

# Morash Park, Dartmouth Women's Safety Assessment (WSA) Report

**DATE OF WSA: November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2022**

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## Background and Context

On July 4, 2022, Public Safety Office (PSO) staff met with Tony Mancini, District 6 councillor, to conduct a site visit at Morash Park and initiate planning for a Women's Safety Assessment (WSA). Councillor Mancini had walked the park with nearby residents who expressed concerns about the path around the perimeter of the park's pond. The councillor asked PSO staff to facilitate a WSA to garner further feedback on safety and accessibility in the park.



*Figure 1: Entrance to Morash Park from Woodlawn Road (source: Google Maps)*

Residents were invited to participate in the WSA by a community leader from a nearby church, the Dartmouth Pickleball Facebook group, the Woodlawn United Church, NSCC, a blurb shared by the councillor to his constituents, and through confirmed participants sharing within their networks.

## History of the WSA Tool

The WSA originated out of Toronto in 1989, as a participatory action tool to build safer communities. It builds on the best practices of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) and incorporates culturally competent, community focused, and gender-based approaches. Research demonstrates that by involving women and non-binary people in the process of identifying safety concerns in public spaces and working with them to develop potential solutions, public spaces are made safer for everyone.

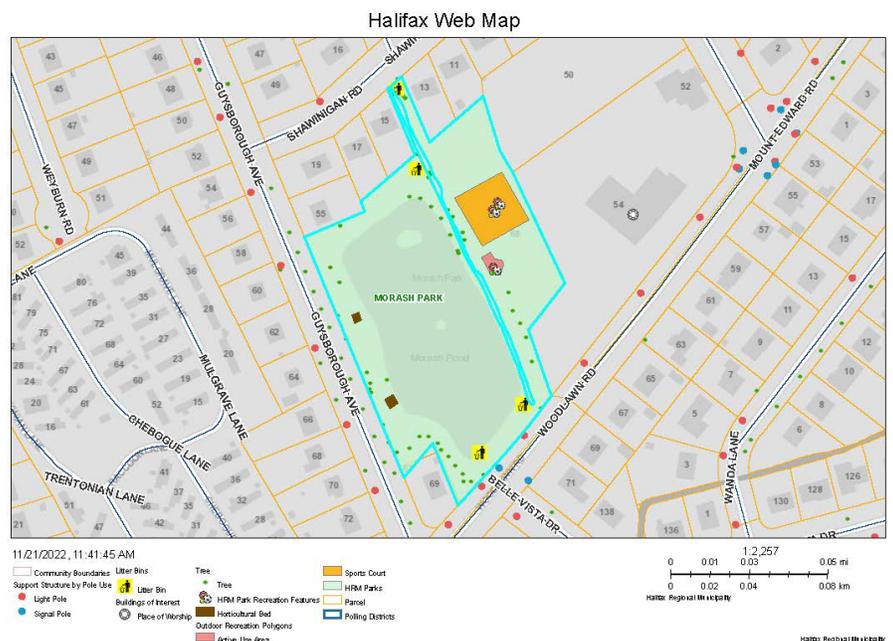
WSAs are different than other safety audits, as they recognize women’s, girls’, and non-binary people’s expertise from their daily lived experiences. These perspectives are gathered through the WSA tool, providing insight into how women, girls and non-binary people perceive their safety in the space and identifying built, social, and natural features that could be modified to improve safety.

The tool is based on the premise that the safer, more accessible, and enjoyable a space feels, the more people will use it, and the safer it will become due to increases in natural surveillance and community stewardship. The tool has been adapted for use all over the globe and endorsed by leading organizations such as UN Women.<sup>1</sup>

## Morash Park WSA

On the evening of November 23rd, 2022, seven people gathered at Morash Park, Dartmouth to conduct the WSA. The group consisted of community members trained in WSA facilitation, residents from the surrounding area, and HRM Public Safety Office staff.

The WSA started in the parking lot adjacent to Morash Park, in front of the pickleball court. We then moved



towards an entrance to the park accessed from Woodlawn Road and walked the perimeter of Morash Pond. We debriefed at our starting point in front of the pickleball court.

It is important to note the conditions, time of day and presence of other people during the WSA as each of these factors impacts how safe and comfortable people feel in a space.

The WSA took place between 6 and 7:30 pm. The conditions were cold, windy, and dark (no daylight). We encountered several other people walking through the park during the assessment.

## Summary of Results

**Morash Park is well loved and frequented by park-goers during daylight hours.** The park is a popular thoroughfare and a place for students to enjoy lunch breaks and take part in citizen-science projects (such as monitoring the wildlife of the pond). The park is also a popular site for folks of all ages to walk, jog, relax and a destination for HRM's ever-growing community of pickleball enthusiasts.

**However, the park can feel isolated and unsafe during the evening, significantly limiting access to this important community asset.** There is potential to increase use, accessibility and enjoyability of this park with some changes to lighting, pathways, and design. Overall, these changes could result in more people coming to the park and staying for longer periods of time throughout the day and into the evening, thereby increasing feelings of safety and benefiting park users and surrounding communities.

**At the end of each WSA, participants share their top three priorities for making the public space safer for all. Participants agreed unanimously that the top three priorities for Morash Park are:**

- **Increased lighting throughout the park**
- **Improved surface and width of paths around the pond and leading into/out of the park**
- **Making the park more accessible for all**

On page 9 of this document, you will find a complete list of potential responses to these priorities, as suggested by participants.

## Key Insights

Below are key insights shared by participants during the WSA organized under the 7 Principles of Design, a foundational framework used in the WSA tool.

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### ***Principle 1: Know Where You Are and Where You Are Going***

***(i.e., signage, signals, orientation)***

#### **Key Insights**

- Street signs are not clearly visible when on the path around Morash Pond, making it difficult to situate oneself in the park (and potentially clearly communicating one's location to emergency responders in the case of an emergency).
  - It is difficult to locate safe, accessible park exits and entrances.
  - There are signs located on the side of the park parallel to Woodlawn Road and near the playground equipment that include important information for wayfinding, including the name of the park, street address, 311 and emergency contact information. Another popular entrance to the park is off Shawinigan Road—this entrance is a significant distance from the other Morash Park signs and so installing a similar sign at this entrance would help people understand where they are and where they are going when accessing the park from this entrance.
  - Participants noted that navigating the park can be difficult, especially for people who visit at night, have limited mobility, impaired vision or are unfamiliar with the area.
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### ***Principle 2: See and Be Seen***

***(i.e., visibility, lighting, hiding places)***

#### **Key Insights**

- Lighting is lacking significantly throughout most of the park. As a result, all participants and facilitators expressed feeling uncomfortable during the assessment. They noted they wouldn't feel safe coming to the park at night, especially if they were alone. Even though we wore headlamps during the assessment, it was difficult to see the path ahead of us and we were caught off-guard by others approaching us. Such limited visibility negatively impacts feelings of safety—being able to see one's surroundings, anticipate interactions with other people and avoid potentially dangerous situations are important factors in safety.

- The stretch of path parallel to Guysborough Avenue is significantly better lit from street lighting and nearby houses and serves as a model for lighting levels throughout the park. Along this stretch, participants felt significantly safer compared to the rest of the park.



*Figure 3: Participants stand on the path on the west side of Morash Pond. This side of the park is significantly better lit than the rest of the park. The lighting in this area could serve as a model for lighting levels in the rest of the park.*

- Morash Park has important recreational amenities, such as a pickleball court, walking path and playground. Yet, because of lack of lighting, participants do not feel safe using these amenities after sunset. At the time of the WSA, the park was dark by 5:00pm, demonstrating limited community access to these affordable recreation options in the fall and winter months.
- The large parking lot between Woodlawn United Church and Morash Park is often used by park and church goers. At the time of the assessment, however, the parking lot was empty, dark, and felt isolated. One of the streetlights in the parking lot was not lit, which contributed further to feelings of lack of safety.



Figure 4: View from the Woodlawn United Church parking lot looking towards the playground, taken during the assessment.

- During the WSA, most leaves had fallen from the trees, so it wasn't possible to assess the impact of foliage on sightlines throughout the park. Participants did note, however, that there is generally sufficient upkeep of foliage in the spring, summer, and fall.
- There is one point along the path surrounding the pond (see red circle on map below) where it is difficult to see what is ahead because of the "s-bend". Participants noted this a spot where special attention should be paid to upkeep of foliage so that sightlines are as clear as possible.

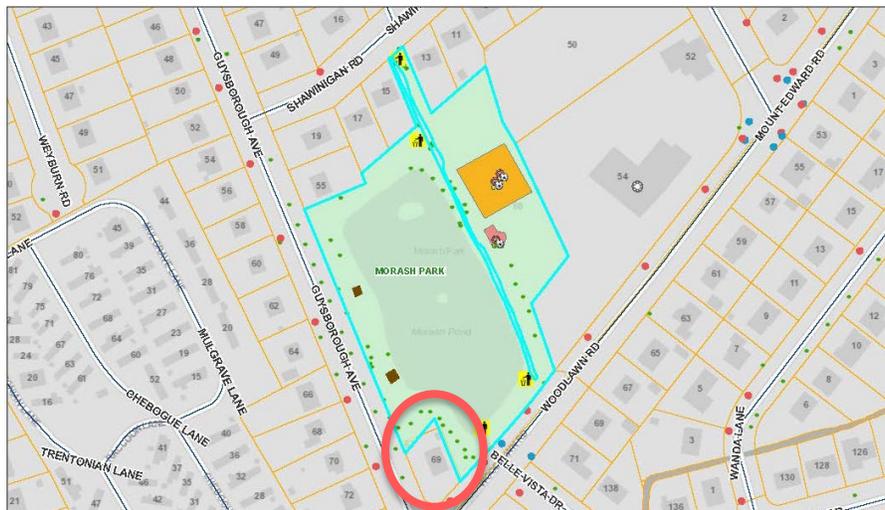


Figure 5: The red circle on this map highlights an area where sightlines are hindered by the natural layout of the space. Special attention should be paid to maintaining foliage in this area to increase visibility as much as possible.

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### ***Principle 3: Hear and be Heard***

***(i.e., rush hour, peak circulation, social use of space, proximity of others)***

#### **Key Insights**

- In some areas of the park, nearby houses are close enough that residents might hear if someone were calling for help. In other areas, particularly along the parking lot and where the park is separated by Woodlawn Road, calls for help would likely not be heard.
- Participants did not know of any emergency services (e.g., alarms, security personnel or crisis telephone) in direct vicinity of the park. During open hours, Woodlawn United Church and nearby houses could be places to go for help.
- Participants noted that it is easy to predict when other people will be using the space: middle school and high school youth spend lunches in the park and cut through to surrounding areas in the mornings and afternoons, staff of nearby childcare centres bring young children to the park for activities, people of all ages use the path around the pond, the pickleball court is a very popular spot during the day and the parking lot is full during church services and events.

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### ***Principle 4: Being Able to Escape and Get Help***

***(i.e., informal and formal surveillance, access to emergency services, multiple route options)***

#### **Key Insights**

- At the time of the assessment, the park felt very isolated. While we encountered several other park users during the WSA, the lack of lighting made it difficult to know how many people were in the space and where they were in proximity to us.
- There are multiple ways to escape the park, however, park topography poses barriers to accessing these routes. Steep hills, uneven paths and unclear entrances and exits are barriers to park users, especially people who have physical disabilities, use mobility devices, strollers, or, for any number of reasons, are not able to scale steep and uneven ground.
- Before the assessment started, two police cars were parked in the church's parking lot. Participants noted that they have seen police cars parked in the lot on other occasions, but that their presence is not predictable. Participants do not know of a community neighbourhood watch program in the area or if security personnel are ever present in the park.

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## ***Principle 5: A Clean and Welcoming Environment***

***(i.e., design, maintenance, management, organization of space)***

### **Key Insights**

- There are many built and natural features that make the park enjoyable: the playground, pickleball court, Morash Pond, trees, bushes, and pleasant landscaping. Participants noted that foliage in Morash Park seems to be sufficiently maintained.
- During heavy rains, paths in the park can become swampy and flooded, making them difficult to navigate. During the winter, ice and snow can make entrances/exits and the walking path around the pond inaccessible.
- There are several garbage cans situated throughout the park, but no receptacles for compost and recycling. Further, participants noted that at some points throughout the year, especially when many people are using the park during lunchtime, garbage cans become full and are not emptied frequently enough.
- There are currently few viable options for locking up bikes. Installing bike racks could make the space more enjoyable for those who need to or would choose to bike to the park, either as a mode of transportation or an activity in and of itself. Secure bike racks also allow people to freely explore the space and stay longer, potentially increasing the presence of people in the park, consequently making the space feel safer.



*Figure 6: A bench sits on top of the hill on the west side of the park (along Guysborough Ave.)*

- Benches and picnic tables in the park are well used and allow people to rest, relax and enjoy the park. Participants noted that installing more and varied seating would support people to stay in the park for longer periods of time, better facilitate activities that already take place and create other recreational opportunities for park users (e.g., picnics or BBQs, playing board games, writing, and any number of activities that require a table surface).
  - Several benches are placed along the ridge of the hills that surround the park and slope down towards the pond. This placement provides enjoyable views into and beyond the park but can also pose safety risks. During the assessment, we encountered a man who had fallen off a bench and tumbled down the hill before hitting the path below. It is important to place benches enough of a distance from the hill so that people, especially those who may have reduced balance or mobility, are able to safely sit and dismount from seating.
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### ***Principle 6: Working Together***

***(i.e., community participation, grassroots involvement, partnerships)***

#### **Key Insights**

- Participants feel that the community generally has a say in decisions made about Morash Park. The involvement of various interest groups in the life of the park, such as the various schools who use the park as part of their activities/teaching, the engaged pickleball community and Woodlawn United Church, offer additional avenues for community input into use and activities in the park.
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### ***Principle 7: Inclusion and Accessibility***

***(i.e., universal accessibility, flexible space, barriers to access)***

#### **Key Insights**

- Access to bathrooms is an issue of inclusion and accessibility. Participants noted the importance of the portable toilet near the pickleball court. Public bathrooms allow all people to feel comfortable travelling to and spending time in a public space. For some people, especially parents with children, people who are pregnant, have recently given birth, or have medical conditions that require frequent bathroom use, the presence of a bathroom can dictate their ability to access a public space.
  - Participants noted that the toilet should be cleaned frequently and be in a well-lit area with open sightlines (not hidden behind any obstructions). If the opportunity ever arises, a permanent public bathroom with plumbing, potable water and a change table would be

an asset to the park and would encourage people to stay and spend time, contributing to overall feelings of safety and community ownership.

- Currently, there appear to be several “desire paths” leading from surrounding streets into the park towards the pond. Desire paths are created by people using the same informal routes repeatedly and offer insight into preferred routes in a space. In Morash Park, these seem to be the only reliable routes to reach the path around the pond. However, the paths are steep, require a great deal of balance to scale and are not graded or surfaced to be accessible to people using mobility devices, wheelchairs, or strollers.
  - Parts of the path around the pond, particularly along the east side (closest to Woodlawn United Church parking lot) are very narrow. Further, both the path around the pond and those leading in and out of the park are uneven in many places. Participants agreed that resurfacing and widening the paths would increase physical accessibility, enjoyability and feelings of safety. Participants also noted that a surface should be chosen that will address these needs while also being mindful of potential environmental impacts on the pond.
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## Proposed Actions

Action	Principle of Design <i>*find more info for each action in the respective “key insights” section above</i>	Outcome
<b>Entrances, exits and paths</b>		
<p>Clearly mark park entrances and exits so visitors know how to safely enter and leave the park. This can be achieved through installing more signage and clearly demarcating entrance/exit points with visible and obvious paths.</p> <p>Signage should also indicate which entrances/exits are wheelchair accessible.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Know where you are and where you’re going</li> <li>• Inclusion and accessibility</li> </ul>	
<p>Formalize “desire paths” throughout the park (i.e., from the playground area down to the pond, two paths leading from Woodlawn Road to the path around the pond and on the hill adjacent to Guysborough Avenue). Widen, grade and re-surface these paths to meet best practices in accessible pedestrian path/trail design.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being able to escape and get help</li> <li>• Inclusion and accessibility</li> </ul>	
<p>Widen and resurface paths around Morash Pond to meet best practices in accessible pedestrian path/trail design.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being able to escape and get help</li> <li>• Inclusion and accessibility</li> </ul>	

<b>Lighting</b>		
Install lighting on the east side of the path around Morash Pond, matching the level of lighting on the west side of the park and creating an evenly lit space.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See and be seen</li> <li>• Know where you are and where you're going</li> <li>• Being able to escape and get help</li> <li>• Inclusion and accessibility</li> </ul>	
Work with Woodlawn United Church to ensure lighting in the parking lot is sufficient and broken lights are fixed in a timely manner.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See and be seen</li> <li>• Know where you are and where you're going</li> <li>• Being able to escape and get help</li> <li>• Inclusion and accessibility</li> </ul>	
Install lighting near playground and pickleball court to extend use into the evening during early spring, late fall and winter, thereby increasing access to these affordable and enjoyable recreation options for individuals, families, and communities in the area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See and be seen</li> <li>• A clean and welcoming environment</li> <li>• Inclusion and accessibility</li> </ul>	
Consider adding alternative forms of lighting/decorative lighting options throughout the park to improve atmosphere and increase enjoyability of the space.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See and be seen</li> <li>• A clean and welcoming environment</li> </ul>	
<b>Maintenance and upkeep</b>		
Install a 3-compartment waste receptacle (garbage, compost, and recycling) to support waste diversion and increase pride and enjoyability of the space.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A clean and welcoming environment</li> </ul>	

<p>Empty garbage cans more frequently during spring, summer and fall when more people are in the park eating and thereby producing more garbage.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A clean and welcoming environment</li> </ul>	
<p>Maintain paths throughout the winter and during heavy rain periods so the park is safe and accessible throughout all seasons.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being able to escape and get help</li> <li>• A clean and welcoming environment</li> <li>• Inclusion and accessibility</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Activating Morash Park</b></p>		
<p>Install more and varied options for seating (i.e., a mix of benches, accessible picnic tables and other creative forms of seating) to increase enjoyability and access to the park, thereby increasing feelings of safety.</p> <p>Also ensure seating is placed a safe distance away from steep drop offs and that some are located close to walking paths so that people of all abilities can safely sit down and get up from the seats and easily access paths down to the pond.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A clean and welcoming environment</li> <li>• Inclusion and accessibility</li> </ul>	
<p>Install bike racks to support those already travelling to and from the park by bike and further position Morash Park as a destination for bike travel.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A clean and welcoming environment</li> </ul>	
<p>Consider making the portable toilet available at the park year-round. This is particularly important if other changes are made to the park that will increase use throughout all seasons, such as</p>	<p>Presence and condition of portable toilet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A clean and welcoming environment</li> <li>• Inclusion and accessibility</li> </ul>	

<p>increased lighting, accessible paths, and further activation of park assets like the pond, playground and pickleball court.</p> <p>Ensure the portable toilet is regularly cleaned and maintained, and positioned where there is good lighting and sightlines.</p>	<p>Position of portable toilet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See and be seen</li> <li>• Hear and be heard</li> <li>• Being able to escape and get help</li> </ul>	
<p>People of many ages, abilities and interests use Morash Park. Because there is already significant activation of this space, particularly in spring, summer and fall, there is a good foundation to build upon for further activation of the park. Holding events, camps, and activities (e.g., pickleball tournaments) improvements to the playground or additions to infrastructure, such as adding outdoor exercise equipment, can increase enjoyment, community ownership and feelings of safety and vibrancy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clean and welcoming environment</li> <li>• Working together</li> </ul>	

