

Toronto Planning Review Panel

Summary of Results from the Toronto Planning Review Panel Meeting held June 10, 2017

Executive Summary

The Planning Review Panel is a representative group of Torontonians, made up of 28 randomly selected Panelists. Panelists have been asked by the Chief Planner, Jennifer Keesmaat, to work together over the course of two years to provide City Planning with informed public input on major planning initiatives. Panelists are tasked with helping to ensure that initiatives are well aligned with the values and priorities of all Torontonians. On June 10th, 2017, the Panel met to discuss two topics: the Bathurst Quay Streetscape and Public Realm Improvement Plan and the Laird in Focus Study.

Bathurst Quay Streetscape and Public Realm Improvement Plan

Panelists concluded that:

- Modest temporary improvements near the Malting Silos could be a worthwhile investment for the City, considering the area acts as a gateway for visitors to Toronto from the airport and has not received as much investment as other parts of the downtown waterfront. The temporary public space improvement project should be approached as a pilot that explores and demonstrates the viability of more permanent uses for the site.
- Parts of the park land near the Malting Silos should continue to be used to mitigate the impact of airport operations. However, current designs may designate more space than is necessary to these uses. By integrating the taxi corral into either the pick/up drop off area in front of the terminal or into the parking lot, the pedestrian route to the 509 Harbourfront streetcar stop could be improved.
- The design vision for public space near the Malting Silos should allow for more flexibility and change over time. This would allow for different uses to be tested as part of a pilot project. Plans to improve the space should focus on enabling different animations through activities like public art installations, potentially drawing on creative ideas from local artists, neighbours, and students.

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Laird in Focus Study

Panelists concluded that:

- The vision should be more specific to the study area and the Leaside neighbourhood. The emerging vision is too general to be useful, and could be used to guide work in any neighbourhood. Instead, the vision should first describe the elements of the study area's existing character that are to be preserved and improved, and how the study will serve different groups, including residents, employees and businesses, and those who travel to the area to shop. Then, it should identify potential improvements that are specific to this area and for these groups of people. The emerging vision should include reference to, for example: the boundary between residential and employment areas, access to and from the Laird Eglinton Crosstown LRT stop, and traffic associated with businesses in the study area.
- The emerging principles should use more precise language and clearly define the local relevance of phrases such as “a high quality, sustainable public realm” and “optimize the use of existing infrastructure” so that these principles will be more useful in decision making.
- The emerging principles for the study should include the following elements:
 - An inviting public realm that attracts nearby residents and visitors to the area, ensures seating and gathering areas that are usable all-year round, incorporates greenery and draws pedestrians to surrounding natural areas and ravines;
 - Urban design that is simple, beautiful, and promotes a shared identity for Leaside;
 - A built form that clearly delineates pedestrian and vehicular uses, and prioritizes pedestrian uses, along Laird Drive and Eglinton Avenue;
 - A finer-grained street network that improves walkability and access to the Laird LRT stop as well as other transit stops;
 - Improved access for trucks into the employment areas without having to pass through the intersection of Laird Drive and Eglinton Avenue;
 - Complete main streets, facilitated by the relocation of parking spaces to more centralized parking facilities; and
 - Infrastructure that prioritizes environmental sustainability, such as using recycled materials and energy to build and power new developments. This could be extended to include using reclaimed materials in local place-making efforts.

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About the June 10, 2017, Meeting of the Planning Review Panel

On June 10, 2017, the Panel met to offer input on the Bathurst Quay Streetscape and Public Realm Improvement Plan and the Laird in Focus Study.

To begin the morning session, panelists were asked to think about parts of the downtown waterfront that are most attractive to Torontonians as well as public amenities that are missing from the downtown waterfront.

After sharing some of these in plenary, Bryan Bowen from the City Planning Division's Waterfront Secretariat presented an overview of the ongoing waterfront revitalization and the Bathurst Quay project. He provided context about the area, which includes Eireann Quay and the Canada Malting Silos and provides access to Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport. Bryan also shared the project's objectives and some ideas to improve Bathurst Quay through hardscaped pedestrian areas with access to Ireland Park, public art or heritage features, and changes to the parking areas and taxi corral.

Gene Cabral, Executive Vice-President of Ports Toronto and Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport, shared some details about the airport's operations and passenger traffic as they relate to the Bathurst Quay neighbourhood. Gene and Bryan also spoke about how Ports Toronto and the City of Toronto are working together to address some of the impacts of the airport on the Bathurst Quay neighbourhood.

After a short break, Panelists were asked to work in groups to answer three questions:

1. These improvements are expected to be replaced within 5-10 years. Preliminary construction cost estimates are between \$3 and \$5 million dollars, with costs shared between the City and Ports Toronto. *Do you believe this is a worthwhile investment for the City to consider? Why or why not?*
2. The current design for this public land includes airport parking and a taxi corral, so that airport-related activities don't spill over into the adjacent community. *Do you believe this arrangement is appropriate, given the benefits of the airport to the city and the impacts on local community? Why or why not?*
3. The current design includes hardscaping, trees, seating and a piece of public art or an interpretive feature. *Do you believe this is the right design approach for this site? If not, explain why, and suggest an alternative vision that would be more beneficial for Torontonians. If you agree with this design approach, please*

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suggest design improvements to - help make this site more attractive to a range of Torontonians.

Each group shared their recommendations in plenary.

After lunch, panelists turned their attention to the Laird in Focus Study. Referring to a copy of Map 2 from the Official Plan, which shows urban structure, Panelists were asked to think about their perspectives and experiences regarding Employment Areas across Toronto. Panelists were specifically asked to consider the value of these lands as places of employment; their sense of place; how people move through them; how they integrate into surrounding areas; and any noticeable changes to these areas. Panelists discussed their experiences in small groups before sharing general themes and notable examples in plenary.

Josh Reis, a Senior Planner in Community Planning, presented an overview of the Laird in Focus study area and goals. He gave details about the existing streetscape and shared feedback provided by the community during recent consultation events.

Connor Turnbull shared her perspective as a resident of Leaside and Co-chair of Leaside Matters, a community group promoting the history and character of Leaside.

Then, Panelists were asked to work in groups to examine the emerging vision statement for the Laird in Focus Study and to suggest ways to improve the statement so that it balances the needs of local residents, local employees and businesses, those who travel through the area, and all Torontonians. Each group then shared their suggestions in plenary.

After examining the emerging vision statement, Panelists focused in on the emerging principles for the Laird in Focus study, splitting into four groups that each considered one of the following topics: Urban Design and Built Form, Public Realm, Transportation, and Infrastructure. Again, Panelists made suggestions about how to improve the emerging principles so that they balance the needs of local residents, local employees and businesses, those who travel through the area, and all Torontonians. Each group shared their recommendations in plenary.

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Detailed Summary of Results

The results of the Panel's discussion are summarized below. Following the meeting, this summary was drafted by the Panel's support staff based on documentation from the meeting and circulated to Panelists for edits and to approve that this summary reflects the broad consensus achieved during their meeting. Panelists were also welcome to submit additional, individual commentary for inclusion in this summary, which would be included under the names of individual Panelists in the subsequent section. No Panelists submitted individual commentary for this summary.

Bathurst Quay Streetscape and Public Realm Improvement Plan

Discussion: Toronto's Downtown Waterfront

Before the project team's presentation, Panelists were asked to think about parts of the downtown waterfront that are most attractive to Torontonians. Panelists suggested that the downtown waterfront is primarily an interesting space to walk or cycle, noting Wave Deck Park and Sugar Beach as some of the attractions along the waterfront trail. Some Panelists identified Harbourfront Centre, Queens Quay Terminal, and the Ferry Terminal as heavily used sites along the downtown waterfront.

Panelists were also asked to think about public amenities that are missing from the downtown waterfront. Most Panelists identified public washrooms and adequate seating options as the major public amenities that are currently missing from the downtown waterfront. Many Panelists also expressed a desire for coffee shops and restaurants along the waterfront, though these may or may not be publicly provided. Several Panelists suggested that there should be more relaxing, natural areas, with an expanded tree canopy where possible. Some Panelists suggested that more activities or programmed areas would be beneficial. A few Panelists identified wayfinding signage, lighting, and parking options as lacking.

Question 1 asked the Panel to consider whether temporary public space improvements at Bathurst Quay were a worthwhile investment for the City to consider.

While many Panelists were in favour of making an investment in public space improvements at Bathurst Quay, they recommended that these investments proceed as a pilot project, rather than as a temporary project that would later need to be removed.

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Panelists were generally cautious about making a large investment, especially given uncertainty about the potential for cost-sharing with Ports Toronto and other competing priorities across the city. They suggested that a pilot project or phased-in approach could make use of more inexpensive improvements, e.g. movable furniture, painted or projected art installations. A pilot project could be used to better understand how different people use the space and could demonstrate the effectiveness of different improvements.

Many Panelists believed it was necessary to make some form of investment in this part of the waterfront because it has not received as much investment in recent years as other parts of the downtown waterfront. Some Panelists noted that Bathurst Quay acts as a gateway to Toronto for those arriving at the airport, and so should be made more welcoming to tourists. Others were keen to see investment that supported the historical preservation of sites on Bathurst Quay.

Question 2 asked the Panel how to balance airport uses and public uses at Bathurst Quay.

Panelists were generally supportive of allocating public land to airport pick-up and drop-off, recognizing the need to improve traffic flow on Eireann Quay and mitigate the impact of the airport on local residents. Some Panelists believed that airport operations should be accommodated because of the benefits to residents across the city. However, the Panel suggested that the proposed designs for the parking areas and taxi corral may designate more space than is necessary to these uses.

Some Panelists suggested that the taxi corral could be integrated into either the passenger pick-up/drop-off area or into the parking lot, instead of having three areas with separate entrances. Others suggested that ridesharing services should be given more consideration and should be able to use areas currently allocated to taxis.

In general, Panelists felt that more space could be allocated to pedestrians and transit riders. Some Panelists suggested that an expanded sidewalk with improved wayfinding would better facilitate pedestrian connections to transit such as the 509 Harbourfront streetcar.

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Question 3 asked the Panel if the design vision, including hardscaping, trees, seating, and a piece of public art or an interpretive feature, was the right approach for the site.

Panelists recommended that the design for the public space near the malting silos should allow for more flexibility and change over time. This would allow for different uses to be tested as part of a pilot project. While Panelists generally welcomed improved paths, seating, and trees, they agreed that efforts to improve the site should focus on enabling different animations through activities like public art installations. Panelists strongly encouraged creative approaches to programming the site, from the simple projection of art onto the silo walls to activities such as rock climbing. A few Panelists suggested inviting local artists, neighbours, and students to help creatively animate the site.

Some Panelists also suggested the following factors should guide the design vision for the public space near the malting silos:

- Ireland Park's prominence should be increased through direct pedestrian connections;
- Hardscaped pathways are a logical choice for the site, particularly from the airport to nearby streetcar stops. However, there are already many hardscaped parts of the downtown waterfront, and softscaping should be incorporated wherever possible; and
- An airport theme should be considered for the site, instead of or in addition to the proposed maritime theme.

Laird in Focus Study

Discussion: Perspectives and Experiences with Employment Areas

Before the project team's presentation, Panelists were provided with copies of Map 2 from the Official Plan, which outlines urban structure, and asked to think about their perspectives and experiences regarding Employment Areas in Toronto.

Though Panelists each had some personal experience working in a couple employment areas, their knowledge of other employment areas was limited. Most Panelists characterized their impression of medium- or low-density employment areas as hostile to pedestrians, often with significant truck traffic for the movement of goods. Many Panelists spoke about the traffic and congestion they experience around employment areas. Some mentioned that they choose routes through lower density employment

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areas when their typical routes are congested. A few Panelists noticed that formerly industrial areas have now become districts for creative industries.

Discussion: Emerging Vision

Several Panelists remarked that the emerging vision was too general to be useful, and seemed to apply to any neighbourhood. For example, while Panelists supported the idea of “a high quality public realm,” they felt that this phrase alone was too vague. Instead, the Panel recommended that the vision should first describe the elements of the study area’s existing character that are to be preserved and improved. Then it should identify potential improvements that are specific to this area. The Panel agreed that the vision should attempt to differentiate between the character of the study area and that of surrounding areas including Bayview Avenue.

Panelists generally agreed that the emerging vision should be more explicit about how the study and plans will serve residents, employees and businesses, and those who travel to the area. Many Panelists also suggested that the vision could select key constituencies to focus on serving.

Panelists also suggested the emerging vision should address:

- An improved boundary between residential and employment areas;
- Those who travel to shop at businesses in the study area. Many of the businesses serve a larger population of residents outside Leaside, who should be considered as a key constituency;
- Access to and from the new Laird Eglinton Crosstown LRT stop; and
- Impacts such as traffic associated with businesses in the study area.

Discussion: Emerging Principles

Each working group made suggestions about content that should be included in the principles, as well as about the wording of the principles themselves.

Public Realm

In response to the emerging principles for the Laird in Focus study, this working group agreed on the following:

- Define what is meant by “a high quality, sustainable public realm”;
- Attract residents and visitors to the area through an inviting public realm that emphasizes the character and heritage of the neighbourhood;
- Ensure that places to gather and sit are usable all-year round;

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- Incorporate greenery into the public realm; and
- Use complete streets to draw pedestrians to the natural areas and ravines across the employment areas.

Urban Design and Built Form

In response to the emerging principles for the Laird in Focus study, this working group agreed on the following:

- *Urban Design:*
 - Strive for a simple, beautiful urban design that promotes a shared visual identity for Leaside;
 - Separate the principle about “a mix of uses and densities” into two principles – one about uses and one about densities, with specific goals for each; and
 - Clarify whether the principle stating that “Eglinton and Laird will be welcoming and unifying corridors for the existing and future adjacent communities” refers to communities adjacent to the main streets within Leaside, or those adjacent to but outside Leaside.
- *Built Form:*
 - Prioritize pedestrians along Laird Drive and Eglinton Avenue. The built form should clearly delineate pedestrian and vehicular uses, and should provide visual cues about how pedestrians can stop and interact with it; and
 - Replace the principle stating that buildings should include “animated street frontages” with more specific text focused on pedestrians. This principle could be rewritten as “Varied, dynamic street frontage along Laird should encourage a range of active pedestrian interactions.”

Transportation

In response to the emerging principles for the Laird in Focus study, this working group agreed on the following:

- Prioritize a finer grained street network in order to improve walkability, including through shorter walking distances between businesses and the Laird LRT stop;
- Consider ways to improve truck access from both the south and the east directly into the employment areas, without having to pass through the intersection of Laird Drive and Eglinton Avenue. A more direct road through these employment areas may also supplement Laird Drive’s function as an alternative to Bayview Avenue and the Don Valley Parkway if overall traffic increases; and

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- Support complete streets by moving on-street and ad hoc parking spaces away from the major roads, potentially to a central public parking facility contained in the employment areas.

Infrastructure

In response to the emerging principles for the Laird in Focus study, this working group agreed on the following:

- Prioritize and encourage sustainability when planning new infrastructure. This could include using renewable or recycled materials in new construction, or using excess heat, waste, and energy from industrial uses to power new developments;
- Clarify what “optimize the use of existing infrastructure” means for the study area; and
- Consider creative funding tools for new servicing infrastructure, such as incentives for developers, businesses, and the Business Improvement Area.