

YONGE ST. LINEAR PARKS IMPROVEMENTS

Public Meeting #1

Meeting Summary

Thursday November 5, 2020



Notes taken by Pauline Craig, Dept of Words & Deeds

Note about Phase 1 Engagement Reporting: This summary is based on the November 5th, 2020 public meeting. A complete summary of "What We Heard" during this first phase of concept design will be posted on the City website which will include survey results and key points from all engagement activities to date.

General: A virtual meeting was held on the WebEx platform on Thursday, November 5, 2020; 6:30pm – 8:00pm to gather feedback from the public on the preliminary park design concepts for George Hislop Park, Norman Jewison Park, and Alexander Street Parkette. There were approximately 60 participants including City of Toronto staff and consultant Project Team members.

Meeting Objective: To present and gather feedback from members of the public on the preliminary park design concepts and refinements of the master plan for George Hislop Park, Norman Jewison Park, and Alexander Street Parkette, and to collect some responses to the high-level concepts for the integrated LGBTQ2S+ public art component. The following is a summary of the discussion that took place.

Meeting Overview:

A Land Acknowledgement was provided by City of Toronto's Parks, Forestry and Recreation Senior Project Coordinator, Nancy Chater. Facilitator Jane Farrow (Dept of Words & Deeds) introduced the project team, provided an overview of the project timeline and a summary of the consultation and outreach activities, and discussed key points of the feedback received thus far.

Lead designer and landscape architect Fung Lee (PMA Landscape Architects) reviewed some historical context of the park locations followed by a presentation of the preliminary park design concepts. A discussion of these design concepts followed.

Following the discussion on the park design concepts, Jane Farrow reviewed key points that emerged from a preliminary discussion amongst LGBTQ2S+ arts and history professionals on the integrated LGBTQ2S+ public art project. The artist Stanislav Jurkovic, (uoai, artist on PMA team) then presented two concept options that are being developed for this public art work to be installed in George Hislop Park. A second discussion followed Stanislav's presentation to provide feedback on the public art concepts.

At the conclusion of the meeting, City Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam extended appreciation to all participants for their time, patience and valuable feedback. Councillor Wong-Tam also expressed positive support for the project team and their work on this and similar projects.

Nancy Chater (City of Toronto) invited participants to provide additional comments on the online survey which was available between November 6-29, 2020; and to join the second public meeting to be held in

the next phase (January/February 2021) where the preferred concept plan will be presented for feedback.

Details of the second public meeting will be made available on the website, and communicated by flyers, posters and social media ads.

Summary of Key Points

1. Safety

Design should focus on features to improve safety for all visitors moving through, lingering and enjoying the park spaces.

2. Seating, Lighting and Circulation

Participants voiced support for finding the right balance of spaces to sit, alone and in small groupings, with nodes and walkways that feature lighting, clear sightlines and plantings that discourages unsafe uses or illicit gatherings.

3. All Season

Participants expressed a desire for the park designs to consider and incorporate year-round usage, and options for programming, physical activities and environmental sustainability.

4. Flexible Spaces

Participants offered support for programming in the parks while noting the importance of keeping spaces flexible and adaptable for regular and routine park uses.

5. Quality materials and maintenance

The importance of quality materials and good maintenance regimes was noted by many who wanted to make sure the parks, the plantings, the seating, lights, surfaces and artworks were kept in a good state of repair for years to come.

Detailed Feedback

Provide more access in and out of the parks through laneways. Participants were pleased to see proposed routes to and from the parks via laneways to improve safety and access to the parks. One participant asked that there be consideration to open access to George Hislop park from the laneway between the CASA Condominium and the Children's Aid Society on the east side to further improve safety and accessibility for residents of CASA and people travelling to and from the Children's Aid Society building.

Be mindful of park access and through movement when designing gathering areas. One participant pointed out that gathering spaces and grouped seating located near park entrances can become congested and may discourage people from travelling through the park or entering into the park and using the interior spaces.

Include lighting that will be bright enough to improve the feeling of safety in the parks at night. Most participants who provided comments said they would like to see brighter lighting in the parks to improve their sense of safety after dark.

Response: Fung Lee (PMA) informed the group that the project team is looking into providing pedestrian lighting through the parks. The team's electrical consultant is also investigating opportunities to upgrade the lighting to meet safety standards and to improve lighting at park access points. The project team is

also working to improve safety by keeping entranceways clear; opening up sight lines from one end of the parks to the other; and seeking opportunities for additional entrances/exits from laneways.

Include ample seating in all the parks that is spread out so that people have options to sit alone, in small groups or sit together with others. Some participants preferred that seating be spread out around the parks to provide a variety of options. Different types of seating were also mentioned to allow for people to sit closely with others, socially distanced from others, or to stretch out and rest.

Seating should be located and designed so that it is welcoming to park users and does not appear to belong to adjacent private businesses. Several participants expressed concerns about the seating shown adjacent to Anndore House café/barbershop exit door in the concept plan for George Hislop Park. They felt that the seating would appear as though it belonged to one private business which could make some park users feel unwelcome to use it, or that they had to be customers of the business in order to use the seating. Another participant said that they liked the added safety and maintenance responsibility that would come from locating seating next to Anndore House.

Response: Fung Lee (PMA) explained that the project team is working in earnest with all of the stakeholders to find opportunities to activate the park. The goal of designing the seating near Anndore House is to create activation, animation and "eyes on the park" by functioning as a plaza that takes advantage of the flow of people coming and going to that exit door. This seating area is one part of a larger plan to activate the parks through design by providing different types of seating, such as individual seating which is especially important during the pandemic, and looking at other opportunities for seasonal and daily activation. The proposed seating near Anndore House would be fully public, owned by the City, and open for anyone to sit at, with no need to purchase anything in the café. The City has no intention to privatize a public park.

Use materials that will weather well, provide comfortable seating and continue to be attractive over time. Materials used in the park redesign were discussed with participants in agreement that the materials should weather well and continue to be attractive with use and exposure to the elements. One participant pointed out the importance of being able to easily clean or dry off park seating and referred to the existing seating in Alexander St. Parkette as a good example of a material that allows for this.

Consider an alternative to large grassy areas because the grass is difficult to maintain. One participant suggested including plantings such as pollinator friendly gardens instead of large grassy areas which require more maintenance.

Prioritize green spaces and plantings. Two participants said they preferred to see green spaces prioritized over pavement or hard surfaces and that green spaces could include plantings and water features.

Provide a Dog Relief area that can accommodate the number of dogs in the neighbourhood. Participants were generally in favour of the dog relief area. Two participants felt that the dog relief area shown in the concept plan would not provide enough space for the densely-populated neighbourhood. Another participant pointed out that there is no dog relief area shown in the concept plan for Alexander St. Parkette.

Encourage and support wildlife in the parks

Pollinator gardens were mentioned by several participants as something they would like to see in the parks. One participant said they would like to see birds, butterflies and other wildlife encouraged to use the park spaces

Look for ways to discourage pigeon feeding which attracts too many pigeons. Several participants were concerned about pigeons being fed in the area and the resulting mess the pigeons are causing in the parks and to surrounding buildings. Some participants felt that the pigeons were making it difficult to enjoy the park spaces

Include design features that will be able to withstand strong wind patterns. Some participants were concerned about wind tunnel effects through the linear parks and asked that winds be considered in the design.

Response: Fung Lee (PMA) agreed that wind can be a challenge in the area. She told participants that the design will use features such as topography and plantings to create protected microclimates within the park that are intended to help mitigate wind.

Design the park spaces so that they can be enjoyed in all seasons including winter. Some participants expressed a desire to see some design options that could provide protection from wind and rain and one participant pointed out that snow plows can disturb lawn areas so paths should be designed to accommodate plows used to clear them. The design team confirmed their goal to capture and create microclimates with sunny and shady spots for daily use and consider opportunities for activity and lighting for all seasons.

Consider including opportunities for adult fitness / exercise or other activities in the parks to help activate the spaces. Some participants commented that they would like to see some equipment in the parks to facilitate adult exercise. Suggestions included exercise equipment, table tennis, and chess tables.

Accommodate regular activation of the park space. Participants said they would like to see regular and frequent activation of the park spaces made possible to improve safety and make the parks a destination. Suggested ways to activate the parks included games for adults and children, buskers, and summer weekend concerts. One participant felt that a Park activation plan was needed to ensure that the parks are being activated in a positive way.

Create performance or event spaces that can be used for other purposes so that they will not sit empty when there are no events. Several participants said they have seen stages or other event spaces in other parks that are often not used and create an empty, unwelcoming atmosphere.

Create an informal outdoor theatre space in Alexander St. Parkette to support Buddies in Bad Times Theatre. One resident of the neighbourhood was pleased to see the design of the park supporting Buddies in Bad Times theatre and asked whether the seating could be arranged to support an informal amphitheatre space to further support theatre activities.

Response: Fung Lee (PMA) pointed out that both design concept options that were presented show a design of the space that supports theatre performance use.

Combine some elements of both design options to create the final design. Several participants pointed out singular elements from both designs that they preferred. These included: the topographical variety in Option 2 Nodes design; children's play area next to the Childrens' Aid Society in Option 2 Nodes

design; seating area up against the Anndore House (without a walkway in between the building and seating area) in Option 1 Flow design; location of the dog relief area in Norman Jewison Park in Option 1 Flow design; curved pathways in Option 1 Flow design.

Investigate options to reflect the cultural importance of Norman Jewison. One participant said they didn't think that the cultural importance of Norman Jewison was reflected in the design and felt that this was a missed opportunity.

Ensure that park space in Norman Jewison Park is not taken up by adjacent businesses. One participant pointed out that the offices in the building on the east side of the park have a path running parallel along the building face with low gates that link to the park. At least one gate has a small paved pad on the park side of the property/fence line. They asked the City to enquire about this arrangement and whether the paved pads could be removed and returned to the park and any other potential encroachments to ensure all of the park space is available to residents for their use.

Response: City staff will investigate the status of the east park edge regarding potential easements etc.

Consider incorporating a community garden or space for a farmers market. Some participants suggested having access to local food would be one way to activate the park in a meaningful way. One participant suggested a dedicated space for a farmers market as has been discussed in the past by the Church Wellesley Neighbourhood Association.

Coordinate park entrance design with planned improvements to the road network. One participant pointed out that a bump out / curb extension is being planned for the south side of Gloucester Street and should be considered with any proposed modifications to the street design to improve park connections between James Canning Gardens and Norman Jewison Park

Consider providing alternative parking / loading areas to discourage illegal parking on Isabella Street at George Hislop Park. One participant said they have spoken with delivery drivers who are parking in the 'no parking' zone on the south side of George Hislop Park and they have asked if the parking in front of the Rabba and Fitness Centre on Isabella Street could be made into a Loading Zone to facilitate deliveries in the immediate area. (While this topic is outside the scope of this project, the input is captured here.)

Key Feedback on integrated LGBTQ2S+ artwork

Projections in the LGBTQ2S+ artwork are a good way to provide lighting while being flexible for representation. One participant felt that the use of projections could allow for celebration of broad aspects of history and also be used to reflect current celebrations or commemorations.

Design for minimizing vandalism in the design considerations for the LGBTQ2S+ integrated art. One participant suggested that mirrored surfaces or large blank surfaces could invite vandalism.

There is support from participants for an integrated artwork that will represent LGBTQ2S+ history. All participants who provided comments were in support of the integrated artwork's intention to represent LGBTQ2S+ history in the neighbourhood

Ensure that any lighting component of the artwork is well maintained. Several participants raised concerns about maintenance of any non-standard lighting and gave examples of other parks where this

has been an issue. Suggestions included securing a long-term maintenance contract and investigating alternative energy sources like solar or wind. Others wondered if considerations had been given to the possibility that light or reflections could disturb nearby residents.

Responses: Stanislav Jurkovic, (uoai, artist on PMA team) told the group that the team will be exploring lighting that can be easily maintained but will also look at designing the interaction between the lights and other pieces in the park such that if one light fails there will be other elements that will continue to work in the meantime. City staff note: All park lighting will be dark-sky compliant, for human and wildlife comfort.

Nancy Chater (City of Toronto): said that with regard to maintenance of the programmable lighting, City Parks staff will review the specifications and make sure they can support the particular products as robust and easy to manage. She also noted that Underpass Park has had good success with programmable LED lighting which is also well maintained.

Fung Lee (PMA) said that the project team is talking to Parks operations staff very early in the design process; using lessons learned from Barbara Hall Park, both from stakeholders and operations staff; and investing in robust materials that will minimize maintenance in the long run.

On the topic of light reflections, it was explained that a photometric study of the light and reflection would be conducted in order to prevent unwanted light entering residences. The installation will also be under the canopy of trees and will include elements that will react with and help disperse / shade the light.

Q: What is the difference between a dog park and a dog relief area?

A: A dog park or dog run is also known as an off leash area and is a fenced-in area where dogs are allowed to run off-leash and the intent is to have enough space to exercise the dog so they are large in size. A dog relief zone is not fenced but includes a granular material on the ground that makes it easy to clean up after the dogs. All dogs would be expected to be on-leash in this relief area.

Q: Will the parks be accessible to cyclists?

A: The pathways will be designed as park paths which are meant to be pedestrian priority. Cyclists may share the path with pedestrians but must travel at pedestrian speed and give right of way to pedestrians. In some cases, the design of the pathway will help to slow cyclists down in a friendly way.

Q: Have the Gay and Lesbian Archives been consulted with on the design concepts?

A: Volunteers and staff of the Archives (as it is known) have been invited to and contributed at the Community Resource Group and Queer Art Subgroup meetings.

The following questions were posted in the Chat function during the meeting and are being answered here.

Q: Besides the Barney fountain, will you have water features?

A: The two Yonge St. parks are built on top of the Yonge St. subway line and water features are not compatible with the subway tunnel roof below grade.

Q: How is the space behind Sanctuary being integrated into the park design?

A: There is no integrated plan at present. The fence between the two properties will remain in place.

Q: Are Shadow Studies considered when designing the parks?

A: Not in the same way as shadow studies are done for proposed developments. The park is existing and will be improved, so the shadow conditions will not change. No new buildings are planned on the park edges, so no changes to light/shadow are anticipated in that regard.

Q: What will you do about the tents in the park during these past few months?

A: There are no tents at present. The former members of the encampment were housed on a voluntary basis, at least for a short term. The City's encampment solution is focussed on housing opportunities. The City bylaw remains in place that does not allow camping in public parks.

Q: Will George Hislop Park be the sight of the Inspire Monument as is the intention of the organization's board?

A: Private corporations such as Inspire do not have access to installing monuments in public City parks. The Inspire group initiated the idea of an LGBTQ2S+ monument/art work in the park and the City has supported the idea behind their initiative by adding an integrated LGBTQ2S+ public art/design element into George Hislop Park, which is funded by the City. This integrated public artwork will be owned and maintained by the City. In recognition of their role in initiating an LGBTQ2S+ artwork in the park, Inspire is a community stakeholder on the Community Resource Group for the project.

Addendum: Project Team Attendance

Toronto City Ward 13 Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam
Tyler Johnson, City of Toronto, Councillor Wong-Tam's Office

Nancy Chater, Senior Project Coordinator, Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PFR)
Pablo Munoz, Senior Consultation Coordinator, City of Toronto

Fung Lee, Principal, PMA Landscape Architects
Dylan Cassidy, PMA Landscape Architects
Hannah Soules, PMA Landscape Architects
Stanislav Jurkovic, uoai, artist, on PMA design team

Jane Farrow, Facilitator, Dept of Words and Deeds
Pauline Craig, Notetaker, Dept of Words and Deeds