

# **CITY OF TORONTO DESIGN REVIEW PANEL**

## **MINUTES: MEETING 1 – February 26, 2025**

The Design Review Panel met virtually on Wednesday, February 26, 2025, 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 December 11, 2024, by email.

### **MEETING 7 INDEX**

1. PAC (IN CAMERA)
2. Downsview West District Plan - 1377 Sheppard Ave West (1st Review)

# DOWNSVIEW WEST DISTRICT PLAN

## CITY OF TORONTO - DESIGN REVIEW PANEL MINUTES

DESIGN REVIEW	First Review
APPLICATION	ZBA and SUB
DEVELOPER	Canada Lands Company CLC Limited

### PRESENTATIONS

CITY STAFF	Perry Korouyenis, Community Planning PC Wasserman, Urban Design
DESIGN TEAM	Emily Reisman (Urban Strategies) James Miller (Trophic Design)
VOTE	Support: unanimous

### REVIEW PARTICIPANTS

CHAIR	Gordon Stratford
PANELISTS	Dima Cook, Ralph Giannone, Meg Graham, Jim Gough, Jessica Hutcheon, Olivia Keung, Paul Kulig, Michael Leckman, Joe Lobko, James Melvin, Heather Rolleston
CONFLICTS	Not in Attendance: Anna Madeira

### 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. The proposed public realm strategy for the district, particularly the:
  - a. Courtyard Commons and Bio Corridor – their role, function, conceptual design considerations; and
  - b. Depot Mews – its role as an active and pedestrian oriented frontage, and design moves to support this space.



2. Strategies regarding the Supply Depot, particularly:
  - a. How can the two sections of the Supply Depot still connect, visually or otherwise, while the new Northern Street connection bisects it?
  - b. How should the adjacent built form respond to the Supply Depot building?
3. The overall approach to height and massing distribution of the district.

## **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 a strong presentation of a promising design vision that includes the reimagining of existing heritage structures, an extensive network of park and green spaces, ancestor's trail, distinctive neighbourhoods, and much more.

The development of Downsview as a high-quality community is an essential goal for the future of our city, and this proposed project has the potential to become an exemplar. The Panel encourages the design team to develop their design further, including the following which highlights some of the key comments from Panel members.

### **RESPONSE TO CONTEXT:**

Panel members are encouraged by the design team's development of a dynamic modern community that sensitively retains and celebrates significant existing built form context. The Panel advises that further efforts be made to address the following context:

#### **Destinations Context:**

- The proposed new community is adjacent to major destination amenities that will result in large crowds flowing through the community. Develop circulation solutions that accommodate such crowds without detriment to the new community.

#### **Transition to Surrounding Context:**

- The west and north edges of the proposed community present a wall of buildings along Sheppard Avenue West, with limited visibility of the activated environment inside the community. Make these edges more permeable, animated, and

connected with the surrounding context.

## **SITE PLAN:**

Panel members have commented on how the proposed site plan sets the stage for a vibrant community. At the same time further work is needed, as identified in Response to Context above, and in the following areas:

### **Pedestrian/Active Transportation Network:**

Members appreciated the focus on the pedestrian and active transportation network in the site plan; providing the following suggestions to the applicant:

- Extend the Bio Corridor north to Sheppard Avenue West.
- Prioritize which pathways should be used by destination crowds. Determine appropriate corridor widths to accommodate anticipated crowd sizes, and also ensure effective transition between public, semi-public, and private realms. For example, determine whether the Courtyard Commons should be open to destination crowds or only used by neighbourhood residents.

### **Bio Bridge:**

Some Panel members asked whether the Bio Bridge over Dovehouse Avenue Extension includes connection to the Avenue below and Depots.

- Please clarify.

### **Dovehouse Avenue Extension:**

- Ensure the Avenue does not divide the site to the detriment of the overall proposed development.

### **Permeability/Activity:**

Members appreciated the inviting porosity of the site plan, and the potential of activated placemaking in the network.

- More work on the site's west, north and east edges (along the depot buildings), is needed to fully realise the design team's strategy.

### **Community Amenities:**

- Include a fabric of civic amenities to match the anticipated population size (e.g.: day care, schools, libraries, community centres, etc.).

### **Parks and Green Spaces:**

Panel members encourage continuing to work on the site plan's positive nature-to-nurture start.

- Ensure that all parks connect (not divide) neighbourhoods in the new community. Example: Northern and Station Parks in Station Quarter.
- Show network map of all exterior and interior courtyards (inside depot buildings), parks and green spaces interconnected.

### **Depots North and South:**

Panel members applauded the creative reuse of the depot in the proposed development; with mixed feedback regarding whether the Depots should be physically connected.

- Provide details regarding how ease of pedestrian connectivity (including barrier free access) between the two Depots is achieved.

### **Film Production:**

During the design team presentation film production was mentioned as a potential use in the east area of the two Depots.

- Media (film, TV, etc.) production is security-sensitive, and sometimes requires large outdoor parking/staging spaces. Provide more detailed information about how the Depots and adjacent land would accommodate this type of production.

### **BUILT FORM:**

Panel members appreciate the proposed "Sculpting the Massing" strategy for the overall community.

- Provide more detailed information regarding proposed building heights, to enable the Panel to fully assess the overall design proposal.

## **FROM VISION TO REALITY:**

Since its inception, the Panel has reviewed many projects where the promise offered by the design vision sadly fails to reach fruition in the final built reality. The design vision proposed for this project promises the opportunity for a uniquely sensitive, vibrant and enriching community. The overall Downsvue development needs to be a major step forward for the quality of life in our city, and this project can make that happen only if the design vision remains complete and true in the completed community.

- To achieve this, the proposed vision needs to be translated into requirements rather than just guidelines.

## **Panel Commentary**

### **Project overview and Enthusiasm**

The panel commended the presentation and the comprehensive vision for the district, emphasizing its potential to become an important part of the city's evolving urban fabric. One panelist described the proposal as "one of the most sophisticated and thoughtful presentations seen in recent times," highlighting the depth of consideration given to the site's history, sustainability, and public realm strategy. Another panelist reinforced this sentiment, noting that the project successfully transforms an industrially rooted site into a rich and complex urban community, balancing residential, commercial, and public spaces.

A significant aspect of the discussion centered around the project's commitment to sustainability, with multiple panelists praising the proposal's adherence to TGS Tier 3 standards. A panelist pointed out the presence of a steam plant on the south side of the site, suggesting that this could be leveraged to support a broader district energy strategy. Another panelist urged the team to explore pushing the boundaries of affordable housing within the plan, as this project presents a rare opportunity to create a diverse, inclusive neighborhood.

### **Depot Building and Public Realm Strategy**

The discussion around the depot building was particularly animated, with panelists expressing excitement about the potential to regenerate this historic structure into a dynamic focal point for the community. One panelist remarked on the fortress-like nature of the existing building, praising the efforts to introduce porosity and connectivity. However, concerns were raised about the balance between vehicular circulation and public accessibility, with a panelist pointing out that the most compelling aspects of the depot's adaptive reuse seem to be compromised by prioritizing vehicle movement.

Several panelists suggested that a stronger effort should be made to integrate more interstitial spaces—areas that blur the lines between indoor and outdoor environments—to encourage more organic public interactions. One member commented on the market imagery presented, stating that these vibrant spaces should extend beyond the building's interior and spill into the surrounding public realm. Another panelist echoed this sentiment, emphasizing that rebalancing circulation patterns could help ensure that the depot remains a central, animated space rather than being constrained by adjacent roadways.

The Courtyard Commons and Bio Corridor were also discussed extensively. One panelist noted the bio corridor must be carefully designed to ensure it is not merely a pathway but a dynamic ecological and social spine. They cautioned that without robust design interventions, it could risk being trampled by large event crowds, such as those leaving a major concert or gathering. Another panelist encouraged a closer integration of landscape and public space elements, particularly at key junctions where movement and gathering spaces intersect.

### **Connectivity and the Supply Depot**

The conversation around the supply depot and its bisected sections brought up differing opinions. One panelist agreed with the current approach, stating that the separation of the two sections is inevitable and that the proposed pedestrian connection along the railway corridor sufficiently links them. Another panelist suggested that further continuity could be established through materiality and street furniture, creating a visual language that ties both sections together.

An important point was raised regarding the relationship between the depot and the adjacent built form. One panelist questioned whether the surrounding architecture adequately responds to the depot's scale and character, urging the team to ensure that future developments provide a respectful yet contemporary dialogue between old and new. Another panelist suggested introducing more strategic setbacks or terracing to

allow for better visual and physical relationships between the depot and new structures. The discussion also touched on the role of street design and circulation in reinforcing the connectivity of the district. A panelist proposed extending the Bio Bridge further north to Shepherd Avenue, making it a stronger connective element. They argued that this extension could enhance the project's larger integration with the surrounding urban framework, particularly in linking educational institutions and transit hubs.

## **Massing and Built Form Strategy**

The panel had mixed opinions on the overall approach to height and massing distribution across the district. One panelist noted that the balance of building typologies seemed appropriate, with taller buildings situated in strategic locations that minimize shadowing impacts. However, another panelist found the height transitions abrupt and urged a more gradual scaling of buildings to create a more harmonious skyline.

Several panelists pointed out the importance of considering the human experience at street level, emphasizing that a well-defined public realm is crucial to ensuring that large-scale buildings do not overwhelm the pedestrian environment. One panelist specifically referenced the Courtyard Commons, questioning whether the scale and permeability of the buildings framing this space were sufficient to encourage an inviting, active environment. Another panelist suggested introducing smaller-scale retail or community functions at key intersections to animate the ground plane and create a more layered urban experience.

A panelist expressed skepticism about the Muse District's current configuration, suggesting that while the idea is promising, the execution requires refinement. They emphasized that the scale and character of the Muse should be carefully considered to ensure it functions as an intimate, pedestrian-friendly environment rather than a secondary service corridor. Another panelist agreed, noting that the renderings were evocative but that clear guidelines would be needed to ensure that the final built outcome maintains this level of character.

## **Public Realm and Social Anchors**

A recurrent theme in the discussion was the integration of key social infrastructure elements within the district. One panelist raised concerns about the lack of clear placement for schools and daycare facilities, pointing out that these elements are fundamental to anchoring a complete community. Another panelist added that ensuring these facilities are well-integrated with public spaces will enhance their usability and



contribute to the broader neighborhood fabric.

The panel also discussed how the station area and northern park space could be better refined to create a more intimate and engaging public realm. A panelist observed that the scale of Station Square seemed too vast and suggested that introducing more defined edges—either through built form or landscape interventions—could help provide a stronger sense of enclosure. Another panelist recommended incorporating elements such as public art or programming to ensure these spaces remain activated throughout the day and evening.

### **Sustainability and Implementation Considerations**

The final section of the discussion focused on sustainability and long-term implementation strategies. Several panelists emphasized that the success of the project hinges not only on its initial design but also on how it evolves over time. One panelist underscored the importance of establishing strong architectural and public realm guidelines to ensure that as individual parcels are developed, they adhere to the larger vision.

Another panelist highlighted concerns about residential density and public space balance, suggesting that ensuring ample green space and community amenities will be critical in maintaining long-term livability. Additionally, there was a call to explore more innovative stormwater management solutions, such as integrating green infrastructure within roadways and public spaces.

The panel closed the discussion by emphasizing the need for a robust, clear implementation framework that guides future developments while allowing for flexibility and adaptation. Panelists expressed enthusiasm for the project's vision but reinforced the need for careful attention to execution, ensuring that the final outcome reflects the ambitious goals set forth in the master plan.