

# CITY OF TORONTO DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

## **MINUTES: MEETING 4 – May 6, 2026**

The Design Review Panel met in-person and virtually on Wednesday May 6, 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 April 8, 2026, by email.

## **MEETING 5 INDEX**

- 1) In-Camera
- 2) Wilson District at Downsvew (1st Review)
- 3) Multiplex pre-approved plans (1st Review)

# Wilson District at Downsview

## CITY OF TORONTO - DESIGN REVIEW PANEL MINUTES

DESIGN REVIEW First Review

APPLICATION City Study

### PRESENTATIONS

CITY STAFF Sophie Knowles, Community Planning  
Joanna Chludzinska, Urban Design

CONSULTANT Keith O'Connor, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM)

VOTE NA

### REVIEW PARTICIPANTS

CHAIR Meg Graham

PANELISTS Jessica Hutcheon, Jim Gough, Paul Kulig, Gordon Stratford

CONFLICTS Heather Rolleston



## Introduction

City staff outlined the project history, existing and future context, and overall planning framework. Staff are seeking the Panel's advice on the following key issues:

1. What additional design principles and strategies should be considered to guide transitions between Northcrest lands and adjacent properties in the following locations:
  - a. The Arc and TTC lands to the southeast
  - b. Mid-block connection to the southwest
  - c. Interface with Wilson Avenue and Billy Bishop Way Intersection
2. Please comment on the public realm strategy for the Arc with respect to the scale, public realm and programming. Are there any additional design considerations that you would recommend to ensure the Arc succeeds as a pedestrian friendly space?
3. Please comment on the proposed locations of at-grade uses. How do they contribute to the public realm and create a complete community?
4. Please comment on the proposed strategy for the distribution of the building heights and massing.

## Summary of Project's Key Points

### Overall Vision and Coherence

Panel members recognized the proposal as a large-scale and ambitious city-building exercise supported by a strong planning framework, including transit-oriented density, a connected open space network, and a mixed-use development approach. However, despite the strength of individual components, the Panel observed that the proposal lacks a clear, unifying thesis or overarching narrative. The intended six character areas and the structuring moves that were meant to organize the site were not clearly legible in the plan. As a result, Panel members emphasized the need to establish a stronger identity and a more coherent sense of purpose for the district as a whole.

### Public Realm and Open Space Network

The Panel expressed general support for the proposed network of parks, including the runway, the green spine, and the Arc, as a conceptual framework for the public realm. The Arc was recognized as a primary organizing feature of the district, intended to function as a major pedestrian spine that links the park, the broader open space system, and transit. While Panel members supported its role as a social, cultural, and pedestrian-focused corridor, they felt it remains underdeveloped in both spatial and programmatic terms. There were concerns that its effectiveness is compromised at critical intersections,

particularly where it meets Billy Bishop Way and Street A, as vehicular infrastructure may dominate these areas. The Panel emphasized that the success of the Arc depends on a stronger definition as a pedestrian-priority environment, better integration with adjacent streets and blocks, and clearer programming and active uses at grade. In addition, the location of the major park raised concerns about accessibility and integration, with the possibility that it may feel isolated within the broader plan.

### **Transit Interface and Connectivity**

The Panel identified a critical concern regarding the connection to Wilson Station. They noted that the transition across major roads, particularly at Billy Bishop Way and Street A, risks becoming a barrier and undermining the pedestrian experience. Panel members stressed the importance of creating seamless, pedestrian-first connections to transit in order to fully realize the intent of transit-oriented development.

### **Mobility and Traffic**

Panel members issued a strong warning about potential traffic impacts, particularly related to the proposal to link Dufferin Street through the site. They highlighted the risk of creating a high-traffic corridor that could conflict with the public realm objectives. To address this, the Panel emphasized the need for greater coordination with ongoing transportation and environmental assessment work.

### **Block Design and Internal Spaces**

Concerns were raised about the design of internal block spaces, including the apparent overloading of courtyards with servicing, loading, and parking functions. The Panel emphasized the opportunity to instead prioritize these areas as livable, open, and green interior spaces that contribute positively to the overall quality of the development.

### **Built Form and Height Strategy**

Panel members were generally supportive of the proposed height and density strategy. They endorsed the approach of locating taller buildings closer to transit and stepping down heights toward adjacent neighbourhoods, noting that this is appropriate and consistent with the Downsview Secondary Plan framework. However, they also indicated that the height strategy should be more clearly tied to the overall vision and intended character of the district to ensure greater cohesion and clarity.

## **Panel Commentary**

### **Big Picture and Clarity of Vision**

The Panel strongly emphasized that the project lacks a clear narrative or identity. While technically sophisticated, it currently reads as a collection of good planning elements rather than a cohesive place with meaning and character.

### **The Arc and Central Public Realm**

Panel members consistently identified the Arc as potentially the most important public realm element in the proposal; however, they emphasized that it currently lacks the clarity and strength needed to fulfill that role. Although it is envisioned as a vibrant and active corridor, its spatial definition, adjacent uses, and interface with buildings and streets remain unresolved, limiting its effectiveness as a coherent organizing feature.

A key concern focused on the intersection where the Arc meets major streets, particularly at Billy Bishop Way and Street A. This junction was identified as a high-risk condition where multiple traffic movements, including turning lanes and vehicular demand, could undermine pedestrian continuity. Panel members noted that the Arc risks feeling interrupted or “broken” at this location, resulting in a fragmented and potentially unsafe public realm experience. To address this, the Panel recommended designing the intersection as a shared or pedestrian-priority space, minimizing vehicular dominance by simplifying turning conditions, and treating the area as a signature gateway rather than a conventional road crossing.

Panel members also identified a significant gap in how the Arc connects to Wilson Station. While the Arc is intended to function as a primary link to transit, its current termination appears unresolved, ending at what reads as a barrier condition characterized by fences, service areas, or poorly defined edges rather than a meaningful public destination. The transition into TTC lands lacks clarity and integration, which undermines the Arc’s role as a continuous pedestrian spine. The Panel emphasized the need for a seamless and legible pedestrian experience extending directly into the station, improved coordination with TTC lands to avoid dead ends or low-quality spaces, and a stronger design approach that ensures the Arc functions as a true transit-oriented connector.

Concerns were also raised about how the Arc interacts with the broader street network. Panel members noted that parallel streets, such as the Street B and E corridors, may compete with and dilute the prominence of the Arc. In addition, servicing, loading, and building frontages along both sides of the corridor risk over-constraining the space, reducing its capacity to function as a generous public realm feature. The hierarchy between the Arc and surrounding vehicular streets is not yet clearly defined. In response, the Panel encouraged simplifying and rationalizing the street network to prioritize the Arc, and ensuring that building design and servicing strategies reinforce, rather than weaken, its role as the district’s primary public spine.

### **Connectivity and Transit Integration**

A major concern was the disconnect between the site and Wilson Station. While the Arc is intended to link directly to transit, Panel members noted that it currently appears to terminate at a poorly resolved condition, with barriers, fencing, and unclear pedestrian routes. The key intersection at Billy Bishop Way and Street A was identified as a high-risk point where traffic movements could interrupt continuity. The Panel stressed that the success of the district relies on a seamless, intuitive, and uninterrupted pedestrian connection to transit, which is not yet clearly demonstrated.

### **Movement vs. Place**

Panel members highlighted a strong tension between mobility infrastructure and placemaking. Concerns were raised that the proposed street network—particularly potential through-traffic connections—could introduce significant vehicular volumes, undermining the pedestrian intent of the public realm. Intersections along the Arc, especially where major streets converge, risk becoming dominated by traffic rather than

functioning as civic spaces. The Panel emphasized the need to prioritize pedestrian movement and carefully manage vehicular circulation to ensure the district functions as a place, not just a network of streets.

## **Public Realm Priority**

The Panel consistently emphasized that the success of the district will depend on the quality of the public realm, particularly at the ground plane and first few storeys of buildings. While the plan identifies a strong open space network, there is insufficient clarity on how streets, building edges, and interior block spaces will function at a human scale. Concerns were raised about service, loading, and circulation elements overwhelming block interiors, limiting the usability of these spaces. Panelists encouraged a stronger focus on lived experience at street level, ensuring that public and semi-public spaces are active, comfortable, and cohesive.

## **Character and Identity**

Although the proposal identifies multiple character areas, the Panel found that these distinctions are not yet legible in the plan or built form. The different zones currently read as conceptually defined rather than physically expressed. Panel members encouraged clearer differentiation through programming, block structure, and public realm design, rather than relying on abstract descriptions. There is a need to establish a stronger and more coherent identity for the district, ensuring each area offers a distinct and recognizable experience.

## **Gateways**

Panel members supported the overall identification and placement of the district's gateways, recognizing them as important structuring elements that frame arrival into the community. However, a consistent theme across the discussion was that these gateways are currently only diagrammatic and require significantly more development to become meaningful, legible, and experiential spaces.

The Wilson Avenue gateway was seen as appropriately located and highly visible, but Panelists emphasized that it should function primarily as a strong urban marker rather than a place of rest or gathering. Given its context along a busy arterial, the gateway should be expressed through built form, scale, and architectural presence, clearly signalling entry into the district rather than relying on softer landscape gestures alone.

In contrast, the transit gateway at Wilson Station was identified as the most critical and most unresolved condition. While this location is intended to act as the primary arrival point, the Panel expressed concern that the convergence of pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles risks creating a congested and confusing environment. The current configuration compresses key public realm elements, including the Arc and green spine, and lacks a clear hierarchy of movement. Panel members stressed that this gateway must be reworked as a pedestrian-first, highly legible space, with stronger spatial definition and improved integration with the transit lands.

The intersection where the Arc meets the street network, particularly near Billy Bishop  
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Way and Street A, was also discussed as a critical gateway moment. Panel members expressed concern that this condition could become a break in continuity rather than a seamless transition, with vehicular infrastructure potentially dominating the experience. There was strong encouragement to rethink this junction as a signature shared or pedestrian-priority space, ensuring that the Arc maintains its continuity and prominence as a central public spine.

More broadly, the Panel noted that while multiple gateways are identified, their roles are not yet clearly differentiated. Each gateway should respond to its context and function distinctly—whether as a civic threshold, transit arrival point, or internal social node. At present, they lack a clear hierarchy and do not yet express the diversity of experiences intended within the district.

Overall, the Panel's message was that gateways must move beyond conceptual markers and become fully resolved spatial conditions, integrating built form, movement, and public realm design to clearly announce arrival and reinforce the identity of the Wilson District.

# Multiplex Pre-approved Plans

## CITY OF TORONTO – DESIGN REVIEW PANEL MINUTES

DESIGN REVIEW                      First Review  
APPLICATION                        City Project – Concept Review

### PRESENTATIONS

CITY STAFF                          Megan Drupals, Toronto Building  
   Joseph Luk, Urban Design

CONSULTANT                        Janna Levitt, LGA Architects  
   Michael Piper, ReHousing

VOTE                                    NA

### REVIEW PARTICIPANTS

CHAIR                                  Meg Graham

PANELISTS                          Jessica Hutcheon, Heather Rolleston, Jim Gough, Paul Kulig,  
   Gordon Stratford

CONFLICTS                          None



## Introduction

City staff and consultants outlined the project history, policy objectives and context, and vision of design excellence. Staff are seeking the Panel's advice on the following key issues:

1. The proposed multiplex developments must accommodate a range of required site elements—including servicing infrastructure (e.g., pad-mounted transformers), access routes, accessibility features, and amenity components—within relatively constrained sites. What strategies, design approaches, or precedents could support the integration of these elements into a cohesive and well-designed site plan that maintains a high-quality public realm. How might required infrastructure such as pad-mounted transformers be incorporated in a way that minimizes impacts on pedestrian experience and supports a positive streetscape condition?

## Summary of Project's Key Points

Panel members strongly supported the initiative as an important tool for increasing housing supply and improving design quality across the city through standardized, pre-approved multiplex designs. They identified several areas where further refinement would strengthen the proposal.

### Scope and Impact

The proposal's potential to apply to a large proportion of citywide parcels, covering up to approximately 76% when combined with other catalogs, was highly praised. Panel members viewed this as a meaningful step toward democratizing access to high-quality design and enabling more consistent outcomes across a broad range of neighbourhoods.

### Implementation Challenges

At the same time, Panel members raised concerns about implementation, noting the low uptake of previous pre-approved garden suite designs. This prompted questions about whether limited adoption is driven by issues related to the designs themselves, the approval and permitting process, or broader systemic barriers such as cost, awareness, or complexity.

### Site Design Constraints

The Panel highlighted the considerable pressure placed on small sites by multiple and sometimes competing requirements, including parking, waste storage, transformers, accessibility, and tree protection. There was concern that these cumulative demands could compromise overall livability, particularly by limiting the availability and quality of outdoor space.

## **Public Realm and Urban Integration**

Panel members emphasized the need to better integrate elements such as trees, utilities, and street interfaces into the overall design framework. They encouraged expanding the list of site considerations to more fully account for existing conditions, including mature trees, servicing constraints, and easements, to ensure that new development fits more seamlessly into its context.

## **Housing Quality**

Concerns were also raised about the quality of basement units, particularly regarding access to natural light, adequate outdoor space, and overall livability. The Panel stressed the importance of ensuring that all units, regardless of location within the building, have access to sufficient private or shared outdoor space and meet a high standard of residential quality.

## **Panel Commentary**

### **Value of the Initiative**

The Panel expressed strong support for the initiative and its broader objectives, recognizing its potential to meaningfully increase housing supply while improving the quality and consistency of design across the city. The analytical approach—particularly the parcel analysis and data-driven methodology—was widely praised as rigorous and innovative. Panel members noted that this level of research provides a valuable foundation not only for the design of the multiplex prototypes, but also for broader conversations about housing delivery and urban intensification.

### **From Design Tool to Policy Lever**

A key theme of the discussion was that the success of the initiative should not be evaluated solely based on the uptake of pre-approved plans. Panel members emphasized that the project has the potential to act as a strategic policy tool, helping to identify systemic barriers embedded within current regulations and approval processes. The work was seen as an opportunity to highlight where existing requirements may be overly restrictive or misaligned with desired outcomes, and to inform targeted policy adjustments. In this regard, the prototypes should function not only as design solutions, but also as demonstration tools that test assumptions, reveal constraints, and establish best practices for future development.

### **Site Constraints and Trade-offs**

The Panel highlighted the cumulative impact of required site elements—including parking, waste storage, accessibility features, and electrical infrastructure such as pad-

mounted transformers—as a significant challenge to achieving high-quality site design. Members noted that, particularly on smaller sites, these requirements can consume a substantial portion of available space, limiting opportunities for landscaping, outdoor amenity, and overall spatial quality. The Panel encouraged the project team to use this work to clearly illustrate these trade-offs and to identify opportunities where requirements could be reconsidered, consolidated, or reconfigured to better support livable outcomes and improve the public realm.

### **Flexibility and Adaptability**

Panel members encouraged an approach that prioritizes flexibility over fixed solutions. While the development of prototype designs is supported, it was emphasized that Toronto's parcel fabric is highly varied and often irregular, making rigid templates less effective in practice. The Panel suggested focusing on adaptable systems or frameworks that can respond to a wide range of site conditions, including non-standard lot shapes and dimensions. This may include developing guidance that allows elements of the design to shift, scale, or reconfigure while maintaining overall intent and performance.

### **Livability and Everyday Use**

The Panel placed strong emphasis on the quality of everyday living within the proposed units. Key considerations included access to meaningful outdoor space, adequate storage, visual and acoustic privacy between units, and opportunities for personalization. Panel members noted that, given the relatively compact nature of multiplex developments, small differences in design can have a significant impact on daily experience.

One Panel member suggested considering minimum outdoor space targets, similar to those used in larger residential buildings, to help ensure a consistent baseline of livability. In addition, concern was raised regarding the potential overuse of rooftop amenity space, with a recommendation to explore limiting or carefully controlling rooftop programming to avoid negative impacts on adjacent properties and neighbourhood conditions.

Attention was also given to the quality of ground-related and below-grade units, with recommendations to ensure sufficient natural light, usable outdoor areas, and a strong relationship to the street or shared spaces.

### **Innovation Opportunities**

The Panel encouraged the exploration of more innovative approaches to both building and site design. Suggestions included:

- Considering modular or prefabricated strategies to improve efficiency and construction quality
- Exploring shared amenity spaces (including storage) where appropriate to optimize limited site area
- Testing alternative setback conditions or site configurations to unlock additional usable space
- Developing a “kit-of-parts” approach to allow for adaptation and customization across varied site conditions

In addition, the Panel encouraged the project team to engage directly with practitioners—including architects, builders, and developers—to better understand implementation challenges. This includes identifying where proposals are not advancing due to perceived constraints or risks and understanding why certain sites are not being pursued. The Panel noted that insights from unrealized projects may help reveal systemic barriers and “weak points” in the current framework, which could inform more effective and widely applicable design solutions.