

Re: King-Parliament Secondary Plan Review

Summary of Advice from the Planning Review Panel, November 2, 2019

Executive Summary

The Planning Review Panel is a representative group of 32 randomly selected Torontonians that help the City Planning Division guide growth and change in Toronto. They have been asked by the Chief Planner to work together over the course of two years to provide City Planning with informed public input on major planning initiatives. Members are tasked, in particular, with helping to ensure that these initiatives are aligned with the values and priorities of all Torontonians.

Advice re: King-Parliament Secondary Plan Review

Planning Division staff are writing a new King-Parliament Secondary Plan, and attended the Panel for advice on how to manage competing priorities for the public realm in the King-Parliament Study Area. Planning Division staff presented six examples of public realm community benefits that they may need to balance in the future: parkland dedication, privately owned publicly accessible spaces (POPS), mid-block connections, wider setbacks, street trees, and pedestrian and cyclist amenities. Panelists discussed which of these benefits would be most appropriate to prioritize for three different parts of the neighbourhood: King East (between Jarvis and Parliament), Queen East (between Parliament and Sherbourne) and the proposed King-Sumach Pedestrian Plaza. Panelists also suggested some overall public realm objectives for the King-Parliament area.

- **King East:** Panelists recommended benefits that would increase safety and ease of travel for pedestrians and cyclists in this high-traffic area. Panelists knew that there are few opportunities to dedicate parkland or alter the streetwall in this area, so they recommended that the City encourage POPS to create more common open space.
- **Queen East:** Panelists stressed the need for benefits that would increase safety and security for pedestrians and cyclists. Panelists also urged the City to prioritize parkland dedication, because Queen East is a wider street that presents more opportunities to create more green space.
- **King-Sumach Pedestrian Plaza:** Panelists urged that the City seize opportunities in this area to create wider sidewalks and dedicate parkland as they would complement a possible future pedestrian plaza. Panelists also felt that mid-block connections might help pedestrians move through the area with greater ease.
- Panelists suggested that the City's **overall objectives for the public realm** of the entire King-Parliament area should be to incorporate features that improve safety and security for pedestrians and cyclists, make it easier for non-motorists to get around, and protect and build on the character of the neighbourhood.

Detailed Process Summary

Sara Phipps and Michelle Drylie from the City Planning Division presented to the Panel about the King-Parliament Secondary Plan Review. The City is in the process of drafting a new secondary plan for the neighbourhood. The King-Parliament Secondary Plan must consider recent changes to the Planning Act, and must also incorporate directions from the recently-approved Downtown Plan.

Recent provincial policy changes have impacted how community benefits are categorized and funded, meaning that in the Secondary Plan the City may need to prioritize between different types of benefits to the public realm. The project team sought the Panel's input on how to prioritize and balance these trade-offs in different parts of the neighbourhood.

The project team presented background on the legislation that affects their ability to make public realm improvements, discussed the Downtown Plan, and outlined the King-Parliament Study Area and the neighbourhoods included therein. They also presented maps of the location of current and potential heritage buildings, currently existing parks and public land, and some of the City's planned "Big Moves" for the area.

Because the context and built form of the King-Parliament area vary by neighbourhood, the types of public realm benefits that are most beneficial would likewise depend on the neighbourhood. For this reason, the project team presented three examples of different types of neighbourhoods in the King-Parliament area:

1. King Street East from Jarvis to Parliament Streets (hereafter referred to as King East)
2. Queen Street East from Sherbourne to Parliament Streets (hereafter referred to as Queen East)
3. The complex intersection and underpasses at King Street and Sumach Street/ the "King-Sumach Pedestrian Plaza" (hereafter referred to as the King-Sumach Plaza)

These three areas had different features and characteristics, and were presented as archetypes for other, similar areas to which the Panel's recommendations could also apply.

The Panel was also presented with six examples of public realm community benefits that the City may need to trade-off:

1. Parkland dedication
2. Privately owned publicly accessible spaces (POPS)
3. Mid-block connections
4. Wider sidewalks
5. Street trees
6. Pedestrian and cyclist amenities

The project team explained each benefit and described where they're most needed or where they're most often seen.

In groups, Panelists were then asked to review each of the three neighbourhoods again and select three benefits they would prioritize for each area, and explain their rationale for these

choices. Following this activity, Panelists were also asked to describe some overall objectives the City should pursue for the public realm in the King-Parliament area.

Detailed Discussion Summary

Part 1: Prioritizing Public Realm Community Benefits

Benefits for Area 1: King East

This area is characterized by high levels of current and future development, built heritage resources, a mix of uses, narrow sidewalks, a consistent and tall streetwall, and some street trees and furniture.

Based on those characteristics, the Panel prioritized the following benefits:

1. POPS (4 out of 4 groups)

Panelists unanimously agreed that POPS should be a priority due to limited available land for parkland dedication, and more frequent opportunities to negotiate with developers for new space. Panelists also noted that this area sees a high amount of pedestrian traffic which makes POPS more likely to be used.

2. Pedestrian and cyclist amenities (4 out of 4 groups)

The Panel also unanimously agreed that pedestrian and cycling amenities would be beneficial because there are high numbers of pedestrians and cyclists, with future growth expected. Panelists also felt that these amenities might actually encourage more people to use more active transportation. A few Panelists did, however, indicate that in the specific case of King East, more emphasis should be placed on creating benefits for pedestrians than cyclists, given that there are cycling lanes on Adelaide and Richmond Streets, which run parallel to King Street where it might make more sense to put more cycling amenities.

3. Mid-block connections (3 out of 4 groups)

Many Panelists felt that mid-block connections would be useful for King East, as they would allow safer, faster alternatives to walking or cycling on a major street like King East. A few Panelists also suggested that mid-block connections might not always be obvious to users, and should be better communicated to pedestrians, especially if they are indoor connections.

Additional comments: A few Panelists also argued for prioritized wider sidewalks in this area because they would increase pedestrian safety and comfort, allow for greater mobility and accessibility, and preserve a “main street” aesthetic. Panelists acknowledged that widening sidewalks in the King East area was likely less feasible due to the consistent and well-developed street wall, but suggested that sidewalks could be widened in the future if the King Street Priority Transit Corridor is extended, allowing for the removal of on-street parking.

Benefits for Area 2: Queen East

This area is characterized by low rise buildings, many heritage buildings, a mix of uses, increased growth pressure, narrow sidewalks, varied streetwall, few street trees, and limited street furniture.

Based on those characteristics, the Panel selected the following benefits:

1. Street Trees (selected by 3 out of 4 groups)

Most Panelists recommended street trees to improve the street's aesthetics and make it more enjoyable to walk down. Panelists also felt that more street trees would complement existing parkland.

2. Pedestrian and Cyclist Amenities (selected by 3 out of 4 groups)

Most Panelists selected pedestrian and cyclist amenities as a desirable community benefit in an area like Queen East, noting that the area is facing growth pressure and thus is also likely to see an increase in non-vehicular traffic. Many Panelists also stressed the need for lighting to improve the safety of this specific area for pedestrians.

There was some disagreement on other benefits that should be prioritized for this area:

- Several Panelists prioritized POPS for Queen East because they felt that it would create a balance along the sidewalk and help fill in the 'jagged teeth' of the streetwall caused by many parking lots and mechanic shops with wide setbacks. Panelists also felt that POPS would maintain the openness of the street, that accessible, well-maintained spaces would make the area feel safer, and that the City should make it a priority to secure public space by any means.
- A few Panelists prioritized parkland dedication because they thought the City should always prioritize securing parkland, even if it is a small amount of space. These Panelists stressed that they had chosen this benefit in this area because there was little available land for this purpose in the nearby King East area.
- A few Panelists also prioritized midblock connections in order to create convenient, safe, and secure pathways for pedestrians.
- A few Panelists prioritized wider sidewalks to increase the comfort and safety of pedestrians.

Benefits for Area 3: King-Sumach Plaza

This area is characterized by varying sidewalks with an inconsistent streetwall. It is adjacent to mid- and high-rise residential buildings, and low- and mid-rise commercial buildings. It is also adjacent to parkland, and has many nearby heritage buildings.

This area is substantially different from the King East and Queen East areas. King-Sumach Plaza includes City-owned land (which is currently used as surface parking) located under

or adjacent to the Richmond Street East, Adelaide Street East, and Eastern Avenue overpass network. King-Sumach Plaza also includes the wide, complex intersection at King Street East and Sumach Street. The area was presented to the Panel as the site of a proposed “King-Sumach Pedestrian Plaza”, which the City hopes to develop in the future to improve pedestrian and cyclist connectivity and provide more opportunities for placemaking.

Based on those characteristics and intentions, the Panel selected the following benefits:

1. Parkland dedication (3 out of 4 groups)

As in the King East and Queen East areas, most Panelists urged the City to secure parkland whenever possible. Many felt that the land currently being used for parking could be turned into public space, and suggested new uses like a skate park, ice skating rink, or games area. Panelists also noted that dedicating parkland in the area would make the area more enticing for future development, and might allow for wildlife conservation.

2. Pedestrian and cyclist amenities (selected by 3 out of 4 groups)

Most Panelists felt that pedestrian and cyclist amenities would be useful in this area given the City’s intentions to make it a pedestrian plaza, which will increase the number of pedestrians and cyclists.

There was some disagreement on other benefits that should be prioritized for this area:

- Several Panelists felt that given the current state of the area, mid-block connections should be created to give pedestrians and cyclists the option to avoid car traffic. Panelists also noted that although there are major attractions in the area— such as Corktown Common, the Distillery District, and Queen Street East— the area is difficult to navigate on foot, making any improvements to connectivity helpful.
- A few Panelists prioritized wider sidewalks in order to provide better accessibility for passersby. They also noted that since this area is not very developed yet, there is a good opportunity to put in wider setbacks before the area gets busier and more built up.
- A few Panelists also felt street trees would be a valuable benefit in this area to make the planned pedestrian plaza greener and more pleasant.

Part 2: Overall objectives for public realm in King-Parliament

Following the above discussion, the Panel was asked what the City’s overall objectives should be for the public realm in the King and Parliament neighbourhood. Their recommendations— many of which are overlapping or interconnected— are summarized thematically below.

Safety and Security

Most Panelists stressed that public realm community benefits that add to the safety and security of this area should be the City's first priority. Panelists highlighted in particular that lighting and wider sidewalks were two amenities that could help make the King-Parliament area safer.

Connectivity and Accessibility

Most Panelists felt that the City should work to make this area as connected, navigable, and accessible as possible, especially by active transportation. Several Panelists even suggested widening sidewalks by removing parking or driving lanes, which would also improve the accessibility of the area for pedestrians and cyclists.

Aesthetics and Character

Most Panelists made mention of retaining or improving the aesthetics and character of this area. Panelists felt that the City should preserve or create green spaces wherever possible, whether through parkland dedication, POPS, or street trees. Several Panelists felt that when it was not possible to add or retain green spaces as a first priority, the City could at minimum make the space more vibrant with public art.

Many Panelists also urged that the City make an effort to maintain the different characters of the neighbourhoods within the King-Parliament Study Area, and specifically noted the importance of preserving heritage buildings or their facades.

Spaces to Gather

Several Panelists thought an objective for the public realm in the King-Parliament area should be to create more gathering places for those in the community, and stressed that those public spaces should be useful in all seasons.