

# YONGE ST. LINEAR PARKS IMPROVEMENTS

## Public Meeting #2 – Preferred Concept Plan

Wednesday, February 17, 2021



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*Notes taken by Jane Farrow, Sneha Mandhan, Leah Birnbaum and Pauline Craig, Dept of Words & Deeds*

**General:** A virtual meeting was held on Zoom on Wednesday, February 17th 2021; 6:30pm – 8:00pm to gather feedback from members of the public on the preferred design concepts for George Hislop Park, Norman Jewison Park, and Alexander Street Parkette. There were 72 participants including City of Toronto staff and consultant Project Team members.

**Meeting Objective:** To present and gather feedback on the preferred design concepts for George Hislop Park, Norman Jewison Park, and Alexander Street Parkette, and the preferred design concept for the integrated LGBTQ2S+ public art piece in George Hislop Park

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

**Overview:** A Land Acknowledgement was provided by Nancy Chater, Senior Project Coordinator, City of Toronto. Jane Farrow, Department of Words and Deeds, facilitated the meeting on behalf of the City of Toronto. Jane provided an overview of the meeting agenda, introduced the project team, stakeholders, and project timeline; provided a summary of the consultation that has taken place thus far, and let the group know that an online survey is available through the project website until March 12, 2021.

City Councillor (Ward 13 – Toronto-Centre) Kristyn Wong-Tam thanked participants for taking the time to attend the meeting and provide feedback. She spoke in support of the design and the improvements it will provide to the parks that will become busier in future as population grows. Councillor Wong-Tam told the group that the City of Toronto will be working to expand the Yonge Street linear park system in the future as opportunities arise; and she complemented the project team, saying they were an excellent team to be working on this project, and mentioned other successful projects to which the project team members have contributed.

Lead designer and landscape architect Fung Lee (PMA Landscape Architects) presented the guidelines and objectives for the project; the concept themes that have guided the preferred design; and summarized the feedback that has been received through the project's

consultation activities. This was followed by an overview of the preferred design concept for all three of the parks, including a review of the key design elements and the indigenous placemaking and placekeeping concepts that have influenced the designs. The preferred design concepts for the three parks were then presented one by one, and participants were divided into one of four breakout groups following each presentation to discuss each park separately.

## **Summary of Key Points**

### **1. Attractive and welcoming design**

There was a general sense among participants that the park designs were attractive, welcoming felt safe, and that the integrated LBTQ2S+ artwork is appealing and will help to animate George Hislop Park.

### **2. Safety**

Participants were supportive of the open design and increased lighting and recognized that the design - along with community support and increased activity in the parks over time - has the potential to help improve safety.

### **3. Plantings and hardscaping balance**

Participants were in favour of creating paved areas for pedestrian traffic in order to avoid muddy paths and gathering areas but also expressed hopes for a larger proportion of grassy or planted areas.

### **4. Maintenance and Cleanliness**

Keeping the parks tidy and well maintained were seen by many participants as important for both safety and enjoyment of the parks.

### **5. Dog Relief Areas**

Designated space and facilities to manage dog waste was a priority for many participants.

### **6. Neighbouring Properties**

Participants voiced support for improving fences and other visible boundaries at the edges of the parks.

### **7. Accessibility and Permeability**

Ensuring that the parks are accessible to community members of all abilities and prioritizing proposed connections along laneways or other properties were identified by participants as key components to a welcoming design.

## **Detailed Feedback**

## All Parks

### **The designs are attractive and welcoming to most participants.**

A majority of participants said that they really liked the designs and several said they like the aesthetic and placement of the arches and “cigarette” style lights. Several participants mentioned they were pleased to see that the parks will be well lit, which they felt will improve safety. One participant reminded his breakout group that the parks are part of a green loop that was envisioned to run on both sides of Yonge Street between Maitland and Wellesley. He saw the parks as welcoming connections to the fabric of the neighbourhood, both physically and conceptually. Three participants said they were not fond of the arches in the park designs and felt like the structures and the proposed lighting detracted from the natural setting of a park. They suggested that instead trees should be planted to arch over the walkways.

**Response:** Nancy Chater (City of Toronto) told the group that steel arches were part of the 2017 Master Plan design and have already been included in the James Canning park design. The project team has worked to integrate these into the proposed design but has decreased the number of arches in this design.

**The designs should strive to create a park atmosphere with more natural, green spaces but will also be mindful that muddy paths and spaces are undesirable.** All participants were in favour of the plantings and greening strategies. Many people felt that the designs for all three parks had too much hardscaping or paving and wished to see more green space and more plantings. One participant said they thought the paving would help to keep the parks clean so suggested that more trees be planted to create more green space. Another participant asked that the precast concrete "pebble" seating be designed to look organic and natural, like large rocks. One participant said the designs felt open and exposed and she suggested including plantings in the middle of paths to break up large areas of paving and provide more plantings that would invite people to explore and find their own space to enjoy. A few participants specifically said they loved the idea of using indigenous plants.

### **Design the parks and program their maintenance to ensure clean, well maintained locations.**

Several participants pointed out that the street entrances to George Hislop Park are often littered and have overflowing garbage bins. Participants suggested that all park designs should lend themselves to cleanliness and maintenance of the parks should be prioritized. Several participants agreed that more garbage / recycling bins should be provided. People were hopeful that a thorough regime of winter maintenance would come with the new park designs and maintenance plans.

**Response:** Dylan Cassidy (PMA) informed one breakout group that the project team is consulting with Solid Waste Management Services (COT) but that standard Toronto Park

waste and recycle bins will be used because they are designed to work with garbage collection vehicles. However, that there may be a need for more receptacles.

**Vary the location of seating so that there are options for people to sit in grassy areas as well as paved areas.** Several participants felt that some seating should be located within the grassy areas of the parks rather than having all the seating concentrated along and facing the walkway.

**Ensure the park designs are accessible and welcoming to all.** One participant expressed the desire for the designs to undergo a thorough audit of AODA and accessibility compliance, with an emphasis on ensuring that the needs of those with 'lived experience' of disability be included and accounted for. One participant suggested that public washroom facilities be included in the parks.

City Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam indicated that there is a City of Toronto Accessibility Committee and that the designs should be presented to this committee to ensure a high level of accountability and accessibility.

### **George Hislop Park**

**The integrated LBTQ2S+ artwork is attractive and will help to animate the park.** Several participants praised the preferred design for the integrated artwork, particularly the lighting which some thought would help to animate the park. One participant pointed out that heavily used pathways can change colour over time and suggested that bright pink pavers might show wear faster than neutral colours. Another participant pointed out that the second option for lighting (the Multi-luminaire assemblies) seemed inhospitable, especially for sleeping. One person suggested that the City bring in queer artists to create art installations as an alternative to the pink light installation to make them feel more included. There was also a concern expressed about the "harshness" of the archway towards the northern edge of the park.

**Reduce the amount of pavement and add more green space.** Several participants felt that the paved surfaces were too large in the park. In one group, participants mentioned that the lawn areas are where people can get their feet in the grass, which also speaks to the Indigenous connection to land. There was also a recommendation that flat pavers which allow for plant growth in between pavers be considered. Some participants said that they were happy with the balance of greenery and hard surfaces, to avoid muddy walkways and grass.

**Response:** Fung Lee (PMA Landscape Architects) told one breakout group that the design team has heard about the lawn getting worn and muddy, and that they hope that the design invokes a feeling of being nestled in green.

**Provide some more seating** One participant felt that there could be opportunities to provide more seating in George Hislop Park.

**Ensure the finished design is a success by selecting materials that will withstand wear and tear and by consistently maintaining park infrastructure.** One participant mentioned problems with lighting in James Canning Gardens and felt that the lighting in George Hislop Park would need to be better maintained to avoid this problem.

**Find a creative way to incorporate the TTC vent.** One participant suggested that the TTC vent be made more aesthetically pleasing and decorative.

**Create a designated space for dogs in George Hislop Park.** Some participants felt that a dog relief area was needed in the park to serve the growing population in this immediate area.

**Create an attractive, welcoming border with The Sanctuary:**

Some participants suggested that the existing chain link fence should be upgraded to something more attractive. One participant highlighted that the mere addition of new fencing adjacent to the Sanctuary felt too minimal and like a missed opportunity to create something more attractive. Planting the fence with vines was suggested.

**Incorporate the existing drinking fountain into the design.** Participants pointed out that there is an existing drinking fountain located on the northern side of the park on Charles Street (currently shut-off due to COVID-19) which should be incorporated into the design of the park.

### **Norman Jewison Park**

**Consider removing the Toronto Parking Authority parking lot or providing something to screen it or minimize its visual impact from the park.** Several participants felt that the TPA parking lot should be removed because it creates, noise, pollution and visual disruptions that interfere with enjoyment of the park. Screening the parking lot was suggested but more access between the park and the parking lot was also supported.

**Response:** Dylan Cassidy (PMA) told one breakout group that the TPA parking lot will remain for the time being, but the preferred design proposes a bioswale that will help to screen the parking lot from the park.

**Response:** Nancy Chater (City of Toronto) told another breakout group that the surface lot is going to stay for another estimated 5 years and that Parks would like to expand the park but is not able to do so immediately.

**The improvements to pedestrian pathways in and surrounding the park are a welcome improvement.** One participant said they were pleased to see the proposed curb bump-outs that would increase the sidewalk space at the intersection with Gloucester Street.

**Consider relocating some seating away from the walkway.** One participant suggested providing seating along the outside edges of Norman Jewison Park rather than down the center. Other suggestions were made about having some seating along lawn areas without back rests to allow users to sit facing in either direction. One participant said she appreciates the range of seating that is proposed.

**Reduce the size of the central paved area and consider other pathways.** A majority of participants felt that the paved area in the park was too large and suggested providing more plantings and grass to reduce the paved area. Participants recommended creating opportunities in the park for different ways to engage with the space (creating 'nooks') as compared to only being in the main, central corridor.

*Response:* Fung Lee (PMA Landscape Architects) mentioned the limitation of creating paved areas in the Tree Protection Area, but acknowledged the opportunity to create more soft paths.

*Response:* Dylan Cassidy (PMA) said the design team will look at increasing the green space further keeping in mind the necessary clearances for snow plows and garbage pickup.

**Consider relocating the dog relief area away from the park entrance, and redesigning some of the elements.** Several participants felt that the placement of the dog relief area at the entrance of the park would create an unwelcoming smell at the entrance. Concern was also expressed that the dog relief area encroached on the pedestrian path area. One participant felt that the dog area should be fenced in to contain dogs and signage provided to direct dog owners to the correct relief area. Another participant suggested that small dogs also don't feel comfortable walking on pea gravel and felt wood chips would be a better option for the relief area surface. One participant felt that dog owners would not use this area but would let their dogs go anywhere. Another participant suggested consideration be given to a linear, fenced-in dog park along the side of the parking lot.

*Response:* Dylan Cassidy (PMA) said that the intent of the dog relief area is that it will be irrigated to reduce any odours.

*Response:* Nancy Chater (City of Toronto) said that the design team could try to put the dog relief area further into the park and explained that its current location was chosen to preserve the view to the Faculty Club heritage building with open lawn feature in the central area of the park.

**A stylized water fountain for dogs is a positive addition to the park but could be more functional.** People were generally supportive of the idea of a drinking fountain for the dogs but also wondered if it could be adapted so people and dogs could both have separate or dual

function drinking fountains. One of the participants also requested that the bowl contain memorial text (“In Memory of”). One person thought that the dog fountain idea needed to be considered much more closely, in detail, before they could support the idea.

**Provide more waste / recycling bins.** One participant highlighted the need for more waste/recycling receptacles in the park.

**Create attractive borders with adjacent properties.** One participant said they applauded the proposed upgraded fence on the east side of the park bordering on 30 Gloucester Street.

**Ensure lighting illuminates the whole park and not just the walkways.** One participant felt that the increased planting might create hiding places and suggested the planted areas be well lit.

**The design concept of a lost creek was well received.** Some participants said they thought this concept was a great idea and an important factor to recognize.

### *Alexander Street Parkette*

**The design, and particularly the performance space, is a positive improvement for the park.** There was general support for the design and in particular how the new plaza space would accommodate and promote arts and performance events such as those given by Buddies in Bad Times Theatre around annual Pride celebrations.

**Look for ways to improve connections into the north end of the park.** Participants recommended redesigning the north end of the parkette along the laneway fence to make it appear less like a back of the park and more like an entrance. Participants pointed to the fence along the laneway potentially acting like an end-point. One participant pointed out that there used to be a north-south public walkway on the east side of 25 Maitland Street but the condominium board closed it.

**Response:** Nancy Chater (City of Toronto) told the breakout group that the walkway at 25 Maitland Street was closed due to security concerns and that the City is hoping that the park revitalization and the influx of more people from the new development on Yonge Street near Alexander Street will create more 'eyes on the park' and increase safety, which may encourage the condo board to reconsider and open the access.

**Response:** Fung Lee (PMA Landscape Architect) highlighted that one of the previously presented design options did have a more designed plaza on the northern end. She also mentioned that Nancy Chater from the City of Toronto is looking into the possibility of the 25 Maitland property removing the fence along Sky Gilbert Lane.

**Consider seeking community support to create a safe space in Alexander Street Parkette.** One participant was concerned about safety in the park, saying that because there is currently not a lot of traffic through the park it becomes more of a refuge space and has become unpleasant for residents because of safety issues. He suggested seeking support such as talking with the police department about how to monitor and keep the park safe.

**Response:** Dylan Cassidy (PMA) told the group that safety is a common concern that the project team has heard and suggested that the City's Park Ambassadors may be a helpful resource to address some of these issues.

**Provide a dog relief area.** In general, participants felt that there should be a dog relief area in Alexander Street Parkette because of the large number of new developments in the area, and an expectation of more dogs in the near future. Some participants also confirmed that their dogs will just relieve themselves everywhere in the park regardless of a designated dog relief area, and perhaps more frequent and edge-related dog-relief areas could be considered.

**The seating is a positive feature of the design.** Some participants said they thought the seating was well done. One participant felt that the park needed more seating for individuals or couples in addition to large seating areas.

**Consider ways to avoid having an infrequently used performance plaza in the centre of the park.** One participant was concerned that the central event space in the park would remain unused most of the year and could encourage people to congregate or create an uncomfortable, barren environment. Another participant expressed concern over the loss of a significant amount of green space in the parkette and suggested the design team explore an opportunity to build an 'off-the-cuff' performance corner by cutting into the natural slope of the park.

#### Additional Comments / Questions of Clarification:

**Q:** What is defensive design?

**A:** Design that prevents certain kinds of behaviour, like a bench that is designed to prevent someone from lying down. The community feedback has said that this kind of design is not wanted in the park, rather it should be a welcoming space for everyone.

**Q:** What is AODA and how do the designs meet AODA standards?

**A:** **Recognizing the history of discrimination against persons with disabilities in Ontario, the purpose of this Act is to benefit all Ontarians by,**



- **(a) developing, implementing and enforcing accessibility standards in order to achieve accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities with respect to goods, services, facilities, accommodation, employment, buildings, structures and premises.**

The AODA requires that parks and outdoor spaces be designed so that they do not present any physical barriers to people with disabilities. In terms of the park designs this applies to many things such as surface materials, tactile paving in appropriate places for visually impaired people, the steepness of slopes and ramps, seating. All consultant teams have to apply these standards regularly to City park designs. The City also has its Accessibility Design Guidelines that must be followed with similar intent to AODA.

**Q:** Does the pre-cast concrete "Pebble Seating" have a coating to make cleaning graffiti easier?

**A:** A coating can be applied to make cleaning easier.

**Q:** Has there been any thought to putting a linear dog park along the park edge?

**A:** Yes, in previous iterations of the design during 2017 the masterplan development, the dog relief area had a more linear layout, but the project team received feedback asking to make the dog relief area less dominant in the design.

**Q:** Will there be any concern with ice build-up and wind on the arches?

**A:** No, there have not been any concerns raised with the arches in James Canning Gardens. The issue of wind is addressed by structural engineering design of the arches.

**Q:** Is there an Indigenous art component in the parks?

**A:** Not at present. The focus of the art was determined to be LGBTQ2S+ through community initiative and to reflect the Church Wellesley village neighbourhood. The bioswale elements in the parks are a response to feedback received through Indigenous consultation to bring back and celebrate the natural elements like water. They also provide a reference to Moss Creek which is buried under Norman Jewison Park. We are hoping to work with an Indigenous artist to create an interpretive piece about indigenous placekeeping.

**Q:** What is a bioswale?

**A:** A bioswale is a depression in the land, similar to a ditch, that collects and holds stormwater temporarily as it permeates into the ground. A bioswale can have a grass surface or it can be planted with plants that will help to take up some of that water and create visual interest

**Q:** What is the plan to deter unwanted activity in the parks?

**A:** An open design that follows CPTED principles (crime prevention through environmental design) which includes open sightlines, high tree branches, adequate lighting, and no visual blocks at eye level so there are no hiding places. The park revitalization is intended to draw more park users which will create more “eyes on the park” for safety.

**Q:** Will there be water fountains in the parks?

**A:** Yes, there will be bottle fillers.

**Q:** Is the dog relief area in Norman Jewison Park an off leash area?

**A:** No, this would be an on-leash area. It is not fenced because the parks are relatively small and have a linear form, so a fenced off-leash area would take up a significant portion of the park. It will be irrigated for maintenance.

**Q:** Will there be enforcement for use of the dog relief area?

**A:** The Parks department will put up signs in parks that describe the rules and bylaws and the standard enforcement will be in place through the City's Municipal Licensing and Standards branch which enforces bylaws. We hope that by providing something appealing people will use it in the intended way.

**Comment:** Several participants felt that pigeons and pigeon feeding is a problem in the parks creating mess and public health issues. They would like to see PFR address the problem somehow and in park designs if possible.

**Next Steps:** A survey link was circulated to the group through the Zoom chat function and participants were directed to the project website for more information and another route to find the survey link. Nancy Chater (City of Toronto) explained that following completion of the online survey, the consultation portion of the project will be completed. A final concept plan will be posted online for public view. The next phase of the project will be the detailed design phase to develop the technical details based on the concept plans , followed by the preparation of contract documents for construction tender

**Project Team and City of Toronto Officials at the meeting;**

Ward 13 Toronto City Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam

Tyler Johnson, City of Toronto, Councillor Wong-Tam’s Office

Nancy Chater, Senior Project Coordinator, City of Toronto, Capital Projects (PFR)

Rajesh Sankat, Senior Public Consultation Coordinator, City of Toronto, Capital Projects (PFR)

Fung Lee, Principal, PMA Landscape Architects

Dylan Cassidy, PMA Landscape Architects  
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