

Public Meeting #1 Summary

Midtown in Focus

Thursday, Sept 26, 2013, 6:30 – 9:00 pm

Anne Johnston Health Station

About the Meeting

On Thursday, September 26, the City of Toronto hosted a Public Meeting to discuss *Midtown in Focus*, a Parks, Open Space, and Streetscape Master Plan for the Yonge Eglinton Area. The purpose of the meeting was to present the Study Team's preliminary analysis and learn participants' ideas for the area. The meeting began with a brief overview presentation from the City's lead consultant on the project, Public Work (Adam Nicklin) and was followed by a series of smaller working sessions focused on four key topics relevant to the Parks, Open Space and Streetscape Master Plan. Participants spent about 30 minutes at each of these working stations, and then rotated to the next working station (for more detail, see the meeting agenda attached). The four working stations included:

- Green Links and Ravine Connections;
- Streets and Laneways;
- Squares and Other Open Spaces; and
- Eglinton Park.

Approximately 90 people attended the meeting, including residents, business representatives, and City Staff. Councillors Josh Matlow, Karen Stintz, and Jaye Robinson also attended the meeting.

Ian Malczewski, Yulia Pak, Jane Farrow, and Nicole Swerhun from Swerhun Facilitation prepared this Draft Meeting Summary and shared it with participants for review prior to finalizing it. This summary is meant to summarize key themes discussed at the meeting, and is not a verbatim transcript.

Key Themes from Feedback Received

There were a number of themes that emerged from participants' feedback, which we have summarized below:

Parks and open spaces are critical to the area's liveability. Given the amount of development coming to the area, it's very important that new and existing parks and open spaces are designed and programmed to accommodate all residents.

Accessibility, greening, and connectivity should be priorities. Pedestrian and cycling connections between the area's different neighbourhoods ravines, squares, parks, and open spaces are important. Connections should be as green and accessible as possible, and should take all four seasons into consideration.

The public realm should support and assert the area's identity. Adding distinct spaces, iconic art / architecture, and creative interpretations of the area's history are some of the strategies participants suggested the study team explore.

Eglinton Park's program and design need to carefully balance many needs. The park should accommodate a variety of uses and users, both active and passive, and is currently not meeting many participants' needs.

Detailed Feedback

We have organized participants' feedback into the four topic areas the defined each station: green links and ravine connections; streets and laneways; squares and other open spaces; and Eglinton Park.

Working Station 1: Green Links and Ravine Connections

Discussion at the Green Links and Ravine Connections working table covered a number of ideas and suggestions.

1. The ravines are great assets and could be improved through a few strategies:

- Getting in and out of ravines is challenging for seniors, so accessibility for the aging population should be part of their design.
- "Daylight" the ravine by taking out the pipe and concrete coverings.
- Find a way to resolve conflicts between fast-moving bicycles and pedestrians
- Make an effort to clearly mark connections into the ravines, including adding maps around the area.
- Consider adding a tunnel beneath Bayview Avenue to connect the ravines and parklands.

2. Sherwood Park

- The park is well-used at all times of the day, especially by dog-walkers, some of whom come from other parts of the city.

- Some participants said they liked that the ravines felt wild and less manicured than the park.
- Some participants thought that more visible signage should be added to the neighbourhood to point out the way to Sherwood Park, since it's not easy to find. One suggestion was to rename the street leading to the park as Sherwood Park Avenue.
- Others preferred that the park remain a hidden gem, and expressed concern that more signage might increase use of the park and attract more cars / parking to the area.
- Adding another entryway, perhaps off Keewatin, would improve accessibility to the park.
- Adding a safe connection from Sherwood Park across Bayview would improve connectivity to other ravines in the area.

3. Eglinton Park

- The park is heavily used by people from outside the neighbourhood, particularly the sports fields.
- Grass in the park gets overused and muddy. Consider installing astro-turf.
- North-south walking and cycling connections through the park should be improved.

4. Kay Gardner Beltline

- For many people accessing the Beltline, Colin Avenue is their preferred cycling route, though many people also use Lascelles Boulevard.

5. Alexander Muir Ravine

- Participants noted that, even though bike riding is not permitted, people do ride their bikes here.
- The gardens and views in Alexander Muir ravine are well-loved and appreciated by participants.

6. Mount Pleasant and Mount Hope Cemeteries

- Many participants like the cemeteries as places to visit, picnic, walk, or ride through, and they appreciate the green, quiet space.
- One participant reported being locked into Mount Pleasant after hours, since the cemeteries are only open from dawn to dusk.
- Participants felt that connections to Mount Pleasant Cemetery could be improved to make it more legible and welcoming.

7. Other Comments About Connectivity

- Cycling infrastructure could improve the use and safety of Mount Pleasant Road, Duplex Avenue, and Bayview Avenue as a cycling route.
- Longer crossing intervals would improve safety in some, particularly at Mount Pleasant and Sherwood. In others areas, more frequent crossing intervals would improve connectivity, such as at the intersection of Lascelles and Eglinton.

Working Station 2: Streets and Laneways

Participants at the Streets and Laneways station discussed a number of ideas, including:

1. Links and Connections

- Consider adding new streets and connections in the northwest quadrant of the study area to allow walking directly through the block.
- Introduce multiple connections to the new Loblaws to allow residents to easily access it.
- Between Yonge Street and Mount Pleasant Road, consider improving connectivity going north from Eglinton.
- Add above-grade links between towers to better connect them.
- Add an underground connection to the LRT, similar to the PATH, with accessibility as a key design consideration.
- Formalize the path to Erskine Avenue going through the east side of St. Monica School.
- Generally, improve connectivity between the northeast and southwest corners of the study area.
- Create a better-connected formalized bicycle network in the neighbourhood.
- Ensure that this project is compliant with the “Complete Streets” concept as proposed in Eglinton Connects.
- Increase awareness of the path going through Mount Hope Cemetery to Sherwood Park.
- Ensure that new development provides laneways or other pedestrian access.

2. Walkability

- Increase sidewalk space along Yonge Street to accommodate pedestrian traffic. Consider stricter rules and stronger enforcement for retail signs, since they can create impediments to pedestrians.
- Consider removing flowers on Broadway Avenue to increase sidewalk space.

- Ensure that the sidewalks immediately around the subway are wider to accommodate increased foot traffic.
- Require deeper setbacks from proposed new developments to create a more generous sidewalk.
- Consider making residential areas one-way streets to accommodate more sidewalk space.
- Explore strategies to address people parking on sidewalks. On side-streets with retail, many drivers park on sidewalks to avoid blocking traffic and end up blocking pedestrians.
- Create park-like street trails that encourage exploring the neighbourhood by foot.
- Consider removing a lane from Yonge Street to widen sidewalks.

3. Safety

- Ensure that there are proper traffic calming mechanisms in places with poor driver / pedestrian visibility and more than three lanes with high-speed traffic.
- Explore strategies to address noise, broken bottles, and drunken crowds.
- Implement a scramble intersection at Yonge and Eglinton, which is the second busiest intersection in the city.
- Add more traffic lights and increase crossing intervals for busy, wide roads, to allow pedestrians to cross the street safely.
- Improve connectivity between major streets and provide better lighting. One participant mentioned that Yonge Street between Eglinton and Lawrence is poorly lit.
- Enforce by-laws that prohibit cycling on sidewalks.

4. Greening

- Parkettes, such as Redpath Parkette on Erskine, are very important for the neighbourhood.
- Ensure that existing healthy trees are preserved, especially in construction areas.
- Green Erskine Avenue to return the street to its original state.
- Greening Eglinton should be a priority, and corners along its length should be turned into small parkettes.
- Increase the depth of setback to allow for more green canopies.
- Diversify the kinds of trees in the area to support and preserve current ecology.
- Plant larger trees, and use native flowers as much as possible.
- Green any new pedestrian pathways.
- Consider adding coniferous trees so that there is still greenery in winter.

5. Other

- Make all parking metered, especially around the residential apartment areas.
- Ensure existing parking rules are enforced.
- Developers should provide more underground parking in new development and especially close to the subway station.
- Ensure that recommended depths of setbacks are written into a by-law and are enforced.
- Be aware of the fact that the increase in population will likely result in an increase in traffic.

Working Station 3: Squares & Other Open Spaces

Discussion at the Squares and Other Open Spaces station focused on a number of different topics.

1. Overall Ideas about Squares & Open Spaces

- Midtown doesn't have a Rockefeller Centre, and likely won't have one in a single place due to space constraints, but a series of squares could create a similar feel in Midtown.
- There should be a map in the area that identifies all the squares, green spaces, connections, and publicly-accessible open spaces in the area.
- School yards should be considered (and protected as) part of the open space network.
- Create a water feature and put the words "love and gratitude" on it (drawing inspiration from the artist Masaru Emoto).

2. Accessibility and Connectivity

- More signage and way-finding should be added to the area to help residents and visitors navigate the neighbourhood.
- Consider designing a park overpass between the northwest and southwest corners of Yonge and Eglinton. It could improve connectivity and become a miniature version of the high-line.
- There is little to draw people south of Eglinton, and the pedestrian experience is poor. This could be a good location for streetscape improvements or a new square.
- Too many cigarette butts mar the streets: consider putting in more receptacles so that people have a place to throw them out.

- The shortcut at North Toronto Collegiate Institute is fantastic – there should be more connections like this in the area.
- Consider adding green space on transit shelters to improve their look and feel.
- Widening the sidewalks would greatly improve connectivity and safety between any future squares.
- Add more benches and bicycle lock-ups to the streets: they create mini-square in and of themselves.
- Consider closing the tree planters to better protect the trees.

3. Ideas for New Squares

- Many participants wanted to know the status of the former TTC bus bay at the southwest corner of Yonge and Eglinton. City staff explained that, for the next 10 years, these lands will be used as a staging area for the construction of the Eglinton LRT. There is a vision in place that includes a public square at the corner, and there will likely be a need to re-visit that vision once the LRT construction is complete.
- The four corners of Yonge and Eglinton should each be mini-squares with benches set back from the corners to encourage people to use these spaces.
- One participant urged the team not use cobblestones in any new squares, as they are difficult to navigate for mobility-challenged people.
- Consider having each square perform a specific function. For example, a square outside the subway / LRT station could be more focused on mobility and meeting, while a square north at Montgomery Square or St. Clements could be more focused on relaxing or meeting people.
- Consider creating a “reading garden” near the library.
- There should be some kind of iconic design or public art in that identifies the squares, especially at the intersection of Yonge and Eglinton.
- All the squares should have free Wi-Fi.
- The intersection of Yonge and Montgomery is the highest topographical point in the old City of Toronto. A future square there should take advantage of and recognize this fact.
- The squares could benefit from some kind of sculptures or sculpture garden.
- Consider putting a bend in the road at Yonge and Eglinton to slow traffic, disrupt the street grid, and create a more generous area for pedestrians.
- Schoolyards should be considered part of the network of open spaces and should be made more accessible to the community.
- The farmer’s market is a well-loved area, but it needs a bigger space than its current location at Montgomery Square.

Working Station 4: Eglinton Park

The group discussions regarding Eglinton Park covered much common ground, and in many cases expressed similar opinions about the park. Feedback received regarding Eglinton Park included:

1. **Access to Eglinton Park is difficult.** This point was raised by all four groups of participants rotating through the Eglinton Park working table, with a large focus on poor access from Eglinton. Key points raised included:
 - Some participants went as far to say that the “park edge along Eglinton is like a fortified wall” and that “right now access to the park from Eglinton is ugly and uninviting.”
 - There were concerns about poor lighting on the south edge and too much street parking on the north edge.
 - One participant felt that there’s nothing on either the north or south side of the park to signal that a big park is there, or that the north and south ends of the park are connected.
 - It was suggested that Trinity Bellwoods and Jimmie Simpson are not good examples to draw on for Eglinton Park because neither have a large community centre building blocking access to the park (like the park edge at Eglinton).
 - One participant sees a critical opportunity at the south end of the park and suggested that the City hold a design competition for designing a gateway for each end of the park.
2. **It doesn’t feel like “our” park.** Participants in every group described the park as being dominated by organized sport uses, and many said they were looking for opportunities to provide greater variety in its program and park features. Key points included:

Park identity:

- Park is “confusing because to me it’s a field”
- Park needs an identity – is there a way to theme the park? Like Trinity Bellwoods? Needs something special to attract people to come
- It doesn’t feel like a local park – feels more like a destination park
- It doesn’t feel like “our” park, it’s not like Sherwood Park (which feels more like our park)

Diversity of uses:

- Park has different pieces that aren’t well harmonized

- If you're not a dog or a kid, you wouldn't have any reason to go to the park
- There are no events at the park (but there are events at other Toronto parks)
- Would like to see chess tables and checkers, maybe ping pong tables – need options that draw a broader range of users
- Used to be cricket in the park but it got kicked out because soccer was so popular
- Should be WiFi in the park
- Should be creative regarding winter uses (e.g. flood the field to skate)

Interest in having the park play a role in bringing the community together:

- Would be nice to have an area that changes the focus of the park – something that brings the community together
- It feels less like a park and more like a play area – it's not good to go there to sit and read a book, no good meeting places
- The field house breaks the openness of the park – if we want a gathering space for more people, it could be located there (a place to meet)

Interest in more places to sit and read:

- It isn't a park to find a spot to read
- We need/want a place to just sit and read, need more benches at good intervals (e.g. granite shelf in Forest Hill Village)
- Need more benches
- There are really dense trees or open space, and nothing in between (there should be)

Related to organized sport:

- There are some very big users that dominate the use of the park, and unless they're contained they push out more passive uses – park is held hostage to sports fields
- Hockey is controlled by the GTHL – so there's no longer a community hockey team because they couldn't get ice time in their own rink
- Programming is controlled by outside groups
- Maybe too much baseball, since only 9 people play at a time)
- Soccer and baseball uses take over the park, and repel uses like sitting under a tree and reading a book – love how Trinity Bellwoods takes advantage of the relief in the park to create different places
- Sports groups should have space too because we need something for young people to do

- I prefer Sherwood Park – I see Eglinton Park as an active young person facility (I think you should leave it like that and people should use Sherwood Park to communicate with nature)
- Don't want artificial turf
- Tennis courts should be open before June, lights should be on earlier, and questions about why only 2 of the 4 nets are up

3. Dogs

- The accommodation of dogs was an important issue for many participants. Some participants felt that on a daily basis there are more dog walkers than any other park users.
- A defined area for dogs, both on leash and off leash, was suggested. One participant suggested that the dog area should not be in the centre of the park, since doing so would send the message that Eglinton Park is a dog park.
- Conflicts between dogs and dog waste and other park users (such as soccer players) are common.

4. Children's Play Area

- There were participants who mentioned that the children's play area is great for kids.
- It was suggested that the children's play area should be fenced off to help segregate children from dogs.

5. Paths & Connections

- Accessibility and connections to the park were common concerns. Participants felt there should be more accessible paths into the park, more paths in and around the park (including diagonal paths), a dedicated bicycle path through the park, and a more consistent sidewalk on the north side of Orchard View to bring users into / out of the park.
- Participants suggested widening the sidewalks around the park to make the park more of a destination.
- Many felt that the park needs better connectivity – prioritizing pedestrians first, then cyclists, then vehicles.
- Discussing the path on the east side of the park, participants said the clay soil under the path results in the trail flooding and freezing, creating dangerous conditions. Many participants felt this path could be wonderfully re-designed.
- Others suggested that the perimeter of the park could be designed so that people could run a circuit through the park.

6. Community Garden - Many participants were unaware of the community garden, however a participant directly involved with the garden outlined the thinking being done regarding the garden's future. Key points included: the fact that the community garden is used by some children's groups but has lost its connection with local residents. The people involved with the garden would like to re-build that connection, and ideas to do so include focusing on education around local food, native plants, heritage seeds, and potentially using the hill beside the community garden for movies, environmental education, and working with new Canadians and ESL programs. In response to this information, several meeting participants were supportive of the garden.

7. Parking lots and car access

- Some participants felt that the lack of parking prevents people who travel by car from visiting the park.
- Dangerous blind spots were a concern, specifically at Orchard View, where bushes are over grown and there is a lot of traffic (especially around hockey games). A suggestion to alleviate this condition was to provide arena access was off Eglinton Avenue.
- Several participants suggested removing the surface parking lot beside the arena and exploring better ways to use that space. Some suggested the City consider extending the underground lot to serve the rink.
- Some participants felt the community centre underground parking was underused because people don't want to pay for it. Participants felt this resource could be better used through strategies like renting spaces to employees of nearby office buildings.
- Cars parking on the street on the north side of the park are a constant irritation for local residents.

8. The Hill

- Many participants like the hill in the park and felt there should be more creative ways to use the hill encouraged (e.g tobogganing).
- The steps down the hill are a major feature on the west side, but participants felt they could be in better condition.

9. Landscaping and Design

- Participants thought felt there should be more ways to get relief on hot days.
- Some participants thought the lighting on the walking path was a perfect brightness, while others thought the park as a whole needed more lighting. In particular, some described the Eglinton edge of the park as too dark.

- Some participants felt adding berms could give the park even more interesting topography and landscaping.
- Participants liked that the park has washrooms and a pool.

Next Steps

The study team committed to summarizing the notes of the meeting and sharing it with participants who had left their contact information on sign-in sheet. The team also committed to sharing the dates for upcoming public meetings related to other initiatives in the area on the project website. The next public meeting will be in January, 2014.