

ConsumersNext: Planning for People and Business at Sheppard and Victoria Park

Project Launch – Community Meeting 1 Summary



Participants Listening to the Overview Presentation

Prepared for the City of Toronto by Swerhun Facilitation

July 15, 2015

MEETING OVERVIEW

On June 24, 2015, the City of Toronto hosted the ConsumersNext Project Launch from 5:30 – 8:30pm at the Radisson Hotel Toronto East Banquet Hall, 55 Hallcrown Place. Approximately 130 people participated in the Project Launch, including residents, employees from businesses located in the Study Area, commercial land owners and commercial brokers. Councillors Shelly Carroll and Norm Kelly also attended and provided welcoming remarks.

This was the first of four community meetings that will be held over the first three phases of the study. The purpose of the Project Launch was to hear from local employers, employees and residents about what is working well and what could be improved within the Study Area.



Study Process Graphic

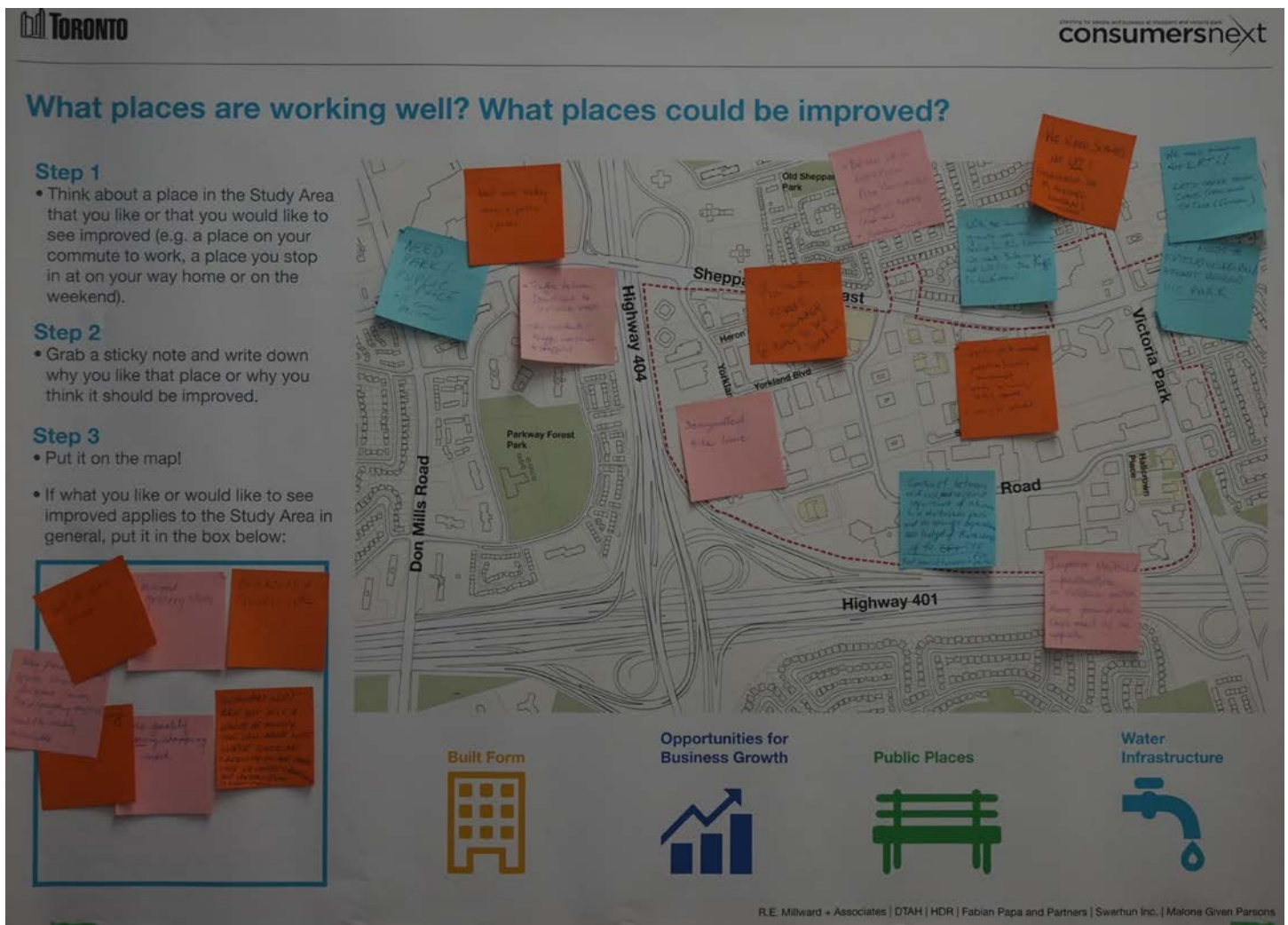
ConsumersNext is focused on six building blocks: Public Places, Transportation Choices, Built Form, Opportunities for Business Growth, Community Services and Facilities, and Water Infrastructure. A summary of each building block was shared during an overview presentation and at six interactive stations. Participants were asked to visit each of the six stations to provide their views through conversations with study team members, and in writing on sticky notes posted to interactive display panels and/or on comment forms.

This summary was written by Swerhun Facilitation, an independent facilitation firm that is part of the R.E. Millward & Associates-led consultant team. This report is not intended to provide a verbatim transcript of the meeting but instead provides a high level summary of the views provided by participants.

If you have any questions about this summary, please contact Steve Forrester, Senior Planner, Community Planning, City of Toronto, by email (sforrest@toronto.ca) or by phone (416-395-7126).

OVERALL OBSERVATIONS

1. **Attendees represented a broad range of interests**, including residents from neighbourhoods adjacent to the Business Park, employees who work in the Business Park and commercial land owners and brokers who own and lease properties within the Business Park.
2. **The Transportation Choices building block station attracted the greatest level of interest**, with several participants providing views on the poor pedestrian environment, traffic congestion and infiltration, and higher-order transit on Sheppard Avenue.
3. **Several participants provided views that wove multiple building blocks together**. For example, some participants felt that placing buildings closer to the street and providing space for retail and services (built form) would create a more pleasant streetscape (public places) and more places to walk to, providing a better pedestrian environment and reducing car use (transportation choices).
4. **Most of the input provided by participants was not place-specific with the exception of the Transportation Choices building block** where a large portion of input related to automobile use was related to specific intersections and/or streets.



Interactive Display Panel with Participant Comments on What Places are Working Well and What Places Could be Improved

DETAILED SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

The detailed summary of feedback below is based on the views of participants shared through conversations with study team members and in writing on sticky notes posted to interactive display panels and/or on comment forms. It has been organized according to the six building blocks.

Public Places

Parks and Open Space

There is a need for additional public parks and open spaces within the Study Area – not just privately owned, publicly-accessible spaces (POPS). Some felt that if new parks and open spaces were to be provided through POPS, they should be located/designed so that they are welcoming to the public. Others were concerned about security issues resulting from current public use of privately-owned open spaces.

A number of new park locations were suggested by participants. There was a suggestion that the open space in front of 30 Heron's Hill Way should be used as a community park. It was also suggested that new parks could be created along Sheppard Avenue and in front of Fairview Mall at the northeast corner of Sheppard and Don Mills.

Parks and open spaces should be located and designed to accommodate a range of users and uses. They should be located conveniently to both residents and businesses and designed to accommodate a number of different uses/programs, like outdoor movies in summer and ice skating in the winter.

Streetscapes

Existing and new pedestrian space would benefit from more frequently placed street furniture, including seating and trash/recycling receptacles, and better, bolder wayfinding signage at easily visible locations. Street furniture and signage would help draw people to walk to and within the Business Park.

Participants singled out opportunities to improve public space along Sheppard and Victoria Park. They suggested that the intersection of Victoria Park and Sheppard could be improved by eliminating overhead wiring and improving lighting and that there is an opportunity to transform Sheppard into a great street.

Transportation Choices

Several participants felt that moving people through the area should be the main priority of the study and that considerations of transit, traffic and parking go hand-in-hand with intensification.

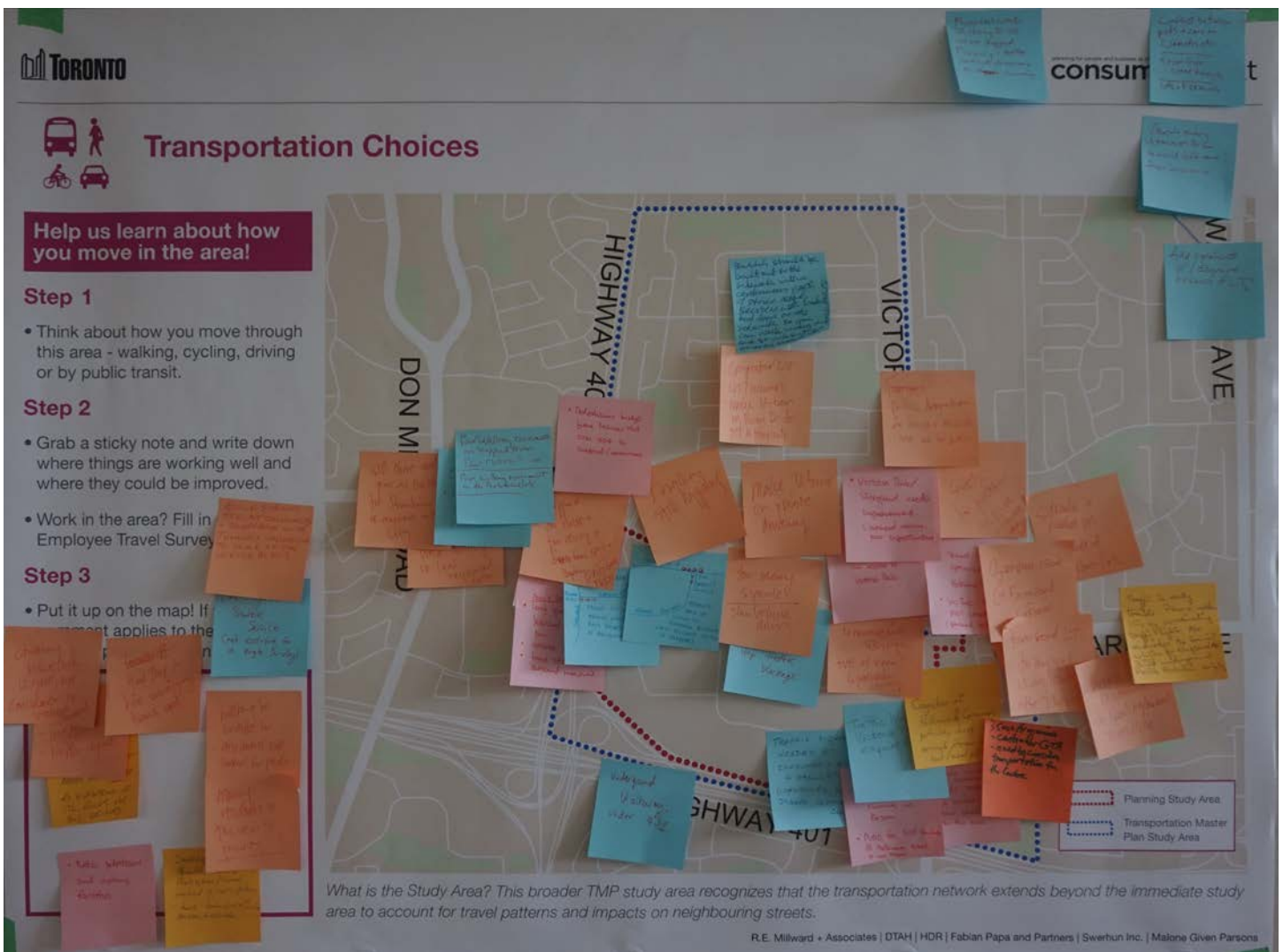
Pedestrians

Several participants felt that there was a poor pedestrian environment in the Study Area with few walkable areas and amenities to walk to. A lack of pedestrian safety was also highlighted, especially safety issues for seniors and children. There is a need to improve the sidewalk on the east side of Victoria Park Avenue.

Sheppard Avenue in particular has a very poor pedestrian environment and several participants said they avoid walking there because of how noisy and dusty it is as a result of the high volumes of automobile traffic.

Several participants also indicated that the walk from Don Mills Station to the Business Park and area is challenging – the sidewalk along Sheppard Avenue is very narrow and increasingly busy where it crosses over Highway 404. There is little to no separation between fast-moving cars and pedestrians, and there is poor snow clearing/storage on the Highway 404 overpass that makes the sidewalk inaccessible after a snowfall.

Consider improving pedestrian infrastructure at the 400 series highways to make it easier and safer for pedestrians to access the Business Park and area.



Interactive Display Panel with Participant Comments on Transportation Choices

Cycling

A few participants felt that there is a need for better cycling facilities in the Study Area.

Some of these participants felt that it is important to ensure that ease of automobile movement is taken into consideration when planning bike lanes.

Transit

There was a range of views on the merits of adding transit services. Some felt that adding transit would help ease traffic congestion. Others felt that transit is inefficient and too greatly impacts traffic.

Some felt that transit access is adequate during weekday rush hours but could be improved after 6pm and on weekends (during rush hour the 24B Victoria Park route connects with Don Mills Station, but outside of rush hour, a transfer is required at Sheppard and Victoria Park and this greatly expands transit time). It was suggested that buses should run on Brian Drive.

Several participants weighed in on the planned higher order transit along Sheppard Avenue, with some expressing concern whether the planned new transit infrastructure would provide maximum benefit to the Study Area. Nearly all of the participants who provided their views on this planned higher order transit expressed their preference for a subway over Light Rail Transit (LRT).

Reasons given included:

- An LRT may not have the capacity to handle the projected density of residential units along Sheppard.
- A subway would be more convenient for accessing downtown.
- LRTs could further disrupt an already congested segment of Sheppard Avenue.

Some felt that if an LRT is built, it should be underground at least until Victoria Park Avenue.

Private vehicles

Several participants felt that both Sheppard and Victoria Park are very congested and that this congestion is even worse when there are accidents on the adjacent highways.

There was a range of views on the merits of adding additional traffic signals. Some felt that too many signals slow vehicles down. Others felt that additional traffic signals would benefit both cars and pedestrians and that negative impacts could be minimized by coordinating signal timing.

Participants identified a number of specific areas where improvements to the road network could be made to help alleviate congestion:

- There are long queues on Yorkland Road to exit the Business Park in the pm peak.
- Participants recommended a number of locations for new traffic signals.
- Line ups at the Tim Hortons at Heron's Hill Way block residents exiting Heron's Hill Way to Sheppard Avenue and result in traffic backing up along Sheppard Avenue East, affecting bus service. Heron's Hill Way is also congested by business motorists using the street during rush hour to access and exit the Business Park.

- The entrance and exit to the Enbridge parking lot is dangerous for cars turning left from the parking lot onto Consumers Road. Consider providing access from the parking lot directly to Victoria Park Avenue.
- The intersection of Farmcrest Drive, Consumers Road and Victoria Park is usually congested after 2:30pm as a result of its proximity to the 401 on-ramps.
- The intersection of Hallcrown Place and Consumers Road is used by both employees and for drop-off and pick-up by the private school, resulting in congestion during the morning and afternoon peak periods as school pick up and drop off at the school coincides with rush hour.
- The proposed 32-storey building at the southeast corner of Sheppard and Pharmacy has been designed with a driveway exiting onto Pharmacy Road. Some expressed concerns about the traffic impact of this development proposal.

Several participants were concerned about traffic infiltration into residential neighbourhoods. Brian Drive was mentioned repeatedly with participants noting that they had observed cars avoiding the congested left turn from Consumers Road onto Sheppard Avenue by driving north from Consumers Road across Sheppard Avenue to Brian Drive, then making a U-turn to head back south to make a right turn onto Sheppard Avenue.



Participants Engaged in a Discussion at a Display Panel

Built Form

Height and Design

There was a range of views on building heights. Some would like to see more mid-rise residential along the avenues (Sheppard and Victoria Park). Others would like to see taller buildings.

Several participants felt that new buildings should be built out to the sidewalk with a continuous wall of retail, services and restaurants on the ground floor with large windows and doors fronting the sidewalk and minimal obstructions (e.g. planters and columns). These participants felt that this would help make the area more walkable by providing a more pleasant walking environment and places to walk to.

Encourage rooftop gardens on all new buildings that can be used by employees and residents. The 401 Richmond building downtown was mentioned as a good example of a building providing an accessible rooftop garden.

Uses

Several participants would like to see a greater amount of retail and services within the Study Area, including coffee shops, stores, restaurants (not just fast food and sandwich restaurants), grocery stores and childcares.

These participants felt that a greater amount of retail and services within walking distance would provide many benefits, including reducing the need to drive and thus lessening traffic in the area, helping attract and retain younger employees, allowing employees to stay in the area over lunch and longer after work and making the area more self-sufficient.

A few participants provided comments on existing retail uses in the Study Area, noting that future design for retail in mixed-use buildings needs to be more inviting than in the recently occupied buildings on Sheppard Avenue East. They would also like to see the supermarkets and all retail on the east side of Victoria Park remain as is, as the walkability in this area is considered adequate.

Community Services and Facilities

Several participants emphasized the role that the existing 'non-employment' uses play in the Study Area (such as the schools and community cultural centres). In addition to these facilities, participants noted that they also use the Pleasant View Arena, the school east of Victoria Park, and local libraries and parks. There was interest in better understanding the extent to which residents of high rises that contain swimming pools, exercise equipment and other recreational facilities use local community centres.

Several participants felt that new community centres, schools, libraries, childcare facilities and clinics may have to be built to accommodate the increased residential population. They also would like to see additional spaces for seniors' clubs, non-profit organizations and residents to run activities, meetings, events, etc., and that the community services and facilities are family-friendly.

Opportunities for Business Growth

Several participants mentioned that brownouts occur far too often in the Business Park, with one building experiencing 52 brownouts in the previous year. In some cases these issues have affected the ability to lease office spaces. It was suggested that above-ground electrical lines in the area need to be upgraded.

Improving pedestrian access and amenities within the Business Park is important for attracting and retaining businesses.

Sustainable buildings can be important for attracting business, however participants also noted this may be challenging in this area as sustainable buildings typically require higher rents to justify the costs.

Some felt that residential growth could help attract/sustain local retail businesses. Others felt that it would be important to compare the potential rental costs/revenue requirements of local retail businesses with the disposable incomes of residents in the Study Area to ensure that there is a market for local retail.

Water Infrastructure

There is a lack of water pressure within the Study Area, to the east of Victoria Park and to the west of the Don Valley Parkway.

There are occasional flooding issues near the Enbridge building at Consumers Road and Victoria Park.

NEXT STEPS

Phase 1 of ConsumersNext (background and existing conditions analysis) will be informed by the participant input from the Project Launch. A second community meeting – a Visioning Workshop – will be held in late September 2015. The two remaining community meetings will be held in subsequent phases of the study, one to test and confirm design alternatives and another to review the draft study recommendations.



Participants and Study Team Members Engaged in Discussions