

Engagement Summary



Date June 17th, 2025
Subject **City-Wide Wayfinding Engagement Summary**

Summary of Feedback

This report summarizes the community engagement activities undertaken as part of the development of Finding Your Way: A City-Wide Wayfinding Strategy for Guelph. It outlines how we engaged with residents and interest holders, what we heard, and how this feedback will shape the next stages of the project.

The input received through this process is crucial for shaping a wayfinding strategy that is inclusive, accessible, and aligned with Guelph's unique identity. It reflects the City's commitment to fostering a cohesive, welcoming, and easy-to-navigate environment for residents, visitors, and all users of public spaces.

What We Did

We held a variety of engagement sessions and workshops to gather input on the following:

- The identity of Guelph and how that could visually be represented in signage.
- Important destinations, tourism attractions and amenities that the community would like to see on signage.
- What tools people use to navigate new places and how they navigate Guelph.

Engagement and Workshops ran between April 28th - May 13th and included the following activities:

Indigenous Engagement

Engagement with Indigenous communities involved the following activities during the first phase of the project:

- Introductory letters emailed to the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and Six Nations of the Grand River.
 - Invitation to provide feedback on design elements that could be included in wayfinding system to mark culturally important destinations.
 - Commitment to engaging further during detailed design with the Six Nations of the Grand River.
 - Follow-up email and phone call to the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation for invitation to connect during the detailed design phase.
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Accessible Advisory Committee

City staff prepared and presented to the City of Guelph Accessibility Advisory Committee on April 18. The following feedback was provided:

- Use of alternative navigation apps (such as Geocacheing or Pokemon Go) should be considered to gain insight into areas of the City that may receive high traffic where information on accessibility may not be readily available.
- Google Maps and the streetview layer are often used to scout an intended destination ahead of time to determine how accessible it will be.
- Information that can be helpful to include on signage includes seating information, maintenance of a particular pathway, and whether an area is not accessible.

The following motions were passed by the Accessibility Advisory Committee:

1. That the Accessibility Advisory Committee receives the information on Finding Your Way: A City-Wide Wayfinding Strategy for Guelph, dated April 15, 2025.
2. The Accessibility Advisory Committee recommends that staff return to provide an update and receive feedback on the Wayfinding Strategy prior to presenting to City Council.

Workshops

- Tourism Operators (April 28) – 8 attendees
- Downtown Community (April 29) – 3 attendees
- Newcomers and Navigation (May 1) – 6 attendees
- City Services (May 2) – 13 attendees

Pop-Up Engagements

- West End Recreation Center Pop-Up (May 1) – 25 people
- Guelph Farmers' Market (May 3) – 150 people

Survey

- Online (April 25 – May 13) – 54 survey responses
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What We Heard

Signage Content

- The use of street names, distances, colour coding and symbols/icons were noted as being helpful for navigation.
- Various Parks Canada pictograms were displayed without labels. It was noted that the following were difficult to identify: Museum, library, seating, information, shopping, walk your bike, dogs off leash, lookout, bus and taxi transportation, theatre, and playground.
- Some of the ambiguity in the pictograms stemmed from their lack of site specificity, their strong association with park settings, or their overly complex design.
- Smaller districts were noted as being hubs worth drawing special attention to such as Exhibition Park and the Ward.
- The purple 'P' signs in the Downtown that direct to parking does not resonate with the residents.
- Some people noted that colour coding would be helpful on signage to categorize or highlight key information.
- There is a desire for layered or themed maps (e.g. restaurants, trails, historic sites) for various user needs.

The following destinations were highlighted as being important to note on signage:

- Arboretum
- Art Gallery of Guelph
- Basilica of Our Lady Immaculate
- Boathouse
- Covered Bridge
- Donkey Sanctuary
- Downtown
- Exhibition Park
- Farmers' Market
- Guelph Lake
- Guelph Museum
- Guelph University
- Hospital
- Market Square
- McCrae House
- Memorial Garden
- Ontario Reformatory
- Preservation Park
- River Run Centre
- Riverside Park
- Sleeman Centre
- Spring Mill Distillery
- St. George's Square

The following amenities and information were noted as being important:

- Bike Parking
- City Hall

- Distances
- Guelph Central Station
- Visitor Information Centre
- Landmark
- Parking
- Parks
- Street Names
- Symbols & Icons
- Washrooms

Navigation

- There is a lack of directional signage for vehicles, pedestrians, trails and bicycles.
- No signage at key pedestrian gateways like Guelph Central Station, parkades, or transitioning out of University of Guelph.
- Poor signage around parkades make them difficult to locate.
- Several sessions raised issues around the lack of signage to public washrooms, and that some are not clearly public or only seasonally available.
- The City has resources on their website noting parking and highlighting park amenities, but they're not very intuitive or user friendly.
- Streets that change names along their route—such as Gordon to Norfolk to Woolwich—make it harder for people to give and follow directions.
- The downtown's irregular street layout and lack of alignment with cardinal directions make navigation challenging, with routes that feel inconsistent or fragmented.
- There is a heavy reliance on landmarks for navigation through and around downtown.
- People believe that visitors are more likely to park right in front of their destination rather than take a short walk to a parkade.” Which ever is accurate.
- A general interest in having walking distances included on signage to promote walkability of the city.
- When navigating new places people often seek out visitor centres for printed maps, use signage, or use digital apps.
- There is a strong dependence on digital tools like Google Maps and AllTrails from residents.
- The community takes pride in their extensive trail network, but even with their local knowledge they find them hard to find and navigate.
- A desire to promote navigation to destinations outside of the downtown core and from the university to the downtown area.

Guelph's Identity

- Known for its natural beauty and greenery with the extensive trail network, rivers, parks and conservation areas.
 - Invites exploration and discovery with an extensive network of hidden gems to discover.
 - The colour green and blue are noted frequently as being representative of Guelph. Some answers specifically noted the colours in relation to nature and the rivers, with a few noting the Guelph brand.
 - A mix of nature and contemporary style with historic roots that are shown through limestone architecture like the Basilica of Our Lady, the Ontario Reformatory, original City Hall and John McCrae House.
 - When discussing physical representation of Guelph the covered bridge, Basilica of our Lady, Guelph University, and the rivers were almost always mentioned.
 - The Basilica of Our Lady and St. George's Square was noted as being the heart of Guelph. Both as a visual anchor and a hub.
 - A supportive, inclusive and welcoming community draws visitors back and even university students to stay permanently.
 - Strong values in accessibility, inclusivity and small-town warmth.
 - A refuge from large cities like Toronto with a less commercialized and more authentic vibe.
 - A vibrant arts and culture scene that is present in the various venues, events and history of Guelph.
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What We Are Doing

The input gathered through engagement will be used to inform the design of the wayfinding program to ensure the program accurately represents the identity of Guelph.

The feedback will directly inform the wayfinding program, from terminology guidelines and signage design to placement strategies and accessibility considerations. Once finalized, the wayfinding strategy will provide a comprehensive framework to guide the design and implementation of signage across Guelph.

What We Are Not Doing

We will not be doing any of the following as a part of this project:

- Install of wayfinding signage.
- Renaming destinations (trails, roads, amenities, facilities etc.).
- Planning locations or written content of signage.
- Map design.

Next Steps

The next phase of this project will commence in early June and will include the following:

- Establish principles and recommendations for destination, amenity and district categories.
- Guidelines for planning, messaging and destination listing.
- Framework for equitable and accessible wayfinding and Indigenous inclusion.

The City of Guelph will provide ongoing updates about the project on the Have Your Say webpage.