

# Urban Indigenous Engagement Summary Notes for Baby Point Heritage Conservation District: April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Presented to:



Prepared by:



June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024



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## Baby Point HCD Walking Tour

April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024

10:00 AM – 1:00 PM

### Attendees:

15 Participants

City of Toronto: Heritage Planning

Innovation Seven

Elder Donna Powless

### Overview

On April 18th 2024, City of Toronto Heritage Planning Staff, in collaboration with Innovation Seven, hosted a Walking Tour of the Baby Point Heritage Conservation District to engage with urban Indigenous community members. The purpose of this tour was to introduce Indigenous participants to the study area and to share overviews of important spaces and places that have been identified in the HCD plan and contribute to its heritage value. Additionally, this tour served as an engagement opportunity following the minimal uptake in participation for the Virtual Engagement Session and sought to provide an overview of the Baby Point HCD and its place in the overall HCD planning process, along with an opportunity for immediate feedback through conversation and a short discussion period. Discussion questions and related responses are included at the end of this Engagement Summary.

### Summary

City of Toronto Heritage Planning staff and Innovation Seven arrived early to Etienne Brule Park to prepare for participant arrival. Ongoing construction on Catherine Street was initially expected to impede the use of the parking lot closest to the meeting location, however on the day of, access was not an issue. Despite heavy rain the day before, resulting in large wet patches in the park, both project teams created a talking circle atop a dry patch of land, established signage to direct participants around construction, and prepared all necessary materials. Without access to electricity or technical support, Heritage Planning staff were able to provide in-person supplies to facilitate discussion and I7 shared a QR code which led to a mobile presentation that supported Heritage Planning staff's verbal presentation. Snacks and water were also provided.

Though Elder Donna Powless arrived late, Wendy Jocko (Innovation Seven) was able to provide opening remarks and welcome participants to the Walking Tour. A round of introductions preceded an initial overview of the Baby Point HCD project delivered by Heritage Planning staff, in which they took time to speak about the purpose and process of creating Heritage Conservation Districts, the work and planning that is currently underway for the study area, and the district history and significance with specific reference to its history as a garden suburb and its Indigenous roots along the Toronto Carrying Place Trail and as the location of the seventeenth century Haudenosaunee village of Teiaiagon. This contextualized the Walking Tour for participants in thorough detail.



Following Heritage Planning staff's explanations of the study area's history, the logistical process that is involved in HCD designation, and the arrival of Elder Powless, Heritage Planning staff then led the tour group through Etienne Brule Park. Three strategic stopping points were established to allow for identification of natural and architectural heritage features, and opportunity for questions and conversations – this helped provide a more vivid understanding and image of the study area's narrative history leading into the present.

- The tour—which stretched alongside the steep slope leading up to the Baby Point neighbourhood—naturally generated conversations about the landscape and its history, and where present property lines lie.
- One participant questioned the architectural restrictions placed on homes, specifically how excavation may only occur for the construction of homes, and wondered how homes were bypassing this restriction through the construction of pools. This allowed for clarification of when zoning restrictions were set and when they were changed, as well as how the construction of pools (and other groundwork) now triggers alerts for archaeological assessments.
- Elder Powless identified the improper spelling of a plaque commemorating the history of Teiaiaagon and spoke at length of the history and culture of the village, including: its location along the Humber river, its designation as the 'herd of plenty' due to centralized trading, the numerous nations that occupied and travelled the surrounding territory, adjacent burial sites, and tragedies that befell the village and land and how the surviving nations then migrated. She also described the geographical strategies Indigenous ancestors used to protect their villages and ensure security, leading into how surviving nations would adopt one another as settlers encroached.
- The area's natural resources were also discussed, including ancient freshwater springs that served Teiaiaagon. Elder Powless described the various treaties that blanketed the territory and continued to stress the importance that the territory played as a place of community for many Indigenous groups.
- Elder Powless: "Well the way I see it is it's like a paradise. When we were here it was a paradise where we could hunt, fish, trap, grow gardens, we had villages and a place for lots of other nice people to come together and trade."
- Participants commented on other natural features of the park including the testing of Humber River's water quality, and the incorporation of Indigenous vegetation, such as medicinal plants, into the park. Although these topics are not directly under jurisdiction

of a HCD plan, they are noted as having strong connection to Indigenous culture and could afford opportunity for Indigenous representation.

- One participant expressed the desire to see a natural playground installed for the kids, as there currently is nothing like this at the park. This would provide an alternative avenue for children to expend their energy and would help to avoid disturbance in natural/forested areas.

As the walk concluded and attendees returned to the talking circle, snacks and refreshments were distributed and I7 helped facilitate a short discussion activity to accommodate the event lasting longer than anticipated. Participants were able to write out and share an insight for each of the main discussion questions provided by Heritage Planners. To efficiently gather responses, discussion questions were presented on poster boards and each participant was given a pen and sticky notes. They were then asked to write out their response to each discussion question – these sticky notes were collected on each appropriate discussion question board. This ensured a timely response period and allowed participants to share their insights without pressure from the rest of the group. Participants were pleased with the event and expressed interest in attending others. Written responses to discussion questions are recorded below.

### Discussion Questions & Initial Responses

#### 1. What are your experiences with this neighbourhood?

- “The green space, river salmon, and trout; generally don’t use the neighbourhood, but plan on returning.”
- “I have gardened with the re-sistering garden group and participated in ceremony. My kid also gardened/planted corn, beans, squash. Corn reeds were heritage seeds that were planted along the river hundreds of years ago.”
- “The river. Wildlife (geese, fish, birds, wild plants)
- “I use it to walk on.”
- “This neighbourhood has been pretty good to me so far. The river and forest are important to me, reminds me of home. I could interact with ceremony or just a walk”
- “I use this area to swim in, I also use it to climb the big mountain.”
- “Bike trails and picnic areas. I like reading plaques about local history & enjoying gardens.”

- “(I) use area for nature. Important to preserve nature, use for walking and exposure to land learning.”
- “I just know the old mill! Very charming – the path for walking.”
- “It’s a beautiful space. I walk the paths.”
- “Nice area. Nice river. Cool views”

## 2. What is cultural heritage value for you?

- “Salmon sliders and ladders”
  - During the walking tour one participant addressed the need for salmon sliders to be made more accessible for salmon, ideally, through renaturalization of the river.
- “My cultural values to me: Our traditions, customs, beliefs; fishing; community; hunting; trapping; gathering.”
- “(I) value its history and natural beauty (and) abundance of nature in birds, wildlife and trees all in harmony.”
- “Cultural heritage: early 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture, the original forest. The nature: water, birds, trees, fish. Indigenous history continues to the present. Communities are still here.”
- “You gotta let the land sit as it sits”
- “An important part of history—maintaining culture and family/community. Land has memory.”
- “The history, the beauty, the ecosystem and its home to animals and birds.”
- “Kid’s park. Native trees and shrubs.”
- “The salmon and the forestry should be kept. The salmon since we should take action for the next 7 generations to have.”
- “It’s important to preserve the nature, land, organic state. Only planting native plants & medicines into the land. Respect the burial sites of the past.”

**3. What are aspects of this place that need to be protected and conserved for future generations? How can this be communicated?**

- “Protect ecosystem for 7 generations to come.”
- “Aspects for conservation: I am unsure but there could be if space is made. Could you build a longhouse with Haudenosaunee community for ceremony and also learning with the public?”
- “The locality should stay the same, it’s beautiful as it stays.”
- “Test the river water to see if its swimmable for future kids. Plant native plants. Remove invasive species.”
- “Protect the land for future generations. Invest more in native plants. More green on trails.
- “Clean the river and park.”
- “Space for ceremony and sacred fires. River needs to be protected, so do birds and wildlife.”
- “Cultural value: knowing the significant nations along the river, having place to gather for Indigenous community today.”
- “Label the trails.”

**Innovation 7 Takeaway**

The event proved successful and experienced no outstanding issues. Heritage Planning staff were timely and communicated their expertise in a thorough manner. Etienne Brule Park was an excellent selection for an outdoor event and Heritage Planning staff effectively made use of what little park amenities were available to create a welcoming and encouraging space—their preparation of additional seating, nametags, and writing/recording tools were crucial to the event’s success in engagement and certainly made up for the lack of attendance and engagement during the Virtual Engagement Session. Though the majority of attendees were staff and students from the Native Learning Centre Downtown (TDSB), they expressed an interest and were attentive to information regarding Heritage Conservation Districts and the agency they hold.

Indigenous cultural values identified during the session centred on Etienne Brule Park and its natural aspects. Preservation and renaturalization of the Humber River was among chief

concerns, especially in relation to the salmon that occupy it. This sentiment was maintained in regard to the park's greenspace – participants emphasized its protection for being a home to wildlife as well as an important space that is set apart from Toronto's urban environment where one can reconnect with nature. Conservation of plant life and forestry are instrumental in this regard. The park grounds have potential for child amenities (play structures) and should just as well provide opportunities for community activities. Space should be made for cultural activities and/or ceremonies which could act as a means of exchanging cultural knowledge with the non-Indigenous public. Cultural representation would benefit Indigenous inclusion in the park as well, through culturally informative signage or artistic representation.