

Toronto Planning Review Panel

Summary of Results from the Toronto Planning Review Panel Meeting held April 22, 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 April 22, 2017, the Panel met to discuss two topics: the development of the Don Mills Crossing Study Area, and the proposed changes to the University of Toronto St. George Campus Secondary Plan.

Don Mills Crossing Study

The Panel was asked to identify essential planning ingredients to include in order for Don Mills Crossing to thrive, as well as planning pitfalls to avoid when planning for the Don Mills Crossing Area. The Panel suggested that, for the Don Mills Crossing area to thrive, there needs to be:

- A mix of retail space that is matched to the needs of residents and workers in the community;
- Support for local businesses, art, and placemaking initiatives that highlight and strengthen the area's unique character;
- An appropriate, human scale for buildings along roads, such as mid-rises along the street and taller building behind them;
- Sufficient parking near the Don Mills & Eglinton intersection, designed so that it doesn't negatively impact the quality of the public realm, in addition to sufficient parking at a walking distance from the Ontario Science Centre and other attractions for those coming from elsewhere;
- Sufficient space for community services and facilities, particularly near low-income areas, located directly adjacent to transit stops. There should also be central facilities adjacent to the LRT stop;
- A well-designed network of side streets and bypasses that provides options for traffic flow;
- A well-integrated system of trails, pedestrian walkways, and bike lanes;

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- An active, diverse, and welcoming streetscape that encourages pedestrians to walk and linger;
- A large natural area that feels removed from traffic, is accessible to all, and can be used all year round; and
- A dense tree canopy that provides shade, shelter and respite from noise and traffic.

The Panel also suggested that, for the Don Mills Crossing area to thrive, planners need to avoid:

- Planning retail sites and facilities that lack pedestrian routes that work for families, older people, and people with disabilities;
- Creating non-intuitive pedestrian paths with poor wayfinding;
- Allowing for a poorly integrated mix of building uses and sizes;
- Designing streets with isolated, poorly integrated, or incomplete routes for active modes of transportation;
- A retail centre of big box and luxury stores;
- Expensive and high-maintenance gardens and outdoor areas, when resilient indigenous plants could be used instead;
- Parks that are too small for high-density areas, or designed without accounting for different user groups, and therefore create conflicts between different users.

University of Toronto St. George Campus:

The Panel was asked to brainstormed features and benefits of the University of Toronto St. George Campus and surrounding area that are important to a range of Torontonians. The following core features emerged from the Panel's deliberations as important to Torontonians:

- The area's character as a space for learning, notable due to the cluster of related institutional uses and the design of outdoor space that distinguishes the area as one of contemplation;
- The area's historic character;
- The area's parks and greenspace;
- The area's walkability and pedestrian network;
- The area's transit accessibility.

The Panel made the following recommendation with regard to how to update the University of Toronto St. George Campus Secondary Plan:

- Focus on maintaining and enhancing historic and educational character;

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- Density and height can be increased in principle, if historic and educational character is protected and good design choices are made;
- Approach retail and other private partnerships cautiously, as these could undermine educational character;
- Ensure the Secondary Plan helps implement the recommendations of U of T's Wecheehetowin Report about how the university should respond to the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

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About the April 22, 2017, Meeting of the Planning Review Panel

On April 22, 2017, the Panel met to offer input on the Don Mills Crossing Study and the University of Toronto St. George Campus Secondary Plan. Panelists participated in a learning session about Indigenous people and Toronto, led by educators and consultants Giidaakunadaad (Nancy) Rowe and Kevin Best. Nancy and Kevin spent the morning speaking with the Panel for 2.5 hours about the history of Indigenous people in this area and across the Americas, the rights of Indigenous people, and some of the steps that would be required for these rights to be properly respected by the City of Toronto.

After lunch, panelists turned their attention to the Don Mills Crossing Study. To warm up, panelists were asked to think about their favourite places in the city, and what makes each one significant. Panelists discussed their favourite places in small groups before sharing general themes and notable examples in plenary.

Then Christian Ventresca from the Don Mills Crossing Study team presented an overview of the study and the planning process. He provided context about the area's history, the community's needs, and the study's goals.

Following Christian's presentation, Panelists were asked to work in groups to identify short lists of 'planning ingredients' that they believe are essential in order for Don Mills Crossing to thrive, along with short lists of 'planning shortfalls' that they believe need to be avoided in order for Don Mills Crossing to thrive. Panelists split into four groups that each considered one of the following topics: Parks and Community Facilities, Streets and Trails, Public Realm, and Built Form and Land Uses. Each group shared their recommendations in plenary.

Following the conversations on the Don Mills Crossing Study, Panelists turned to the University of Toronto St. George Campus Secondary Plan. To warm up, Panelists were asked to think about the St. George campus and the area nearby, and to share one or two valuable features or benefits of this area for different Torontonians. After sharing some of these features in plenary, the Panel heard a presentation from Paul Johnson, Planner, Community Planning, who introduced the current plan and explained, in broad strokes, the updates to the U of T St. George Campus Secondary Plan that had been proposed by the University and were now being studied by the City Planning Division.

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Following Paul's presentation, Panelists were asked to work in small groups to add to their list of features and benefits important to different Torontonians, and then to offer recommendations on how an updated Plan can protect or enhance the features or benefits that they think are most important to Torontonians.

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 is included under the names of individual Panelists in the subsequent section.

Don Mills Crossing Study

Discussion: Favourite Places in Toronto

Before the project team's presentation, Panelists were asked to think about their favourite places in Toronto and consider what made each one great.

Discussion: Essential planning ingredients to include in order for Don Mills Crossing to thrive, and Planning Pitfalls to avoid when planning for the Don Mills Crossing Area

Within four small working groups, panelists agreed on the following:

Built Form and Land Uses

This working group agreed on three 'Planning Ingredients' that are essential for Don Mills Crossing to thrive:

1. There needs to be a good match between the type & mix of retail space and the demographics of residents & workers. There should also be a mix of retail space sizes and uses so that most products or services that local residents and

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- workers need are within walking distance: the Stockyards at St. Clair and Keele are an example of a neighbourhood where this is successfully accomplished.
2. There needs to be well-integrated and sufficient parking available for those driving to the area to access transit or come to work, but it should not come at the expense of a welcoming, pedestrian friendly public realm.
 3. There needs to be sufficient space allocated for non-profit organizations, charities, and community facilities and recreation. These spaces should be located closer to lower income areas and not necessarily right at Eglinton and Don Mills, and could be built into new developments. The group felt that Regent Park is a good example of a community where there are sufficient and well-located community spaces.

This working group agreed on two 'Planning Pitfalls' that need to be avoided for Don Mills Crossing to thrive:

1. Don Mills Crossing should avoid becoming a place without accessible pedestrian routes to retail and amenities, especially for seniors and people with disabilities. Gerrard Square is an example of where this pitfall has been successfully avoided.
2. Don Mills Crossing should avoid becoming a place where there is a mix of uses and sizes, but they are poorly integrated. The area just north of the Yonge and Sheppard is an example of this pitfall.

Street and Trails

This working group agreed on three 'Planning Ingredients' that are essential for Don Mills Crossing to thrive:

1. The neighbourhood needs to be maintained as a convenient destination for visitors who drive to the area from further away to visit the Ontario Science Centre and other attractions. Parking needs to be conveniently located and a short walk to their destination. Ripley's Aquarium, where sufficient parking is only a 10 minute walk away, is a good example of a place where this is done well.
2. It should be possible and attractive to walk everywhere in the neighbourhood. Changing between modes of transportation should be easy; the different modes (walking, cycling, transit, driving) should be well integrated rather than highly segregated. Roncesvalles is an example of a street that is walkable and where different modes of transportation are well integrated.
3. There need to be options for traffic flow through the area, in case there are accidents or major congestion on a major route, or else it will become a bottleneck. A network of side streets and bypasses needs to be in place so cars

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move through the path of least resistance during busy hours. The intersections of Yonge and York Mills, and Yonge and Lawrence are good examples of places where this is done well, while Kennedy and Steeles is an example where there aren't enough alternative routes.

This working group agreed on two 'Planning Pitfalls' that need to be avoided for Don Mills Crossing to thrive:

1. Don Mills Crossing should avoid becoming a place with non-intuitive and inaccessible pedestrian paths, where poor sidewalk & walkway design and unhelpful signage inhibits pedestrian movement. The Old Mill Inn is an example of this pitfall.
2. Don Mills Crossing should avoid becoming a place where active transportation routes are available but poorly designed. When it comes to designing routes for active transportation, do it right or don't do it at all. The Sherbourne St. biking lane is an example of where the design can actually discourage cycling on that route.

Public Realm

This working group agreed on four 'Planning Ingredients' that are essential for Don Mills Crossing to thrive:

1. The local community's unique character should be featured and strengthened through support for distinctive locally-owned businesses, public art, and other placemaking efforts like street names that reflect the people who live there. The murals around Underpass Park are an example of where this is done well.
2. Flexible and multi use public spaces need to be incorporated in the area.
3. The streetscape should be welcoming, active, and encourage more pedestrian use and more lingering. This can be done through wider sidewalks, planters, designated playspaces, seating, patios, and sustainable natural features along sidewalks. John St. is an example where this is being explored.
4. There needs to be appropriate, human scale for buildings along roads, with mid rises along the street and taller building in the back. Properties shouldn't be built right up to the edge of property lines, so there is some space between buildings and the street, without being very spread out.

This working group agreed on one 'Planning Pitfall' that need to be avoided for Don Mills Crossing to thrive:

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1. Don Mills Crossing should avoid becoming a place with big box and luxury stores. Shops at Don Mills already caters to that retail experience, creating a certain type of community feel. The Crossing should offer something different when it comes to the public realm.

Parks and Community Facilities

This working group agreed on three 'Planning Ingredients' that are essential for Don Mills Crossing to thrive:

1. There needs to be a large natural area that feels removed from car traffic, is usable all year round, encourages both active and passive use, and is accessible for Indigenous spiritual practices. Corktown Common and the Don Valley Brick Works Park are examples of spaces where this is done well.
2. Community facilities need to be immediately adjacent to a transit stop in order to eliminate car-dependence. Ideally a central community facility would have direct underground access to the new LRT stop, while other facilities could be spread along other transit routes in the community. Regent Park, Parkway Forest are attractive facilities that aren't located right adjacent to a transit stop, while the planned East City YMCA does have direct access to transit.
3. There needs to be a dense tree canopy that provides shade, shelter, and respite from noise and traffic, both on streets and in parks. Cabbagetown, Palmerston Boulevard, and Riverdale Farm are good examples of where this is done well.

This working group agreed on three 'Planning Pitfalls' that need to be avoided for Don Mills Crossing to thrive:

1. Don Mills Crossing should avoid becoming a place with high-maintenance gardens and outdoor areas, where resilient indigenous plant species are overlooked in favour of more expensive ones. Franklin's Children Garden in the Toronto Island Park is an example of where this potential pitfall has been avoided through the use of resilient indigenous plant species.
2. Don Mills Crossing should avoid becoming a place where parks are either over- or under-programmed. Park landscapes should not be designed for very specific and narrow uses, nor should they be too minimalist and sparse. Regent Park and Dufferin Grove are examples of parks that strike a good balance.
3. Don Mills Crossing should avoid becoming a place where a dense population and scarce park space causes conflicts between different users. Specifically, unfenced off-leash areas for dogs should not be located near other park users for

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a number of reasons, including feelings of safety. Trinity Bellwoods is an example of a park where this is not done well enough.

Feedback on Proposed Changes to the University of Toronto St. George Campus Secondary Plan

Panelists identified features and benefits that should be protected or enhanced, which have been combined into five key features and benefits. Though Panelists were asked to consider whether the feature would be enhanced, protected, or put at risk under the proposed changes, for the most part panel members concluded that, based on the presentation, they did not have enough information to come to a sound conclusion in this regard.

Educational Character - Panelists identified the area's academic character as an important feature for Torontonians that should be protected. This educational character was seen as beneficial because it improved the local workforce, generated good jobs, fostered personal improvement, and enhanced public space. Two particular elements were noted: the area has a cluster of related institutional uses (University, research, healthcare, etc.), which strengthens this educational character; and the design of outdoor space in the area distinguishes the area as one for learning and contemplation, separated from the day-to-day bustle of the surrounding downtown. Some panelists suggested that the proposed changes could enhance the educational character of the area by increasing the level of educational (and related) activities in the area.

Historic Character - Panelists identified the area's historic character as an important feature that needs to be protected. They valued the area's iconic buildings, such as Hart House, University and Trinity College, as well as other elements that complemented this historic feel, such the formerly residential houses along St. George that are part of Innis College. Panelists also valued the vistas into and out of the campus that highlight historic features.

Parks and Greenspace - Panelists generally agreed that the area's green space and parks were important features that benefit Torontonians. These natural spaces complemented the educational and historic character of the area, and were useful for both quiet, contemplative uses, as well as active recreational use. Some panelists felt that the area's green space could be at risk under the proposed changes.

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Walkability and Pedestrian Network - Panelists generally agreed that the network of walking paths into and through the area's courtyards, streets, and green spaces is an important feature that should be protected. Some panelists felt that the existing pathways and connections in the area could be at risk under the proposed changes, while others thought that based on the presentation they heard, it was unclear what the plan's effect would be on this feature.

Transit Accessibility - Panelists identified the area's connections to subway lines and other transit routes as an important feature that should be protected. Panelists thought it was unlikely that this would be put at risk by the proposed changes.

Based on the features and benefits that Panelists identified as most important for Torontonians, they shared the following recommendations on how the proposed change could protect or enhance them:

1) Focus on Maintaining & Enhancing Historic and Educational Character

Panelists generally agreed that the Secondary Plan should maintain and enhance the historic and educational character of the area. Panelists were generally opposed to removal of historic structures, the reduction of green space and pedestrian pathways, or to constructing buildings that took away from this historic character. They generally support change that maintained or enhanced the feeling of being on a thriving university campus centred around student life; enhancing pedestrian movement was generally seen as a good way to enhance this feeling.

2) Density and height can be increased in principle, if historic and educational character is protected and good design choices are made.

Panelists generally agreed that density and building height in the area could be increased, if done carefully, without damaging the historic and educational character of the area. Many felt this could potentially enhance the educational character of the area and increase the overall benefit that the University creates for Toronto. That said, some panelists worried about the impact of overly high buildings, which they felt had a higher risk of hurting the area's historic character and its aesthetic appeal, or of very modern architecture, like that of the ROM. Some panelists also noted that feelings of safety for pedestrians should be protected by ensuring good sightlines throughout the area.

3) Approach retail and other private partnerships cautiously, as these could undermine the academic character of the space.

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Commercialization efforts and partnerships with private corporations should be approached cautiously, as they could be a threat to the historic character of the area. Some panelists thought street life could be enhanced for students (and others) by carefully introducing better-placed cafes and restaurants that focused on serving students. Some saw new office space as beneficial, if their use was linked to the educational character of the area. Residential development for non-students was generally not seen as complementary to the character of the area.

4) Ensure the Secondary Plan helps implement the recommendations of U of T's Wecheehetowin Report about the university should respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

The Secondary Plan should align with and help the University implement the 34 recommendations in the Wecheehetowin Report, many of which focus on making physical changes on campus, including the creation of better, dedicated Indigenous space on campus.

Some Panelists also made the following recommendations:

- Given the potential of the plan to increase activity and density in the area, there should be more thought given to improving the interactions between cars, pedestrians, and cyclists, especially along St. George St.
- Environmental sustainability should be given greater consideration in the Plan.
- The Plan should conform to City Planning categories, rather than creating new terminology, to ensure clarity and consistency.
- Students, and other local communities, should be consulted to ensure their needs and perspectives are reflected in the Secondary Plan.