

NATIONAL CAPITAL COMMISSION
COMMISSION DE LA CAPITALE NATIONALE

Public Engagement on the National Capital Core Area Plan Review

(Phase 2: June-December 2023)

SUMMARY REPORT
MARCH 2024

Canada

Context

The National Capital Commission (NCC) is reviewing the National Capital Core Area Plan (the Plan), the lead long-term planning document governing the planning and development of federal lands in the downtown cores of Ottawa and Gatineau. The Plan, which was last approved by the NCC Board of Directors in 2005, is being reviewed to develop a shared vision to guide the planning and the management of the core area.

The NCC has committed to engage with members of the public and stakeholders throughout the review process to collect their perspectives on the Plan's priorities and to promote awareness of the Plan.

Overview of Engagement

This report summarizes the results of engagement activities with members of the public and stakeholders carried out under Phase 2 of engagement for the Plan, from June to December 2023.¹ Future phases of engagement will help to further refine and validate the review of the Plan. Engagement activities included as part of this phase include:

- **Key informant interviews:** Between June and October 2023, eight key informant interviews were held with community associations and business improvement areas (BIAs) in Ottawa and Gatineau. Participants were asked to provide feedback on the proposed engagement plan and to share their perspectives on the key themes proposed for the new version of the Plan.
- **Public workshops:** On November 15, 2023, two public workshops (one online, one in person) were held with interested residents and stakeholders. The workshops included a presentation by the NCC project team on the setting, planning context, major projects, vision, big moves, and big themes proposed for the Plan. Participants were asked to discuss major themes and opportunities for the core area. 76 people attended the workshops.
- **Pop-up kiosks:** In September and October 2023, four pop-up kiosks were held in public locations in downtown Ottawa and Gatineau. The kiosks featured display boards of the key themes and big moves proposed for the new Plan and provided an opportunity for NCC staff to engage directly with residents and visitors to discuss visions for the future of the core area. Approximately 445 people visited the kiosks.
- **Public advisory committee:** In October 2023, community members representing 16 key stakeholder groups for the core area were invited to join the [Public Advisory Committee](#) (PAC) for the review of the Plan. The inaugural meeting of the committee was held in November 2023.

¹ Phase 1 of engagement (April-December 2022) involved internal engagement only. The results helped to establish the existing conditions for the Plan.

- **Public survey:** From October to December 2023, members of the public were invited to complete a survey hosted on [PlaceSpeak](#). Respondents were asked to comment on the key themes and big moves being considered as part of the Plan review. The PlaceSpeak page received approximately 2,600 views during the consultation; 111 people filled out a survey and 233 additional participants engaged through the public message board.
- **Accessibility Plan consultations:** In September and October 2023, stakeholders and members of the public were invited to comment on the NCC's new [Accessibility Plan](#) (2023 – 2026) through an online survey and a series of virtual meetings. In addition, participants were asked to help identify accessibility barriers in the context of the National Capital Core Area Plan review. The survey received 134 responses, and six representatives from various organizations participated in the online meetings.

Through Phase 2 of engagement, participants were asked to provide feedback on three big moves that are being considered to help guide the review of the Plan, as well as its five overarching themes. More information on the big moves and themes can be [found here](#).



A member of the NCC project team displays consultation materials at the pop-up kiosk held near the Confederation Park bistro in September 2023.

What We Heard

Below is a summary of key findings across all engagement activities.

The Big Moves

1) Turn toward the water and shorelines

There is significant interest from participants in the revitalization and further development of the waterways in the core area. Although it is located outside the core area, the newly restored NCC River House was often cited as a well-executed waterfront project that represents the potential for more public use of the Ottawa River shoreline.

Participants insisted on the importance of access to public waterways considering rising temperatures associated with climate change. Participants also discussed the impacts of climate change on waterways and shorelines, noting the need for proactive, coordinated measures by local officials and landholders to address the increasing impact of extreme weather events on shorelines, as well as the need to consider long-term resiliency when designing projects. Participants noted that increased flooding of riverfront pathways could be addressed through investments in shoreline development.

The views of participants varied in the *Accessibility Plan* consultations on the current level of accessibility of the core area's waterfront spaces and provided several suggestions for improvements to waterfront pathways and facilities that would encourage use by people with reduced mobility.

2) Create new spaces

Among residents and stakeholders, there is strong support for the creation of new spaces that could revitalize the core area post-pandemic. However, it was noted that this should be done while also improving existing spaces and amenities. Participants often suggested creating car-free zones that prioritize walkable, accessible and pedestrian-focused mobility. Participants also noted the potential benefits of additional practical amenities like washrooms and parking spaces (including for vehicles such as EVs, scooters and bikes). Participants were in favour of revitalizing spaces by putting people first and offered suggestions to leverage gathering places, such as the NCC bistros, to host more events that bring people together in the core area, especially in the evening. Many also noted that vacant buildings could be leveraged for entertainment, pop-up businesses, housing or community activities for residents and visitors.

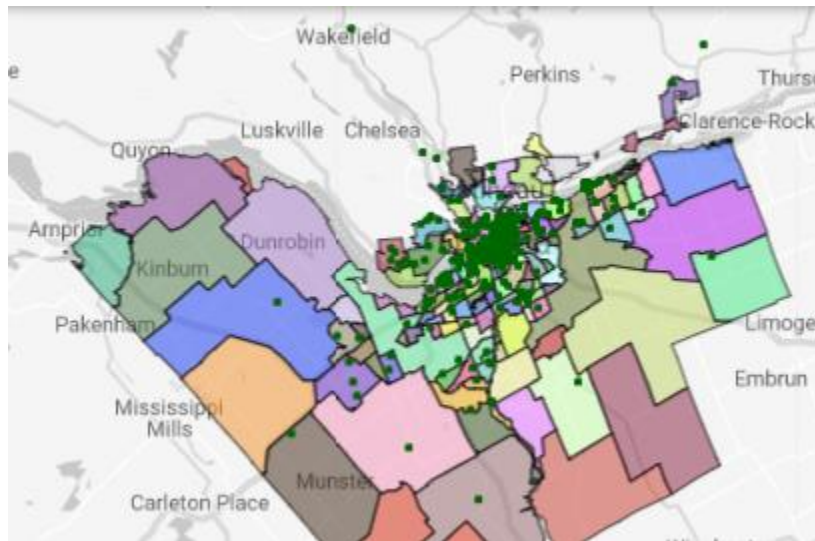
Participants in the *Accessibility Plan* consultations noted that public spaces in the core area are moderately accessible but that more access points and designated parking spaces would promote use by people with mobility limitations. Participants also identified uneven pathways and a lack of appropriate seating and washrooms as barriers for their use of public spaces.

3) Shift toward sustainable mobility

Participants expressed concern about the car-centric nature of the core area, which they viewed as practically and environmentally unsustainable. Many noted that truck traffic poses challenges for residents and discourages visitors from moving through the core area. Participants widely agreed on the need to reduce personal vehicle traffic in the core area by repurposing road space for people rather than cars.

However, participants understood that this could be challenging given the region's historical, cultural, and practical prioritization of cars; a perceived lack of coordination between key interprovincial agencies; and issues with regional public transit systems in their current state. Participants largely agreed that a shift toward sustainable mobility is needed, primarily through the prioritization of public transit as well as active modes of transportation such as walking, cycling and e-scooters.

Participants in the *Accessibility Plan* consultations identified a generally acceptable level of physical accessibility for pathway infrastructure in the core area but emphasized a need for clearer and more visible wayfinding signage. Improved lighting and larger sidewalks would also improve mobility and connectivity. They also shared information about features of multi-use pathways and other infrastructure that can present barriers for people with disabilities.



A map showing the locations of participants for the online PlaceSpeak engagement page. Green dots represent participants.

Themes

1) Democracy and meaning

Many participants acknowledged the defining significance of Canada's Parliament and other democratic symbols in the core area, but also

expressed that more could be done to encourage reflection on Canada's history. Specifically, respondents suggested that the core area feature more Indigenous symbols and cultural elements. Suggestions included sculptures to commemorate Indigenous historical figures and improved leveraging of cultural spaces through developments such as the Zibi project. In addition, participants recommended offering more Indigenous-focused engagement opportunities and activities throughout the year, not just on the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation, to increase public awareness and understanding of the importance of Indigenous peoples in Canada's history.

2) Beauty and majesty

Participants expressed a desire to preserve and leverage the beauty of the core area's natural environment and architecture by improving access to natural sites and river pathways, as well as adding cafés and bistros along cobblestone walkways. Many stressed that preserving the beauty and majesty of the core area's sites, pathways, buildings and parks requires a shift toward pedestrianization of the public realm, along with more active and public transportation access. Participants also highlighted the importance of addressing social issues such as housing and public safety in the core area, although many acknowledged the need for multilateral solutions that extend beyond the NCC. Participants often noted that efforts should be made not only to beautify the core area, but to make it a welcoming space for all.

3) Sustainability and resilience

Participants emphasized the importance of accelerating climate change mitigation by quickly transitioning to green energy sources. They also suggested that incorporating more sustainability and mitigation strategies into the Plan could yield significant positive impacts. For example, increasing tree canopies to mitigate heat islands would not only help preserve greenspaces in the core area, but would also protect natural areas for future generations. Participants strongly emphasized the need to prioritize these efforts to ensure a sustainable and livable future for all. Sustainability often came up in the context of conversations about transportation, with participants frequently stressing the need for a shift to more sustainable modes.

4) Vibrancy and animation

Participants highlighted a link between accessible mobility, vibrancy and a desire to visit and stay in the core area. They noted that current planning prioritizes commuters, which has resulted in frequent gridlocks that detract from the area's appeal.

To encourage visitors and residents to visit, participants suggested prioritizing seamless movement to and within the core area. Participants also

put forward ideas for a range of activities that could boost vibrancy and visits in the core area, from all-season bistros and community pop-up attractions to large events and festivals. Participants pointed to Canadian and international cities with bustling arts scenes, inviting landscapes, and waterfront activities that reflect the boldness, creativity, and ambition to which the Plan could aspire.

5) Thriving economy

Many participants were frustrated with a lack of available services and stores in the core area in a post-pandemic context, as well as the prevalence of empty storefronts, which they attributed in part to unaffordable commercial spaces for business owners. As a result, there is a general perception that the core area lacks opportunities for fun and creative tourism offerings. While the ByWard Market and Sparks Street were identified as having a lot of potential, they require economic revitalization and a conceptual rethink to attract more people.

Feedback on consultation activities

Overall, members of the public and stakeholders reported high satisfaction with in-person engagement activities and felt they contributed to a better understanding of the Plan. The materials and presentations provided by NCC staff were well received and helped participants provide informed feedback throughout the engagement process. In particular, the pop-up kiosks allowed for a broader range of members of the public to contribute their thoughts, compared to other, more conventional, consultation methods such as surveys. By engaging with people in person and allowing for informal engagement with the project team, the NCC was able to build trust and raise awareness of the plan.

While feedback was largely positive for in-person activities, participants also noted opportunities for the NCC to improve its online engagement platform and to provide more information on how public feedback will impact the development and implementation of the Plan. Going forward, it will be important to continue to encourage public interaction through in-person events, although hybrid and virtual engagement remains important from an inclusivity and accessibility perspective.



Members of the public participate in a workshop held in the NCC Urbanism Lab on November 15, 2023.

Next steps

Work is underway to draft and refine the Plan throughout 2024. There will be two additional phases of consultation:

- Winter-spring 2024: consultation with technical and community stakeholders to refine early concepts; public information-sharing.
- Summer-fall 2024: public and stakeholder engagement on the draft plan.

As of Phase 3, public and stakeholder engagement will include discussion on the [Confederation Boulevard Guidelines](#), which are also under review in 2024 – 2025.

The revised plan is scheduled to be recommended to the NCC's Board of Directors for approval in January 2025.