CITY OF TORONTO DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

MINUTES: MEETING 6 – July 8, 2026

The Design Review Panel met in-person and virtually on Wednesday July 8, 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 (Acting)
Maxine Cudlip: Urban Design, City Planning Division

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

The Panel confirmed minutes of their previous meeting, which was held on June 3, 2026, by email.

MEETING 6 INDEX

Rosedale Valley Viaduct

CITY OF TORONTO - DESIGN REVIEW PANEL MINUTES

DESIGN REVIEW	First Review
APPLICATION	City Infrastructure

PRESENTATIONS

CITY STAFF	Wenlong (William) He, Infrastructure & Development Services
CONSULTANT	Magdy Samaan, Nicholas Bava, and Greg Mucsi; EXP
VOTE	NA

REVIEW PARTICIPANTS

CHAIR	Gordon Stratford
PANELISTS	Michael Leckman, Paul Kulig, Joe Lobko, Heather Rolleston, Juhee Oh, Sibylle von Knobloch
CONFLICTS	None

Introduction

City staff and the consultant team sought the Panel's advice on the suitability of the proposed barrier design options, including their compatibility with the bridge's heritage character, maintenance requirements, user experience, and opportunities for design refinement. Staff are seeking the Panel's advice on the following key issues:

1. Design suggestions to connect to the greater Toronto area architectural language?
2. Feedback based on similar barrier experiences within Toronto?

Summary of Project's Key Points

The Panel thanked the City and consultant team for a highly detailed and well-organized presentation. Members appreciated the rigorous design process, clear evaluation framework, and high-quality renderings, noting that the visual materials were particularly effective in illustrating the design intent, user experience, seasonal conditions, and comparative assessment of the proposed options. The Panel acknowledged the thoughtful evaluation of competing objectives related to public safety, heritage conservation, maintenance, constructability, and civic design quality. The project was viewed as a complex exercise that successfully balanced technical requirements with broader urban design and public realm considerations.

Balancing Safety and Heritage

The Panel recognized the challenge of introducing a contemporary safety intervention onto one of Toronto's historically significant bridges. Members generally agreed that the project should aim to enhance safety while preserving the architectural integrity, heritage character, and civic presence of the Rosedale Valley Viaduct.

The Panel appreciated the consultant team's effort to ground the design process in a thorough understanding of the bridge's architectural significance and recognized that the project represents a delicate balance between meeting contemporary safety expectations and respecting a valued heritage resource. Members felt that the intervention should support the long-term stewardship of the bridge while maintaining the qualities that contribute to its significance and identity.

Selection of a Preferred Direction

The Panel generally agreed that all three shortlisted options represented viable design solutions and reflected a thoughtful and comprehensive design process. Members appreciated the clear explanation of the strengths and limitations associated with each approach.

While all three options received some support, there was broad consensus around the vertical bar option as the preferred direction, with further design development required (see Attention to Detail below). Members felt this option achieved the strongest balance between heritage compatibility, transparency, structural expression, durability, constructability, and long-term maintenance requirements. The option was seen as providing an elegant solution that responds to the character of the bridge without

appearing overly dominant or intrusive.

Notwithstanding the general consensus, some members expressed concern regarding the visual weight of the preferred vertical bar option, suggesting that the use of heavy bars could result in a poor design outcome. It was also noted that they were not persuaded by the argument that thinner wire-based systems, such as those employed in Toronto's Luminous Veil or New York City's High Line, should be discounted due to installation challenges or concerns regarding potential damage or cutting.

Importance of the User Experience

The Panel emphasized that the experience of pedestrians and cyclists should remain a primary consideration as the design advances. Members noted that the bridge functions as an important public space and that the design should promote a sense of openness, comfort, and safety for all users.

The preferred option was generally viewed as creating a more inviting and less restrictive pedestrian experience than a conventional fence-like barrier. Members highlighted the importance of maintaining transparency and preserving the quality of the crossing experience while meeting the required safety objectives.

Attention to Detail

A recurring theme throughout the discussion was the importance of detailed design development. Members emphasized that the success of the preferred option will ultimately be determined by the refinement of its proportions, materiality, structural rhythm, transparency, and detailing.

The Panel encouraged further study of member sizing, spacing, alignment, colour, connection details, and transition conditions. Several members noted that relatively small decisions regarding scale and detailing may have a significant impact on the overall visual quality and integration of the design.

Civic and Public Realm Value

The Panel viewed the project as more than a functional infrastructure upgrade. Members recognized the Rosedale Valley Viaduct as an important civic landmark and a memorable piece of public infrastructure that contributes to the character of the city.

Members observed that the viaduct functions as an important point of transition within the city and contributes to the experience of entering and moving between distinct neighbourhoods. The Panel encouraged the team to consider how the project can reinforce this civic role while remaining sensitive to the natural ravine setting.

The Panel encouraged the City and consultant team to treat the project as an opportunity to enhance both public safety and the public realm. Members noted that, while the intervention originates from a safety requirement, it also has the potential to contribute positively to how people experience and remember the bridge as part of Toronto's civic landscape.

Panel Commentary

Design Process and Presentation

The Panel commended the consultant team for the quality of the presentation and the clarity of the design evaluation process. Members noted that the study effectively communicated the opportunities and constraints associated with introducing a contemporary barrier system to a heritage structure. The evaluation matrix, renderings, and comparative analysis were viewed as valuable tools that helped frame the discussion and demonstrate the rationale behind the preferred design direction.
The Panel appreciated the inclusion of seasonal renderings, user-level perspectives, and comparative studies, all of which helped illustrate how the proposed interventions would be experienced over time.

Heritage Integration and Architectural Expression

The Panel supported the effort to derive design concepts directly from the character and structure of the Rosedale Valley Viaduct. Members appreciated the references to the bridge's concrete piers, structural rhythm, steel framing systems, and original heritage detailing. These references were viewed as providing an appropriate basis for developing a barrier that feels integrated with the bridge rather than simply applied to it.

There was broad agreement that the bridge itself should remain the primary architectural feature. Members cautioned against solutions that read principally as fencing systems or security infrastructure and encouraged further refinement of the design to ensure that the heritage structure continues to dominate the visual experience.

Several members referenced the Prince Edward Viaduct Luminous Veil as an important precedent. While the project was acknowledged as successful from a safety perspective, there was discussion about how strongly it established its own visual identity. Members encouraged the team to ensure that the Rosedale Valley Viaduct remains the primary focus of the design and that the new intervention does not become the dominant architectural feature.

The Panel noted that while contemporary heritage interventions have often relied upon contrast as a design strategy, this project may benefit from a more nuanced approach that achieves distinction while retaining a strong visual relationship with the existing bridge. Members felt that subtle references to the structure's rhythm, proportions, and architectural language would be more successful than a solution that intentionally separates itself from the historic fabric.

Review of the Design Alternatives

The Panel discussed each of the three shortlisted options in detail.
The cable option was generally viewed as the least successful of the three alternatives. Members felt that the design had the appearance of a fence placed on top of the existing

parapet and lacked the same level of integration achieved by the other options. While the transparency of the system was acknowledged, there were concerns that the design language did not fully respond to the character of the bridge.

The steel mesh option was recognized for its visual lightness and ability to preserve views. However, members expressed concerns regarding maintenance requirements, specialty materials, constructability, snow accumulation, and lifecycle costs. Some members also questioned whether the system contributed sufficiently to the architectural expression of the bridge.

The vertical bar option received the strongest support from the Panel. Members felt that this solution successfully balanced transparency, safety, structural expression, heritage compatibility, and long-term maintenance considerations. The angled profile was viewed positively and was seen as contributing to a more open and comfortable pedestrian experience than a conventional vertical fence condition.

Scale, Transparency and Rhythm

A significant portion of the discussion focused on scale, proportion, and rhythm. Members emphasized that the success of the preferred option will depend heavily on the size, spacing, and profile of the vertical elements.

The Panel repeatedly encouraged the project team to minimize the visual mass of the barrier and carefully study the dimensions of both the primary structural members and the infill bars. Several members expressed concern that oversized members could create an unnecessarily heavy appearance that would compete visually with the heritage structure and reduce the perceived transparency of the installation.

Several members noted that spacing should not be treated solely as a code compliance exercise. The Panel encouraged the team to study spacing and alignment as compositional tools that can reinforce the rhythm of the existing structure and strengthen the overall integration of the barrier with the bridge. Members also commented that the outward cant of the preferred option contributed to a greater sense of openness and reduced the feeling of enclosure at the sidewalk level, particularly when compared to more conventional vertical barrier systems.

There was extensive discussion regarding rhythm and alignment. Members noted that the relationship between the barrier and the primary structure of the bridge including its arches, piers, bays, and structural supports—may ultimately be more important than direct alignment with the parapet pattern above.

Pedestrian Experience
The Panel emphasized that the design should prioritize the experience of pedestrians and cyclists crossing the bridge.

Members noted that the Rosedale Valley Viaduct differs significantly from the Prince Edward Viaduct because it is experienced largely within a mature ravine landscape and tree canopy rather than through broad panoramic views. As a result, preserving openness, lightness, and a strong connection to the surrounding natural environment was considered more important than maximizing long-distance views through the barrier itself.

The Panel encouraged continued refinement to ensure that visual clutter is minimized and that the barrier avoids creating the appearance of a conventional fence mounted above the historic parapet.

Structural Expression and Views from Below
The Panel appreciated the attention given to views from beneath the bridge and acknowledged that the underside condition represents an important component of the public experience.

Members supported the concept of extending the structural rhythm of the bridge upward into the barrier design. The preferred option was viewed as particularly successful in establishing a visual relationship with the arches, piers, and structural elements below.

Members cautioned that the proposed attachment and transition details may become highly visible architectural elements in their own right. The Panel encouraged the team to study these conditions carefully, noting that the actual connection between the new barrier and the historic structure may prove more complex than illustrated in the current concepts and should be treated as an integral part of the design expression rather than a purely technical solution.

Several members suggested that views from below may ultimately be the most significant public-facing views of the intervention, as many of the design features and connection details will be more visible from the valley than from the bridge deck itself. The Panel encouraged the project team to continue prioritizing these perspectives during design development.

The Panel also encouraged the preparation of additional renderings and studies illustrating views from below the bridge and the interaction between the proposed intervention and the existing structure.

Materials and Long-Term Performance
The Panel supported the consultant team's emphasis on durability, maintenance, and lifecycle performance. Members appreciated that long-term operational considerations were evaluated alongside design objectives and encouraged continued consideration of materials that can deliver both durability and civic quality.

There was discussion regarding long-life materials, maintenance requirements, coatings, colour selection, and weathering characteristics. Members emphasized that material decisions will play a significant role in the ultimate success of the project and encouraged careful consideration of how finishes and colours relate to the existing bridge.

Several members referenced the importance of learning from comparable Toronto infrastructure projects, including the Prince Edward Viaduct Luminous Veil and more recent bridge projects that have successfully balanced durability, maintenance, and public realm objectives.

Members noted that colour selection should be considered alongside material durability and maintenance. The Panel observed that the relationship between the proposed barrier and the existing colour palette of the bridge will influence how integrated or distinct the intervention appears at the pedestrian level and from surrounding views.

Environmental Considerations
The Panel encouraged careful consideration of any future lighting, monitoring systems, or other ancillary elements associated with the barrier.

Members noted the sensitive ecological context of the ravine and encouraged approaches that minimize impacts on wildlife and the surrounding natural environment. Should lighting become part of the final design, downward-directed fixtures and strategies that minimize light spill were recommended.

The Panel also encouraged continued consideration of the relationship between the intervention and the mature tree canopy that contributes significantly to the character of the bridge and valley.

Recommendations for Next Steps
The Panel expressed support for the continued refinement of the vertical bar option and encouraged the team to advance the design with particular attention to proportions, transparency, materiality, structural rhythm, connection detailing, and the pedestrian experience.

The Panel strongly encouraged the use of full-scale mock-ups as part of the next phase of design development. Members felt that physical testing would be critical for evaluating transparency, member sizing, spacing, sightlines, and the overall pedestrian experience. Mock-ups were viewed as an important tool for understanding how the barrier will be perceived both on the bridge and from surrounding viewpoints.

Members also encouraged further visualization and study of the underside condition, including views of key attachment points and transition details, to better understand how the intervention will be experienced from the valley below.

Overall, the Panel supported the direction of the study and encouraged the City and consultant team to continue developing a solution that successfully balances public safety, heritage conservation, civic design quality, durability, and user experience.