

Jane Finch Initiative: Community Advisory Committee Meeting



6:00-8:00pm, July 18th, 2023

OVERVIEW

On July 18th, 2023, a 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 Indigenous consultation process for the Jane Finch Initiative.
- Provide an update on the JFM+ visioning process and development application.

WHAT WE HEARD

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

Key Themes

- Discussion on the JFM+ Visioning Process and Development Application
 - Members shared questions and concerns about the potential loss of retail space for small businesses and essential medical services during redevelopment.
 - Members expressed concern about parking availability and transportation options during construction.
 - Members discussed the impact of LRT construction on physical and mental health and wellbeing. Members asked that the Jane Finch Mall consider the impact of construction on residents living nearby.
 - Members expressed support for the emphasis on equitable development, local hiring, and investments in public art and cultural opportunities. Members were interested in exploring innovative and community-led governance models.
 - Members asked for details on project funding and the long-term commitment of the ownership group to the project.

Discussion on Indigenous Consultation

- Question: Have any concerns or key areas been identified so far?
 - Response from Innovation Seven Representative: We haven't heard concerns yet. Six Nations has expressed a desire to continue to be involved in policy and development relating to affordable housing and social development initiatives.
- Question: If we want to engage with Indigenous partners, what would be the best approach?
 - Response from Innovation Seven: Once the initial contacts are in place, it is important for the relationship to be maintained between the City and the individual organizations.

Discussion on the JFM+ Visioning Process and Development Application

- Question: How will the retail areas in the mall shrink over time, and what will happen to the retailers that are currently in the mall?
 - Response from JFM+ Representative: In the early and mid stages of the redevelopment, available retail space may increase or stay the same. In the long-term, the mall plans to provide 70-80% of the current retail space. The focus will be on small commercial units to support small and local businesses, and efforts will be made to support existing businesses, including finding new locations for businesses affected by construction.
- Question: Will the post office be preserved?
 - Response from JFM+ Representative: We cannot comment on specific retailers, but the mall has a history of serving the community with retail, and that will continue. Critical services like Shoppers Drug Mart, where the post office is, are important to residents and have long leases at the mall.
- Question: How much parking will be available during mall construction?
 - Response from JFM+ Representative: A building will be constructed on an underutilized section of the parking lot during the first phase. During this phase, parking around the mall will be retained. Over time, parking in the northeast corner will be removed, but some parking will still be available around the mall. Each new development will include underground parking with the possibility of expansion if needed. The goal is to encourage walking, biking, and transit use to create a more transit-friendly environment.
- Question: Will the mall have living spaces available on higher levels for residents while retail stores remain on the ground floor?
 - Response from JFM+ Representative: The reconstruction of the mall involves reorienting the front of the mall to face outwards, rather than adding a second story. It will continue to be a single-story building, but with a different appearance and a different relationship to the street. Some existing retail units, like Shoppers Drug Mart, already face the parking lot. This characteristic will be maintained.

- Question: How much parking is currently being used?
 - Response from JFM+ Representative: The Jane Finch Mall requires less parking than many other malls because it is primarily a locally serving mall. Many people already walk, bike, or use public transportation to get there. Traffic assessments have shown that there is more parking available than necessary. In the early phases, we can develop on the existing parking area, and in later phases parking will be provided underground.
- Comment: I think the McDonalds should be moved somewhere else on the Jane Finch Mall site. The traffic coming into the parking lot from Finch creates a bottleneck, and it becomes very dangerous for pedestrians to get through.
- Comment: I also agree that the drive-through is hazardous for pedestrians.
- Question: Will there be space made available for medical services?
 - Response from JFM+ Representative: We can't say what uses will be here, but medical services will be permitted.
- Question: Will there be one long construction period, or will there be breaks in between phases?
 - Response from JFM+ Representatives: The mall owners are not construction experts, and they will likely partner with several companies for financing and construction through the various phases. With different partners and a variety of structures being built, there will be breaks between phases. Most likely, the first block in the corner will be built, followed by a period of observation to understand its impact on the community space and operation of the mall. There will probably be similar gaps between subsequent phases.
- Comment: I have some concerns about ongoing construction. For those of us living in the area, there have been mental and environmental health issues due to the impact of LRT construction. It's not only about the noise, it's also about the mental and physical health concerns of living near ongoing construction.
 - Response from JFM+ Representative: It is also important to note that LRT construction takes place in the public realm; the streets and sidewalks that people use daily. From what we have heard, the constant changes of bus stops shifting, pedestrian crossings, and daily routines being disrupted is very stressful for people. Development on the Jane Finch Mall site will occur within the private property of the mall. Boarding will be put up around the construction area, and it should not affect most people's daily routines. There will still be some disruption, but it should be a more consistent and contained process compared to the LRT construction.
- Comment: It is good to know that the impact of construction on health is something that you are thinking about.
 - Response from JFM+ Representatives: It is also common for residential developments to incorporate significant and interesting boarding designs, like construction fencing in partnership with local artists and interesting lighting designs to make sure the area is bright and safe at night.
- Comment: Support for inclusive co-working spaces to be incorporated in the site designs.

- Comment: Support for a localized chamber of commerce.
 - Response from JFM+ Representative: There has been a lot of discussion about building up the commercial center at the intersection of Jane and Finch, including both support and opposition to a Business Improvement Area or another model to support small local businesses.
- Question: How will members of the Economic Opportunities Committee and the Cultural Opportunities Committee be selected?
 - Response from JFM+ Representative: The committees will be made up of local residents, members of the ownership team, and the design team. We are not yet working at this level of detail, but we will be thinking about this in the next few months and are open to suggestions on how the selection process for local residents should be done.
- Comment: I am encouraged by the strategy of creating an Economic Opportunities Committee and the Cultural Opportunities Committee. This seems like a good way to encourage local hiring on the construction projects and invest in appropriate public art.
- Question: What is the cost for a project of this magnitude?
 - Response from JFM+ Representative: Over the next 20-30 years, the cost will be in the billions of dollars. It's a big project, and we can't say exactly what the total cost will be. Since construction costs are high, the margins in housing construction are quite slim right now, but since housing on new transit is so important it makes sense to start thinking about this site. Those economics will also change a lot over the lifespan of this project.
- Question: Where will the money be coming from to fund this project?
 - Response from JFM+ Representative: The way these projects typically get funded, the owner will fund 20-25% of the project costs with equity, and then the remaining project costs are funded with loans. Since the equity component on a project of this size will be so big, the owners will likely be working with financing partners to de-risk the investment.
- Question: What if residents' priorities don't align with stakeholders priorities?
 - Response from JFM+ Representatives: We are trying to strike a balance that upholds community-oriented principles of ownership. There will continue to be disagreements about priorities, but right now Urban Strategies, the owners, and the community animators are assembling a comprehensive engagement process to include as many perspectives as possible. We are getting diverse feedback through quarterly stakeholder sessions, informal conversations through animators' networks, and the City's public process. As planners, we are also using the mechanisms available to formalize our commitments in writing. For example, we are using the official plan amendment and zoning bylaw amendment application to secure our commitments on affordable housing, community spaces and the daycare facilities. Once a development partner is secured, they would need to go through a separate public process to amend those applications. So we are using the tools at our disposal to make commitments in the short-term.

- Question: How will snowfall be managed? In other construction sites, the snow is sometimes dumped irresponsibly onto streets, sidewalks, and parking spaces.
 - Response from JFM+ Representatives: Snow management will be handled in various ways throughout the life of the project. As development progresses the teams involved will have different processes to manage snow. As new public streets are introduced, the responsibility of clearing snow from public streets will shift to the City. On the mall's property, there will be a focus on innovative snow management solutions onsite. We're exploring district heating and cooling, and we may use the heat from sewers running underneath the site to passively warm public squares and plazas, causing snow to melt more quickly.
- Comment: It is great to see that the Jane Finch Mall is invested in the community and is doing whatever they can do for equity in an economic crisis. I hope that land doesn't get sold to foreign buyers who are not invested in the community, and don't have a relationship to the community.
 - Response from JFM+ Representative: It is definitely strange to see the City changing rapidly and to see so much foreign capital flowing into our neighbourhoods. It is important to differentiate two things. One is the capital that goes into developing a project, and the other is the end user who might purchase individual units. We can't comment on who the end purchasers may be, but those people have no control over community benefits or the look and feel of the project. On the front end, I can say that this ownership group is committed to staying with the project for a long time. There is a level of commitment to the community.

APPENDIX A: AGENDA

6:00 Participants join
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Welcome, introductions, and land acknowledgement [Denelle]
6:15 Update on Indigenous consultation
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Presentation on Indigenous Consultation [Innovation Seven Representatives]
6:25 JFM+
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Presentation on JFM+ visioning process and development application process [JFM+ Representatives]• Q&A and discussion on the Jane Finch Mall redevelopment [All]
7:55 Closing notes
<p>Attendees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2 JFCF Centre staff: Denelle Carvalho and Clara Stewart-Robertson• 1 City of Toronto staff: Zahra Joseph Wilson• 4 JFM+ Representatives: Craig Lametti, Keisha St. Louis-McBurnie, Jonah Letovsky, Shannon Holness• 1 Innovation Seven Representative: Vincent Kayseas• 12 Community Advisory Committee members: Susel Munoz, William Ballard, Veronica Eastman, Devayani Chitnis, Maize Blanchard, Kayzie Sutton, Mena Hervieux, Maria B, Edna Gualtero, Jennifer Boakye, Troy Budhu, Terryl Knox.

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**.