

Food Forests

Phase 2 Engagement Survey Feedback Report

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BACKGROUND

The City of Saskatoon (City) is engaging community on two food forest demonstration sites in Boughton Park and Leif Erickson Park.

The food forest demonstration project is part of the implementation of the [*Pathways for an Integrated Green Network*](#) and [*Pathway to a Sustainable Urban Forest*](#), to establish safe and accessible edible landscapes across Saskatoon, enhance our green network, and contribute to the city-wide tree canopy. Several sites were considered using criteria such as land availability, neighbourhood food insecurity and public accessibility. Based on the results, Leif Erickson Park and Boughton Park were selected as the highest priority sites and designs were developed incorporating site-specific design constraints, subject matter expert recommendations, and community feedback.

Building on the introduction of the project within phase 1, where the food forest demonstration sites were discussed with impacted groups to identify site-specific considerations and to determine site-specific community support, the phase 2 survey asked for feedback on draft site designs with communities and user groups.

This report offers a summary of the feedback heard through the Phase 2 food forest design survey.

Phase 2 – Engagement Survey

Administration conducted a self-administered online survey from June 5 to July 19, 2023. The survey was sectioned into the Boughton Park food forest design and the Leif Erickson food forest design, allowing participants to choose which demonstration site they preferred to provide feedback. The survey also included a common section requesting the respondent to self-identify if they were interested in future stewardship of a food forest site and demographic questions.

In response to early feedback, the Boughton Park food forest design was adjusted to include a larger buffer between its design and the Holiday Park Community Garden site. As such, the design was updated within the survey questions on June 21, 2023. This change to the design was identified in the survey and on the food forest project Engage webpage.

Intended Audience

The purpose of the survey was to validate draft site designs with neighbourhood communities/user groups directly connected or impacted by the proposed food forest sites at Boughton Park, in the Holiday Park Neighbourhood, and at Leif Erickson Park, in the Westmount neighbourhood.

Marketing Techniques

The survey was promoted through advertisements on City's Facebook and Instagram accounts, posts on the neighbourhood-based Nextdoor app, direct emails to Community Associations, garden collectives and schools, flyers delivered to the neighbourhoods surrounding each food forest demonstration site and promoted at the in-person open houses.

Additionally, flyers were delivered to the Gordie Howe Complex and the Kinsmen Arena, located adjacent to the proposed Boughton Park food forest demonstration site.

Data Limitations

Online engagement is not inclusive for those with limited to no Internet access. This limitation was mitigated by also providing other opportunities to provide input including onsite open house events and project contact information located on the project Engage webpage.

While this type of survey is not considered statistically valid, it provides an indication of the public's perspective about food forest designs and general feedback on specific planting and usage opportunities for neighbourhood food forest sites.

SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS

Demographics

113 surveys were received (101 online and 12 paper copies distributed during two open house events).

Survey results included participation from neighbourhoods across the city, with a majority representing neighbourhoods surrounding the demonstration sites. The neighbourhood with the highest participation was Westmount with 20 entries, representing about 18% of the total entries, while the Holiday Park neighbourhood provided with 17 entries, representing 15% of the total entries.

65% of participants identified themselves as homeowners. Female participants represented 67% of respondents and 35 - 49 years were the most represented age cohort at 41% (21 participants).

Structure

The survey consisted of 5 site-specific questions with respondents asked to provide their opinion on both what they like and their concerns for each food forest site design as well as any considerations that should be incorporated into the plan. Additionally, participants were asked for feedback on what plants and features they prefer in the community planting section for each forest demonstration site. Finally, all respondents were asked to self-identify if they were interested in participating in the community planting section or with stewardship and maintenance.

Results

Feedback received through the online and paper surveys (distributed during in-person open house events in July) reflects comments directly related to the draft designs for both Leif Erickson Park and Boughton Park food forest sites.

Boughton Park Site Design – Feedback Themes:

What do you like about the design?

<i>General Support</i>	The most common response from participants reflected general support for the design. Several comments appreciated the large variety and high number of plants included in the design. Participants also identified that the location closer to the play structures and paddling pool location are a benefit to the community.
<i>Plant Variety, Plant Amount</i>	Comments reflecting this theme include support for the variety of trees and shrubs as well as the number of plants reflected in the design.
<i>Amenities</i>	Within this theme, specific support for seating, tables, bike racks and a gathering space was identified by participants.
<i>Location</i>	The redesign to incorporate a larger buffer between the Holiday Park Community Garden and the proposed food forest site resulted in positive feedback. Several comments received after the redesign was posted reflect support for the updated location being closer to the play structures and a greater setback from the community garden.
<i>Unwanted Usage, Not Support</i>	A couple of participants indicated that they are not supportive of the food forest indicating a concern with unwanted usage and crime

What would you change about this design?

<i>Design footprint</i>	<p>The theme with the highest number of comments indicated concern over the design boundaries and footprint. Early feedback identified strong resistance to the design’s proximity to the Holiday Park Community Garden. This resistance prompted a redesign to incorporate a larger buffer resulting in positive feedback for the new food forest boundary.</p> <p>Other concerns noted included several indicating that the design footprint is too small and a preference to connect the raspberries plot to the larger plot (currently the design incorporates a buffer around the raspberry patch to support maintenance). Notably, after the redesign was posted, a couple of comments recommended positioning the food forest closer to the garden site. Finally, this theme included a small number of comments that reference a concern about the plants being positioned too densely.</p>
<i>Plant Variety, Plant Number</i>	Several comments requested an increase of certain plants, specifically more native grasses and flowers, apple trees, and raspberries. One comment raised a concern over the ability to grow plums, pears, and apricots in Saskatchewan.
<i>Maintenance</i>	A couple of participants voiced concern about over harvesting within the food forest site. This theme was also reflected in concerns about preventing the public from taking from the community garden site.

<i>Not Support</i>	A couple of participant comments reflected no support for the design or for putting a food forest into Boughton Park.
<i>Other</i>	Other concerns about the Boughton Park food forest design varied in theme and comments ranged from a request for educational signage, more bike racks and seating, to incorporating a water source and other facilities that would make the space multi-purpose.

The design of the food forest includes an unplanted area for interested community members to plant in the future. What would you like to see planted in this area of the site?

The various plant recommendations for the community planting area are as follows (in descending order of prevalence):

1. Indigenous or cultural plants (these comments included sage or did not specify plant variety)
2. Vegetables, herbs, grains (including lettuce, kale, cilantro, grains, legumes, peas)
3. Pollinator garden, flowers (specifically milkweed, amaranth, or generally listed pollinator garden)
4. Fruit, berries (including Prairie Sensation Apple trees, raspberries, blueberries, cherries, pears)
5. Fungi (including edible mushrooms)

Additional comments included having this area incorporate plants that benefit others by providing shelter or nutrients and also be native to the region. One participant also recommended including an art piece to create additional usage such as photos.

Is there anything else you think the City should consider before proceeding with this design?

In this section, a high portion of responses of participants who completed the survey prior to the re-design on June 21 identified a need to create a larger buffer between the Boughton Park food forest design and the existing community garden site. This buffer was added in the re-design resulting in no further requests for increased separation of sites. Other themes identified include incorporating some annual flowering plants and drought tolerant varieties.

Reflecting comments in previous questions, a small number of participants highlighted their concerns about maintenance and unwanted usage, specifically citing encampments. A concern over the cost for installation and not wanting tax dollars spent on the project was noted. Finally, a couple of participants provided recommendations on project process and potential knowledge resources.

Leif Erickson Park Site Design – Feedback Themes:

What do you like about the design?

<i>Plant Variety, Plant Number, Design</i>	The majority of responses received in this question reflected support for the variety and number of fruits, plants and trees presented in the Leif Erickson food forest site design. Additional comments identified appreciation for the inclusion of native drought resistant plants and plants that require less maintenance.
<i>Amenities</i>	Comments that incorporated appreciation for different amenities identified the presence of paths, tables, benches and waste bins.

<i>Park Usage and Accessibility</i>	Participants commented about the large open area in Leif Erickson Park and supported using the land in this park for this project. Additional comments appreciated keeping the design accessible using paths and location.
<i>Others</i>	Additional comments appreciated the visual enhancement that the food forest will provide and identified educational opportunities as a positive result of the food forest site.

What would you change about this design?

<i>Design Footprint</i>	Similar to feedback received for the Boughton Park site, design footprint and the layout of the food forest at Leif Erickson Park received the greatest number of comments. Most responses indicated that participants felt the design was too small. Additionally, concern was raised about the density of plants particularly requesting larger space between trees to enhance growth. One participant recommended the removal community planting area, referencing the presence of a community garden in Leif Erickson Park.
<i>Amenities and Educational Signage</i>	A high number of comments reflected an interest in adding more amenities including green bins for plant waste, more seating, lighting, tables, benches, gazebo, play spaces, water feature, bike racks, and shade. The most often requested amenity was benches or more seating. Additionally, educational signage was requested several times with comments indicating the importance of helping the community learn about the plants and harvesting.
<i>Plant Variety</i>	Several responses indicated concerns about the type or number of plants proposed in the Leif Erickson food forest design. In this theme, comments included requests for more native, ground-level edible plants such as herbs and vegetables, the addition of grapes, and medicinal plants. Concern was raised with the inclusion of chokecherries due to the potential for black knot.
<i>Maintenance</i>	A small number of responses indicated concerns about maintenance noting that reliance on volunteers is difficult. Recommendations included potential for student summer jobs to support maintenance.
<i>Unwanted Usage</i>	In this theme, a couple of participants noted their concern about the potential for increased crime and needle dumping in the proposed food forest site. One comment recommended positioning the site closer to the current community garden.

The design of the food forest includes an unplanted area for interested community members to plant in the future. What would you like to see planted in this area of the site?

The various plant recommendations for the community planting area are as follows (in descending order of prevalence):

- *Fruit, berries* (raspberries, orange trees, wild strawberries, chokecherries, blueberries, cherries, peaches, apples, Haskaps, plums, blackberries)

- *Vegetables, herbs, grains* (including fiddle head ferns, clover, Labrador tea, root vegetables including carrots, beets, and potatoes, squash, corn, beans, wild spinach, garlic, rhubarb, and mint)
- *Indigenous or cultural plants* (these comments included sage, tobacco, a meditation circle or did not specify plant variety)
- *Pollinator garden, flowers* (specifically wildflowers and plants that attract butterflies or bees, milkweed, edible flowers, amaranth, or generally listed pollinator garden)
- *Grasses* (native)
- *Nuts, Fungi* (included hazelnuts, edible mushrooms)

Other comments included having native plants that support one another by providing nutrients incorporated into the design.

Is there anything else you think the City should consider before proceeding with this design?

The majority of feedback focused on maintenance including questions about how the site would be watered, who monitors the plant health, who manages harvest, and what happens with food waste.

Several comments reflected ideas about design elements such as maintaining informal paths that exist, creating gathering areas with lighting, ensuring that the site has proper drainage and that any amenities are designed to withstand vandalism. Several participants incorporated further requests for amenities including educational signage and lighting.

While many comments reflected general support for this design and future growth of the program, concerns were raised about crime, discarded needles, and the cost to taxpayers for this project.

NEXT STEPS

The Food Forest Project builds upon the lessons learned through engagement within the first two phases and transitions into engaging interested residents and organizations about stewardship plans for the demonstration sites. Additionally, this next phase engages in discussions around broader program processes and understanding stewardship roles and agreement terms. Engagement activities will take place in the Fall of 2023.