

CITY OF TORONTO DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

MINUTES: MEETING 2 – March 11, 2026

The Design Review Panel met in-person and virtually on Wednesday, March 11, 2026, 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 February 11, 2026, by email.

MEETING 2 INDEX

1. Queen's Park North Revitalization (1st Review)



Queen's Park North Revitalization

CITY OF TORONTO - DESIGN REVIEW PANEL MINUTES

DESIGN REVIEW First Review
APPLICATION City project – Concept Review

PRESENTATIONS

CITY STAFF Shannon Lawrence, Program Manager Urban Design
 David O'Hara, Project Manager SIPA

CONSULTANT Jessica Hutcheon, Partner Janet Rosenberg & Studio
 Todd Douglas, Senior Associate, Landscape Architect Janet
 Rosenberg & Studio

VOTE Support

 Conditions (revisit the composition of programming; further
 advance forest management strategy)

REVIEW PARTICIPANTS

CHAIR Heather Rolleston

PANELISTS Gordon Stratford, Michael Leckman, Dima Cook, Ralph
 Giannone, Jim Gough, Olivia Keung, Sibylle von Knobloch,
 Paul Kulig, Jim Melvin

DRC MEMBERS (UofT) Pat Hanson, Marc Hallé

CONFLICTS Jessica Hutcheon, Juhee Oh



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. General input or advice on concept as the team moves into detailed design
2. Input or advice on the washroom/café location
3. Input on degree to which the proposal considers the civic nature and use of the park for public gathering/demonstration
4. Input on degree to which the proposal responds to and integrates the parks cultural heritage
5. Input on concept and location of tree walk structure

Summary of Project's Key Points

Panel members expressed strong appreciation for the quality of the presentation, noting its evocative, immersive, and thoughtful approach. The project was recognized for its ambition in rethinking the park as a more social and inclusive space, with meaningful programming and strong cultural and ceremonial potential. The following key points highlight areas for further refinement:

Park Vision and Programming

The Panel supported the overall direction toward a more social and program-rich park, with particular appreciation for the diversity of ceremonies and activities proposed. The café and restaurant uses were seen as valuable additions, though it was suggested that the café could engage more lightly with the ground and consider its presence from all sides.

At the same time, members emphasized the importance of balancing programming with the park's role as an oasis for quiet reflection. Care should be taken not to overburden the park with interventions, ensuring that spaces for stillness and respite remain central.

Public Realm and Access

Concerns were raised regarding the park's accessibility, particularly given its current

condition as an “island” surrounded by fast-moving traffic. The Panel encouraged further study of safe and intuitive crossings, potentially integrated with key elements such as the café.

Movement within the park was generally supported, though suggestions were made to introduce additional loops and moments for pause, encouraging visitors not only to pass through but to linger and engage with the space.

Landscape, Ecology, and Tree Strategy

The Panel strongly emphasized the importance of tree health, soil conditions, and long-term ecological resilience. A comprehensive forest management strategy was recommended, alongside continued focus on regeneration and the protection of significant “hero” trees.

While the tree walk was appreciated as a concept, some concern was expressed regarding its potential impact and intrusiveness. Refinement may be needed to ensure it integrates sensitively with the existing landscape.

Opportunities to incorporate sustainable approaches—such as low-carbon strategies and reclaimed materials—were also encouraged

Commemoration and Cultural Expression

There was appreciation for the project’s respectful approach to commemoration and its intention to evolve beyond traditional colonial narratives. The commemorative garden was discussed as an important element, with suggestions to explore more abstract or flexible interpretations that allow for future evolution.

The Panel encouraged continued exploration of public art and interpretive elements, including the possibility of ongoing and adaptive forms of commemoration over time.

Design Refinement and User Experience

Panel members encouraged further refinement of spatial scale and sequencing, noting that some program elements are separated by large distances. Introducing more cues, moments of interest, or intermediate spaces could enhance the user experience.

Additional considerations included accessibility (e.g., widening areas of the tree walk), opportunities for elevated experiences such as roof access, and creating quieter zones oriented toward contemplation rather than activity.

Operations, Maintenance, and Long-Term Stewardship

The Panel highlighted the importance of maintenance, servicing, and long-term stewardship, including waste management and operational considerations for programmed elements.

Strong support was expressed for partnerships, innovation, and community stewardship models, including the potential role of “friends of the park” or similar groups. The idea of the park as an evolving, adaptive landscape was seen as a positive direction.

Overall, the Panel expressed strong support for the project’s vision and direction, with constructive feedback aimed at balancing programming with ecological integrity, enhancing accessibility and user experience, and ensuring long-term resilience and stewardship of the park.

Panel Vote

The Panel voted in support of the proposal, with the condition that the project return for a subsequent review. Support is contingent on further refinement of the programming composition and advancement of a comprehensive forest management strategy.

Panel Commentary

Project Vision and Design Approach

Panel members expressed strong appreciation for the clarity, depth, and evocative quality of the presentation. The proposal was recognized for its immersive storytelling and layered approach, successfully conveying the experiential qualities of the park. The project was seen as ambitious and complex, with a strong overarching vision that links ecology, culture, and social use.

At the same time, several panelists encouraged a more focused approach, suggesting that not all ideas need to be fully realized at once. There was a general recommendation to prioritize key moves and avoid overdesigning, allowing the park to evolve over time.

Balance Between Programming and Respite

A key theme across the discussion was the importance of maintaining the park as a place of quiet reflection and respite. While the proposed programming and social activation were widely supported, panel members cautioned against overloading the site.

The park's role as an "oasis" within an increasingly dense urban context was emphasized, with recommendations to ensure that passive, contemplative spaces remain central. Clustering program elements were generally supported, though refinement may be needed to balance activity with stillness.

Landscape Strategy, Tree Health, and Long-Term Resilience

Panel members strongly emphasized that the trees and overall ecological health of the park are its defining asset and long-term legacy. A comprehensive forest management and soil strategy was identified as critical, going beyond standard arborist reporting to address the health of the landscape as a system.

There was encouragement to take more decisive and potentially bold actions in the short term to ensure long-term canopy success, including soil remediation, selective tree replacement, and prioritization of "hero trees." The regeneration approach was widely supported, though it should more clearly inform design decisions moving forward.

Circulation, Access, and Movement

Concerns were raised about the park's accessibility, given its condition as an "island" surrounded by high-traffic streets. Panel members encouraged further exploration of safe and legible arrival points, with clearer hierarchy and improved pedestrian connections.

Within the park, there was support for enhancing circulation by introducing more loops and varied pathways to support different types of users, including families, seniors, and those seeking longer walking routes. The need to encourage both movement and lingering was highlighted.

Built Elements and Programming (Café, Pavilion, Facilities)

The inclusion of a café and public washroom facility was broadly supported, particularly in response to the growing residential population. The central location was seen as logical in terms of pedestrian flows, though some panelists suggested further study of siting, orientation, and servicing requirements.

Operational considerations—including waste management, servicing access, and long-term maintenance—were identified as critical and should be carefully integrated into the design. Some panel members suggested testing food-related programming (e.g., temporary or mobile options) before committing to permanent built form.

Tree Walk and Elevated Structures

The proposed tree walk generated mixed responses. While its intent to connect people with the canopy was appreciated, several panelists raised concerns regarding accessibility, safety, maintenance, and long-term viability.

Questions were raised about its width, usability in winter conditions, and potential impact on root systems. Some panel members suggested reconsidering its necessity or exploring alternative ways to achieve similar experiential goals with less intervention.

Commemoration, Heritage, and Cultural Expression

Panel members supported the project's respectful approach to cultural heritage and evolving narratives, particularly the shift toward a more social and inclusive park. The variety of ceremonial and commemorative opportunities was appreciated.

However, there were suggestions to further rethink traditional elements—such as the commemorative garden—toward more contemporary, flexible, and inclusive interpretations. The positioning and treatment of existing monuments were also discussed, with differing views on their role as gateways or symbolic features.

Public Realm Experience and User Behavior

The importance of designing for real user behavior was emphasized. Panel members encouraged the team to study how the park is used at different times and conditions, and

to reflect these patterns in the design.

Issues such as safety, visibility, and intuitive wayfinding were raised, particularly in relation to enclosed or inward-facing elements. The need to create inviting destinations and clear visual cues to draw people into the park was also highlighted.

Sustainability and Material Strategy

There was strong support for integrating sustainability more explicitly into the project, including low-carbon materials, reuse strategies, and educational components. Panel members encouraged the project to demonstrate leadership in sustainable design and to communicate these strategies clearly to the public.

Operations, Maintenance, and Stewardship

Long-term operations and maintenance were identified as critical to the success of the project. Panel members stressed the importance of robust planning for waste management, servicing, and seasonal use.

The idea of stewardship—through partnerships, community involvement, and ongoing management—was strongly supported. The project was seen as an opportunity to establish a long-term model for adaptive, evolving landscape management.

Design Development and Implementation

Panel members encouraged the next phase of work to more clearly connect the vision with technical strategies, particularly in relation to landscape systems, infrastructure, and implementation.

Further refinement is needed to resolve tensions between formal and informal elements, and to ensure that design decisions are grounded in long-term ecological and operational realities.

Overall, the Panel expressed strong support for the project's vision and ambition, with recommendations focused on prioritizing ecological health, refining program balance, strengthening accessibility and user experience, and ensuring long-term resilience and stewardship of the park.

Future Review

The Panel recommends that the project return for a subsequent review. The next submission should demonstrate a more resolved park organization and progress at the Design Development stage, while maintaining flexibility to address Panel feedback.

Forest Management Strategy

City staff clarified that the forest management work will be advanced as an Urban Forest Stewardship Plan / Forest Management Plan, informed by City Forestry guidelines and ongoing technical and public consultation.