

Update Downsview

Disability Inclusion Stakeholder Meeting

Thursday, December 8, 2022 at 9:30AM on Zoom

Meeting Summary

Prepared by the Jane/Finch Centre and the City of Toronto

Study Background

In January 2022, the City of Toronto launched the **Update Downsview Study**, a generational and transformative opportunity to plan for a new community within the City of Toronto and reconnect the Downsview lands with the surrounding neighbourhoods. Update Downsview is being coordinated with the Official Plan Amendment (OPA) application made by Canada Lands Company and Northcrest Developments for the existing Bombardier airport lands.

The Update Downsview Study includes the preparation of various deliverables, including:

1. An updated land use plan (i.e. Secondary Plan) for the Downsview area.
2. A new Community Development Plan (CDP) that outlines key priorities and strategies for supporting better social and economic outcomes for existing and future residents.

These new long-term plans will guide future growth, development, and community building in Downsview in a collaborative way.

As part of Phase 2 of the Study, the Jane/Finch Centre, a local community-based organization, was contracted to coordinate an equity-driven community engagement process and facilitate a series of focus groups and conversations from November to December 2022. Phase 2 was focused on identifying and confirming the Downsview community's vision and priorities for the future plans.

Meeting Overview

The meeting provided an introduction to Update Downsview – a City-led Study to update the Downsview Secondary Plan, the Community Development Plan (CDP), as well as sought feedback on the seven draft priorities of the CDP. A CDP is a framework

for the implementation of prioritized actions and identified resources that ensure equitable opportunities for residents, community groups, agencies, businesses, local anchor institutions and other rights-holders and people in the Downsview Study Area and surrounding communities. The CDP will endeavor to consider and prioritize social and economic investments.

This meeting included representatives from the City of Toronto, Northcrest Developments, and Canada Lands Company as well as five representatives from ODSP Lawrence Heights, ODSP Yorkgate, and Sick Kids Centre for Community Mental Health (Keele/Sheppard).

Meeting Minutes

The below feedback was shared by representatives of ODSP and Sick Kids Centre for Community Mental Health.

1. Types of Issues and Disabilities Experienced by Clients

- ODSP is the only income source for many clients.
- Residents are predominantly dealing with financial issues.
- About seven years ago, started to see more people with invisible disabilities.
 - For example: People with addictions, who have lost jobs due to mental illnesses, are along the Autism spectrum, or are experiencing schizophrenia, anxiety disorders, or depression.
- Seeing an increase and strong need among clients trying to access funding for mobility devices, social events and cultural events to deal with isolation, and affordable food.
- More and more clients who are living alone are spending upwards of 80% or more of their ODSP funds - They're stuck in cycle.
 - This cycle is coupled with decreasing funding for supportive housing.
- Types of disabilities:
 - People with physical disabilities may be using mobility devices, such as walkers, canes, electric wheelchairs, and scooters to get around.
 - Among children and youth - Seeing ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) on the incline, anxiety, addictions, and mental health issues.
 - Big population of seniors with dementia, Alzheimer's, low vision, and hearing impairment, as well as some physical disabilities.
 - Majority of clients have invisible disabilities (e.g. from terminal illness, recovering from serious illness or surgery, or any sort of impairment that would not allow them to work enough to sustain themselves).

- We work with a lot of newcomers to Canada (some with status and some without status) who face barriers, such as social isolation.
 - Having a community to gather and get connected with is critical for their mental health.

2. Feedback on the Update Downsview Study and Draft Community Development Plan Priorities

Vision/General Comments:

- It's a great vision.
- What needs to be done to make sure that folks feel included and feel welcome?
- Likes that the City and OPA applicant are thinking more about building spaces for agencies that service people with disabilities.
 - Build a hub of services, like at Yorkgate Mall.
- Many local parents with kids with disabilities have to travel all around the city to access different services.
 - Being located in the heart of the community is important.
 - Not aware of any schools with disability services in the area.
 - We don't build schools in the heart of communities and we're not using schools enough for community access.
- Some clients require social cohesion.
- Include more jobs.
- Consider people with disabilities (sensory issues) when designing new buildings; consider people with autism and think about acoustics.
- Have seen isolation and lack of access to food, cultural services, and events due to not having enough money. This is drawing a lot of clients to ODSP offices.
 - Clients hang out at ODSP offices during the days and staff make computers available to them to look for work. Many clients are seeking employment in the service industry.
- Consider language barriers when designing spaces, parks, movements, etc. (e.g. someone who doesn't read English at all or who may not read in their own language).

CDP Draft Priority— Access to Housing:

- The cost of housing is a major barrier faced by clients, including seeking affordable rental housing.
- What's affordable within someone's income? Housing might be affordable to one person, but not at all for someone else.

- Especially for clients on ODSP, even below market rate housing would need to be geared to their income, because sometimes their income doesn't even make up what would be below market rate.
- Need open spaces within the new development.
 - E.g. Lawrence Heights was too compact before the current revitalization process and not conducive to open spaces and safe gathering spaces.
- Like the idea of building physical structures that are open and interlinked with the local area and other amenities. This provides opportunities to come together.
- Have larger unit sizes and intergenerational housing to accommodate families with lots of children and extended families.
 - Think about newcomers arriving with their families or people living with aging seniors to care for them.
- When designing the new homes and communities in Downsview, make sure to include green spaces and support people to get outside and enjoy their community.
- Consider how having light in units is important for people's mental health.

CDP Draft Priorities— Access to Employment Opportunities and Establishing an Inclusive Economy:

- Toronto Employment and Social Services (TESS) has an employment support program where clients are linked with other service providers who may work specifically with people with disabilities and help to find employment that they can maintain with their disability.
- Clients are currently applying for a wide variety of jobs (e.g. service industry, childcare, etc.), depending on their skill set, where they are in life, and whether they are at the very beginning of the process (e.g. preparing a resume).
- Increasing percentage of clients are looking for work and are reporting earnings (e.g. majority in service industry, cleaning jobs, restaurants, offices, etc.).
- An increasing number of people are reporting self-employment.
 - E.g. cleaning companies, businesses selling and reselling products, private day cares, online businesses, etc.
 - Also seeing artists who are reporting income from events.

CDP Draft Priority— Access to Recreation and Below Market Rent Spaces for Non-Profit Agencies:

- Are there plans for a new library?
 - Clients often travel to get computer access to apply for jobs and contact their case workers.

- Malls often become hubs
 - E.g. In Jane-Finch, Jane Finch Mall became a hub when living there because there was no other defacto community centre a lot of times.

Transportation Challenges:

- Some clients get confused moving from point A to point B.
 - Improve accessibility; as a bare minimum, have more information and resources to help users understand how to get from one place to another (around the city).
- Need better maintenance of roads and bus shelters during the colder months/winter, including when it snows.
- Need audible options and different languages to better support people to read signs.
 - There's a huge Spanish-speaking population in the community and being able to navigate transit using their native language is important.
 - Audible buttons and different languages would be really helpful for those who don't know how to use QR codes or can't afford a smartphone (access to tech is a limiting factor).
- Have colour codes for transit lines (e.g. following the blue line takes you eastbound and the red line to the west).
- Are walkways actually wide enough for people with walkers, moms pushing strollers, or someone with a guide dog?