

Jane Finch Initiative: Community Advisory Committee Meeting



6:00-8:00pm, June 20th, 2023

OVERVIEW

On June 20th, 2023, the Jane Finch Initiative Community Advisory Committee meeting was hosted by the Jane Finch Community and Family (JFCF) Centre with support from the City of Toronto. This consultation is part of the [Jane Finch Initiative's](#) comprehensive engagement process and it was held online over Zoom. The agenda and project background can be viewed in the appendices.

The purpose of the event was to:

- Provide an update on the built form options in advance of a presentation to the Design Review Panel.
- Provide feedback to SmartCentres on their [development application](#) for the Yorkgate mall site

WHAT WE HEARD

This section includes the summaries of the feedback collected from the discussions during the Zoom meeting.

Key Themes

- Discussion on built form options:
 - Members discussed the impacts of building setbacks and shadows on community safety, pedestrian comfort, and food growing potential.
 - Members expressed they need to balance access to sunlight, generous sidewalk widths and visibility with the need for visual interest and creation of prominent public spaces on main streets.
 - Members noted that it is difficult to comment on setbacks without a visual depicting where the public right-of-way ends and private property begins.
 - Members recognized the benefits of increasing density in an area with high access to transit and highways, but are concerned about the potential for high traffic generation.
- Feedback on Yorkgate mall site development application:
 - Members expressed disappointment and frustration in the lack of targeted and meaningful engagement with the community to formulate the proposal for Yorkgate Mall.
 - Members contrasted the engagement process with the approach taken for the development proposal for Jane Finch Mall. Residents shared a deep concern that

Summary Report by the Jane Finch Community and Family Centre

there is inadequate effort to provide affordable and family-oriented housing on the site and a disregard for the replacement of existing community agency spaces and spaces intended for community use in any future developments on the site.

- Members asked that public indoor and outdoor community gathering spaces are incorporated on the mall site, including space for festivals and community events.
- Members expressed the importance of Yorkgate mall as a community gathering space and highlighted the importance of services and programming offered by The Spot, Toronto Employment and Social Services, Black Creek Community Health Centre, and others. Members asked that spaces for community programming and services be retained through redevelopment, and that mall tenants be fully involved in redevelopment.

Discussion on Draft Built Form Options: Jane Street

- Where do setbacks begin in front of a property? Do they start from the street or from the sidewalk?
 - Response from City staff: Setbacks begin from the property line. This is usually closer to the building than one would expect, on what appears to be the building's front lawn. We can sometimes express this in distance from the centerline of the street. Property lines can be viewed by using the properties filter on the City's mapping tool through the following link: <https://map.toronto.ca/torontomaps/>
- How will setbacks impact access to sunlight on the street and through the windows of the buildings?
 - Response from City staff: The distance of buildings to the street does have shadow implications, but there are other factors to consider. For example, tower separation distances impact the amount of sunlight that falls between buildings. These standards are different downtown than they will be farther from the core.
- The gaps between buildings should be well designed with intentional gathering spaces. Without appropriate design and landscaping, varied setbacks along Jane can feel unsafe because gathering spaces would not be visible down the street. A member expressed a preference for building designs that are shorter and have greater visibility for residents in towers to view activity on the street level. This creates more of a community feel.
 - Response from City staff: Shadows are influenced by tower separation and the size of the floorplate. Typically a thinner tower allows shadows to pass more quickly, but many of the existing buildings in this area have a large floor plate and a shorter height. It is valuable to know that visible and well-designed outdoor amenity spaces are important to feelings of safety.
- Right now, pedestrians don't feel as cold walking down the sidewalk because existing buildings do not shadow the sidewalk. However, if the setbacks are narrower and prevent sun rays from reaching the sidewalk, pedestrians will feel much colder.
 - Response from City staff: This is an important point, and is especially relevant on east-west corridors, like along Finch. This is also relevant to the issue of snow

storage. With narrower setbacks, snow will be plowed into snow banks and this impacts the amount of space people have to move through.

- Another issue with shadows is that they impact the food growing potential around buildings and on balconies.
- In regards to the setbacks, for the average community member, the property lines are difficult to visualize and understand. In the future, when sharing information with residents, it would be helpful to use the centerline method whenever possible
 - Response from City staff: This is helpful advice. Note that this is not always possible because the official distances are from the property line, not the centerline of the street, and the distances between the propertyline and the centerline of the street varies between buildings. We will aim to have materials that show these distances more clearly when doing community consultations.
- Some buildings and houses in areas with large setbacks end up using two gates to protect their front lawn from intruders. One at the property line and one at the entrance to the home or building. In contrast, some areas with narrow setbacks, have a more modern feel with easy access to retail. Having more storefronts would also be a good way to encourage active transportation, as people are more likely to walk or cycle with lots of retail along the street.
 - Response from City staff: The intention of the setbacks would be to create green spaces that function as public space, so we would discourage this kind of privatizing and “gating in” greenspace.
- The green space along setbacks sounds nice in theory, but in practice there is potential for vandalism, loitering, and unhoused people living in setbacks because they don’t have other places to go. It is also important to have appropriate paving through wide setbacks, so that pathways are clear and we can prevent desire lines from forming.
 - Response from City Staff: We also hope to formalize existing desire lines.
- The impact of podium heights is difficult for the average resident to understand, especially because podiums are not as common in Jane and Finch as they are in other parts of the city. It was only once I went downtown after learning about podiums from JFM+ that I realized how much of an impact they make on the street level. This is a difficult concept to properly explain to the public.
- Will new buildings along Jane street be mixed-use or all residential?
 - Response from City Staff: Currently some parts of Jane Street require a mix of uses while others simply permit it. We want to encourage more commercial uses along Jane Street and need to know whether residents would prefer that we:
 - a) continue to reinforce a high concentration of retail at the intersection of Jane and Finch; or
 - b) increase access to retail along Jane street, even though that might deemphasize the commercial core at the intersection.

Discussion on Draft Built Form Options: Finch Avenue

- As someone walking along Finch Avenue, I would prefer direct connections to the street network behind buildings, rather than a continuous streetwall.

- As someone living along Jane Street, having quieter green spaces tucked behind a more continuous streetwall is preferable, because it allows residents access to outdoor space without being right on a busy street.
- The continuous streetwall option may also create a stronger sense of community for residents because fewer non-residents will be using the greenspaces adjacent to the buildings on Finch.

Discussion on Draft Built Form Options: Norfinch

- From a highrise standpoint, it would be prime real estate to be so close to Highway 400 in the Norfinch District. There is great opportunity for mixed-use development to accommodate the retail needs of a high density community.
- It seems difficult to manage traffic in such a small area. I would be interested in seeing more comprehensive visioning on traffic implications in this district.

Discussion on Yorkgate Site Development

- Residents know that at some point in the far future, the mall will be coming down. Do we have an idea of whether or not the services will be relocated to some of the new buildings? How can we ensure that the community will have access to those services?
 - Response from SmartCentres representatives: SmartCentres has no intention of relocating major infrastructure. The easement will remain, and there will be some sort of open space connection to the hydro corridor through the site. However, we are hoping to narrow the required easement. Regarding community services in the mall, our main focus is to deliver rent to stakeholders, so determining future retail uses will be a business case for a later point in our phasing. We agree that it is great for residents to have community uses in the mall, and it is important for us to have these anchors to keep people on the site.
- It appears that only one community space is in [the current design](#). Has more thought gone into the amenity spaces?
 - Response from SmartCentres representatives: The first building is a standalone apartment. There will be amenity space within the building for tenants and an outdoor amenity space that will be programmed for tenants and may be used by non-residents. The other potential uses in the draft strategies have not yet been considered by SmartCentres. Tenants in the mall may be moved to other buildings in the future.
- How are you thinking about affordability when it comes to new rental space in the future?
 - Response from SmartCentres representatives: We have not planned any affordable housing in the proposed apartment building. We believe that there is a need and a want for residents to move into a fresh, new building; this sentiment has been reiterated over and over again. In the future we will build in accordance with whatever the market dictates, including rental housing, condos, market rate, and affordable rentals. We know that there is a need for affordable

housing and that the City requests affordable housing in many properties, so we will have to abide by these requirements.

- You said that you have heard a repeated desire for new, market rate buildings. Can you speak to the public consultation process thus far, or where you have heard this messaging? Please also speak to any future consultation events that you have planned.
 - Response from SmartCentres representatives: In November 2022, we had one open house in the mall where we shared the proposal for the apartment building. We heard a number of comments, primarily from mall tenants. It appeared that comments were supportive of a new apartment building, but people wanted to know more about the rental costs. We were not able to share expected rates at that stage.
- Is there a record of the November 2022 consultation event?
 - Response from SmartCentres representatives: No, there is no public record of that engagement. It may have been shared with the planner on our file.
- Unless the team does not want input from the community, it would be wise to engage the public sooner rather than later so that ideas from the community can actually influence the design process. In order to mitigate any backlash, it would be beneficial for residents to have greater participation in designing this space that has been a part of the neighbourhood for a long time.
 - Response from SmartCentres representatives: Community engagement is an important tool for us to explain to residents that the mall is not being demolished anytime soon.
- How will you make it affordable for residents to live in? Is there any transparency on your end in regards to rent prices?
 - Response from SmartCentres representatives: We will take this question back to SmartCentres and seek guidance on how we can become more transparent about costs in the future.
- Do you have a sense of the sizes of the units, including the number of rooms per unit?
 - Response from SmartCentres representatives: The original application included 287 units. At that time, we were considering only one and two bedroom units. However, the revised application is 25 stories and 302 units, including one three bedroom unit on every residential floor and more amenity spaces. Apartment sizes will range from 500 square feet for a studio to over 800 square feet for the three bedroom units.
- Yorkgate mall is a very important space to the community. The mall itself is a gathering space, and it hosts an employment center, a health center, The Spot, and more. It seems that the value of these places to the community is not a significant factor in your design process. I suggest finding a balance between finding a great return on your investments while also addressing some of the local concerns.
 - Response from SmartCentres representatives: We intend to have a space in the mall that will be dedicated to community engagement in this initial phase and in future engagement phases. We hope that this model will allow us to share a bigger picture of what the site will become.

- A couple of the things you mentioned indicate that there was not a lot of conversation with residents. You mentioned that there will be no affordable units in the proposed building, but affordability has been such a big issue in the community for the past 5 years. You also mentioned that the original proposal was all one and two bedroom units, which goes against a lot of what people have been saying in the neighborhood. Considering the fact that people have really been supporting the site financially by coming out to the mall and patronizing the mall for such a long time, it is disappointing to see that residents' concerns are not represented here.
 - Response from SmartCentres representatives: Affordability in this part of Toronto is very important, and we are bringing a product that is competitive to the market because we believe that the people who live here want to remain here. We are not creating an affordable housing building, but by building smaller units we will be able to provide rents that are more affordable than the units in the original proposal would have been.
- It should be very easy to complete community engagement on the site because two of the tenants, Toronto Employment and Social Services and the Black Creek Community Health Centre, are frequented by people who would be very interested in engaging with this project. Are you really trying to meet the needs of people who have been patronizing the mall for the past thirty years?
- How big will the parking spaces be for the residential building?
 - Response from SmartCentres representatives: There are currently a lot of vacant parking spaces on the site, so SmartCentres does not intend to add underground parking spaces. Adding underground parking spaces would be unnecessarily unaffordable.
 - Response from City staff: This has been an ongoing topic of discussion between SmartCentres and the City. The City does not support keeping surface level parking because it does not align with the long-term vision of the area surrounding the intersection. City staff feel that the site would be better served by a walkable, pedestrian-friendly design like those envisioned in the draft strategies.
- Residents recognize that this is a for-profit business. The concern to the community is that many for-profit businesses have come in and made a profit in Jane and Finch, and haven't given back. Hearing that you have done some community engagement, but that it has not been documented and there is no broader long-term public engagement strategy is insulting. I want to reiterate the concern for the services in Yorkgate Mall that thousands of people rely on. We need a commitment to maintaining access to these services. I also do not understand why you cannot afford to put in underground parking considering the number of buildings that you intend to build on the site in the future.
 - Response from SmartCentres representatives: We appreciate this concern. The Yorkgate site is unique in our portfolio as SmartCentres primarily builds retail spaces, so we do not have an established process for community engagement around residential developments. Additionally, because the services are constrained in this area and other developers have already received their building permits, we had limited time for community engagement as we needed

to get a building permit as quickly as possible. We are constrained by the capacity of the sanitary pipes that this region drains through.

- It is disappointing to hear that when there are system problems, such as the limited infrastructure capacity, the outcome is reduced engagement with residents, and ultimately residents suffer.
- Will there be outdoor amenity spaces for festivals and community events?
 - Response from SmartCentres representatives: This has not been a part of our designs so far.
- Can holding provisions be used to halt the development process when community services cannot support new buildings?
 - Response from City staff: Holding provisions halt the development process until certain conditions are met, but those conditions are typically about hard infrastructure provision. In practice, the process of ensuring that community services and “soft infrastructure” is sufficient for new developments is more about community conversations, advocacy, connection with the local councillor and participation in community consultation meetings. We can encourage applicants to do extensive community consultation but we can't require any consultation beyond the statutory meetings.
- I encourage SmartCentres to reach out to some of the tenants in the mall which are already well connected and embedded in the community, including the employment office, Black Creek Community Health Center, Winston LaRose's office, and The Spot. Many of the community leaders already working in the mall would be happy to work closely with you throughout the engagement process for this site.

APPENDIX A: AGENDA

6:00 Participants Join
6:05 Welcome, introductions, and land acknowledgement
6:15 Update on Indigenous engagement strategy
6:20 Presentation and discussion on draft urban design strategies
7:55 Closing notes
Attendees: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● 2 JFCF Centre staff: Denelle Carvalho and Clara Stewart-Robertson● 2 City of Toronto staff: Zahra Joseph Wilson, Leah Birnbaum, and Jedrick So● 3 SmartCentres representatives: Joe Cimer, Moe Zeidi, and Mary Malhi● 13 Community Advisory Committee members: Maize Blanchard, Veronica Eastman, William Ballard, William Lopez, Devayani Chitnis, Christine Le, Terryl Knox, Maria B, Jennifer Boakye, Kayzie Sutton, Sharon Taylor, Troy Budhu, Edna Cofles Gualtero

APPENDIX B: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The City of Toronto's Jane Finch Initiative is a resident-informed project to plan for the future of the Jane and Finch area. Together, we are developing a community development plan and a land use plan so that residents and businesses are supported as the area changes over time with the opening of the Finch West LRT.

The [Jane Finch Initiative](#) is a resident-informed project to plan for the future of the Jane and Finch area and to determine how best to leverage the investment in light rail transit (LRT) for the benefit of local communities. It is a collaborative community planning exercise in 'Neighbourhood 24 - Black Creek' and 'Neighbourhood 25 - Glenfield-Jane Heights' (see [Neighbourhood Profiles](#)), centered on the intersection of Jane Street and Finch Avenue West.

The Jane Finch Community and Family Centre are supporting the City's community engagement process by facilitating community consultations.

The initiative involves three integrated streams of work:

- 1) **Comprehensive engagement**
- 2) A **community development plan** including a local economic opportunities plan;
- 3) An update to the **land use planning framework**.