

What We Heard Report: Beaver Hills House Park & Michael Phair Park Renewal Concept Design

September 2022

Open Spaces Planning & Design,
Integrated Infrastructure Services
www.edmonton.ca/BeaverHillsMichaelPhairRenewal

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Project Background

Beaver Hills House Park and Michael Phair Park are connected parks embedded in the urban fabric of downtown Edmonton. Located on the north side of Jasper Avenue between 104th and 105th Streets, they provide important services to the residents and businesses of the dense city core and positively impact the quality of life in the city.

This project will see the renewal of aging infrastructure and improve the overall design and function of both parks. The goal of the renewal, in addition to repairing or replacing the existing infrastructure, is to improve safety and accessibility and increase the use of these open spaces in downtown Edmonton.

Next steps include further detail design development as well as public and stakeholder engagement opportunities to refine the design. Construction is planned for 2023-2024.

The Downtown Public Places Plan provides a contextual framework for the significance of Beaver Hills House Park and Michael Phair Park as important civic spaces. The study notes:

“As Downtown’s population grows, so does demand for a vibrant and interconnected network of public places. Public places serve as the living room for Downtown residents. They provide respite, relief, and room to socialize, celebrate, and recharge. Public places support public life. They host amenities that support various wellness, celebration, and ecological functions.” (Downtown Public Places Plan, 2020)

Additional policies related to the project (which can be found on the City’s website) include:

- + The City Plan
- + Capital City Downtown Plan (2011)
- + The Downtown Public Places Plan (2020)
- + City of Edmonton Public Engagement Policy
- + City of Edmonton Access Design Guide
- + Winter City Design Guidelines (2011)

How We Engaged

Online and in-person stakeholder engagement sessions for the Concept Design phase occurred between May and September 2022 using a variety of engagement tools.

Engagement & Communications Tools

Engage



Online Public Survey

The online survey was the primary means to share information and collect feedback during this phase of engagement.



Paper Survey

Survey questions were included in a paper handout to collect feedback.



In-person

Public engagement pop-up session was held to share information and collect feedback from the public.



Online

Online engagement sessions with stakeholder groups.

Inform



Project Webpage

The City's online hub for all project information, including the public survey, park design plan updates and engagement materials – www.edmonton.ca/BeaverHillsMichaelPhairRenewal

Communications



Social Media

Posts on the City of Edmonton's Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts.



Posters & Lobby Displays

Signage was posted around the site and within the lobbies of surrounding properties to inform area residents and promote engagement.



QR Codes

QR Codes on all posters and handouts, to stay informed on project updates.



Postcards

Postcards promoting public engagement opportunities with links to project webpage were distributed to neighbouring postal codes.



Direct Emails

Direct emails to identified stakeholder organizations and property owners.

Who We Engaged

The City is committed to involving the people affected by the decisions it makes and seeks diverse opinions, experiences and information so that a wide spectrum of perspectives are represented in the process. For Beaver Hills House Park and Michael Phair Park engagement this included:

Stakeholder Groups:

A variety of internal City departments, and external organizations including community associations, local area property owners, Indigenous elders, and special interest individuals and groups were invited to provide their feedback in either online or in person engagement sessions.

General Public:

Engagement opportunities were open for all Edmontonians to participate and were promoted widely through social media, postcards distributed to neighbouring postal codes as well as signage in both parks and surrounding businesses. The design team also held a pop-up event in Michael Phair Park on August 20, 2022.



Stakeholder Engagement Summary

The online engagement session was the primary tool used to collect feedback from external stakeholders with **15 participants**.



15

Online Participants

The format for the online stakeholder engagement sessions included:

- + Presentation on project vision and objectives, as well as project site and context (by City and O2)
- + Questions about current park uses, vision and needs for events (open discussion)

WHAT WE ASKED	WHY WE ASKED
Q1 - PARK USES How do you use the parks currently?	To determine current uses and activities in the parks
Q2- PARK VISION What would improve the parks?	To brainstorm ideas for Concept Design that are most important
Q3- PARK EVENTS What are the event needs?	To gather information on items relevant to events and temporary uses

Summary of Discussion

Participants were enthusiastic about discussions to renew the parks to improve safety, accessibility and programming. A summary of responses can be found here:

Park Uses:

- + Pathways need to be accessible for people in wheelchairs and individuals with limited mobility so all can access both parks
- + Trees and vegetation in both parks are limited because of access and erosion on slopes
- + Water feature is difficult to maintain and requires regular cleanings of filters, drains, etc

Park Vision:

- + Indigenous history, meaning and storytelling needs to be embedded into Beaver Hills House Park
- + The parks need to create a welcome place for all people, with visible displays of colour and artwork

Park Events:

- + Participants provided descriptions of the limitations of the parks for hosting events at the plaza along Jasper Avenue, citing issues with sight lines, traffic noise and accessibility issues
- + Power supply and lighting are concerns that should be addressed for temporary events and festivals
- + Food truck parking would be helpful for events
- + Winter programming needs should be incorporated

Public Engagement Summary

The online survey was the primary tool used to collect feedback from public stakeholders with **152 participants**.



152

Survey Participants

Question 1: Existing Park Features

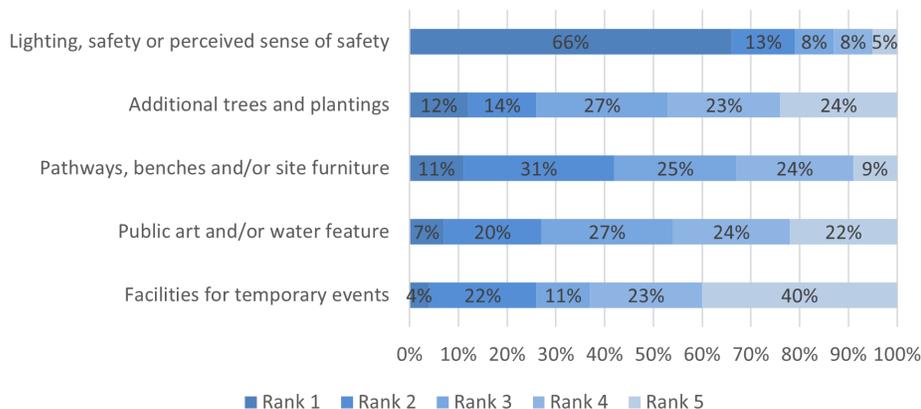
Which existing park features need the most improvement? Please rank the following features. The first should be the most important feature and the last should be the least important feature that needs improvement.

Total Respondents: 152

Total Comments: 108



Q1



We asked this question to discern which exiting park items need the most improvement. As indicated in the chart above, the majority of respondents indicated that **Lighting, safety or perceived sense of safety** was the park feature that required the most improvement (Rank 1). **Pathways, benches and/or site furniture** was the 2nd highest ranked feature. Tied for third were **Additional trees and planting** and **Public art and/or water feature**. The last ranked option was **Facilities for temporary events**.

Following the ranking question, respondents had an opportunity to provide open-ended comments. This was the first opportunity for respondents to add open-format text to accompany their response and 108 comments were received.

At a high-level, the responses can be summarized as follows:

- + The park feels unsafe with a lack of proper lighting, reduced visibility and illicit activity
- + The park is not very accessible and pathways are hard to follow
- + Benches and seating need improvement
- + The park feels tired and dated and needs substantial improvements
- + Water feature is a nice element but needs updating

Verbatim Quotes *

Site Furniture

- + "The temporary benches are messy and take away from the park..."

Public Art and Water Feature

- + "The semi-natural water feature is unique and memorable in downtown Edmonton. We should enhance this..."
- + "Public art is so essential to placemaking generally, but in this area specifically through grassroots initiatives led by Michael Phair in making this area vibrant and accessible. The work done by the community to create community around these spaces is important to honour in whatever plan is approved."

Lighting, Safety or Perceived Sense of Safety

- + "Both locations have issues with perceived safety which include dark areas, [and] poor sightlines..."
- + "...The back corner being out of sight from the street makes it feel dangerous..."

Additional Trees and Plantings

- + "...trees and plantings need to be removed or cleaned up..."

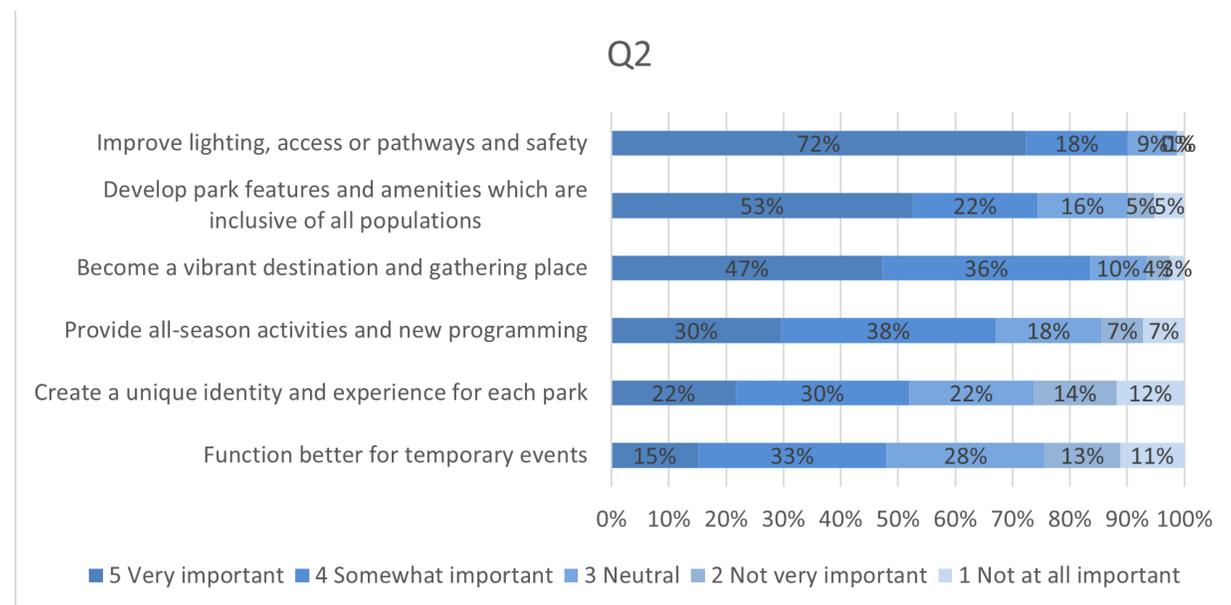
Facilities for Temporary Events

- + Both Beaver Hills House and Michael Phair Parks are located ideally to host events and expand street life...Running water, overhead lighting, mood music, public washrooms, use the building walls as projection screens for light installations, etc... would all make the space much more welcoming.

Question 2: Concept Evaluation

How important are each of the following factors for the renewal of both parks?

Total Comments: 152



We asked this question to discern which factors are most important to participants. Exactly 72% of respondents indicated that the most important element for the renewal is to *Improve lighting, access or pathways and safety*. Over half of respondents indicated that to *Develop park features and amenities which are inclusive of all populations* as well as to *Become a vibrant destination and gathering place* are also very important factors.

The next most important factor indicated by respondents is to *Provide all-season activities and new programming* as well as to *Become a vibrant destination and gathering place*.

Questions 3 & 4: Concept Options 1 & 2

What do you like and/or dislike about the concepts shown above (Concept Options 1 & 2)?

Total Respondents: 152

Total Comments: 151 (for each)



We asked this question to help guide options for the Preliminary Design phase. Nearly all survey participants provided comments to this open-ended question. There were some consistent themes in the comments, including:

- + That the current negative activities within the park were not addressed within the concept options.
- + A desire to keep the parks green and not eliminate plants and trees
- + A concern that there are too many hard surfaces, particularly at Michael Phair Park
- + The stage may not be used frequently and will sit empty when not in use
- + Public washrooms are a need that should be addressed in the park renewal

The proposed climbing wall in Concept Option 1 received a lot of comments, both positive and negative:

- + Some respondents like the climbing wall as an activation element to draw in people
- + Some respondents don't think it fits with the character of the park

Similarly, the proposed children's playground in both options received a lot of comments, both positive and negative:

- + Many respondents do not think sand is an appropriate material for an urban park
- + Some respondents indicated that the children's playground should be bigger and incorporated throughout the park, including nearby restaurant patios

Verbatim Quotes *

Likes

- + "I really like the better connections between the two parks, makes it feel less like a shortcut and more like a valid walkway."
- + "I like the amphitheatre seating in the park, and I like the "backyard" feel of the Micheal Phair park. I like that this version keeps the two parks visually different even as it improves the connection between them..."
- + "I like that the more "active" elements will be in the Michael Phair park."

Dislikes

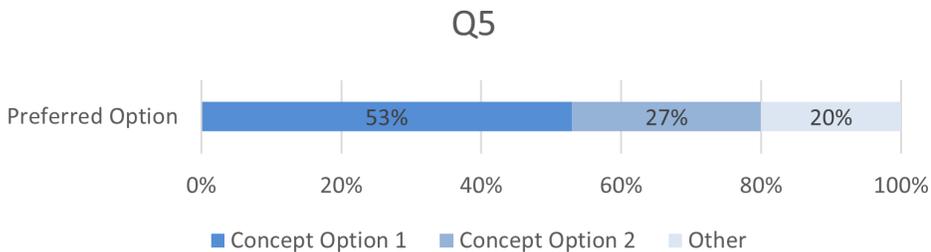
- + "Please don't get rid of the waterfall! The two lower pools could go, but the sound of the waterfall is so soothing and just what is needed to take people out of the hustle and bustle and traffic noise..."
- + "I don't like how little grass there is in this new design, laying on the grass during Al Fresco with some food is so fun, and the little patches in this new design won't be good enough."
- + Edmonton is dark so much of the time... You need light stands. Lights under benches. Lights shining on the climbing wall. Lights strung in the trees."
- + "There should not be a sandbox for small children to play in. This is not a suburban backyard, it's downtown. The potential for harmful objects to be dropped into the sand is too great (i.e. cigarette butts, needles, broken glass, etc.)".
- + "Micheal Phair Park needs more landscaping/greenery."

Question 5: Concept Preference

Which option do you prefer overall?

Total Respondents: 152

Total Comments: 32



We asked this question to help guide options for the Preliminary Design phase. It is clear from the chart above that just over half of respondents preferred Concept Option 1, with just over one quarter preferring Concept Option 2.

Many respondents indicated their preference for "Other". A total of 32 responses were received in this category, which indicated:

- + About half informed that they preferred neither option, or requested both designs be reworked
- + Some respondents indicated a mix of design features from both concept options

Verbatim Quotes *

Concept Option 1

- + *[Option 1] has much more defined areas, and feels much more welcoming and sheltered. Most of this has to do with the inclusion of more grass in Michael Phair, and the form of the plaza along Jasper Ave. I agree that the plaza areas are important in getting more people to use them, but option 2 (Michael Phair option 2 as well) goes overboard with the concrete, and creates a place that feels cold. Option 1 also has a lot more distinction between and within parks, which allows for a wider use variety.*
- + *Option 1 includes more green space... [which] provides more shade and tree cover in both parks making it more comfortable for event-attendees or vulnerable community members in need of shade/cover, but includes lighting to make it safer for those that commute through, and it maintains the water feature. In a future with more intense seasons these are all important factors to consider in addition to vibrancy.*

Concept Option 2

- + *"Concept option 2 does more to preserve the space as a park rather than a playground or event space."*
- + *"Concept 2 has 3-season active features that will make it a destination for workers and residents; and their very presence will make the parks safer and more accessible."*
- + *"Both are good, but prefer Option 2 since it does not have the private patio space for the hotel."*
- + *"I love the beaver dam references and curve of the pathway in option 2."*

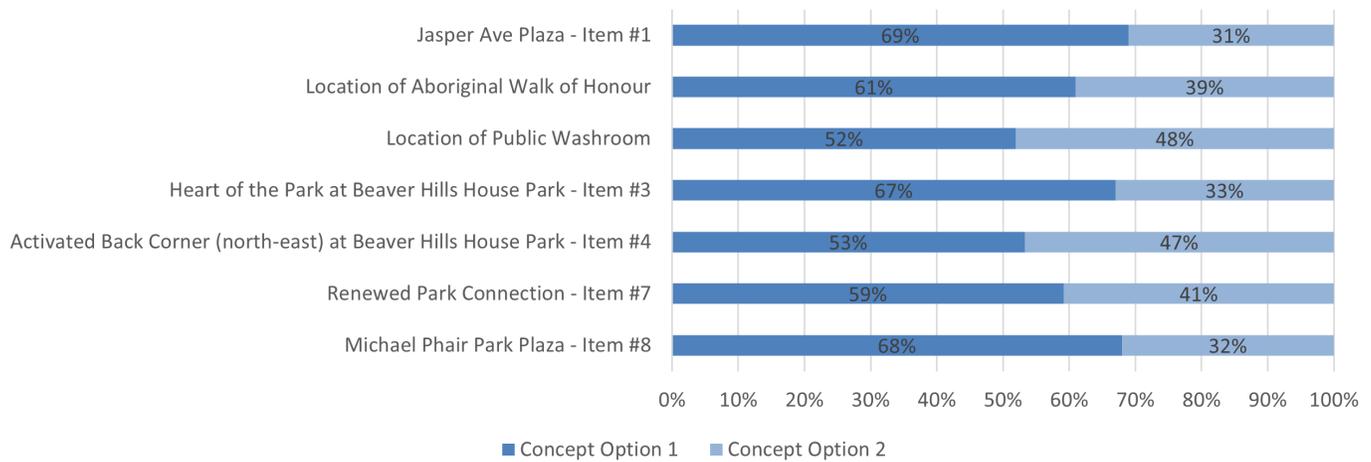
Question 6: Feature Preference

Which option do you prefer for each specific feature?

Total Respondents: 152



Q6



We asked this question to help guide options for the Preliminary Design phase. This question requests feedback on specific park features and Concept Option 1 receives the most favorable responses. This supports the result from the previous question where Concept Option 1 received the most preferable response overall.

The location of public washroom received the most even response at a near-tie.

The activated back corner at Beaver Hills House Park also received a nearly-even response.

Question 7: Additional Comments



Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about the concept options for Beaver Hills House Park or Michael Phair Park?

Total Respondents: 152

Total Comments: 74

As the final question of the survey and last opportunity to provide a comment response, this question received many comments:

- + The waterfall in Beaver Hills House Park is a popular feature and many respondents do not want to see it removed
- + Some respondents think the renewal efforts are a waste of taxpayers money
- + Be holistic in the design and respectful for the many people who inhabit the parks
- + Keep in mind the practical realities of residents and business owners of the downtown (eg. snow clearing, pathways, benches)
- + Seating is an important aspect that needs to be improved
- + Improvements to parks require regular maintenance and care
- + Public washroom is important and needs to be monitored
- + Lighting and sight lines need to be improved
- + Safety is an ongoing issue
- + Add colour, flowers and softer edges to the parks

Verbatim Quotes *

- + *"I am concerned about making Michael Phair park into too much of a paved plaza, I would suggest more grass in the final design..."*
- + *"In both options, the unique character of the park is being lost with the removal of the lowered centre pond area. I understand the desire for increased sense of security and improved sight lines, but this eliminates a unique space and turns it into a generic park."*
- + *"Would like to see as much green spaces and gardens with native plants as possible in the renewal project, in both spaces. It is also important to think about accessibility to make the space as inclusive as possible, wider sidewalks, braille on signage, inclusive playground areas for children of all abilities, gender neutral and family washroom stalls."*
- + *"Think about how everyone uses the parks. From the homeless to the condo owners. Keep in mind other city projects like the Irt coming on 102 Ave that will change traffic patterns. As summers get hotter there is a need to increase grass, tress and heat absorbing materials, not heat reflecting pavement."*
- + *"The current water features are actually enjoyed and are unique. Encouraging more daily use will help the space be used better and installations like le lapin, mini nuit blanche, night markets, etc were amazing. This is because the space is inviting and unique with softer natural edges with trees, rocks, and water..."*

What Happens Next?

Phase 2 for the project is to determine a preferred park design concept with the help of input received from this engagement as well as site analysis and consultant studies, review of City plans and policies and technical considerations. Once this option is confirmed, another round of engagement will occur to gather feedback on the design.

Engagement Timeline

Concept Design Summer 2022	Preliminary Design Winter 2023	Detailed Design Spring 2023	Construction 2023 – 2024 (anticipated)
<i>Stakeholder Meetings</i> <i>Public Engagement</i>	<i>Stakeholder Meetings</i> <i>Public Engagement</i>	<i>Information only</i>	<i>Information only</i>
Insights on issues and opportunities	Feedback on park design options	Project updates	Project/construction updates

Stay informed!

Visit the project website for more information:

www.edmonton.ca/BeaverHillsMichaelPhairRenewal

