

# CITY OF TORONTO DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

## MINUTES: MEETING 1 – January 26, 2023

The Design Review Panel met virtually on Thursday, January 26, 2023, at 12:15 pm.

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### Members of the Design Review Panel

**Gordon Stratford (Co-Chair):** Principal – G C Stratford – Architect

**Michael Leckman (Co-Chair):** Principal – Diamond Schmitt Architects

**Meg Graham (Co-Chair):** Principal – superkül

**Margaret Briegmann:** Associate – BA Group

**Dima Cook:** Director – EVOQ Architecture

**George Dark:** Partner Emeritus/Senior Consultant – Urban Strategies

**Ralph Giannone:** Principal – Giannone Petricone Associates

**Jim Gough:** Independent Consultant, Transportation Engineering

**Jessica Hutcheon:** Principal – Janet Rosenberg & Studio

**Olivia Keung:** Architect – Moriyama & Teshima Architects

**Paul Kulig:** Principal – Perkins & Will

**Joe Lobko:** Partner – Joe Lobko Architect Inc.

**Anna Madeira:** Principal – BDP Quadrangle

**Jim Melvin:** Principal Emeritus/Advisor – PMA; Owner – Realm Works

**Juhee Oh:** Director, Sustainability & Energy – WSP

**Heather Rolleston:** Principal, Design Director – BDP Quadrangle

**Eladia Smoke:** Principal Architect – Smoke Architecture

**Sibylle von Knobloch:** Principal – NAK Design Group

### Design Review Panel Coordinator

Lee Ann Bobrowski: Urban Design, City Planning Division

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### CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

The Panel confirmed minutes of their previous meeting, which was held on December 8, 2022, by email.

### MEETING 1 INDEX

- i. 1151 Markham Road (1<sup>st</sup> Review)
- ii. Davisville Yard & McBrien Building Feasibility Study (1<sup>st</sup> Review)
- iii. Jane Finch Initiative (1<sup>st</sup> Review)



City staff questions to Panel members include requesting comment on the built form of the proposed design, but member remarks clearly indicate that first and foremost the fundamentals of the presented site plan need be rethought. These changes include (but are not limited to):

- reducing and rearranging the overcrowded mix of ground level uses on a confined site,
- designing every side of the site as vital civic frontage; including:
  - o East - Transforming the currently back-of-house east edge into an activated pedestrian-first realm that enlarges and contributes to the proposed adjacent park.
  - o North and West – Creating a stronger and more useful high quality public realm streetscape and street corner plaza space.
  - o South – Strengthen quality of landscape and integrate with adjacent currently fragile public realm, including visually screening proposed vehicular area.

## **Panel Commentary**

### Transportation Infrastructure and Street Frontages

- Panelists noted that there was a lack of integration as well as understanding of the future transportation networks impacts along the site, including the Durham-Scarborough BRT and cycling infrastructure. This piecemeal approach to planning that ignores context should be avoided.
  - o Impacts of the proposed, and the eventual outcomes for the streetscape should be captured in the application, including the cycle track.
- One panel member calculated that the new proposed lanes and central platform will occupy all of the 36 metres within the right-of-way, leaving no room for street trees along Ellesmere. The minimal streetscape is unfortunate particularly in consideration of the new residents; an attractive, shaded streetscape is needed.
- A panel member highlighted the existing bus stop along Markham Road, noting that if it remains, the 18-metre clearance it requires will be in conflict with the proposed trees, as indicated. As a result, there is the potential for no street trees at the intersection of Markham and Ellesmere.
- A panelist noted that the corner location for the urban square does not seem to work anymore, in consideration of the future BRT. It would benefit from the inclusion of more landscape features to establish a quality space and ensure it feels less empty.
- Overall, the Panel identified that significant improvements are required for commuters as the proposed pedestrian realm is bleak. The streetscapes are neglected and need to be studied in great detail. Further coordination with site adjacencies is required, including the neighbours to the south.

### Site Organization and Public Realm

- The Panel identified significant concerns regarding the public realm, site organization and edge conditions.
  - o As a large population is planned for this site and the adjacent blocks, it is imperative to make an attractive, functional space for the residents.

- A greater contribution to the community is needed, and not just a density grab; what is currently proposed is not substantial enough.
- Multiple panel members highlighted the small site as a primary challenge. The team was encouraged to consider and prioritize the project's design goals to help inform the site's spatial organization.
- A greater understanding of how the larger public realm network functions is critical to the future of the project but lacking in the application.
  - It is imperative to ensure meaningful connections as well as continuity between public spaces, including the POPS and the adjacent public park.
  - The residential entrance and linkage to the park also needs to be strong.
  - A new site plan is needed to reconcile the nature of these spaces.
- The Panel identified multiple issues with the POPS design, including the location of proposed servicing.
  - The air shaft disconnects the lobby from the space, and the transformer placement is not ideal along a street frontage. It was suggested that the transformer be moved to ensure a larger, functional open space that is useful and attractive to the community.
- The Panel voiced great concern for the development and encouraged a fundamental rethink of the site plan. As currently proposed, it is a large building on a very small site. The design lacks the critical influence of a Landscape Architect, and the open public space requires significant expansion.
- A panelist noted the site planning approach as part of the issue. Although there is the potential for a thousand new residents with the units proposed, a quarter of the site is related to car-use. More space needs to be given over to pedestrians.
- A panel member underscored the fragility of the public realm at the southern edge of the site as a result of the automobile drop-off location, the ramp access zone, and the building misalignment. The team is encouraged to prioritize the strong definition of the westerly public realm, as well as edge-making at grade, and not only above grade.
  - The panelist suggested extending the lower parts of the building further towards the property line to create a street wall or party wall condition, allowing the southern face of the development to contribute to the continuity of the public realm.
  - The vehicular movement areas on the southwest corner should also be reconsidered to ensure the space is not a void for pedestrians; perhaps retail or amenity could provide continuity of the public experience along that edge.

#### Ground Floor Programming and Building Materiality

- Panel members encouraged a detailed exploration of the program including the idea of extending retail across Ellesmere; several agreed that the main entrance to a residential building needs to be on a street frontage.
- A panel member questioned if the site was a good location for both retail and residential at grade; they are fighting for space and entrance sequences.

- Further consideration on the appropriateness of retail may lead to a better organization of the ground floor. It is cautioned that sometimes retail spaces within condos are orphaned without the context of a high street to support them.
- A panel member extended the bleak description of the urban realm to the materiality of the building; it is hard and grey with significant glass.
  - A greater consideration of the window-to-wall ratio may help facilitate responsible design to reduce the amount of glazing on the tower.
  - The materials at the base of the building are described as very hard and dark; consider bringing more richness to the corner and where there will be pedestrian life.

# DAVISVILLE YARD & MCBRIEN BUILDING FEASIBILITY STUDY

## CITY OF TORONTO - DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

### DESIGN REVIEW PANEL MINUTES

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DESIGN REVIEW First Review

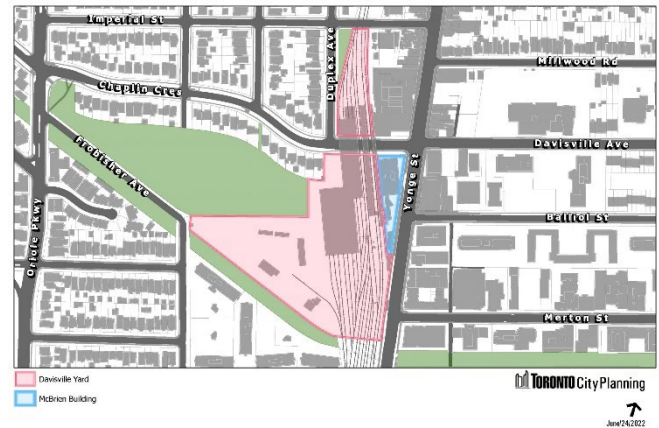
APPLICATION City Study

#### PRESENTATIONS:

CITY STAFF Svetlana Lavrentieva, Strategic Initiatives

DESIGN TEAM David Collins, Zeidler Architecture

VOTE None



#### REVIEW PARTICIPANTS:

CHAIR Michael Leckman

PANELISTS Gordon Stratford, George Dark, Jim Gough, Jessica Hutcheon, Paul Kulig, Joe Lobko, Sibylle von Knobloch

CONFLICTS Not in Attendance: Anna Madeira, Jim Melvin, Heather Rolleston

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## Introduction

City staff outlined the project history, existing and future context, and planning framework. Staff are seeking the Panel's advice on the following key issues:

1. Provide recommendations on improving Yonge Street public realm and grade change between the street and the built form
2. Provide recommendations on improving connection across Chaplin Crescent to connect to future trench park
3. Provide comments on the overall site layout and fitting into the existing context

## Chair's Summary of Key Points

Panel has often commented that it should see large complex projects at their earliest possible stages, to ensure that design direction strongly emphasises the public realm. Davisville Yard and McBrien building is a project in such an early phase. Fortunately, the core objective of the project is to create significant new park space, fully integrated with the existing neighbourhood, with new density, and new community amenity. Implicitly, it benefits the public realm. Panel was in support of the project's overall objectives.

While Panel has asked for early-stage projects, it shouldn't surprise that many of the comments coming from the discussion were either about the areas where documentation and development

were too light, or that the concepts hadn't been subject to a significant enough reality-check in this investigation phase.

On the subject of reality-check, there were many panel members suggesting a closer look at traffic flow on Chaplin, looking for a better connection across Yonge Street with the emerging context of Merton Street, or asking to look more closely at the logic of the woonerf on the west side.

In addition, Panel was hoping for a narrative that acknowledges the complexities of elements below the proposed signature park: what strategy would there be for adaptive re-use or abandonment of existing support buildings? What impact might the needs of exiting and ventilation have on this potentially extraordinary park?

Most importantly, it was not clear how the concept would imaginatively respond to the changing elevation along Yonge Street. There is great risk that the raised edge shown on page 63 of the pdf – immediately adjacent to Yonge Street as well as very close to the TTC tracks – creates a barrier instead of an invitation to the public realm. While Planning had asked the Panel for ideas, none were offered. The City and design team should strongly focus on strategies to solve this difficult area – even at a conceptual level – for the overall objectives of the Feasibility Study to be viable.

Finally, panel members were very interested in a high-level business plan for the parkland proposal, in particular the way in which the development density relates to the aspiration. The implication was that a lot of density would be required to achieve the vision, and that the proposal has insufficient density to credibly do so.

## **Panel Commentary**

### Concept and Feasibility

- The Panel conveyed great support for the ambition and initiative of the intensely aspirational project. They commended the good initial instincts demonstrated in the work, including the idea of decking over a train yard, creating public greenspace, as well as generating a platform for new housing and office development.
- Several panel members questioned the feasibility of the proposal, and noted surprise that more of an integrated, comprehensive business vision was not combined with the development vision.
  - o In consideration of the substantial decking required, a panelist encouraged the CreateTO team to reevaluate the first principles to assess if the city benefit is worthwhile. Perhaps there are more economical ways to deliver affordable housing and a park.
  - o A panel member also cautioned perching the proposed 1900 Yonge development over the existing McBrien building; it is expensive and complicates the adaptive reuse of the heritage building.

### Southern End and Decking

- The importance of the study's ideas to the city was underscored, including the proposition of significant decking.

- The team was encouraged not to underplay the site; an enormous amount of capital will be required to realize the vision.
- Multiple panelists noted that the south end of the site was rather underplayed; the density is underwhelming.
  - o The development along Merton is much more significant as a place than implied by the plans, including its role as a connector piece with neighbourhoods eastward. Enormous densification has occurred along here.
- The nature of the significant grade change at the south end of Yonge and the built form needed to accommodate it challenges the pedestrian experience. Perhaps increasing the porosity by widening the mid-block connections or introducing celebratory entrances up to the top deck could improve this.
- The Panel highlighted the challenges as well as opportunities related to the building façades and grade differences.
  - o Visionary architecture will be needed to design accessible and attractive ground floor building space at the south end.
  - o The suggestion was made to introduce public art, a green wall, or transparency into the architecture to animate the grade difference along Yonge; perhaps there could be a glimpse inside to the building's subway operations.

#### Public Realm and Open Space

- A panel member noted their appreciation for the amount of greenspace the project would bring to the city. The expanded public realm on Yonge Street is exciting, including the unique public spaces that encircle the heritage building.
- The proposed alignment of the mid-block connection to Balliol Street was noted to make sense; it is likely where the grade change works best.
- In concert with Mount Pleasant Cemetery, a panel member underscored the potential that the proposal has to augment the overall experience along Yonge with greenspace, to create a sense of respite in the middle of the city.
- Reiterating the aspirational vision of the proposal, a panelist encouraged the team to explore other land adjacencies to expand the development, including the park to the north and the open yard south of the Beltline Bridge. Perhaps there are opportunities to incorporate or develop the land to bring money into the project.
- A panel member agreed that the third option for the parkland layout makes the most sense. It combines with the existing Oriole Park in the best way to create a massive park, and presents a great opportunity to connect with the Kay Gardner Beltline Trail.
- A panelist noted that the community space over the bus loop (Site 3) was not being appreciated for its potential. Given the crowdedness on the corner, perhaps it should come into play more.
- A panel member expressed that the proposal was missing the perspective of a Landscape Architect.



- The parkland north of Chaplin Crescent was identified as significant enough in size to be developed as its own parkette. Perhaps a lit crosswalk connection could be introduced at the intersection.

### Transportation

- Multiple concerns were identified from a transportation perspective, including road layouts and pedestrian connections.
  - o In consideration of the bus loop, and the potential for additional traffic loads, a design for Chaplin Crescent that narrows visually moving west, beyond the development may help to minimize community opposition.
  - o A panel member questioned the one-sided extension off Chaplin; perhaps the bus loop could connect to Balliol rather than serve as a dead-end road.
  - o A panelist cautioned for the careful design of the service and access road; it may be more important than initially considered, particularly if it is accommodating loading.
  - o Another encouraged the design of the park-side road to be as narrow or short as possible, and suggested to collocate or centralize loading to ensure service vehicles do not require the full length.
  - o It was suggested that an AODA compliant connection to the Beltline across Yonge Street linking the park would maximize pedestrian accessibility, and help integrate the design into the community.
  - o Support was noted for a new signal at the Balliol Street intersection to further link the two sides of Yonge.
- A panelist questioned the future of the TTC components as well as the site's parking strategy; these topics were not addressed as part of the presentation.

### Graphics and Visualizations

- Multiple panelists offered feedback to improve the study's visualizations and graphic legibility.
  - o The Davisville Square imagery seemed cold; it could be more vibrant and colourful. Perhaps the square is a great location for public art.
  - o It was noted that some of the graphics were confusing; it was difficult to understand the street and block plan, including the unfolding urban pattern.
  - o A panel member wondered about including a series of pedestrian visualizations at the ground level on Yonge Street that could help in the understanding of the project's design evolution.
  - o Some perspective imagery lacked site specificity and were not helpful in understanding the place.

# JANE FINCH INITIATIVE

## CITY OF TORONTO - DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

### DESIGN REVIEW PANEL MINUTES

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DESIGN REVIEW First Review

APPLICATION City Study

#### PRESENTATIONS:

CITY STAFF Leah Birnbaum, Strategic Initiatives

DESIGN TEAM Paul Kulig and Eunice Wong,  
Perkins & Will

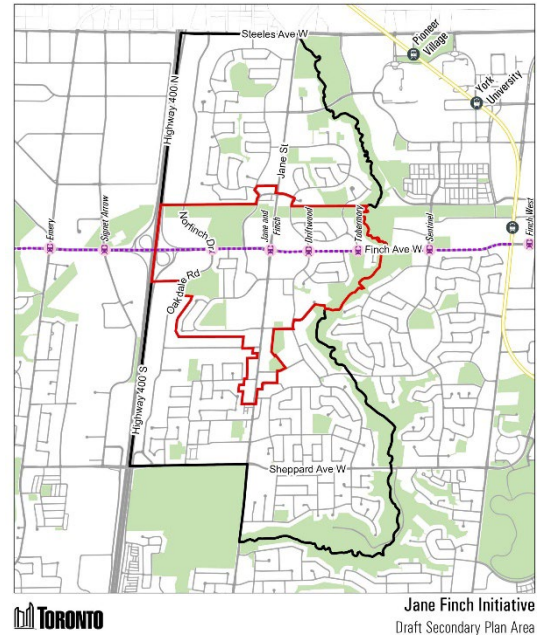
VOTE None

#### REVIEW PARTICIPANTS:

CHAIR Gordon Stratford

PANELISTS Michael Leckman, George Dark, Jim Gough, Jessica Hutcheon, Joe Lobko, Jim Melvin

CONFLICTS Presenter, Design Team: Paul Kulig  
Not in Attendance: Anna Madeira, Heather Rolleston



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## Introduction

City staff outlined the project history, existing and future context, and planning framework. Staff are seeking the Panel's advice on the following key issues:

1. How well do these plans capture the city-building potential of Jane and Finch?
2. What does a Made-in-Jane-Finch “Avenue” look like?
3. What does the future of retail look like in the Jane and Finch area as malls are redeveloped?

## Chair's Summary of Key Points

The Panel would like to thank the proponent team for their excellent submission. It possesses the strong potential to become an exemplar for its extensive community involvement, thoughtfully creative strategic vision, and engagingly crafted presentation.

This Initiative is of essential importance to our City, not only for the area it focuses on but also because there is so much in it that can be learned from and adopted elsewhere. This observation has clearly been made though the many comments from Panel members.

The Panel has seen many projects where there is an exceptional vitality in the area that is being studied but the resulting study itself fails to recognize, nurture, and embody that unique energy and

hope. Promisingly, this Initiative does not follow that path. The Panel encourages the proponent team to build upon their strong submission and include the following:

- Green Spines
  - Keep these spines wide, well landscaped, and above all fully suited to community needs and desires.
- Green Spaces
  - Use as a key driver to create a strong “connective tissue” that weaves Jane Finch together and seamlessly interlaces with surrounding green spaces, such as Black Creek Valley.
- Mobility
  - Provide mobility equity for all community members. An example would be short- and long-term bike share availability throughout the community.
- Retail
  - Plan for small scale affordable retail that meets community needs, rather than the typical big box retail solution.
- Food Security
  - Ensure that green spaces foster and support this vital security through the provision of generous food garden areas throughout.
- Connectivity
  - Include connectivity beyond the Initiative’s boundaries (e.g.: TRCA spaces, York U, etc.).
- Modeling
  - Integrate Smart City modeling into the engagement and design process.
- Catalysts
  - Include strong gathering places throughout, looking to precedents such as Evergreen Brick Works and Wychwood Barns for their gathering place ideas and programmes.

## **Panel Commentary**

### Study Approach

- The Panel expressed their appreciation for the work brought forwarded. A lot of good beginnings and instincts have been demonstrated; there is great promise.
- Multiple panelists applauded the place-based approach to the study.
  - The community engagement seems to be energizing authentic responses and a grassroots understanding of place is important. It is great to see the level of detail and planning focus applied to this area to ensure it lives up to its potential.
- A panelist commended the City and design team for the wealth of background information gathered in the Ideas Report.

## Commercial Redevelopment

- In consideration of the retail mall, a panelist questioned ways of calculating space for the social activities in the existing conditions, as well as the recent programming in the parking lots to ensure that it returns, or is added to. How do the numbers inform what comes back, and how do these social spaces then begin to mix with other uses such as institutional or parkland to focus on a place-based direction?
- A panel member identified their preference for small-scale, affordable retail spaces that the community can develop for their own business, rather than another array of large-scale, bland, corporate fast-food and big-box retail. Hope was noted that Jane Finch could be an incubator for further enhancement of the community.
- Review of the Mirvish Centre as a precedent for redeveloping the core of Jane Finch was suggested, notably the smaller stores that are much more adaptable to use as well as some higher-density located around greenspaces.
- A panelist highlighted the plaza areas proposed at the Jane Finch intersection, noting that the plans indicate a desire for people to migrate to these gathering spaces, and questioned what kind of buildings will facilitate this.
  - o Perhaps a container-ized idea could be employed to test out these spaces, to be moveable and useable throughout the neighbourhood.
- The challenges of the existing pedestrian environment were identified, as the area is dominated by regional collector roads with very wide streets and very light sidewalks as well as strip malls with green edges.
  - o A panelist wondered if landscape urbanism could be established along either side of the collectors where intense, clear, spatially-defined environments could create enjoyable spaces for the pedestrian, independent from all of the traffic.
  - o The space required should be declared early, and as part of any future development, so it is not compromised in any potential redevelopment. Perhaps it is possible for this character defining-element of the place to be sustained.
  - o The future of the strip malls was also questioned in recognition of their role as community centres. How are they a part of a successful regeneration that does not wipe it all out when the mall redevelopment occurs?
- A panel member suggested that the inclusion of community garden space on roofs could be included as a requirement of any new redevelopment, to provide for new tenants.

## Greenspace and Connections

- Understanding the pressures on right-of-ways, a panelist appreciated the dedication to maintaining the green setbacks along the green spines.
- A panelist identified previous work with the Black Creek Strategic Neighbourhood Action Plan, on behalf of the TRCA and City of Toronto. The study identified food security concerns, and concluded that a portion of available land could be used to grow significant amounts of food for the neighbourhood; perhaps there is potential for the current study to connect with this previous work.

- A panel member noted a bit of a disconnect between the staff and consultant presentations; the staff examined the larger context whereas the consultants focused on the secondary plan area and the Jane Finch intersection. The panelist encouraged the team to consult with other planners familiar with the Black Creek Ravine system that had previously dedicated efforts to extend the trail system north-south; it is underutilized in terms of its green connectivity potential.
- A panelist questioned if there was an opportunity to engage institutional partners to establish a community gathering space. In consideration of the available land, the team was encouraged to explore imaginative ideas to introduce a community magnet to the neighbourhood.
  - o Precedents including Wychwood Barns and Evergreen Brick Works were noted. Perhaps the study could begin to articulate where or how this might work.
- A panelist questioned if Jane and Finch were the streets to have green; perhaps smaller, north-south green connections to establish linear parkways on existing streets was a solution.

### Mobility

- A panelist underscored the necessity for the mobility plan to reflect the socioeconomic characteristics of the community makeup to focus on sustainable modes of transportation, as it does suggest.
  - o This includes wider sidewalks, facilities for cycling and bicycle shares; the community cannot satisfy demands through auto.
  - o Equity needs to be the prime focus of the mobility plan to give everyone the opportunity to connect within the secondary plan area, as well as the broader community.
- A panelist highlighted the Finch LRT as an important part of the mobility plan to connect the community with the broader city. They disagreed with the idea that LRT operating speeds are subservient to pedestrian needs.
  - o There needs to be a comprehensive, balanced plan to move people through the neighbourhood, but also to an LRT that will work functionally and move them efficiently to employment as well as schooling opportunities across the city.
- A panelist noted their appreciation for the focus on the Jane Finch intersection but underscored the huge potential for the Jane Street corridor heading north, and encouraged more consideration for connectivity with York University.
  - o The new TRCA development at the south end of the Black Creek Farm is a very desirable east-west connection that gets the north end of Jane Finch linked to the York subway station.

### Graphic Representation

- A panel member commended the team for their fresh approach to representing visualizations about a neighbourhood. The opening graphic was highly accessible to help residents see their own place and understand the spatial relationships of their neighbourhood.

- Alternatively, another panelist expressed difficulty interpreting the graphics; there was a lack of clarity as to why some gathering spaces were placed in their proposed locations.
- A panel member encouraged the City of Toronto to invest in a smart-city model of the area, to develop a 3D model with topography to really understand the potential of the place. The work is inspirational, but currently abstract.