
YONGE ST. LINEAR PARKS IMPROVEMENTS

Community Resource Group Meeting #2



Friday October 30, 2020

Notes taken by Pauline Craig, Dept of Words & Deeds

General: A virtual meeting was held on Zoom on Friday, October 30, 2020; 11:00am – 12:30pm to gather feedback from the Community Resource Group on the preliminary park design concepts for George Hislop Park, Norman Jewison Park, and Alexander Street Parkette. There were 20 participants including City of Toronto staff and consultant Project Team members.

Meeting Objective: To present and gather feedback on the preliminary park design concepts and refinements of the master plan; and to collect some responses from the group to the high-level concepts for the integrated LGBTQ2S+ public art component

The following is a summary of the discussion that took place.

Overview: A Land Acknowledgement was provided by Nancy Chater, City of Toronto. Fung Lee (PMA) briefly outlined the community outreach and consultation schedule including upcoming consultation with vulnerable communities; summarized the feedback that has been provided to date; and presented the preliminary park design concepts. A discussion of the concepts followed the presentation. Stanislav Jurkovic, artist, on PMA design team, presented preliminary concepts for the integrated LGBTQ2S+ public art component of the design. A second discussion followed his presentation to provide feedback on the public art concepts.

Participants were invited to attend the upcoming public meeting on November 5, 2020 and encouraged to invite others to this meeting. The group was also notified of an online survey that will be available from November 5-22 for those who aren't able to attend the public meeting.

Summary of Key Points

Event spaces have good potential to animate the parks but should be located and designed in way that discourages antisocial activity when they are not in use.

In general, participants responded positively to having event spaces as part of the park designs. Several participants felt that the event plaza in Alexander Street Parkette was a very positive feature because it provides an opportunity to contribute to the space with events or performances. However, participants were concerned about empty event spaces, particularly in the interior of the parks, encouraging illicit or antisocial activities in the parks when the spaces are not activated. Several participants felt that the placement of the event spaces could help to minimize these issues. Suggestions included placing event spaces such that people walking through the park were not

required to pass closely by groups of people that may be creating an uncomfortable atmosphere. Clear sight lines for people moving through the park was desired to create a feeling of safety for park users.

The parks are an important pedestrian through route and the design should take this into account. Several participants pointed out that they and others use the park as a walking route alternative to Yonge Street and would like to see clear, direct walking routes maintained through the park spaces.

Seating steps are not desirable in areas where they may encourage people to gather and use the space in a negative way. Several group members expressed concerns about the use of seating steps in the park designs, such as the proposed event terraces in George Hislop Park. Steps have been shown to encourage people to gather and in some cases, create an antisocial atmosphere that intimidates and discourages others from using the park. Participants' concerns included solicitation, and open drug use among groups of people occupying the steps. The City of Toronto representative from the Downtown East Action Plan pointed out the parks are often used by street-involved people and people using drugs so safety is a high priority for the design of the parks.

Providing an access from George Hislop Park to the back of the Children's Aid Society building (which connects to Macy DuBois Lane) would better provide for people accessing the CAS. A participant representing the Children's Aid Society pointed out that residents, staff and clients of the CAS access the park regularly from the back exit of the CAS building and felt that the design should consider including paving this access to better accommodate the existing foot traffic.

Response: Fung Lee (PMA) said that the team would look into this and noted that the Project Team is also looking into the possibility of opening up Biscuit Lane as another route to access George Hislop Park. Nancy Chater (CoT) noted that the idea of laneway connections is not part of the original scope, and so is still without funding and pending review and approval from City of Toronto's Transportation Services division.

Laneway accesses and other spaces on the edge of parks should be prioritized for public use and to draw people into the park spaces. One participant noted that existing walkways into Norman Jewison Park from one building are being used by adjacent private businesses and asked if there were any efforts to reclaim these spaces for park use. Other participants questioned how the design of Alexander Street Parkette would encourage people to enter the park from Sky Gilbert Lane and Alexander Street, and whether the pathway on the east side of the condo building north of the parkette was going to be opened to provide a north-south pedestrian access between the parkette and Maitland Street (as per an easement secured through the condo building's site plan).

Response: Nancy Chater (City of Toronto) agreed that the project team would investigate the walkways in Norman Jewison Park further but noted that there may be easements in place as well as necessity to maintain due to fire egress for the buildings

or other issues. The access between Sky Gilbert Lane and Maitland Street is also being looked into by the project team.

Large grassy areas should be reimagined in Alexander Parkette because maintaining grass in this location is very challenging. Some group members shared their observations of grass not surviving and a lot of bare earth and mud in Alexander Parkette. Participants felt a different approach should be used here rather than grass.

Food trucks are not a desirable option for animating Alexander Street Parkette. Representatives from the Church Wellesley BIA pointed out that food trucks create competition for struggling brick and mortar businesses in the neighbourhood but suggested that a day market that supports local businesses could be an alternative option for animating the north east corner of Alexander Street Parkette.

The Play area is a positive addition to the park design. A group member representing the Children's Aid Society was in favour of the play area and liked both locations shown.

Pigeons are a concern for Park maintenance and have been made a more significant problem as a result of a community member who is feeding them.

Participants raised the issue of pigeons creating an undesirable environment in the parks and asked if there were any design treatments to address this problem. A representative from the Church Wellesley BIA shared that they are looking into introducing a pair of Peregrine Falcons to roost on their building.

Response: Fung Lee (PMA) told the group that outside of solutions to prevent pigeons from occupying structures there are no known design treatments that can address this problem other than providing signage to deter feeding the pigeons. Nancy Chater (City of Toronto) assured the group that MLS officers do respond to complaints.

Lighting should be bright and consistent to create a safe and comfortable environment. Many participants felt that better lighting in the evening was needed to create a sense of safety among park users. Participants responded very positively to the use of lighting in the integrated LGBTQ2S+ public art component. One participant cautioned that the choice of lighting should consider how different communities use the space and not stigmatize some uses – such as blue lights which are sometimes used to deter drug use.

Projections in the LGBTQ2S+ public art concepts provide an opportunity to provide context and beauty but should not be used for commercial purposes.

Participant comments were unanimously positive regarding the use of light in the art concepts. Some participants cautioned that the projections should not be taken over with corporate logos during larger events. One participant pointed out an opportunity to use the projections to capture some of the existing LGBTQ2S+ experiences of feeling displaced from the neighbourhood due to gentrification and the consequences of disinvestment followed by new investment, such as the redesign of the parks.

The LGBTQ2S+ integrated public art should include indigenous and Two-Spirited peoples to welcome the indigenous community within the concept. Some participants suggested that including indigenous themes and two-spirited peoples in the public art concept would be an opportunity to celebrate the historical native cultural centre that used to be in the area.

Interactive art pieces may risk being monopolized by vulnerable community members. Some participants pointed out that interactive art pieces such as a sculpture near the Regent Park Community Centre, can be used by vulnerable community members as a place to put things on, or to camp out on thus encouraging occupation of the park space, and preventing others from interacting with the art pieces.

Maintenance should be a consideration of any lighting component of the LGBTQ2S+ integrated public art. Several participants expressed concerns that non-standard lighting can present a challenge for parks maintenance. Programmed coloured lights in Barbara Hall Park were used as an example by one participant, saying they have been out of sync for a long period of time despite efforts to correct this.

Designing the parks like a gallery space with art throughout for people to experience provides more opportunities for engagement. Some participants felt that an artwork dispersed over a large area would increase the number of people engaging with it and would encourage engagement from different kinds of communities

Consider an audio or story-telling component to the LGBTQ2S+ integrated public art. Oral history and a storytelling of queer and indigenous histories was suggested by one participant as an element to include in the public artwork, such as the Murmur project by Shawn Micallef.

Additional Comments: A reminder of upcoming meetings was provided to the group at the close of the meeting, including the second public meeting on December 9th and the next meeting of the Community Resource Group on December 4th.

Meeting Participants:

Alejandra Adarve, Artist in Residence, The Sanctuary
Daniel Carter, Director of Programming, Buddies in Bad Times Theatre
Shaun Daudlin, Managing Director, Buddies in Bad Times Theatre
Juliana de Marco, HR lead, Health and Safety, Children's Aid Society of Toronto
Mo Fayaz, Director of IT & Property, Children's Aid Society of Toronto
Christopher Hudspeth, Church Wellesley BIA
Connie Langille, Church Wellesley Neighbourhood Association
Bobby MacPherson, Director of Operations, Pride Toronto
Stephanie McCracken, Church Wellesley BIA
Rolfe Santos, Community Development Officer, Tower and Neighbourhood Revitalization (Downtown East Action Plan)

George Sovatzis, General Manager, The Anndore House
Curran Stikuts, Manager, Community Engagement, The 519

Project Team

Nancy Chater, Senior Project Coordinator, Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PFR)

Rajesh Sankat, Senior Consultation Coordinator, Parks, Forestry and Recreation

Fung Lee, Principal, PMA Landscape Architects

Dylan Cassidy, PMA Landscape Architects

Stanislav Jurkovic, uoai, artist, on PMA design team

Hannah Soules, PMA Landscape Architects

Jane Farrow, Facilitator, Dept of Words and Deeds

Pauline Craig, Notetaker, Dept of Words and Deeds