

Jane Finch Initiative: Heritage Focus Group Meetings



6:00-8:00 pm, October 4th, 2023

6:00-8:00 pm November 2nd, 2023

OVERVIEW

On October 4th and November 2nd, 2023, Jane Finch Initiative Heritage Focus Groups were 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 they were held online over Zoom. The agenda and project background can be viewed in the appendices.

The purpose of the event was to:

- Receive feedback on the Cultural Heritage findings and draft Urban Design guidelines related to Heritage

WHAT WE HEARD

This section includes the summaries of the feedback collected from the group discussions during the Zoom meeting. Meeting agendas including discussion prompts are available in Appendix A.

Key Themes

- Attendees expressed concerns about gentrification and displacement, and emphasized that the maintenance and protection of stable, affordable housing is a priority.
- Residents specified some buildings and housing complexes which have cultural significance, or that have interesting and unique design to be preserved
- Community engagement in heritage planning should be ongoing, particularly in determining the specific ways that people and events are commemorated
- Residents suggested commemorating local heroes and influential individuals through murals, statues, honorary plaques in community centres, and more.
- Some discussed preserving outdoor views and vistas, iconic corners of the area, and the potential impact of construction on visual elements

Recorded Feedback

October 4th, 2023

Comments relating to specific places

- Firgrove-Grassways had a unique history as one of the area's first social housing projects with brutalist architecture, but unfortunately it had to be demolished because it wasn't maintained. When I see Palisades here, I am concerned about the same thing. If we suggest that buildings are heritage sites, does that have other implications for the maintenance and the upkeep of these buildings? We should always be prioritizing the current living conditions for residents, and not cementing patterns of bad maintenance and upkeep.
 - Response from City of Toronto representative: Firstly, we stress that we're not currently saying that these places merit inclusion on the register either through listing or through designation. I appreciate that these may be places that had high design value when they were created, but between then and now there's a lot of history that is lost if we just talk about design value.
- Winston LaRose has always spoken about establishing a mural wall at the corner of Steeles and Jane to highlight the historical legacy of the community and individuals' contributions. A major mural that would be big and wide and colourful.
- The York Woods library has been very significant in hosting a lot of major events in the community. And I understand that the music school will shortly be built.
- There is always a need for more meeting and gathering spaces in the community. The Jane Finch Hub and Centre for the Arts will be a transformational building, because we're always struggling to find and secure meeting places. Often you have to pay out of pocket, which no local community organizations should be doing because they are dedicating their time to community benefit. Sometimes people want to host Christmas or Thanksgiving events, but it's not possible to find appropriate spaces for it.
- Concerning Corner Commons at the intersection, when the construction is complete, that corner could be a place to add a mural and display cultural historical significance.
- There is a beautiful sunset that you can see as you're coming down Sentinel and Finch into Tobermory. That view is nice and should be considered as a view that could be preserved. Like the New York Henge, it would be cool to have a Jane Finch Henge.
- Trees are heritage. Three trees were chopped down in front of 4400. They may be replanted, but young trees are not equivalent to mature trees.
- Brookview Middle School is significant because lots of things have happened in it. It was the first high school in the neighbourhood, and many community organizations started in the school. The grounds are also a migration stage for the Canada geese.
- 15 Tobermory Drive was built as a private building. The province bought it as a social housing building, and later on the Mennonite Church came into the building and implemented programming and services which created community; a thrift shop, a food

bank, community meetings and events, and a family exchange program. When all of that programming ended, it was never replaced. We need to consider how to best use common areas in residential social housing buildings, otherwise it is a lost opportunity

- The boys and girls clubs in Driftwood have been productive programs that have supported many youth. These spaces create fun memories, build character, and develop skills.

General comments

- How can heritage recognition be encouraged in properties that are currently undergoing the development application process, and may complete the process before the land use and community development plan are approved? How will current conversations impact decisions on zoning or official plan amendments?
 - Response from City of Toronto representative: it is true that without properties listed on the heritage register, heritage planning won't directly review development applications through that lens. However, through the Jane Finch Initiative, Heritage Planning is collaborating closely with our colleagues in community planning and across the City. Because of the inter-divisional nature of the Jane Finch Initiative, potential heritage designations are considered by staff reviewing development applications
- It is important to recognize the unique architectural styles in Jane and Finch. Parts of Jane and Finch were among the early walkable communities, with schools, buildings, and shopping centers all integrated in it.
- The schools and community centres are important, but we need additional meeting spaces.
- Can any of the commemorative pieces (such as murals) be effectively done through this process? What are the outcomes of this research?
 - Response from City of Toronto representative: We're working towards recommendations of what types of commemorative pieces could be implemented in Jane and Finch in the future
- It is beautiful at night, I think. With Jane and Finch going up the way it is, you will be able to see it from Jane and Sheppard, Jane and Wilson, Jane and Lawrence. But will the local people actually benefit from and be a part of the new Jane and Finch. Will they be pushed out because of gentrification? Changes are good, as long as we can keep up with it socially and economically.
- A lot of the time, places come and go while residents are displaced. It's important that people's stable housing is always the priority.

- Something like a plaque is less valuable than having a physical gathering space as commemoration.
- Has there been any consideration to preserving views and vistas in Jane and Finch? For example, preserving sunrises and sunsets. There are particular views and focal points which have become iconic to Jane and Finch, and create a magnetism to specific corners of the neighbourhood.
 - Response from City Staff: Yes, we have draft policies and guidelines to recognize and consider views and vistas. These [policies and guidelines are currently online and available for public input](#).
- A Jane and Finch walk of fame to highlight icons from the area. For example, Anthony Bennett and Winston LaRose. Suggestion to add Winson LaRose's name to the Jane Finch Hub and Centre for the Arts.
- July Black and other people could be commemorated in a mural or collage.
- As development intensifies and population intensifies, an effort needs to be made to ensure that community spaces are preserved.
- Ways to beautify the area, such as statues of historical figures or a water fountain.
- There is a need for more training and employment opportunities for youth, including opportunities in the vocational trades, construction, technology, digital fields, and creative fields. Consider building local educational hubs for the vocational trades and technology within the community. This would also encourage the use of public transportation and active transportation because students would not need to travel as far.
- It's important to preserve the community building function of common areas in residential buildings, rather than just preserving spaces that have historically been significant to the community.
- Need to honour local heroes, inspirational individuals. This could be done at the malls or at the community centres.
- The schools need to do a better job at civic education so that young people can understand and participate in politics and government. Relevant books should be distributed in the Toronto school system and in local libraries.

November 2nd, 2023

Comments relating to specific places

- Northwood holds significant history, serving as a golf club and a community banquet hall. When the City proposed selling York Woods, the residents opposed the sale

because they valued how unique the building was. The City sold it anyway, and the community lost interest in the Oakdale Community Centre's development.

- Oakdale Community Centre has a lot of value to the people in the nearby social housing development.
- Even with the renovations and additions, the York Woods library still feels the same as it did when I was young. It feels nostalgic to go there.
- The York Woods theatre is architecturally unique because it was built to be round.
- Interest in preserving and protecting Marian Shrine of Gratitude
 - Response from City of Toronto representative: this is outside the Jane Finch Initiative study area but staff have registered the desire for its preservation.
- The church at Finch and Driftwood is built in an unusual way.
- The Christian Centre has messed up the outside, so I don't think it needs to be preserved for design reasons.
- We should pay attention to the sites of the Community Music School and the Boys and Girls Club.
- Will some of the businesses in the plaza in the southwest corner of the Jane and Finch intersection be displaced?
 - Response from City of Toronto representative: Commercial displacement is a significant concern. We are requiring a certain amount of shops and services, so developers can't only do housing, they need to also build an appropriate amount of shops and services
- 15 Tobermory and 2999 Jane should be sites of community interest.
- York Woods village is a well-designed and visually interesting area.
- As a former Firgrove resident, I've always appreciated the community there as well as how it was designed. It had elements that allowed for communal gathering, and felt like there were enclosed areas with parks, benches, and seating. It felt safe to me.

General comments

- Is there any imperative or way to acknowledge community uses of the outdoor mall and plaza spaces and to create a guideline for retaining these community uses?
 - Response from City of Toronto representative: Our intent is to collect stories and information about sites of community interest, then direct landowners to respond to the fact that their development application includes a site of community interest in a planning rationale.
- If a property is classified as a heritage site, how does that protect it from development? Will there be restrictions on what can be built?

- Response from City of Toronto representative: We have a few policies that would protect the existing buildings, even if they're not on the heritage register. We expect infill developments, to build on the green space between buildings

APPENDIX A: MEETING AGENDAS

October 4th, 2023

6:00 Participants Join
6:05 Welcome
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Introductions, land acknowledgement, agenda ● Opening remarks and introductions
6:10 Overview
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Presentation 1: Jane Finch Initiative Cultural Heritage Resource Assessment, and what we've already heard [Heritage Planning and Jane/Finch Centre] ● Group Discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Prompt 1: What excites or concerns you about the Cultural Heritage Resource Assessment?</i> ○ <i>Prompt 2: What do you agree or not agree with in the feedback we have received? What are we missing?</i> ● Presentation 2: What are the important places in Jane and Finch? [Common Bond Collective] ● Group Discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Prompt: What do you think about the types of buildings and landscapes that have been identified? What are we missing? ● Presentation 3: Histories of community organizations and activism in Jane and Finch [Wanda MacNevin] ● Group Discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Prompt: Based on your knowledge and experience of these histories, how has the history of community organizations and activism in Jane and Finch contributed to special places?
7:55 Closing Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Next steps & things to look out for

Attendees:

- 1 Jane Finch Community and Family Centre representatives: Denelle Carvalho
- 2 City of Toronto representatives: Gary Midema, Tatum Taylor Chaubel
- 2 Common Bond Collective representatives: David Deo, Ellen Kowalchuk
- 1 Resident Historian: Wanda MacNevin
- 7 Heritage Focus Group attendees: Maize Blanchard, Shannon Holness, Abishak Jeyaseelan, Jerome Johnson, Helen Teclé, Winston LaRose, Peter Blake

November 2nd, 2023**6:00 Participants Join****6:05 Welcome**

- Introductions, land acknowledgement, agenda
- Opening remarks and introductions

6:20 Review from October 4th meeting

- Summary of the Jane Finch Initiative Cultural Heritage Resource Assessment and What We've Heard [Heritage Planning and Jane/Finch Centre]

7:25 Presentation and discussion

- Presentation 1: Important places in Jane and Finch [Common Bond Collective]
- Group discussion
- Presentation 2: How has the history of community organizations and activism in Jane and Finch contributed to special places? [Common Bond Collective]
- Group discussion

7:55 Closing Notes

- Next steps & things to look out for

Attendees:

- 1 Jane Finch Community and Family Centre representatives: Denelle Carvalho
- 4 City of Toronto representatives: Gary Midema, Tatum Taylor Chaubel, Dan Rosen, Leah Birnbaum
- 2 Common Bond Collective representatives: David Deo, Ellen Kowalchuk
- 8 Heritage Focus Group attendees: Maize Blanchard, Wanda MacNevin, Shannon Holness, Abishak Jeyaseelan, Jerome Johnson, Helen Teclé, Winston W LaRose, Peter Blake

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**.