

Jane Finch Initiative



Ideas Booklet:

Parks and Public Spaces

This is one of 12 booklets that summarizes the Jane Finch Initiative Ideas Report. Booklet topics:



- Arts & Culture
- Climate action
- Community service facilities
- Heritage
- Housing
- Inclusive employment opportunities
- Inclusive entrepreneurship opportunities
- Land use, built form, and urban design
- Mobility - getting around
- Parks & public spaces
- Resources, partnerships and governance
- Social development

The Jane Finch Initiative is a resident-informed project to plan for the future of the area so that residents, local groups and businesses are supported as the area changes over time with the opening of the Finch West Light Rail Transit.

Parks and Public Spaces

Vision for the future: Jane and Finch has beautiful, connected, welcoming parks and open spaces.

The public realm is a network of all public and private areas to which the public has access. It includes parks and open spaces, streets, sidewalks, trails, pedestrian connections and natural areas such as ravines. It also includes 'Privately-Owned Public Accessible Spaces' or POPS and other public lands such as the grounds of schools, universities and other public institutions.

A beautiful and thriving public realm promotes resiliency, and physical and mental health. Everyone should have access to beautiful public spaces for recreation, passive use, active transportation, or just being in nature.

1. Create new parks, prioritizing areas with lower parkland provision rates and areas with walkability gaps.

Although the Jane and Finch study area as a whole is not parkland deficient, there are parts of the study area that are underserved in parks, especially near the intersection of Jane and Finch. People do not always have easy access to parks, even when they are close to green space. New parks should be located to ensure that all residents are within about a five minute walk to a park.

As new development arrives, the population will increase, and the demand and use of parks will go up. As the larger sites within the study area are redeveloped, there is an opportunity to extend the public realm into these sites.

Ideas

- Introduce new parkland around the Jane and Finch intersection where there is currently a parkland walkability gap and very low tree canopy.
- Consider the potential for new parkland at the centre of the study area to be designed as a 'public square' to allow it to serve as a civic gathering space that would allow for social interaction, entertainment, cultural events and flexible programming that can enhance the daily lives of residents and workers.
- Explore opportunities to create new parks in underserved parts of the study area and where growth is anticipated. This can be achieved by prioritizing on-site dedication of parkland for new development, particularly on larger sites, such as the mall sites, and on infill proposals within Apartment Neighbourhoods.
- Explore opportunities to enhance existing green space to better serve communities including recognizing the character of Tower in the Park built forms where green space is a defining feature.

- Seek opportunities to consolidate parkland dedications from more than one development, wherever feasible, to assemble larger park sites that can maximize parks and recreation programming.
- Expand existing parks by prioritizing parkland dedication that is immediately adjacent to existing parks, where appropriate, in order to enhance their size, function, visibility, connectivity and accessibility.
- Require that parkland dedications to be easily accessible in highly visible areas with prominent street frontage, contributing to a fine-grained pedestrian network. Lands should be in a size and shape that is functional and programmable with good sunlight access.
- Pursue privately-owned publicly-accessible spaces (POPS) to complement the area's public parks and contribute to the overall parks and open space network (POPs will not count towards parkland dedication and do not replace the need for public parkland).

2. Make parks and public spaces inclusive, welcoming, accessible, safe, and fun.

Parks and other public spaces should be accessible, safe and welcoming for everyone. The public realm should offer easy and equitable access for all residents regardless of age, ability, gender identity, sexual orientation, income, race or ethno-cultural background.

During community conversations, we heard that residents value public spaces because they convey a sense of community identity, especially through artist expression such as murals. People also shared that public spaces are important sites for vigils, community activism, and as places of networking and relationship building.

- Design new and existing parks and open spaces to accommodate, welcome and be safe for people regardless of age, ability, gender identity, sexual orientation, income, race, and ethno-cultural background.
- Frame parks and other public spaces with interesting architecture, building designs and art.
- Offer a range of amenities that support year-round and diverse activities including places to gather and socialize, places to stay and linger, places for active play and recreation, places for community and special events, places for public art, and places to connect with and enhance nature.
- Encourage public life by providing amenities that encourage social gathering and community events such as seating, picnic facilities, public washrooms and drinking water stations.
- Seek opportunities to introduce more flexible open spaces for community gathering and events, such as public plazas and squares, either in existing parks, future parks, or other publicly-accessible spaces.
- Explore opportunities to enhance existing parks that are significant for their connections to community identity and cultural heritage value.

3. Work with community members to evaluate the quality and function of parks and public realm and determine what and where improvements should be prioritized.

Residents of Jane and Finch have raised a range of issues and concerns related to the maintenance of parks and public spaces and pointed to several areas where reinvestment is needed to ensure that public space in the area is maintained to the same standard as spaces in the rest of the city. Encouraging community stewardship of parks and open spaces can help make parks more comfortable, welcoming, inclusive, safe and beautiful community spaces that encourage people to stay and enjoy them.

Ideas

- Support a community-based planning and design process for parks and public spaces.
- Design public space improvements to reflect the history, diverse cultures and heritage of the community through a process of co-design. Seek input to identify where amenities may be incorporated such as seating, drinking water stations, public washrooms, garbage bins, enhanced lighting, public art and others.
- Seek opportunities to introduce new active recreation facilities that are needed in the area – such as soccer/multi-use sports fields, basketball courts, outdoor skate-spots – in either new or existing parks within or close to the study area.
- Build and improve pathways and trails to make them fully accessible, easy to navigate in all seasons, well-lit at night, and feel safe for all users.
- Support community gardening and link to community-based food justice efforts that are encouraging uses that support urban farming, food production, food processing and distribution.
- Use POPS, easements and shared-use agreements to improve access to and connectivity between existing open spaces from tower communities.
- Implement the planned facility improvement projects within and close to the Jane and Finch study area within the implementation strategy for the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan.
- Design new public spaces that facilitate effective maintenance (i.e., durable materials, paths wide enough for snow clearing, durable litter bins, etc.).
- Seek opportunities to include green infrastructure and elements which enhance ecological and hydrological functions, support habitat development, and promote biodiversity within parks and the broader public realm where appropriate, using the Green Streets Technical Guidelines.

4. Explore opportunities to celebrate Indigenous cultures and histories in public spaces.

The public realm can tell the story of a place through, for example, street names, public art, interpretive features and other local design elements. Public places and spaces have the potential to advance reconciliation by acknowledging Indigenous historical presence and by celebrating contemporary Indigenous presence and cultures.

Ideas

- Continue to pursue consultation, collaboration and partnerships with Indigenous communities in the planning, design and development process in Jane and Finch.
- Explore opportunities through engagement with Indigenous communities for parks and public space improvements and protection of natural heritage to reflect and celebrate Indigenous identities and histories and be welcoming and supportive of Indigenous cultural practices.

5. Protect the Black Creek Ravine, invest in improvements to the trail system and crossings, and connect Jane and Finch to the City's wider ravine system.

Ravines are treasured as one of our city's greatest assets. They connect us with nature, with history and with Indigenous heritage. They are rich in biodiversity, provide many ecological benefits and are a place to enjoy nature amid urban life. Growth, development and climate change will put pressure on the Black Creek ravine so it will be critical to balance protection of the natural environment with human use and identify investments needed to ensure that everyone in Jane and Finch can enjoy this extraordinary place for generations to come.

Ideas

- Provide visual and physical connections between public spaces, parks and trails with pathways and trails connecting destinations within and surrounding the neighbourhood with clear connections and wayfinding to the wider city.
- Work with partners such as the Toronto Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) and Evergreen to implement ravine and trail improvement projects, including:
 - enhancing ravine access while managing and reducing user impacts and protecting and restoring ecological features in the Upper Black Creek Priority Investment Area.
 - building the proposed northerly extension of the existing Black Creek Trail, just north of Shoreham Drive, as part of the Northwest Cultural Trail project.
 - designing and building the Loop Trail, a continuous, 81-kilometre circular walking and cycling route that will pass through Jane and Finch along the Finch Hydro Corridor and Huron-Wendat Trail connecting the Jane and Finch area to the Humber River and Don River ravine systems and the waterfront.
 - filling in other trail gaps and formalize existing informal trails (desire lines) to make them more accessible and safe for use, where appropriate.

6. Create streets that function as community gathering spaces and are animated through local-serving businesses.

Shopping streets contribute to vibrant and walkable neighbourhoods, provide local employment opportunities and animate our streets. Streets should be designed as safe, beautiful and vibrant community spaces with conditions that support the planting and growth of healthy trees. People have expressed a desire for a vibrant street life with easy access to local shops, services and restaurants. People have also told us that the transit riding experience can be improved along Jane Street with better design of bus stop waiting areas to make them more comfortable, safe and welcoming. The importance of the design of streets and public spaces was highlighted in community conversations around safety, policing and gun violence. Ensuring that meaningful community input is sought when assessing design options for public spaces will be essential to addressing these concerns.

Ideas

- Recognize the public realm as the organizing element for the Jane and Finch secondary plan and the starting point for building a transit-supportive complete community that supports community identity, public life, health, liveability, social equity and quality of life. Require new development, especially on large sites, to deliver a fine-grain public street grid network scaled for pedestrian movement and experienced as safe public spaces, in addition to providing important links within a multi-modal transportation network.
- Design streets with generous public boulevards through setbacks that allow for a vibrant public realm and pedestrian amenities such as street trees, landscaping, pedestrian-scale lighting, seating and places to linger.
- Encourage development and the design of streets to provide green infrastructure and above- and below-grade growing space to support the planting and long-term health of street trees.
- Strengthen the relationship between streets and parks to ensure the integration of pedestrian and cycling networks and to form a cohesive, connected and safe public realm.
- Focus public realm placemaking investments at transit stops along Jane Street to create gathering spots, support wayfinding, and improve the transit experience.
- Seek to minimize surface parking and where it does remain, introduce improvements for safe pedestrian movement.

Jane Finch Initiative

Ideas Booklet: Parks and Public Space



We want to hear what you think of these ideas. Are we on the right track? What's missing? What could be better?



Send us an email us at janeфинch@toronto.ca.



Find out more about the Jane Finch Initiative at toronto.ca/janeфинch, or scan the QR code below.



Give us a call at 416-338-0775.

