



City of Toronto

Laird In Focus Urban Design Guidelines

Laird In Focus Urban Design Guidelines online:

<https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/planning-development/official-plan-guidelines/design-guidelines/north-york/>

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1.0 Introduction

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Urban Design Guidelines for Laird in Focus will establish a context for coordinated development and are used as a planning tool to ensure appropriate development is consistent with the Official Plan and Site and Area Specific Policy (SASP #568).

The Urban Design Guidelines will also be used as a planning tool to guide standards included in the implementing Zoning By-laws, where one has not been established through the study process, and to evaluate applications for approval of Plans of Subdivision and Site Plan Control.

The Urban Design Guidelines together with the Structure Plan in SASP #568 set out a framework for the creation of a high quality public realm and built form.

1.1 BACKGROUND

Laird in Focus provides a vision and framework as well as recommendations for the redevelopment of properties in proximity to the Laird LRT Station.

Laird in Focus is a comprehensive planning study that builds off the work previously completed through the Eglinton Connects Planning Study, which identified the large format retail parcels on the south side of Eglinton Avenue East as an area to create a finer grained street network to support transit investment near Laird Station. Laird Drive was incorporated into this mixed use vision as part of the study.

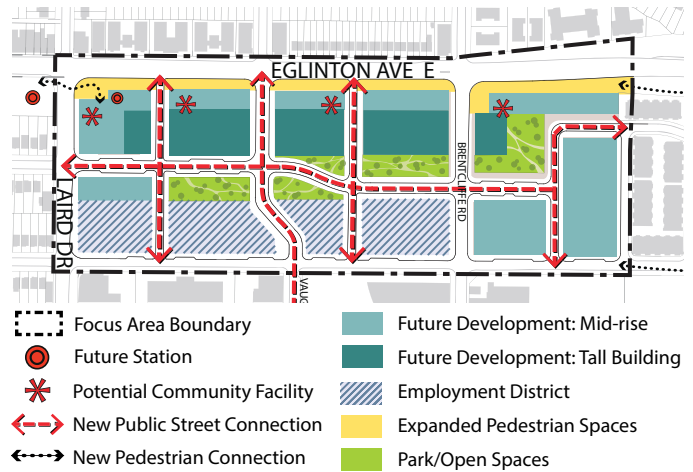
1.2 MANDATE

The Laird in Focus Urban Design Guidelines apply to the entire Site and Area Specific Policy (SASP) area and are to be read in conjunction with the SASP for Laird in Focus. This document provides detailed implementation guidance to ensure development is coordinated and consistent with SASP #568.

This document will provide the public, City staff, members of Council, and the development community, direction on development applications in the area. This document illustrates design principles and demonstrates the vision for the Eglinton Avenue East and Laird Drive areas.

The Laird in Focus Urban Design Guidelines are to be used in conjunction with the other applicable City-wide urban design guidelines. In the event of a conflict, the Laird in Focus Urban Design Guidelines will take precedence in consideration of area specific conditions, opportunities and constraints.

These guidelines acknowledge the land encompasses the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit.



The Laird Focus Area as envisioned from the Eglinton Connects Planning Study.



Eglinton Connects establishes a streetscape vision for the entirety of the new LRT corridor. Laird Drive and Eglinton Avenue East was envisioned to maintain surrounding employment uses and retail activity, while transitioning to a more mixed use community.



The main station entrance will be at the southwest corner of Eglinton Avenue East and Laird Drive, with a secondary entrance located on the southeast corner.

1.3 PLAN AREA

The boundaries of the Laird in Focus Urban Design Guidelines incorporate two focus areas:

Area A is along the south side of Eglinton Avenue East, bounded by Laird Drive to the west, Vanderhoof Avenue to the south, and Aerodrome Crescent to the east. Area A will consist of Mixed Use lands, with Employment uses preserved along Vanderhoof Avenue to integrate with the Leaside Business Park.

Area B incorporates the streetscape along Laird Drive from the LRT station at Eglinton Avenue East south to Millwood Road, and includes all Mixed Use properties along the west side of Laird Drive. This main street links the residential neighbourhood of Leaside to the LRT station at Eglinton.



The LRT transitions above-ground at the portal just east of Brentcliffe Road, and provides expansive views out to the Don Valley Ravine system.



The Laird in Focus boundaries for Area A and Area B, and surrounding context.



The Laird in Focus Area in context, along Eglinton Avenue East looking northwest towards Midtown.

1.4 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Indigenous History

As glaciers retreated at the end of the last Ice Age, the lands comprising Leaside emerged to overlook what is now the Don River Valley. The first peoples to occupy southern Ontario almost 12,500 years ago were bands of early hunters. They pursued migratory game, and lived on the shores of the glacial meltwater lakes in an environment of open spruce forest mixed with tundra. Their camps were often located on the elevated shorelines of these ancient lakes.

By 9000 years ago small bands of hunter gatherers were adapting to changing environmental conditions and moving to take advantage of seasonal resources. A shift toward agriculture led to the development of semi-permanent year-round villages. The sophisticated cultural practices, trade networks and settlement patterns reflect a complex and deep history of occupation by aboriginal peoples in southern Ontario.

First European Settlers

The first European settlement of the area now known as Leaside began in the early 19th century primarily with British settler, John Lea, who purchased land in 1820. Lea's land passed on to his sons, John Jr. and William. William Lea purchased additional land, and established the village of Leaside c1854.



The Todd plan envisaged Laird (named "Harding") Drive as a two sided residential street with the exception of the block south of Wicksteed Avenue.

In 1881, the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) constructed a line across the northern edge of the City of Toronto, purchasing part of the Lea family holdings. In 1894, the CPR constructed Leaside Station, naming it to honour William Lea. Leaside was incorporated as a town in 1913.

Formulation of Leaside and the Todd Plan

Leaside owes its urban structure to the masterplan of one of Canada's first major practicing landscape architects, Frederick Todd. An apprentice of famed landscape architect Fredrick Law Olmsted, Todd came to Canada from Boston to design planned communities for the Canadian National Railway (CNR), notably Montreal's Mount Royal and Surrey, BC's Port Mann.

In 1912 CNR hired Todd to prepare the layout for the future Leaside community and the adjacent employment lands. The plan provided a street network influenced by the Garden City movement: spacious radial tree-lined residential streets, access to green space, and the inclusion of a separated industrial zone to support new residents. Leaside was planned out as a new town, offering public institutions and infrastructure, as well as a range of housing types and densities.

Initially residential development slowly materialized during the first two decades of the 1900s. In 1913 Leaside's population was 43 but with substantial development in the 1930s this number dramatically increased to 6,180 by 1940. Industries were located adjacent to the CPR station with Canadian Wire & Cable Co. arriving in 1912, followed by Durant Motors of Canada Ltd. in 1921 and various other industries before the outbreak of World War II.

The Todd plan envisaged Laird Drive as primarily a two-sided residential street with the exception of the block south of Wicksteed Avenue. By 1924 the full length of Laird Drive had been subdivided with shops and residential uses, with residential primarily making up the heart of Leaside neighbourhood to the west. Industrial uses were confined to large tracts of land east of Laird Drive and south of Soudan Avenue (today's Research Road). The teardrop-shaped block that contains Trace Manes Park was initially subdivided into residential lots, but today serves as one of the main green spaces for Leaside.

Connections to the Town of Leaside had historically been limited. Leslie Street was surveyed to extend northward from the City of Toronto and would have provided an eastward access road for Leaside. However, the topography of the Don Valley interrupted this potential alignment, making Leaside dependent on Bayview Avenue for access from the south. It was not until 1927 that the Millwood Road rail line underpass and bridge were constructed.

After World War 2, the industrial area continued to expand and develop. Roadwork improvements occurred in 1956 by extending Eglinton Avenue across the Don River, which originally ended as a dirt path by the valley. Originally a residential street, Eglinton Avenue East became a high-volume arterial road. Laird Drive as a result became an important north-south access route.

1.5 SURROUNDING CONTEXT

The block structure west of Laird Drive and north of Eglinton Avenue East originates from the Todd Plan and consists of blocks scaled for detached and semi-detached residential dwellings. East of Laird Drive the Todd plan anticipated industrial uses resulting in the larger block structure. The block and street pattern evolved over time responding to the needs of industrial uses as they arose. As a result, the block and street pattern east of Laird Drive is grid-like, compared to the curvilinear Todd design west of Laird Drive.

Directly north of Area A, Eglinton Avenue East is composed of walkup residential apartment buildings and semi-detached residences. Eglinton Avenue East continues eastward opening out to dramatic views of the Don Valley.

Existing building heights are generally between one and three storeys throughout the Focus Areas, with the exception of the northeast corner near the Valley, where residential buildings range in 12-20 storey heights. Recent proposals along Eglinton Avenue East range in heights from 18 to 28 storeys at 939 Eglinton Avenue East, and a proposal with heights up to 38 storeys at 815 Eglinton Avenue East.



1931 Aerial Photograph looking north east at the junction of Laird and McRae drives with the Durant Motor Complex and in the foreground the few houses that had been constructed on the west side of Laird Drive by this date. The aerodrome of 1917 is in the background, north of Wicksteed Avenue. (Rempel)



Laird Drive looking north from Parkhurst Boulevard, 1955. (Salmon, Courtesy of Toronto Public Library)



Leaside Vernacular – A mix of densities, handscaled-masonry, curving streets, and lush, landscaped front gardens.

Laird Drive Character

Laird Drive is characterized by an asymmetrical mix of residential vernacular, small and large-scale commercial retail, encompassing a full range of 20th century architectural styles. This includes smaller scale restaurants and offices, auto bodies and car dealerships. Big box retail formulates the East side of Laird Drive, with Smart Centres Leaside, as well as Leaside Village which includes adaptive reuse of the former locomotive facility for the Canadian Northern Railway.

Newer developments at the Laird and Millwood intersection range in heights from seven to eight storeys. A 7-12 storey mid-rise is proposed integrating the former Durant Motor company building at 146-150 Laird Drive.



150 Laird Drive, the former Durant Motor Company building.



42 Laird Drive



190 Laird Drive, pubs along Laird Drive.



206 Laird Drive. An eclectic mix of architectural styles and uses along the west side of Laird Drive.



Laird Drive at the Millwood Gateway, with an 8 storey mid-rise adjacent to the southern end of the Laird Drive Area B.

1.6 VISION STATEMENT

Development of the lands will support the Eglinton Crosstown Light Rail Transit (LRT) investment and create a transit supportive, complete mixed use community that will integrate with the surrounding area. New forms of development will respect the character of the residential and business contexts, while evolving to meet the needs of future residents and workers.

Development of the lands will:

1. Create a community focus at Eglinton Avenue East and Laird Drive, which includes the Eglinton LRT Station, a public park, community facilities and Privately-Owned Publicly Accessible Spaces (POPS) connected to the surrounding community with an expanded network of streets;
2. Promote Laird Drive as an enhanced main street which connects this new community focus area with the existing Leaside Memorial Gardens and facilities;
3. Develop Eglinton Avenue East as a generously landscaped promenade linking the community focus area at Laird Drive to an accessible West Don River Trail; and
4. Connect Leaside to the West Don River Trail by enhancing Vanderhoof Avenue as a park connector of existing and future parks.



Laird Drive view north at Lea Avenue



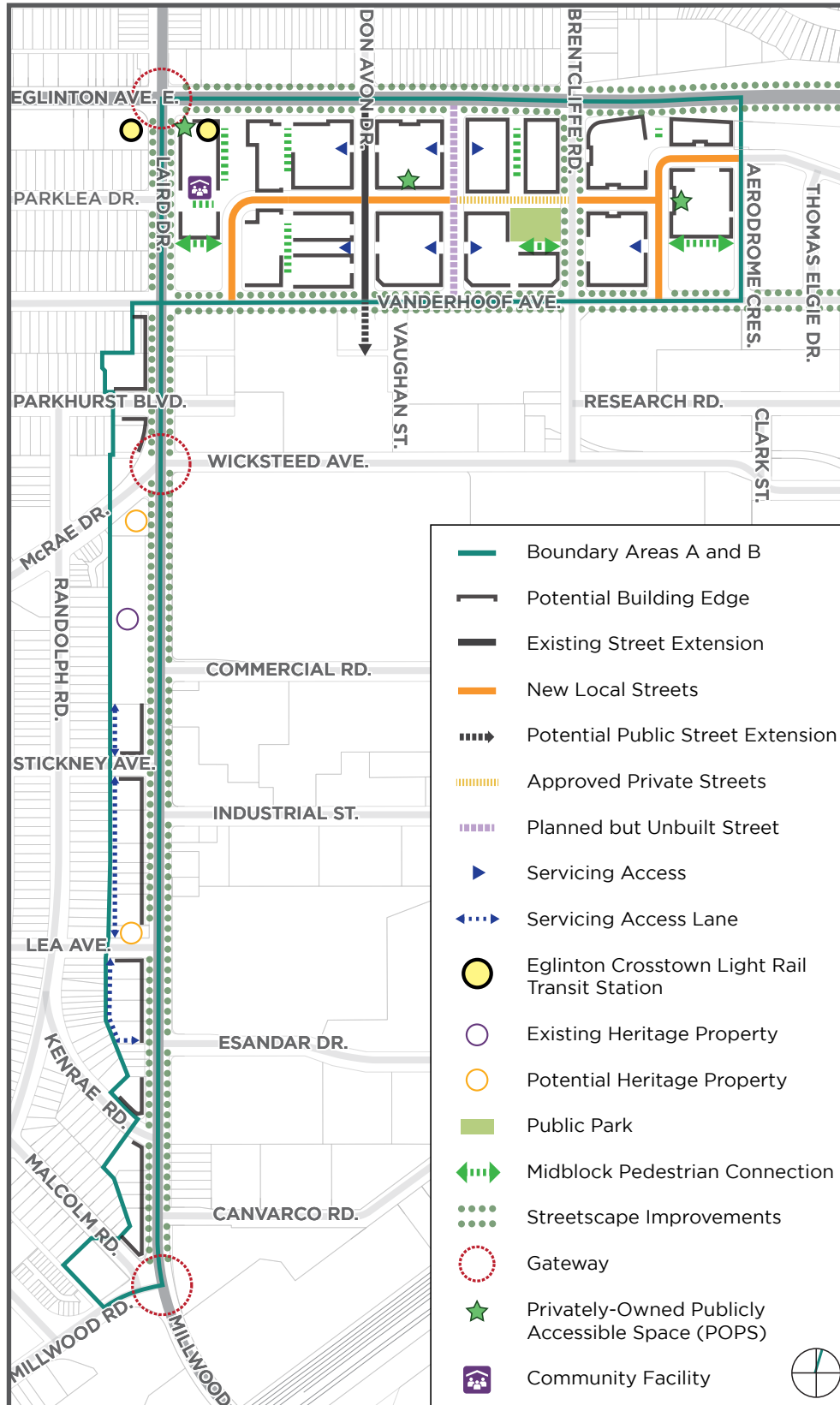
Industrial forms along the east side of Laird Drive.



House forms along Laird Drive, at Esandar Drive.

1.7 STRUCTURE PLAN

The following Structure Plan from SASP #568 describes the overall vision for the physical form and public realm character of the future development for Laird in Focus.



2.0 Demonstration Plan

2.1 Area A - Eglinton Avenue East

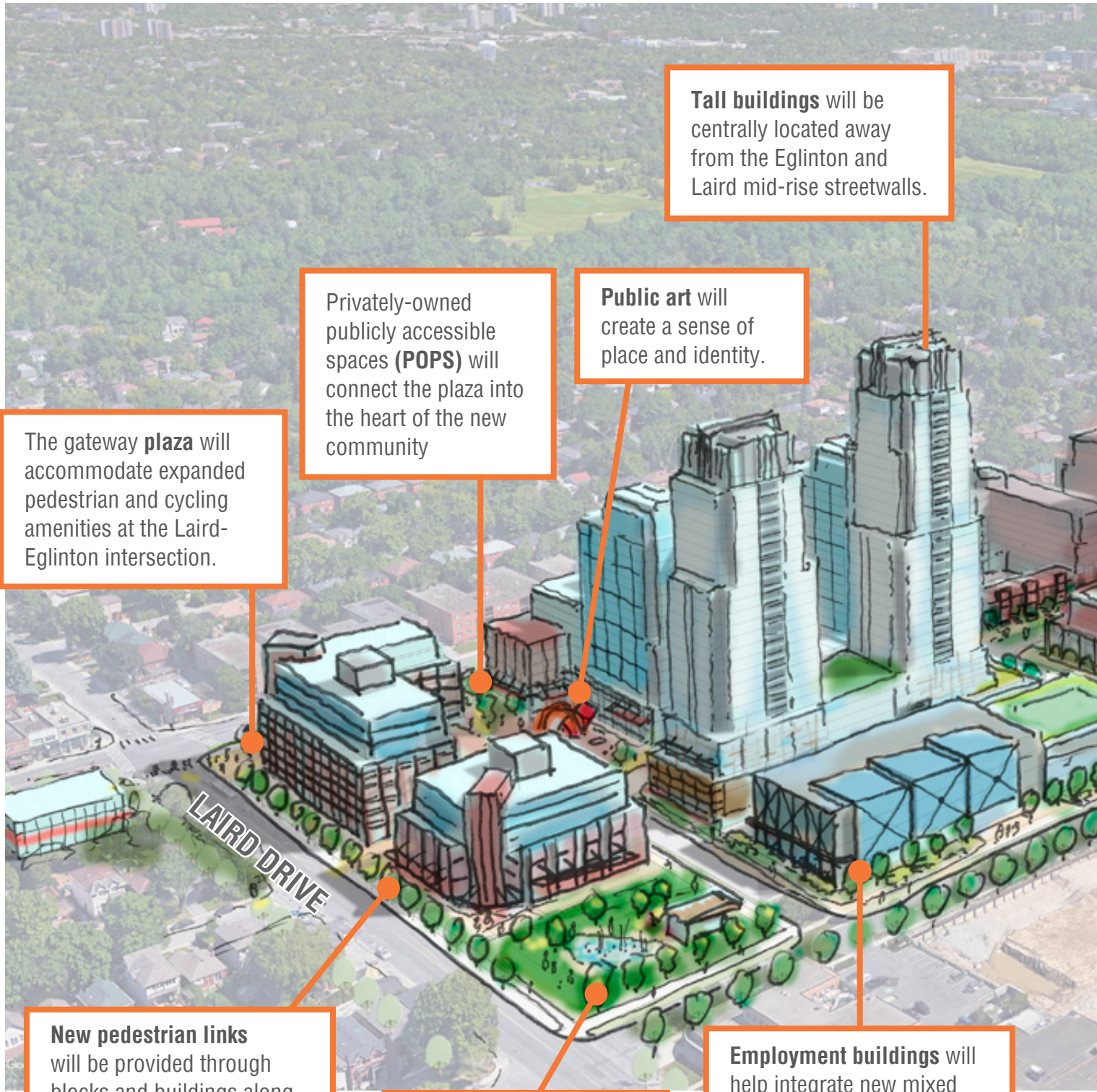
2.2 Area B - Laird Drive

The Demonstration Plan is a conceptual illustration of the Laird in Focus Areas. It shows views at full build-out, with all sites redeveloped, guided by the SASP and the Laird in Focus Urban Design Guidelines.

The first demonstration encompasses the new community of Area A along Eglinton Avenue and will integrate with the adjacent Leaside Business Park to the south. The second demonstration illustrates a view south along Laird Drive's new conceptual main street.

The Demonstration Plan is not a Master Plan. It is presented for illustrative purposes only and is a potential outcome of the guidelines.

2.1 AREA A - EGLINTON AVENUE EAST



Tall buildings will be centrally located away from the Eglinton and Laird mid-rise streetwalls.

Privately-owned publicly accessible spaces (**POPS**) will connect the plaza into the heart of the new community

Public art will create a sense of place and identity.

The gateway **plaza** will accommodate expanded pedestrian and cycling amenities at the Laird-Eglinton intersection.

New pedestrian links will be provided through blocks and buildings along Laird Drive to community amenities.

New public parks will be prominently located to accommodate a range of users and activities.

Employment buildings will help integrate new mixed use blocks with the Leaside business park.