

Design Charrette_Summary_FINAL

A Design Charrette for the Bloor West Village Avenue Study was held on Saturday April 8th 2017 at the Runnymede United Church. Over 40 participants contributed their thoughts throughout the day. The purpose of the charrette was to engage the community in exploring potential built form and public realm futures for the Bloor West Village study area. The results of the charrette will inform the development of options to explore in Phase 2.

A. Charrette Process

The charrette was organized into three main parts: Introduction, Planning and Design Exercises, and Synthesis Exercise. The Introduction included a presentation that provided an overview of the Avenue study process, benefits of redevelopment, and the existing conditions, and rules of the charrette.

Following the presentation were four planning and design exercises at separate stations situated around the venue. The purpose of these exercises was to provide education to all participants about the issues and offer the opportunity to explore options. Each exercise was led by a Consultant Team member with support by City of Toronto Staff. Participants worked at each station for 30 minutes then rotated to the next, so that they had the opportunity to discuss each part of the study area. Three of the stations related to built form and placemaking specific to different segments of the study area (West Village/Main Street, Main Street/East Village, and High Park Frontage). The fourth station related to street design where participants were asked to consider mobility alongside placemaking.

In the afternoon, participants were asked to join one of three teams who over 60 minutes developed an overall composite plan that was informed by the discussions in the morning and to consider the main subjects of Placemaking, Built Form and Streets. Each group then reported back in plenary format the key moves and recommendations.

B. Key Messages from the Charrette

- Most participants provided support to protect and respect the lower scale and fine grain nature of the Village Main Street; provide lower streetwall heights to better fit new development with the prevailing existing context in the Village Main Street character area.
- Participants strongly supported the small independent retail that currently exists along much of the Main Street but also recognize the need for new businesses.
- Most participants understood that the few larger redevelopment sites provided opportunities to introduce new public spaces on Bloor Street West and to improve place-making.
- Many participants supported adding midblock connections and open spaces to better connect to existing parks and parking lots, and to make more corners for outdoor seating. Related to this is the introduction of more space between buildings, particularly around High Park.
- Most participants acknowledged that greater height is possible outside of the Village Main Street Character Area if site conditions permit, and to adjust density on site with greater step backs and lower streetwall height to achieve a more attractive built form
- For the High Park frontage, there were differing opinions on maximum height –some participants felt that if the bulk of a mid-rise building is set to the back of the site then max mid-rise height is acceptable – others felt that a consistent street wall should be avoided and density could be concentrated into tall buildings – located to not block views from the apartment neighbourhood.
- Many participants expressed an interest in a varied built form edge
- Some participants expressed that recent development activity is part of an emerging context and is also important to consider
- Several participants expressed the need to respect the unique qualities of the High Park frontage:
 - » provide deeper landscape setbacks relating to the existing residential front yards on Bloor and side streets
 - » locate taller building forms back from the streetwall
 - » ensure that new development has no negative impacts on the sensitive High Park environment, above and below grade
- General support for re-balancing the available space in the Bloor Street right-of-way to improve placemaking, mobility and greening, with specific suggestions to improve safety and operations in the Kingsway/Jane segment
- Several participants supported the removal of the Avenues overlay from the High Park Frontage and Humber Gateway segments given that they are Neighbourhoods and Apartment Neighbourhoods not Mixed Use Areas so as not to confuse where intensification is and is not anticipated.

C. Summary - Built Form and Placemaking Exercises

Character Areas: West Village/Main Street

This part of the study area is in transition. Built form includes the two larger Old Mill developments, the proposed redevelopment of the Humber Cinema, a subway station, the gas station, an office commercial plaza, two larger office buildings, a 4 storey apartment building, and a number of more traditional main street scaled mixed use buildings.

Discussion

a. Parks and Open Space

- Participants mentioned that open space and art would be helpful at Bloor and Riverview Gardens intersection, specifically at the corner of the gas station site (closest to intersection), with another suggestion for art related to Humber River/ Ravine

b. Built Form

- Participants expressed a strong desire for the low scale of the character area to be reinforced within this Avenue study
- Many participants stated that in the Main Street Area a 2-3 storey streetwall would relate to the existing character of Bloor Street West, and that the streetwall should be a physical step-back not just a material change. Some participants suggested that it should relate to or happen at a common height that relates to adjacent built form and not to the “as-of-right”(14m). Also suggested that perhaps revised zoning could apply this datum line rule as BWV goes through redevelopment.
- Participants suggested that the Humber Odeon Site could accept greater height but perhaps in a different form, with the tallest portions stepping down towards Jane Street, and serve as a view terminus. Others suggested that a greater setback from Riverview Gardens would be better.
- 30m (tallest height) at Riverview Gardens and stepping down to Jane Street
- Participants suggested that the gas station could accept greater height than existing in the range of 6-8 storeys, while others suggested stepping down in height from the Medical Office Building towards the South Kingsway.
- Most participants noted that whatever the height, a fine grained frontage to shops is preferred.

c. Land Use

- Participants suggested that some select larger format retail in the West Village (ie. Outside BWV character area) could happen. One member believes that the Humber Odeon site should have a grocery site – the participant does not have a car and No Frills is too far

Character Areas: Main Street/East Village

This part of the study area includes a designated heritage building, potential heritage quality buildings, larger residential apartments, and sites that have already redeveloped or are under construction. Buildings includes the Runnymede Library, LCBO, No Frills, recently approved and under construction developments, larger apartment buildings, and larger more recent developments (Ellis Park Road and Seniors Complex). Buildings for the most part are built to the property line or boulevard setback. The subway corridor runs to the rear of the study area with Runnymede and High Park Stations serving higher order transit to this part of the Avenue. On top of the subway is predominately green space and parking lots. The study area slopes dramatically towards High Park from Glendonwyne.

Discussion

a. Parks and Open Space

- Participants agreed that there is a great opportunity to add a village green or civic plaza within larger potential development sites. In this part of the study area the LCBO and No Frills sites are the clear redevelopment opportunities.
- Suggestion that the City purchase parking lots for public space and include places for recreation
- Strong support to protect and enhance view corridors to lake from the No Frills parking lot
- Suggestions to consider sun access, skyview and shading in winter as well as the rest of year
- Participants supported bigger sidewalks where possible

b. Built Form

- Participants suggested that new development should consider the corners, and to provide setbacks on side streets to create interesting spaces and next to heritage buildings with new built form relationship to Library.
- Strong preference for fine grained development that respects the existing context
- Suggestion to put greater height in rear of sites not on streets
- Suggestion that additions to existing buildings are a form of intensification
- Suggestion to perhaps consider height in exchange for greater setbacks
- 7-8 storeys max
- Suggestions to introduce stepbacks at 2 to 3 storeys for pedestrian perception of the streetwall
- Suggestion to establish a 3-storey gable line
- Suggestions to consider mechanical penthouses in overall height

c. Land Use

- Suggestion to change the Official Plan to protect main streets like Bloor West Village from growth
- Suggestion that affordable housing is needed

- Suggestion to Limit the scale and size of individual retail shops, and to define the max width of retail storefronts
- Suggestion to retain grocery stores on the street. One participant noted that when the IGA left foot traffic dropped elsewhere.
- Suggestion to maintain the core main street at the same heights and allow, higher densities at the ends
- Suggestion to establish maximum lots sizes
- Suggestion to not change the permitted densities from what they are now, and provide lower densities in the Village from other parts

Character Area: High Park Frontage

This part of the study area is unique in that it has development on one side and High Park on the other. Built form is predominantly residential with some commercial at grade in buildings 2-4 storeys in height. Buildings are mostly house form or walk up apartments. This character area also includes two larger recent developments: Daniels High Park and the High Park. Buildings are for the most part setback from the street with front and side yards. The subway corridor runs to the rear of the study area with High Park and Keele Stations serving higher order transit to this part of the Avenue. On top of the subway is predominately green space except for where it becomes open at grade. Given that a great number of comments were provided regarding natural heritage protection in this character area, please find those key messages in section E: Natural Heritage

Discussion

a. Parks and Open Space

- Most participants agreed this character area was different from the others and should present a green frontage with front yards set back from the street with trees and other planting
- Some participants suggested green fingers extending from Bloor Street West into the Apartment Neighbourhood, achieved through building separation and setbacks along the side streets
- Some would like to see mixed use in front of High Park –some want no mixed use (light pollution from the Rabba)
- Some participants recommended building guidelines to address light and noise pollution
- Some participants suggested that future development not include basements so as not to interfere with groundwater movement
- Suggestion that bird friendly monitoring take place for all buildings fronting the park
- Suggestion that more detailed requirements for root zone health for street trees are required

b. Built Form

- Those who supported redevelopment did not have an issue with the as-of-right height (23m) or greater if done well.
- Some suggested that extra height was justified due to being along subway corridor, with a 25-30 storey limit deemed appropriate.

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- Others suggested that 5 storeys was a better height that related to the existing context and tree canopy height in High Park
 - Some suggested that it was more a question of density that height
 - Some commented that if no shadow or overlook issues, then unsure why limit height. Others suggest at minimum apply a 45° angular plane from park to define limits of taller forms.
 - Those who did not support redevelopment stated this part of Bloor Street West should not be an Avenue or area for intensification, and that midrise was too high.
 - Many noted that High Park Avenue is a gateway to the park and should receive special attention
 - gateway features
 - Many participants felt that the street wall of the Daniels building is too close to the street and too high. All new buildings should include a set back and additional step back should occur to minimize the impact on the street and High Park.

c. Land Use

- Some participants supported extending the Mixed Use Area designation to the High Park Frontage, stating that the Apartment Neighbourhood residents have no place to shop.
- Another suggestion was to introduce more retail around the Park's main entrance only.
- Other opinions ranged from no retail stating that it would need both sides to work and not to change anything at all, or even reduce the current zoning permissions.
- A new land use category was suggested--"Mixed Use Neighbourhood" as a way to allow a wider range of uses to happen without further intensification

D. Summary - Street Design Exercise

Participants were provided with a mix and match exercise with various street design elements and asked to test different combinations and arrangements as a way to stimulate discussion. Elements included vehicle lanes, parking lanes, different types of cycling facilities (bike lane, buffered bike lane, cycle track), parking lanes, turning lanes/central medians, and sidewalks of differing widths with each having its own arrangement of sidewalk elements (pedestrian clearway, cafes and seating, and planting).

Twelve cross-sections were developed by four groups, each fitting within the existing 27 metre right of way of Bloor Street. These are shown in Appendix A. The groups showed a high degree of flexibility in terms of the number of traffic lanes, and general support for bike facilities:

- 10/12 sections provided a 6 metre boulevard width on either side of the street. 6/12 sections included a 2 meter parklet to the boulevard that may also be used for layby parking. In most cases, the parklet was added to a 4.8 metre wide boulevard. Some groups expressed a preference for wider boulevards on the north side (sunny side) of the street.
- 10/12 sections provided some variation of bike lanes. Bike lanes on both sides of the street were proposed in 8 sections. In most cases, a buffered or a cycle track type separation was preferred as opposed to a buffer-less 1.5 meter bike lane.
- 8/12 sections provided 1 travel lane in each direction while 3/12 sections maintained the existing 2 lanes in each direction. 1 cross-section included 2 travel lanes westbound and 1 lane eastbound. A 3 meter wide center turning lane or a median was proposed in 4/12 sections.
- 4/12 sections included exclusive lay-by parking while 3 sections proposed travel lanes to be used for off-peak hour parking while maintaining 1 travel lane in each direction.

Discussion

Safety

- Many participants stated that improvements were needed for the Bloor and Kingsway intersection
- Some participants suggested that the Bloor and Riverview Gardens area would benefit from a central median
- Some stated that bike lanes would help to calm traffic and slow vehicle speed

Arrangement

- Some participants suggested that perhaps the corridor could differ along its length, with different elements and cross section related to the adjacent uses: for example, different in Village Main Street vs High Park Frontage
- Several participants noted that the side streets offer great opportunities for cafes, restaurants, and additional greening

Pedestrian Environment

- Many participants expressed that the north sidewalk has a higher pedestrian volume than the south side
- Many noted that right now the sidewalks are quite generous but can get congested during the busiest times of year

Cycling Facilities

- Many participants stated that cycling should happen on Bloor and connect to broader network
- A few questioned if cycling lanes would be well used along corridor; some had sense that the subway stations were the destination not east-west travel
- Overall, the great majority supported adding cycling facilities if they fit and don't have to give up too much to get them

General Comments

- BIA chair cited Port Credit as a good example of a re-imagined street
- Side streets: not many comments. People want lower speed
- Older business owner does not want change - sees bike lanes as not being well-used, and cyclist not adhering to them anyway
- Environmental concerns re High Park - how to minimize impact? No clear position on their part, regarding number of lanes on Bloor. No position on bike facilities or sidewalks
- Desire to "tame" the Kingsway intersection. Toronto Transportation has examined the intersection previously, not much more can be done until the gas station redevelops
- High Park Subway Station: wayfinding and access should guide users to the High Park Boulevard entrance so they cross at the signalized intersection
- Adding more mixed-use opposite High Park would likely reduce auto dependence for the large population living in this area - more local trip-making which could be bike / walk trips

E. Summary – Comments Regarding the Environment

Given the location of this Avenue between High Park and the Humber River Valley, a number of participants expressed concern for the potential impact of new development on natural heritage resources. This summary includes the key messages related to the environment separately rather than embedded in each exercise discussion.

Discussion

- Several participants stated great concern with the environmental aspects of the Avenue, specifically:
 - » concerns with stormwater and hydrogeology
 - » concerns with ravine and High Park degradation due to visitation
 - » intensification, from a provincial perspective, is too focused on economic aspects and to the theoretical preservation of Niagara Escarpment and Oak Ridges Moraine. It was also stated that Provincial policies are also too focused on tourism
- Several participants stated that many questions are not yet answered regarding the indirect and direct impacts of intensification on the natural environment so that it is premature to allow additional density
- Many participants suggested to incorporate greening of upper floors and vertical greening into new buildings, and include green roofs with all development. Some participants suggested that roof gardens on upper floors could be publicly accessible. Some participants suggested that given proximity to High Park that all new buildings should achieve the highest standards of sustainable design
- A few participants suggested that all new and existing buildings should be bird friendly, that north-south landscape ecological corridors should be introduced between buildings and along streets to connect High Park with open spaces within the Apartment Neighbourhood to the north

F. Summary of Synthesis Exercise by Each Group

Following the Station Exercises, each group was asked to prepare a composite vision plan for the entire study area and present back to the larger charrette attendees. Below is a summary of the key messages from each group.

Key Messages: Group 1

Humber River

- Potential to improve public access via Riverside Dr?

West Village

- Bloor and South Kingsway/Riverview gardens intersection was considered a mess in need of more detailed study – note use of S Kingsway to access Gardiner/Lakeshore
- Development on the Esso site could be shaped to address the corner condition (potentially shave off NW corner of the building)
- Although many favoured limits to retail floor areas elsewhere on the Avenue, some suggested larger-format/destination/grocery retail would be appropriate here

Village Main Street

- Limit intensification to smaller-scale infill/additions on north side of street – maintain two-storey street wall with large step-backs for additional storeys, perhaps stepping back again after the fourth floor, with a limit of 5-6 storeys
- Funeral home is largest potential redevelopment site; open space opportunity
- Shallow sites on south side a big challenge for redevelopment
- Avoid long running streetwalls, break up

Village Main Street/East Village

- No Frills parking lot
- flagged as a location for a public gathering space connecting to adjacent ravine land
- potential for a lookout point toward Lake ON
- some also raised the potential for a staircase/access to Dacre Crescent through the forested area, while others maintained the importance of not disturbing wildlife (coyote and hawk habitat) and Dacre residents who prefer limited access
- on-site park dedication was mentioned as important here to secure the space/view when the large site is redeveloped
- proximity to heritage Runnymede library adds to placemaking potential

High Park Frontage

- Development along HP frontage should:
 - » be set back further from the street than Daniels High Park, with trees and soft landscaping
 - » retail at entrance to Park, but not necessary for rest of segment
 - » include side setbacks allowing 'green fingers' to extend into neighbourhood to the north
 - » meet highest standard of green architecture, bird-friendly design, etc.
 - » proceed only after detailed study of subsurface hydrogeology and other ecological issues
- Suggestion of potentially removing Avenues designation along High Park frontage
- High Park Chess House raised for potential heritage designation
- One participant also suggested creating a new 'protected Mixed Use' OP land use category to signal where intensification is not anticipated or encouraged.

Key Messages: Group 2

Avenue Vision

- Establish a maximum height limit that reflects the prevailing topography – taller buildings at each end; shorter buildings in the village core.
- High Park Intersections
- Option 1 – increase flanking setbacks to open views to the Park.
- Option 2 – close down intersections to constrain Park views and dramatize the Park approach and experience.
- High Park Frontage Development
- Increase setbacks to permit extension of Park to north side of Bloor.
- Increase upper-storey setbacks to 'green' buildings and provide sky views.
- Establish a 3-storey datum line.
- Village Core
- Development potential is greater on the south side due to deeper lots and larger properties.
- South side development should maintain sun access for north side – increase setbacks and angular plane, control heights.
- Consider developing subway station air-rights.
- Re-name subway stations to reflect local character.
- Improve wayfinding from subway stations to the Village.
- Consider structured parking to release existing surface lots for new park development.
- Civic Focus
- Church has a good setback; develop central civic square or park at Funeral Home site.
- No-Frills
- Maintain Glendonwynne view corridor.
- Consider pedestrian access down to Dacre Crescent.
- West Village
- Significant redevelopment is expected and acceptable.
- Major grocery store should be provided in the base of cinema site to serve local residents and act as a new anchor – takes advantage of existing Green P parking.

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- Riverview intersection – redevelop to sort out traffic, improve pedestrian experience and express entry to the Village – could include small civic spaces at each corner, with public art / interpretation.
 - Improve access to Humber River open spaces.

Key Messages: Group 3

Vision

- Provide for a pedestrian scale and focus
- Protect and enhance Main Street; serve local needs and act as a destination
- Protect and enhance natural features

Built Form

- Lower heights in Village, greater heights possible to east and west
- Streetwall and maximum height to relate to prevailing context (2-3 storey streetwall in Main Street segment)
- Remove Avenues overlay for High Park and Humber Gateway segments. No additional intensification until cumulative impacts better understood
- Protect sky view along Avenue with greater transitions to street (steeper angular planes, lower streetwalls)

Placemaking

- Public gathering spaces on large sites (Funeral Home and No Frills), and introduce midblock public spaces on longer blocks where possible (between Glendonwyne and Kennedy Park)
- Break up longer blocks so streetwall has interruptions, and connect to parks and open spaces that are to the north and south of the study area
- Introduce corner plazas at offset intersections (Kingsway and Bloor area) to provide placemaking opportunities
- Using cash in lieu for acquiring a bigger park piece in the area (Rear of Loblaws nature conservancy)

--END--