

First Parliament Project: Public Workshop

Summary Report

October 15, 2019

MASSLBP

Submitted to City of Toronto, Real Estate Services

Submitted by MASS LBP Inc.

Public Workshop Information:

Date: October 15, 2019

Time: 6:20 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (doors open 5:30 p.m.)

Registered: 115 (approx.) **Attendance:** 78

Promotion approach: outreach kit; email and phone calls to community, heritage, service delivery, and other groups that have an interest in the future of the site as a public space; local city councillor email newsletter list; municipal social media accounts; asking registered participants to invite people from their own networks.

Summary of public workshop goals:

- Better understand the role the site should play in the community;
- Better understand what community members would want to see on the site; and
- Better understand how community members would organize the site with the library building as a central focus.

Note: The activities for the public workshop were meant to freely generate ideas, rather than indicate measured preference or priorities. This report and the raw data will be taken into consideration by DTAH and EVOQ to inform their work in developing the site's Master Plan.

Public Workshop Summary

On October 15, 2019, the Real Estate Services Division of the City of Toronto hosted a public workshop. Seventy-eight participants assembled to learn about the history of the site, received an update on the Heritage Interpretation Strategy, learn about the Master Planning process and the factors that may affect the design or organization of the site, and share insights based on their own experiences of living in the community and working with its members. The information and views gathered from the participants will be used to inform the Master Plan.

The project team promoted the workshop by inviting previous participants from Phase 1 of the project, conducting email and phone outreach to organizations in the community that are focused on heritage, and advertising through Facebook. Each participant who registered for the event was also asked to promote the workshop through their own networks. Additionally, the workshop was promoted through the local city councillor's office email newsletter. Approximately 115 people registered their interest in attending the event.

The session consisted of two presentations by DTAH, the first on phase one of the process (namely the Heritage Interpretation Strategy), and the second on the Master Planning process. A facilitated activity conducted in small groups followed each presentation; activity specific templates were used to document the work of the participants. MASS LBP provided the design, facilitation, and management staff.

Attendees were encouraged to view the information display boards prior to the start of the workshop. These display boards summarized project information from Phase 1 of the project—the development of a Heritage Interpretation Strategy—and touched upon topics such as the archaeology of the site, the historical eras of the site leading up to its present state, connections to other heritage sites in Toronto, Ontario, and further abroad, and environmental considerations.

The boards also summarized project information for Phase 2 of the project —the development of the Master Plan for the site— which covered the connectivity of the site with other areas in the community, potential placement of the library, and relative size of the site compared to other known public open spaces in the city.

Key Takeaways:

General Considerations

- Many participants suggested green space or natural landscaping as important to the design and ultimate feel of the site.
- Many participants noted that the site must represent Indigenous pre- and post-colonial stories of the area in some way.
- Most participants placed a high priority on heritage interpretation while recognizing that the site could/should accommodate a range of public/community uses.
- Many participants saw the library building as an opportunity to provide space or support for the heritage interpretation of the site. In addition, many participants viewed heritage as a common theme or lens, which could inform the shape, placement, and design of many of the elements on the site.
- Most participants indicated that community services or amenities should be important elements of the site. Some indicated the need to include small commercial spaces such as pop-up shops, food services, or food truck parking.

Programming and Organization of the Site:

- Most participants emphasized the need for flexible indoor/outdoor spaces where community members could gather.
- Most participants viewed the library as a planning element that could insulate the site from the noise and activities of the surrounding neighbourhood and streets.
- Other elements and ways of organizing the site indicated that participants were interested in a quiet, calm neighbourhood sanctuary, and wished to maintain or maximize the openness of the site.
- Participants also emphasized the need for accessibility, robust transportation links, and neighbourhood connectivity, and indicated that the site should allow for the flow of pedestrians and take on the role of a neighbourhood hub or crossroads.
- In their site design ideas, participants tended to avoid placing buildings on the zone of potential archaeological interpretation.
- Participants also commonly acknowledged the natural shorelines at the southern end of the site, interpreting it as a natural threshold or border in the site's organization, and endorsed recognizing it with some kind of physical representation.
- Many participants showed interest in treating Berkeley Street as a pedestrian-priority connection between First Parliament and the entertainment and cultural institutions nearby (e.g., the Canadian Opera Company).



Figure 1— Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam, welcomed the participants, acknowledged the Indigenous lands where the building sits, and briefly described the importance of the site and the need to recognize its history.

Presentations and Activities

Overview: Councillor Wong-Tam provided the opening address and land acknowledgment (see Fig. 1) and MASS and DTAH provided information about the history of the site, its historical and community significance, and the Master Planning process. The presentation then described in detail the state of the site including Master Planning considerations, programming opportunities, broad design choices and their implications, the environmental damage that decades of industry has left behind, and the areas of the site that have the most potential for archaeological discovery. These presentations were used to help support the facilitated activities throughout the event.

Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam: Welcomed the participants, acknowledged the Indigenous lands where the building sits, and briefly described the importance of the site and the need to recognize its history.

Before the DTAH presentation, MASS spoke about the goals of the workshop, and outlined the agenda and activities. The host worked throughout the session to answer questions and check-in with participants to ensure they felt heard and were on track.

Presentation #1

DTAH presented a concise historical review of the site and its uses based on the team's research and work to date. This spanned the following periods or eras: pre-colonization, early York, First and Second Parliament Buildings, Home District Gaol, Consumers' Gas, and neighbourhood redevelopment following the decline of Consumers' Gas. The presentation outlined the site's zone of archaeological potential, noting the fragility of artifacts representing the Parliament era.

The presentation also outlined the project team's planning principles for the work ahead:

1. Prioritize heritage preservation and interpretation;
2. Respond to the site and its context;
3. Recognize the site as a valuable public asset;
4. Celebrate the library as the first key piece; and
5. Develop a vision that can be implemented over time.

The presentation emphasized the importance of protecting and interpreting the site's history as well as the potential of the site as a future community asset. The District library was identified as a core planning element. As well, other examples of programming for the site were presented to help inform the planning process.

Group Activity #1

MASS LBP introduced the first activity, the goal of which was to identify the programming or site elements (in addition to the library) that would best meet the needs of the community. Participants were asked to individually generate ideas for the site that they felt would be valuable to the community and write each idea on a card. Facilitators at each table of participants collected the cards, and laid them out on the table. The ideas were discussed in these small groups and sorted by similarities in theme.

Procedure

1. On blank cards, participants wrote their ideas about what could be placed on the site — aside from the library— that would best meet the needs of the community. Participants wrote down as many ideas as they could generate.
2. Participants were then asked to work together in small groups to assess the ideas one by one, and cluster similar ideas.
3. Clustering similar ideas revealed common themes (see below).

What We Learned

This activity generated approximately 443 program suggestions for what to put on the site that would best meet community needs. These ideas will help the project team to identify gaps in their initial planning research and ideation process and to better understand the priorities of the community. Upon general thematic review of the individual suggestions, several themes or categories emerged.

Indigenous Representation

The majority of participants expressed a strong interest in creating a tangible representation of Indigenous history on the site.

Heritage Interpretation

Nearly all participants recognized the need to interpret the heritage on the site. However, the approach to telling the story of the site's heritage was generally focused on integrated design

elements, such as a playground that supported the interpretation of the blockhouse or railway lines.

Few participants specified the need for a standalone heritage centre. Instead, many indicated that the library building should play a strong role in serving as a heritage centre or space.

Community Amenities

Participants suggested that the site should include community amenities, ranging from small features like fire pits and outdoor kitchens/ovens to large, more prominent elements like skateboard parks or an outdoor amphitheatre. The amenities that were documented seemed to be divided between passive comforts for those who live and work nearby and larger amenities that would draw visitors to the neighbourhood.

Community Services

Ideas regarding developing the site for community services ranged from multi-use spaces for activities—such as small informal meetings and more formal events like citizenship ceremonies—to services requiring more permanence, like daycares or resource centres for those in need.

The range and types of recommended services indicated that participants recognize the growth and change in demographics of the neighbourhood, with some participants being highly interested in daycares and others preferring seniors centres.

Library Integration

Many suggestions indicated that participants were interested in the library being a strong or integral part of the landscape and experience—not just a building on the site. For example, many participants recommended having outdoor seating on a terraced green roof, indoor/outdoor reading spaces, and community meeting areas.

Transportation Access

Several suggestions highlighted the need for easy access to transportation and amenities such as vehicle parking. In some cases, parking spaces were directly associated with the library, and some suggested underground parking.

The possibility of building in temporary vehicle access was also highlighted, such as for wheel trans services, taxis, and even food trucks.

Natural/Green/Landscape Elements

A common element across many suggestions was the need for landscape design that prioritized natural elements or green space (trees, gardens, and grass). Several participants indicated that a creative water feature could serve to highlight the former shoreline at the southern edge of the site.

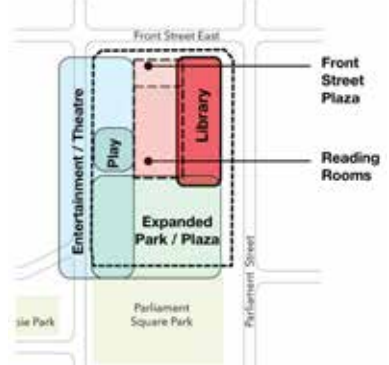


Commercial Services

A few participants proposed that the site accommodate food trucks, pop-up shops or restaurants, and other small-scale commercial establishments. The idea of these services being temporary or small-scale was common to these suggestions.

Presentation #2

DTAH presented an overview of the key form determinants, namely heritage interpretation,

site programming, and environmental conditions (contamination) of the site. To stimulate conversation, three possible placements of the district library building based on the key form determinants were proposed.

Parliament Street Location	Front Street Location	Parliament Square Location
		
<p>Rationale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prominent location on Parliament St. at Front St. • Exposes important open spaces to Front St. • Building relates directly to the historical heart of the site. • Ensures open spaces have access to sunlight. • Protects options for a future “Theatre Plaza.” 	<p>Rationale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prominent location on Front St. at Parliament St. • Exposes important open spaces to Parliament St. • Shields important open spaces from traffic noise. • Forces removal of the existing car dealership. 	<p>Rationale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates a strong interface between First Parliament and David Crombie. • Maintains the integrity of the site’s heritage zones. • Celebrates the site’s open spaces on Front St. and Parliament St.

Group Activity #2

The participants were presented with the three site options (see above). Each participant was then provided with blank site-maps and asked to draw their own placement for the library, given their understanding of the key form determinants and their knowledge of the community. It was made clear that participants were free to emulate one or more of the presented options, or to create their own.

Participants were permitted to draw multiple placement ideas for the library, although most chose to draw only one. Below the maps, the phrase “please briefly explain your choices” urged participants to clarify their reasoning. Participants were asked to write a few sentences describing their rationale for the placement of the library and make notes on the map if helpful.

Participants then compared their individually generated maps at their table and discussed the virtue of each placement.

Procedure:

1. Participants worked individually to draw their ideal placement for the library on one or more blank site-maps.
2. Participants then wrote their rationale for placing the library where they did on the map.
3. Participants came together in small groups to discuss their placement choices and to explain why they made those choices.

What We Learned:

Activity 2 generated a great deal of discussion over the organization of the site and the placement of the library building. Though a wide range of programmatic ideas and priorities were presented, there were several commonalities in the way participants chose to organize the site. Based on a review of the participants' work and discussion with facilitators, the following commonalities were identified:

- The majority of participant suggestions protected the zone of archaeological potential.
- The majority of participant suggestions placed the library near the northern or north-eastern edge of the site and indicated it could act as a shield from the noise and traffic of Front Street and Parliament Street.
- Many participants prioritized open space.
- Many participants expressed interest in the activation of the theatre district (western side of the site near Berkeley Street).
- The southern zone of the site was envisioned as a means to acknowledge the former shoreline of the lake through a programmatic or sculptural element.

It should be noted that this activity was designed to freely generate ideas that could inform the Master Plan, and was not intended to be a voting mechanism that would decide elements of the Master Plan.

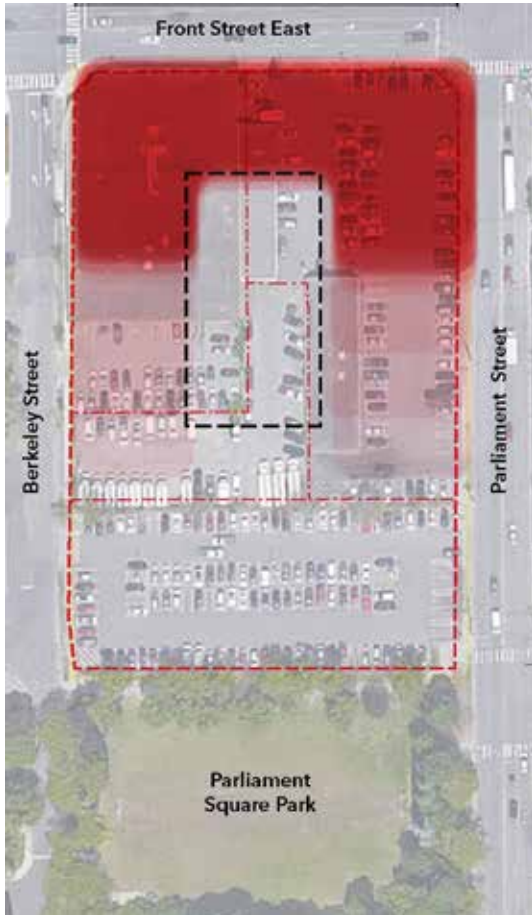
Participants' library building placement examples:

Participants generated 65 examples for the organization of the site and the placement of the library building. These examples were collated and reviewed for commonalities. Below we've provided the most common examples with summaries derived from the participants' comments.

It should be noted that the 'library building' was defined as more than a traditional collection of books and information services. As the Toronto Public Library's mission is to provide free and equitable access to services that meet the changing needs of Torontonians, participants felt that it might be within their mandate to provide space for programming, heritage interpretation, some public services, and other community amenities, or for the library to be co-located with those services and amenities.

Placement of Library Building

Northern placement A



Characteristics and Frequent Suggestions

- This placement of the library building used or adapted option #2 presented by DTAH with some slight variation in size or footprint.
- This placement was seen as a way to protect the site from surrounding noise and also limit the effects of shadows on the site.
- This placement was characterized by the creation of an open area central to the site that could be used as a reading garden, plaza, or more informally as an inner sanctuary with fewer activities or programming. This space also provided protection for the zone of archaeological potential.
- The areas adjacent to the central open area drew varied suggestions for design elements, including earthen landscaping, children’s play structures, connection to the theatres on Berkeley Street, and outdoor heritage interpretation elements.
- The majority of suggestions related to this positioning of the library building included an interest in interpreting the former shoreline at the southern edge of the site.
- Key observation: This approach to organizing the site places a greater emphasis on the development of a calm sanctuary for visitors.

Placement of Library Building

Northern placement B



Characteristics and Frequent Suggestions

- This placement of the library typically followed a simplified version of option #2 presented by DTAH — a singular block that lines Front Street.
- This placement of the site shared many aspects of Northern placement A, but with a stronger interest in the need for an open space and multiple uses for outdoor programming.
- Key observation: This approach to organizing the site places a greater emphasis on the development of an open space for visitors, but is less insistent on creating a sheltered, quiet space. This approach would also allow more flow of pedestrians to the south of the library building.

Placement of Library Building

North-eastern placement



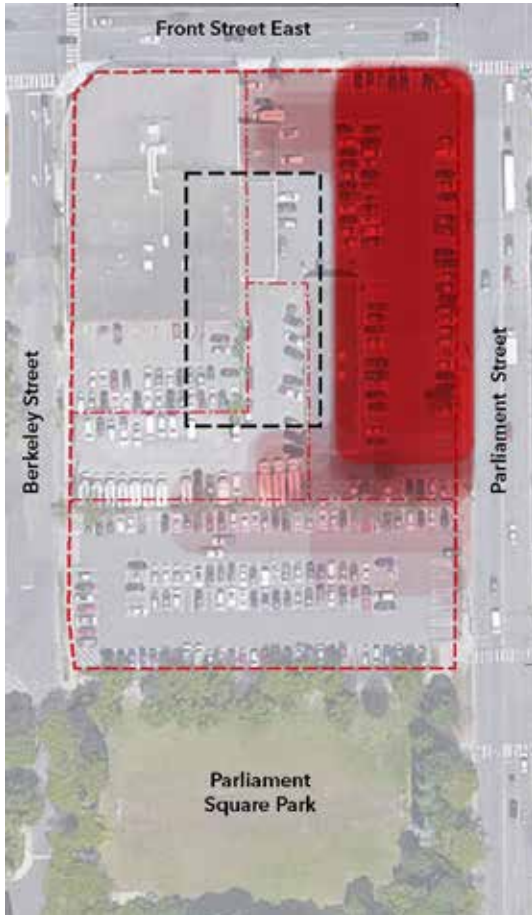
Characteristics and Frequent Suggestions

- This placement was also seen as a way to protect the site from surrounding noise and limit the effects of shadows on the site.
- Like the northern placement of the library building, this option was often associated with the creation of an open central area or inner sanctum. This placement also provided protection for the zone of archaeological potential.
- Unlike other examples, this placement of the library put greater emphasis on an open public space with natural elements. In some examples, the footprint of the library building was reduced and the height increased to create more open space on the site.
- Key observation: This approach to organizing the site reduces the need to disrupt the current operation on the Ontario Heritage Trust land, and in some ways indicates openness to a phased approach to development.
- Key observation: This approach to organizing the site allows for greater connectivity to Berkeley Street and allows pedestrian traffic through the site from the north-western edge of the site.

Placement of Library Building

Characteristics and Frequent Suggestions

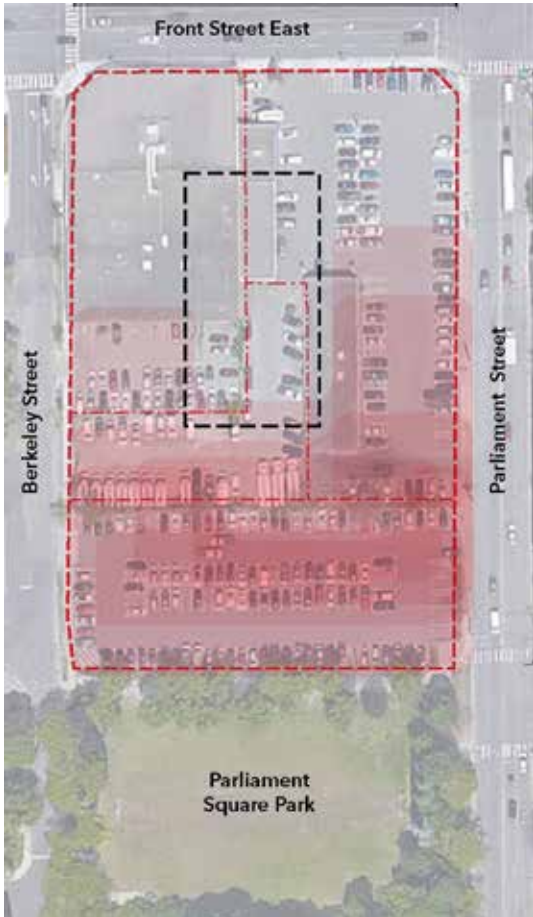
Eastern placement



- This placement was often accompanied by comments that indicated support for a stronger use of heritage interpretation of the site.
- Several participant examples used the footprints of buildings that once existed on the site—such as the Parliament buildings, the Gaol, and Consumers’ Gas—to organize and provide heritage interpretation themes for the programming elements on the site.
- Like other examples, this placement could protect the site from noise from the neighbourhood and streets.
- Several participant examples placed emphasis on this placement’s greater connectivity to Berkeley Street and easy flow of pedestrian traffic from the north-western side of the site to neighbourhood destinations such as the Distillery.
- Participants who endorsed this placement also included or acknowledged the potential for other buildings not associated with the library building on the site.
- Key observation: This approach to organizing the site reduces the need to disrupt the current operation on the Ontario Heritage Trust land, and in some ways indicates openness to a phased approach to development.
- Key observation: Like other examples, this organization of the site allows for greater connectivity to Berkeley Street and enables pedestrian traffic from the north-western edge of the site.

Placement of Library Building

Southern placement



Characteristics and Frequent Suggestions

- This placement puts a stronger emphasis on maintaining openness and connectivity to Front Street.
- Like other examples, this placement was associated with greater connectivity to pedestrian-friendly Berkeley Street.
- This placement of the site shared the strong association to the need for an open space as found in Northern placement B.
- Key observation: Unlike other examples, this approach to organizing the site did not place an emphasis on connectivity with other areas, particularly those to the south of the site—making the site more of a singular destination.