

# CITY OF TORONTO DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

## MINUTES: MEETING 8 – November 19, 2025

The Design Review Panel met in-person and virtually on Wednesday, November 19, 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 October 15, 2025, by email.

### MEETING 8 INDEX

1. Growing Marlee-Glencairn Study (2<sup>nd</sup> Review)
2. Liberty Village Planning Study (1<sup>st</sup> Review)



# Growing Marlee-Glencairn Study

## CITY OF TORONTO - DESIGN REVIEW PANEL MINUTES

DESIGN REVIEW                      Second Review  
APPLICATION                        City Study

### PRESENTATIONS

CITY STAFF                            Valeria Maurizio, SIPA  
   Michael Sakalauskas and Abhinav Sukumar , Urban Design

CONSULTANT                        Ute Maya-Giambattista and Hart Young, O2 Planning+ Design

VOTE                                    None

### REVIEW PARTICIPANTS

CHAIR                                    Michael Leckman

PANELISTS                            Gordon Stratford, Heather Rolleston, Jim Melvin, Meg  
   Graham, Olivia Keung, Paul Kulig, Ralph Giannone

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. Do the options strike the right balance of density, height, and land-use mix to support growth that is appropriate for this context?
2. Are there design elements or frameworks the panel recommends carrying forward as part of a preferred option and what challenges do you anticipate with implementation?

## **Summary of Project's Key Points**

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

Thank you to staff and Panel members for a constructive discussion. The Panel recognizes the ambition of the study and the complexity of planning for long-term densification in an area with established character.

### **CHARACTER + EXEMPLARS**

Panel members emphasized that both existing and proposed character must be integral to growth. Densification should draw from the neighbourhood's identity rather than override it. The Panel encouraged identifying exemplars to demonstrate how incremental change can be elevated into a model for future development.

### **GREEN CONNECTIONS + THE ALLEN EDGE**

Strong support was expressed for creating continuous “tendrils” of green that connect the neighbourhood rather than relying solely on discrete park spaces. Enhancing the edges of the Allen as pedestrian-, cycling-, and green-oriented corridors was identified as critical to creating a cohesive civic experience. Reinvestment in the Marlee streetscape, including tree canopy, will also be essential.

### **DENSITY + LONG-TERM VISION**

Panel members highlighted the importance of clearly communicating how density will unfold over time. A balanced distribution of growth (Option 2) was generally supported, as it may better integrate communities. The Panel encouraged articulating a compelling long-term vision that helps residents understand what this neighbourhood could become over several decades.

### **CIVIC FOCUS + RETAIL STRATEGY**

Opportunities to introduce neighbourhood-serving retail and civic anchors were seen positively. However, caution was raised about overextending mixed-use areas. Focused, well-designed nodes anchored by public space may be more successful than broad dispersion.

Overall, the Panel encouraged staff to continue refining a vision that integrates character, green continuity, civic identity, and incremental growth in a cohesive and legible way.

## **Panel Commentary**

### **Character, Identity, and “What Makes This Place Worth Living In”**

A recurring theme was that, beyond infrastructure metrics and walking distances, the study needs to better capture and carry forward “character”—either by revealing what already exists (even if subtle or “hidden”) or by intentionally shaping a new identity. Panelists emphasized that successful long-term densification depends not only on the technical framework, but also on whether the plan can protect and build upon the neighbourhood’s heartbeat: the small-scale elements, patterns, and lived experiences that people already value. Several comments reinforced the idea that the plan should be compelling not just as a housing model, but as a place-making vision.

### **Green Network, Canopy Loss, and “Tendrils of Green”**

Panelists strongly emphasized the need for a more explicit and connected green strategy—especially because parts of the study area already show limited canopy and growth will likely intensify that pressure. The concept of “tendrils of green” was highlighted as a useful way to think beyond large parks: narrower, continuous green links that provide shade, comfort, and ecological continuity across blocks. Panelists asked for clearer direction on where new parks, pocket parks, and green connections will go, and how they will stitch through mid-rise areas where green space can easily disappear without firm planning.

### **Parks and Key Connections Across the Area**

Panelists focused on strengthening connections between existing parks and potential new civic greens. There was interest in how major parks on both sides of the expressway could become more than isolated destinations, especially through planned linkages that reinforce identity and legibility. A notable suggestion was to explore whether a major park could become a symbolic and functional bridge between areas—an aspirational move, but one seen as potentially transformative and worth testing through the plan framework.

### **The Expressway Edge as a Civic Experience**

Panelists were clear that the expressway is both an asset and a barrier: it supports mobility, but also produces division and weak edges. Because the plan anticipates more density along the expressway, panelists urged the study to address how to humanize the edge conditions—with better pedestrian and cycling experiences, greener buffers, and improved comfort. The goal is not just to add buildings near the expressway, but to ensure the “life above and beside it” remains enjoyable, safe, and liveable.

## **Preference for Option 2 and Neighbourhood Integration**

Across comments, there was a general leaning toward Option 2, largely because it was seen as more balanced in how it distributes density and improves connectivity between areas on both sides. Panelists noted that Option 1 appeared more weighted to one side and could unintentionally reinforce separation rather than integration. Option 2 was seen as offering stronger potential for knitting communities together—provided that pedestrianization, green connections, and street-quality upgrades are delivered as part of implementation.

## **Pedestrianization, Active Transportation, and Network Hierarchy**

Panelists supported strong active transportation planning, but cautioned that the mobility framework may need hierarchy and prioritization. Several comments noted that making every street “do everything” can result in diluted outcomes. A more strategic approach was encouraged: clarify which routes are primary (e.g., transit/retail movement), which are secondary, and which are best suited to be quieter “green streets” that prioritize walking and cycling. Connectivity to broader regional networks (including key trail systems) was also identified as important, with emphasis on making access intuitive and comfortable.

## **Implementation Risks in Neighbourhood Intensification**

Panelists recognized that intensification into established neighbourhood areas will be one of the hardest aspects to implement. Concerns included uneven redevelopment patterns (single lots vs. assembled sites), the potential for awkward party-wall conditions, and the risk of poor-quality outcomes if site servicing and building mechanics are not carefully anticipated. Panelists encouraged scenario-testing: identify what outcomes are unacceptable (e.g., poor streetscapes, exposed servicing, cluttered frontages) and where flexibility is appropriate. The emphasis was on designing the framework so the incremental 50-year change still produces coherent, liveable streets.

## **Public Realm Conflicts at Grade**

Panelists highlighted recurring “ground-floor battles” that will intensify with growth: bike lanes, loading, garbage, pick-up/drop-off, curb cuts, landscaping, and utilities competing for limited space. The panel urged the study to address these conflicts early—through clearer public realm standards and street sections—so the resulting environment supports trees, comfort, and safe movement rather than becoming congested and compromised.

## **Community Services, Fine-Grain Retail, and Corner-Store Nodes**

Panelists stressed that a complete neighbourhood needs more than housing and transit access. The plan should anticipate and enable community-serving uses—small retail, daycare, libraries, and everyday services—distributed in ways that feel natural and walkable. The concept of introducing small nodes (including corner-store opportunities) was seen as a valuable layer that helps residents meet daily needs locally and reinforces “neighbourhood-ness” beyond the transit station.

## **Engagement Readiness and Communicating Benefits**

A key warning was that even a strong technical plan may face resistance if residents see only mass change (e.g., large areas of intensified zoning) without a clear picture of benefits. Panelists noted that the more ambitious option will require a persuasive narrative: show what is wonderful about the future place—greener streets, better connections, improved comfort, access to parks, and neighbourhood services—so the community can understand the “why” and feel invested in the outcome.

## **Overall Impressions**

Panelists thanked the City team and the consultant team for a clear, well-structured presentation and a package that was easy to follow. The work was seen as layered, legible, and helpful in illustrating the implications of two distinct options. Panelists appreciated that the graphics made trade-offs understandable and supported a meaningful discussion about how the area could evolve over time.

# Liberty Village Planning Study

## CITY OF TORONTO - DESIGN REVIEW PANEL MINUTES

DESIGN REVIEW                      First Review

APPLICATION                        City Study

### PRESENTATIONS

CITY STAFF                            George Pantazis, Community Planning  
Junayed Chowdhury Md and Vera Autilio, Urban Design

VOTE                                    None

### REVIEW PARTICIPANTS

CHAIR                                  Michael Leckman

PANELISTS                            Gordon Stratford, Heather Rolleston, Jim Melvin, Meg  
Graham, Olivia Keung, Paul Kulig, Ralph Giannone

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. What building heights are appropriate given that Liberty Village sits within two Major Transit Station Areas and the existing context of Liberty West as a former employment area that will now permit residential uses? Are height transitions appropriate?
2. How can new developments contribute to enhancing the public realm?



3. Do the public realm opportunities identified in the plan appropriately reflect the future, denser Liberty Village and its distinctive character?
4. How can new development within the Liberty Village area be compatible with and enhance the existing heritage context?
5. What is missing in Liberty Village that should be actively pursued?
6. How should current and future development applications contribute to the achievement of complete communities?

## **Summary of Project's Key Points**

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

Thank you to the City team and consultants for a thoughtful presentation and to Panel members for a rich discussion. The Panel recognizes that this is an area with significant existing character and vitality, and that the central challenge is not how to create identity, but how to protect, evolve, and amplify what already exists while accommodating growth.

### **CHARACTER + PRESERVATION**

Panel members emphasized that Liberty Village possesses a distinctive and fragmented vitality that should be understood more deeply before being reshaped. The current character—industrial, fine-grained, and at times picturesque—derives strength from its diversity and irregularity. The Panel encouraged more innovative mapping and analysis of this vitality so it can inform where and how density is introduced.

The discussion reinforced that intact environments—such as those seen in projects like the Brickworks, Waterworks, and the Distillery District—demonstrate how strong city direction and clear expectations can result in successful outcomes. A similarly intentional framework may be needed here to ensure that growth reinforces rather than erodes identity.

### **HEIGHT + DISTRIBUTION OF DENSITY**

Panel members questioned whether taller buildings could be more strategically located—such as nearer to rail corridors—to reduce impacts on sensitive areas and preserve valued districts. There was discussion that, in some cases, greater height may allow slimmer shadows, smaller podiums, and the preservation of more meaningful open space. The Panel encouraged continued exploration of whether height can be used surgically to protect character rather than simply increase intensity.

## **NON-RESIDENTIAL + EMPLOYMENT VITALITY**

The Panel underscored the importance of non-residential uses and employment in the area. The current concentration of jobs contributes significantly to Liberty Village's vitality. Mapping and amplifying this employment character will be critical in shaping a balanced, complete neighbourhood as density increases.

## **PUBLIC REALM + LIBERTY STREET**

The eastern edge of Liberty Street was identified as a key opportunity for improvement. Traffic calming and reclaiming space for pedestrians were strongly supported. The Panel encouraged prioritizing public realm upgrades, including trees, paving, lighting, and materials—to reinforce both existing and future character.

There was also interest in exploring whether a proportional “formula” for community space, linked to overall density, could be established to ensure that civic amenities grow alongside development.

## **OPEN SPACE + LANEWAYS**

Panel members suggested further analysis of open space capacity—particularly laneways and civic spaces—in parallel with proposed density. Understanding how much usable space remains as intensification occurs will be critical to maintaining livability.

## **ADAPTIVE REUSE + CATALYST SITES**

The concept of circularity and adaptive reuse was encouraged, particularly in relation to the Police Services building. Reimagining such sites as community-serving anchors could act as catalysts for neighbourhood identity. Similarly, Lamport Stadium was discussed as a potential generator of new design thinking, particularly at its edges, to strengthen surrounding streets.

## **FORWARD VISION**

Finally, the Panel suggested exploring a unifying architectural datum—potentially masonry-based—that reflects and evolves the district's industrial heritage while allowing variation and dynamism across new development.

Overall, the Panel encouraged a careful, surgical approach to intensification—one that preserves Liberty Village's distinctive vitality, strengthens its public realm, and introduces density in ways that reinforce rather than dilute its character.

# Panel Commentary

## Overview and Context

Panel members thanked the City team for the comprehensive presentation and acknowledged the complexity of the study. The discussion noted that, unlike many redevelopment sites where character must be created, Liberty Village already possesses a strong and identifiable character. The central challenge identified by the Panel was how to accommodate significant density and transit-oriented development while protecting and enhancing the area's existing heritage fabric and vitality.

Several panelists reflected on past lost opportunities across the city where heritage assets were not successfully integrated into redevelopment. Examples of successful adaptive reuse projects such as the Brickworks, Waterworks, and the Distillery District were cited as precedents demonstrating that strong direction and clear expectations from the City can lead to positive outcomes.

## Heritage Preservation and Placement of Height

Significant concern was expressed regarding the placement of very tall buildings within areas of concentrated heritage assets. Panel members emphasized that once heritage buildings are lost, they cannot be replaced, and therefore careful siting of height is critical.

There was discussion about whether taller buildings should be strategically located closer to the rail corridor or less sensitive edges of the site in order to protect the critical mass of heritage buildings in the core of the district. Some panelists suggested that increased height in appropriate locations could potentially reduce podium scale, create slimmer shadows, and preserve more open space if handled carefully.

The Panel requested future modeling and shadow studies to better understand how density could be sculpted to protect heritage clusters while still meeting growth targets.

## Non-Residential Uses and Employment

Panel members emphasized the importance of maintaining non-residential uses and employment vitality within Liberty Village. While there was uncertainty about the appropriate percentage allocation, there was agreement that employment uses should not be eliminated, nor should residential overwhelm the existing commercial character.

The need to “thread the needle” between over-intensifying residential uses and over-burdening the site with employment was acknowledged. Maintaining the neighbourhood’s economic diversity was considered essential to preserving its vitality.

### **Public Realm and Liberty Street**

The eastern edge of Liberty Street was identified as a priority area for improvement. Panel members supported traffic calming and widening sidewalks to enhance pedestrian comfort. There was discussion about transforming Liberty Street into a slower, promenade-like environment with enhanced planting, paving, lighting, and public seating.

Several members noted that the current pedestrian experience is constrained by narrow sidewalks and excessive vehicular priority. Reducing on-street parking in select areas to improve the pedestrian realm was suggested.

It was further noted that Liberty Street should play a key role in setting the tone for courtyards, laneways, and new development along its edges.

### **Organic Movement Patterns and Spatial Character**

Panel members observed that Liberty Village’s public realm is not a conventional grid but a fragmented and organic network of streets, laneways, patios, and small plazas. Several members encouraged deeper experiential mapping of how the area functions throughout different times of day and week.

The intersection near local restaurants and gathering spaces was identified as an example of unplanned but successful convergence. Panel members suggested that the plan should reinforce such nodes rather than impose overly rigid circulation concepts.

Concerns were raised about over-formalizing mid-block connections. The Panel encouraged allowing the network to remain somewhat irregular and layered, reflecting how people naturally move through the site.

### **Open Space, Courtyards, and Laneways**

Panel members suggested preparing quantitative analysis comparing the area of laneways, courtyards, parks, and open spaces to better understand how new development could protect and expand this open space network.

The idea of embedding courtyards within larger blocks was strongly supported. Courtyards were seen as a way to introduce humane scale and open space within

intensified development. The Panel suggested that future development should add to, rather than diminish, the total open space inventory.

There was discussion about whether a minimum open space or community space ratio, tied to density, could be introduced as part of the planning framework.

### **Community Infrastructure and Civic Anchors**

Panel members emphasized the need for community-serving uses beyond housing and restaurants, including medical services, family amenities, and spaces for seniors. It was noted that the area currently lacks facilities that support long-term family life.

The Police Services building was identified as a potential catalyst site for community uses, adaptive reuse, or redevelopment. There was discussion about whether the site could accommodate a community centre or other civic program.

Lamport Stadium was also identified as having untapped potential. The edges of the stadium were seen as opportunities for activation and integration into the surrounding neighbourhood. Some panelists suggested reconsidering the park design competition timing to ensure it aligns with the broader neighbourhood vision.

### **Mobility and Pedestrian Experience**

Concerns were raised regarding vehicular dominance and traffic speeds, particularly along Liberty Street. Panel members advocated for a pedestrian-first approach and suggested exploring reduced speeds, enhanced crossings, and a more promenade-like character.

The Liberty “loop” concept was discussed, with some panelists suggesting that intuitive wayfinding and visual continuity may be more effective than rigid circulation paths.

Cycling infrastructure was also noted as needing careful design integration to ensure safety and visual coherence.

### **Built Form Character and Architectural Expression**

Panel members discussed the opportunity to establish a consistent architectural datum within the neighbourhood, potentially rooted in masonry construction to reflect industrial heritage. A layered approach was suggested, where a masonry base creates continuity at lower levels, with more contemporary materials expressed above.

There was concern about generic glass tower typologies eroding neighbourhood identity. The Panel encouraged a distinctive architectural language that reinforces Liberty Village's personality rather than replicating standard downtown forms.

### **Sustainability and Material Reuse**

The concept of circularity and material reuse was positively received. Panel members suggested that adaptive reuse and low-carbon construction methods could reinforce character while meeting sustainability objectives.

The possibility of shared mechanical systems or district energy was briefly discussed, including whether such systems could contribute to recognizable architectural elements (e.g., chimneys or industrial references).

### **Overall Observations**

Panel members acknowledged the conundrum of balancing transit-oriented development, housing demand, heritage preservation, and community livability. There was recognition that this study must carefully manage density placement, public realm enhancement, and preservation of vitality.

The Panel encouraged continued refinement of modeling, heritage strategy, open space analysis, and public realm detailing in future submissions.