m. Monday to Friday)

- Improve the park's appearance by not running a four-lane highway through it
- The Parkway's proposed two-lane configuration would **not**:
 - Reduce traffic congestion
 - Improve access to the riverfront park

V – Next Steps

Public comments and feedback will be factored into the completion of the Sir John A. Macdonald Riverfront Park Plan.

In spring 2017, the Plan will be submitted to the NCC Board of Directors for approval.

VI – APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Appendix 2: Reference Documents

Appendix 3: Telephone Survey Findings