

CITY OF TORONTO DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

MINUTES: MEETING 8 – December 11, 2024

The Design Review Panel met virtually on Wednesday, December 11, 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 October 16, 2024, by email.

MEETING 7 INDEX

1. PAC - Don Mills Community Recreation Centre - 844 Don Mills Road (1st Review)
2. Growing Glencairn Study (1st Review)
3. Rail Deck Development - 595 Front Street West (1st Review)

Don Mills Community Recreation Centre

CITY OF TORONTO - DESIGN REVIEW PANEL MINUTES

DESIGN REVIEW	First Review
APPLICATION	PAC (Future ZBA and SUB)
DEVELOPER	City of Toronto

PRESENTATIONS

CITY STAFF	Michelle Charkow, Community Planning; Grace Gao, Urban Design
DESIGN TEAM	Robert Allen, Haleh Ghodsimaab, Matt Lamers, Hyaeinn Lee MacLennan Jaunkalns Miller Architects
VOTE	None

REVIEW PARTICIPANTS

CHAIR	Michael Leckman
PANELISTS	Gordon Stratford, Jim Gough, Heather Rolleston, Meg Graham, Dima Cook, Jessica Hutcheon, Sibylle von Knobloch, Joe Lobko, Anna Madeira, James Melvin
CONFLICTS	None

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. How does the CRC relate to the Don Mills Road? How does it connect to the park and greater public realm? Should it serve as a prominent landmark, buffer noise and traffic, or provide an inviting frontage to attract passersby, or both? Should it blur the boundaries between indoor and outdoor amenities, or frame views of the park? Taxiway How can the CRC complement or enhance the broader culture and heritage context and characteristics?

2. Families, seniors, youth, athletes, or diverse community groups—what spatial plan will serve them best with balance? What functions and activities will the CRC host? How can it adapt to changing needs over time? Can the design allow for modular spaces or flexible programming?
3. What are the primary access points? How to address grading differences? How does it connect to public transit and active transportation networks? How will loading, parking and drop-off areas be integrated without impacting public ROW?
4. How can the design respond to the natural context of the park and CPR Trail? Can the building harmonize with the natural setting through materials, scale, and landscaping? How can sustainable design principles be integrated? How could the building become a Net Zero Emissions Building? Could the CRC use renewable energy, green roofs, stormwater management, or passive solar design?
5. What role will the CRC play in community-building and social wellbeing? Are there cultural or historical aspects of the site to honor? Could the design reflect Celestica’s technological innovation traditions, history, or cultural expressions? How inclusive is the design? Does it remove barriers for participation?
6. How can the design create memorable experiences, through visual connections between the urban street and the park, interactive features, or indoor-outdoor transitions? What architectural identity should the CRC built form present? What is the public art plan?

Summary of Project’s Key Points

Panel members have expressed strong support for the project, praising its design, clear expression of aspirations, and notable commitment to sustainability. The following key points highlight areas of potential further refinement and development:

Design Response and Context

The project has received commendation for its positive contribution to the community, with particular focus on how it “elegantly starts the community dancing.” However, the Panel has suggested the following adjustments:

The entrance on Don Mills should be further studied to better integrate all three major access points, with special attention to the colonnade on the Don Mills side.

Consideration of transparency onto the rink could enhance the animation of the Don Mills side.

Acknowledgement of Indigenous input should be more prominently integrated, potentially through visible evidence of conversations and contributions within the design.

Site and Public Engagement:

The proposed park has been noted as a key component of the site, with some suggestions for future development:

Further development of the park design is needed, with an emphasis on synergy with the west face of the building and its colonnade.

Encouragement for incorporating public art into both the park and building site design to enrich the overall experience.

Built Form and Aesthetics:

Panel members expressed appreciation for the project's design direction and aspirations but suggested the following refinements:

The current muted color palette might benefit from the addition of more vibrant tones to infuse the design with greater energy and joy.

Overall, the project has strong support from the Panel, with constructive suggestions aimed at enhancing the community engagement, public spaces, and the integration of design elements that reflect diverse contributions.

Panel Commentary

Site Context and Adjacencies

The design team was commended for their clear and thoughtful approach to the building's context and its relationship to surrounding elements. The use of natural materials and transparency throughout the design helps create a welcoming public space that feels open and accessible. The colonnade, in particular, was praised for its ability to link the building to the park and the streets, creating a seamless transition between the building and its surroundings. A panel member suggested that the colonnade could be a key feature in ensuring the building serves as a central, community-oriented space.

Further study was recommended regarding the relationship between the building and Don Mills Road. A pedestrian entrance on Don Mills could activate this side of the building and make better use of the colonnade, especially given the heavy traffic and potential for increased foot traffic in the area. Some panel members expressed concern that the current design might underutilize this important space, which could otherwise help draw people in. Although traffic volumes on Don Mills Road are high, the panel emphasized that creating a more pedestrian-friendly experience here aligns with the city's long-term goals of enhancing walkability.

The current lack of an integrated park design was another area of concern. The panel encouraged the design team to coordinate the building's design with the development of the park to ensure both spaces work together cohesively. The park's undefined status in the proposal was noted as a potential limitation in terms of its ability to interact with the building in a meaningful way. A more comprehensive design that considers both the building and the park as one unified space could enhance the overall experience for users.

Circulation and Access

The project's circulation plan was generally praised for its thoughtful approach to managing the flow of people through the site. However, several concerns were raised regarding the drop-off area. The panel advised a more detailed study of how this area will function in practice, particularly in relation to bike lanes and pedestrian movement. If the drop-off area primarily serves buses and heavy vehicles, there should be careful consideration of how these vehicles interact with other site users, especially cyclists. Some panel members felt that this area could become congested, and its design should be optimized to ensure it does not interfere with pedestrian or cyclist routes.

A suggestion was made to reconsider the building's entrances. The current layout, particularly the southeast entrance, might not provide sufficient visibility or prominence. It was suggested that the entrance could be positioned in a way that better addresses the surrounding streets and creates a more welcoming experience for visitors. In particular, the Don Mills entrance should be studied further to ensure it serves pedestrians coming from the north and helps to animate the street. Panel members emphasized that this building should feel open and accessible from all sides, and an entrance from Don Mills could help achieve that goal.

Building Design and Programming

The design of the building was widely praised, particularly the colonnade, which was seen as a powerful architectural feature that blurs the lines between the building and the park. However, the facade, especially on the east side, was noted for its relatively muted appearance. Panel members suggested that increasing transparency, adding more

openings, or incorporating some color could help make this side of the building feel more lively and inviting. Transparency into the rink area, for example, could animate the Don Mills side and make the building feel more engaging to those passing by.

Some panel members questioned whether all of the interior spaces, particularly the multi-purpose rooms, were as active and engaging as they could be. While the rooms do have great potential for flexibility, the panel suggested that there could be more opportunities for these spaces to engage with the park and surrounding areas. The community kitchen space was seen as a great asset, and its connection to the exterior spaces was appreciated. The idea of turning the roof terrace into a more functional and consolidated space for urban agriculture was also supported, as it could complement the building's community-focused goals.

The panel raised concerns about the need for more informal public spaces, particularly for people waiting for others to finish their programs or games. The second floor, in particular, was noted for its potential to provide more flexible spaces that could support these types of activities. The use of the colonnade and park edge to create spaces where people can gather and watch outdoor activities was encouraged as a way to further activate the site.

Landscape and Open Space

The landscape design was generally appreciated, but the panel encouraged further attention to how the building integrates with the park and other open spaces. In particular, the transition between the park and the building should feel seamless, with careful consideration of how the building's community rooms can open up to the park. The idea of indoor-outdoor rooms was applauded, and the panel suggested that the program along the west side of the building could have more interaction with the park to further activate this area. The potential for future park design elements, such as water features or sports fields, should be considered in the current design to ensure a strong synergy between the park and the building.

The panel also recommended further study of the park's edges, particularly along Varna Road. More greenery and softer edges could help improve the overall pedestrian experience, especially considering the current challenges posed by traffic along Varna. The introduction of bioswales and stormwater management features was suggested as a way to further enhance the environmental sustainability of the project.

Sustainability and Materials

The commitment to sustainability was praised, with particular attention given to the project's Zero Carbon goals. The location of the building's key programs, such as the swimming pool and gym, was noted as a positive aspect from a sustainability

perspective. The design of the building's facade, with its focus on limiting sun exposure, was seen as an important element in achieving net-zero energy use.

The use of natural materials like terracotta and wood was generally appreciated, but some panel members felt that the materials needed to be more textured and varied to better connect the building to its site and enhance its public presence. The panel suggested that the base of the building could be made more engaging through the use of richer textures or additional colors to create more visual interest, especially at the ground level where it interfaces with the park and streets.

Project Integration and Community Fit

The panel expressed strong support for the project's direction, recognizing the building's potential to be a central community hub. Many aspects of the design were well-received, including the thoughtful use of natural materials, the colonnade, and the sustainable design features.

Some areas, such as the entrances, park integration, and facade transparency, require further refinement, but the overall concept was seen as very promising. The panel emphasized the importance of making the building feel welcoming and accessible from all sides, particularly by addressing the pedestrian experience on Don Mills Road.

The project's community-focused programming and sustainability goals were highlighted as key strengths, and the panel expressed confidence that with further refinement, the project will become a valuable addition to the community.

GROWING GLENCAIRN STUDY

CITY OF TORONTO - DESIGN REVIEW PANEL MINUTES

DESIGN REVIEW First Review

APPLICATION City Study

PRESENTATIONS

CITY STAFF Erika Ivanic, Strategic Initiatives; Maryam Sabzevari, Urban Design

DESIGN TEAM Kiran Chhiba and Ute Maya-Giambattista
O2 Planning + Design

VOTE None

REVIEW PARTICIPANTS

CHAIR Meg Graham

PANELISTS Jim Gough, Heather Rolleston, Michael Leckman, Gordon Stratford, Dima Cook, Jessica Hutcheon, Joe Lobko, Anna Madeira, James Melvin

CONFLICTS Not in Attendance: Sibylle von Knobloch

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. **Urban Structure and Housing:** How can we enhance and connect the existing and emerging neighbourhood cores at Marlee Avenue, bridging across the Allen, while considering opportunities for intensification east of the Allen?
2. **Open Space + Public Realm:** What key elements should be prioritized in a parkland strategy and street improvement initiatives, such as active mobility, greening, and stormwater management, to enhance public space and networks in the area?

3. **Mobility:** How can we improve east-west and north-south connections to better connect destinations and maximize the use of existing and proposed transportation infrastructure?
4. **Environment + Sustainability:** Please advise us on strategies to balance the need for urban intensification with integrating sustainable measures such as low-carbon developments, energy efficiency and Green Street initiatives.

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 City team and the proponents for their thoughtful analysis and presentation. The study area represents a unique challenge due to its predominantly single-family home fabric, bisected by the Allen Expressway, under significant development pressure, and its adjacency to high-order transit. The panel appreciates the deliberate and comprehensive approach taken and looks forward to future updates as the study progresses.

Response to Context

The panel identified insufficient park space as a critical issue and emphasized the importance of creating additional green spaces while using greenery as a connective and unifying element throughout the study area. Key opportunities include transforming Glengrove into a green street that spans the Allen and enhancing green corridors to stitch the area together. The panel also encouraged embracing the distinct identities of the two sides of the Allen, rather than attempting to make them uniform, to reflect their unique contexts.

Site Plan

The focus for intensification should be between Marlee Avenue and the Allen, ensuring that green streets such as Glencairn and Viewmount are integral to the plan. The panel highlighted the importance of prioritizing pedestrian-friendly design, including wider bridges, which can serve as significant design features and multimodal assets. Marlee Avenue should be developed as a vibrant local "main street" and anchor for the neighborhood. Additionally, the panel recommended considering an express bus route on Marlee Avenue to mitigate the distance between major east-west streets and

subway stations.

Public Realm and Landscape

The panel advocated for a landscape-led approach to development, similar to strategies used in waterfront areas, enhancing park spaces to support and frame intensification. They suggested exploring opportunities to extend the existing western park eastward and the eastern park westward to create continuous green connections. Developing an open space strategy that prioritizes these enhancements will help create a cohesive and livable urban environment.

Built Form and Master Planning

A staged approach to planning is recommended, with documentation showing projected outcomes for 5, 10, and 15 years, supported by metrics on community capacities such as schools, community centers, and transit. This will allow for thorough evaluation and comparison of progress. The panel stressed the need for a large-scale master plan that includes detailed ground-level conditions to effectively manage hyper-growth while ensuring high-quality, livable spaces for the community.

Approach and Vision

The panel praised the City team's thoughtful and strategic approach, emphasizing the importance of creating a master plan that delivers quality spaces for people to live in a rapidly growing area. They encouraged continued focus on ensuring livability, leveraging landscape design, and addressing the unique challenges posed by this high-growth context. This study has the potential to set a precedent for urban design in similar areas, provided the deliberate and methodical approach is maintained.

Panel Commentary

Project Context and Development Challenges

The panel commended the design team for their detailed and thoughtful analysis of the study area, which is under considerable development pressure. The area, primarily composed of single-family homes, is bisected by Allen Road and supported by high-order transit, creating unique opportunities and challenges.

A panelist highlighted the complexity of balancing the preservation of the existing neighborhood character with the need for intensification. They emphasized the

importance of planning for future needs, including green spaces, public infrastructure, and transit capacity, to accommodate the expected growth.

Allen Road was repeatedly identified as a significant barrier that divides the community into two disconnected zones. However, the panel also viewed this as an opportunity to strengthen connectivity and enhance the public realm.

Suggestions included creating pedestrian-focused green bridges that incorporate landscaping and multimodal pathways to improve integration and connectivity between the two sides.

The panel discussed the existing development patterns along Marley Avenue and adjacent streets. They emphasized the importance of maintaining a consistent streetscape while accommodating higher densities closer to transit nodes. Marley Avenue was identified as a potential high street and anchor for intensification, with recommendations to focus on pedestrian-friendly design and active public spaces.

Design Strategy and Site Layout

Green spaces emerged as a central theme in the discussion. While the panel supported the design team's commitment to integrating green infrastructure, they stressed the importance of making these spaces multifunctional and accessible to all community members.

Specific suggestions included introducing playgrounds, community gardens, sports facilities, and dynamic programming to ensure that green spaces serve as vibrant community hubs.

Building massing and setbacks along Marley Avenue were discussed at length. Panelists recommended prioritizing mid-rise structures to align with the street's existing character while concentrating taller buildings near Allen Road to minimize disruption to the neighborhood fabric.

A call for formal guidelines on tower massing was made to ensure that future developments respect the area's identity while accommodating growth.

The panel also encouraged a focus on sunlight access and its impact on streets and public spaces. They suggested that shadow studies and other analyses be used to guide massing and placement of taller buildings.

Street and Pedestrian Connectivity

The panel praised the emphasis on creating a walkable and pedestrian-friendly environment but urged the design team to further integrate internal pathways with the surrounding urban context.

Completing and expanding the sidewalk network was recommended to enhance accessibility and connectivity, particularly across Allen Road.

Bicycle infrastructure was highlighted as a critical aspect of the development. Panelists suggested prioritizing secure bike parking and storage options to promote cycling as a sustainable mode of transportation.

Additional recommendations included creating dedicated bike lanes along key corridors and ensuring seamless connections to transit stations.

Enhancing east-west connectivity was deemed essential. Wider, pedestrian-friendly bridges were proposed as a way to knit the community together and improve access to transit and amenities on both sides of Allen Road.

Public Space and Green Infrastructure

Green infrastructure was identified as a cornerstone of the development's success. The panel stressed the need for robust green connections along Allen Road to link residential areas with public amenities and transit nodes.

Transforming Glen Grove into a green street and implementing innovative strategies such as bioswales and permeable paving were suggested to maximize sustainability and resilience.

Existing parks, such as Brenner Park, were identified as valuable community assets that should be enhanced and integrated into the overall development plan. Panelists encouraged the design team to explore ways to expand and activate these spaces.

Ideas included creating spaces for outdoor events, adding diverse plant species, and incorporating elements that promote biodiversity and stormwater management.

The importance of soil volume for tree planting was emphasized. Panelists

recommended designing streetscapes that support a healthy and long-lasting tree canopy, particularly along key corridors like Marley Avenue.

Design Refinements and Building Form

The architectural relationship between podiums and towers was a major focus of the discussion. Panelists expressed concerns that the current designs might overwhelm the street level and suggested exploring more inviting and human-scale approaches.

Recommendations included using natural, tactile materials for podiums to create a warm and engaging streetscape. Panelists also proposed refining the transitions between podiums and towers to achieve a cohesive and harmonious design.

Mid-rise development was identified as a preferred approach for Marley Avenue. Panelists urged the design team to carefully study the impacts of intensification on sunlight access, wind patterns, and the pedestrian experience.

They also encouraged exploring innovative massing strategies to ensure that new developments align with the neighborhood's character while accommodating growth.

Sustainability and Urban Livability

The panel reiterated the importance of balancing density with green space and public realm improvements. They commended the design team for their thoughtful approach and encouraged continuous refinement of the plan.

Leading with landscape, as demonstrated by Waterfront Toronto, was recommended as a guiding principle for creating high-quality public spaces that anchor the development.

A staged approach to development was strongly advocated, with clear milestones and metrics to evaluate progress over time. This approach would ensure a livable transition for current residents and provide a roadmap for future growth.

Suggested metrics included current and projected capacities for schools, community centers, transit, and public spaces. These metrics would enable comparative analysis and informed decision-making.

Collaboration with local stakeholders and continuous community engagement were highlighted as essential for the project's success. Panelists emphasized the importance of responding to the needs and aspirations of residents to create a development that is both vibrant and sustainable. They also encouraged the design team to consider indigenous place-keeping and cultural elements as part of the planning process, ensuring that the development reflects the area's diverse history and identity.

The panel concluded by acknowledging the complexity and ambition of the project. They expressed optimism that the thoughtful approach taken by the design team would result in a development that balances growth with livability, creating a model for sustainable urban design in Toronto.

RAIL DECK DEVELOPMENT

CITY OF TORONTO - DESIGN REVIEW PANEL MINUTES

DESIGN REVIEW	First Review
APPLICATION	OPA and ZBA
DEVELOPER	Rail Deck District Corporation

PRESENTATIONS

CITY STAFF	Joanna Kimont, Community Planning; Julie Bogdanowicz, Urban Design
DESIGN TEAM	David Copeland, Dermot Sweeny, and Kevin Hurley Sweeny & Co Architects Inc, SvN Architects + Planners
VOTE	None Support

REVIEW PARTICIPANTS

CHAIR	Gordon Stratford
PANELISTS	Jim Gough, Heather Rolleston, Michael Leckman, Dima Cook, Jessica Hutcheon, Joe Lobko, Anna Madeira, James Melvin, Meg Graham, Sibylle von Knobloch
CONFLICTS	None

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. Are the proposed configuration and dimensions of the park appropriate? What is the preferred transition of the park towards Northern Linear Park?
2. Have all mobility issues associated with the project been considered?

3. What sustainability measures should be considered?
4. How can uses at grade better animate the public realm and the park?
5. Moving into SPA, can the Panel opine on architectural expression? Should the towers' materiality and articulation be consistent, or is diversity encouraged?

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 sharing their proposed project at an early stage; understanding that the design presented is high level and preliminary. This structurally complex and urbanistically challenging development is requesting a very big “ask” in terms of density, and in return must make a substantial contribution to our city. It is essential that the design of both the buildings and park space be of the very highest quality, especially given the importance of this development to Toronto’s downtown core. Considerable further work is required to achieve a civic contribution sufficient to justify the big “ask.”

The following highlights some of the key comments from Panel members.

Response to Context

Panel members appreciate the design team’s efforts to bridge the rail corridor but resulting elevation differences challenge the ability to integrate the proposed design with its surrounding context.

Along all edges of the site, develop a gentler, more fluid transition from surrounding existing street-level public realm context up into the new park areas.

Create a more sensitive response to the scale context of heritage Draper Street.

Provide a more sensitive built-form transition along Front Street, Blue Jay Way, and Ice Boat Terrace.

Site Plan

The earlier vision for the site above the rail corridor included a continuous public park that was accessible and useful. The current proposed open space between Bathurst Street and Blue Jays Way may appear contiguous in site diagram form (proponent's submission, page 29) but in reality, is a series of thin, fragmented, and difficult to use bits and pieces of "park area" space.

Green/Park Space: For the entire site (Bathurst to Blue Jays Way) provide a model, and series of north-south and east-west sections, to clearly show the proposed topographic shaping of the overall site and surrounding context. The design strategy presented is a "buildings first and park space second" approach. Develop a strategy that turns this equation around, providing a cohesive, more permeable, and easily accessible, contiguous park space from Bathurst Street to Blue Jays Way. Consider alternatives for the placement of built form density that will help achieve park space objectives noted above.

Parking: The Panel appreciates the proponent's efforts to reduce parking and encourages further study for increased reduction.

West Block: Back of house functions assume most of this Block's Front Street frontage. Provide street front animation strategy that counters this condition.

Centre Block: Consider whether all planned retail will be viable (e.g.: upper floor retail along Front Street, extent along park frontage).

East Block: The proposed design shows a significant elevation difference between the POPS and Northern Linear Park. Provide more information about the proposed relation and connectivity/accessibility between these two civic spaces. Also clarify how the high wall will integrate into this setting (e.g.: blank? programmed with amenities? retail? other?). Consider whether all planned retail will be viable.

Livability: The Panel appreciates that the submission is preliminary but with the high density and anticipated on-site population livability needs to be of the highest quality. Some information is provided (e.g.: daycare, retail, private amenity space) but more is needed. Provide a livability strategy that will support this population (e.g.: community services and amenities, wind mitigation, sun/shade impact on green/park spaces, etc.).

Sustainability

The panel Provide a deep, site-wide sustainability strategy.

Built Form

Panel members expressed concern regarding the Centre Block's massive over-sized frontage (similar to the convention centre frontage further east) along Front Street and the park on the south edge.

Develop design further, including: Breaking up the massing of the podium and reducing its height. Articulating the mid-block POPS connection (it now appears to be hidden within the massing). Alternatives to slab towers. Reducing the number of towers. Ensuring that the West and East Blocks follow this built form strategy.

Note to city

With this development (and potentially large publicly accessible park) being of vital importance to the City the design of the park (from Bathurst Street to Blue Jays Way) must take place in tandem with the built form. As noted above, the submission shared with the Panel is largely built form focused. This is understandable due to the challenges imposed by the rail corridor. However, as a result the spaces left over for park land are in bits and pieces, awkwardly shaped and molded, and accessibility challenged. If we want this essential park to be a jewel for livability in the downtown core its design needs to start now and be a driving force that defines this development.

Panel Commentary

Project Overview and General Observation

The panel acknowledged the bold vision of transforming the rail yard into a park and urban community, describing the proposal as “healing a scar in the city.” The ambition to create a vibrant, green space integrated into Toronto’s urban fabric was widely recognized and commended. However, the sheer scale and complexity of the development raised significant concerns about its alignment with urban design principles, livability, and sustainability.

Several panelists emphasized that while the ambition is admirable, the project must ultimately serve its community by addressing pressing issues such as connectivity, accessibility, and functionality. They urged the team to critically assess the risks of a development of this magnitude to ensure it aligns with the needs of both current and future residents.

Connectivity and Urban Integration

The project's ambition for connectivity, while appreciated, is hindered by the proposed design, particularly the 250-meter-long podium in the central block. The panel noted that this massive podium restricts pedestrian movement, creating a "canyon effect" along Front Street that is antithetical to the principles of permeability and accessibility.

Several members suggested breaking up the podium into smaller, more permeable sections, or eliminating parts of it entirely to allow for meaningful north-south connections. Specific recommendations included introducing through-block pedestrian pathways that connect seamlessly with Wellington Street, King Street, and other key thoroughfares, enabling more fluid movement and greater integration with the surrounding urban fabric.

The park's elevated position—8.5 meters above grade—further complicates accessibility, with panelists expressing concerns that this design isolates the park from its surroundings and diminishes its usability. They stressed the importance of creating intuitive, equitable access points that allow people of all abilities to easily reach and enjoy the park.

The narrow setbacks along Front Street were also flagged as problematic, with panelists advocating for wider setbacks to create a more inviting streetscape and support pedestrian activity. These adjustments are critical to ensuring the project achieves its goal of fostering connectivity and establishing the park as a truly accessible and integrated public space.

Livability and Community Considerations

The panel strongly critiqued the lack of provisions to support a "complete community," highlighting significant gaps in amenities and services. With over 50% of the proposed units being bachelor or single-bedroom apartments, the development is poorly suited for families, limiting its potential to foster a diverse and inclusive neighborhood.

The absence of essential facilities such as daycare centers, healthcare services, and community spaces further exacerbates this issue, leaving panelists concerned about the project's ability to meet the needs of its residents. They urged the team to incorporate these elements into the design, emphasizing that a successful urban community must provide services and spaces that cater to people of all ages and life

stages.

The podium design also drew substantial criticism for its imposing height and length, which detract from the human-scale urban experience. Panelists noted that the podium's overwhelming size creates a monolithic and unwelcoming environment, particularly in the central block. Breaking up the podium into smaller, more permeable sections or reducing its height were suggested as ways to improve its relationship with the street and surrounding areas.

Panelists also recommended eliminating one of the towers in the central block to create an open courtyard that transitions up to the park, fostering a more vibrant and livable urban environment. These changes are essential to addressing the disconnect between the project's stated goals and its current design.

Public Realm and Open Spaces

While the inclusion of park space was appreciated, the panel expressed serious concerns about its scale, functionality, and integration. Given the project's immense density, the proposed park space was deemed insufficient to meet the needs of the projected population.

Panelists emphasized the importance of providing a detailed vision for the park that outlines its programming and ensures it is proportionate to the development's scale. Without such a commitment, there is a risk that the park could become a "leftover space" rather than a central community feature.

The linear park on the southern edge was also criticized for its narrow width and lack of integration into the overall site design. Panelists suggested reimagining this area to create a more inviting and functional green space that better serves the community.

The reliance on retail to animate the park spaces was flagged as potentially problematic, with concerns about vacancies and the limited diversity of offerings. To address this, panelists recommended incorporating community facilities or smaller-scale activations to ensure long-term vitality.

The narrow setbacks along Front Street further exacerbate the lack of usable public space, with panelists urging the team to widen these areas to create a more vibrant and pedestrian-friendly streetscape.

Built Form and Massing

The panel found the proposed massing, particularly in the central block, to be overwhelming and misaligned with the surrounding context. The nine-story podium wall along Front Street was described as excessive, creating a monolithic barrier that diminishes the human-scale urban experience.

Panelists strongly recommended reducing the podium's height and length to improve its relationship with the street and surrounding areas. The alignment of the towers along Front Street was also flagged as problematic, with suggestions to explore alternative layouts, such as offsetting or angling the towers, to enhance light, views, and overall visual interest.

The tower floor plates were criticized for being excessively large, contributing to issues of density and overshadowing. Panelists suggested adhering to the city's guidelines for smaller floor plates to reduce the visual bulk and create opportunities to expand public spaces.

They also recommended eliminating one tower in the central block to create an open courtyard that improves pedestrian flow and access to light. These adjustments are crucial to ensuring the development achieves a balanced and harmonious relationship with its surroundings.

Sustainability and Environmental Concerns

The project's high embodied carbon was a significant concern, with one panelist describing it as "scary." Given the environmental cost of such a large-scale development, the panel questioned whether its benefits justify its carbon footprint.

They emphasized the need for a stronger commitment to sustainability, urging the team to integrate district energy systems and comprehensive waste management strategies. These elements are essential to reducing the project's environmental impact and aligning it with the city's sustainability goals.

A staged Panelists also recommended incorporating green infrastructure, such as permeable pavements, rain gardens, and solar canopies, to enhance the development's environmental performance. These measures not only contribute to

sustainability but also improve the overall livability and functionality of the public realm. A stronger focus on sustainability is essential to ensuring the project meets the long-term needs of both residents and the broader community.

Path Forward for Design Improvements

The panel recognized the ambition and complexity of the project and commended the team for their efforts to date. However, the current proposal raised significant concerns about its ability to deliver on its stated goals of livability, connectivity, and sustainability. The design must prioritize creating a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable community that integrates seamlessly with its surroundings.

The panel emphasized the importance of revisiting the central block, park development, and overall urban design to address these critical issues. They encouraged the design team to collaborate closely with city staff and refine the proposal to ensure it becomes a landmark for Toronto rather than a missed opportunity.