July 2015

Community Consultation REPORT

totherive

PREPARED BY: KOVACS GROUP INC. • PREPARED FOR: LONDON COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Table of Contents

ection 1.0 Introduction	3
1.1 About The Back To The River Project	
1.2 Back To The River Partners	
1.3 Community Consultation Sponsors	4
, ,	

2.1 Purpose	5
2.2 Methodology	5

Section 3.0 Summary of Results......7

3.1 Introduction	7
3.2 Water	7
3.3 Social Connection	8
3.4 Recreation	9
3.5 Entertainment	.11
3.6 Nature	.11
3.7 Health, Wellbeing, and Spirituality	.12
3.8 Urban Development and Planning	.12
3.9 Education	.17
3.10 Economy	.17
3.11 Heritage	.17
3.12 Design	.18

10 EU

. 19

Section 4.0 Conclusion

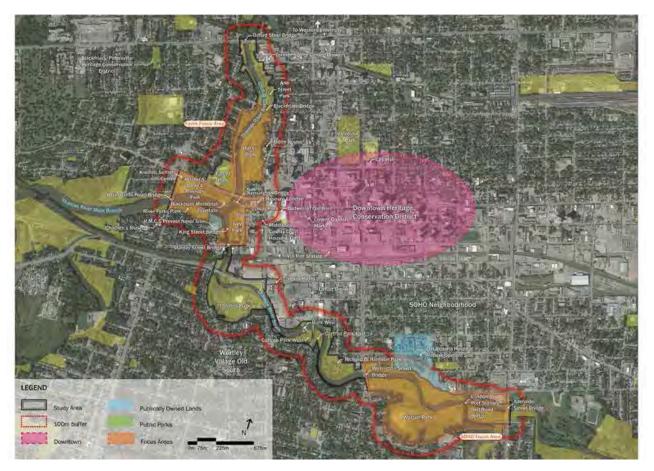
Introduction

1.1 ABOUT THE BACK TO THE RIVER PROJECT

THE THAMES RIVER IS THE HEART OF LONDON: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE. AS A HERITAGE RIVER TIED TO OUR REGION'S IDENTITY, THE THAMES RIVER HAS THE POWER TO BRING THE COMMUNITY TOGETHER. THIS IS WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO BRING LONDONERS BACK TO THE RIVER.

Back to the River is a community mobilization initiative spearheaded by London Community Foundation in partnership with the City of London and the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority. Through an international design competition, the initiative will revitalize a five kilometer stretch of the River radiating from the Forks in three directions: north to the intersection of Oxford Street bridge, west to the Wharncliffe Road bridge, and south to the Port Stanley railway bridge.

Study area and areas of interest.



Striving to enhance community quality of life, environmental, and economic development, the goal is simple: to give Londoners a place to work, play, and call home; a place that draws the community together.

The Thames River has and continues to be one of the community's most recognizable resources and is highly valuable to Londoners, which is why this project has the power to catalyze community change.

The power of river revitalization projects in other communities across North America has been astounding. London is ready to embrace this ambitious venture and to redefine its downtown riverfront in order to further engage its citizens in the limitless possibilities of the Thames River.

1.2 BACK TO THE RIVER PARTNERS

About London Community Foundation

London Community Foundation is a charitable organization dedicated to improving communities across London and Middlesex County. By pooling donations to create endowment funds and using the investment income to make grants, London Community Foundation has been providing steadfast support for the community and its charitable organizations for the past 60 years. London Community Foundation also provides leadership by monitoring this area's quality of life, and convening people, ideas, and resources to help build stronger and more resilient communities.

About the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority

Conservation Ontario is a non-governmental organization that represents the 36 Conservation Authorities within Ontario. The Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) was the sixth Authority formed in Ontario, founded in 1947. The UTRCA covers the upper watershed of the Thames River, an area of 3,482 square kilometres.

About the City of London

The City of London's 2015-2019 Strategic Plan outlines the City's vision to be "a leader in commerce, culture and innovation," with the aim of creating "the City where all Londoners have the opportunity to live, work, play and prosper." (The London Plan, 2015)

1.3 COMMUNITY CONSULTATION SPONSORS





TD Friends of the Environment Foundation



UPPER THAMES RIVER



4

Section 2.0

Community Consultation Process

2.1 PURPOSE

The London Community Foundation is seeking innovative design plans to revitalize the land along the Thames River through a design competition.

To understand the community's vision for the future of the Thames River, the Back to the River partners decided to engage citizens of London. The community consultation process, facilitated by Kovacs Group Inc., was designed to gather the community's input on what they would like to see incorporated into the design plans for the Thames River.

The findings from the community consultation process, compiled within this report, will be provided to design proponents. The findings will be taken into consideration when the plans are designed.

2.2 METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

Through both online and in-person consultation, citizens of London were asked a series of questions to gather their insights and ideas, including:

- 1. What features at or around the River currently makes it:
 - a. An Environmental Resource
 b. An Economic Resource
 c. A Heritage Resource
 d. A Social Resource
- 2. What do you value about the River?
- **3.** How do you currently engage with or use the River now?
- **4.** How would you like to engage with or use the River in the future?
- 5. What currently exists in, on, or around the River that you want to keep in the redesign?
- 6. What is your big, bold vision for the River?



The consultation process included the following:

Focus Groups - Six focus groups were held throughout the month of June 2015 at various locations throughout the city to engage Londoners in a discussion about their vision for the section of the Thames River within the geographic scope of the Back to the River project. Approximately 160 people participated in the focus groups.

Focus groups were held at the following times and locations:

June 2nd, 2015 at 7:00 p.m. at Central Library, Stevenson Hunt Room June 8th, 2015 at 7:00 p.m. at Central Library, Stevenson Hunt Room June 9th, 2015 at 2:00 p.m. at Central Library, Stevenson Hunt Room June 10th, 2015 at 7:30 a.m. at Goodwill Industries June 10th, 2015 at 7:00 p.m. at N'Amerind Friendship Centre June 20th, 2015 at 10:00 a.m. at Kinsmen Community Centre

Surveys - Hard copies of surveys were available at all branches of the London Public Library. Thirty-seven (37) surveys were completed.

Online Surveys - Surveys were available online through the London Community Foundation's website. In total, 72 online surveys were completed.

Section 3.0



3.1 INTRODUCTION

This community consultation report is the culmination of ideas shared by the community regarding the River and its revitalization. This section of the report provides an overview of the most common themes that emerged from responses to the focus group and survey questions.

3.2 WATER

Almost all respondents incorporated the theme of water in their responses, whether for recreational use, ecosystem health, or its beauty. Water quality was highlighted as a predominant concern, particularly in terms of pollution, contamination from black water treatment facility overflows, E-coli, and high levels of bacteria.

Water management was another key focus area that emerged, including water infrastructure such as dams and weirs. The topic of dams was highly contentious, and although the dams mentioned by respondents are outside the geographic scope of this project (located at Springbank and Fanshawe), they are a significant factor in terms of water flow, water levels, and the health of the River. Several respondents highlighted water movement, using the phrase "a free-flowing river."



Respondents raised other factors concerning water management, such as the River's ability to absorb excess storm water runoff, or conversely, flood in the spring. A few respondents also mentioned that water is a valuable resource with respect to drinking water. Respondents generally placed value on a clean, healthy river, listing river cleanup and ecological restoration as important considerations.

"The River itself" was a common response when respondents were asked what makes the River an environmental resource, and also when asked what they value about the River. Respondents highlighted the value of the River as a source of life, an environmental asset, and as a heritage site.

3.3 SOCIAL CONNECTION

Respondents emphasized that the River is a place for social gathering and spending time with friends and family, and that it provides an opportunity for developing connections among community members. The ability of the River to connect people was stated by multiple respondents.

Community connection was a theme that was referenced by respondents who listed the River as a place to bring the community together. Respondents generally valued public space that is freely accessible and can be used for community groups and events, such as fundraising for charities, tree planting, and walk-a-thons. The River was cited as a place where people can engage with each other and with the community.



The River was also listed as a place for family connection, where intergenerational relationships blossom and memories are created. Grandparents and parents valued spending time with their grandchildren and children at the playgrounds and splash pads, and a few respondents mentioned teaching their children about the ecology of the River while fishing. Reports reflected nostalgia for Canada Day celebrations, fireworks, and family picnics. Several also mentioned walking their dog or enjoying their family in a beautiful, natural setting.



3.4 RECREATION

Many respondents affirmed that they value the opportunity for recreation and leisure along the River, and that they regularly engage with the River through recreation and leisure activities. Recreation was highlighted as a social benefit. Having a publicly available space for an active, healthy lifestyle appeared to be of importance to many respondents. However, recreational activities were not limited to physical activity; for some, a place for reading and writing outdoors, or just sitting and enjoying the view, was also an important attribute of the River.

Water sports emerged from collected responses as an important theme, with canoeing, kayaking, and paddling sports all being highly valued. Many respondents cited the desire to swim if the water quality of the River was improved to safer levels. Others specified sailing, rowing, and recreational boating as ways in which they would like to engage with the River.

Trails and paths also received a great deal of emphasis from respondents. Cited by almost all respondents, multi-purpose trails for walking, jogging, cycling, and hiking were highly prized by Londoners who responded to surveys and attended focus groups. Paths are used not only for recreation, but also for commuting, with many respondents stating the desire for more interconnected and car-free cycling paths to provide a more viable alternative form of transportation in the city.

Bird watching and wildlife observation were forms of recreation that many respondents noted as ways they choose to engage with the River. These activities were also highlighted as being an environmental, economic, and social resource. From feeding the ducks, to appreciating the rare turtles and other aquatic life forms, to sightings of bald eagles and osprey, many respondents appreciate the River's thriving wild ecosystem. Others felt that the recreation experience could be even better if the River's ecosystem health was improved.



Many respondents cited fishing as a form of recreation they enjoy at the River. Several commented on the River's history and times when it was in both better and worse health for fishing, while some stated they would like to use the River for fishing if water quality was improved.

Walking, hiking, jogging, and running are activities enjoyed by a number of respondents, who again emphasized the value of the paths and trails for this recreational pastime. Several mentioned their passion for exploring and appreciating trails in nature within the city. Others expressed a desire for the paths to be ploughed in winter so as to remain accessible year-round.

Similarly, many respondents valued cycling and bike paths. A few respondents suggested widening the bike paths. Others discussed a pedestrian cycling network, the enjoyment of biking along the River, and using cycling as a way to travel to the downtown area.

Several respondents recognized the arts as an appreciated form of recreation, including painting, drawing, and photography. Others mentioned public performance spaces, outdoor art, and even the potential to hold an art contest to capture the beauty of the Thames. When looking to the future, respondents placed more emphasis on the value of the arts, including allocating space for artists and performers, as well as the potential for artists to redesign garbage and recycling containers along the River.

As a mix between a social activity and recreation, many respondents listed picnicking as a way they choose to engage with the River. From casually eating lunch by the River, to family picnics and larger events where picnic areas would be rented out, respondents valued the open space available for outdoor eating. Several respondents would also value additional space for picnicking, including shaded gazebo areas.

Many respondents valued sports and activities, including recreational space for tennis, soccer, baseball, swimming, and a free place to exercise. Others mentioned rollerblading, tai chi, skating, cross country skiing, skateboarding, golfing, and other sports. Several respondents indicated that they use the public pools that currently exist near the River. Splash pads and playgrounds were highlighted as recreational spaces enjoyed by respondents, particularly because they provide a play space for children.

3.5 ENTERTAINMENT

Events and multi-purpose event space were listed by respondents as a way they engage with the River for social purposes. Sporting events, such as baseball or soccer games, were also noted.

Several respondents recognized that spaces along the River are used for concerts and festivals, including music concerts such as Rock the Park, along with band shell performances and festival events held at Harris Park. Many noted that supporting a dedicated space for concerts near the River would add value to the community.

Museums and art galleries that currently exist along the River were listed as arts and cultural entertainment, including the London Regional Children's Museum and Museum London. Respondents would like these spaces to continue to thrive and be valued by the community.

Respondents also noted the lack of restaurants, cafés, and markets close to the River, citing the desire for more riverside cafés or restaurants, along with the potential for food trucks and mobile food vendors.

3.6 NATURE

Many respondents named wildlife habitat as an important environmental resource, as well as a characteristic they value about the River. Several respondents pointed out that the River is both the natural habitat and a food source for unique species. A few respondents referred to the aquatic ecosystem and riparian habitat of the Thames River. Others indicated they valued having wildlife habitat downtown, in the centre of the city.



A significant number of respondents also acknowledged the importance of biodiversity and its preservation. Several respondents mentioned individual species of flora and fauna, including birds, eagles, osprey, water fowl, beavers, insects, fish, and deer, as well as trees, flowers, grass, and plants that they enjoy seeing by the River. Turtles were also specifically noted, including the endangered spiny soft shell turtle. An appreciation of native plants and trees was also reflected.

Several respondents highlighted the natural corridor and forest, listing it as a natural heritage feature, a migratory corridor, a natural River corridor, and a corridor for wildlife. Forest and wooded areas were also emphasized as wild instances of nature, as opposed to manicured or landscaped park areas.

Nature appreciation, wilderness, and the natural environment were also listed as a value of many respondents. Respondents noted the natural space as "a place to get back to nature," that the River provided an opportunity to engage the public in environmental issues and concerns, and noted the continuity of the River's existence.

Other respondents detailed their sensory experiences of nature, appreciating looking at the River, listening to its sounds, enjoying its smell in the spring, and its ambiance. Some respondents detailed the River's cooling microclimate effects on a hot day, and many stated that they enjoy witnessing the change of the seasons around the River. One respondent listed the River's power for inspiration; another said the view of the River is soothing.

3.7 HEALTH, WELLBEING, AND SPIRITUALITY

Several respondents advocated for the River's power to positively affect community health, stating that the River promotes wellbeing, relaxation, stress relief, and healthy living. The River's positive effects on mental health were specifically emphasized, as it is valued as a place for meditation and a place for fresh air within the context of the city.

Many respondents noted the value of the River for personal space, as a refuge within the city, and a quiet, tranquil sanctuary. One respondent called it a "natural oasis within the city," while others valued the escape from busy city life. One respondent listed the River as a "heart resource," and another said, "it lifts your spirits." Some respondents mentioned the opportunity for solitude, while others commented that the River is calming, peaceful, and a great place for thinking.

Some respondents noted the spiritual and emotional connection they share with the River, particularly noting their feeling of connection to nature through the River, especially within a city context. A few respondents mentioned the River's value as a quiet place for prayer, and a feeling of being "drawn to the River." Others mentioned the significance of water representing life or life force.

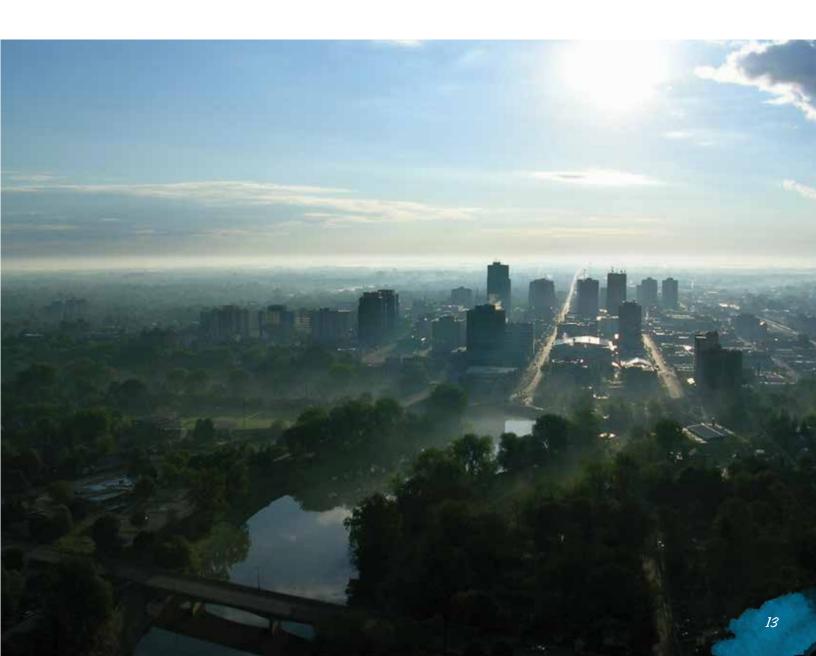
3.8 URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING

General development and zoning was an area of concern raised by many respondents. Specifically, the issue of the amount of development appropriate for the revitalization of the River was a contentious one, and opinions varied widely. Some respondents were against any further development near the River, particularly within under 100m of the riverbanks. Some respondents advocated for protecting just the 30m closest to the River's edge while others stated that 100m should be protected. Many respondents want the area around the River to remain as natural as possible. Some feel that all development should be environmentally responsible, while others still feel there is a need for much greater development in the River area, including more residential and commercial sites.

Generally, respondents agreed that land use should remain public and accessibility should not be limited by private ownership; however, several respondents also agreed that the scenic views of the River greatly enhance property values, making it a valuable economic resource. A few respondents stated that city zoning has traditionally focused on income generation from property taxes and has not focused on community use. Several respondents agreed that development around the River should be mixed-use.

Respondents also mentioned the need to revitalize the South of Horton (SoHo) area and its untapped potential. There was also mention of the development of the Line 9 pipeline, with proponents both for and against, which, although outside the geographic scope of this project, would impact the River downstream.

Accessibility was a concern for many respondents who implored the design proponents to consider ways to improve the River's accessibility. Suggestions for improving accessibility included better links to public transportation, wheelchair accessibility, as well as increased access to the water with docks and boat landings. Many noted that they value the River's proximity to downtown and to neighbourhoods, as well as the way in which the River links diverse neighbourhoods within the city.



Respondents also noted the value of transportation. In particular, respondents highlighted the trails and paths as a greener alternative to commuting by car or bus and the opportunity for "active transportation" around the River. A few respondents mentioned that their engagement with the River is limited to driving past it in their car, and a few respondents mentioned that they would like to create a change in their own behaviour by engaging more with the River. Several respondents suggested improving parking (and offering free parking) to be able to access the River more easily.



The capacity of the River as "lungs" to remediate pollution was mentioned by some respondents, detailing the power of the River to purify both the air and water. Others pointed out infrastructure inadequacies regarding Pollution Control Plant (PCP) outlets and their outflows polluting the River. Several respondents emphasized a need to clean up the River and no longer treat it as the "city's sewer." Others mentioned the need for more garbage and recycling containers near the River to help prevent litter, or to increase fines for littering. One respondent noted that the River is a, "visual reminder of the health of the environment."

Green space was valued by many respondents, with "naturalized areas," "undeveloped green space and corridors," and "nature in the heart of the city," cited among other responses. Several respondents commented that they enjoy the fresh air of green spaces, as well as the River's cooler microclimate, semi-wild areas, and the forest around the River.

Maintained parks and gardens were also highlighted as strongly appreciated by the community respondents, particularly noting the Fork of the Thames, Harris Park, Thames Valley Park, Gibbons Park, and Labatt Park. The memorial and peace gardens were also mentioned, as were lvey Park, and public gardens. Several respondents listed community gardens as a social and environmental resource, as well as a way in which the community engages with the River. Many respondents stated "fountains" as a way they currently enjoy engaging with the River.

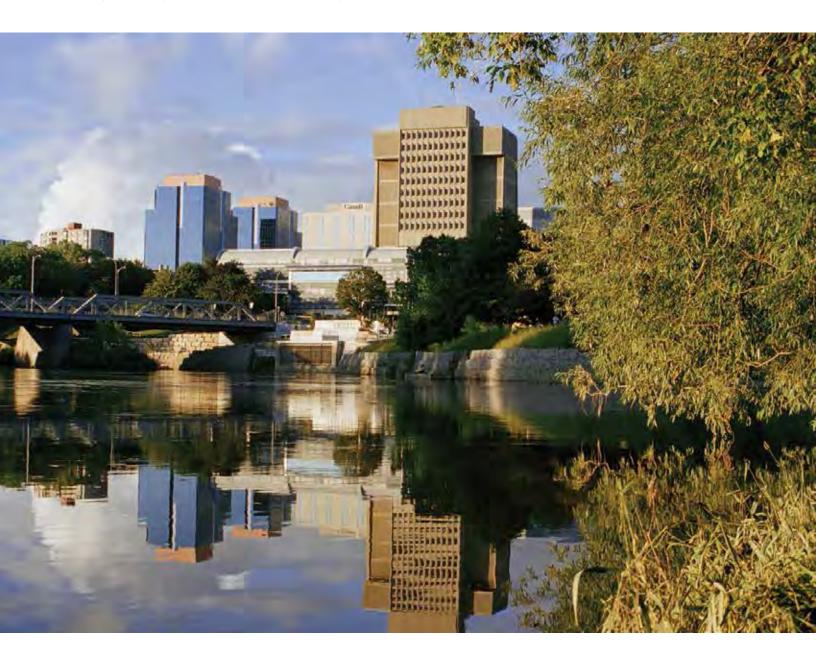


Some respondents emphasized public safety as a concern, with ample lighting around the River being the primary issue raised. One respondent also suggested using Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) in redesign plans.

Most respondents felt that it was important to comment on the beauty of the River and its views and scenery. Several respondents valued the open sky vista and open spaces, as well as bridge views, views of downtown, natural features, stargazing, and "long" views or panoramas. Several respondents raised concerns about future development and securing the preservation of these vistas by not blocking views with high rises. Again, the seasons were highlighted within this context, as many noted that the River provides stimulating and ever-changing natural scenery.

The overall health of the urban ecosystem was also noted by respondents, with mention of the ecosystem services the River provides and its interconnectivity to many aspects of city living. Further, the River was mentioned as an indicator of overall ecosystem vitality.

A few respondents mentioned the role of the River in terms of energy generation, highlighting the River's potential as a hydroelectric power source or as a venue for solar panel installations.



Bridges were listed as an economic, heritage, and social resource, as well as a way in which Londoners engage with the River. Many respondents cited Blackfriars Bridge and its heritage significance, with several respondents advocating for keeping this bridge as a pedestrian bridge and not reopening it to vehicular traffic. Others cited pedestrian bridges more generally, as well as the potential for bridges to be used as lookouts for the River's scenic vista.

3.9 EDUCATION

Education emerged as a key theme from respondents' comments. Respondents reported valuing the River as an educational resource and a classroom for research, learning about various science topics, and for environmental education. Respondents commented on the River's utility for field trips and school projects, as well as for studying in a quiet place. Some respondents referred to the historical information plaques and their ability to educate students about London's heritage. Many would like to see the continued use and upkeep of information plaques along the River.

3.10 ECONOMY

Many respondents reported the River is an economic resource, particularly in regards to tourism. The ability for the River and its surrounding areas to serve as a tourist attraction was listed by many respondents, as was its potential for ecotourism initiatives. Respondents suggested boat tours, nature walks, festivals and events as a way to bring both Londoners and visitors downtown.

While development near the River's edge was debated, many respondents desired more social and economic engagement near the River, particularly with respect to the development of restaurants or cafés. Many respondents nominated food vendors, food trucks, and patios as a way in which they would like to engage with the River.

With respect to addressing employment and the overall economy, some respondents suggested job creation in environmental work, trail and bridge maintenance, and at festivals to stimulate the job market in London. A few respondents mentioned that, while the River is important as an economic resource, its environmental significance should be prioritized.

3.11 HERITAGE

Respondents emphasized the historical significance of the River. Noting many historical locations and landmarks, respondents mentioned the value of the River as a heritage resource with a vast and diverse history. From its geological significance, to the founding of London, its industrial history, and its history of floods, respondents captured the richness of the Thames River's history as a natural heritage feature of London.

Heritage buildings and historic bridges were mentioned by many respondents, including Eldon House, the Court House, the old jail, Museum London, the old Victoria Hospital, and many more historic sites.

Several respondents made suggestions for improvements to showcase the River's heritage, including more detailed information plaques on the pathways along the River, producing and distributing booklets about the area's history, and even the potential to add a historical interpretation centre in the redesign.

Some respondents acknowledged the Aboriginal history and its significance for First Nations communities, including connections to ancestral knowledge.

Respondents also commented on the Thames River's significance with respect to the River being an integral part of London's identity. Several respondents reflected nostalgia for having grown up around the River, and many hold the River as their connection to London's past, present, and future.

3.12 DESIGN

Respondents made recommendations for design proponents, ranging from infrastructure development, to economic revitalization, to the importance of ecological restoration. Multi-season use emerged as a strong design recommendation, with many respondents wishing to be able to engage with the River year-round.

A number of respondents commented that nature should be kept at the forefront of the design with respect to enhancing the River for recreational and social use without compromising its important ecosystem functions or losing habitat for various species of flora and fauna. Many respondents pointed out the interconnectedness of the River and how the Back to the River project will have significant impacts both downstream and upstream that extend far outside the geographic scope of the project.

A few respondents expressed a desire to have more of a "downtown" feeling at the River, while others expressed the opposite, wanting the area to remain as close to nature as possible. Further, several respondents even suggested re-naturalization of the area by the River. Many respondents highlighted the desire for pedestrian and car-free areas within the design.

While some respondents advocated for innovative and groundbreaking design, many respondents requested practical solutions to improve day-to-day city living and the urban environment. Overall, the vast majority of respondents indicated an excitement to be able to engage with the River more, whether in existing or new ways.



Section 4.0



With the aim of providing design proponents an insight into the ways in which the community values the Thames River, this community consultation report reflects the opinions shared by London citizens, with over 250 people participating in focus groups and responding to surveys, both in print and online.

The Thames River is a key environmental, economic, heritage, and social resource for the City of London. The River's importance to the community is apparent in this stakeholder engagement report.

All responses from focus groups and surveys were categorized into themes, reflecting respondents' current attitudes and engagement with the River, aspects of the River they feel should be kept in the redesign, and ways in which they would like to engage with the River in the future.

Key themes in all three areas, current values, things to keep, and future engagement, included:

- Water
- Social Connection
- Recreation
- Entertainment
- Nature
- Health, Wellbeing, and Spirituality
- Urban Development and Planning
- Education
- Economy
- Heritage
- Design

Moving forward with the Back to the River design competition, the London Community Foundation, in partnership with the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority and the City of London, will make this report available to all design proponents so as to ensure the voices of the community are thoroughly considered in design plans.





PREPARED FOR LONDON COMMUNITY FOUNDATION www.lcf.on.ca



PREPARED BY KOVACS GROUP INC. www.kovacsgroup.ca

> FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT BACK TO THE RIVER PLEASE VISIT: www.backtotheriver.ca