

GOLDEN MILE SECONDARY PLAN STUDY

Golden
MILE

FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY

COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE STUDY

This is a summary of the two Golden Mile Community Infrastructure Study focus group sessions written by Alexandra McDonough of the Canadian Urban Institute. It is intended to capture the main themes and outcomes of the discussion and is not intended to be a verbatim transcript. This report was circulated for comment and one clarification was received. For more information, please contact Alex at amcdonough@canurb.org.

Background & Session Overview

On Thursday, September 21, 2017, the Canadian Urban Institute hosted two focus group sessions for the Golden Mile Secondary Plan (GMSP) Study's Community Infrastructure Study. Two options for timing and location were offered. Both sessions included the same presentation and discussion questions. One session was held at 10am at McGregor Park Community Centre and the other was held at 2pm at the Victoria Park Hub.

The purpose of the focus group was to involve human service agencies located in the study area to gather input on existing conditions, challenges and opportunities related to delivering programs and services. Twenty participants from community organizations delivering human services in the community attended the sessions. Alex McDonough from the Canadian Urban Institute (CUI) provided a presentation outlining the study, the purpose of the sessions and some key demographic information to inform the discussion. This was followed by a roundtable discussion facilitated by Jeff Evenson from CUI. The discussion focused on the following questions:

Current conditions:

1. What is working well about your space/location right now? (accessibility, transit, co-location, comfort, etc.)
2. What challenges or barriers do you feel are affecting service delivery in the Golden Mile study area?

Growth:

3. How do you currently plan for growth and change? (For instance, what data do you use and what is your methodology?)
4. How do you think population growth will affect service and space needs in the Golden Mile study area?

Opportunities:

5. What changes to your space would help you deliver programs? (Ideas could include relocation, renovation, expansion, and co-location).
6. What services are ideally co-located? (E.g. adult literacy and child care; older adult day programs and children's drop-in)
7. What data would help you?
8. Any other advice?

See Attachment A for the Agenda.

Key Messages

The following key messages have been distilled from the feedback at the sessions. They are numbered here for ease of reference and are not intended to indicate importance.

What's working well for Community Infrastructure

1. Human service agencies are working collaboratively to deliver services through hubs, partnerships and colocation.
2. Many programs and services are being delivered in existing community spaces to improve access and reduce space requirements (e.g. public health services in schools, newcomer services in TCHC buildings).
3. Service and program provision increasingly reflect the community (e.g. diversity of staff and translators).
4. There is a robust network of community agencies and grassroots organizations that can be built on.
5. The Victoria Park Hub is seen as a successful example of program and service delivery as well as partnership and co-location.

Community Infrastructure Challenges

1. Space, in terms of both amount and access, is the main barrier for human service agencies operating in the area. In particular, youth and seniors' spaces were flagged as being inadequate and/or outdated.
2. Lack of timely data on the demographics of incoming populations makes it difficult for human service agencies to plan for growth.
3. Physical and financial access to transit, and mobility in general are barriers to accessing community services.

Planning for Growth

1. Planning for growth is a challenge for many human service agencies due to limited resources and/or information.

Opportunities to Explore

Several opportunities were suggested to improve and facilitate partnerships and develop innovative ways of accessing space and delivering programs and services:

1. Commercial community kitchens are needed in the area for newcomers to develop business opportunities.
2. Community recreation facilities, particularly space for youth activities, are currently at capacity in the area.
3. Expand the Victoria Park Hub to offer more space, services and programs under one roof.
4. Streamline access to school space.
5. Provide a space for residents to incubate their own ideas and co-work.
6. Create community gardens for community and health programming.

Detailed Summary of Discussion

1. Current Conditions

Many agencies are working collaboratively with partnerships and co-locations already in place.

What's working well

- Many agencies are already partnering to deliver programs and services; many through co-location.
- TESS has found that partnering is working well. Increasingly, partnerships are also colocations. They have excess space due to a decline in cases in recent years and have shared their space with partners.
- There is existing social infrastructure in the community led by resident groups.
- The Victoria Park Hub is a great model with many services in one location. There are lots of partnerships there and the space is maximized. It is currently operating at capacity.

Challenges

There were several common challenges raised by participants including insufficient or inaccessible space, barriers to transit and financial instability. Other challenges included language barriers and the need for translators, especially with the influx of Syrian newcomers into the area.

Inadequate, Inaccessible and Insufficient Space

A large focus of discussion was space. Many raised concerns about space being limited, inaccessible or inadequate. There is a general need for more space. Due to space constraints, some agencies had to split programs amongst different locations and unable to accommodate students because there is insufficient space to do so. Outdated spaces were a concern for some. Some participants said that their current space was not enough to meet their daily program needs resulting in less community participation in programs and services. Some said they don't have much space for their own operations, so they deliver programs in existing spaces run by others. Some don't advertise programs because their space can't accommodate more people and others can't hire more people because they don't have space for additional offices.

The following types of spaces were highlighted as needs:

- Office space: There often isn't enough space to sufficiently support the team and carryout the programs needed, specifically meeting rooms.
- Recreational space: Participants mentioned a lack of facilities such as a gymnasiums and community centers. Indoor swimming pools were raised as a void in the area.
- Youth space: Recreational space was also mentioned with reference to youth programs in particular, saying that these programs are often full. Youth 13-18 need a double-gym and if it is school space, it is important that the school is located within the community to ensure access (O'Connor and Victoria Village communities in particular).
- Commercial community kitchens were raised as being critically important for Syrian newcomers in particular.
- Green space
- Libraries

- Child-care space
- Space for mental health programs
- Flexible space that could be used for confidential conversations
- A social innovation space for residents to incubate their own ideas and co-work. Linking opportunities for pop-up markets, subsidized commercial space for locally owned small businesses.
- Evening space for programs - The Victoria Park Hub was seen as a very successful space but a concern was raised over its limited availability in the evenings due to funding and staffing constraints. It is currently only open on Wednesday and Thursday evenings and as a result, the Hub is turning down programs.
- Need appropriate space. For example, having adults using small furniture in child care facilities does not work.

Access and Mobility

Access was discussed in terms of financial means and mobility. Some agencies were concerned that there wasn't accessible transit near their locations while others try to go where people are to reduce barriers. Their clients often need to take several buses to reach their location which presented a barrier, particularly for those who couldn't walk and lower income community members. TPH indicated that even by providing tokens, bussing is a barrier for some. Others felt that their location was in a prime spot allowing ease of access to residents of the community. Parking was also raised as being a common challenge for agency staff and clients.

Financial Instability

Unstable financial resources was a shared area of concern. Some participants said that their organization lacked space and resources as a result of minimal funding. Other concerns related to funding included the increasing costs of rent. ANC mentioned that many of their itinerant partners (small organization like breastfeeding organizations, Flemingdon Health Centre) aren't able to access permanent spaces due to limited funding.

Other Challenges

- Community safety (gang violence)
- Trend in recent years with economy doing well the EI caseload has been declining (from 105 000 to 80 000 cases for the city). This means that people on assistance have been on for a longer period of time meaning that the labour market is more distant and they are more in need of more intensive services.
- Employment
- Newcomer integration
- Language is a barrier but agencies are getting better at having diverse staff and translators
- Agency catchments are a problem but flexibility is improving
- Conflict of uses – for example gym/multipurpose room where youth group floor hockey and basketball take place can cause conflicts because day care use of kitchen and gym.
- Concerns related to redevelopment including loss of employment, displacement of current residents
- Homelessness within the community.

2. Growth

Planning for growth is a challenge for many human service agencies due to limited resources and/or information.

The challenge of planning for growth

Many participants found it difficult to plan for growth when “band-aid”, often temporary solutions are used to solve problems. Others described growth not being a factor in their planning because space and financial resources often remain the same. For example, TCHC doesn’t have many new units coming on line and there isn’t much turnover in terms of tenants. Their waiting list may be 12 or 15 years already so growth doesn’t impact their planning too much.

Need for Data

Several participants indicated that the lack of timely data on the demographics of incoming populations makes it difficult for human service agencies to plan for growth. They need current demographic data to effectively adapt their programs and facilities to serve the needs of the community. Although the data they have (Census data) helps provide long-term trends, participants expressed that current data on an annual basis is necessary to help assess needs and where the needs are located. Often, by the time they receive data, it is already outdated.

Some agencies use service user data to assess needs and where they are, and to understand trends in immigration and settlement. For example, with Syrian newcomers they were able to plan as the situation unfolded.

Some use City Planning development use pipeline data to understand new developments and EQAO data from schools to help understand education needs.

One participant suggested that Economic Development should work closer with partners to share what is in the development pipeline to help agencies develop socially and culturally appropriate services such as Muslim friendly services, acquiring halal food, preparing for language barriers and more.

Changing local needs

Participants noted change in a few population groups including the aging/senior population and the influx of Syrian immigrants. The Salvation Army noted that their clients increased from 150 to 300 a month with the influx of Syrian newcomers. They also needed to adapt their services quickly including providing Muslim friendly services, halal food (which is hard to find in food banks), and addressing language barriers. TPH noted that they were able to scale up fairly quickly to address Syrian newcomers, but would like to be able to plan a year in advance for similar situations.

Participants noted that Eglinton Square functions like a community hub for seniors and suggested there could be another room in the mall to have more space for them to congregate in addition to the food court. It’s not about providing services there, but about a space to hang out for mall walking in the morning and as a general meeting place.

3. Opportunities

Many organizations are already co-locating to deliver programs services in partnership. Several opportunities were suggested to improve and facilitate partnerships and develop innovative ways of accessing space and delivering programs and services.

- One opportunity exists to streamline access to school space for partnerships and program delivery. Currently, agencies find accessing school space a challenge and haven't figured out how to make the best use of school space but recognize that it is an important resource.
- There is a need for space for residents to incubate their own ideas as well as co-working opportunities, social innovation space (linked to pop up markets), and commercial space for locally owned business.
- There were suggestions for community gardens to be considered as innovative counselling spaces and space for art/photography therapy.
- Commercial community kitchens were seen as an important and necessary space for bringing communities together. This would provide space for training and programming and create economic development opportunities through food entrepreneurship. Regent Park's community kitchen was cited as an example. Specific requirements include a commercial stove, freezer, triple sink, and separate sink for handwashing.
- TCH wanted to see a one-stop-shopping opportunity – a hub - where residents could access recreation (including soccer/football field domed in winter), rooms for dance, arts, doctors, library, school, youth programs attached to employment programs, even a small grocery store.
- TCH accesses Seneca and Centennial College space now. There are more opportunities for community agencies to partner with these institutions in creative ways to access space.
- TESS has some available space due to a decrease in caseloads that it is sharing with Ontario Disability and Support Program. They also have some minor colocations with TPH, TPL, Shelters on site. There is an opportunity for sustained colocation with TESS here as well as an opportunity to have child care offered in this space.
- There's an opportunity for the City to provide current data on an annual basis to help agencies assess needs and where the needs are located. (E.g. Economic Development should work closer with partners to share what is in the development pipeline)

Next Steps

Following the focus groups, the presentation and human services map was circulated to participants. No additional feedback was received. A human services survey was also circulated to participants and the wider Golden Mile human services agency contact list to collect more detailed information about space needs for agencies.

Based on comments and suggested changes to the map received at the sessions, the human services map has been updated and will be incorporated into the Community Infrastructure Study.

The challenges and opportunities raised in the discussions and survey will inform the development of the existing conditions of community infrastructure in the study area and the opportunities identified in the Community Infrastructure Study.

ATTACHMENT A: Agenda

- 0:00** **Welcome, Introductions & Agenda Review**
Jeff Evenson, Canadian Urban Institute
- 0:10** **Golden Mile Community Infrastructure Study Presentation**
Alex McDonough, CUI
- 0:25** **Questions of Clarification**
- 0:35** **Roundtable Discussion #1: Current Conditions**
1. What is working well about your space/location right now? (accessibility, transit, co-location, comfort, etc.)
 2. What challenges or barriers do you feel are affecting service delivery in the Golden Mile study area?
- Plenary**
- 1:00** **Roundtable Discussion #2: Growth**
3. How do you currently plan for growth and change? (For instance, what data do you use and what is your methodology?)
 4. How do you think population growth will affect service and space needs in the Golden Mile study area?
- Plenary**
- 1:25** **Roundtable Discussion #3: Opportunities**
5. What changes to your space would help you deliver programs? (Ideas could include relocation, renovation, expansion, and co-location).
 6. What services are ideally co-located? (E.g. adult literacy and child care; older adult day programs and children's drop-in)
 7. What data would help you?
 8. Any other advice?
- Plenary**
- 1:50** **Wrap-up and Next Steps**
- 2:00** **Adjourn**