

CHAPTER 2: STUDY PROCESS

This study began in December of 2016 and concluded in December 2017. Extensive and well attended public consultation activities were key aspects of this study. Stakeholders and the community-at-large contributed to the overall vision and helped to inform the outcome.

The overall project was conducted in three phases. The first phase was to introduce the project to the community, understand the local context and issues, and develop a vision for the Study Area. In the second phase, a range of alternative options were explored, tested and confirmed, while in the third and final phase the draft recommendations were presented, and input received through the entire process was synthesized and documented in the final report.

In response to strong interest and concern raised through Phase 1 and the early stages of Phase 2 about future redevelopment and the potential adverse impact on sensitive natural systems—specifically High Park, the City of Toronto expanded the scope of the overall Avenue Study to include a desktop study of the Hydrogeology and Natural Heritage features. The supplemental

study recommendations informed this Avenue Study report, and suggest future work to follow the Avenue Study process.

2.1. COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

Stakeholders and the community were involved in all Phases of the Avenue Study process, which included:

- Four Local Advisory Committee (LAC) meetings
- Three public open houses
- A community design charrette
- A community stakeholder meeting
- A landowners meeting
- A heritage focus group meeting
- Two presentations to the Design Review Panel



Figure 2.1 Bloor West Village Avenue Study: Study Process

The consultation program was designed to ensure a meaningful process where all participants saw a strong rationale to be involved, understood their role, and contributed throughout. At the end of each phase, the Study Team met with the LAC and the public to present the purpose and scope of the Study, discuss the key findings, and solicit feedback from participants.

To further support the consultation program, a project website was established to share information, materials and communications, the ward councillor shared updates through her newsletter, and updates were provided through the City of Toronto City Planning Twitter feed. All materials posted to the City's website were AODA compliant.

A full account of all public engagement events and the messages received are contained within the Appendices of this Report.

Stakeholder Meetings

The Study Team met with key stakeholders as part of Phase 1 to introduce the project and discuss their operations and future plans.

Three meetings took place through February and March 2017. The first meeting was a Heritage Focus Group Meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to gain a better understanding of the history and evolution of the area and receive input from local residents who had a role in the Heritage

Conservation District Study nomination. The second meeting was with landowners in the area who own property, have development interests, or with active applications before the City. The third meeting was with representatives from the various residents associations, ratepayers associations, and community groups active in the area. Representatives from these three meetings were invited to participate in the LAC.

Key Messages: LAC and Public Open House Meetings

Key messages the Study Team received from the public included:

Overall:

- Provide a clear explanation of the purpose of the Avenue Study, including how it will influence future development and connect to other policy tools.
- Develop strong policies to accompany recommendations from the Avenue Study.
- The Study and proposed recommendations should demonstrate consideration of indigenous rights and knowledge, especially in terms of water and natural heritage.

Built Form:

- Balance growth with the area's village feel and its infrastructure constraints.
- Develop strong recommendations to protect sunlight and sky view on Bloor Street West.
- Development on Bloor Street West should be sensitive to adjacent neighbourhoods.
- Angular planes should not exceed 45-degrees.
- Provide a clear rationale for recommended building heights and transitions.

- Building design and heights should maintain a human scale and the "village" feel in Bloor West Village.

Land Use:

- Midblock connections and laneways should be safe and comfortable with pedestrian access.
- Support and promote small-scale local retail along Bloor Street West by restricting retail shop sizes.
- Maintain the village feel in Bloor West Village by creating a vision for balanced growth that supports the population and respects the area's history.
- Remove Avenues designation from the Humber Gateway and the north side of High Park.
- Support for protecting office and employment uses by restricting the conversion of office uses.

Street Design & Transportation:

- Congestion and parking are key issues that should be addressed in the Avenue Study.
- General support for future cycling infrastructure with suggestions to study the economic impacts of cycling infrastructure, especially on local businesses.
- Ensure the recommendations enhance pedestrian safety.
- Congestion is a key issue; the recommendations should help alleviate congestion and improve traffic flow.
- Require new developments to provide adequate on-site parking. Concern that inadequate on-site parking could result in increased on-street parking in the surrounding neighbourhoods.

Natural Heritage & Hydrogeology:

- High Park’s distinct contributions and environment need to be studied and considered.
- The cumulative impacts of development on High Park needs to be considered in the Avenue Study.
- Strengthen the protection of natural heritage in the guiding principles.
- Integrate the Natural Heritage, Water and Functional Servicing Studies.
- Protect and enhance underground and surface water.
- Protect Chimney Swifts and other threatened species.
- Ensure prescribed urban burns in High Park are able to continue.
- More work is needed to understand impacts on natural heritage and hydrogeology, especially in High Park.

2.2. DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

The Avenue Study was presented to the City of Toronto Design Review Panel twice during the process. The first presentation was in April 2017, following the community design charrette, and was aimed at introducing the project and seeking feedback regarding the potential directions the Study might take. The second presentation was in December 2017. It sought input regarding the option development and draft recommendations.

Feedback was highly positive and assisted the team in refining the overall outcome.

In summary, the key messages from the first presentation were:

- *Support for the Village:* A key consideration would be to determine the qualities that contribute to the village character according to various stakeholders such as residents and business owners, and better define this, as advised by a Panel member. It was noted that the village is losing its “villageness” with gentrification due to changes in uses and types of retail. Stronger guidance could be provided in the Study in delineating fine grain articulation in building form.
- *Consider topography and sequence of views.* A Panel member noted the area is unique in that there is a sense of arrival and departure from Bloor West Village that is unlike other areas. Part of this is likely from topography and scale of buildings in the arrival and departure sequence. It was recommended to study the views and how they contribute to the sense of the Village, and to consider how redevelopment can reinforce the sense of entering and leaving the Village.
- *Consider a strategy for Main Street buildings.* Several Panel members noted that Toronto has a series of main streets that all share a similar character of existing two and three storey buildings that create value and identity for their areas. A Panel member noted, “those buildings get lost

because there is no intrinsic value but there is contextual value”. It was suggested to look at other similar studies to form a coherent strategy for how to address main streets. The strategy should consider the age of the building stock and the financial pressures that the current shop owners have to endure, which are greater than the value of the buildings they occupy.

- *Future development and differences between north and south side of street:* It was noted how the street differs from one side to the other, and how lot depth, future consolidation, and transitions to the adjacent Neighbourhoods would work. One Panel member was curious what would happen on the larger sites and how that would fit or not with what remains. Panel members advised that strategies need to achieve a balanced massing on the street between north and south lots.
- *Ensure sunlight and sky view:* Panel members advised that sunlight studies are particularly important for this area which enjoys sunlight on the main street. A Panel member noted that the “unique identity of this portion of Bloor Street West has to do with that special character” and advised that more height and bulk guidelines should be developed beyond what is typical for Avenue Studies. The area was noted to be a destination for shopping from the greater city. The sunlight on the street is a key factor in attracting people, as noted by Panel members, and that care should be taken to maintain the sunlight in the shoulder seasons.

- *Preserve and enhance existing parks:* A Panel member noted that the parks located on top of the subway lands north of Bloor Street West as shown in the presentation, will need sunlight to be preserved through built form guidance. It was observed that the shallow depths of the north properties along Bloor Street West will limit height and should allow for sunlight on the parks. Improvements were also recommended for the open spaces so they are better used by the community.
- *Support for Soft Intensification concept:* Several Panel members were intrigued by the soft intensification concept as a very respectful way of intensifying the Study Area. It was suggested to identify opportunities where this could happen, such as at the arrival and departure areas of the “village”.
- *Make a Complete Street:* Several Panel members advised that the Complete Streets approach would bring great benefits to Bloor Street West and help out with what the Village is missing now. It was noted how important cycling is as a mode of transportation in the city, and that opportunities to make more pedestrian-friendly streets could include ways to slow down traffic and reduce vehicular lanes.

The key messages from the second presentation were:

- *An inclusive process:* The Panel commended the Study, noting that they appreciated the depth of the work and response to Bloor West Village. This Study could become an exemplar of how to sensitively add density to a signature Village without destroying its unique identity. Several members additionally mentioned that they were very familiar with the Study Area. They thought everything was well-considered and included data and input from a large breadth of the community. One member specifically appreciated the Study’s “crawl through the properties”, while another thought it was “really great” to see an area study that deals with both sides of the street. Several members noted that they greatly appreciated the responsiveness of the design team to the community feedback. With regards to the natural heritage, the Panel felt the community had made a lot of interesting suggestions that they hoped would be taken into consideration.
- *Market forces will apply pressure to Village:* Market conditions and a highly desirable Village will result in pressure for far more density than the Study currently shows. Develop strong planning and design regulations that counter this pressure.
- *Acknowledge development beyond the Village:* Explore potential for added density in areas beyond Study boundaries to relieve development pressure on Village.

- *Further support for soft intensification:* At the same time encourage soft intensification that allows increased density that is sensitive to and never overwhelms the existing Village context and character.
- *Support for a range of building types:* Develop a range of different built form typologies beyond the typical midrise form shown in Study.
- *Support for maximizing green character:* enhance natural green character that defines Bloor West Village; including but not limited to further maximizing park space where surface parking currently exists.
- *Support for stronger definition of the “village”:* The Panel felt that although the Study Area had a very distinctive character, there was a lack of definition to the extents of the village. Specifically, they felt there were no ‘entrances’ or gateways into the neighbourhood as well as no defined centre when within the village itself.
- *Support for a central square:* It is important to ensure that a centrally located public space along Bloor Street West was additionally developed in conjunction with the various urban plazas.