

Kensington Market & West Queen West Heritage Conservation Districts – Indigenous Engagement Sessions 3 & 4 Summary

Overview:

On September 28, 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 the local urban Indigenous community concerning the West Queen West and Kensington Market Heritage Conservation District (HCD) Plans. These were follow-up meetings to the sessions held in July intended to gather feedback on whether the draft HCD objective and guidelines encompass the previous feedback from community members. There was a formal presentation by City staff that included open discussion periods facilitated by Innovation Seven. These meetings took place on the following date and times:

- Thursday, September 28th, 2023, from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM
- Thursday, September 28th, 2023, from 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM

As attendance was low for the early afternoon session, data from both sessions has been amalgamated in this summary.

SESSION 3 & 4

Attendees:

17 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.

Innovation 7 provided a land acknowledgement as well as an acknowledgement of National Day for Truth and Reconciliation upcoming on September 30th.

Discussion:

The City of Toronto Heritage Planning team delivered a 10-minute presentation, beginning with a review of Heritage Conservation Districts and the two areas currently under study related to the engagement process. The feedback from the July sessions was summarized and reviewed with participants who agreed that the two key themes below resonated with what was previously shared with Heritage Planning:

- The Kensington market and West Queen West areas are lacking in opportunities to educate on Indigenous histories.
- Visible representation of Indigenous people is needed in these areas, as well as in the city more broadly.

The presentation was paused for questions of clarification and a brief break.

The Heritage Planning team then introduced the topic for the next part of the session, a discussion on the draft HCD objective and guidelines that were created with the feedback from the first two sessions. Participants were asked to comment on whether the proposed language accurately reflected this feedback and share any additional information as each slide was presented.

- In response to a question, City staff clarified the intention and purpose of the guidelines and what they will be used for
- A participant observed that the summary of feedback did not appear to address Indigenous spiritual culture and questioned whether it would be possible to include reference to places for holding ceremonies/sacred fires. These practices are deeply rooted in histories and first Nations culture. City Staff responded that this would be touched on in one of the draft guidelines that had not yet been presented.

Heritage Planning Staff then continued with the presentation of the draft language, starting with the draft HCD objective. Feedback was generally positive, with several suggestions from participants on how to further improve or modify the draft language, including the following ideas and thoughts:

Draft Objective: *“Acknowledge and honour the historic and ongoing presence of Indigenous peoples in the District, including through visual representation of Indigenous heritage within the public realm.”*

- The physical representation of Indigenous peoples does not simply have to be art. There are many other forms of representation that should be included, such as plaques, statues, street names, ambiance, etc.
 - It would be comforting to see that this is a space, an area, for Indigenous people. One would not feel so alone. To create an urban home away from home, a place to feel like part of a community for Indigenous peoples, would be nice.
- There needs to be consideration of all Indigenous people present in the area, including Inuit and Métis people, communities, and organizations.
- All age groups need to be approached for feedback, for instance the youth.

Draft Guidelines: Public Art and Cultural Expression: *“In consultation with Indigenous communities and nations and Aboriginal Affairs Advisory Committee, maintenance and enhancement of the public realm through the creation of public art or other art installations by Indigenous artists are strongly encouraged. Honour and recognize special events, such as National Indigenous Peoples Day, as part of the gateway treatments.”*

- We do not want to overuse certain symbols; for example, stereotypical symbols can lose meaning if always associated. Be critical and thoughtful with the type of Indigenous representation and expression.
- Subtleties are a wonderful way to introduce an Indigenous theme, for representation of culture and art. Participants expressed a desire to see physical elements within the urban environment that would provide the feeling of entering a place in a way that enables the visitor to feel like one has arrived somewhere distinct. For example:
 - A participant noted that “when you visit places like Little Italy, you cross a certain point and you feel like you’re going into Little Italy. I would like the idea of being able to come into these districts and feel like I’m going into a place that’s [centered on Indigenous culture and peoples] and knowing that that’s what it is.”
 - Rather than limiting to a single focal point, there should be an Indigenous presence interwoven throughout the area
 - Marking an entry point into a neighbourhood in a subtle way could be one way to help achieve this
- A suggestion was made to have a dedicated laneway or outdoor art exhibition area exclusively for Indigenous artists, similar to how Graffiti Alley is a permanent canvas for street artists
 - It was important to participants that these dedicated spaces be located in prominent and visible spaces.
- There is concern related to what is to become of the old Greyhound Bus Station. Will the paintings and Indigenous artwork be safe kept or guarded? Should the space be redeveloped?

Draft Guidelines: Naming and Placekeeping: *“In consultation with Indigenous communities and nations and Aboriginal Affairs Advisory Committee, honour and celebrate Indigenous heritage and languages through the naming of streets, laneways, and public spaces. Honour and celebrate the history of the District(s), including Indigenous heritage and history of social and community activism through placemaking, wayfinding and interpretive features.”*

- Adding Indigenous translations to existing street names was suggested as a positive measure.
- Some interest was expressed in the removal of colonial names to areas and/or streets.
- Indigenous street names should be in equal size text to colonial names. No small print.
- Pathfinding was also brought up as an important way to orient Indigenous peoples within the city and to direct them to relevant cultural hubs and programs, such as the Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre and the First Nations House located in the Annex.
 - This would expand the naming process into a navigation process and interconnect Indigenous resources across the city.
- Participants were interested in whether or not a guideline could encourage the use of Indigenous language in the naming of new or redeveloped buildings in the area.

Draft Guidelines: Parks and Green Spaces: *“In consultation with Indigenous communities and nations and the Aboriginal Affairs Advisory Committee, prioritize the creation of spaces appropriate for Indigenous cultural and ceremonial practices in Bellevue Square Park and Sonya’s Park.”*

- A dedicated gathering or meeting space would be extremely beneficial to the area and welcomed, however it would be better to go beyond that if possible: finding opportunities for re-naturalisation and the addition of small-scale or informal greenspaces is also important, such as alcoves, gardens, etc.
 - Feedback from the July sessions highlighted the concrete jungle, and that people are more likely to respect green spaces more. There should be encouragement of more greenspaces in any available corner of the neighbourhood.
 - Participants expressed optimism that perhaps the green space in tandem with Indigenous representation will deter vandalism.
- There should be hiring of Indigenous people to safeguard/ place keep in dedicated ceremonial areas.
- Sustainable gardens, rooftop greenspaces, and working or community gardens would be a beneficial aspect to improving the area, encouraging an Indigenous lens on reciprocity and life cycle.
- Empty spaces now are turning into condominiums. Are there any current plans, or could there be any future plans to create more parks/greenspaces instead of buildings?
- Participants expressed positive interest and support for the example shown of the proposed design for the greenspace at Macdonald Block Loop designed by Two-Row Architect, and specifically for the inclusion of traditional and native species plants into the landscaping plan.

Innovation Seven Takeaway:

- The session proceeded very well, the groups received the draft guidelines well, and were receptive to their structure. A number of great ideas were added to the existing data and will prove useful in the next draft of the objective, policies, and guidelines.
- A number of attendees indicated their interest in showing up at future public engagement events related to the project.