

# West Annex Heritage Conservation District Study – Indigenous Engagement Meetings – Native Canadian Centre of Toronto and Wigwamen Terrace

## Meeting Summaries

### **Overview**

Three Indigenous Engagement meetings were hosted by City of Toronto Heritage Planning in collaboration with Nbisiing Consulting on February 24 & 25, 2026 and on March 6, 2026.

The purpose of the meetings was to seek input on whether there are places within the West Annex HCD Study area that are valued by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit community members, with a particular focus on how these community members value the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto (or NCCT) and Wigwamen Terrace (or WT). The feedback gathered from these meetings will inform the project team's understanding of the area's potential cultural heritage value and sense of place.

The purpose of the project is to determine whether the West Annex HCD Study area merits designation as a Heritage Conservation District under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act. An area's merit is determined through a comprehensive combination of historic research, character analysis, and community engagement.

All three meetings were facilitated by Bob Goulais of Nbisiing Consulting. As a facilitator who is not advocating for any particular outcome of this project, Bob Goulais' role was to capture the diverse perspectives shared during the dialogue. This meeting summary does not indicate an endorsement of any of these perspectives on the part of Nbisiing Consulting or the City of Toronto.

The following sections reflect summaries of the conversations had with participants during the meetings. Participant responses have been edited for length and clarity. Due to the similarity of the topics discussed, the feedback received from these meetings has been combined into one summary.

# Meeting 1: NCCT Lunch Hour Conversations

## Meeting Details

West Annex Heritage Conservation District (HCD) Study – Indigenous Engagement Meeting  
Native Canadian Centre of Toronto (16 Spadina Road)  
February 24, 2006  
11:00 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

### **Attendees:**

- 10 community members
- Bob Goulais (Nbsiing Consulting)
- Ana Martins, Colin Yu (City of Toronto, Heritage Planning)

The meeting format was a series of in-person, informal conversations between Nbsiing Consulting, Heritage Planning staff, and attendees of the NCCT's lunch program.

## Key Themes

- Interviewees described the importance of the NCCT as a place of gathering, connection and community, as well as accessing services, spiritual healing, culture and language
- Cultural safety was raised
- The West Annex neighbourhood was not mentioned as important (apart from the St. Thomas Spiritual Garden near U of T)
- The building itself is reminiscent of a Residential School through its architecture
- The need for more visible markers of Indigenous presence was raised (either through more centres like the NCCT, language through the naming of places, or flags)
- Interviewees are community members from a diverse range of reserves from across Canada
- Many are long-term residents in the city
- Many interviewees (if not all) were Residential School or Sixties Scoop survivors and the NCCT offers a way to be connected to their roots/their Indigeneity
- When speaking about all that the NCCT offers, the building itself was not important to participants, but its role as a culturally-safe space to be in community and provide access to services was highlighted as very important

## Feedback Summary

### **B. and J.**

- B. is from Nova Scotia (Mi' kmaq) but has lived in Toronto for 36 years; has lived off and on in the neighbourhood and knows the neighbourhood quite well
- J. is from northern Alberta (northern Cree); she is a Residential School and Sixties Scoop survivor; 2 years ago she and her siblings reconnected

- J. loves the neighbourhood; she indicated that there is history to this place (noted that this area was once under water) and that the word Spadina is pronounced “Ishpaadinaa” meaning a high place in Ojibwe
- The NCCT is important to both B. and J.; the NCCT offers language and culture as a way to connect with community; they attend socials and meet and connect with friends; it offers opportunities such as drumming
- The NCCT is in a very central place near the subway, library, Shoppers Drug Mart, etc.
- The NCCT building reminds J. of a Residential School; the wood doors are a reminder and can be triggering; J. also stated that telling the truth about Residential Schools is also important
- Toronto means ‘meeting place’; need to build more centres like the NCCT
- The NCCT offers a place for ceremony and food is offered (like the daily lunches)
- Other places in the area that are important is the spiritual garden outside a church; it’s a ceremonial space with a bench (The participant may be referring to St. Thomas Anglican Church which hosts a “Spiritual Garden.”)

#### S.

- Has been in Toronto for 40 years and been coming to the NCCT for 30 years and now lives at Wigwamen (she’s Algonquin)
- The Thursday evening social is important; cultural programmes are important and so is food
- Funding is an issue now at the NCCT; there’s not enough programming/services for 2-Spirit people
- The NCCT is a landmark: it’s a gathering place for everyone; important place for ceremony like the sacred fire for Ginny (a Wigwamen resident who has passed away); it’s a safe place both culturally and physically; there is a variety of people who go there
- Memories: socials; ceremony is important (she pointed to the sacred fire for Ginny); birthday songs and round dances; it’s a place to celebrate special occasions
- The NCCT being in the neighbourhood is important; the NCCT is rented out to other Indigenous service organizations; it’s a hub; the totem pole draws people there; lots of artwork; renowned Anishinaabe artist Norval Morrisseau used to go there

#### J. and R.

- J. has been going to the NCCT for 34 years, former board member, teacher worked for Toronto Metropolitan University (or TMU; formerly Ryerson), St. Mikes; introduced her kids to the NCCT when they were young
- R. is a singer, teacher worked for Toronto District School Board
- NCCT: is important for learning, sharing, career, cultural events, funerals; it’s an important hub for family and youth services; cultural and social gathering – a place to learn
- Feelings about the NCCT building: the building itself is not her history or her people’s history; glad that the totem pole is there and the art vault
- She mentioned a historical society, the Birds of a Feather program, and referenced artist Phil Cote of the Tecumseh Collective.

- R. left Toronto and came back; first used the NCCT when it was on Beverly Street
- Other Indigenous organizations used by J.: Native Women Resource Centre (on Gerrard)
- Other places that are important: Kensington Market, the Toronto Public Library branch next door to the NCCT (J. mentioned that the building has the name written in Cree syllabics, which is important and would like to see more Indigenous place naming)
- Bathurst and Bloor and Christie and Bloor were areas that were raised as important because of the Native Youth Resource Centre at Bathurst and Bloor and Christie Pits as the site of occasional celebrations (and it's also where a Sacred Fire is held on a regular basis)
- Having a space is important for ceremony, respecting treaty and showing respect for all relations; community gathering and connection; sweat lodges are important too
- Future: encouraged us to reach out to the youth; listen to the elders; offer more resources to the community for healthcare and mental health
- CAMH at Ossington and Queen was mentioned as was the Okichitaw Martial Arts program offered by George Lapine at the NCCT

#### S.

- Attending the NCCT since 1990s; she's originally from Moosenee (near James Bay in northern Ontario); she currently lives at Bathurst and Vaughan
- NCCT is where she hangs out with friends; learns how to braid; attend Thursday night socials
- Maintaining her connection to elders is important and listening to their stories; there are elders from home who she meets here and knows many people who have passed away (Jim Mason, Vern Harper, Lillian McGregor)
- Storytelling and Indigenous history are important to her
- She noted that for Residential School survivors, getting together to talk is healing (she indicated that this was true for her)
- She was 16 when she came to Toronto and described her kids as "urban Indians"
- She worked at the NCCT over the years, at the shop and with the senior programming
- Other places in the neighbourhood that are important: Honest Eds (sadly gone), the Brunswick House, and the church with the spiritual garden
- She feels that the NCCT is haunted

#### K. and W.

- K: Has been going to the NCCT for 53 years, attended the NCCT when it was on Beverly Street
- It's a meeting place and a place for contact; his mother is an elder who lives next door at Wigwamen;
- His memories include parties; dances; Christmas dinners
- Christie Pits was mentioned as a place for the large yearly picnics for Wigwamen
- The NCCT is important because there's a network of services that he can access; friendship centres are important for that
- The NCCT offers personal support

- It's also a meeting place to gather for lunch or meet other members of one's reserve (he mentioned that it's a meeting place for First Nations communities and gave his personal example of when he arrived from Sudbury as a 17-year-old in the 1970s, he met family members there by chance)
- The NCCT building: there are helpful people, it's warm and welcoming; one can attend pow-wows and meet with elders; and it's an important place to learn language
- It's a visible presence of the Anishinaabe
- W: from the Dakota people of Saskatchewan and has been in Toronto since 2008 (off and on); has been going to the NCCT for about 5 years
- Has lunch at the NCCT, attends social nights on Thursday to listen to the drum song; attend pow-wows ; she meets and connects with people; described it as a place "to meet other Natives;" it's a place for everyone and for all ages; for education and programming (youth and elder); Gift shop for smudging and medicines; it's a resource centre for accessing other services in the city; AA services are offered here

#### **R. and L.**

- R. has been going to the NCCT for over 16 years
  - Her sister worked here so she would come for lunch
  - When her sister died, she was supported by the community here;
  - She mentioned that the Toronto Public Library branch next door is important to her
  - Other places of importance: Four Winds at Queen and Bathurst
- L. has been going to the NCCT since the 1980s. She initially volunteered, then worked in the kitchen, then went on to do maintenance.
- The NCCT is a place to meet people; it's in a good location near the library and Shoppers
- Council Fire at Dundas and Parliament is another place of importance to her

# Meeting 2: NCCT Lunch Hour Conversations

## Meeting Details

West Annex Heritage Conservation District (HCD) Study – Indigenous Engagement Meeting  
 Native Canadian Centre of Toronto (16 Spadina Road)  
 February 25, 2006  
 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

### **Attendees:**

- 11 community members
- Bob Goulais (Nbsiing Consulting)
- Ana Martins, Colin Yu (City of Toronto, Heritage Planning)

The meeting format was a series of in person, informal conversations between Nbsiing Consulting, Heritage Planning staff, and attendees of the NCCT's lunch program.

## Key Themes

- Funding cuts have resulted in a reduction of programming offered and this was noted consistently by interviewees; community members wanted to see more programming for youth, and 2-spirit people
- The NCCT and Toronto's Indigenous community made more visible either through more friendship centres or through place naming, incorporating Indigenous heritage into what comes next for the area
- Access to spiritual healing, traditional medicines, healers, and aunties were very important – part of one's mental, spiritual and physical health

## Feedback Summary

### **M.** (from the Chippewas of the Thames)

- Has been in Toronto since 1981 and has lived at Wigwamen for 12 years
- NCCT is important for seniors; they feel taken care of although pre-Covid there were more programs offered especially for young people
- Other places that are important: Anishnawbe Health Toronto to help with her diabetes
- language and culture are very important to her; generally, there's the need for more openness to accept different languages and culture

### **C.**

- Has been going to the NCCT since the 90s; he's now 36 years old
- NCCT is important because the aunties who join the daily lunches "help him stay sober"
- NCCT holds space and offers food although he mentioned that many services have been taken away; there's the general feeling that there aren't enough activities and circles and Thursdays have changed; noted that this was due to funding

- It's a place to learn tradition, traditional medicines and access to these medicines
- It's a place to connect with elders/aunties; it's a place for healing

**M.** (from Serpent River but raised in British Columbia)

- Has been going to the NCCT for 4 years now
- NCCT is where she gets help and direction to different services (Native Women's Resource Centre and Anishnawbe Health Toronto were mentioned)
- Doesn't use parks in the area although she does use the JCC for swimming

**D.** (from Saskatchewan)

- He designed the logo for the NCCT back in the early 1980s
- He currently attends the senior programming offered
- Although he found the building well-maintained, he has heard stories of it being "haunted"
- He noted that the Annex needs to be more inclusive; he suggested opening up the building and its programming and assert itself more
- AIM used to be across the street (the American Indian Movement)
- Language is important to him but there's no one around to speak it

**L.**

- Her husband was Indigenous from Nova Scotia (she is not)
- Has been going to the NCCT for about 1.5 years; currently lives at Wigwamen because rent is cheap
- When she lost her husband, the community was there to support her
- She likes the park nearby (didn't know the name but indicated it was on Walmer) but said that more spaces like that are needed

**M.**

- Non-Indigenous older man who joins the lunch program often
- The NCCT is important to him because of the food that's offered at lunch and also a chance to make friends although he noted that he's "made enemies"
- Paul Martel Park was mentioned as another place in the Annex that he goes to; there used to be a portal washroom there but is no longer and noted that the city needs more public washrooms; it's difficult to access a washroom when you can't go into a Tim Hortons or restaurant
- Trinity St Paul's was mentioned as another important place
- The NCCT is important for Indigenous peoples he noted that it's a place for culture and language

**C.**

- Has been going to the NCCT for about 10 years
- She used to work at the Aboriginal Legal Services but left because of burn out
- The food offered here is important

- She accesses social programs and uses many services offered
- The building style itself reminds her of a Residential School – she’s heard this comment from many people and noted that it could be triggering for many
- Other places that she uses: Native Women’s Resource Centre; Anishinawbe Health Toronto
- Access to Indigenous culture and language is important and it’s not reflected anywhere else in the city

#### L. (from Birch Island)

- Has been going to the NCCT for 10 years (as long as she’s been in Toronto)
- Occasionally, she’s a fire-keeper at the NCCT
- Her mother lives at Wigwamen
- She enjoys the Thursday evening social offered at the NCCT
- She’s recently made a drum and there will be a ceremony for it soon
- Other places that she uses: Four Winds program (Queen and Bathurst)
- The NCCT has historical importance because of the fact that it’s been on Spadina and in the neighbourhood since the 1970s
- She’s a Sixties Scoop survivor and her parents went to Residential School

#### T. (Nipissing)

- Currently lives at Na-Ma-Res (and has been since August; he was previously incarcerated)
- He’s been in Toronto for 20 years
- It’s now that he’s meeting lots of people from Indigenous communities
- Access to food here is important
- The NCCT is a place to be in community and meet people
- The physical building itself does not hold importance but what’s found inside does
- He suggested that the NCCT could incorporate more Indigenous markers – he mentioned flags, something to make it more visible, more prominent to draw more people in
- The NCCT is a place for learning Indigenous culture and languages – that’s important

#### W. (Timiskaming First Nation near Quebec)

- The NCCT brings people together and to encounter spiritual healers and access spiritual healing
- Uses the NCCT to access culture/cultural programming such as beading
- She described the NCCT as a second home and a safe haven; its safe – getting there and being there is safe on all fronts; the NCCT is for everyone
- It has good energy; she has access to food instead of going to a food bank
- The vendors (at the gift shop) are important; and advocates for more spaces for vendors
- Finding housing is her priority now and costs are a barrier for her
- Allen Gardens was also mentioned as an important space and likes it there
- NCCT: access to job training

- Wants to see more healers and access to traditional healing in the future along with better access to health care and support services

**J.W.**

- 15 years in Toronto; grew up in Barbados
- Accesses programs at the NCCT such as food, Thursday socials; called it 'his reserve' and said that there are many Indigenous people in this area
- Volunteers at Wigwamen as a handyman
- As a younger person, met with cousins at the NCCT
- Future: incorporating language and Indigenous heritage into the area

# Meeting 3: Wigwamen Terrace

## Meeting Details

West Annex Heritage Conservation District (HCD) Study – Indigenous Engagement Meeting  
Wigwamen Terrace (14 Spadina Road)  
February 25, 2006  
11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

### **Attendees:**

- 8 community members
- Bob Goulais (Nbsiing Consulting)
- Ana Martins, Colin Yu, Emma Doedens (City of Toronto, Heritage Planning)

The meeting format was in person and light refreshments were served. The meeting began with an invocation and welcome from Bob Goulais, followed by smudging and the sharing of tobacco. A series of questions were used to guide the conversation. The questions were crafted by Heritage Planning staff, with input from Bob Goulais.

## Meeting Summary

### **Residents**

- The participating residents have lived at Wigwamen Terrace (or WT) for a range of years, from 3 years to as long as 25 years.
- Some had moved to WT from within Toronto, but others had come from places further afield like Manitoba, Nova Scotia, James Bay, St. Catherines, and Cape Crocker (Nevaashiinigmiing).

### **Wigwamen Terrace**

- Participants highlighted the central location of WT within the city as a positive. There are many things to do nearby, such as parks, commercial amenities, and transit connections to other areas in the city. This last point is important because it makes it easy for participants to get to medical appointments wherever their doctors are located. It also means that participants can connect to family members who live in the city.
- Participants also like how close WT is to the Toronto Public Library – Spadina Road Branch (10 Spadina Road), the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto (16 Spadina Road), and attractions such as Castle Loma and the Royal Ontario Museum.
- There is a small parkette at Bloor Street and Spadina Road where residents like to gather and have coffee.
  - The Tim Horton's location at Bedford Road and Bloor Street West was a popular place for socializing before the public seating was removed.
- There is a strong communal atmosphere in the building. Participants appreciate the elevator and the laundry room in the basement, which is a place where residents cross paths and can chat.

- However, some participants mentioned that there are security issues because any member of the public can access the building through the front door (due to the duration of the automatic door opening, which allows non-residents to tailgate in).
  - Participants emphasized the importance of feeling safe within their community.
- WT also promotes cultural practices through crafting events held in the upper rooms and by helping residents access wild food sourced from Indigenous communities in the far north.

### **The Native Canadian Centre of Toronto**

- One of the participants shared how she was a survivor of the Residential School system. Her adoptive mother brought her to the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto (its former location at 603 Church Street) “to connect with her people.”
  - Through the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto (or NCCT), the participant signed up for ballroom dance classes with a group of other Indigenous children at the YMCA on College Street. She remembers the time fondly.
- The NCCT was important to the participants who grew up in the area and has become a place of convergence for those who come from communities outside of Toronto. It was known as the gathering place, and has been referred to as the Friendship Centre in the past.
  - The NCCT ends up feeling like home for many who gather there.
  - Having a space like the NCCT in Toronto is important particularly because the city is a major draw for employment opportunities. The NCCT supports the many members of various Indigenous communities who come to Toronto for work.
- Despite changes to its operations, the NCCT remains important to the participants. Several mentioned how the NCCT hosts fewer social programs now than in the past and suggested that those programs – especially social programs targeted towards seniors – should be re-introduced.
  - The Thursday Socials were mentioned by several participants as being packed with people and having a great atmosphere. Today, the attendance isn’t as robust.
  - The NCCT was a place where one could “just drop in to chat.” This has changed slightly with the security requirements including the doorbell/buzzer entry system.
- Participants highlighted how the NCCT lunch programs support the whole neighbourhood and are actively used by both the youths and elders in the community. The program creates a warm, communal atmosphere for a few hours.
- Inter-generational experiences at the NCCT are key. Some WT residents have been going to the NCCT since they were children, and now their families still attend and are continuing the community building.

### **The West Annex Neighbourhood**

- One participant commented on how the area has become a place of congregation and home-coming for many people from various Indigenous communities. For this reason, he sees the individual histories of these people as being more prominent than a single, historical narrative for the area.

- Some people have maintained connections with their cultural histories, but many who come to the area and to the NCCT are re-learning and reconnecting with their culture.
- The same participant highlighted the creation of Aki Wiidookaagewin (Earth Helpers) Indigenous botanical garden at Paul Martel park for being a place of Indigenous storytelling through the public murals and the native plants.
  - The park was fixed up with assistance from the Annex Residents' Association, and the native plants were restored circa 2020.
  - The participant expressed concerns that with the increased presence of nearby high-rise developments, the park has become too shady to plant the variety of native plants it featured formerly.
- A participant suggested that there should be signage in the area that uses Indigenous language and terms.

### **Indigenous Culture in the Area**

- Another participant reiterated how many Indigenous community members who participate in the programs at the NCCT are returning to their culture later in their lives and learning the traditional Indigenous crafts, the music, and the languages now as opposed to when they were younger.
  - This situation is particularly relevant to the WT residents and their generational contemporaries because many of them grew up in an era when Indigenous culture and traditions were not promoted and in many cases were suppressed instead (i.e. Residential Schools, the Sixties Scoop).
- Therefore, the NCCT is not only a place for socializing. People are coming to the NCCT to learn. The promotion of cultural practices and traditions through the NCCT's events and programming is essential.
  - One participant shared a story about when she returned to visit her community up north, she had lost some of the pronunciation skills in her language.
  - Participants spoke about the importance of the Indigenous language courses offered at the Toronto Public Library – Spadina Road Branch.
  - The library also has resources on Indigenous/native plants.
- The discussion emphasized how hearing one's culture is as important as seeing one's culture. To hear Indigenous languages being spoken; to hear Indigenous music being played, such as the water drum. To bring the sound of the culture back.
  - This can be achieved by creating and protecting spaces where members of the cultural community are not afraid to be who they are.
- The city of Winnipeg was mentioned by one participant as doing well in their promotion of Indigenous culture.
  - Winnipeg has more places for the public to go to learn about Indigenous culture, especially within the actual education systems.
  - Toronto could look to how other cities across Canada are finding similar success in this area.

- However, participants are noticing a positive shift in the learning process of the younger generations who are embracing their Indigeneity and already know so much more about their Indigenous cultures than the participants did by their age.
  - The younger generations are eager to learn. They're learning through personal connections and through Elders; they're learning about Indigenous medicines, Spirit Names, and they're learning about Indigenous histories.
  - Participants want to see a continuation of this upward trend with more language classes offered at the NCCT, and looking at even more ways to get the younger generations involved.