

# **Jane Finch Initiative: Resident-led Grassroots Meeting**

**November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

**6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.**

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**Summary Report by the Jane Finch Community and Family Centre**

## **BACKGROUND**

The [Jane Finch Initiative](#) (JFI) is a City of Toronto and resident-informed project to plan for the future of the Jane and Finch area. Together, we are developing a community development plan and a land use plan so that residents and businesses are supported as the area changes over time with the opening of the Finch West LRT. It is a collaborative community planning exercise in 'Neighbourhood 24 - Black Creek' and 'Neighbourhood 25 - Glenfield-Jane Heights' (see [Neighbourhood Profiles](#)), centred on the intersection of Jane Street and Finch Avenue West.

The initiative involves three integrated streams of work:

- 1) **Comprehensive engagement** (ongoing)
- 2) A **community development plan** including a local economic opportunity plan.
- 3) An update to the **land use planning framework**.

Community engagement is at the heart of the Jane Finch Initiative. The City is working in collaboration with the Jane Finch Centre which is supporting community engagement and facilitating different community conversations to collect ideas and feedback. This includes facilitating monthly meetings of a Community Advisory Committee.

## **MEETING OVERVIEW**

On Wednesday November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021, from 6:00 pm to 8:00 p.m., City of Toronto staff and the Jane Finch Centre staff, hosted the Resident-led Grassroots meeting. This meeting is a part of the Jane Finch Initiative's comprehensive engagement stream, and it was held online over Zoom. The evening agenda can be viewed in Appendix 1 on page 11, while the Google Jamboard responses can be viewed in Appendix 2 on page 12.

The purpose of the event was to:

- Introduce the Jane Finch Initiative (JFI) to local grassroots groups in Jane Finch.
- Provide a presentation from City staff to participants about the Jane Finch Initiative.
- Answer questions following the presentation.
- Hold a Jamboard discussion with participants about the Grassroots perspective for the JFI.

## **ATTENDEES:**

- **3 JFC staff;** Amadeo Ventura (Manager of Strategic Development), Clara Stewart- Robertson (Manager of Community Planning & Development), Maymun Abukar (Jane Finch Initiative Coordinator).
- **3 City of Toronto staff:** Janvere Lyder (Community Development Officer, Social Development Finance & Administration), John Smith (Manager, Social Development Finance & Administration), Leah Birnbaum (Senior Planner, City Planning).
- **1 Resident Co-facilitator:** Kemisha Thomas.
- 63 Resident-led Grassroots groups' participants.

## **MEETING SUMMARY**

- Maymun welcomes everyone, reads the Land Acknowledgement, and goes over the evening agenda.
- JFC staff, City staff, and resident- led grassroots groups are invited to briefly introduce themselves on the Zoom chat.
- John and Leah present the Jane Finch Initiative to the participants.
- Maymun and Kemisha present the community engagement partners of the JFI, which include the JFC and Community Advisory Committee (CAC).
- After the presentation, City staff and answer any follow-up questions pertaining to the JFI.
- Following this Q&A period, Kemisha facilitates the discussion, asking a research question for participants to engage during the meeting, and on Google Jamboard.
- At the end of discussion, the meeting is adjourned.

## **WHAT WE HEARD**

This section includes the summaries of the feedback collected from the discussions during the Zoom meeting.

### **Presentation Questions/ Answers Discussed:**

**Q:** How do you join the CAC?

- **Response:** The CAC was recruited over 7 months ago; the first meeting was back in June. We mailed out notices to everybody in the area and invited people if they were interested in joining the CAC. We were delighted to have a lot of people interested, including Kemisha (co-facilitator), and a few other people in this meeting who are also on the committee as well. Folks had a chance to share their interest and together with the City and JFC staff, we selected people who were a diverse representation of the community, in terms of age, neighbourhood and other factors. We now have a waiting list of people who are not on the committee but did indicate their interest; that waiting list can potentially be open if spots are freed up, which has not happened yet- the committee is very active. There are lots of other ways to get involved other than the being a part of the CAC.
- **Response:** Because we are looking at a new process with the Community Development Plan, it's important that we look at the engagement process as a whole. When we went to Council, there was a motion that staff set up a CAC so that the community can ensure participation and involvement in the process directly and in the engagement process as a whole. We are looking at working through Covid, but we hope that in the second phase and beyond, we have active resident participation and involvement. We know that there are a number of different places in the community, we hope to get an on-the-ground connection to residents, looking at an ongoing way of resident participation in this process to ensure a diversity of voices, ideas in developing the community plan. I think it is also important that we look at supports, not only ensuring compensation for participation, but opening the doors for people to speak and creating a process of understanding how planning, community investments and decision-making processes work. I think the CDP and the JFI are an opportunity to invest in those areas as well. Projects like the Growing in Place Initiative, led by our Confronting Anti-Black Racism unit and in support of engagement and skills awareness and further participation in community planning.

**Comment:** I think it's important to not erase the work that grassroots groups have done in the community. The CAC came from the work that grassroots groups have done (part City and part resident). A lot of residents spent a lot of time on this and sometimes it

gets lost in the way the City and other institutions take up the space and people can get offended.

- **Response:** Thank you for this feedback. We will take it into account and ensure that we acknowledge that these plans are building on the work that grassroots groups have been doing for years.

**Q:** Since people have struggled financially due to Covid, is there some way to incorporate the JFI with a financial recovery process?

- **Response:** I will say that we have been working with a number of organization and community/grassroots groups to coordinate with community partners and donations coming in through the city. Working with our United Way partners (JFC) as well, having continual conversations and investments can happen through the services. The non-profit sector has been impacted, residents felt the brunt of Covid, particularly Jane-Finch. This plan has to recognize investments that need to happen now and in the future. Food access has been a key issue, employment skills and training, data equity and access to Wi-Fi. Recognize there are pieces to work with community partners like the JFC, the Black Creek Health Centre and other groups. We will continue to have a coordinated approach to work with non-profit organizations and investments in the community. There is a lot of work going on with groups and organizations to recognize the needs of the community for now and in the long-term.

**Q:** As we plan and invest in the Jane-Finch community, I want to push advocacy note here the fact that residents of Jane and Finch and neighbouring postal codes find it had to get employed I have been a victim to that... applying for a job you qualified for and never even get feedback: Can the City do something about raising this issue? When jobs come into Jane-Finch from the investments, do residents get the first opportunity to apply?

- **Response:** There is no City policy in terms of postal code discrimination, but we know employment discrimination and all forms of oppression like Anti-Black Racism exist. Part of that change involves a collective effort from within the city to have those conversations, plans and investment directly into Jane-Finch. Motions of job prioritization and investments, tools can be used. A good way of creating a better relationship is a community-endorsed plan and continuing to have the community in those discussions and investments. We don't want to only have a plan but to also have resources to invest in those actions and to attract more resources. Whether it's a CDP, they have to be ongoing with residents. We have to change for the long-term, not just one initiative.

**Q:** I didn't see anything mentioned about providing community space for growing food, is this a consideration at all?

- **Response:** Yes, for sure. We are in discussions with organizations like the Black Creek Farm and groups that run community gardens. Access to food and space is important. It is important to assess your community and see where investments for food and growth can happen. There is a lot of investments that are necessary, we need the feedback from the community not just as an idea but to hear the experiences, knowledge and awareness, this investment cannot happen without the community participation.

**Q:** It would be great in forums like this to see the folks who lead and do this work. To go back to a previous comment, when I think of employment opportunities, how are we ensuring that the community are the ones who get jobs in the community with the provincial government, TTC and Metrolinx? As other investments and developments like the LRT are happening, how can we ensure that the members of the community are getting those jobs that are coming into the area? How do we also respect the community's time and effort and ensure that we see the City follow-up and work around this feedback provided?

- **Response:** Thank you for your comments. There should be more learning from the wisdom and learning experiences from those in Jane-Finch. The strength in leveraging more community participation is having a plan that goes through and approved by City Council. We want to as city staff, who are following the direction from City Council, go forward into JF, meet with community partners, and make a plan that recognizes the priorities of the community- this should speak to the priorities of the area. We won't be going forward with a plan without the say of the community- this is newer than the traditional process of engagement and planning from the city's end- it's an ongoing, living document that changes with the community and with participation.
  - Community Benefits framework- we have colleagues from the city working on this process and having those conversations. We also have some people on this call advocating for community benefits who are a part of those conversations. We want to bring the full power of the municipality behind those conversations and have those conversations with the TTC and the province.

**Q:** This consultation should take into consideration to lift up community groups when approaching the city for partnerships and to consider in your planning of spacing.

- **Response:** Thank you for the comment. We are assessing the need for community spaces and have heard in other consultations that access to space for community groups is needed. It's something we know needs to be addressed in both the land use plan and the community development plan as well.

**Q:** Moving forward with community development, I have not seen anything that specifically caters to children with special needs- I would like to see more programs and places where children with special needs can feel welcomed so they can feel secure.

- **Response:** Thank you for highlighting those investments that need to be conscious with accessibility for disabilities. We need to have these plans be inclusive to all needs and all community members.

### **Jamboard Community Input:**

The question asked of the participants was, “*What ideas should be included from the perspective of Grassroots groups?*”.

- **Participant:** A social sector incubation space- an incubator for people who want to start a non-profit or an initiative. A space for dedicated funding for people who want to do something for the neighbourhood.
- **Participant:** With all the violence happening, how does the city want to reduce gun violence especially when they're turned away from community centres due to the covid mandate that was implemented. There is an increase in gun violence and gang activity because children feel like no one cares- if a community centre is built for them, why aren't they allowed in?
  - **Response:** There have been public health policies in place for everyone because of covid. It has impacted everyone and there needs to be alternatives looked at for recreation programs in spaces with public health guidelines. We are all concerned for safety in communities, causing a lot of shut down of operations in communities.
- **Participant:** (The subject of) violence is also a part of public safety. If we lock out children, we will get an influx of crime. What I am asking is what can we do so no child is left behind (reference to people who are not vaccinated due to religious beliefs)?
- **Co-Facilitator:** Some things mentioned in the chat and on the Jamboard are the need commercial kitchens to help entrepreneurs. Space dedicated to funded community projects. Supports for the local growth of food and building more community gardens. Supports for special needs. Food and social insecurity. More youth led programs to support Black boys in the Jane Finch community.
- **Participant:** I want to see us, as organizations in the community, be more aggressive in our approach to things, in terms of our advocacy. We, as organizations, represent the larger groups in these discussions and yet we are not aggressive in our advocacy- we don't want to rock the boat, but all of these issues happen and directly affect us. We know what happens in the community and point you (the City) in the direction of solutions. It's about time we present these things the way they are.
- **Co-Facilitator:** I see on the Jamboard and in the chat; funding existing grassroots groups, supporting essential services in the community, indoor recreation facilities with multiple functions. We also have regarding to the commercial kitchen and an email contact about this. Also have another person mentioning spaces for children to socialize and guidance, spaces for vaccinated and unvaccinated children.
- **Participant:** How do you know who to give funding to? There are a lot of organizations here that guise under the notion of working for Black youth and do



nothing but pocket the cash. Money is wasted to many of these organizations I have never heard of. How do you know if this funding is effective in helping Black children and youth in the community?

- **Response:** The City does provide funding for non-profit organizations. There are different funding sources based on what's available and what these organizations are doing, either ongoing, one time or core funding. With the City of Toronto, what we are trying to do is to ensure any funding that does do out to organizations, supports active engagement from residents and community members. On the community level, maybe there needs to be a better community collective evaluation in relation to community investments and how does the community get informed of these projects and their targets. These are things we are looking at, a forest of funding, sometimes when funding happens you may not be aware of it- which we should address.
- **Response:** We are currently working on the Black-Mandated Funding Framework with the City, part of what we're working on will have initiatives that will focus specifically on the Black community next year- welcome anyone who wants a conversation offline regarding this information.
- **Participant:** A couple of points in regard to funding, there is a large amount of money being put into the 31-division area and with not much results in the diminishment of gun violence, poverty and aiding mental health. Another point, the Black Creek community is down 54.5% and the Glenfield- Jane Heights is down 66.7% in shootings due to the community officers in the neighbourhood building relationships. In terms of job opportunities, I'll put the 31-Division resource page for employment opportunities that are there.
- **Participant:** The Jane-Finch area has many refugees and immigrant frontline workers, but they have no immigration status. Will the City do something about the inclusivity of immigrants and newcomers?
- **Co-Facilitator:** As many people are saying in the chat, grassroots organizations are helping the combatting of gun violence in the community. We give credit to these groups.
- **Participant:** There are a lot of grassroots groups and resident organizations organizing around big issues- this needs to be recognized. Most community groups are organizing fun community events and we (Jane-Finch grassroots groups) are solving systemic problems like gun violence, access to education and postal code discrimination. The only reason we (the community) are doing this is because there is a failure somewhere in the for profit and government sector, and what makes this worse is that the valuation metric does not recognize this- residents are the ones doing this work and we are undermined. An example is that TDSB said that schools in the area are improving, without recognizing the work done by groups in these schools, but they only showed that statistic without acknowledging the work done behind it. Even in this meeting, we started off the meeting with 2 things and without acknowledging that they were introduced by residents- the deputation for the CAC and Growing in Place project- there is no recognition. We don't get paid for our work and we get undermined and coopted

into other things, it's depressing, and barriers are evident. The solution is here, we just need to support it.

- **Participant:** Our concern is for stopping gun violence and not concerned about what actually starts this gang-violence. We should also note that these kids and youth joining this violence do not choose to, but they have underlying factors- if we look at those, we can maybe help to stop the violence. Something like a mentorship program and initiatives geared towards fixing these issues may be essential. Inspirational speakers and coaching in schools are not common but can be an effective tool for life skills. I am aware the City has such programs in place (Bathurst/Finch Hub) but they are not penetrating the youth of Jane-Finch. A police presence is not enough and doesn't help in the long-term.

### **Jamboard Sticky Notes Responses:**

- Evaluation metrics for city institutions (i.e. TDSB, policing, TCHC, etc.) need to account for the work of grassroots groups. Things don't improve by themselves, there are a lot of groups working to make a change.
- Support local growing of food.
- Support for all our community gardens, build new ones, school gardens, and Black Creek Community Farm to support growing food locally that is culturally appropriate to help address food insecurity, social
- Commercial kitchen to help food entrepreneurs.
- Support and access to land for urban farmers in the community.
- Space and support to have a local farmer's market to source fresh, cultural food.
- Space with dedicated funding for community projects.
- Introduce and support Creative industries, including training and career opportunities, as well as community-based multi-media exposure – based on Jane & Finch creative history, current local talent, and future/emerging potential.
- Creating an entrepreneurship hub to allow the people of this community to develop their creative businesses further.
- Funding for existing grassroots groups.
- Services for children with special needs.
- Make sure kids have access to space regardless of vaccination status, so everyone has safe places to play.
- Indoor recreational facility that has gym, public space for meeting, swimming pool, etc.
- More youth-led support programs especially for our Black boys in the Jane and Finch community.
- We need space for kids and teens to socialize, do their homework, receive mentorship and guidance.
- STEM (science, technology, engineering & mathematics) programming provided for kids and youth (ie. Coding classes).
- Skills training for youth like growing food, bike repair, cooking, coding, etc. creating career pathways for youth so we can hire them back into our community.

- Internet access and technological tools (computer) for connectivity, especially for seniors, youth, and families who need support.
- Day programming for seniors – recreational activity, physical exercise, gardening, cooking to prevent social isolation.
- Community centre that supports multiple uses.
- Access to affordable community space for church groups, etc.
- Ensure all landscaping and construction designs include a cultural and artistic esthetic. Make Jane and Finch a destination and creative hub for entire city.
- Accountability and consequences for \$118 million dollars to 8 agencies since 2014 operating in the Jane and Finch community. Redirect funding to residents and grassroots.
- Re-direct part of the Toronto Police Service's \$13.95 billion dollar budget and put into the community.

## **Appendix 1: Meeting Agenda**

### Resident-led Grassroots Consultation Agenda

<b>6:00 Introductions (Maymun, John and Zahra)</b>
<b>6:05 JFC Presentation (Maymun, Kemisha, John and Zahra)</b>
<b>6:15 Jamboard (Maymun and Kemisha)</b>
<b>7:25 Meeting Wrap Up</b>
<b>7:30 Internal Staff Debrief</b>

<b>Roles</b>	
Facilitator	Maymun Abukar
Co-facilitator	Kemisha Thomas
In-meeting Tech support/Jamboard facilitation	Amadeo Ventura
Note-taker	Clara Stewart-Robertson
City of Toronto presenters	John Smith Zahra Joseph-Wilson

## Appendix 2: Google Jamboard Responses

