

# Northern District Library Planners in Public Spaces (PiPS) Summary

Yonge-Eglinton Growth, Built Form, and Infrastructure Review

January 19, 2016

3:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Main Floor Program Room, Northern District Toronto Public Library

## Overview

On Tuesday, January 19, 2016, the City of Toronto hosted a Planners in Public Spaces (PiPS) event in the Main Floor Program Room of the Northern District Library. The purpose of the PiPS event was to: raise awareness about the Yonge-Eglinton Growth, Built Form, and Infrastructure Review; share some early work done by the City and its technical consultants, and; seek input related to buildings, landmarks and views; heritage; community infrastructure, and transportation.

The PiPS station event consisted of six display boards arranged in the Main Floor Program Room of the library, each focusing on a different component of the Review. Participants shared feedback by annotating the boards with dots and sticky notes and by speaking with members of the study team. Over the course of an hour and a half, approximately 35 to 40 people stopped to participate in the PiPS event. Andria Salles and Helene Iardas of the City Planning Division attended from the City of Toronto along with Ian Malczewski, Matthew Wheatley, and Ryan Adamson of Swerhun Facilitation. Several people said they planned to visit the project website to provide further feedback and stay up-to-date on the project's progress.

Matthew Wheatley prepared this PiPS Summary and shared it with City Planning staff before finalizing it.

## Summary of feedback

The feedback below is organized into the topics that the City Planning Division invited participants to discuss. These topics include: buildings, landmarks, open spaces and views; heritage; community services and facilities, and; transportation. Participants also shared other feedback and feedback about process.

## Feedback on Buildings, Landmarks and Open Spaces

Participants identified buildings, landmarks and open spaces that they think are important and should be considered through the built form work. Participants also identified some issues and suggested strategies to help improve built form in the area.

### Landmarks & Buildings

**Valued Landmarks.** Buildings that participants said are important and considered landmarks included: North Toronto Memorial Community Centre, Davisville Public School, Eglinton Grand

Theatre, Postal Station K, North Toronto Collegiate Institute, and the Fire Station on Montgomery Avenue (#134). One participant said that the area needs one key landmark/focal point that helps define the area.

**Building Heights.** Participants shared a variety of opinions on building heights in the area. Several participants felt that the area already has too many high-rise buildings, which make the area feel cold and block natural light, other concerns participants identified included:

- Houses and midrise buildings being torn down and replaced with more high-rise buildings;
- New height precedents being set by even taller buildings;
- Reduced livability by clustering towers in one area;
- Creation of wind tunnels between tall buildings; and
- Access for emergency services, especially on the upper floors of high-rises.

Some said they like the tall buildings near the intersection of Yonge Street and Eglinton Avenue West, and feel the tall buildings help to define the area. One participant said that the tallest buildings are useful landmarks, which help people understand where they are in the City.

**Increase the diversity of building design.** Some participants said they would like to see more diversity in the design of buildings in the area. One participant said there are too many glass towers being constructed and they would like to see more diversity in the materials used, such as brick and concrete. Another participant said that buildings should be designed to be more environmentally friendly.

### Open Spaces

**Existing farmers' markets are assets for the community.** Participants identified the farmers' markets at June Rowlands Park and Yonge Street and Montgomery Avenue as valuable open spaces.

**Parks make the area more livable – they should be preserved and expanded.** One participant said there should be a central green space that helps to define the area, similar to High Park in London or Central Park in New York. Some participants said they would like to see more green space and parks in the community, especially for children. One participant suggested putting more green space on the tops of buildings.

## Feedback on Heritage

Participants identified events, institutions, and places they felt were important to the area's built and cultural heritage identity:

**Identified buildings and locations.** Participants identified a number of places including: W.C. O'Brien Building (TTC head office at Yonge and Davisville), Mount Pleasant Theatre, Regent Theatre, Capitol Theatre, 1909 Yonge Street (currently Starbucks), and Postal Station K.

**Preserving the façade is not enough.** One participant said preserving a building's heritage should go beyond simply preserving a small portion of the original building.

## Feedback on Community Infrastructure

Participants identified community services and facilities in the area that they use, as well as services that they felt are missing in the Yonge-Eglinton study area.

**Important existing facilities.** Participants identified several facilities in the area that they feel are important and should be maintained, including: Anne Johnston Health Station, North Toronto Memorial Community Centre, Upper Yonge Village Daycare, and the local schools and libraries.

**Healthcare and wellness.** Some participants felt that the area needs more healthcare services for seniors and young children. One person said that the area is well served for health and wellness and shared that there are several doctors and medical buildings near Yonge and Eglinton.

**Local facilities are very busy and there is a need for more.** Participants said that the area has a number of good schools, libraries, and daycares but they are nearly full and there is a need for more.

**Add more grocery stores.** Some participants said that the area needs more large grocery stores to better serve the current and future residents.

## Feedback about transportation

People identified priority transportation issues / improvements that they would like to see considered in the area, including general improvements, pedestrian and safety improvements, transit improvements, cycling improvements, and parking improvements.

**Traffic flow and signage.** Participants said that the area is congested and requires alternate routes to relieve some of the congestion. One participant said that the City needs to conduct a traffic study for the entire Yonge-Eglinton area to understand the cumulative impacts of development.

Participants also said that better traffic signage, such as the illuminated signs used downtown, would help to improve traffic flow in the area. One participant said the new traffic light at Orchard View Blvd and Yonge Street is great and has helped to improve business for some of the Uptown Yonge BIA's shops; another participant said that this light was a bad idea and makes congestion much worse in the area.

**Pedestrian safety and improvements.** A number of participants provided both general and specific suggestions to help improve the pedestrian environment. Several people said widening sidewalks and increasing building setbacks would make the area safer and more pedestrian

friendly for everyone and especially for people with strollers and accessibility issues. Other specific suggestions included:

- Reduce speed limits on side streets to 30 km/h.
- Increase enforcement at traffic lights; many drivers turn right when they shouldn't be.
- Consider replacing stop signs with traffic lights on Duplex Avenue.
- Find ways to prevent the creation of wind tunnels as they make it very difficult and unsafe for pedestrians, especially people in wheelchairs, to get around.
- Consider putting a scramble intersection in at Yonge St. and Eglinton Ave.
- Coordinate construction to ensure the area is not overrun; high levels of construction make it very difficult for pedestrians, especially those with mobility issues, to get around.
- Explore solutions to address issues related to the high volume of construction hoarding and its impact on the pedestrian environment (including both aesthetic and safety issues). All the construction in the area has created a poor quality pedestrian environment.

**Cycling Improvements.** Some participants said that the area needs better cycling infrastructure and suggested increasing the number of bike lanes. One participant noted that cyclists need more room (wider lanes) in areas where there are steep grade changes.

**Transit.** Several participants said that the buses and the subway are overcrowded. Some said the area is well-served currently but will require increased transit as the population grows. One participant suggested adding express buses on Yonge Street, similar to Mount Pleasant.

**Parking improvements.** Some participants said that the area needs more public parking because it is essential to the success of local businesses. Specific suggestions included:

- Increase the number of parking lots and allow more one-hour parking on side streets.
- Allow parking earlier in the morning on side streets, as early as 9:00 or even 8:30 a.m.
- Allow more valet parking at local businesses.
- Add Green 'P' parking lots in new condo buildings.

## Other feedback

Participants shared other feedback about rental housing, the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB), and development.

**Maintain rental housing.** Some participants said that residents are being displaced by new, expensive condos and more needs to be done to keep affordable rental housing in the area.

**Concerns about the OMB.** A few participants said the OMB often overrides decisions made by the City, which makes it difficult for the City to control how development occurs in the area.

**Ensure developers clean up and repair the area before they leave.** One participant said that developers often leave public streets damaged and the City needs to do more to ensure this is not allowed to happen.

**Process.** Several participants said the PiPS event was a great way to engage the local community.

## Next Steps

City Planning and Swerhun Facilitation thanked people for taking the time to participate and told them this summary of feedback would be posted on the City's website in the coming weeks. The team handed out pieces of paper with the website and encouraged people to learn more and stay involved.