

Kensington Market & West Queen West Heritage Conservation Districts – Indigenous Engagement Session 5 Summary

Overview:

On March 07, 2024, City of Toronto Heritage Planning staff, in collaboration with Innovation 7, hosted an Indigenous Engagement session at the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto to engage with Indigenous individuals and community members who reside within the Heritage Conservation District (HCD) Study Areas for Kensington Market and West Queen West, and those with ties to the land that upholds these districts. This session provided the opportunity for City of Toronto Heritage Planning to conduct a final Indigenous engagement session to introduce the Kensington Market and West Queen West Heritage Conservation District Studies and receive feedback on draft guidelines and opportunities for placemaking. City of Toronto staff formally presented information for both HCDs and their drafted guidelines and objectives while Innovation 7 facilitated the session's opening, closing, and discussion periods.

SESSION 5

Attendees:

5 community members and Elder Jimmy Dick

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

Innovation 7

Summary:

The session began with an opening and welcome from Wendy Jocko and a prayer from Elder Jimmy Dick. Wendy outlined the purpose of the session and the value of Indigenous input regarding future policies and guidelines.

Discussion:

City of Toronto staff followed Innovation 7's opening with their prepared presentation, beginning with an overview of what HCDs are and the long stream of work that must be followed to establish guidelines and policies which will ensure ongoing change conserves and maintains cultural heritage value within identified districts. They then continued to describe the history, characteristics, and individual values of the West Queen West and Kensington Market neighbourhoods. A brief discussion period was held to clarify any confusion regarding the purpose of HCDs.

- One participant asked whether the boundary of the Kensington Market district would include properties on the surrounding main streets – expressing concern that Spadina Avenue would no longer be protected in the HCD.
 - Heritage Planning responded that they are still developing the study area and will ensure individual designations are considered for any excluded properties.

Heritage Planning continued to summarize the key themes and engagement results they have heard to date (lack of opportunity for Indigenous histories and visible representation of culture) and explained how they are using feedback to avoid the need for repetition by sharing information with other departments. They continued to clarify that there are no planned projects, timelines, or budgets in place, and that feedback will be used to help create guidelines and policies that support, display, and represent Indigenous culture and values.

- i. 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.”
- ii. Draft Guideline, 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.”
- iii. Draft Guidelines, 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.”
- iv. 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.”

A discussion period was held for initial reactions to the draft objectives and guidelines, encouraging additional thoughts or suggestions on what should be considered or included in HCD planning. The heritage planners took time to break down and provide examples for each of the four key themes with examples from Toronto and other cities across North America. A break was given midway through the discussions.

- Elder Jimmy Dick was glad to see previous engagement information being incorporated and appropriately put to use, he also emphasized the need for continued action.
- A participant highlighted the opportunity to educate the public on the topic of Indigenous history through street and park names, with most names originating from Indigenous languages (iv).
- Organizational and facilitation support from the City of Toronto was addressed with regard to establishing greenspaces and parks for Indigenous cultural practices (ii).

- Clarification was given regarding how one would go about suggesting site changes within HCDs. Specifying locations for individual changes was encouraged, as was contacting the local BIA.
- The accessibility of language was addressed within the draft objectives and guidelines, as well as how interactive displays might be used to support linguistic and historical teachings for the public (iv).
- A participant identified the presence of natural features (400+ year old trees) that were present long before Canada's first European settlers. They recommended making use of other current City policies for these existing natural features within HDC Plans, or updating/adding additional guidelines in the HCD Plan to explicitly address existing natural features (ii).
- The Executive Director of West Queen West BIA, who was in attendance, emphasized their plan to use the district's 73 planters as bases for sculptures, a plan which could be adopted by the HCD planners to provide indigenous artists an opportunity to create sculptures for the West Queen West district (iii).
- To find and select Indigenous artists for HCD projects, the use of social media was recommended, as was opening a "call for submissions" endorsed by the City of Toronto to attract local Indigenous artists. Other suggestions included connecting with the local BIAs to see if they have any contacts within the arts community and/or connecting with existing community events/street festivals that are already geared towards Indigenous communities (iii).

Case Study: Buried Creeks

The City of Toronto presentation introduced historical mapping indicating a former creek in the Kensington Market neighbourhood as an example of a potential opportunity to highlight Indigenous histories and increase visual representation of Indigenous culture in the District. The former Russell Creek was discussed in relation to usage of Toronto's remaining natural resources.

- A participant who was familiar with the former creek noted that sections of King Street became the city's first sewer, covering the southern portion of Russell Creek. Over time, it continued to be covered and it became polluted, no longer able to serve the establishments it supported. The participant stated that one can still hear it flowing at the intersection of Kensington Avenue & St. Andrew Street (i).
- Its length also stretches past the HCD and runs below orphan laneways (laneways owned by deceased individuals or companies), providing further opportunities for development of abandoned spaces.
- Re-naming the creek was encouraged as Russell was a known slave owner.
- Participants suggested bridging the space between the river and its lost place on the surface with rain gardens, bioswales, or medicine gardens to honour its loss and raise awareness of its existence.
- Participants also noted that while the potential implementation of new parks and green spaces is a great idea, it is not always enough. There need to be efforts made to support these spaces and ensure that they remain active and vibrant.
- Participants raised the concurrent Kensington Safe Streets Project – this project aims to redesign the entire street, and it is viewed as an opportunity to also implement a physical

representation of the river's original nature and course through the street (the suggestion of blue cobblestone was made).

- A participant noted that based on the map, Bellevue Park sits directly on top of Russell Creek and there is a three-story blank wall nearby covered in graffiti which could be put to use for cultural expression.
- A participant noted that Lost Park Creek lies directly beneath Church Street, and alongside the river is a Mississauga burial site (although this location is outside of the two Study Areas).
- Within the West Queen West area, cancelled pre-Covid projects in collaboration with CAMH were raised by a participant, primarily the redesign of sidewalks, which were discussed as important places to tell a story or provide answers to questions, one step at a time (iv).
- A participant suggested collaborating with the City of Toronto working group that is reviewing street names for possible renaming (60 identified, according to a participant) – this is a potential opportunity for Heritage Planning to have engagement with and provide a voice within an active process toward reconciliation (iv).

Elder Jimmy Dick advised caution and respect with any and all future reconciliation activities so as not to indirectly upset or anger Toronto's Indigenous communities, and closed Session 3 with a song and prayer.

Innovation Seven Takeaway:

Heritage Planning's goal for this session was to receive initial feedback and comments regarding their drafted guidelines, and despite minimal attendance there was an informative amount of support from the attendees. Attendees were able to confirm the clarity of the guidelines and understood their use within policies for future projects. Additionally, attendees provided significant detail regarding how the guidelines might make use of and support already established features within both Heritage Conservation Districts. The session was formal, timely, and effective in addressing Indigenous input. Attendees shared many historical facts regarding Kensington Market and West Queen West, which could act as opportunities for both Indigenous reconciliation and improvements to the HCD Plans. Attendees were adamant on the potential of the Heritage Conservation Districts, and hoped to be a part of any projects or developments that may arise from the drafted guidelines and objectives.