

CITY OF TORONTO DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

MINUTES: MEETING 5 – July 16, 2025

The Design Review Panel met in-person and virtually on Wednesday, July 16, 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 June 18, 2025, by email.

MEETING 5 INDEX

1. Tamil Community Centre (1st Review)



Tamil Community Centre

CITY OF TORONTO - DESIGN REVIEW PANEL MINUTES

DESIGN REVIEW	First Review
APPLICATION	City Lands - OPA and ZBA
DEVELOPER	City of Toronto

PRESENTATIONS

CITY STAFF	Rosanna Punit, Community Planning Swathika Anandan, Urban Design
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DESIGN TEAM	John Mckenna, GH3 Architects
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VOTE	None
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REVIEW PARTICIPANTS

CHAIR	Meg Graham
PANELISTS	Jim Gough, Meg Graham, Jessica Hutcheon, Olivia Keung, Joe Lobko, Michael Leckman, James Melvin, Juhee Oh, Ralph Giannone, 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. The Tamil Community Centre is adjacent to the Rouge Park. Are there any opportunities to look at incorporating natural elements as part of the design?

2. The proposed built form aims to reflect Tamil cultural identity in a meaningful yet contemporary way. Do you have any recommendations for how design elements within the public realm might further support this objective?

Summary of Project's Key Points

The Panel expressed strong appreciation for the ambition and cultural significance of this early-stage proposal, commending its architectural sophistication and the boldness of its vision. Members emphasized that their comments are intended to guide the next phase of design, helping the project realize its full potential as a landmark deeply connected to its natural setting.

Landscape and Site Planning

A major theme of the discussion focused on the landscape and overall site plan. Panel members encouraged the team to think of the building as a “building in a park,” with a landscape strategy equal in ambition to the architecture. They advised clearer definition and programming of public spaces, with generous shade and planting to reduce heat and runoff and to weave the site into the Rouge. Questions were raised about the size and configuration of the drop-off and parking areas, suggesting that hard surfaces be reduced, parking split into two locations, and alternative access explored through the hydro corridor. The location of exterior amenities, such as the playground, should also be reconsidered to ensure optimal sun exposure and easy access. A comprehensive approach to stormwater management and flood protection was encouraged, so the site can perform as a resilient community refuge.

Architecture and Materiality

In discussing architecture and materiality, the Panel observed that the building's monumentality should be carefully balanced with the surrounding natural context. They questioned whether the proposed auditorium is the most flexible space for the anticipated range of events and encouraged setting clear sustainability priorities, with design simplification where appropriate to improve energy and thermal performance.

Public Realm Delivery and Stewardship

The Panel stressed the importance of long-term public realm delivery and stewardship. They called for a clear strategy and dedicated budget to create, maintain, and manage exterior public spaces, ensuring these areas remain vibrant and welcoming over time. Finally, they urged the team to celebrate the river and adjacent natural features more visibly, enriching the open plaza and grounding the project in its unique setting.

Overall, the Panel supports the project's direction and looks forward to seeing these refinements—particularly the deeper integration of architecture and landscape—shape the next stage of design.

Panel Commentary

Site Context and Adjacencies

The design team was commended for their clear and thoughtful approach to the building's relationship to its surrounding context. The panel recognized the significant cultural and environmental aspects of the site, particularly its adjacency to Rouge Park. Panelists noted that the site's location at the edge of the city should be leveraged more effectively to integrate the building with the surrounding natural features. The building itself is visually striking but lacks sufficient engagement with its natural surroundings. Further emphasis should be placed on enhancing the connection between the building and the park, ensuring the building doesn't just sit at the edge of the park but becomes a seamless extension of it.

Circulation and Access

The circulation plan for the project was generally praised, with particular attention given to managing the flow of visitors through the site. However, concerns were raised about the drop-off area, specifically its potential to create congestion and its current lack of consideration for cyclists and pedestrians. The panel urged the design team to explore solutions that would allow for smoother traffic flow, especially during events, where high volumes of people will be in the area. It was suggested that a more detailed study of the drop-off area, including how buses, heavy vehicles, and pedestrians interact, would be valuable in preventing future logistical challenges. There was also a discussion about the building's entrances. The current layout, particularly the southeast entrance, was questioned as it may not provide sufficient visibility or prominence. Panel members recommended reconsidering this entrance's position to create a more welcoming experience for visitors, especially those approaching from Don Mills Road. In this context, panel members emphasized the need for multiple accessible entrances to ensure that the building feels open and welcoming from all sides, contributing to its role as a community hub.

Building Design and Programming

The design of the building was generally well-received, with particular praise for its clean, elegant form and use of light materials that help create a sense of openness. However, some panel members noted that the scale of the building, particularly its front facade, might be too monumental and disconnected from its surroundings. It was suggested that greater transparency and the use of natural materials could help integrate the building more effectively with the landscape, making it feel less isolated from the park and

surrounding environment. One key feature discussed was the potential of flexible, multifunctional spaces within the building. The panel recommended further exploration of how the interior spaces, especially the multi-purpose rooms, could be made more adaptable to support a variety of community activities.

The community kitchen space was identified as a particularly valuable asset, and its connection to the exterior was appreciated. Panelists also suggested that the roof terrace could be better utilized for urban agriculture, adding to the building's community-oriented focus. Another area of concern was the playground's location. The panel suggested relocating the playground to a sunnier area on the site, preferably on the south side, to make it more accessible and comfortable for children. Panelists also noted the need for additional informal public spaces, particularly for people waiting for others to finish programs or games. Creating more flexible spaces, particularly on the second floor, was seen as a way to enhance the building's capacity to host a wider variety of activities and to make it more community oriented.

Landscape and Open Space

While the landscape design was generally appreciated, the panel emphasized the need for better integration between the building and the park. The panel suggested that the building should be more seamlessly connected to the surrounding green spaces, ensuring that the transition from the park to the building feels natural and fluid. The concept of indoor-outdoor rooms was lauded, with panelists recommending that the program along the west side of the building be further developed to interact more meaningfully with the park. Future park design elements, such as water features or sports fields, should be considered to create a more cohesive relationship between the building and the park. The panel also pointed out the lack of shade and greenery around the building, which could make the outdoor spaces uncomfortable, particularly during warmer months. Adding more landscaping elements, including trees and other natural features, was seen as a way to improve the overall experience of the site and to help mitigate heat island effects. In addition, the panel recommended more detailed consideration of stormwater management, suggesting the use of bioswales or other water management techniques to enhance the sustainability of the project and reduce runoff.

Sustainability and Materials

The panel commended the project's commitment to sustainability, particularly its focus on achieving zero-carbon goals. The use of passive design strategies and energy-efficient materials was appreciated, and the panel urged the design team to continue refining these aspects as the project moves forward. Panel members recommended a more detailed exploration of how the building's design can minimize its environmental footprint, particularly in terms of energy use and thermal efficiency. However, some concerns were raised about the choice of materials, particularly the building's facade. While the use of light materials was seen as positive, some panel members felt that more varied textures

and natural materials, such as stone or wood, could help better integrate the building with its natural surroundings. The panel suggested that the base of the building could be enhanced with more engaging textures or colors to help ground the building within its context and create more visual interest at the ground level.

Project Integration and Community Fit

The panel expressed strong support for the overall direction of the project, particularly its potential to serve as a central hub for the Tamil community. The design team's commitment to sustainability and community-focused programming was praised, and it was acknowledged that the building has the potential to become a significant cultural space. However, the panel stressed the importance of further refining the design to ensure that the building and its surrounding spaces work together cohesively. The integration of landscape, sustainability, and functionality will be crucial to the project's long-term success. The panel also noted that the project's success will depend on addressing the challenges related to site organization, landscape planning, and the integration of public spaces. By ensuring that these elements are properly coordinated, the design has the potential to become a landmark project that serves the community while honoring the cultural significance of the Tamil community.

Conclusion Next Steps

In conclusion, the Tamil Community Center project has received strong support from the Design Review Panel, with a general consensus that it has great potential to become a valuable addition to the community. However, further refinement is needed in several key areas, including landscape integration, parking, circulation, and sustainability. With these adjustments, the project will be better positioned to fulfill its goals of creating a welcoming, community-oriented space that integrates harmoniously with its natural surroundings. The panel looks forward to seeing the revised proposal and encourages the design team to continue developing the project with careful attention to these key considerations.

The design team will revise the proposal based on the feedback provided and submit an updated version for further review.