

YONGE ST. LINEAR PARKS IMPROVEMENTS

Community Resource Group Meeting #3



Tuesday, February 9, 2021

Notes taken by Pauline Craig, Dept of Words & Deeds

General: A virtual meeting was held on Zoom on February 9, 2021, from 1:00pm to 3:00pm to gather feedback from Community Resource Group members on the preferred design concept for the Yonge Street Linear Parks Improvements Project. There were 18 participants including City of Toronto staff and consultant team members.

Meeting Objective: To gather feedback from Community Resource Group members 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 component within George Hislop Park.

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

Overview: A Land Acknowledgement was provided by Rajesh Sankat (City of Toronto). Jane Farrow (Department of Words and Deeds) presented the meeting agenda, project objectives and timelines as well as a summary of the ongoing community outreach. The group was reminded of the public meeting on Feb 17th, an upcoming online survey, and a “What We’ve Heard” report that will be published to the project website summarizing all of the input to date, for the first phase of park design. Fung Lee (PMA Landscape Architects) presented the project design guidelines and summarized the feedback that has been received to date. This was followed by presentations of the preferred design concepts for each of the three parks. Stanislav Jurkovic (uoai Architects) presented the preferred design for the integrated LGBTQ2S+ public art project. A group discussion followed each park presentation.

Key Feedback Themes

- The lighting and openness of the park designs is attractive and creates a feeling of safety.
- There is a good balance of seating for groups and for individuals.
- More plantings including trees and pollinator gardens are a priority and opportunities to reduce the pavement should be considered where possible.

- The designs for all 3 of the parks should consider use by dog owners and should be mindfully designed to minimize damage to plantings and provide accessible areas for dogs and their owners.
- A flexible, open plaza design that can accommodate events in George Hislop Park is preferred.
- Some existing gate access points from the private property on the east side of Norman Jewison Park do not lead to pathways and should be closed or removed.
- Access to Norman Jewison Park from the Toronto Parking Authority parking lot is a priority and consideration should be given to converting the parking lot to park space in future.
- The integration of the laneways in George Hislop Park and Alexander Street Parkette are a high priority.
- A re-interpretation of the commemorative water fountain/pet drinking fountain is a welcome addition to Norman Jewison Park, but the proposed design and location should be refined to address tripping hazards and other issues.
- The integrated LGBTQ2S+ public art is creative, attractive and engaging.

Detailed Feedback

The lighting and openness of the park designs is attractive and creates a feeling of safety. Participants agreed that the layout of the park elements and the lighting create a welcoming and safe feeling for the park. Some group members suggested using solar or other lights in the trees to light them up as was shown in one of the examples in the presentation.

More plantings including trees and pollinator gardens are a priority and opportunities to reduce the pavement should be considered where possible. Group members were supportive of adding additional trees to expand the tree canopy in George Hislop Park. A few participants expressed concerns about the amount of paving in this park and had concerns about water and drainage. A few participants agreed that the proposed planting surrounding the TTC air vent successfully helped to integrate this infrastructure into the design and suggested using specific plants that may prevent people from accessing the surface of the air vent.

One participant suggested adding more permeable paving near the central lawn area of Norman Jewison Park. Another participant noted that the plan includes multiple

paved paths and suggested converting the proposed east-west pathway that divides the green space south of Sky Gilbert Lane in the Alexander St. Parkette plan back to green space.

Response: Fung Lee (PMA) explained that the amount of paving is increasing in the parks to help address concerns about lawn maintenance and accommodate the volume of pedestrians travelling through the parks. Some of the paving is permeable and the design team is looking for opportunities to add more permeable paving and increase the planting in proportion which will better manage and absorb stormwater. The team will investigate simplifying the route through the 'garden walk' in Alexander St. Parkette and returning some of the paths south of Sky Gilbert Lane back to green space provided it does not impact the accessible pathways into the park.

There is a good balance of seating for groups and for individuals. Two participants felt that there is a good quantity of seating provided in George Hislop Park with a good mix for groups and individuals who would prefer to sit alone.

The designs for all 3 of the parks should consider use by dog owners, be mindfully designed to minimize damage to plantings, and provide accessible areas for dogs and their owners.

Some participants pointed out that dogs could be quite damaging to plants and agreed that some protection of the planted areas from dogs and dog waste is needed. One group member suggested that the proposed pea gravel in the dog relief area in Norman Jewison Park is not an accessible material for dog owners using wheelchairs. The majority of group members agreed that the number of dogs using Alexander Street Parkette may warrant a dedicated dog area in this park and suggested that more amenities like this could increase traffic, improve safety and potentially help to better integrate Sky Gilbert Lane with the park and adjacent properties.

Response: Nancy Chater (City of Toronto) agreed that because dogs need to remain on leash in the dog relief area in Norman Jewison Park, the accessibility of pea gravel is an important consideration for owners cleaning up after their dogs and the Project Team will look at this further.

Response: Fung Lee (PMA) said that a dog relief area in Alexander Street Park is a possibility and will be explored in further detail.

A flexible open plaza design that can accommodate events in George Hislop Park is preferred. Several group members agreed that an open plaza design provides good opportunity for events and activations in the park and works well in other parks.

Response: Fung Lee (PMA) explained to the group that the plaza is intended to provide space for events while allowing other park visitors to walk around it.

Entry plazas at the street connections to all of the parks are other potential spaces for events or activations.

A re-interpretation of the commemorative water fountain/pet drinking fountain is a welcome addition to Norman Jewison Park, but the proposed design and location should be refined to address tripping hazards and other issues.

Several participants agreed that the proposed design of the fountain to replace the existing Barney memorial water fountain was a positive addition to the park, but they had concerns the low profile of the “dog bowl” design could present trip hazards and maintenance problems. One participant thought the placement of the fountain was not consistent with the rest of the park design. One suggestion was to incorporate the fountain into a linear arrangement of elements such as stones that could further incorporate the water theme and illustrate the idea of a creek flowing through the park.

Response: Nancy Chater (City of Toronto) agreed that the Team will need to refine the design and placement of the Barney memorial water fountain to be sure it does not cause accessibility or maintenance issues.

Some existing gate access points from the private property on the east side of Norman Jewison Park do not lead to pathways and should be closed or removed.

One participant pointed out that two or three of the existing gate entrances near the heritage building at 17 Isabella Street open onto grassy areas and may encourage higher traffic over the grass which would create muddy areas. Another participant pointed out that the building is a condominium, so the Confederation of University Faculty Associations is just the front building while the other units are independently owned.

Response: Nancy Chater (City of Toronto) said that the design would not leave gates opening to the lawn and that the team will be coordinating with 17 Isabella Street. Nancy will be connecting with CRG member Paul Farrelly offline for some more detailed information to assist with the coordination.

Access to Norman Jewison Park from the Toronto Parking Authority parking lot is a high priority and consideration should be given to converting the parking lot to park space in future. A number of participants spoke out in favour of the entrances to the park from the parking lot. Several participants suggested turning the TPA parking lot into park space to increase green space in the downtown area.

Response: Nancy Chater (City of Toronto) said that the Yonge Street Linear Park Master Plan did show the parking lot removed and that this option is under consideration with Parks Planning and Procurement, however the timing for this is outside of the timeframe for the park redesign as this is one of the few remaining surface parking lots in this area of the city and would likely continue to function for 5+ years.

The bioswale in Norman Jewison Park is functional and beautiful. Several participants agreed that the bioswale with pollinator garden plantings was a wonderful aspect of the design. Some participants suggested consideration be given to putting the bioswale on the east side of the park because this area is lower, has more sun than the west side, and there are established trees on the west side along Gloucester Lane. One participant noted that Norman Jewison Park design was less dynamic than the others and developing the bioswale idea would add interest.

The redesign of the Yonge Street Linear Parks presents an opportunity for improvements to adjacent properties. One participant felt that there was an opportunity for the existing fencing along the west side of 30 Gloucester Street to be made more attractive to complement the new design for Norman Jewison Park. Another participant felt that 30 Gloucester Street added an important element of green space and suggested that the fence continue to be visually permeable to take advantage of the view.

Some participants expressed concerns about the level of lighting near The Sanctuary and asked about the plan for the existing fence between The Sanctuary and George Hislop Park. They wished to see the park design create a safe and welcoming space for community members from The Sanctuary.

Response: Nancy Chater (City of Toronto): told the group that the fence between The Sanctuary and George Hislop Park is needed for Parks Operations and will remain for the foreseeable future. She noted that community members from the Sanctuary would certainly be welcome in the park, which is for everybody.

Response: Fung Lee (PMA) said that there will be a new access point from the park to Macy Dubois Lane on the east side and there will be safety lighting added there.

The redesign of Norman Jewison Park should coordinate with streetscape improvements planned for the area. One participant reminded the group that there is a curb bump-out planned at the intersection of Gloucester Lane and Gloucester Street, and suggested that increasing the sidewalk space in this area and moving the existing TPA parking meter back would improve pedestrian safety and create a more pedestrian friendly entrance to the park. Another participant agreed and added that the same consideration should be given to the TPA parking meter at Isabella Street.

The integration of the laneways in George Hislop Park and Alexander Street Parkette are a high priority. Several participants agreed that the integration of Biscuit lane into the design of George Hislop Park was a very positive improvement.

Most participants said they would like to see Sky Gilbert Lane opened and integrated into Alexander Street Parkette more than is currently shown. They felt that it would provide benefits for safety and access to the park. Another participant suggested that it would be good to get feedback at the public meeting from residents of 25 Maitland Street whose building backs onto the laneway, and parking garage is located underneath but that is currently fenced off from the laneway. One participant pointed out that there will be more activity in the laneway area once the new development at 501 Yonge Street opens, which will provide more “eyes on the street”.

Response: Nancy Chater (City of Toronto) said that 25 Maitland Street was fenced off from the laneway because of concerns about safety and drug use in this north-east area of the park and lane, but that it would be desirable to reopen this in the future once the conditions change and there is more activity and better lighting. She suggested working with the CRG to try and find some contacts at the building.

Response: Fung Lee (PMA) said the Team is exploring using the "woonerf" (curbless street) idea to inspire integration of the laneway and would like to restore the paving to expand the park aesthetic into the laneway, make it flush (no curbs) with tactile plates for accessibility, and create a kind of flexible street condition. This proposed change to a curbless street is conceptual at this stage, and would require review and approval by Transportation Services to advance.

The large city garbage bins are not attractive in the parks. Most participants agreed that the garbage bins were not attractive and asked if other options were available. One participant suggested having the street furniture garbage bins located in close proximity to the park. A representative from City Councillor Wong-Tam’s office told the group that it is possible to relocate the street furniture garbage bins if the BIA were to request it and that the Councillor’s office would support that effort.

Response: Nancy Chater (City of Toronto) said it is not possible to change the designs of the garbage and recycling bins in the park because Solid Waste collects the bins in all City parks and the current bins are specifically designed to work with their machinery. The street furniture litter and recycling bins are managed separately, and have a different style as noted.

The Community Plaza area of Alexander Street Parkette needs to have drainage or other ways of managing water from rainfall and snowmelt. Several participants had concerns about mitigating water pooling in this low-lying area of Alexander Street parkette

Response: Fung Lee (PMA) said that the design team is looking at using the landscape to pick up some of the stormwater through bioswales and may also include an infiltration trench or bioswale at the base of the slopes. The intent

will not be to drain from the planting to paving but the team will be investigating this further with their civil engineer at the next stage of the design process.

A play area for kids may help to animate Alexander Street Parkette. One participant suggested adding a children's play area on the north side of Alexander Street Parkette to serve the increasing population in this area and further animate the park.

The integrated LGBTQ2S+ public art is creative, attractive and engaging.

The design concept for the integrated LGBTQ2S+ public art was received very positively by the group. Several group members said they liked the aesthetic, the durability of the proposed materials and the central placement of the piece in George Hislop Park.

Questions of Clarification:

Q: What is the planned interface between Sky Gilbert Lane and the north edge of Alexander Street Parkette park on the east side?

A: There are a series of bollards there at the moment. This will probably be designed to have a gate so that Parks and Solid Waste vehicles can drive up to the park but cars will not be able to enter.

Q: Could we not design something to encase the current garbage bins so they would not look so ugly?

A: The garbage bins need to be open so that they can be picked up by the Solid Waste equipment.

Q: Is the underground access building a used access for 25 Maitland Street?

A: The underground parking for 25 Maitland has an easement for periodic maintenance and a fire egress with the glass enclosed stairwell.

Q: Has there been clarification about the ownership of Sky Gilbert Lane east of Alexander Street Parkette? Access?

A: Sky Gilbert Lane is a City public lane that currently dead-ends at private property at its east end. Pedestrian access to connect with Donna Shaw Lane to the east is through private property and beyond the scope of this project to address.

Attendance: Participants from the Community Resource Group

Stephanie McCracken, Church Wellesley BIA

Paul Farrelly, Church Wellesley Neighbourhood Association

George Sovatzis, General Manager, The Anndore House

Christopher Hudspeth, Church Wellesley BIA

Michael Jewison, Resident and business owner

Bobby MacPherson, Director of Operations, Pride Toronto

Connie Langille, Church Wellesley Neighbourhood Association
Trevor Hennig, Church Wellesley Neighbourhood Association

City of Toronto Staff

Nancy Chater, Senior Project Coordinator
Tyler Johnson, City Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam's Office
Rajesh Sankat, Senior Public Consultation Coordinator

Design Team

Fung Lee, Principal, PMA Landscape Architects
Dylan Cassidy, Project Landscape Architect, PMA Landscape Architects
Hannah Soules, Landscape Designer, PMA Landscape Architects
Stanislav Jurkovic, Artist, uoai architects

Facilitation Team

Jane Farrow, Dept of Words & Deeds
Pauline Craig, Dept of Words & Deeds
Sneha Mandhan, Dept of Words & Deeds

This meeting report was written by the DWD facilitation team of Pauline Craig and Jane Farrow.