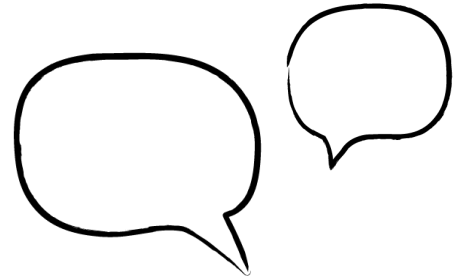


Meeting Summary

Parkdale Main Street Heritage Conservation District Plan Indigenous Engagement Session

May 3, 2022, 10:30 am – 12:00 pm

Location: Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre



Overview

On Tuesday May 3, 2022, the City of Toronto visited a weekly drop-in meeting of the Niiwin Wendaanimak (Four Winds) program at the Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre (PQWCHC), organized by Beth Luttenberger to speak with members of the local Indigenous community about the Parkdale Main Street Heritage Conservation District (HCD) Plan. The purpose of the meeting was to seek feedback on whether there are places of value to Indigenous community members in the District and what should be considered when planning for the future of the area.

City of Toronto staff did not share a formal presentation and participants were free to ask questions at any time to permit a more open discussion. Approximately one dozen community members ranging in age from their early 20s to over 60 were present, along with City of Toronto and PQWCHC staff. Participants were offered tobacco and provided with an honorarium for their time.

City staff committed to sharing the historic description of the area and the summary of the discussion points with participants to ensure that it accurately captures the themes, issues, and ideas raised. It is not intended as a verbatim transcript. Some community members who were unable to attend the meeting in-person shared comments with PQWCHC staff that have also been included in this summary.

What we heard overall

This section summarizes key points we heard in the meeting. They are high-level takeaways only – readers should review them in the context of the broader, more detailed feedback that follows.

Land back is principal to meaningful reconciliation. Participants spoke of the need for places that are Indigenous owned and operated.

Parkdale is important to Indigenous community members. Participants value the existing built form and would like to see it conserved.

Parkdale needs spaces that are welcoming to Indigenous community members, using Indigenous values as their design principles. This could include increased participation of Indigenous artists in public art projects, the intentional incorporation of spaces in public parks for sacred fire ceremony, sunrise ceremony, and other ceremonial practices, and the creation of a designated space that honours Indigenous community members past and present.

The City needs to improve on its engagement processes. Participants expressed frustration that City staff present at the meeting were not able to take responsibility for some input. Accountability was

named as fundamental to establishing any trust in the engagement process. Greater participation from other City departments and the Indigenous Affairs Office (IAO) may be required in future consultations to establish accountability and trust.

Detailed summary of feedback

The discussion in the meeting covered a variety of topics. The summary below is organized under five themes:

1. Indigenous engagement and process feedback
2. Feedback about parks and public realm in Parkdale
3. Feedback about development in Parkdale
4. Feedback about Indigenous representation in City spaces, programs and polices
5. Other feedback and broader issues

Indigenous engagement and process feedback:

Participants raised concerns about who the City of Toronto was speaking to and how those groups were identified. Participants also shared their experiences with other consultations and expressed strong concerns that, like past consultations, this process would not lead to meaningful change.

- **Elders are the knowledge keepers of the community.** Elders should be consulted with first. Some elders are present, but this small group does not represent everyone
 - Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust has worked with local elders and the Indigenous community, they may be a good source to help with making additional connections.
- Participants mentioned that some of the land in the Greater Toronto Area is unceded. City staff on this project should be familiar with the treaty history of the land specific to Parkdale to ensure that the right people are being consulted.
 - Historically, Toronto was the gathering place where people would come together, share between them, have ceremonies, discuss rights; it was also an important fishing spot.
- **The IAO should be part of this process.** They should be hearing and listening to the concerns of local community members.
 - Not having them involved feels like a lack of commitment on their part; if they had wanted to do something, they would have been in the community already.
 - It is important for this to not be a performative exercise that falls on deaf ears, it should result in actual change (even though change is not instantaneous).
 - Indigenous voices are too often silenced.
 - A copy of the meeting summary and feedback from this meeting should be sent to the IAO.
- **The planning process often feels like it jumps over a lot of underlying issues,** and Indigenous community members regularly feel like they are being used for information while fundamental issues of importance to them are not being addressed.

- Concepts and conversations around land keeping and placemaking often exclude Indigenous voices.
 - Indigenous community members want to engage in a dialogue about local development issues and have their interests and needs shape development projects.
- Too often, engaging with the City feels like different departments keep passing the buck and do not take ownership or responsibility of an issue.
- Governments and companies need to stop looking towards Indigenous communities only when they are looking for places to put controversial projects (such as nuclear energy facilities, etc.).
 - Profits should not come without a consultation process and especially not at the expense of poisoning our waters.
 - Too much profit is made off of Indigenous resources, yet so many communities do not have fresh water.
 - Indigenous communities should not be passed over when locations for projects that bring beneficial opportunities are being considered.

Feedback about parks and public realm:

Participants shared some suggestions on how Parkdale's existing public realm (including parks, laneways, and street furniture) could be improved and enhanced.

- The Milky Way and other **laneways in Parkdale serve as important circulation routes**, and also act as a physical access to the Indigenous community garden (Greenest City).
- No new dead ends should be allowed/created for the existing laneway network.
- The City should **protect and expand the existing greenspace in the area**. The current parks are not sufficient for large gatherings of 50+ people. Dufferin Grove and Sorauren Avenue Park are the two nearest larger spaces.
- Masaryk-Cowan Park (or other public space in the area) should **include a sacred fire ceremony site to facilitate Indigenous cultural practices. Indigenous community members should not be made to feel unwelcome for holding fires, drum circles, and other cultural practices** (it is not noise-making, it is ceremony).
 - It would be great if it were possible to have a large gathering space or a procession to celebrate National Aboriginal Day/National Indigenous Peoples Day.
- There should be more opportunities for community gardens.
- There was a suggestion that there should be a medicine garden.
- The laneways should include **more Indigenous art**, especially in Milky Way. More Indigenous art should be included on wall murals, there are so many talented Indigenous artists out there (check out @lanewayproject, @StreetARToronto, and @philipcote).
 - Examples given of the mural of Indigenous elders on the Lower Simcoe Street underpass and a mural at Lansdowne near Dundas.

- Feedback on integrating Indigenous place names and language was received, including the example of using Indigenous names on street signs.
- The City should expropriate land to create more greenspace, if there is not a requirement for a certain percentage to be set aside as part of the development process.
- Street furniture should not include "hostile" design features designed to prevent loitering/skateboarders.
- Public spaces should allow for art, such as rock balancing.

Feedback about development in Parkdale:

Participants shared concerns about the typical scale and character of new condominium developments and how that could lead to an erosion of Parkdale's character.

- In October 2020, City Council approved an allocation of 5,200 new affordable/supportive homes for Indigenous Peoples to be directly delivered by Indigenous housing providers and supported by the City and other orders of government. **Parkdale should be a location for some of these housing units**, as part of the land back movement, with the involvement of local Indigenous community leaders.
- Co-op housing models should be explored and encouraged.
- If the Dollarama site is expropriated as part of the Parkdale Hub project, it should incorporate housing units for Indigenous community members.
- Building heights are a concern, the City should prevent Parkdale from experiencing overdevelopment like what is happening further east on Queen Street and also on King Street.
- The City could look towards New York and London as international examples of development policy that integrate local heritage.
- Parkdale has a lot of small-scale density (such as large houses being transformed into 5-unit rooming houses), which is better than allowing these properties to become new, large condo developments.
 - More condos will result in more displacement of current residents; this should be avoided.
- **It is important to consider the small corner stores/other typical commercial properties as heritage and not just landmarks** like the Gladstone hotel.
- Rent increases by landlords are a problem (example – Parkdale Community Legal Services was forced to leave 1266 Queen West because of rent increases).
 - 1266 Queen Street West could be demolished, especially if it could provide more green space
- The tax-exempt status of buildings like churches may mean they have different concerns than other property owners.

- The City should **include policies about sustainable design** to help move to a future that is not as heavily dependent on carbon and fossil fuels such as through the installation of solar panels and greenery on buildings and roofs.
 - New and alternative transportation methods should be considered in the vision for the future of Parkdale
- Too many tall buildings block the sun, this should be avoided if possible for Parkdale's future; allowing new condo buildings and other developments to do this diminishes the quality of life for current residents and community members
 - Suggestion to look to examples like Kensington Market for limiting building heights
 - College Street is an example of where height used to be limited but now the character has changed because of the height of new developments.
 - 5m and 3m stepbacks may not go far enough if excessive height is permitted (it should feel like Parkdale, not Hong Kong).
- The design of **new buildings should not be generic** like other areas of the city. Designers should find creative solutions other than shiny glass boxes and ugly gentrification.
- Developers/owners should keep existing buildings and find creative ways to renovate interiors to **repurpose buildings, not demolish them.**
 - Although the existing built environment is far from what many Indigenous people really want, the more development and construction that is allowed to occur, the further away we get from the principle of land back.
 - Existing older buildings should look the same in the future (a future Parkdale should resemble what currently exists today).

Feedback about Indigenous representation in City spaces, programs and polices:

Participants expressed interest in increasing the visibility and presence of the Indigenous community in Parkdale.

- The City should consider financially supporting community members that take ownership of public spaces through stewardship activities like park cleaning/waterfront cleaning.
- Water has high importance. The City should consider reinforcing or restoring access to existing and historic waterways whenever possible.
- Many participants found their way to Parkdale because of the Indigenous community that exists in the area. Parkdale is a place where a person can come for support and rebuild themselves. **It is important that the existing community is not pushed out.**
- All participants at this meeting are knowledge keepers worth more than a \$50 honorarium.

- There should be a place for an Honour Hall or **similar space where Indigenous community members (past and present) can be honoured, recognized and celebrated.**
 - This could potentially be located at the gateway to Parkdale (Parkdale Amphitheatre) or other central location.
 - It could include information about noteworthy Indigenous people.
 - It could include plaques to educate non-Indigenous people, even though that is a surface-level, settler approach.
 - It should not be a museum; a museum conveys the incorrect sense of artifacts/dead people which is not the intent of what this space would be.
 - It should be a place of healing, so that you leave the place in a better state (similar to a sweat).
 - It could include a space for sweat.
- It is important for Indigenous community members to have a place that is not centered on disenfranchisement and/or service provision. For example, an Indigenous-run community centre like a YMCA with arts and sports programs that is based on Indigenous values and ideals.
 - The frame of reference should be moving away from the notion that Indigenous people need to be "helped"; what would help is getting land back.

Other feedback and broader issues

- The HBC building in Winnipeg that will be donated to Southern Chiefs' Organization and used for housing is an interesting example of heritage buildings and land back principles.
- The Beer Store serves an important role by giving change for empties, which is important for anyone without access to credit and debit cards. It is frustrating that it keeps moving further away from Parkdale.
- Example of not being allowed to smile in photos for status cards is another example of repression.
 - Status cards should not expire; a person's identity does not have an end date.
- Canada has hate crime laws that protect newcomers and other groups from being marginalized, why are these laws not enforced equally when it comes to Indigenous people?
 - Indigenous people are treated like second class citizens on their own land.
 - The treaty card system has been designed to shame Indigenous people for existing.
 - The genocide of Indigenous people continues to this day.
- Racial profiling by police is too common (breaking up fire/drum circle in Dufferin Grove, chalk art).

Next steps

- City staff committed to sharing the meeting summary with participants and the IAO
- City staff committed to sharing the historic summary of the area from the HCD Study