



UNIVERSITY of TORONTO

LANDSCAPE

of **LANDMARK
QUALITY**

INNOVATIVE DESIGN COMPETITION

Public Feedback Report

2015.12.09



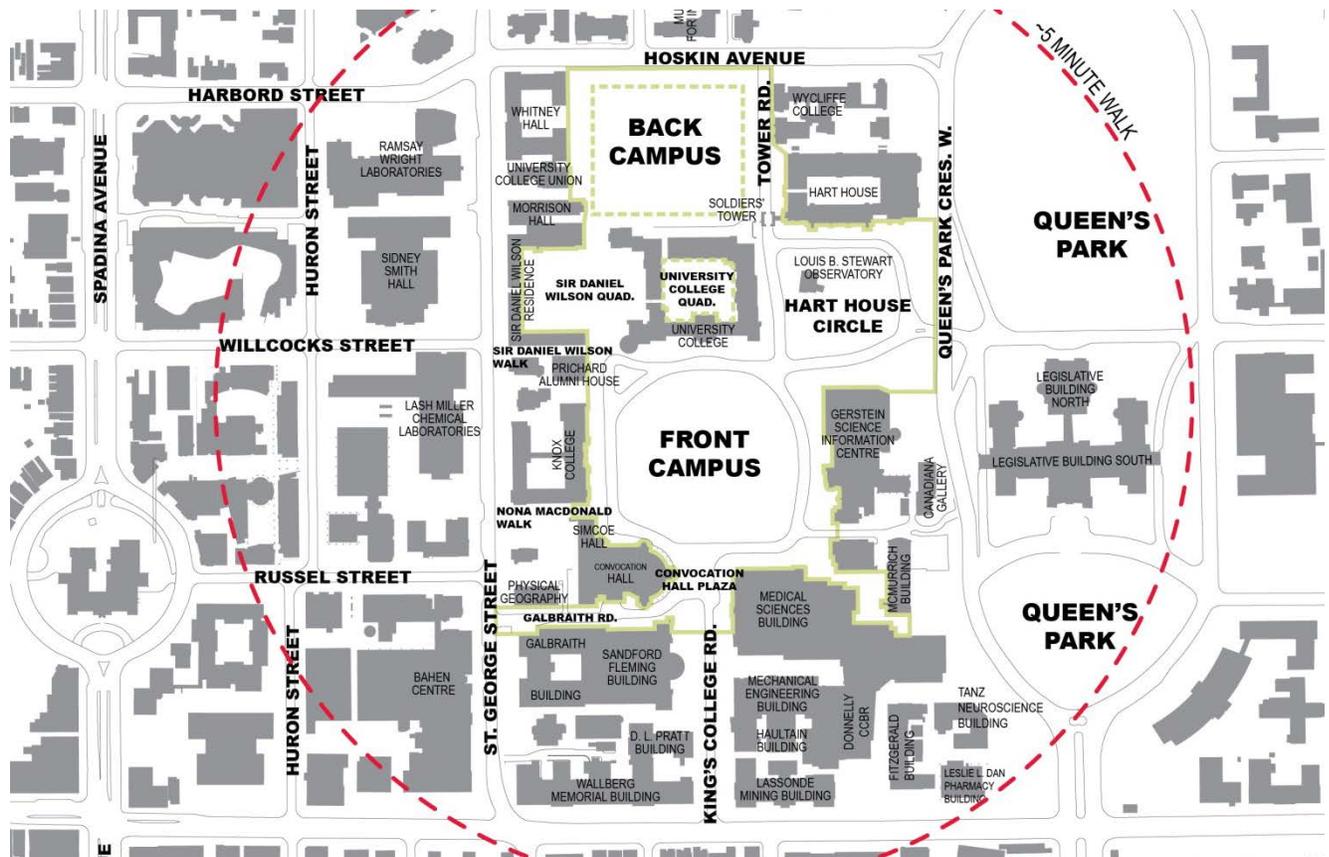
UNIVERSITY OF
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ABOUT THE COMPETITION

In May of 2015 the University of Toronto initiated an Innovative Design and Ideas Competition for the revitalization of the major open spaces of the historic St. George campus – “A Landscape of Landmark Quality”. These open spaces consist of the Front Campus and King’s College Circle, the Back Campus and Tower Road, Hart House Green, the Sir Daniel Wilson Quadrangle and the Medical Sciences Plaza. The competition emerged from a year-long planning and visioning process in which a committee of faculty, staff, students, and alumni deliberated on the direction of the University should take in revitalizing its historic heart.

Four teams representing a range of architectural and landscape philosophies were shortlisted to compete in June, through an open RFQ (Request for Qualifications) process. Design team selection was based on *Design Experience* - executing projects of a comparable nature, scale and complexity using innovative yet contextually sensitive solutions; and *Public Engagement* - demonstrated ability to engage in broad public consultation with, and outreach to, a diverse range of stakeholders from within the University of Toronto, as well as neighbouring resident groups, and the city at large.



Plan of the southern portion of the St. George Campus. The extents of the project area are bounded by a green line



The competition itself ran for eight weeks from July to September. During that time, each of the teams prepared original designs to address the many challenges of the project area. While the design ideas developed during the competition were important to the process of selecting a winner, it was not intended that the winning team's submission would be implemented exactly as presented. Rather, the successful team will enter into a process with the University to critically review the ideas emerging from the competition and develop a Master Plan for the project area. This process will involve broad consultation with University stakeholders, neighbouring communities, and the University's Design Review Committee.

HOW THE UNIVERSITY REACHED OUT TO THE PUBLIC

Broad outreach is very important to the University in general and specifically for a project of such significance – the re-imagining of the heart of the historic St. George campus – an exceptional landscape resource enjoyed by the University community and the city as a whole. Public consultation and the solicitation of feedback has been an important component in the planning and execution of the competition. Consultation will continue to be a priority as the project continues.

Public engagement was carried out through the following means:

U of T Media

U of T News, published by University of Toronto Communications (UTC), ran three articles in the weeks leading up to and following the public presentation of the competition entries. These articles were distributed to the University community through the *Bulletin*, the U of T email newsletter (which is regularly opened by several thousand members of the university community). One contained a specific request for readers to provide their feedback through the online survey. Links to each of these articles can be found at landmark.utoronto.ca.

News Media

UTC shared its content with all major Toronto media outlets (newspaper, television and radio) with a special focus on those journalists who cover urban affairs and urban design/architecture. The same outreach targeted selected online media sources (e.g. the *Huffington Post*). The *National Post* ran an article on the 29th of September which outlined the competition and highlighted interesting components of each team's design. *Metro News* published a similar article online on October 22nd, which included a link to a video created by the University's student-run-newspaper, the *Varsity*.

In addition to the video, the *Varsity* published an article about the competition after the public presentation and an op-ed piece responding to the competition.

Links to each of these articles and the video can be found at landmark.utoronto.ca.



Website

UTC posted a banner on the university's home page (a property which is viewed hundreds of thousands of times per month) to bring visitors to the content identified above. A dedicated website (landmark.utoronto.ca) continues to provide information about the design competition and the project as it progresses. It also includes historic and background information related to planning for the project prior to the initiation of the competition. Following the public presentations, the competition entries, and videos of the public presentations were posted on the site so that people who had been unable to attend the presentations and exhibitions in person could have a close look at the entries and provide feedback. The website contains a regularly updated list of links to related media articles. Contact information is also available for those who wish to provide ongoing feedback or ask questions about the competition.

The University plans to continue using the site to post information about the project as it progresses, notably details about public events such as consultations and information about developments in the design process.

Social Media

Using the university's two central Twitter accounts (@UofT, with over 17,000 followers and @UofTNews, with over 22,000 followers), UTC publicized the public presentations at Convocation Hall (see below) as well as the public exhibitions of the four teams' proposals (see below). Tweets started in the third week of September and continued until the second week of October. UTC also posted an item regarding the four proposals on its Facebook page. The post reached more than 28,000 Facebook users.

Public Presentation

A public presentation marked the formal end of the eight-week design competition. Members of each of the design teams presented their proposals at the event, which was held at Convocation Hall on September 28th, 2015. Seating was available for approximately 700 people. The event was free and open to the public.

The event consisted of introductory remarks by Scott Mabury, Vice President, University Operations, followed by 25 minute presentations by each of the four teams. A Q&A session followed, moderated by Donald Ainslie, Principal of University College. Members of the audience were encouraged to ask questions of the teams or about the project as a whole. Videos of the public presentations were posted at landmark.utoronto.ca to allow those who were unable to attend the event to view the presentations and Q&A session.

Display panels, prepared by the design teams, were exhibited at the event to allow visitors to view the proposals more closely both before and after the presentations. These panels included QR links to the competition's website, and to an online feedback survey.

The event was listed on the websites of the Ontario Association of Landscape Architects (OALA) and Ontario Association of Architects (OAA), as well as in *News@UofT*, a monthly e-newsletter that is circulated to alumni, donors and friends of the University. Email invitations were also sent out to many people in the Division of



University Advancement's contact databases. These included individuals living within a 20 minute walking radius of the St. George campus, and UofT alumni. Approximately 20,000 email invitations were distributed.



Adam Nicklin of PUBLIC WORK answers an audience question at the public presentations on 28th

Public Exhibitions

In order to provide opportunities for the public to view and provide feedback on the competition entries, display panels, summarizing the competition entries, were exhibited at two venues on the St. George campus following the public presentation. Each team prepared six large panels, detailing the key features of their work, including an overall plan of the project area, enlarged plans and renderings of key areas and many diagrams and explanatory texts. The office of Campus and Facilities Planning prepared additional panels providing background information on the competition, the campus, and its history. These panels also contained contact and website information and provided a link to an online survey designed to collect public feedback.

In the week following the public presentation the display panels were exhibited in the front lobby of the J. Robert S. Prichard Alumni House, located at 21 King's College Circle. This building was chosen for its location within the project area, its central location, and its accessibility. The Division of University Advancement provided volunteers to answer questions and encourage feedback. With the intention of allowing for greater student exposure to the project, the panels were remounted from October 8th to 13th in a high-traffic student common area on the main level of Sidney Smith Hall. This building is a short walk from the project area.

The online survey closed on October 21st in order to compile comments for the Evaluation Committee to review. However, the exhibit was mounted a third time at Hart House from November 2nd to 22nd, with the



aim to encourage continued dialogue about the project. An introductory panel at this exhibit encouraged viewers to send their questions and comments to the project's dedicated email address (landmark.committee@utoronto.ca).



Examining the display panels at Convocation Hall on September 28th

Sign-up cards

Interested parties were encouraged to fill out sign-up cards in order to stay informed about the project. These cards were provided at the public presentation and also available at the first exhibition at the J. Robert S. Prichard Alumni House. Sign-up cards were collected and processed by the Division of University Advancement. In total, ninety-four cards were collected, forty-six percent of which were filled out by students. Sixteen percent of the cards were filled out by alumni, nine percent by faculty and six percent by local residents. A further twenty-four percent were filled out by other members of the University community.

The university may use the contact information from this list to provide updates about the project in the future.

Online survey

An online survey was prepared by the University in order to collect public feedback about the competition entries and the design teams. Questions focussed on the eight principles that were identified to guide the competition process (see <http://landmark.utoronto.ca/overview/project-goals/> for further information about these principles):



1. Improved pedestrian experience
2. Enhanced green space
3. Public spaces that animate the campus
4. Support of events
5. Removal of surface parking from King's College Circle, Hart House Circle, and Tower Road
6. Limiting traffic on King's College Circle and Hart House Circle
7. Innovative solutions to wayfinding
8. Maintenance and improvement of servicing and access

Additional questions focussed on the teams and their presentations.

Two comment fields were provided in which people could provide comments of unlimited length. They asked:

- "What were some of the best ideas proposed by any of the teams?"
- "Further comments: Did we miss something? Other comments or concerns? Add them here!"

The survey was anonymous and did not collect any personal or demographic information about the individuals who completed it. 613 responses were collected between September 28th and October 21st when the survey closed. The majority of responses (401) were collected in the first four days that the survey was open, reflecting a large amount of media attention on the project at that time. Notably, an article published in *U of T News* on September 29th made a call for readers to complete the survey. Between one and twenty-eight people responded each day for the rest of the time that the survey was open.

Links to the online survey were provided in a number of locations on the competition website (landmark.utoronto.ca) and on the display panels exhibited at the J. Robert S. Prichard Alumni House and Sidney Smith Hall (see above). Respondents were also encouraged to write to the project's dedicated email address (landmark.committee@utoronto.ca). A small number of respondents from inside and outside the University chose to provide their comments through this channel, rather than completing the survey.

While many respondents only filled in the multiple choice questions, the University was nevertheless extremely pleased with the number of written comments, with 269 responses to the question asking for the best ideas proposed by any of the teams, and 157 responses to the question asking for further comments. Combined, these written comments represented over 28,000 words of written text.

WHAT WE HEARD FROM YOU:

The Evaluation Committee was overwhelmed by the quantity, quality and variety of the responses that were received through the online survey and through the dedicated email address. While many took the opportunity to simply list their favourite design ideas, many others took the time to write thoughtful and detailed responses. Dozens of respondents used the comments to critically compare different competition entries; to propose hybrids of different proposals; to suggest improvements or changes to the proposals; or to provide their own, original ideas.



The Evaluation Committee was impressed by the depth and breadth of this response. It suggests that the historic St. George campus is deeply important to a wide range of people who look forward to seeing it improved over time. Many respondents demonstrated a deep understanding of the campus, its history, and its many functional challenges. While an overall consensus from the public did not emerge from the survey, the comments did suggest a broad support for the objectives of the design competition and the spirit of the proposals. We thank you for your participation and support of this project.

Themes that emerged over the course of a careful review of the comments received included:

Heritage

The four design teams were praised for their very different approaches to engaging with the campus' unique history. Commenters demonstrated a strong appreciation for the preservation of heritage buildings and views to those buildings.

The introduction of a large water feature at Hart House Green was one of the most popular ideas for connecting with the University's past that emerged through the competition.

Sustainability

Many commenters praised the expansion of green spaces, pedestrian and bicycle circulation and features such as stormwater retention and intensive plantings of native species. Some commenters encouraged the university to build an even stronger sustainability component into the plans for the St. George campus, expressing the view that the university has an opportunity to take a leadership role in the field of sustainable design and to set an example to individuals and other institutions.

Pedestrian Experience

An improved pedestrian experience was almost universally applauded by respondents to the survey. While a few people expressed concerns about inconveniencing or penalizing those members of the University who drive to the campus, the vast majority responded positively to the four teams' proposals for a greatly improved and enlarged pedestrian realm, more bicycle routes and reduced automobile traffic.

While some commenters praised improvements in pedestrian and bicycle circulation at the same time, others stressed the importance of separation between pedestrians and bicycle traffic for reasons of safety and comfort.

Some commenters focused on the type and quality of the paving proposed in various entries. They suggested that care be taken to choose paving solutions that will not result in shifting or heaving with the wear and tear of heavy vehicles and the weather. Others praised the possibility of a higher quality paving palette, noting that certain teams' proposals for stone pavers were appropriate to the rich historic context.



Proposed improvements across the Medical Sciences Building Plaza (including an improved connection to Queen’s Park subway station) and across Hart House Green were well received both for reasons of greater accessibility and convenience. A number of people were happy to see proposed improvements to the route through the MSB plaza in particular.

Accessibility

A few commenters felt the entries needed to include greater attention to accessibility. While some expressed excitement in seeing that the project could be used as a means to improve accessibility across the campus, others felt that none of the teams went far enough to address accessibility issues. A few comments noted Canada’s aging population and stressed that the need for greater accessibility will only increase in the coming years.

Green Space

The enhancement of green spaces in the project area was received positively almost across the board. Commenters were happy to see a greater diversity of planting types and many more pedestrian routes lined with varied planting. New trees on campus were also welcomed, as was the preservation of the existing tree canopy, as emphasized by some of the teams. The analysis, put forward by some teams, of the effects of having higher-canopy trees was enthusiastically noted by a number of commenters. Many people welcomed the greater diversity of trees proposed, including the many flowering trees and trees with vibrant fall colours. A focus on native and hearty plants was also welcomed and encouraged. Concerns were raised by a few about how new trees may interfere with existing views across the campus to various buildings.

A few respondents were concerned that some of the proposals would reduce the size of the useable area of the Front Campus, either by regularizing the form of the circle, or by adding new trees. They noted that the lawn is already heavily used, and a very rare amenity for informal sports. A small number of other commenters felt that the Front and Back Campuses are too heavily used for sports, and that they could be freed up for use by others.

A number of commenters noted the challenges of maintaining the Front Campus lawn through the winter and a few people expressed their desire to see more attention paid to this issue. Hart House Green received perhaps the most attention of the green spaces included in the project area. This attention focussed mostly on the various proposals to include large water features in the spaces as well as on pedestrian circulation across it (see below).

Public Space & Campus Animation

Commenters responded favourably to proposals including more benches, meeting spots, outdoor study spaces, and facilities for outdoor activities such as skating or informal sport. Many commenters praised the



designers' visions of a more animated and lively campus and a significant number praised the competition's focus on seasonality. There was an almost universally positive response to proposals that would encourage people to linger outdoors throughout the year.

While each of the design teams proposed a café or food service element in their submissions, they did not emerge as a major interest among commenters.

Water Features – Hart House Pond

Water features, and the revival of a pond at Hart House Green were overwhelmingly popular ideas. Many respondents praised the idea of a major water feature on Hart House Green for its connection with the site's history; McCaul's pond (a small body of water, created by damming the Taddle Creek) once occupied the eastern part of the site. Others noted the mental health benefits of water for students and the surrounding community, as well as the picturesque qualities that a pond or water body would bring to the campus. A large number of respondents used words such as 'loved' to describe their reaction to water features and a few described them as 'a must'.

While DTAH's pond proposal was a clear favourite, some respondents noted that any of the water features would suit them and a few praised elements of the water features proposed by other teams, notably the interactive nature of JRS' reflecting pool. A few people called for water features somewhere in the project area but did not speak to Hart House Green in particular.

Many respondents also raised concerns about ponds and large water features, noting safety and sanitation concerns. Stagnant water, insect breeding grounds and dangers for pedestrians (particularly in winter) were commonly raised concerns. Many people also questioned the costs involved in installing and maintaining a large water feature.

Skating Features

The idea of having a skating rink or trail in the historic campus was another very popular idea to emerge from the competition. Many respondents noted that this popular, iconically Canadian activity was perfectly suited to a campus that is used most heavily through the winter. The possibility of animating the campus with winter sports produced many positive responses.

A few respondents raised concerns about how difficult it might be to maintain a skating rink or trail when sub-zero temperatures rarely last for long periods in Toronto and climate change may make sustainable natural ice even rarer in the future. The appearance and function of these amenities during warmer months of the year was also a concern to a number of respondents, as was the cost of constructing and maintaining such an amenity.



Underground Parking

The vast majority of respondents welcomed the idea of removing surface parking and reducing traffic in the project area. The concept of an underground parking garage was widely praised by commenters, noting its potential to improve green space and pedestrian circulation at grade, and to increase parking provision as well. A few called for a bolder vision of underground facilities, including a second level of parking (to increase capacity) or other amenities such as food services or shower and storage facilities for cyclists.

On the other hand, there was considerable concern about the impacts that the construction of a large parking garage would have on the campus. A few were concerned about the cost of such a structure.

There was also a strong theme of caution to ensure that entrances to an underground parking structure would not diminish the campus environment.

Automobile entrances to the parking garage were also frequently commented on. Many comments expressed concerns about those proposals that located the entrances to their parking garages on Queen's Park Crescent or on Galbraith Road. A parking entrance at Wellesley Street was frequently noted as being the most practical.

Bicycle parking was a common concern for a number of commenters with many responding enthusiastically to underground and covered parking facilities.

Traffic Calming

A reduction in automobile traffic around the historic campus was embraced by a large number of respondents. Many commenters expressed their dislike for the current state of the campus and responded positively to the calm and increased safety anticipated in the proposals.

Commenters enthusiastically responded to the increases in cycling infrastructure proposed by all of the teams. While a few respondents called for mixed pedestrian and cycling routes, a greater number stressed the importance of separating the two noting that more coherent cycling routes through the historic campus could result in higher volumes of bicycle traffic so care should be taken to ensure comfortable places for pedestrians to walk.

Wayfinding

A few respondents noted the importance of wayfinding. The Justina M. Barnicke Gallery and the University of Toronto Art Centre, which are located on either side of the Soldiers' Tower, at Hart House and University College respectively, were called out as examples of locations that would benefit from improved wayfinding.



Servicing and Discreet Building Access

A few respondents questioned whether the vehicular access proposed by all of the teams would be sufficient to service the many buildings in the project area. It was also noted that many of the buildings around the project area require regular catering and that delivery vans will continue to be a regular presence.

NEXT STEPS

With the selection of a winning design team, this project will move into a phase of evaluating the ideas that have emerged from the design competition, as well as the feedback received from the public. The winning team will now begin to synthesize this wealth of ideas into a Master Plan that embraces the aspirations of the University and its many stakeholders.

It is important to recognize that the selection of the winning team is not an acceptance of the ideas brought forward at this initial competition stage – in other words, the winning team was not selected for the ideas presented in and of themselves, but rather for their understanding of the scope of the project, including the requirement for significant and iterative input from a wide range of stakeholders – students, staff, faculty, alumni, and our neighbours. The winning team is now tasked with beginning a process that is deeply consultative and will include broad public engagement, to develop the ultimate vision for the heart of the campus.

The whole of the public commentary on the project will continue to be reviewed. However, in light of the public feedback, as well as feedback from the Evaluation Committee, the winning team will be asked to consider and address a number of points, in particular:

- How best to balance the individual character of the distinct, yet interrelated, spaces within the project area with the need for these spaces to be integral components in the broader St. George campus' open space network;
- How best to pedestrianize the historic campus, considering the many possible secondary effects of doing so on existing traffic flow, building servicing, wayfinding, accessibility and pedestrian safety;
- How best to introduce underground parking while improving the quality of the historic campus landscape, especially considering the challenges of discreet pedestrian and vehicle access to underground spaces;
- How best to animate the campus in all seasons and accommodate events including large and logistically challenging events such as spring and fall convocation;
- Whether a winter recreational feature can be introduced into the landscape considering the challenges and costs of winter maintenance and alternative uses during the rest of the year;
- Whether a water feature could be added to the Hart House Green, or elsewhere in the historic campus considering the challenges and costs of maintenance, risk management concerns and secondary effects such as insects and geese;



- How best to improve pedestrian crossings across Queen’s Park Crescent West, with a focus on the Wellesley Street underpass and the pedestrian crossing between Hart House and Queen’s Park;
- How best to ensure that sustainability considerations are among the primary drivers of the decisions made for the project area, and to ensure that changes to the historic campus result in improvements to the wellbeing of the University community, natural ecosystems and the University’s significant heritage;
- How best to ensure that accessibility challenges are met in order to move toward a barrier-free St. George campus. It should be noted that in addition to consultations with University experts and groups, the winning team will work with an accessibility consultant to ensure that improvements to the campus meet and, where possible, exceed the requirements of all relevant accessibility standards.

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROJECT

Moving into the next phase of this project, the University wishes to thank its community for taking the time to provide feedback and join us at the exhibits and presentations during the first competition phase. Further opportunities to provide feedback, express concerns, or give ideas will be provided at landmark.utoronto.ca. Because the project area is an important landscape resource, a place of respite, and source of pride for people all over the city and beyond, the University looks forward to working with the broader community to ensure that this space remains an outstanding and beloved resource for all to enjoy.

Please contact us at landmark.committee@utoronto.ca with questions or comments and check the project website regularly for news and updates.