

**Jane Finch Initiative:  
Arts & Culture Consultation  
August 5, 2021 12:00-1:30**

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

## Background

The [Jane Finch Initiative](#) is about planning for the future of the area and how best to . 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 opportunities plan;
- 3) An update to the **land use planning framework**.

The City is working in collaboration with the Jane Finch Community and Family Centre who will support community engagement and facilitate different community consultations to collect feedback.

## Meeting Summary

On Thursday, August 5th, 2021, from 6:00-8:00pm, the Jane Finch Initiative Arts & Culture Consultation was hosted by the Jane Finch Community and Family (JFCF) Centre with support from the City of Toronto and in partnership with the Jane Finch Artist Collective. This consultation is part of the Jane Finch Initiative's comprehensive engagement stream and it was held online over Zoom. See agenda on page 8.

The purpose of the event was to:

- Provide a brief explanation of the Jane Finch Initiative and upcoming consultations;
- Share how the City's updated Land Use Plan and Community Development Plan can and will impact artists and the services they access
- Engage local artists to understand their experiences and vision for the future of Jane Finch artists

### Attendees:

- 2 JFCF Centre staff, Berta Kaisr, Clara Stewart-Robertson;
- 2 City of Toronto Staff, Leah Birnbaum, Andrea Raymond-Wong;
- Sariena Luy, a local resident and artist as co-facilitator;
- 40 Local artists and JF resident organizers

## **How We Engaged**

This consultation was planned in coordination with the Artists Collective, a local group composed of Jane Finch-based artists and residents. It was decided that artists and arts-based organizations would be consulted in two ways: 1) A public Zoom meeting and 2) One-on-one calls with artists unable to meet the public meeting. This summary report is for the public meeting which was co-facilitated by Sariena Luy, a local artist and organizer. A separate summary will be available for the one-on-one interviews.

A poster (Appendix 2, page 10) was created for outreach for both forms of engagement. 57 people registered through Zoom to attend the event and 40 people were present at the meeting.

When the meeting began, the JFI team and City of Toronto staff introduced themselves; then City staff, Leah Birnbaum and Andrea Raymond-Wong, provided a presentation about the Jane Finch Initiative and the work of Arts & Culture Services, the art-related work they participate in and how it relates to local JF artists. After the presentation, Butterfly GoPaul, a local resident and organizer, provided some context to the history and current situation regarding Jane Finch artists. She detailed the frustration of the community's needs never being prioritized, inadequate access to services and physical spaces for artists, and the cycle of consultations that never resulted in meaningful change. When there is some change, where for example, artists are provided with a physical space to practice their art, those spaces are usually "co-opted" by the City and other officials. Butterfly stresses that artists need resources and funding, but not at the cost of gentrification.

Following Butterfly's remarks, the local artists and organizations were invited by Sariena to provide feedback and answer questions using Zoom features including the chat and through unmuting themselves/using the "raise your hand" feature. An option to use a prepared Jamboard was provided, but no feedback was collected through the jamboard. There was also a google form sent out where participants were able to send in further feedback and indicate their choice of honorarium. The feedback from the google form is also summarized in this report.

## **What We Heard**

This section includes the aforementioned summaries of the feedback collected from the discussions during the Zoom meeting as well as the google form responses.

The main questions asked of the participants were the following:

- How is your experience as an artist shaped by your experiences living in the Jane Finch community?
- What are the missing elements for you as an artist? What do you need to thrive?
- What kind of art programs and services are missing from the community?
- What community spaces are important to you right now? What is missing and what do you leave the community for?
- What is your future vision for the community and what else would you like the City to know about?

See Appendix 1, page 10, for a detailed list of the questions asked in the engagement segment. In essence, the participants of the Arts & Culture consultation were asked to reflect on their experiences as artists in the community, what supports and services they need moving forward and what their future vision for artists in the community is. The section below provides an insight to those answers and reflections.

### → **Experience as a JF Artists**

When discussing their experiences in the community, the artists mentioned the strong sense of bond and community they feel as residents and artists within Jane Finch. Many of the participants mentioned how their art is influenced by what they see and experience in Jane Finch from the negative to the positive - it is all interconnected. They feel pride in their art because it reflects their community and history.

Some participants shared that they have felt disconnected from the community at times, having to go outside of the community to find like-minded individuals and artistic opportunities for growth. However, these members expressed a desire to be connected to the community and their fellow local artists, so they were happy to be part of the Arts & Culture consultation.

Other artists also expressed similar sentiments of needing to leave the community to attend art-focused schools and programs, but always feeling one step behind their peers as they usually came from more affluent areas with more resources, and depending on the art medium, more efficient equipment. These Jane Finch artists feel as though they have to work twice as hard to receive the same opportunities and to break into their industries.

### → **Issues:**

Some issues have been highlighted above but participants also highlighted bureaucratic struggles and lack of sustainable funding as two very pressing issues.

The participants during the Zoom call all have had some experience dealing with the City of Toronto's processes and highlighted that the bureaucracies in place often create

obstacles for the community. The City needs to be more accountable and transparent, otherwise community members might choose not to participate in any projects moving forward.

A participant shared how artist groups and programs used to be able to use the Jane Finch mall parking lot for the Jane Finch festival, but with the change of owners of the mall, the access the community previously had was lost and the City of Toronto did not intervene to help. The participant expressed that the City involves itself with the neighborhood when it serves its purposes. For instance, examples were shared during the consultation of when local artists are asked to beautify parts of the neighborhood yet they often do not have access to the building and services they are helping beautify thus being exploited for their talents.

Inaccessible spaces can also be tied into the fact that the community does not have ownership of many spaces, so instances such as the example above of artists not being able to access the spaces they have beautified, occur more often.

Additionally, an underlying issue is the lack of funding or more specifically, the lack of sustainable, long term funding. It was commented by the participants that each time they have a great program running, it rarely lasts beyond a couple of years. Then it is back to square one for the community.

#### → **Proposed Solutions:**

Despite the issues and struggles they face, the community is hopeful that there are opportunities for change and solutions so long as they are equity-based, prioritize the current community, and address systemic racism and injustices.

With the neighbourhoods being labeled as Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs), it must be treated meaning there needs to be more resources and funding flowing through the community in order to *improve* the area. According to the participants, the resources currently provided do not provide meaningful solutions nor address the system issues. Meaningful funding would address the issues of the community at the root to prevent the same cycles from reoccurring, because if it is not meaningful, then it will merely provide a temporary solution.

In order to ensure the best solutions are being provided to the community, the City and other agencies must prioritize the current community residents and involve them in the conversations taking place about their community. Involving the community at every level of the decision making process to ensure the solutions are for the community and by the community is important. An idea mentioned multiple times during the meeting was that we are past creating space at the table for the community, the table must be broken down, and the system currently in place does not serve the community so it must be dismantled.

With reference to the arts and on the point of prioritizing current residents, the incoming projects need to highlight the history and present of the community which will evidently help future residents and generations as well. There should be art in the community that prioritizes the legacy of the community and the struggles and resilience of its members. Permanent art fixtures that highlight these themes could be one option of realizing these visions.

These types of visions not only honour the past and residents, but they also serve as empowerment tools for the young and future generations of Jane Finch. Empowerment is necessary to help the Jane Finch community understand that their artistic hobbies are not simply dreams or hobbies, but that provide possible and sustainable futures for them. Empowerment can also be provided through local artist groups such as theatre groups, mentorship programs, physical studio spaces, and artists' collaborative.

The community's artists, of all ages, not just the youth, should be confident in knowing that they do not need to limit themselves, that they can dream and achieve their artistic goals and to make these visions a reality, it will take a collaborative effort.

#### **Questions asked during the consultation:**

1. What is the difference between this consultation and the others? What generation of our community will benefit from this?
  - Leah's response: We understand that community members have been dealing with City processes in cycles for a long time, and things haven't worked out right. We know that we're listening to that in terms of what can be different. What we're trying to do here is "show up" and not take up space to allow for more community feedback - that's what is different this time. The difference is also that we're engaging community members in partnership with community consultants such as the Jane Finch Community and Family Centre.
  - I can also tell you that with the way our systems are, we don't have funding levels from the federal and provincial government at a level that allows us to build units that are deeply affordable, for example, so there's a limit to what I can influence and I want to be transparent about that. I'm going to write a land use plan. There's only so many things that a land use plan can do so we're trying to be transparent about that as well.

2. What is the corporate social responsibility that will be available?
3. Can we create a list or a resource centre of all the arts-related events, resources, opportunities, initiatives, that relates to Jane-Finch? (so we know what we have been through and are not repeating the same things)
4. How do we make arts & cultures sustainable?
5. What resources/ programs exist currently in the community to avoid redundancy/improve on/be informed
6. What existing policies work against it?

### **Consultation Reflections:**

The City staff present at these JFI consultations are cognizant of their role and the frustrations of community members about over-consultations and the lack of results, but they need to do more.

In the Arts & Culture consultation, several members were aware that it is not the fault of one or two or even a whole of City staff, but that of the City's entire system and way of operation. However, the system can be changed and in collaboration with the community, City staff can also make a difference.

It is constantly inspiring witnessing the passion and power of mobilized community members and the artists in this consultation were no different. Clearly frustrated and over consulted, yet they chose to share their stories, struggles, and hopes. The City needs to listen and take action. And hopefully, as many members hope, the Jane Finch Initiative can be the beginning of a different and improved way of collaborating with the City in ways which bring forth the long-awaited change.

## Appendix 1: Agenda

<b>6:00 Welcome and Introductions (Berta)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the purpose of this evening?</li> <li>• Overall structure of the workshop</li> <li>• Who to contact if you're having tech issues</li> </ul>
<b>6:10 Icebreaker (Sariena)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introducing artists and their medium</li> <li>• What did you want to be when you grew up?</li> </ul>
<b>6:20 City Presentation (Andrea)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intro to JFI</li> <li>• Why Visioning Matters</li> <li>• What we've heard about Community Visions and Guiding Principles</li> <li>• Share opportunities and programming available through the City (Segue into workshop)</li> </ul>
<b>6:30 Butterfly's Remarks</b>
<b>6:35 Visioning Workshop</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you need to thrive as an artist in the Jane and Finch area?</li> <li>• What's missing? (program-specific spaces, opportunities, programs, opportunities to engage in art – theatre, concerts, exhibitions, etc.)</li> <li>• What spaces or services do you find yourself leaving the community for?</li> <li>• What art spaces, or art works (i.e. murals) in the community are important to you/significant?</li> <li>• What spaces and resources are available to you to make/create art?</li> <li>• What kinds of spaces or programs would benefit your artistic practice?</li> <li>• What local spaces could be activated with arts/cultural events?</li> <li>• What kinds of events would you like to see?</li> </ul>
<b>7:25 Meeting Wrap Up</b>

<b>Roles</b>	
Facilitator	Berta Kaisr
Co-facilitator	Sariena Luy
In-meeting Tech support	Jane Finch Centre staff
Note-taker	Jane Finch Centre staff
City of Toronto presenter	Andrea Raymond-Wong
City staff attending	Leah Birnbaum

### Detailed Guiding Questions:

#### Missing Elements (Discussing Disparity):

- What do you need to thrive as an artist in the Jane and Finch area?



- What's missing? (program-specific spaces, opportunities, programs, opportunities to engage in art – theatre, concerts, exhibitions, etc.)

**Spaces (Provide examples): *Relating to: What do you value about your neighbourhood now?***

- What spaces and resources are available to you to make/create art?
- What spaces do you find yourself leaving the community for?
- What art spaces in the community are **(or were)** important to you?
- What kinds of spaces would benefit your artistic practice?
- What local spaces could be activated with arts/cultural events?
- What kinds of events would you like to see?

**Services — Opportunities & Resources:**

- What resources are available to you to make/create art?
- What spaces do you find yourself leaving the community for?
- What kinds of programs would benefit your artistic practice?
- What have you seen from other communities that works or doesn't work?

**Guiding Principles — What is your vision for the future of the area?**

- If you could tell the City of Toronto anything, what would it be?

## Appendix 2: Arts & Culture Outreach Poster



**JANE FINCH INITIATIVE**

# **ARTS & CULTURE CONSULTATION**

Are you an artist or an arts-focused organization in the Jane Finch community? Do you want to share your experience and your vision for artists in the future plan for Jane Finch?

The Jane Finch Community and Family Centre is looking for artists and arts organizations to participate in a short Arts & Culture consultation as part of the Jane Finch Initiative:

**Thursday, August 5th @ 6PM**

Meeting will be held over Zoom, sign up through the link: [bit.ly/janefincharts](https://bit.ly/janefincharts)  
Honorariums available.



For questions, call Berta Kaisr 416-663-2733 ext 317