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LET'S TALK PARKS CANADA HALIFAX!

What We Heard Phase One Public Engagement January 2020

Ce document est également disponible en français.



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1 Introduction and background

About Parks Canada

Parks Canada manages Canada's system of national historic sites, national parks, national marine conservation areas, and Canada's first national urban park. The mandate of the Parks Canada Agency is:

To protect and present nationally significant examples of Canada's natural and cultural heritage, and foster public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment in ways that ensure ecological and commemorative integrity of these places for present and future generations.

This mandate includes protecting natural and cultural resources, facilitating inspiring experiences for visitors, and providing public outreach education. Parks Canada plans and manages for the three aspects of its mandate using an integrated approach.

Parks Canada's goal is to make Canada's places and stories more relevant to Canadians as described in the Agency's vision statement:

Canada's treasured natural and historic places will be a living legacy, connecting hearts and minds to a stronger, deeper understanding of the very essence of Canada.

About the Halifax Defence Complex and its management plan review

In 1965, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC) recognized the importance of Halifax as one of four principal overseas naval stations of the British Empire during the 18th and 19th centuries. Of the many different forts and batteries constructed by the British and Canadian militaries in the Halifax area, there are five that, since being designated in 1965 as national historic sites, are collectively

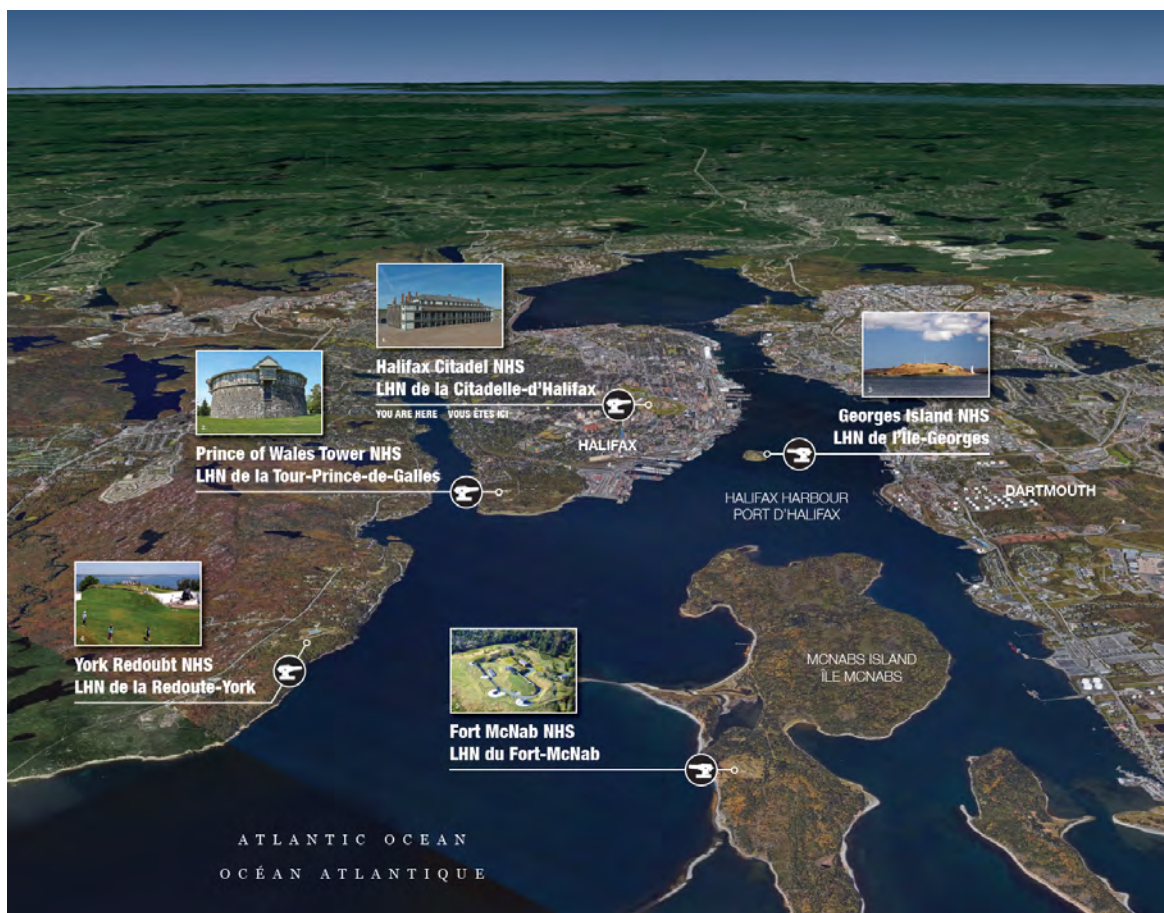


known as the Halifax Defence Complex. These sites protect and conserve fortifications and cultural landscapes, historic and archeological objects and archaeological sites. They also serve as public spaces for recreation, enjoyed by residents and visitors of Halifax.

These sites were chosen by the HSMBC because they represent the complete range of shore defences found in and around Halifax Harbour from the late 18th century to the Second World War: The Halifax Citadel, Georges Island, Prince of Wales Tower, York Redoubt, and Fort McNab. Now as part of a nation-wide network of national historic sites, they are protected and presented by Parks Canada, on behalf of all Canadians.

In accordance with the *Parks Canada Agency Act* and the *Canada National Parks Act*, a management plan must be developed for the sites of the Halifax Defence Complex.

The management plan proposes a strategic management approach that aims to integrate the three elements of Parks Canada's mandate: heritage resource protection, public education and visitor experience. Management plans are developed through consultation with Indigenous people, and through the engagement of partners, stakeholders and the public. The management plan for the Halifax Defence Complex will be submitted for approval by the Minister responsible for Parks Canada, and is intended to serve as the key accountability document to Parliament and to Canadians regarding the management of these sites.



2 Engagement and Consultation Process

Overview of *Let's Talk Parks Canada* *Halifax!* consultation process

In order to facilitate meaningful opportunities for the public to contribute to the management plan review for the Halifax Defence Complex, a two-phased approach has been developed to promote participation by all Canadians, locally and nationally, using in-person and online channels to obtain public input.

- Phase one engagement (January – March 2019) focused on refining elements of the vision and exploring with the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia, site partners, stakeholders and the Canadian public the opportunities and challenges related to management of the sites, prior to the development of a draft management plan.
- Phase two consultation (winter 2020) will provide the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia, site partners, stakeholders and the Canadian public with an opportunity to review and comment on the draft management plan.

Phase one engagement activities

A variety of approaches were implemented to collect feedback from the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia, site partners, stakeholders and the Canadian public on four principal topics:

1. Refining the vision for the Halifax Defence Complex
2. Sharing diverse perspectives
3. Maintaining relevance
4. Meeting the changing needs of visitors

Staff and site partner engagement

Sessions were held on January 16, 2019 to allow staff from organizations operating the Halifax Citadel (Parks Canada and site partners including the Halifax Citadel Society) to provide their unique perspectives on the future of these sites.

Youth engagement

Parks Canada staff in the youth demographic (18–24) were engaged in August 2018, and members of Parks Canada Campus Clubs in metro Halifax were engaged through an in-person meeting in February 2019 at Dalhousie University.

Stakeholder workshop

A multi-stakeholder workshop was held on February 7, 2019 in Halifax at Pier 21, with thirty groups and organizations being invited to



participate. In the end, 21 people attended from 17 groups and organizations including municipal and provincial governments, tourism industry, heritage and culture, the Port of Halifax, and the Mainland Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq-Parks Canada Advisory Committee.

Online engagement

Online engagement platforms – www.letstalkparkscanadahalifax.ca and www.parlonsdeparcscanadahalifax.ca – were developed to facilitate the collection of feedback through a diversity of tools, recognizing the varied locations, needs, and preferences of individual participants.

- **Survey:** Provided participants with an opportunity to voice their opinions in a convenient and structured way.
- **Stories:** Provided space for participants to share stories about their connection to the sites of the Halifax Defence Complex.
- **Ideas:** Virtual “Post-it Notes” for participants to add ideas about the Halifax Defence Complex to a collective board, and to build on the ideas of others for the future of the sites.
- **#NameThisStreet:** An exercise separate from the management plan consultation, that provided participants with an opportunity to suggest a name for the street encircling the Halifax Citadel fortifications that speaks to the site's rich history, while making it easier for visitors locate the front entrance today.



3 Who we heard from

Many thoughtful responses were received during the *Let's Talk Parks Canada Halifax!* engagement and consultation process. This feedback shows the strong connection that Canadians feel for the Halifax Citadel, Georges Island and the other sites of the Complex. Consultation with the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia is ongoing, pursuant to the Terms of Reference for a Mi'kmaq-Nova Scotia-Canada Consultation Process.

Comments for phase one public engagement were collected from January to March 2019, and specifically via the www.letstalkparkscanadahalifax.ca and www.parlonsdeparcscanadahalifax.ca websites from March 1 to 31, 2019. In total:

- 322 respondents to the survey (307 respondents on the English survey and 15 respondents on the French survey), which constituted about 12% of all people who visited the website
- 21 participants at the multi-stakeholder workshop in Halifax
- 8 participants at youth engagement sessions
- 23 participants at staff engagement sessions
- Organizational position statement from an interest group

Postal code data provided upon registration at www.letstalkparkscanadahalifax.ca and www.parlonsdeparcscanadahalifax.ca indicated that 99.4% of participants were Canadian (two respondents were from the United States of America), with representation from all Canadian provinces and territories except Newfoundland and Labrador, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories. The majority of participants were residents of Nova Scotia (283 or 88.7%), followed by Ontario (15 or 0.5%) and New Brunswick (10 or 0.3%). People of all age groups participated in the survey (Figure 1). The majority of participants (92%) reported that they had been to one or more of the five Halifax Defence Complex sites.

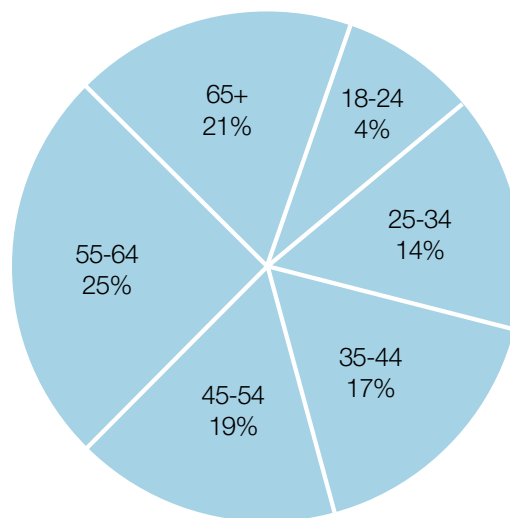


Figure 1. Age groups of participants, self-reported during registration at www.letstalkparkscanadahalifax.ca and www.parlonsdeparcscanadahalifax.ca

4 What we heard

The feedback provided to Parks Canada is organized under the four topics that were explored through public engagement and consultation:

1. Refining the vision for the Halifax Defence Complex
2. Sharing diverse perspectives
3. Maintaining relevance
4. Meeting the changing needs of visitors

Comments and feedback received from all sources in the *Let's Talk Parks Canada Halifax!* Phase one engagement process were carefully considered, analyzed and summarized, as presented in the topic summaries below.

4.1 Refining the vision for the Halifax Defence Complex

Draft vision elements for Halifax Defence Complex were developed by Parks Canada with consideration given to the 2009 management plan vision. The proposed vision elements were further informed by discussions with the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia, site partners, and stakeholders, as well as being informed by the changing management context of the sites.

Six draft elements of a proposed vision were presented to the public as part of the online



survey as well as during the in-person sessions. In the survey, respondents were asked to rank each element as very important, important, of little importance, unimportant, or neutral. Respondents were also given the option to describe their vision for the Halifax Defence Complex if they did not see their ideas reflected in the vision elements presented.

The level of importance attributed to the draft vision elements varied. The vision element about the Halifax Citadel being the flagship site, and the vision element about the need to protect cultural resources both rated at the top of the scale (98% each). While less importance was given to the other vision elements, even the lowest rated vision element was rated as a top priority for 70% of respondents. (Table 1).

Vision elements	Importance
Priority cultural resources, which are tangible evidence of the sites' national historic significance and serve as the foundation for visitors to feel and experience the past, are protected and in fair to good condition.	98%
The Halifax Citadel is the flagship site for exploration and discovery of the stories of the Halifax Defence Complex. It is an iconic tourism attraction for the Province of Nova Scotia and Halifax Regional Municipality, known for bringing history to life through innovative programming and is considered a "must-do" experience. It continues to contribute to the economic growth and vitality of the community.	98%
Residents and newcomers, including youth and cultural communities, feel a connection to these sites. These national historic sites enhance the character of Halifax and are valued as an essential part of the urban fabric both as heritage places and recreational green spaces.	94%
Georges Island is an integral part of a vibrant Halifax waterfront experience. Opportunities for accessing Georges Island and providing a visitor experience have been thoroughly explored and piloted.	90%
The stories told at the Halifax Defence Complex include diverse perspectives on the history of these sites, how that diversity shaped modern day Halifax, and encourage visitors to see themselves reflected there. The stories will also reflect the peoples who were affected by these places, including African Nova Scotians, Acadians, women, and other groups.	89%
Parks Canada is committed to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and is working collaboratively with the Mi'kmaq on the implementation of their rights in these and other sites in Nova Scotia. These sites are welcoming places and provide opportunities for the Mi'kmaq to tell their stories and share their culture, heritage and traditions to reflect the Mi'kmaw world view.	70%

Table 1. Vision elements presented in order of importance according to the percentage of respondents who indicated the vision element was 'important' or 'very important'.

For those who felt their ideas were not reflected in the vision elements presented, additional comments provided tended to group with the key themes listed below.

Public Access: Many expressed a desire for the sites to be open and available to the public, including locals and not just out of town visitors. Many wished for transportation options to be in place to facilitate getting to the sites.

“ Parks Canada sites should be accessible to all regardless of income or ability. ”
– Survey respondent

“ I would love to see direct transportation to and from [Georges Island] to open it up for the entire public to access, enjoy, and appreciate. ”– Survey respondent

Georges Island: Most of the responses submitted on the survey indicated that the vision element proposed for Georges Island did not adequately reflect their vision for the site to be more open to the public for visitation and to be developed to facilitate visitation. Some cautioned that visitor numbers should be managed so that the site is not overwhelmed. Other survey respondents strongly expressed that either

Georges Island should not be open to the public, or that it should be treated as a sacred site given its tragic history as a place of Acadian detention prior to their deportation, known as *Le Grand Dérangement* (The Great Upheaval), and expressed that accordingly programs and access should be respectful of this history.

“ Georges Island has historic importance for Acadians of Nova Scotia, in particular during the Deportation period. In effect, it was on this island that Acadians were brought before they were deported. It is therefore important that this part of history of Georges Island appears in Parks Canada’s vision for the site. ”

– Survey respondent



“ Having Georges Island accessible and open to the public should be top priority. With its rich history, it’s a gem that our city has, that has just to be discovered and shared. ”

– Survey respondent

Focus on history: Some respondents expressed that Parks Canada should not try to do too much, or tell too many stories at these sites, but rather that the focus should be on communicating history, particularly the reasons the sites were designated. Some encouraged taking a broad and contextual approach to history, showing the norms and standards that used to exist and how they have changed, and many urged the telling of the “good” with the “bad.”

“ The sites need to be fluid and remain contemporary, while still maintaining the strong bond with the history. ”

– Survey respondent

During the in-person sessions, participants strongly supported that recognition be given to the Mi’kmaq of Nova Scotia in the vision for the Halifax Defence Complex sites, and that broadened stories be told at the sites to include a range of different perspectives including those of various cultural communities. However, participants cautioned that the sites are designated as military sites and architecturally important landmarks, and these values should not be forgotten or diminished. Feedback from participants at in-person sessions generally aligned with the feedback received from survey respondents. Both survey respondents and participants at in-person sessions felt that the vision for Georges Island does not go far enough and that there should be an active visitation offer in place at the site within the timeframe of the vision.

Participants mentioned that the vision element related to increasing the relevance of the sites to local residents could use language such as “instilling pride” and “local ambassadors.” They observed that the sites’ importance as places for locals to use and connect with nature, as

recreational green spaces within a dense urban centre, should be emphasized. Finally several participants voiced the importance of including greater use of emerging technologies in the visitor experience offer, particularly to attract younger demographics.

“This is an exciting opportunity to work with [the municipality] and create a “regional” or “networked” relationship between the Parks Canada sites on the Peninsula (also Fort McNab and Georges Island) by ensuring that there is a green belt that connects the various locations. This could be a walking, running, cycling route for visitors and guests.”
– Survey respondent

4.2 Sharing diverse perspectives

In the in-person sessions, strong support was voiced for expanding the stories told at the sites beyond their reasons for designation as British military sites. Participants expressed that Parks Canada has a responsibility to expand beyond the reasons for designation of the sites and to seek ways to engage and connect with more Canadians. Many participants felt that more people would connect better with the sites if more stories were told that give insight into the everyday lives of soldiers and their families, as well as others associated with the sites. They observed that interpreting a broader timeline of history would naturally encompass more events and peoples. Numerous responses to the question “What topics would you like to learn about more?” indicated an interest and curiosity in other stories in addition to those currently being told.

“I would really like to see the experience of the black community given more prominence, and become a regular part of the story, instead of just a side note.” – Survey respondent



Survey respondents were asked, “What additional stories, beyond the British military history, would you be most interested in learning more about at the Halifax Citadel or the others sites in the Halifax Defence Complex?” and were prompted to pick their top three choices. The most frequently identified topics were a tie between the history of Halifax more broadly and Mi’kmaw history, heritage and culture (both chosen by 50% of respondents); followed by life of women, including soldiers’ wives (46% of respondents). Other survey respondents favoured the Acadian story. Themes favoured by the majority of survey respondents echoed what was heard during the in-person sessions; participants favoured learning more about

Mi'kmaw stories related to the sites and about the everyday lives of British soldiers and of women and children who also lived at the fortifications.

Survey respondents were invited to identify additional topics or stories not already mentioned that they would like to see shared. Topics identified included the role of the sites in the World Wars, immigrants and other cultural communities, the effect of the military on society in the city of Halifax, and the conflict between cultures.

“ Evolution of the city over time, from Mi'kmaw use to French, to British and the land use & development growth ”
– Survey respondent

4.3 Maintaining relevance

In the survey, respondents were asked to “Please indicate the level of importance [they] attribute to each of these sites.” Of greatest importance to respondents was the Halifax Citadel (99%), followed by Georges Island (94%) then the other three sites were considered important to 70-80% of respondents.

Following this, survey respondents were simply asked, “Please tell us more about the importance of these national historic sites to you.” Most frequently mentioned was the sites’ importance as places that protect and present history, particularly military history, and that protect our shared heritage, particularly built heritage. Respondents also cited the sites’ role in the development of Halifax and as part of the story of Halifax, and their availability as places

where people can go, as part of the urban green spaces of Halifax. Other survey responses stated that the importance of Georges Island to them was for its tragic role in the history of Acadians.

“ Of the sites of the Halifax Defence Complex, Georges Island is the only site of historic importance to Acadians... Georges Island is a site of tragedy for l’Acadie. But it’s equally a site that illustrates the resilience of the Acadian people. ” – Survey respondent



“ Each site is like a living time capsule to those times when the city of Halifax was being established. Whenever I visit those sites, I am able to consider another perspective and imagine the lives of those before me who stood where I was standing and made decisions that affected where I live today. ”
– Survey respondent

Survey respondents were asked, “What would increase your interest in these national historic sites?” The top responses selected were:

- Additional free entry days to the Halifax Citadel (e.g. special events) (65%)
- Package tour of all Halifax Defence Complex sites with transportation provided (62%)
- Behind-the-scenes tours (57%)
- Recreational activities (e.g. guided hikes, races, picnics and camping) (48%)

Other responses submitted favoured opportunities to explore personal connections and stories such as genealogical research and having more information about heritage values and the reasons for designation of the sites.

Participants at in-person sessions were asked how the sites might be made more relevant to people, particularly to local residents. Participants felt that the sites have great potential as venues for arts, culture, recreation, community celebrations, but their existence is not well known. A suggested barrier, particularly

for Georges Island, is that people lack a way to get there or to access the place. Participants expressed that while many third parties could make great use of sites, they are unaware of what is allowed and what conditions might apply. As well, a lack of basic infrastructure and amenities (suitable wharf, washrooms, potable water) can be a barrier to using the sites. It was suggested that having such things in place could help reduce costs/make the sites more feasible for use by third parties. Others felt that local residents might be more inclined to go to the sites if there was more information available on the types activities that could be done on-site, hours of operation, and existing amenities. Participants felt that if the sites were used more as venues for family and community celebrations, people would develop greater personal or emotional connections to sites, and would likely value them more. For new Canadians, being greeted or having information available in their own language could help them feel more welcome and it was observed that technology could help facilitate this.



4.4 Meeting the changing needs of visitors

Survey respondents were asked to “Please share [their] ideas on how [Parks Canada] can ensure that the sites meet the changing needs of visitors.” The most frequently selected responses were:

- **Access:** Ensuring the sites are open to the public; providing a means of getting to the sites, particularly to Georges Island; and ensuring the sites are barrier free to people with mobility challenges.
- **Increased use of digital technology:** More use should be made of digital technologies, particularly for things like virtual tours of inaccessible spaces, accessing information, self-guided tour apps. Digital technologies allow site managers to more readily refresh the visitor experience, and particularly should be used to attract younger visitors and increase overall satisfaction of visitors. Many observed that digital technologies should supplement, not replace, in-person experiences, which are still felt to be very important.
- **Military interpreters:** Continue to have in-person interpreters and have more of them.

“ Experiment, change, and expand your audiences and offerings. Replace your locked doors with ones that opened widely to your community and the cultural experiences they seek. Help outsiders to build new doors. ”
– Survey respondent

“ Keep pace with modern technologies that deliver the message including relevant personal apps. Appear visibly coordinated with partners /stakeholders through websites / apps that seamlessly ‘Work’ and complement to deliver the experience. ” – Survey respondent

When the same question about responding to changing markets was asked during in-person sessions, participants raised similar themes:

- Make people feel welcome with greetings and information in their own language
- Get into the digital age by enabling visitors to get information and orientation through their mobile devices
- Expand the visitor season and/or adjust times the sites are open (e.g. to accommodate cruise season, winter offer/March Break, evening programming)
- Find ways to appeal to Millennials
- Leverage partners to promote and get the word out about the sites
- Have free programs and promote the noon gun during the off-season to appeal to local residents who are more price-sensitive
- Activate green spaces through having more people using the sites both informally and formally through events; generally, just have more things going on at the sites
- Get people from the waterfront up to the Halifax Citadel NHS via transportation, packaged tours and through having a more visible presence on the waterfront

5 #NameThisStreet

As part of the management plan public engagement phase, the public was invited to suggest names for the roads leading to the Halifax Citadel, which currently have no official name. Not only would naming the street help first-time visitors to find the front gate by enabling GPS devices to function with greater precision, this engagement activity provides an opportunity to highlight the site's rich history. It should be noted that this was not part of the

formal consultation on the management plan, but rather a discrete exercise.

Through the course of the engagement period, 52 individuals contributed 67 suggestions as part of the *#NameThisStreet* initiative. Suggested street names fell into four broad categories; military history, historical figures, geographic descriptions, and words that recognize the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia.



6 Next steps

A draft management plan will be prepared taking into consideration the comments received through phase one engagement and consultation activities, as well as ongoing consultation with the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia. Parallel to development of the draft plan, a selection committee comprised of Parks Canada staff, on-site partners, and stakeholders will be assembled to review the submissions for the #NameThisStreet initiative and select the name(s) to be put forward for approval by the Halifax Regional Municipality.

The draft management plan will be made available for public comment during phase two consultation at www.letstalkparkscanadahalifax.ca. For updates on the management planning process, register and check back regularly at www.pc.gc.ca/halifaxcitadel, www.letstalkparkscanadahalifax.ca, or follow us on Facebook, www.facebook.com/ParksCanadaHalifax.