

November 2013 Midtown Planning Group Meeting

Final Meeting Summary

Tuesday, November 19, 2013

6:00 - 9:00pm, Anne Johnston Health Station

Overview

On Tuesday, November 19, the City of Toronto hosted a meeting with the Midtown Planning Group (MPG). The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the *Midtown in Focus* Study Team's draft vision, goals, and preliminary ideas. Participants rotated through four working stations discussing Eglinton Park, Squares and Open Spaces, Streets and Greenways, and Ravines and Green Links. Afterwards, the facilitators summarized the key messages from each station and members of the audience shared additional feedback.

Approximately 40 people attended, including members of residents' associations, the Business Improvement Area, City Staff, and the project team. Councillor Matlow also attended the meeting.

Ian Malczewski, Nicole Swerhun, Jane Farrow, and Yulia Pak from Swerhun Facilitation prepared this Meeting Summary and shared a draft with participants for review before finalizing it.

Key Messages

Carefully consider the balance of uses at Eglinton Park. Many participants liked the idea of re-balancing the uses at Eglinton Park, but suggested this required careful attention. In particular, proposals related to active sports or sports facilities (including the parking lot) would require active and consistent involvement of the various sports associations that rely on those facilities.

Find ways to implement the plan as soon as possible. While participants liked many of the long-term ideas illustrated, some expressed concerns with the feasibility of some of these suggestions and asked for some shorter-term strategies. Addressing challenges with tree planters on Yonge Street, running a pilot project to showcase the proposed urban squares, and explaining how the greenways reflect the idea of "street parks" were suggestions for how to do this.

The details are important. Several participants suggested the team show more detail in its drawings, such as locations for benches, trees, and other amenities. Conceptual drawings would help people better understand what the proposed directions could look like.

Use signage, wayfinding, and mapping to help people better understand the neighbourhood. In several of the working stations, participants said that teaching people about existing spaces was important. Participants suggested finding ways to identify privately-owned public spaces, ravines, existing parks, and heritage buildings / areas to integrate the area's distinct identity in the master plan.

Questions of Clarification

- 1. Are you recommending relocating the arena?** *Some participants in Public Meetings and Midtown Planning Group Meetings have suggested the Study Team create more green space and explore opportunities for passive recreation. In response to these suggestions, the team has explored ideas around the hockey arena, but it is not recommending relocating it. Any changes to the hockey arena, community centre, and their associated facilities would require discussions with the hockey arena and associated sports associations. Specific park development matters, including any potential arena relocation, should be further studied and may be part of a future Master Plan study for Eglinton Park.*
- 2. How many lanes of traffic are proposed on Eglinton in Eglinton Connects?** *The preferred design presented at Eglinton Connects Meetings illustrates three lanes between Avenue Road and Mount Pleasant. West of Avenue Road and east of Mount Pleasant, the preferred design illustrates four traffic lanes.*
- 3. Are you aware that the Orchard View library is undertaking a study of how to use its surrounding space?** *Yes, the study team is aware of their work. Given that the library is just beginning its process, its ideas are not yet available to incorporate into this study.*
- 4. What is the status of the TTC bus yard?** *The City undertook a focused review that proposed a concept plan for the TTC lands, which was translated into a zoning by-law and City Council approved Urban Design Guidelines. This study reflects that work. Metrolinx will use the TTC bus yard as a staging ground for the construction of the Eglinton LRT for eight to ten years.*
- 5. What is the difference between the orange colours on the Framework Plan?** *The light orange suggests that there should be some kind of unifying paving that creates a district feel and includes the street (for example at Montgomery Square). The darker orange identifies proposed squares or privately-owned public spaces.*
- 6. Are you proposing taking away space from vehicles?** *The team is trying to work with the existing road widths and keeping the existing road capacity.*
- 7. What do the white blocks (north of Eglinton, east of Yonge) represent?** *These blocks represent potential redevelopments. They do not illustrate any specific proposal, but are conceptual illustrations that allow the team to show the relationship between the Eglinton Green Line and potential future development.*
- 8. How are current Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) appeals being coordinated with this plan?** *City staff responsible for the development applications in the Yonge Eglinton area are actively involved in Midtown in Focus and are incorporating the emerging ideas and concepts wherever possible. Generally, policies, guidelines, and master plans that were in effect at the time when a development application was filed are the relevant policy framework at an OMB hearing. However, policies, guidelines and master plans subsequently adopted by Council may be considered and given weight at the hearing as evidence of appropriate land use planning and emerging policy direction.*

Detailed Summary of Feedback

Eglinton Park

Following this study, the City could initiate a Master Plan for Eglinton Park that would result in a detailed design for the park. The *Midtown in Focus* work would inform the Eglinton Park Master Plan by providing general directions and principles to guide the Master Plan. As a result, the purpose of discussions at this meeting was to propose and seek feedback on four draft principles that could guide the development of a future Eglinton Park Master Plan, including:

1. Improve entries, especially from Eglinton;
2. Improve internal circulation in the park;
3. Revisit the park program to achieve a better balance in what the park offers (to respond to the feedback that right now the park is primarily focused on active sports and families); and
4. Protect and improve the natural environment in the park, including striving to do things like increase the tree canopy, better manage stormwater and drainage, etc.).

Ideas for Eglinton Park that People Liked

Participants expressed considerable support for Principles 1, 2 and 4. Specifically, discussion reinforced the following points:

- 1. Support for improved access from Eglinton.** There was considerable support for adjusting the grade along Eglinton to facilitate access through the community centre to the park behind (one participant suggested terracing). Several people were unaware that there was a cut-through there. There was a lot of support for creating an obviously signed entrance to the park, and also highlighting the location of the path. Some participants expressed concern that increased access from Eglinton could bring strangers into the Arena Facility, posing a safety risk.
- 2. Support for improved circulation.** Suggestions included: having the path meander along the east side of the park to mimic the creek underneath it; creating walking circuit (loop) around the park; and creating a path under the trees along the west side of the park.

Ideas for Eglinton Park that Generated Mixed Opinions

- 1. Principle 3** (which identifies the need to revisit the park program to strive for a better balance of uses) was supported by many participants, however there was also a handful of people who raised significant objections due to the negative impact which this could have on existing recreational users in the park (especially soccer and baseball). Points raised included:
 - The importance of connecting with the thousands of parents and kids that use the park when contemplating this type of change, noting that Eglinton Park provides the only ball diamonds in the area and provides cheaper permit fees (one participant shared their understanding that the Toronto District School Board fee is much higher than the City of Toronto fee, which may be one reason so many teams use Eglinton Park rather than other fields;
 - The importance of looking at the park in the context of what's available around it. For example, participants suggested that chess could happen at Montgomery Square and that active sports could potentially also happen at the Marshall McLuhan Sports Field;
 - Some participants didn't see enough in the park for seniors or teens; and

- Some participants were worried that this process was attempting to make a park that would be “everything to everyone” and cautioned that while they felt it should be more than sports field, it’s not reasonable that the park would meet all the needs of all the potential users.

2. There were mixed opinions about the proposed 6 metre wide multi-use path, with some supportive of having a place for bikes in the park, and others who raised concerns about potential conflicts between pedestrians (and especially seniors) and fast moving cyclists. These participants suggested that some type of buffer separate these uses. Some participants felt that these conflicts were unlikely since commuter cyclists were much more likely to use adjacent streets than the path through the park. It was suggested that barriers be installed at the access points to require cyclists to dismount when entering the park path.

3. Most participants were open to exploring options to remove surface parking in the park, however some raised concerns regarding the impact this would have on arena users. The range of feedback included:

- A concern that removing the surface parking lot would negatively impact older officials, parents, care-givers, grandparents, babies, and children, who rely on surface parking for quick, safe, easy access to the arena.
- Interest in seeing if the existing at grade parking could be put underground (either a new lot with direct access to the arena – which could be put under the existing sports fields, or creating direct access from the existing underground lot);
- Observation that a lot of people who come to Eglinton Park come by car, and that in the summer there are more issues with on-street parking by park users;
- Comment that the existing underground parking is closed during certain months and the hours are too short (one participant suggested keeping the existing underground parking open at night, noting that it may be a good revenue source);
- Many participants identified safety issues related to the Edith access at Orchard View Blvd. and suggested that something needs to happen to make the relationship between cars, cyclists, and pedestrians safer; and,
- There are conflicts between pedestrians and cars using the at grade parking lot, and some said that the parking lot is a barrier to integrating the east and west sides of the park.

4. There were some participants interested in exploring long term alternatives for re-locating the arena within the park. One suggestion was to consolidate the uses, potential in a multi-floor building that required a smaller footprint in the park. It was also suggested that a figure-8 skating path would be nice to have in the park.

5. While many participants liked the idea of improved park access at Montgomery, one participant who lives nearby did not like this idea.

New Ideas for Eglinton Park

1. Address the inefficient use of space in the park today. Several people said that there is a lot of existing wasted space in the park (examples raised included the frontage along Eglinton and the space on the hill along the western edge of the park), and that it would be important to make best use of those areas before cutting back on spaces that are heavily used. Others said that there are lots of areas of the park that are currently not welcoming.

2. **Consider putting flexibility into the design of the park that better accommodates existing recreational uses.** This could happen through spaces that can be used for sports during the league season (primarily in the summer) and other uses during the rest of the year.
3. **Make sure there is a clear edge to the park.** Some participants said that right now the boundary on the west side of the park is confusing. There are private properties that tumble into the park (with flowerpots, cinder blocks, old furniture, etc.) and this should be addressed by defining and enforcing the park property line. It was suggested that one way to do this would be with a fence or hedge.
4. **Importance of the hill.** Several people talked about the importance of the hill along the west side of the park. They said that athletes use it, and that it also could be a great spot for a lookout over the park and the city beyond. A new hill/berm to slow down toboggans was suggested (to protect people from trees and the arena).
5. **Several participants wondered what the plan was for dealing with dogs.** Some said that they would like to see dogs confined to a specific area so they don't drift, while others said that a study had been completed on this already and that fencing in the dogs has been ruled out.
6. **Other specific design ideas suggested included:** Creating a place where a band can perform; considering fountains; improving lighting in the park; and creating a cozy area where people can come and sit (rather than spreading a little bit of seating everywhere) and encourage a BBQ or two.

Process / Presentation Suggestions Related to Eglinton Park

1. **Make sure maps of Eglinton Park show existing elements of the park.** For example, it's important that the maps show the community garden (which has plans for expansion, including potential movie nights on the hill, connecting to local language schools, multi-lingual signage, etc.), the children's playground (which is currently being upgraded), both baseball diamonds, and potentially the small basketball court at the field house.
2. **Interest in seeing more detail.** Interest in seeing more detail. Several participants said that it's important there be additional benches in the park, and they were worried they didn't see them on the map. One participant specifically said that they would not like to have plastic benches.
3. **Involve the leagues.** Specifically it's important to make sure this process hears from the North Toronto Soccer Association and the North Toronto Hockey Association. One participant observed that parents are under-represented at the Midtown Planning Group meeting because they're likely at home with their kids doing homework. One participant suggested speaking with the Hockey Arena about improving access to Eglinton Park.

Squares

1. **Eglinton Linear Park.** Most participants liked the idea of a linear park on Eglinton, east of Yonge Street. Many participants liked the idea so much they suggested the park should continue west along Eglinton, too, eventually connecting to Eglinton Park. A few expressed concerns with the practicality of this idea given some recent developments, but they said they liked it and thought it would be a great improvement to the area.

2. **Trees.** Trees were a common topic at every rotation of the Squares station. Many participants felt the Study should add more trees, especially in the proposed corner squares along Yonge Street and along Yonge Street itself. Some suggested that requiring deeper setbacks from new development along Yonge would be one way to do this, while others suggested using Silva Cells.
3. **Show more detail.** Many participants felt the Master Plan should show more detail. For example, one participant wanted to see more detailed design for Montgomery Square (such as the location of benches or tree plantings).
4. While many participants liked the idea of **closing Helendale or Orchardview** to create a pedestrian zone, some expressed concerns with the potential impacts of this idea, including:
 - Impacts on traffic in and around the neighbourhood.
 - Impacts on parking and servicing for buildings on those streets.
 - Impacts on local business (resulting from pedestrians stopping in the pedestrianized area and not visiting businesses to the north)
5. **Redpath Revisited.** Many of the participants liked the proposed changes to Redpath. As with Eglinton Linear Park, some expressed concerns about the practicality of implementing this idea. Participants also supported the proposed new space at Redpath Parkette, and some suggested connecting it to Sherwood Avenue.
6. **Street parks.** Terry Mills, a local resident planning consultant, felt the study did not identify enough land for public realm purposes, and suggested the team put more attention on Street Parks, making them a principal outcome of this exercise. He interpreted the Greenways as places the link places rather than serving as destinations themselves, and expressed a desire to see Greenways become places in and of themselves. Specifically, his recommendation was to “define the street allowance profile between Northern Secondary and North Toronto Collegiate institute in the most assertive fashion - with the south side of Broadway and the north side Roehampton being the most active sides, and the observes sides the most passive, park-like.”
7. **Yonge-Eglinton Squares.** Several participants felt that the entire intersection – including the road itself – should be given a special paving treatment at Yonge Eglinton to make the area feel like one square. One participant liked the spirit of this idea, but said “crazy” snow plow drivers might rip up any special paving. Some participants felt that the Study should make a bolder recommendation for the former TTC barns on the southwest corner, creating a big, green space.
8. **Montgomery District.** All participants liked the idea of a special Montgomery District, with many expressing interest in the Toronto Public Library’s recently initiated project focused on redesigning the space in front of its building.
9. **Other Squares.** Generally, participants liked the idea of re-aligning streets to encourage better traffic flow and create small, urban squares.
10. **Other feedback.** Participants shared a number of other comments, including:
 - A request that the Study Team gives names to the Squares and New Parks.
 - A suggestion that the Team look at adding more trees to the south side of Eglinton, east of Yonge Street.
 - A suggestion that all tree planting use native plants, or maybe even fruit trees on side streets.

- Some participants suggested creating a high green wall on the former bus bays to hide the construction activity on the site.
- Some participants asked the team to look into converting the Green P on Castlefield into a park, putting parking underground.
- Several people felt that Sherwood Park had become overrun by dogs and dog-walkers, and that dog waste was increasingly becoming a flash point with park users and residents.
- A suggestion that the study team maximize open space: “Canadians need space.”
- A suggestion to find ways to open up the lost rivers (such as Mud Creek).
- A suggestion that midblock connections could be good along Yonge Street’s east side, north of Eglinton.
- It is a great idea to consolidate little green spaces to create an exciting Redpath parkette.
- Some participants suggested the team conduct an inventory of private green spaces and consider integrating privately owned public spaces to achieve continuous greenways and to aid the implementation of green loops.
- A suggestion that a shadow study be undertaken to ensure new open spaces are not impacted by current development.

Green Links and Ravine Connections

1. Wayfinding. Participants felt strongly that wayfinding and signage should prioritize pedestrians and cyclists, instead of drivers. They suggested the wayfinding system take a coherent masterplan approach that:

- Coordinates colours and surface textures that visually identifies it as a network of paths that connect the community.
- Is alluring, consistent, natural, and adds identity. It should not add to visual clutter.
- Involves local artists in creating the wayfinding and park emblems.
- Points the way to the local parks from central meeting points.
- Locates signage along the main arterials of Eglinton and Yonge at the major intersections.
- Is prominent from all directions – not just running north on Yonge.
- Uses digital technology, wifi, and QR codes as a complementary system for accessing neighbourhood information, wayfinding, history and directories.
- Takes cues from the way finding in Mt Pleasant Cemetery.
- Includes these destinations: entrances to Sherwood and Eglinton Parks, Kay Gardner Beltline, Mt Pleasant Cemetery, Mount Hope Cemetery, Redpath Park, Montgomery Square, Bike routes and bike infrastructure, dog runs, schools

City staff said there may be opportunities and resources available to pilot some of the wayfinding and signage ideas within this neighbourhood.

2. Park Entryways. Some people felt that it was desirable to share and publicize the parks of the neighbourhood with locals and visitors, as they were a collective resource for all Torontonians and knit people together. Some suggested involving local artists and youth to highlight the pedestrian and cyclist routes to parks – even using temporary materials like chalk and watercolours as part of community events and festivals. Specific suggestions included:

- Park entryways should be more prominent;
- Park entryways could be signaled in creative ways, for instance, with tinted concrete or pavers, public art, textured surfaces;

- Each park or major green space could have an emblem or 'logo' that builds on its distinctive identity;
- One participant suggested using a woodpecker as the emblem for Sherwood Park.

- 3. Signage Inside the Ravines.** Some participants felt that signage inside the ravine was desirable for:
- Orienting people with simple maps noting distances to access points and key destinations, pedestrian and bike routes uptown and downtown, where the creeks originate and flow, picnic facilities, water fountains, lost rivers or watercourses, and nearby amenities,
 - Indicating ecological and heritage points of interest, wildlife habitat and tree species.
 - Indicating separate paths for cyclists and pedestrians

Other participants felt that signage in the ravine should be kept to a minimum, keeping the ravine in a more 'naturalized' or visually 'quiet' state. Participants noted that an advisory committee for Sherwood Park made up of local residents supports this view and has historically resisted installing more signage in the park and ravine, and said this group should be consulted if any plans for ravine signage and wayfinding move forward.

- 4. Cycling Infrastructure.** Many participants felt that on the whole cycling infrastructure was inadequate in Midtown. There was concern that conflicts between cyclists and pedestrians on paths were on the rise as users increased in number. Several participants said they were very supportive of the idea of the Greenways and hoped that the bike connections into the ravines and parks would improve with the public realm plan. One person wished there were plans for another Greenway along Sherwood that would connect the ravine access to Eglinton Park. Participants shared a number of suggestions to improve cycling infrastructure / wayfinding:

- A safe route across Bayview to Sunnybrook Park. One person suggested the team look into well designed and lit tunnel options, airy and accessible bridges or even installing an outdoor escalator in this location.
- Sherwood Park across Blythwood to the adjoining Alexander Muir Park.
- Signage to indicate connections to the Kay Gardner Beltline.
- Signage across Eglinton to Cedar Vale Park.

- 5. Publicly Accessible Private Land.** Given the distinctive built form and land use in the Yonge Eglinton area, there are numerous open spaces where the public is allowed to go, but don't always feel welcome. These include spaces like walkways in the Minto Towers, and the numerous aprons of lawn and gardens found around the base of the towers. People spoke of wanting to use these areas for sitting, walking, passing recreation but were unsure if this constituted trespassing on private land. It was also noted that the best 'cue' for public and accessible open space is having people in it – something a distinctive logo or signage would encourage. Participants suggested the team consider designing a distinctive emblem or identifier that makes it clear that people are welcome to sit and enjoy these important privately owned public spaces.

Streets

- 1. Destinations.** Several participants felt that the study should identify and enhance destinations as well as connections. Specific suggested included:
- The expanded Redpath Parkette could be a northeast destination that could balance the gravity of Eglinton Park in the study area's west.

- Enhancing transit stations (including the new station for the Eglinton LRT)
- Enhancing places with historic value such as the Church of the Transfiguration. One participant suggested building a tower or putting cannons to commemorate its historic value. Another participant noted that Eglinton Park had historic value as it once was home to the Eglinton Hunt and the Fox Clubhouse.

- 2. Streets and Sidewalks.** Several participants suggested that all streets should have wide sidewalks, and many suggested making more room on Yonge Street (either through deeper setbacks or removing the existing tree planters). One participants suggested new buildings should have overhangs / colonnades so that the public realm was wider and pedestrians had a weather-protected area to walk in. Many participants felt that adding trees to as many streets as possible was important. Participants suggested widening streets themselves (such as Redpath) to improve traffic flow when new development opens. Finally, participants suggested adding more pedestrian crossings and providing more traffic lights and traffic calming mechanisms, particularly at the intersections north of Eglinton.
- 3. Greenways.** Many participants liked the greeways, and suggested the team design greenways so that they become destinations, and not just connections. Some participants suggested the team provide detailed illustrations of the green loops, including benches, seating spaces, and the location of elevated bicycle lanes.

Other Feedback

- 1. Make a pilot project.** Many participants like the Study Team's ideas, but asked the team to consider some pilot projects or "quick wins" that could benefit the community in the short- to medium-term. One participant said, "The quicker you implement, the better."
- 2. Explain the implementation process.** Participants suggested that all the projects be categorized as short, medium, and long-term to better communicate and manage expectations around its implementation. One participant asked, "How will this vision be relevant" in the context of on-going OMB hearings and asked that the City / Study Team connect the ideas to implementation mechanisms. *Leo DeSorcy, from the City of Toronto, described a number of mechanisms that could help implement the vision, including the Secondary Plan, development application review processes, and Section 37 of the Planning Act, which allows the City to enter into agreements with developers to secure public benefits. He explained that Section 37 payments are often more generous when a developer sees the payments are connection to a vision like this one.*
- 3. Other suggestions.** Several participants shared suggestions that related to land use, built form, and heritage, including:
 - Consider requiring retail / commercial on ground floors to bring life to areas (for example, Redpath north of Eglinton).
 - Somehow recognize the Hydro building on Eglinton, east of Yonge, either through preserving building or its facade. One participant also suggested preserving the "space-age portes-cochers" on apartment buildings
 - Find ways to ensure and promote office uses in Midtown.
 - Encourage green roofs in Midtown.
 - Some participants felt there should be more one-way streets, while others disagreed and felt the streets should remain two-way

- One participant suggested that the Design Review Panel be given more authority in decision-making.
- One participant suggested restricting turning movements east-to-south on Yonge Street to improve traffic flow.
- One participant suggested calling attention to the falcons that live atop the RioCan and Canada Square buildings.
- Several participants suggested using public art to highlight and mark public spaces.

Next Steps

Nicole Swerhun committed to sharing a Draft Meeting Summary with participants for their review in the coming weeks, and explained that the Study Team would return to the community to present its Design Concepts in early 2014.

List of Attendees

Avenue Road Eglinton Community Association: Gillian Jagasia

Avenue Road Eglinton Community Association: Patrick Smyth

Avenue Road Eglinton Community Association: Frank Peters

City of Toronto: Alex Shevchuk (Parks Recreation and Forestry)

City of Toronto: Andrew Au (City Planning)

City of Toronto: Cliodhna Scanlon (City Planning)

City of Toronto: Diane Ho (City Planning)

City of Toronto: Hans Reikko (Eglinton Connects)

City of Toronto: Helene Iardas (City Planning)

City of Toronto: Leo deSocry (City Planning)

City of Toronto: Jamie McEwan (City Planning)

City of Toronto: Michelle Corcoran (City Planning)

City of Toronto: Patrick Cheung (City Water)

City of Toronto: Rong Yu (City Planning)

City of Toronto: Tim Burkholder (City Planning)

City of Toronto: Stella Gustavson (Eglinton Connects)

City of Toronto: Susan McAlpine (City Planning)

Eglinton Park Residents' Association: Lydia Levin

Eglinton Park Residents' Association: Mark Rubenstein

Eglinton Park Residents' Association: Neil Carter

Eglinton Park Residents' Association: Sharon McElroy

Eglinton Park Residents' Association: Ted Shepherd

Eglinton Park Residents' Association: Tom Cohen

FoNTRA: Terry Mills

Ontario PCs: Robin Martin (Candidate)

Resident: Bruno Apollonio

Resident: Claudia Giraldo

Resident: Helen Riley

Resident: Malcolm Martini

Resident: Mike Muller

Resident: Nick Sion

Resident: Olja Muller

Resident: Lancelyn Rayman-Watters

Resident: Tony Rizutto

Stanley Knowles Housing Co-Op: Ann King

Sherwood Park Residents' Association: Ben Daube

Toronto Green Community Foundation: Abe Dyck

TDSB: Jeff Latto

Toronto Public Library: Maggie Gosselin

Uptown Yonge BIA: Lesley Stanoulis