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Bellevue House National Historic Site

What We Heard:

Management Plan Consultation Report
2023



Bellevue House National Historic Site

'What We Heard' Management Plan Consultation Report

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1.0 Introduction and Background

Bellevue House National Historic Site is located in a quiet residential neighbourhood in Kingston, Ontario, approximately 2.5 kilometres from the downtown core. The land on which the house is built is the traditional territory of the Wendat, Anishinaabe, and Haudenosaunee/Onkwehón:we people. The site is recognized for being a home of Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald, and for its Italianate architecture.

As the only historic site administered by Parks Canada that recognizes and presents Sir John A. Macdonald, this site has great potential for remembering and understanding Macdonald, his role in Canadian history and the development of Canada. Through recent investments into the historic house and programming, Parks Canada is renewing Bellevue House as a place of discovery, learning and reflection. Visitors can learn about Macdonald's legacy, the impacts of Confederation, accomplishments, as well as lesser-known and painful aspects of our shared history.

The *Parks Canada Agency Act* requires Parks Canada to prepare a management plan for heritage places administered by Parks Canada. Management plans are developed through consultation with Indigenous peoples, partners, stakeholders, and the public, and are intended to serve as the key accountability document to Parliament and to Canadians for Parks Canada management and decision-making. The *Bellevue House National Historic Site of Canada Management Plan* sets clear, strategic direction for the management and operation of the site by articulating a vision, key strategies, and objectives.

The objective of consultation is to ensure that management planning is open and transparent, reflects sound financial management, contributes to Government of Canada and Parks Canada priorities, and is results-based to allow for assessment to inform future decision-making. Indigenous peoples, the Community Advisory Committee, stakeholders, partners, and the Canadian public were involved in the preparation of the *2023 Bellevue House National Historic Site Management Plan*, helping to shape the future direction of the historic site. This report outlines the consultation and engagement process including who we heard from, what we heard, and what changes were made to the management plan as a result of this process.

2.0 Overview of the Consultation and Engagement process

During 2018 and 2019, the initial stages of the management planning process were completed. This included the completion of the *State of the Site Assessment* and development of a scoping document, both highlighting the themes needing to be addressed in the new management plan. A draft management plan for Bellevue House was then developed, based on input received following early consultation and engagement with Indigenous peoples, and key partners and stakeholders.

Due to public health measures and restrictions linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, Indigenous and public consultations on the draft management plan initially scheduled for spring 2020 were delayed so that alternate means of consulting in a safe and efficient manner could be found.

The confirmation of residential school mass graves sites findings in 2021 further impacted the consultation schedule. The historic site management team felt that it needed to reaffirm the direction of the management plan and the consultation approach to ensure that the needs of Indigenous peoples were respected during this difficult time.

The Indigenous and public consultation specific to the draft management plan was officially launched in February 2022 and included an open public comment period held between February 10, and April 5, 2022. During this period, the draft plan was posted online along with a comment card to gather feedback on the proposed management direction. The consultation activities were publicised in local newspapers, the Parks Canada website, the Consulting with Canadians website, social media pages, as well as through local radio and television media.

2.1 Indigenous consultation and engagement approach

Parks Canada consulted and engaged with Indigenous communities from the early stages of the management planning process. In 2019, initial letters introducing the planning process and enquiring about how the communities would like to be involved with the development of the draft management plan were sent. Feedback received from the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne and the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte indicated interest in having opportunities to review and provide viewpoints of First Nations in relation to the portrayal of Sir John A. Macdonald at the national historic site.

In October 2021, Parks Canada engaged an Indigenous consultant with Inclusive Voices Inc., to assist with management planning consultations and engagement by reaching out to Indigenous communities in the greater Kingston and eastern Ontario region. With support from Inclusive Voices Inc., an invitation to comment on the draft plan and to participate in online meetings was sent directly to Indigenous Chiefs and advisors, members of the Bellevue House Community Advisory Committee, members of the Kingston Aboriginal Community Information Network, as well as other partners and stakeholders.

An online consultation session was held for Indigenous community members in February 2022, led by Inclusive Voices Inc., along with Parks Canada team members. This engagement process was designed to create a safe space for authentic, open discussion, and to gather meaningful feedback. Participants were encouraged to complete the online comment card and to participate in an additional interactive engagement session with Inclusive Voices Inc. to ensure inclusion during the consultation process.

2.2 Partner, Stakeholder and Public consultation approach

Incidental to management planning, but entirely complementary, concurrent engagement with Indigenous partners, historically marginalized groups, and many partners related to the visitor experience renewal of Bellevue House also took place between 2020 and 2023. This body of work deeply informed the development of a draft management plan for Bellevue House.

Several online meetings were held in February 2022 with partners, stakeholders, and the public, led by Inclusive Voices Inc. and Parks Canada team members. Representatives from the local tourism, culture, academic, and community sectors participated in the partner and stakeholder meetings. A summary of the key components of the management plan was presented to the History and Legacy of Sir John A. Macdonald Working Group of the City of Kingston Municipal Council. A separate session for youth with an interest in Bellevue House, including university and other local students, ensured their ideas were heard in a smaller forum, surrounded by peers.

All these sessions included a presentation on the management planning process and on the proposals of the draft plan, followed by an opportunity for participants to interact with the park planning team, ask questions, and complete the online comment card. Participants were also given an opportunity to share feedback on the vision for the historic site, to comment on the proposed key strategies and objectives, and to make suggestions for visitor experiences, promotion, and potential partnering.

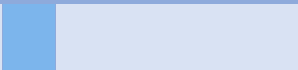

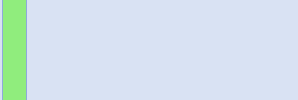


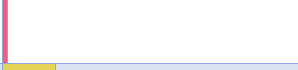
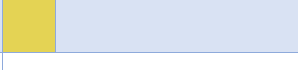
3.0 Who We Heard From

Participation

Parks Canada offered a total of six (6) formal online sessions, engaged with over 60 participants, and received 89 comment cards.

Feedback was received from a diverse group of individuals with an interest in the future of Bellevue House National Historic Site. Many participants identified as being members of an Indigenous community, the tourism/hospitality industry, Non-Governmental Organizations, educational institutions, municipal governments, and other special interest groups.

The following table describes how participants self-identified.

Choice	Percentage	Count	
A member of an Indigenous community	16.92%	11	
A member of the tourism/hospitality industry	26.15%	17	
A member of a Non-Government Organization (NGO)	7.69%	5	
A member of an educational institution	16.92%	11	
An interested member of the public	64.62%	42	
A member of a special interest group	1.54%	1	
Other:	16.92%	11	
Total	100%	65	

4.0 What We Heard

Responses to the online comment card and feedback provided through online consultation sessions indicated that participants generally supported the proposed vision elements and three (3) key strategies identified in the draft management plan.

Several participants took time to write detailed comments and suggestions for how Bellevue House should be managed over the next 10 years and reiterated the national significance of the site. The feedback received showed that many respondents feel strongly about how Sir John A. Macdonald should be portrayed and that connections to Indigenous reconciliation, engagement and involvement should be prioritized.

Many of the responses focused on the importance of honouring the experiences of Indigenous and racialized communities, working with partners and stakeholders to tell more inclusive stories, and ensuring accuracy and commemorative integrity. Many ideas were also shared for enhancing the visitor offer at Bellevue House.

4.1 Vision

Participants were asked if they were in favour of the proposed new vision for Bellevue House and offered five choices as a response: completely agree; agree; neutral; disagree; or strongly disagree. Most respondents agreed with the proposed vision for Bellevue House, with over 73 percent stating they “completely agree” or “agree” with it.

Choice	Percentage	Count	
Completely agree	32.89%	25	
Agree	40.79%	31	
Neutral	14.47%	11	
Disagree	9.21%	7	
Strongly disagree	2.63%	2	
Total	100%	76	

4.2 Key Strategies

The feedback was similar regarding support for the key strategies and associated objectives. There was general support for each of the strategies and no significant outliers showing strong disagreement.

Participants agreed with the direction the site is taking on Indigenous engagement, shifting the focus off of Sir John A. Macdonald and more to the stories around him, the house and the time period.

Key Strategy 1 – An evolving understanding of Sir John A. Macdonald’s legacy

The objectives under Key Strategy 1 received very strong overall support with approximately 89 percent of respondents believing they were very important or important.

Respondents agreed that opportunities should be provided to diverse groups to help Parks Canada plan and deliver visitor experiences. We heard that many voices and viewpoints must be both consulted and reflected at the site, in particular, voices from the Indigenous, Black and other communities of colour. Participants expressed a desire to ensure that the telling of history should be inclusive and not overlook the hardships of one or multiple groups at the hands of another. There was strong support for Indigenous-inclusive messaging.

Respondents generally agreed that Bellevue House needs to be part of the broader reflection on different perspectives of Confederation and that visitors should be able to engage in this dialogue. While Sir John A. Macdonald continues to be perceived very differently amongst respondents, the majority agree that the site should promote dialogue and include all aspects of Macdonald’s legacy.

Key Strategy 2 - An active community partner

Key Strategy 2 was also strongly supported with approximately 90 percent of respondents rating the objectives as very important or important. It was clear that respondents were in favour of partnerships being developed to help present and promote Bellevue House and there was general support to increase awareness of the site and its national significance among visitors to Kingston.

Respondents told us that they see the site as an important part of the story of Kingston and Sir John A. Macdonald, but that Bellevue House cannot be “everything to everyone”. Partners shared ideas for how heritage attractions can work together to tell the story. We heard that increased promotion efforts and collaborations will enable Bellevue House to become a key part of the John A. Macdonald experience in Kingston and an active and recognised participant in the local tourism market.

Key Strategy 3 - A renewed heritage experience

Similar support was observed for Key Strategy 3 with 73 to 94 percent of respondents rating the objectives as being important or very important.

Support for exciting, new, and diverse hands-on experiences was clear and respondents generally agreed that visitation should increase among target markets. We heard that broader topics, more inclusive stories, and interactive presentations would be appreciated.

Regarding the house and facilities, participants see the importance of the house and facilities being in good condition to protect the heritage of the site. Respondents also agreed that the visitor centre should be better connected to the house, improving the flow between both buildings for a better visitor experience. Inclusion and accessibility were mentioned often during consultation with the general consensus that we should aim to provide meaningful experiences for people of all ages, ethnicities, cultures and abilities.

5.0 Next Steps

Following the consultation period, the Bellevue House management team analysed all input received and discussed themes of consensus or concern. The viewpoints shared during the consultation process resulted in meaningful changes to the draft plan in several areas. Changes that were made include:

- Revisiting the vision statement to alter some of the language used based on feedback received.
- Reexamining objectives to emphasize Indigenous representation, including making the site more welcoming/attractive to Indigenous peoples, strengthening focus on the land the house is built on, and ensuring Indigenous involvement in the planning and implementation of programming.
- Removing offensive and/or triggering language that was identified during consultation.
- Modifying language to ensure the plan articulates a fulsome presentation of Bellevue House and of Sir John A. Macdonald’s story.
- Ensuring objectives communicate a brave and daring perspective that reduces harm, builds bridges, and brings Canadians along.
- Reviewing objectives to ensure visitors will be welcomed, surprised and challenged by new experiences at Bellevue House.
- Revisiting objectives to ensure results-based language.
- Strengthening language around inclusivity and accessibility.

Parks Canada thanks all participants who took time to share their views and helped to make important updates to the new management plan for Bellevue House National Historic Site.

Once finalized, the *Bellevue House National Historic Site of Canada Management Plan* will be approved by the President and Chief Executive Officer of Parks Canada and tabled in Parliament by the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change in 2023. Public release of the management plan will follow, supported by communications on the public consultation website, the Parks Canada website and via social media channels.

SURVEY QUESTIONS

CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN BELLEVUE HOUSE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your feedback is important to shaping the new management plan for Bellevue House National Historic Site and will guide decisions and actions in protecting, presenting and operating the site. The survey is made up of 17 questions and all responses will be confidential.

1. Parks Canada has prepared a draft vision for Bellevue House National Historic Site based on initial engagement with Indigenous partners, stakeholders and the public:

The vision presented below expresses the future desired state of Bellevue House National Historic Site in 20 years:

Nestled in a quiet neighbourhood, surrounded by trees and close enough to Lake Ontario to feel its fresh breeze, Bellevue House, with its Picturesque architecture, was once home to an important community member who later became Canada's first Prime Minister. Wandering through this beautiful home and garden oasis, the property provides a perfect setting for all Canadians including Kingston residents, Indigenous people, visitors, and influential leaders to reflect and share thoughts on our country's history. Bellevue House is a place to connect with Sir John A. Macdonald and discover his role, and achievements in creating Canada, while coming to realize the painful legacies of many of his policies and decisions.

Bellevue House uses its rich 1840's decor and its well-preserved historic fabric to showcase a glimpse of the personal life of Macdonald, portray the forces that shaped his paths, with his foibles and struggles, and to demonstrate how Macdonald's experiences in Kingston laid the groundwork for what he became, both personally and professionally. Visitors will be invited to consider Macdonald, in his time, with yesterday's values and understanding, and today's perspectives, as we aspire to grow and reconcile our pasts.

Over the next 20 years, visitors and Kingston Area residents will appreciate a successful and comprehensive management approach at Bellevue House National Historic Site that is reflected in:

- *Updated themes and messages about Macdonald's story, both personal and professional, making Bellevue House a renowned leader in presenting Macdonald's legacy in an open-minded and inclusive way.*
- *Respectful relationships with Indigenous and local communities who help expand the narrative about the story of Confederation.*
- *Redesigned visitor infrastructure that supports growing visitation, offers barrier-free access, and is inclusive and welcoming.*
- *A variety of meaningful visitor experiences that showcase Macdonald and Canada's history through new, strong and diverse partnerships.*
- *Increased promotion efforts and collaborations which enable Bellevue House to become a key part of the John A. Macdonald experience in Kingston and an active and recognised participant in the local tourism market.*
- *A well protected historic place that is preserved to ensure the site remains open for future generations.*

1 a. Use the scale below to tell us overall, if you are in agreement with the proposed vision.

Completely agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

1 b. What resonated most strongly with you?

2. Use the scale below to tell us how important the following objectives are in to you in achieving the key strategies:

	Very important	Important	Not important	No opinion
Key Strategy 1 – An evolving understanding of Sir John A. Macdonald’s legacy				
Opportunities are provided to diverse groups to help Parks Canada plan and deliver visitor experiences.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bellevue House is part of the broader national reflection on different perspectives around the Fathers of Confederation. Visitors can engage in this dialogue.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Key Strategy 2 – An active community partner				
Awareness about the existence of the site and its national significance increases among visitors who come to Kingston.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Partnerships are developed to help present and promote Bellevue House.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Key Strategy 3 – A renewed heritage experience				
Visitors to Bellevue House appreciate exciting new and diverse hands-on experiences.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Visitation increases among targeted markets.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The visitor centre is better connected to the house, improving the flow between both buildings and making a better visitor experience.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The house and facilities are in good condition, reflecting Parks Canada’s expertise in managing and protecting heritage buildings.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. What is the most important thing that Bellevue House NHS should focus on in the next 10 years?

**4. What are you looking for the most in a visitor experience at Bellevue House NHS?
(Please check the boxes you feel apply)**

Use the scale below to tell us how important these VISITOR EXPERIENCES are to you:

	Very Important	Important	Not Important	No opinion
Group guided tour	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Private/individualized tour	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Audio tour	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If audio tours were important, how important would it be that they were available in multiple languages (i.e. Anishinaabemowin, Mohawk, German, Mandarin)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Multi-media/virtual reality tour	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
After-hours / Behind-the-scenes tour	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Indigenous programming	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Food and/or beverage tasting experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Authentic heritage meal programming	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children's/family programming	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hands-on heritage activities like gardening, cooking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Theatre performance/ interactive experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Art/ artistic interactive experience				
Rental of space for events, meetings, private use	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learning more about the histories and stories of the house/site	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learning more about Sir John A. Macdonald	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learning more about life in the late 1800's	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learn more about the architecture of the time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interpretive materials to read and take home	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunities to socialize with others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Exploring a quiet, peaceful setting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Public facilities such as washrooms and picnic areas	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. Do you think Bellevue House NHS can improve or add to the visitor's experience with:

- More unique interactive experiences
- More special events
- More guided tours
- More connection with other Kingston attractions/programs
- More programs / experiences led by partners
- Other ideas (specify) _____

6. Please expand on your visitor experience suggestions from Question 5.

7. Do you have an opinion on the use of smartphones or personal devices to experience or to access digital information during a self-guided tour?

8. Do you have any other comments on the Draft Management Plan? Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

Please share a little bit about you.

Note: All information will be kept confidential

To help us better understand the views and comments collected, we have a few remaining questions for you:

9. Which of the following describes you: (Select all that apply)

- A member of an Indigenous community
- A member of the tourism/ hospitality industry
- A member of a Non-Government Organization (NGO)
- A member of an educational institution
- An interested member of the public
- A member of a special interest group
- Other (please describe) _____

10. What is your age group?

- 18-24 years old
- 25-34 years old
- 35-44 years old
- 45-54 years old
- 55-64 years old
- Over 65 years old

11. Have you ever visited Bellevue House?

Yes

No

11.b. If yes, when did you visit?

- 0-5 years ago
- 5-10 years ago
- 10 + years ago

12. At Bellevue House NHS, I have: (please check all that apply)

- Toured the Visitor Centre
- Toured the grounds/ heritage garden
- Participated in special events or exhibits: _____
- Taken a paid tour
- Visited on a free day
- Attended a 3rd party event: _____
- Other: _____

13. How do you find out about local events in Kingston? (marketing)

- Newspaper
- Social Media
- Kingston Tourism
- Other Cultural Sites
- Radio
- Word of Mouth
- Other: _____

14. Where do you reside?

- Ontario
- Quebec
- Other Canadian province/territory
- International Visitor

If you are Indigenous, please help us understand how you describe your home territory if you do not identify with one of the above descriptions, or please fill in both if you usually use both.

My home territory/ way of describing my community is: _____

15. Postal code (Voluntary, collected for statistical purposes only): _____