

Kensington Market & West Queen West Heritage Conservation Districts – Indigenous Engagement Sessions 1 & 2 Summary

Overview:

On July 20, 2023, City of Toronto Heritage Planning staff, in collaboration with the Indigenous engagement and consultation firm Innovation Seven, hosted two Indigenous Engagement sessions at the Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre (Queen and Bathurst location) to speak with members of local urban Indigenous community concerning the West Queen West and Kensington Market Heritage Conservation District (HCD) Plans. The purpose of these meetings was to gather feedback on whether there are places of value to Indigenous community members in these districts, and what Indigenous histories and present perspectives should be considered in the development of the plans. There was a formal presentation by City staff that included open discussion periods facilitated by Innovation Seven. The discussion questions are included at the end of this document. These meetings took place on the following date and times:

- Thursday, July 20th, 2023, from 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM
- Thursday, July 20th, 2023, from 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM

SESSION 1 : July 20, 2023, 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM

Attendees:

16 community members

City of Toronto: City Planning, Urban Design/Heritage Planning

Innovation Seven

Summary:

The session began with a round of introductions, beginning with Innovation Seven (facilitators), and the City of Toronto Heritage Planning team.

Elder Jimmy Dick presented an opening Prayer and Song.

Discussion 1:

The City of Toronto Heritage Planning team delivered a 10-minute presentation, beginning with an overview of Heritage Conservation Districts and introducing the two areas currently under study related to the engagement process through maps and photographs. This opened an opportunity for participants to share thoughts and experiences they've had in the Kensington Market and West Queen West areas,

what drew them to the session, and what connection they have to the areas. The conversation touched on many topics and themes, and provided the following ideas, data, and thoughts from participants:

- The Toronto Treaty Purchase – viewed as an ill balanced/ coerced purchase of the Lands of Toronto, between some Indigenous peoples of the area, and the Settlers. Many Nations, Tribes, groups of the area were not included in the purchase, and yet were still shifted out of the area. Participants recommended that the City of Toronto provide accessible information relating to the Toronto Purchase on their website.
- Various Nations have called this area home for time immemorial, the Kensington Market area specifically has had a longstanding history as a gathering point/place. The pathways of known Toronto were actually built off of existing routes made by Indigenous peoples all that time ago.
- Indigenous peoples' presence is scattered throughout Toronto, was here long before the city's "establishment," and there is little to no physical representation of this in the city. Colonial construction has worked as a form of erasure of Indigenous heritage throughout the city.
- The Kensington Market area is held in high regard for creating community, for its openness, and for its welcoming nature, characteristics that are in line with Indigenous community values
- Diversity is appreciated in these areas.
- Kensington Market's history does not begin with the Jewish market; many layers of history pre-date this, and they should not be left out because they are seen as less prominent.
- The areas have a high population of Indigenous folk, many of whom suffer unhousing, poor housing, racism, mental health challenges, and various other socio-economic issues.
- There is a huge amount of Indigenous history and culture staring you in the face when walking through Toronto, particularly in these areas, and yet no one knows about it. History has constantly been rewritten/ignored and the people who represent these histories have been ignored.
- Any development should further consider Indigenous knowledges and the lands, the trees, and existing green spaces that are still here. Bathurst Street was once a riverway, dried up and turned to a roadway. The land beneath it was once marshy which affects the construction and integrity of buildings. This is an example of Indigenous knowledge and land use that has been ignored, and thus negatively affected the development of the area.
- Street names, Indigenous naming and place keeping should be considered.
- Commemoration/interpretation (names, art, structures) for Indigenous history would help inform residents of the areas, and those who are non-Indigenous. Currently the areas are generally void of any representation. Although you can find art and small things here and there, formal recognition by the city is non-existent.
- There are many Indigenous artists in these areas who create art, but they don't yet have space or support; their art should be highlighted and valued.

- Toronto has communities like “Little Italy” and “Greek Town.” but there is nothing like this for Indigenous communities. There isn’t a central place where Indigenous peoples can create a sense of place and community. There should be an Indigenous-focused community centre within these areas with a focus on teaching Indigenous knowledges and languages, especially to children.
- If there are any plans for landscaping and or green space inclusions, that could be an opportunity to include Indigenous representation, such as medicine gardens and spaces for sacred fires.
- The City should connect with the work done by the First Story Tours.
- City staff should connect with Elder community leaders and establish a Designated Elder for City projects to provide knowledge and be a representative of the community.
- Involve Indigenous peoples in the construction process for new buildings in the areas, and/or for landscaping projects (introducing carpentry programs with the outreach purpose of creating jobs for Indigenous peoples)
- Event organizers should ensure that there is Indigenous representation during Doors Open
- There is a desire to see Indigenous businesses highlighted within the areas
- There should be more planning of Indigenous related events in the Kensington Market area, as it already has the infrastructure for types of street festivals.
 - Establish Indigenous festivals, like pow wows.

During the discussion, there was also a sense of confusion among participants regarding the purpose of the engagement. City of Toronto staff clarified that this engagement was not related to any specific development proposal or ongoing changes, but rather aimed to collect feedback that would shape policies and guidelines that will protect heritage resources and improve reconciliation. These ideas will be integrated into policies and guidelines ensuring the Indigenous voices are heard. Where input is beyond the scope of the HCD Plans, that feedback will be shared with other relevant City Divisions.

The presentation continued, introducing the content of HCD Plans and the specific sections that could be influenced by feedback from community members.

Discussion 2:

This secondary discussion was an open space for participants to share additional thoughts. The collected thoughts/data/ideas are as follows:

- It is difficult for participants to identify what to “keep”, protect, or commemorate within these HCDs when Indigenous peoples have historically been removed from these spaces and furthermore prevented from building/creating within them due to the pervasiveness of colonial systems.
 - And so, there is a break in tangible heritage because of these restrictions. The HCDs should strive to reintroduce visual representation of this heritage, perhaps through storytelling methods that will make these cultures visible once more.
- Kensington Market has a huge street art showcase; include spaces for Indigenous art, rotating artists, to hold space in the area.
- Policies should help steer towards education of history, place, culture, language of the Indigenous Nations of the areas.
- There needs to be a constant reminder of whose land this is, truly.

Elder Jimmy Dick closed the session with a Song and Prayer.

Innovation Seven Takeaway:

- There is a lot of love for the Kensington Market and West Queen West communities as they currently stand. They offer a sense of community and diversity that is not easily found in other areas of the city; in addition, the history and the culture of the areas runs deep and could be greatly explored. They hold great meaning to many people, yet there are still a lot of things to dislike about the areas due to socio-economic factors, colonial history, and erasure activity/culture. However, there is a lot of opportunity for these HCD policies to foster a healthier, happier, reclamation and restorative environment, physically, mentally, and culturally. There is a lot of potential available to improve recognition and quality of life for Indigenous people and to boost/foster a thriving sense of Indigenous culture.
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SESSION 2 : July 20, 2023 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM**Attendees:**

17 community members

City of Toronto: City Planning, Urban Design/Heritage Planning

Innovation Seven

Summary:

Innovation Seven opened the session with a prayer and words of welcome, as the Elder was delayed in arrival. This was followed by introductions beginning with Innovation Seven, and then the City of Toronto Heritage Planning Team.

The Heritage Planning team began the presentation while awaiting the elder. The same presentation was delivered in both sessions, pausing at the same times to hear from the community.

The presentation was paused for the arrival of Elder Jimmy Dick, who opened the session with a prayer and song before City staff continued with the presentation.

Discussion 1:

The first discussion provided an opportunity for participants to share thoughts and experiences they've had in the Kensington Market and West Queen West areas, what drew them to the session, and what connection they have to the areas. The conversation provided the following ideas, data, and thoughts from participants:

- The West Queen West area was a nice place to grow up, safe environment.
- Kensington Market was a fun place to run around in while growing up; lots to see, lots to do.
- The variety, particularly in food trucks, venues, and stalls is very nice, as is the affordability. The lack of chain restaurants and big box stores is integral to the character of Kensington.
- Kensington Market is proving to be a gathering place for all types of people; it is open and welcoming, no matter your interests; people get along; it is peaceful with great energy, and the people maintain that energy. The Indigenous history is not well known, (this has been a repeated point) but it has always been a gathering place like this.
- Change can be concerning, especially to a dynamic and captivating place like Kensington Market. This neighbourhood should not become a “bland” area of chain retailers and condo buildings.
- Kensington Market is a community hub; everyone gathers here.
 - Comment from participant that, “you go out of your way to walk through [the Market]”.

- The Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre and its programming are a staple to the area, particularly for the Indigenous populations in the community.
- Both the West Queen West and Kensington Market areas are diverse and multicultural.

City staff delivered the second half of the presentation, before opening the floor again for additional discussion.

Discussion 2:

- Greenspace should be increased and highlighted, people respect the greenspaces more, so including Indigenous representation alongside those would be ideal. It will hopefully bring more members of the Indigenous community to the area. Within greenspace areas, or conservation areas, perhaps there could be places held for the following:
 - Sacred fires
 - Community gardens
 - Cultural programs (including the continuation of the annual Red Pepper Spectacle Arts Winter Solstice Festival)
- Indigenous people should be spotlighted more throughout the areas:
 - Have/increase support for vending spots where Indigenous peoples can sell their work
 - Have rotational artwork, murals, and street art from Indigenous artists be present at all times.
- There should be an increase in both the amount of and support for programming and events for Indigenous peoples:
 - A community kitchen - a space where people, particularly the houseless, are able to retrieve meals.
 - A foodbank
 - Cultural programming (potential challenge to determine who would be responsible for organizing that)
- There should always be environmental awareness, and consideration towards environmental resources when thinking of development. Kensington could use more greenspaces for conservation.
- Other ideas and resources that participants would like to see in the policies include:
 - Artwork and murals should be key. These should be in prominent placements where they are visible, not tucked away in corners.
 - Plaques, naming

- Discussion of how to get Indigenous peoples involved with these suggested projects, if they come to fruition, and thereby creating more jobs
- Utilising existing community events like Pedestrian Sundays to incorporate an Indigenous component, such as regalia dancers
- Repeated refrain from the afternoon session where the Indigenous peoples living in Toronto need a place to *go*, to play, to gather, to exchange ideas and experiences

Elder Jimmy Dick provided a closing Song and Prayer.

Innovation Seven Takeaway:

This session was quieter than the first; participants seemed more interested in learning about the Heritage Planning team's intentions for engagement. When prompted with some of the suggestions made during the first session, participants were generally in agreement with those ideas and were able to contribute additional examples and ideas in some areas. At the end of the session, only a small number of the participants from session 2 expressed a strong interest in attending engagements moving forward. The two primary themes of the feedback included education on the Indigenous history of the Kensington Market and West Queen West areas, and the need for visible representation, both of which were the subject of focused, repeated discussion. The West Queen West and Kensington Market areas are loved as they are for what they can bring to the people and what the people bring to the areas. The dynamic in these two communities is fluid and welcoming, and it should stay that way. Policies and guidelines should not inhibit this dynamic; instead, they should enhance it. Fostering Indigenous representation is a positive starting point.

Discussion Questions:**1. What are your experiences with these neighbourhoods?**

Tell us more about the Indigenous people, organizations, and communities in the West Queen West and Kensington Market areas.

- a. Are there any places or businesses in the area that are important to you?
- b. Is there anything special to you about these areas and why?
- c. What should we understand about the history of Indigenous communities in these areas?

2. How can we improve these neighbourhoods for future generations while conserving what is important?

These Heritage Conservation District (HCD) Plans will include a list of goals and objectives for the future of the area (with a focus on the physical environment, including buildings, parks, and public spaces).

- a. Do you have any suggestions on if and how a future West Queen West or Kensington Market can better acknowledge and serve current and future Indigenous community members?

3. What else should we consider?

Is there any interest in celebrating or increasing the visibility of the Indigenous community in this area, and if so, what would be a meaningful way for us to encourage that?

- a. Are there places in these Districts currently being used for ceremony or other activities for the Indigenous community?
- b. Are there any Indigenous people, places, or events that are connected to this area that we should recommend honoring in some way?