

OVERVIEW

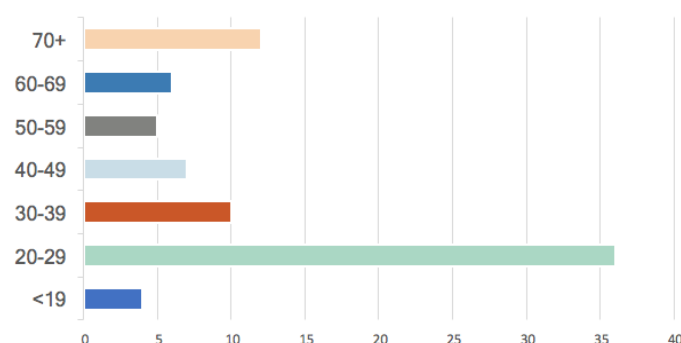
What We Heard at the Third Halifax Common Public Engagement

The third public engagement meeting for the Halifax Common master plan was held on April 25, 2018 from 7:00-9:00, at the Citadel High School atrium. This document is a summary of the meeting activities and public input.

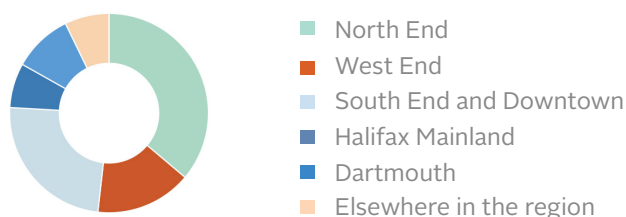
Who Was There

Approximately 90 people attended and were asked to self-identify their postal code and age range. Most attendees live on the peninsula. People in their 20s were strongly represented and the other adult demographics were relatively proportionate with the overall population.

Age of Participants



Home Neighbourhood of Participants

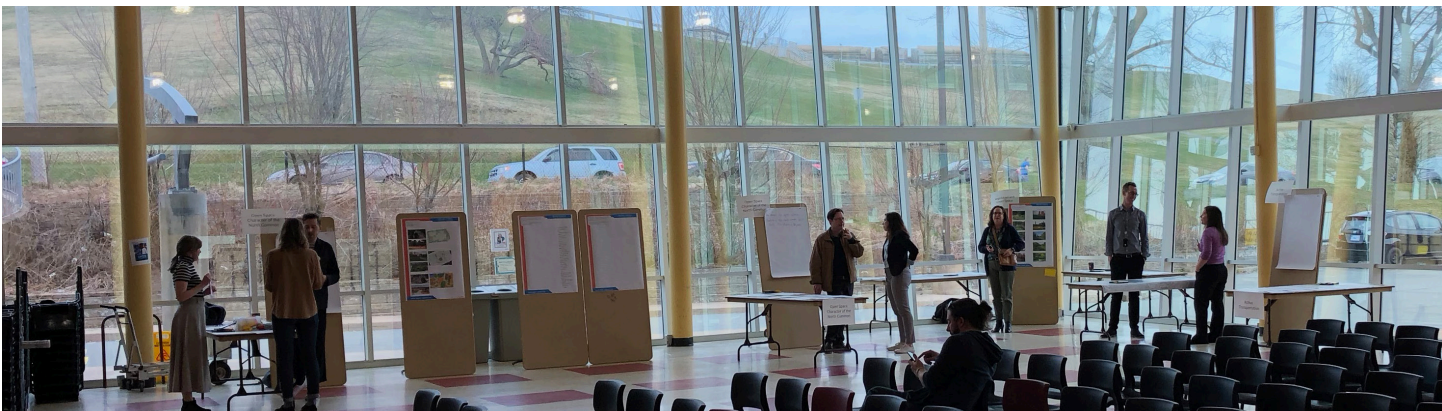
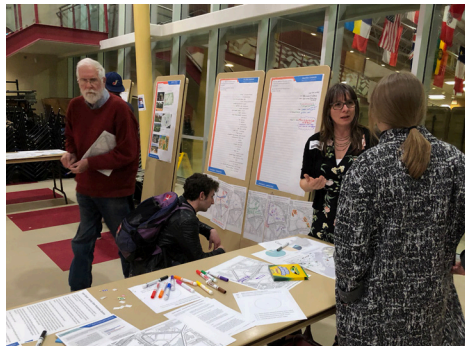
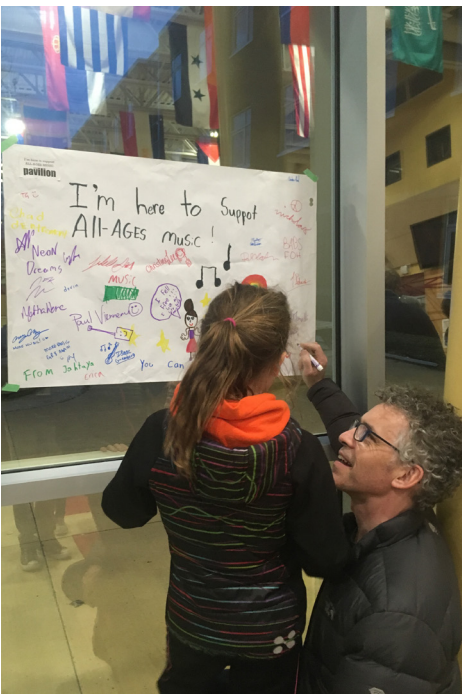


What Happened

The project team began the meeting with presentations of the engagement findings so far. This included highlights of past public meetings, top results of the online survey, and outcomes from stakeholder meetings and outreach. The presentation is available to view on the Shape Your City website.

The second half of the meeting was spent working on seven big design challenges for the Halifax Common. Participants moved among thematic stations at their own pace, to learn more about each challenge and help shape solutions. The topics, questions, outcomes and discussion summary of each station are detailed below.





Open Space Character of the North Common

How might the open space character of the North
Common best suit the desires of the public?

Discussion Summary

The public strongly desires that the North Common be a leisurely and welcoming public space, functioning as a contemporary park, with a balance between different types of activities and increased planting. Participants articulated a range of changes to the open space character that would help to meet these desires, including two “big moves”: formalizing footpaths and reducing the number of ballfields.

Music is also an important component of the North Common. While some neighbours struggle with noise from speakers at the Oval, others feel that music is a vital component of the space. Overall, it is agreed that music ought to be of good quality, supportive of local artists, and that the sound system be improved to minimize neighbourhood disturbance.

Many people enjoy time on the Common with their pet dogs. Some dog owners would like to be permitted to play with their pets off leash, while other feel it interferes with multi-purpose use. Improvements to the nearby fenced dog area were also suggested.

Participants filled out worksheets to demonstrate the balance they would like to see among four types of uses on the North Common.

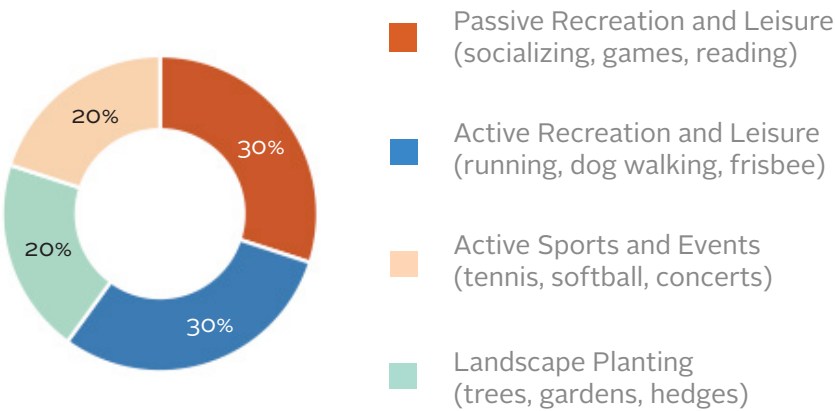
The completed worksheets were compiled to find the average proportion of each type of use participants would like to see. Compared to current use, the averages represent an increase in passive and active recreation and leisure, and landscape planting.

Participants “voted” for the open space features they would most like to see introduced on the North Common, selecting 5 features from a list of 38.

Ten Most Popular Features

- 1. trees in the middle
- 2. outdoor amphitheatre
- 3. urban farming
- 4. BBQs
- 5. dog park
- 6. fire pits
- 7. food vendor area
- 8. drinking fountain
- 9. pizza oven
- 10. seating for groups

Desirable Balance of Uses



Gathering Places

**How might the Common become a place for more
people to linger and socialize?**

Discussion Summary

Food

- Picnics were mentioned several times. Currently, the completely open, flat space is not conducive for peaceful picnics, and there is too much risk being hit by a softball or frisbee.
- BBQs were popular, and garnered excitement.
- Local food vendors are highly desirable.

Pavilion Youth Arts

- Supporters of the Pavilion told their stories about the magic of all ages gathering space for personal development, a reason for being in Halifax, their friendships, happiness, etc.
- People of all ages clearly support music in general, and a youth arts space specifically.

Accessibility

- Wheelchair accessibility was emphasized. Accessibility advocates ought to be brought into the detailed design process.
- Easy seating for elderly people walking the route from Gottingen to Quinpool.

Green

- Green space doesn't have to mean grass. People want to feel safe but slightly enclosed in trees, shrubs, plants, etc.
- Both the Public Gardens and Common Roots were highlighted as amazing outdoor classroom-style spaces.

Participants “voted” for the types of gathering places they would most like to see introduced on the Common, selecting 3 types from a list of 10.

Five Most Popular Features

1. grass and stone amphitheatre
2. café style seating
3. picnic tables and BBQ grills
4. community garden/outdoor classroom
5. landform seating and play structure

Active Transportation

How might the Common best serve people traveling on foot, bicycle, and wheelchairs?

What we heard about traffic and intersections

There is much satisfaction with the treatments at the North Park intersections. The roundabouts make these intersections easy/safe to navigate, and they slow traffic. However, there are several intersections that feel unsafe:

- Robie/Bell/Quinpool/Cogswell
- Robie/Cunard
- Sackville/South Park (this is specifically bad for biking)
- Trollope/Bell/Summer

Robie/Bell/Quinpool/Cogswell is a notoriously bad intersection (even for cars), and is of special interest because many people cross the common in order to go to shops on Quinpool. This intersection would naturally be part of this route if it wasn't so dangerous; instead, many people cross Robie at the crosswalk at Welsford St. to avoid it.

What we heard about pathways and connections on the North Common

Some of the desire lines of the North Common are extremely well used, particularly the routes from Cunard and Robie to the Cogswell crosswalk, and to Cornwallis Street. Muddy and icy conditions, as well as use conflict with sport is a concern. Cunard and Robie is also a primary entry point. Notably, the paved path mid-block at Cunard to the fountain is infrequently taken.

There is a need for clarification about how multi-use paths are to be used, perhaps separate bikes from pedestrian paths, signage or pavement markings.

The crossing at Cogswell should be improved to strengthen the connection between the Oval and the Central Common amenities.

There is also a need for improved lighting.

What we heard about connections throughout the Common

Connectivity between the VG hospital and the Public Gardens could be improved via Victoria Park, with crosswalk improvements across University Ave, and comfortable access around the fountain/hill at Victoria Park. A second route via Summer Street would also enhance the north-south connectivity.

A unifying design aesthetic would make it clear when you were on the Common. Some ideas include:

- Signage throughout
- Standard types of infrastructure (pavers, benches, lamps, etc)
- Subtle cues, such as markers embedded in sidewalks at corners where you are entering or leaving the Common

Vegetation and Green Space

What does “green space” mean to you?

Discussion Summary

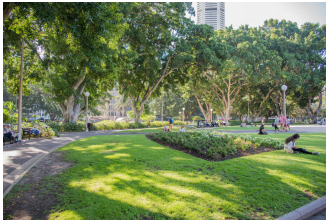
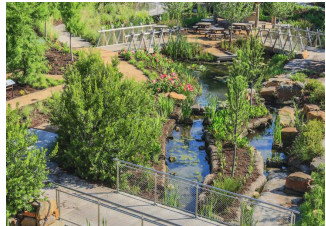
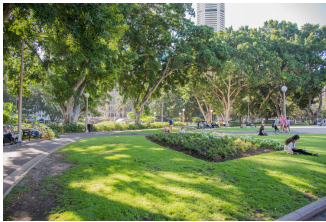
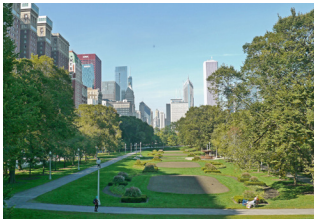
For the majority of participants, green space is more than just flat grass; it is trees and other plants along paths and supporting gathering spaces. Trees are essential as windbreaks, sound buffers, for shade and for play. Grassy hills and undulating landforms would be enjoyed for sitting and observing, and play and sledding for young children. A variety of vegetation is desirable to attract birds, to express the seasons, and for beauty. At the same time, there is a strong desire for open grass space with no prescriptive use, in addition to ball fields.

Other details included urban gardening, engaging all the senses (smell, sound, touch), biodiversity and native species, flowing water, and interactive green spaces.

Participants were asked to identify their preferences for green space and vegetation in three areas of the Common, by selecting examples on two different spectrums; manicured to naturalized and dense to open. The images below were the most popular for each area.

Vegetation and Green
Space Preferences

Overall, these images demonstrate a desire for more vegetative enclosure than exists currently, but also a strong balance of open spaces and views, as well as a interest in somewhat natural landscaping, but with a sense of orderliness.

	Manicured - Naturalized	Dense - Open
North Common		
Central Common		
Victoria Park		

Cultural Heritage Landscape

In what ways might we celebrate heritage while balancing current needs?

In general, participants were supportive of the idea that the entire Common be designated as a cultural heritage landscape, with clarity around the pieces that hold the most heritage value, and the pieces that have become contemporary.

Design Based Solutions

A number of ideas were proposed by participants, to enhance the heritage value and understanding of the Common:

- Enhance and celebrate Camphill Cemetery
- Improve circulation through Camphill Cemetery
- Public spaces should be open at all times (like in other countries)
- Designated areas for busking and music
- Remove ballfields
- Instruments and tools for public play (like Denver)
- Update and open Wanderers Ground greenhouses
- Shiny outdoor hockey space
- Protect views from within the Commons - tall buildings adjacent to Commons should have glass glazing on upper floors to reflect blue skies
- Strong continuous green edge on the North Common
- Extend Victoria Park further south

Awareness Building

Participants also offered suggestions to foster knowledge of the heritage value of the Common, and its ongoing role as a community space:

- Information desk about the entire Halifax Common at the Public Gardens building
- Social media promotion of the Halifax Common and its history
- Events and activities celebrating the Halifax Common
- Interactive chalkboards with questions and answers (like Saskatoon River Landing project)
- Create a “Halifax Common Commission”

The Centre of the Oval

What should be done with the centre of the Oval?

Discussion Summary

Participants expressed that they highly value the Oval. Generally, people felt that the addition of recreational activity in the centre of the Oval should not negatively impact the current functioning of the facility. There was some support for the addition of an ice rink, the addition of summer field sports, or passive opportunities, but there was also apprehension as to how the use of the centre would effect the Oval.

General Comments

- Open and free, accessibility is #1
- Occasional events
- Scheduling - can hockey and skating lessons be held on divided straight-away?
- Play local music for the oval
- How can we wind shelter the west winds?
- Fill the centre of the oval without it being ugly and making the oval feel like a tunnel?
- Think of Rockefeller Centre but in reverse – instead of café/culture on the outside of the skating, lets put it inside. Build berms/bridge ways at both ends to ease us over and in and create a gathering place for all seasons where we can meet, sip, watch, have art shows, etc.
- More summer time uses: Roller-derby, ball hockey, volleyball concert space

In Favour of Ice Surface

- An amazing opportunity to build on the success of the oval and utilize existing infrastructure to build an outdoor hockey rink, provide a much-needed service to those who do not have the skill or available income to be part of the game
- Multi-purpose ice surface(s) for shinny, curling, informal skating, figure skating, ringette, learn to skate, learn to play hockey
- Have hockey equipment available, make it open to all
- Have clear hockey boards, clear netting - needed for safety of people in the Oval

Concerns or Alternatives to Ice Surface

- Oval cannot handle more traffic
- Like the Oval the way it is - skating outdoors, learning to skate, open public skating
- Don't want a lot of noise – pucks hitting boards – like to talk to friends and hear the music
- Due to climate this area must have useful non- ice plan
- Limitations of the building – already at max at times
- Can't see how to coordinate the use of a hockey rink and the free skating of the Oval. Rink boards and nets are needed for safety but would diminish the appearance and feel of the entire space -and I'm a hockey fan!
- Safety? Crossing? Barriers?
- If the goal is shinny – HRM funds and refrigeration could go to neighbourhood rinks
- The expense is not justified compared to the number of people who use the Oval
- There are hockey facilities in the city already

Money Matters

What role does commercial use play in creating a great public place?

What we heard about small scale supportive uses

Participants felt that commercial use is great, sometimes even essential, when it supports the experience of being on the Common. People said they want business that supports both special events, and the everyday experience on the Common. Examples: tours, organized social and recreation activities, sauna, ice cream stand, food trucks, farmers markets, outdoor craft fairs, and food festivals. Spending a day on the Common means having places to buy food, just like having accessible washrooms, at the minimum.

Some participants feel the current regulations and fees are a barrier for small local businesses. Small business owners are looking to provide supportive commercial activity, but are restricted by the “one size fits all” criteria which they feel are only obtainable by large promoters and national chains (fees, insurance, etc.) They are looking for some support or ways that the city can encourage them to operate, and build their enterprises.

What we heard about large scale events

There was of support among participants for both paid entry concerts and free public concerts and events.

Wetspot, Canada Day 2017, Rolling Stones, Paul McCartney all cited as good examples.

Participants like the tourism and excitement it brings to the city.

Participants recommended that a percentage of the revenue from any paid events goes directly to park amenities and maintenance (general improvement and park clean up after events).

It is felt that large scale commercial activities should be treated differently from small scale.

Other comments

Central Communications / Promotions Hub

- Participants recommended a social media presence, or website, that informs the public about the Arts, Cultural, and Sports events happening on the Common.

All Commercial Use Contingent Upon:

- “not another blade of grass, or tree would be lost.”
- Must be wheelchair accessible
- No land sold, all ownership remains as municipal

Commission or Foundation

- Recommendation to start a foundation or commission that could support the Common

The following additional input was gathered, which did not directly align with the seven stations.

What we heard about Pavilion all ages music

There were many participants at the meeting who are strongly in support of the Pavilion. They provided the following comments:

- Renovate or rebuild the Pavilion
- Create a year round multi-use arts space: music // dance // theatre // drama // visual arts
- Can generate revenue through rental to community groups
- Can partner with Citadel High for after school programs
- Can include a youth cafe/hang out with seating, games, resources, quiet space for study or homework
- Pavilion plays a very significant role in the lives of the youth who are involved

What we heard about the 1994 Common Plan

Some participants are concerned about components of the 1994 Plan that have not been upheld or implemented, as well as a general deviation from public open space. Specific comments included:

- Don't privatize the view of the Common with high rises around the perimeter
- What about the promise of a park on the School for the Blind property?
- Communicate about Wanderers Grounds privatization
- Common Roots farm to Wanderers Grounds or St. Pat's high lands
- Regulate the whole of the Common
- Make entire Common green and keep development out
- No more private buildings on Common land, no privatization. Common owned by the commons
- Get rid of the HRM Parks works depot
- Connect North and Central Common by returning Cogswell Street to green space or at least close it on weekends