

Update Downsview Community Development Plan Arts & Culture Focus Group

Monday, January 9, 2023, 1:00 – 2:00 p.m.

The objective of the meeting was to seek input into the development of a Community Development Plan (CDP) framework for the Downsview area. The draft CDP framework included a number of draft community priorities including Access to Healthy and Affordable Food; Access to Housing; Access to Employment Opportunities; Establishing an Inclusive Economy; Access to Recreation and Below Market Rent Spaces for Non-Profit Agencies; Arts, Heritage and Education; Community Safety and Well-Being.

This draft summary reflects the feedback shared by participants when asked to provide their vision, input, and suggested priorities into the CDP.

HIGHLIGHTS

1. Funding and access to affordable spaces for artists and creators is a top priority. Ensure competitive and equitable processes when it comes to providing access to space and funding.
2. Maker spaces and access to new technologies is very important.
3. There's a need for incubation spaces for arts and culture to take place.
4. Providing access to spaces and programming are equally important.
5. Creative entrepreneurship and mentorship programs are both needed and impactful, as well as provide lateral networking opportunities.
6. Living in Downsview and the City in general needs to be affordable for artists. More artists are moving outside of the City due to rising costs of living.
7. Artists can create inspiration for communities but they also need to be in an environment that inspires them.
8. Establish hubs for creatives and young people to network and explore space outside the realm of art education.

On January 9, 2023, the City of Toronto and the co-proponents, Northcrest Developments and Canada Lands Company, hosted a Focus Group open to local residents, artists, agencies and organizations in Toronto to inform the development of the Community Development Plan (CDP) for Downsview. The Focus Group provided an introduction to *Update Downsview* – a City-led Study to update the Downsview Secondary Plan, as well as introduced participants to the CDP and sought feedback on its seven draft community priorities.

A CDP is a framework for the implementation of prioritized actions and identified resources that ensure equitable opportunities for Indigenous communities, 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 be aligned with the City's equity strategies and commitments to Indigenous communities. The CDP will endeavour to consider and prioritize social and economic investments.

Four participants engaged in a wide-ranging dialogue focused on the CDP. Participants were guided through a short presentation on Update Downsview, an overview of the CDP and community engagement process, and an overview of the draft community priorities for the CDP. The priorities are intended to address the key themes of: access to healthy and affordable food, housing, employment opportunities, recreational facilities and programs, spaces for non-profit agencies delivering programs and services, preserving heritage, arts and education, community safety and wellbeing as well as establishing an inclusive economy.

The meeting was held online via WebEx and was led and facilitated by Sundus Balata, Project Manager, City of Toronto. As facilitator, Sundus Balata does not advocate for any particular outcome of this project. The intent is to capture the diverse perspectives shared during the discussion.

DETAILED FEEDBACK ON THE DRAFT COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN PRIORITIES

1. Access to Healthy and Affordable Food

- No specific comments were provided relating to this priority.

2. Access to Affordable Housing

Note: later changed to "Access to Housing" during the Phase 2 engagement process.

- **Arts residency for artists**
 - Establish an arts residency in or around Downsview. Artists are moving to Hamilton or St. Catherines and commuting into Toronto due to increased living costs.
 - Creatives should have affordable housing and spaces to make art.

3. Access to Employment Opportunities

- **Entrepreneurship and mentorship programs**
 - A creative entrepreneurship program at ArtScape Daniel's Launchpad has industry activators and boardrooms that were turned into small offices to run not-for-profits at an affordable rate.
 - ArtScape's creative entrepreneurship programs also provide access to a digital media lab with editing suites, VR, photo, recording, and sewing studios as well as other creative studios.
 - The program offers 15 participants with three months of access to mentorship and programming, access to the space for one year, and a \$1,000 credit that goes towards the studios. There are three hours of mentorship broken into half-hour sessions with different industry professionals.
 - These programs are geared towards a range of creatives, including musicians, program producers, directors, artists, set designers.
 - ArtScape had a program every Saturday which offered different courses, including a creative entrepreneur toolkit which provides education on e-commerce, the business canvas model, how to register a business and get a GST number, etc.
 - "These creative entrepreneurship programs are impactful when people have a space to come to work and which also provides lateral networking among other creatives. For example, you may be a musician but need a producer."
 - One thing missing is that they teach you how to be an artist and designer but they don't teach you how to maintain being a creative entrepreneur and making a living.
 - ArtScape provides basic workshops on how to apply for grants, branch writing, toolkits, etc. These are three month programs and includes mentorship as well.

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–Participant

- There are many opportunities in other sectors to support innovation and entrepreneurship, but we haven't done a good job of supporting this as a country, province, and city (especially for arts and visual arts).
- Getting financial support is very difficult, so having space and mentorship programs is super powerful and impactful.
- There could be cyclical entrepreneurship programs where members support/mentor the next group.

4. Establishing an Inclusive Economy

- **Support artists in the City**
 - Artists are being displaced.
 - "Need support for an innovation in the arts economy as it's important to have artists making artwork in our City."
 - We want to be a creative capital and Downsview wants to represent that, but we can't achieve this if artists aren't making artwork in our City and/or are moving outside of the City (e.g. to Hamilton) due to the rising cost of living.

- **Incubator spaces for arts and culture**
 - Provide incubator spaces that support innovation in the arts.
 - There are start-ups with great ideas but no space to work through them and invite others to contribute.
 - There are incubator spaces in tech and food industries where there's communal space for start-ups to make their products and learn how to market them. Could we take this model and apply it to arts and culture?

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–Participant

5. Access to Recreation and Below Market Rent Spaces for Non-Profit Agencies

- **Access to affordable space for artists and organizations**
 - Space is very expensive and needs to be affordable for artists.
 - Provide opportunities for artists and organizations to have access to spaces and creativity. Think through how we preserve space for artists.
 - Festivals and bringing culture to the community is important, but if we don't have a place/space to practice culture within those communities then it's not a major focus, so have space that reflects that.
 - Organizations and cultural entrepreneurs need to have space to innovate and grow.

"One of the issues is trying to locate space for art-making and other creative entrepreneurs."

–Participant

- Need larger community spaces that allow for events to take place, such as art exhibitions, concerts, plays etc.
- "It's important to build the two things together—providing access to studios and programming."
- The spaces should be for the community and identify the artists' needs when it comes to being able to create, use studios, have rehearsals and hold workshops.
- Important to create spaces where people feel a sense of belonging and ownership, and a place people will want to come see what is being created.
- It's very important that those spaces are more accessible.
- "One of the issues is trying to locate space for art-making and other creative entrepreneurs."

"It's important to build the two things together—providing access to studios and programming."

—Participant

- **Competitive and equitable processes**

- "Fostering and encouraging connections with different stakeholders is really important."
- Is there a way for these connections to be made across organizations? For example, could you require agencies to work with partners of their choice for the first 1-3 years if they are moving into below market rental spaces?
 - This can be difficult as it's often small and grassroots organizations that are scrutinized when larger agencies and organizations are securing a large portion of the available spaces at a nominal price.
- There are often two or three organizations that tend to make decisions on funding and who uses these spaces, so it's important to give opportunities for grassroots organizations to secure small spaces.
- Large agencies and organizations don't feel the need to be at these types of meetings because they face less challenges in securing space.
- Instead of 'forcing' folks together, could there be a way for the gatekeepers of the space to also facilitate connections with others in the area, including businesses, schools etc.?

"Fostering and encouraging connections with different stakeholders is really important."

—Participant

- **Provide maker-spaces and access to new technologies**

- Libraries and community centres should be inclusive of having maker spaces for the community to use and experiment with, whether it's with new technologies like virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), 3D printing, laser cutters, jewelry making, or anything else that may enhance the community.
- Need to invest in communities, especially communities like Jane-Finch, and provide them with access to new technologies.
- Scotland is an example where arts organizations and non-profits have 30-year contacts with the cities for spaces that were going to be dormant anyways.

- **Libraries as community and incubator spaces**
 - Important to preserve these spaces because libraries are becoming bigger community spaces where people can congregate, talk and work, as opposed to being quiet.
 - Libraries can also be incubator spaces.
 - Malvern library becomes the community centre for kids after school.
 - They have a recording studio; it's a space for those between 14-24 years old to use.
 - Would be great to have these incubator spaces in the new local library being built because they're important spaces.

- **Systemic barriers**
 - There are disparities to accessing spaces such as libraries with technology, maker spaces and incubator spaces.

6. Heritage, Arts and Education

- **Intersecting CDP priorities**
 - Heritage, arts and education intersects with many other priorities, including access to employment opportunities, below market rent spaces for non-profit agencies, etc.

- **Establish a creative hub**
 - "It's very needed and impactful to establish hubs for creatives and young people to network and explore space outside of art education."

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—Participant
 - The community deserves some stand-out features, and for it to become a place where people from outside want to go to.
 - It should be seen as a place for work, inspiration, and a creative hub people want to visit if coming to Toronto for the first time.
 - It would be great if a goal for this 30-year project was to be seen as a case study for creative cities around the world.
 - Artists make communities cool. When artists move into communities and develop them, people then want to live in them - think Queen West, Junction Triangle, Parkdale, South Riverdale, etc.
 - Will Downsview be a destination for people from outside of the community, a place for people that live in the community, or a combination of both? Having clarity in that can help with a lot of decision-making moving forward.
 - Recommend finding connections within existing community hubs and groups in the neighbourhood in order to maximize reach and impact. This could include schools, community centres, and hubs like the Downsview Market, which has been an important space for the community for decades and sees a considerable amount of foot traffic from predominantly BIPOC communities and newcomers.

- **Opportunities to create something new**
 - In creating a new community it's important to make sure there's still an opportunity to create something new within a glitzy new space.
 - Artists and creatives are moving to Hamilton because it's cheaper and there's spaces, room for opportunity and innovation.
- **Spaces for educational development**
 - It would be great to look at the ways we can offer space and educational development within the community (i.e. through providing maker spaces).
 - Think beyond going to the library after school to play games on the computer.
- **Cultural street fairs and festivals**
 - Having cultural street fairs and festivals is a great idea.
 - It's important to consider what accessibility means to the local community - this could include free food, local and/or culturally relevant performances / entertainment, and accessible locations (TTC and mobility device accessible, access to free parking, etc).
- **Inspiration for artists**
 - "Inspiration is missing. Artists can create inspiration for communities but they also need to be inspired in order to create the work that they do."

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 - Places such as co-working spaces and innovation hubs need to be inspiring in their architecture and connectedness of the communities. They need to be really cool, with great bars and businesses that artists want to go to when they're finished working.
 - It has to be cool, funky, inspiring and creative—look to other parts of the world.
- **Arts residency for artists**
 - Downsview can be a place where artists live and make art, and it can then be reflected in how art is presented as well as the relationships and partnerships with art organizations. It then becomes an authentic place from the ground up.

7. Community Safety and Wellbeing

- **Transportation**
 - This could be an area of the City that benefits from more transit connectivity.
- **Improve awareness of Downsview**
 - Change the perception of the area by creating new opportunities.

- There aren't many people who know much about Downsview unless they went to York University or are connected to Jane-Finch, and there have been such terrible connections made to that community. How can we change this mindset?
- Need to redirect people to Downsview as it's located in the city, connected to subway lines and has transit, space, green space, community centres, restaurants and sports – with more to come.

Additional comments regarding overall process and engagement for the project:

- As the Downsview area changes, current community members may feel overlooked if there is no targeted engagement strategy.