

Lansdowne Partnership Plan

Focus Group Report
September 2009

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Methodology

Four focus group discussions were conducted in Ottawa on September 16th and September 17th, 2009. Each session was 60 minutes in duration and was conducted in English. The sessions included a mix of primarily English and primarily French speaking participants. There was also a mix of male and female participants and as well as a mix of age groups.

Two groups of eight participants each were conducted with **residents who lived outside the Capital Ward** (September 16th), and two groups of eight participants each were conducted with **residents who lived in the Capital Ward** (September 17th).

The objectives of the focus groups were to identify and understand issues of interest and concern to the public and to support the development of the public consultation materials and content.

Nanos Research was provided with draft story boards by the City of Ottawa to show to participants.

Readers should note that the findings of qualitative research cannot be projected to the populace or to a group but do provide an understanding of the potential context and nuances of opinion.

Executive Summary

Focus testing showed that there was a diversity of views on the proposed Lansdowne Partnership Plan (LPP), participants were divided on the proposal. To follow is a summary of the focus group results.

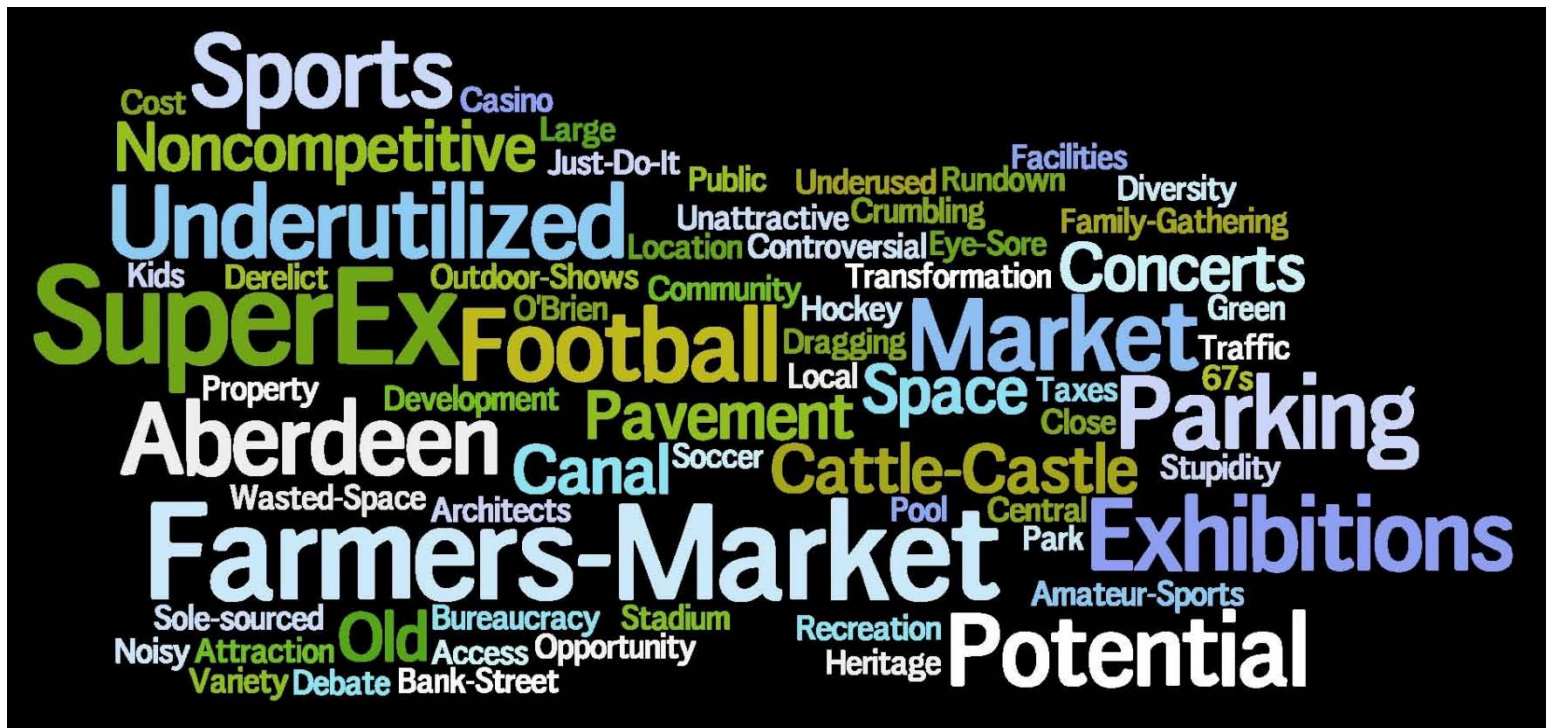
- ✓ **Awareness of LPP was high**
Participants generally had a very high level of knowledge about the LPP proposal. They were aware that the city had entered into negotiations based on a proposal which was submitted by a group of developers and were well informed about the key elements of the plan.
- ✓ **Participants were apprehensive about many of the elements of the plan**
Project financing and the transportation strategy were the primary areas of concern among participants, although there were also less intense concerns associated with the retail, the stadium and arena, the timelines and the green space elements of the proposal.
- ✓ **Several did not believe that a public-private partnership could be successful**
Many participants believe that in public-private partnerships, the public entity generally took on most of the risks while the private entity reaped most of the profits.
- ✓ **Many participants had concerns as to whether the city could manage this scale of project**
Many participants brought up the cancellation of the North-South Light Rail and the payout to Siemens and questioned the City's capabilities to embark on another large scale project.
- ✓ **Participants were skeptical about the materials presented**
Overall, the boards presented to participants were viewed as a "glossy" marketing campaign. Many participants felt they were being delivered a sales pitch and were therefore cautious.

Lansdowne Word Cloud Based on All Participants

A word cloud is a visual representation of words used by participants based on their frequency. Larger fonts denote words with a higher frequency of mentions.

At the beginning of the groups, before any materials were presented to participants, they were asked: “When you think of Lansdowne Park, what three words come to mind?”

The following is a word cloud based on the responses of all participants.



Lansdowne Word Cloud for Rest of Ottawa Participants

A word cloud is a visual representation of words used by participants based on their frequency. Larger fonts denote words with a higher frequency of mentions.

At the beginning of the groups, before any materials were presented to participants, they were asked: "When you think of Lansdowne Park, what three words come to mind?"

The following is a word cloud based on the responses of participants who lived outside of the Capital Ward.

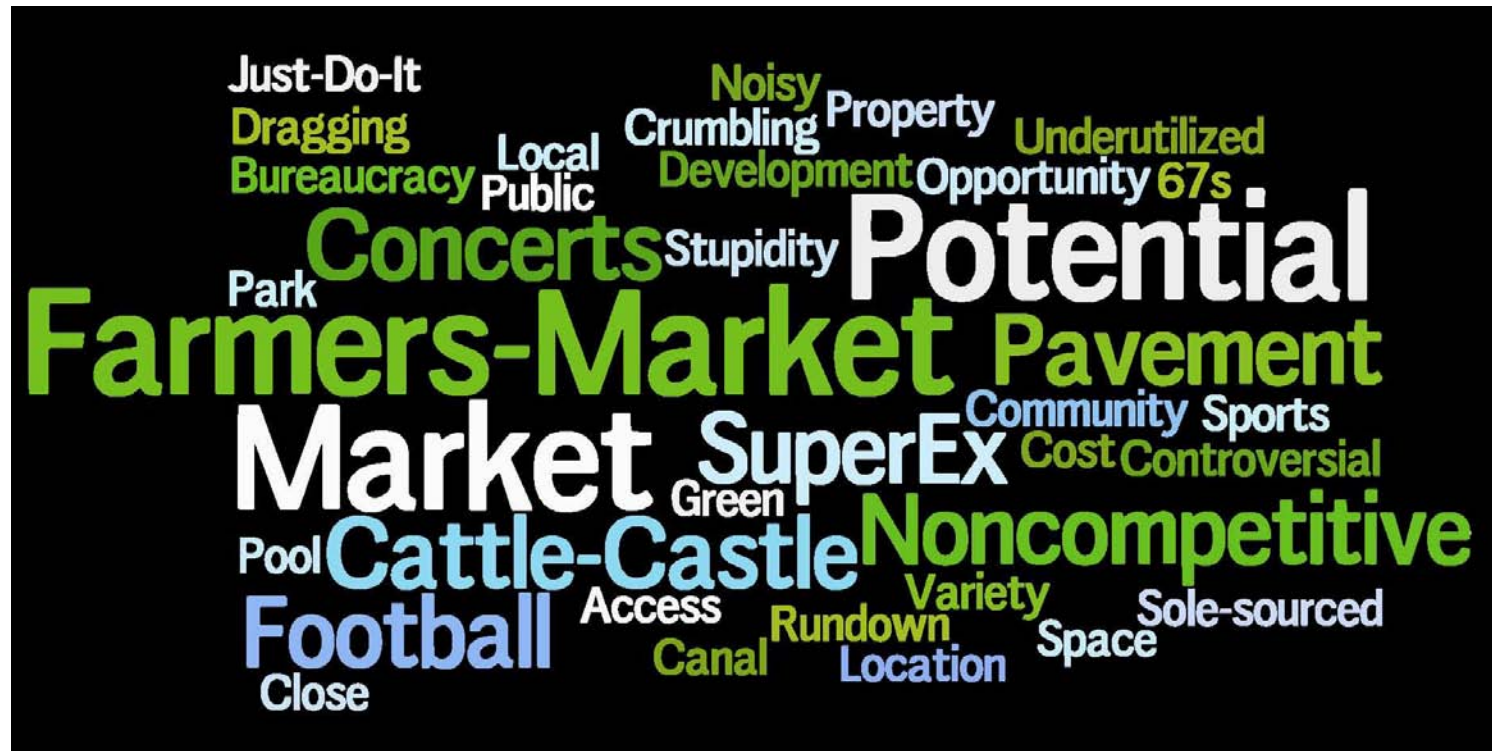


Lansdowne Word Cloud for Capital Ward Participants

A word cloud is a visual representation of words used by participants based on their frequency. Larger fonts denote words with a higher frequency of mentions.

At the beginning of the groups, before any materials were presented to participants, they were asked: "When you think of Lansdowne Park, what three words come to mind?"

The following is a word cloud based on the responses of participants who lived inside the Capital Ward.



Unprompted Views on Lansdowne and Issue Awareness

Awareness of the LLP

Participants generally had a very high level of knowledge about the LPP proposal. The vast majority of participants were aware that the city had entered into negotiations based on a proposal which was submitted by a group of developers. Unprompted, many participants referred to this proposal as Lansdowne Live.

Most participants knew that the proposal included a bid to return professional sports to Lansdowne Park and the possibility of a new CFL team and soccer team. Participants said that the proposed plan also included new retail, office and residential space. Participants were aware that the farmers market would continue to have a space on the site and that expanded green space was also part of the proposal.

Positives Associated with Lansdowne Park

Location was generally viewed as the most commonly articulated positive for Lansdowne, which referred to both its proximity to downtown as well as its proximity to the canal. Other positives, according to participants, were the farmers market, the heritage buildings on site (especially the Aberdeen Pavilion), and the arena.

Negatives Associated with Lansdowne Park

The most commonly articulated unprompted negative associated with Lansdowne Park was that it was an underutilized space. Many participants referred to it as a “vacant parking lot” most of the time. Other negatives associated with Lansdowne were the amount of taxpayer money that is used to upkeep the facilities, the lack of green space, the lack of adequate transportation to get there and the lack of adequate parking when there is a large event.

Views on the Key Players

Throughout the focus groups, participants articulated their views on a number of the key players involved in the LPP. To follow is a brief summary of participants views based on comments made throughout focus group conversations.

City Staff and Management

Many participants viewed the LPP proposal through the lens of the recent payout to Siemens for the cancelled high speed rail project (which was in the news in the period surrounding the groups). Many participants brought up the cancellation of the North-South Light Rail and questioned the City's capabilities to embark on another large scale project.

City Council


Participants were aware that different council members held different views on the project. They recognized that several members of council supported the plan, while others opposed it. Some participants noted that one council member had come forward with an alternative proposal to the LPP.

Developers/Lansdowne Live Group

Participants generally had a favourable impression of the group that brought the plan forward to the City. They believed that they were a capable group with a long track record of success. Others participants held a more distrustful view and believed that the developers were only interested in making a profit at the expense of taxpayers. There was the view that the LPP was a developer driven initiative and was not the result of community-based demand.

Summary of Draft Story Board Testing

It should be noted that there was a level of apprehension associated with all elements of the plan, although some were more contentious than others. To follow is a qualitative assessment of the draft story board testing based on the tone of the conversation, the questions posed and the comments made by participants.

Draft Story Board Titles	Level of Contention
Business Planning and Economic Benefits	Most Contentious
Sustainable Transportation Strategy	
The Vision for Lansdowne	
Stadium and Arena Revitalization	
Unique Retail and Commerce Opportunities	
Open Space in the Front Yard	
Transformation Timelines	
Sustaining the Environment	
Preserving and Celebrating Our Heritage	

Views on the Vision for Lansdowne

Participants were divided on the overall proposed vision. Some liked the proposal, while others felt that this was too ambitious for Ottawa.

Several participants could not separate their views on the proposed vision from their discomfort with sole sourcing of the project, while others disagreed completely with the vision.

Several were uncomfortable with the City entering into a public-private partnership, and did not think it could be a success.



Based on their reaction to the proposal, participants could generally be split into four groups.

Skeptics - Those who did not believe that what was presented in the proposal was accurate or achievable.

Uncomfortable supporters - Those who did not have a problem with the plan overall but were uncomfortable with the process of sole sourcing.

Boosters - Those who supported the plan and wanted to get going on the proposal as soon as possible.

Detractors - Those who disagreed completely with the vision for the park. They were often inclined to think Lansdowne Park should be converted entirely into green space.

Of note, participants were most likely to be skeptics, while there were comparatively fewer uncomfortable supporters, boosters and detractors.

Views on Business Planning and Economic Benefits

Participants were skeptical about the financial figures presented to them. It should be noted that having a level skepticism towards “government financials” and “promises” is a natural default for many individuals in a focus group setting. This is consistent with research conducted in many other areas and not specific to the LPP.

Views on Governance Structure of LPP

Several participants expressed their aversion towards public-private partnerships, saying that in these agreements the public entity generally took on most of the risks while the private entity reaped most of the profits. They also believed that creating a new organization to manage the site would add another layer of bureaucracy.

Some participants expressed discomfort with the long-term leasing agreement. Many believed the project was going to be more expensive and that taxpayers would be on the hook.

Views on Financials

The financials presented in the proposal were viewed by many participants as a “bunch of meaningless numbers”. Many participants thought that the draft story board information presented was unnecessarily complicated, some wondered if that was intentional in order to confuse people.

Some participants stated that they thought that the information on the boards was more of a “sales pitch” than a business plan.

Other participants believed the plan was still in its early stages and that it was too early to make a decision on things that were not yet worked out. Some participants believed that that more study would be required before a decision could be made, for example some participants believed that they would need a SWOT assessment for the project.

Some participants believed that the financials presented were feasible, though this was a minority opinion.

Views on Transforming Lansdowne with a Sustainable Transportation Strategy

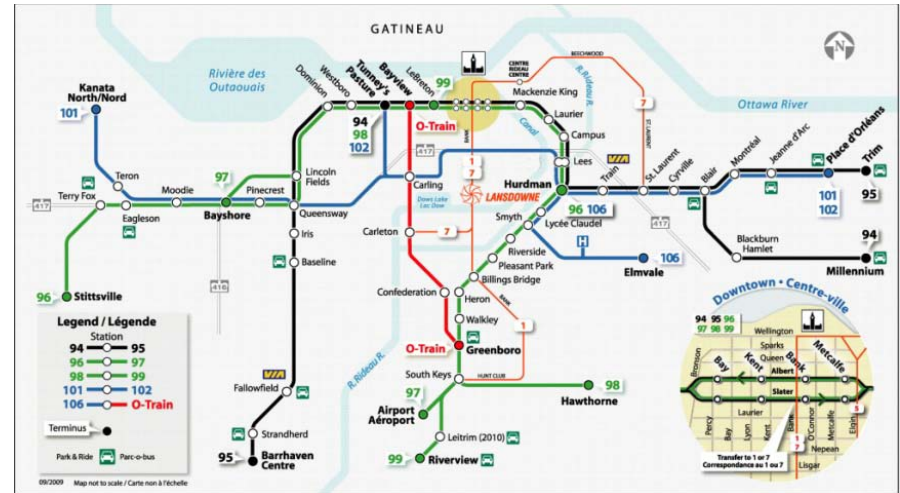
Participants were generally skeptical about the feasibility of the transportation strategy. The overall traffic capacity of the area was considered a major logistical challenge. Many participants noted that Bank Street was already a highly congested arterial road and that perhaps it could not support additional traffic.

Two of the other concerns with the transportation strategy noted by participants were that there was no access to rapid transit at Lansdowne Park and that the cost of the underground parking facility would be very expensive.

Participants generally liked the use of shuttle and park and ride services, though some participants questioned whether Ottawa residents would use them, given their reliance on single occupancy vehicles.

Differences Between the Target Groups

Transportation was viewed differently by the two target groups. Residents who lived outside of the Capital Ward were more concerned about how they would get to Lansdowne, particularly using public transit. Participants who lived in the Capital Ward were comparatively more concerned about parking in the area, as it related to their residential landscape.



Views on Unique Retail and Commerce Opportunities

Many participants were concerned about the impact new retail stores would have on businesses currently operating in the neighbourhood, while others believed that the proposed plan was an improvement over the current state of Lansdowne Park.

Concerns about the Proposed Retail Plan

Several participants noted that much of the neighbourhood's character came from "mom and pop" stores. Some participants were concerned that they would not be able to compete if high-end chain stores moved in.

Some participants believed that there should be affordable rent in the retail spaces in order to encourage small independent shops to move in.

Views on the Phase 2 Optional Components

Office Building - Participants generally felt that, if there were going to be new buildings, having mixed use buildings with retail on the ground floor and office space above was a good option.

Residential - Participants were generally not opposed to building residential units along Holmwood Ave, although there was concern about the increase in traffic as a result.

Boutique Hotel - Participants were divided on whether having a hotel at Lansdowne Park was a good option. Some believed that it would help make the space more viable by attracting tourists, while others did not think it fit the character of the site.

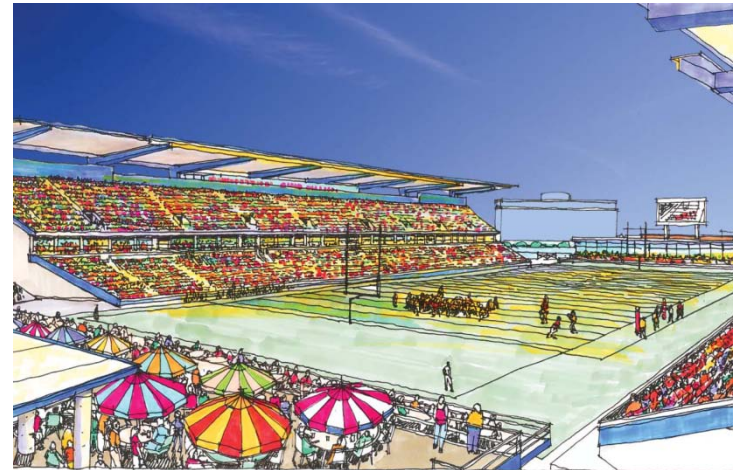


Views on Stadium and Arena Revitalization

Participants were divided on the proposal for the stadium and arena, some believed that it was a good idea to revitalize the existing stadium and arena, while others believed that it would require too large an investment.

Concerns about the Stadium

Many were concerned that professional sports, particularly a CFL team, were not viable on the site. Soccer was generally viewed more favourably. Participants were concerned that if the CFL franchise failed, the City would be stuck with a “white elephant”.



Many participants were concerned about the City having to pay for the revitalization of the stadium and believed that it was one part of the proposal which was likely to balloon in cost.

Some participants disagreed with the proposal to revitalize the stadium and arena because they believed Lansdowne Park was not an appropriate location for a large sports venue given that there are inadequate means of transportation to and from the site.

Positives associated with Stadium Revitalization

Several participants believed that the restoration of the stadium was feasible and that it was positive to bring already existing assets up-to-date.

Views on Open Space in the Front Yard

The majority of participants had a favourable view of the proposed front lawn. Participants generally believed that the expanded green space along the canal would make the site more inviting to residents and tourists.

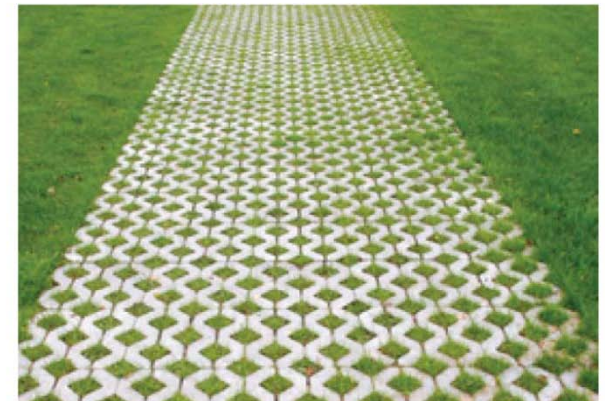
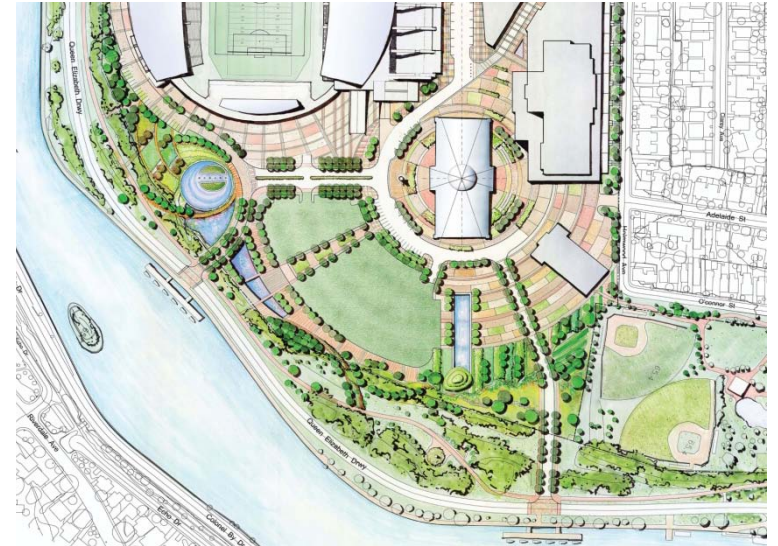
Some participants, particularly those who lived in the Capital Ward, believed that there should be more green space at Lansdowne Park than what was proposed in the LPP, though this was a minority opinion.

Views on Turfstone and Grasspave

There was a lack of understanding among participants about *Turfstone* and *Grasspave*.

There was some concern about how widely it would be used and whether it is safe.

Others referred to it as “a parking lot in disguise” and wondered why the proposal called for parking on top of green space.



Views on Sustaining the Environment

Participants generally had a favourable impression of the environmental sustainability portion of the proposal. The majority of participants believed that there was nothing contentious about that element of the LPP.

Generally participants who were opposed to this portion of the proposal disagreed with any development at Lansdowne Park.

Many participants believed that it should be assumed that if the City is going to be involved in the project that new buildings should be built with environmental sustainability in mind.

There was some skepticism among participants that the plan could say the LPP was going to strive to achieve a LEED designation, but that there were no guarantees this would happen.

Some participants wished the plan went for a higher designation than LEED Silver.



Views on Preserving and Celebrating our Heritage and the Transformation Timelines

Views on Proposal for Heritage Buildings

The preservation and restoration of the Aberdeen Pavilion and the Horticulture Building were widely viewed as the least contentious elements of the LPP proposal. Participants were encouraged that the heritage buildings on site would be protected and restored. Many participants noted the beauty and unique design of the Aberdeen Pavilion.

Views on the Proposed Transformation Timelines

Many participants believed it was unrealistic. Many participants believed that the timelines were too vague to make a proper assessment. Some participants believed that it was so ambitious, while others believed it was unrealistic because there were too many layers of bureaucracy involved there would be unexpected delays in the project. Some indicated that the developers might be able to meet their timelines due to their experience.



Views on whether the City should go Forward with the LPP

Participants were divided on whether the City of Ottawa should proceed with the LPP. Several participants believed that the City should proceed with the proposal presented for the transformation of Lansdowne Park, while several others believed that the City should not proceed even if it meant risking Lansdowne continuing on in its current state. There were supporters and opponents to the LPP in both the target groups (those living inside the Capital Ward and those living outside of the Capital Ward).

Reasons to go forward with LPP

The two most common reasons for saying the City should proceed with the LPP were that the proposal had something for anyone and could be widely liked or that it was better to have something than risk not having anything at Lansdowne Park.

Reasons not to go forward with LPP

The two most common reasons for saying the City should not proceed with the LPP were that they did not agree with the process of sole sourcing or that they disagreed completely with the vision for the park.

Other Considerations

Although the mandate of the focus groups was not to test the consultation strategy, there was a common thread that emerged through testing the materials. Participants said that if they were to go to consultations on the LPP they would like more information and the ability to ask questions of experts on the materials.

Recommendations and Issues to Consider

1. That the draft story boards be rewritten and presented as more of an unbiased narrative.
2. That content related to the financing and transportation be reviewed and enhanced because of the greater likelihood of public scrutiny and interest.
3. That a new governance story board be created to better explain how the project will be structured.
4. That the information in financing section be split between Phase 1 and Phase 2 in order to make it more digestible.