

# CITY OF TORONTO DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

## MINUTES: MEETING 7 – October 16, 2024

The Design Review Panel met virtually on Wednesday, October 16, 2024, at 12:30 pm.

### Members of the Design Review Panel

Gordon Stratford (Co-Chair): Principal – G C Stratford | Architect  
Michael Leckman (Co-Chair): Principal – Diamond Schmitt Architects  
Meg Graham (Co-Chair): Principal – superkül  
Dima Cook: Director – EVOQ Architecture  
Ralph Giannone: Principal – Giannone Petricone Associates  
Jim Gough: Independent Consultant, Transportation Engineering  
Jessica Hutcheon: Principal – Janet Rosenberg & Studio  
Olivia Keung: Associate – Moriyama Teshima | Architects  
Paul Kulig: Principal – Perkins & Will  
Joe Lobko: Partner – Joe Lobko Architect Inc.  
Anna Madeira: Principal – BDP Quadrangle  
Jim Melvin: Principal Emeritus/Advisor – PMA; Owner – Realm Works  
Juhee Oh: Director, Climate Strategy – Choice Properties  
Heather Rolleston: Principal, Design Director – BDP Quadrangle  
Eladia Smoke: Principal Architect – Smoke Architecture  
Sibylle von Knobloch: Principal – NAK Design Group

### Design Review Panel Coordinator

Maria Mokhtariesbouei: Urban Design, City Planning Division

### CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

The Panel confirmed minutes of their previous meeting, which was held on September 18, 2024, by email.

### MEETING 7 INDEX

1. PAC (IN CAMERA)
2. Downsviw: Taxiway West District – 123 Garratt Boulevard (1st Review)

# DOWNSVIEW: TAXIWAY WEST DISTRICT

## CITY OF TORONTO - DESIGN REVIEW PANEL MINUTES

DESIGN REVIEW	First Review
APPLICATION	ZBA and SUB
DEVELOPER	Northcrest Developments

### PRESENTATIONS

CITY STAFF	Sophie Knowles, Community Planning; PC Wasserman, Urban Design
DESIGN TEAM	Emily Reisman, Michel Trocme, and Lauren Haein An, Urban Strategies
VOTE	Support: unanimous

### REVIEW PARTICIPANTS

CHAIR	Gordon Stratford
PANELISTS	Ralph Giannone, Jim Gough, Heather Rolleston, Michael Leckman, Meg Graham, Paul Kulig
CONFLICTS	Not in Attendance: Joe Lobko

### Introduction

City staff outlined the project history, existing and future context, and planning framework. Staff are seeking the Panel's advice on the following key issues:

1. What should the design of Downsview Park Bridge take into consideration on the ground floor / street level interface of Street J? (i.e. what makes for a successful space next to the bridge)
2. How can Greenways, POPS and parks along Street A contribute to the broader parks and public realm network?



3. What guidance can you provide to inform the design of the interface of new development adjacent to the east-west Greenway along Street A?
4. Taxiway Street is a signature public realm element in the District Plan that provides visual and multi-modal connections between the South Hangar buildings with Central Square and The Taxiway and Runway beyond in adjacent districts. The street will provide vehicular circulation, some layby-parking, a robust landscape zone and generous pedestrian realm. The nature of the street as a private street provides some flexibility and opportunity for creative approaches to support a special character.

What are some suggestions that a future detailed design process should include to ensure this is a successful public space?

## Summary of Project's Key Points

The following Panel member discussion points were highlighted in the verbal meeting summary by the Chair:

The Panel would like to thank the proponent team for their presentation of an aspirational development, with a vision that is showing great promise in the proposed design. The Downsview Lands are a key element of Toronto's growth strategy, and Taxiway West has the potential to be an exemplar that sets the bar high for the Lands' future neighbourhoods. Panel members have identified a number of recommendations in support of furthering design efforts, with the following highlighting some of the key comments:

The proposed design's transition to the surrounding existing neighborhoods, and retention of many of the former aero-industry buildings on site, are strong signs of a sensitive response to context. Some of the Panel member comments regarding further work include the following:

**Heritage Context:** The proposed design thoughtfully embraces the aerospace heritage of the site, with more work needed to successfully weave the non-urban industrial past into a new urban neighbourhood.

**Taxiway East:** Provide more detailed design information about the transition between Taxiway West and Taxiway East.

Downsview Park Context: Existing site conditions make it challenging to achieve an easy transition to this major greenspace amenity. The proposed Downsview Park Bridge has exciting potential and needs further work to achieve a fluid connection.

## **Site Plan**

In general, the proposed site plan is showing positive potential, with Panel members recommending further work in the following areas:

**Block Shapes:** Ensure that eccentrically shaped blocks can accommodate effective/efficient built forms that serve their intended use.

**Block O:** This Block is in a pivotal location with view terminus potential along Streets A and B. More fully develop design intent so that the Panel can clearly understand the strategy for this Block.

**Street A @ Block O and Landing Park:** The greenway along Street A becomes pinched along Block O next to Landing Park. Develop design to provide sufficient setback for a continuous greenway along the north side of Street A.

**Taxiway Street:** Provide the proposed design vision for the entire length of this street (including its extension into Taxiway East and beyond), so that the Panel can get a better picture of the complete street.

**Outdoor and Indoor Public Amenity:** To gain a complete understanding of the network of routes, parks, courts, plazas, and greens throughout the site, include a diagram of both indoor (including the hangers) and outdoor spaces and how they are interconnected and programmed.

**Downsview Park Bridge:** This greenway-bridge is a compelling concept that currently feels constricted between the streets on either side. The Panel is interested in seeing more design information (including cross sections that show the greenway and both streets) that will enable members to provide helpful feedback.

**Hangar Roofs:** Consider these large roofs as part of the site plan, contributing community infrastructure (solar/wind energy generation, etc.) and amenities (elevated parks, urban farming, gardens, etc.) wherever possible. Consider adding barrier free pedestrian access to these roofs from the Downsview Park Bridge.

Central Square: Develop the design of this important space further to ensure that it is well framed, programmed and activated for four-season enjoyment.

## **Sustainability**

The Panel is eager to see the development of a deep, site-wide sustainability strategy.

## **Built Form**

The Panel rarely sees a submission that proposes built form heights that are sensitively scaled, in keeping with creating a high quality livable mixed-use neighbourhood. This is a commendable strategy that the Panel encourages the proponent team to maintain through to full completion.

## **Panel Commentary**

### **Project overview and Enthusiasm**

Commendations for the Vision: The panel was unanimous in its praise for the project's bold and innovative vision. A panelist opened by describing the development as a "tour de force" and expressed enthusiasm for its unique potential. He appreciated the thoroughness of the planning document and emphasized how this development stands out from typical urban projects in Toronto. Drawing comparisons to medieval urban planning, he highlighted how the project embraces a non-traditional approach that will ultimately contribute to a distinctive and exciting new neighborhood.

A panelist also commended the team for tackling the "awkward conditions" of the site and transforming them into a special opportunity, noting the project's potential to create a vibrant and unique destination.

### **Heritage Context and Integration**

Respect for Heritage and Taxiway Narrative: The challenge of integrating the site's industrial history into the urban environment was a common theme throughout the discussion. A panelist noted the difficulty of reconciling the heritage of the airport and taxiway with the need to create a modern, urban neighborhood. Despite this challenge, he praised the project for thoughtfully addressing the site's history and using elements like the hangars and taxiway as integral parts of the development's identity. The panel

emphasized the importance of maintaining a strong connection to this heritage while also transforming the site into a vibrant, contemporary urban space.

**Taxiway Street Design:** One panelist, in particular, raised concerns about how the taxiway could be reinterpreted in the new development. He stressed that while it is an industrial element of the site's history, its integration into the urban fabric should not feel like a "pastiche" or forced attempt at authenticity. The panel agreed that careful thought is needed to balance the industrial heritage with the evolving urban context, ensuring that the taxiway remains a key part of the area's identity without feeling out of place in the new neighborhood.

## **Design and Circulation**

**Bridge Design and Functionality:** The bridge, which is a key feature of the project, was discussed in depth. Three members of the panel supported the idea of the bridge being a creative and multifaceted element. One of the panelists emphasized that the bridge offers an incredible opportunity and could become an iconic piece of infrastructure for the site. He noted the challenges associated with the bridge, including its accessibility and the need for a long ramp. However, he expressed confidence in the approach and suggested that the bridge could incorporate elements such as art, green space, and even retail, inspired by the Camden Market in London.

One of the panelists reinforced the previous comment on the bridge's potential, suggesting that the design should allow for a variety of experiences along its length. The panel suggested that the bridge could be reimaged to have different characters as it stretches across the site, perhaps starting as a solid, embankment-style structure near the parking areas and transforming into a lighter, more suspended form as it approaches the main development.

Another panelist echoed this support for the bridge's potential and suggested incorporating public amenities underneath the structure, such as bike parking, public washrooms, or community spaces. He also recommended adding solar canopies to provide shelter from the elements, making the bridge more pedestrian-friendly across all seasons.

## **Public Realm and Open Spaces**

Square vs Plaza: A key point of discussion was the distinction between the "plaza" and the "central square." A panelist expressed concerns about the current designations, suggesting that the plaza, which feels more like a square, should be considered for active uses such as cafes or retail to animate the space. He recommended shifting the focus of the plaza to foster a vibrant, pedestrian-friendly environment, while the central square might require more careful attention to its scale and how it engages with the surrounding spaces.

He also questioned the scale of the central square, which he felt might appear too vast and empty, especially in bad weather. He suggested adding pavilions or smaller buildings, like restaurants or cafes, to break down the scale and make the space feel more intimate. These structures could animate the space and provide shelter, making it a more inviting and dynamic part of the public realm.

Greenways and Public Spaces: There was significant discussion on the importance of ensuring that greenways and parks, particularly around Block O, are well integrated and connected. One panelist stressed that the space between the two major parks (Landing Park and Handover Green) needed to be thoughtfully designed to create a seamless transition. The panel encouraged the design team to focus on the connections between employment and residential zones and to consider mixed-use buildings that could act as a buffer between these areas.

The panel was particularly interested in ensuring that these green spaces are designed not only for aesthetics but also for functionality, providing a variety of recreational and social opportunities for residents.

## **Massing and Built Form**

Concerns with Inefficiencies in the Built Form: Several panel members raised concerns about the inefficiencies in some of the building forms, particularly U-shaped and courtyard buildings. One panelist noted that while these designs can be visually appealing, they may lead to inefficiencies in space usage, which could result in future redesigns or modifications. Other panelist shared similar concerns, suggesting that irregular and complex geometry could lead to functional challenges down the road.

The panel recommended that the design team address these potential inefficiencies early in the process to avoid future problems. They suggested that some of the building

forms be reconsidered to ensure they are both aesthetically pleasing and practical for long-term use.

**Building Massing and Transitions:** Two members of the panel commended the project's massing, especially the transitions between different districts. One of them specifically noted that the massing transitions between the Ancaster neighborhood and the taxiway area were well handled. However, both panel members called for further refinement of the street sections, particularly along Street A, Street B, and other key streets, to ensure that each area has a clear identity and purpose within the larger development.

### **Sustainability and Environmental Considerations**

**Sustainability in the Design:** The panel was generally supportive of the project's sustainability goals, including adherence to Tier 2 of the green standard. Someone on the panel suggested incorporating solar canopies over the parking areas, which would align with the project's sustainability objectives and provide added environmental benefits. He also recommended using green infrastructure such as rain gardens and permeable pavements to enhance the environmental performance of the development.

The two panel members highlighted the importance of ensuring that sustainability is integrated into both the private and public realms. They suggested that the design team should consider how the green infrastructure can be used not only for aesthetic purposes but also as functional, environmentally beneficial elements that support the community's long-term sustainability.

### **Transportation and Connectivity**

**Street and Road Network:** One panelist emphasized the need for a clear understanding of the hierarchy of streets and how they relate to each other, particularly the interactions between the taxiway, Street A, and the greenway. He suggested that these streets should be carefully considered together as part of the broader transportation network to ensure seamless connectivity.

There was agreement among the panel that pedestrian spaces should be prioritized, particularly along busy areas like the taxiway and central square. The design team was urged to continue refining the street sections and the connections between these spaces to ensure they are functional and well integrated into the overall development.



Parking and Traffic Flow: Several panel members raised concerns about the placement of parking garages, particularly how they might impact the pedestrian experience. One of the panelists suggested relocating the parking garages further out from the village to reduce the need for cars to pass through pedestrian areas. He emphasized that intercepting cars sooner would help maintain the walkability of the village and reduce the negative impact of vehicle traffic.