

Midtown in Focus – Public Meeting #2

Meeting Summary

Tuesday, February 4, 2014

6:00 – 9:00 pm

The Salvation Army, 7 Eglinton Avenue East

Overview

On Tuesday February 4, 2014, the City of Toronto hosted the second 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 and discuss the *Midtown in Focus* Study Team's draft concepts and implementation strategies.

Public Work, the lead consultants on Study, gave a presentation about the Concepts and Implementation Strategies, and the North Toronto Soccer Club gave a presentation about how the recreation fields in Eglinton Park are used by the local and wider communities. These presentations were followed by a Question and Answer session, small group discussions, and a larger group report back. Participants also had the opportunity to present their response to the plans in writing. Approximately 80 people attended the meeting. Councillors Matlow, Stintz, and Robinson were in attendance, as was mayoral candidate David Soknacki.

Jane Farrow and Ian Malczewski of Swerhun Facilitation prepared this Meeting Summary and shared a draft with participants for review before finalizing it.

Key Messages

The following key themes emerged during the discussion. These themes are drawn from the detailed feedback in the rest of this meeting summary.

The plan is innovative and exciting. Many participants expressed support and enthusiasm for the vision in the emerging plan.

Active sports are important to Eglinton Park, and any future Master Plan for the park should maintain these uses and balance other uses.

There needs to be more clarity and creativity around implementation. Several participants asked for a clearer explanation of how the plan will be implemented. Some suggested the Team explore creative techniques to do so (such as impact investment and community bonds).

There's an important connection between the local economy and a vibrant public realm. Several participants felt it was important to create and promote a healthy retail environment in Midtown and suggested the Study propose some strategies to accomplish this goal.

Creating and improving mid-block connections is very important. Several participants underscored the appeal of a 'European approach' that created attractive, small-scale gathering spaces, markets and passageways within development blocks as a complement to existing streets and sidewalks.

Questions of Clarification

- 1. What is the proposed timeline for the completion of all those initiatives?** *Adam Nicklin, the lead consultant from Public Work, said that some could be done immediately, others could be done in one to five years, and others would take up to 25 years.*
- 2. Since many of the spaces being considered in this public realm plan belong to developers, what strategies is the team using to secure public use of private land?** *Leo DeSorcy from City Planning said that part of the purpose of the study was to come up with a vision for the future, and that the team was still developing the best policy-level strategies to implement that vision. The vision is an important advocacy tool that will help the City make a case for setbacks, open spaces, and other midblock pedestrian connections in Midtown.*
- 3. How do the Eglinton Connects and Midtown in Focus studies intersect?** *The Midtown in Focus study makes recommendations for certain areas of the Eglinton Connects study, such as station entrances and stops. There is an Environmental Assessment that is recommending bicycle lanes, tree planting, curb to curb, and the Midtown In Focus plan will respect these recommendation and integrate them into the emerging broader vision for the area. Both plans will move forward together through the local councillors and City Council.*
- 4. How will the plans and approaches in this report be paid for?** *Improvements to the public realm could be financed through a range of mechanisms including Development Charges, Section 37 funds, BIA initiatives, and developers constructing their buildings and open to reflect these design priorities.*
- 5. How is the planning department going to approach the development application for the south east corner of Yonge and Soudan which is going to OMB.** *A date of February 20, 2014, is set for the OMB hearing. City Staff will find out there if the applicant is willing to work with City on improvements or modifications.*

Detailed Summary of Feedback

Eglinton Park

Several participants urged the study not to reduce the size of the sports fields at Eglinton Park. *The study team and city staff said that neighbourhood sports activities and organizations are valued and appreciated and that no changes are being recommended for Eglinton Park in this study. Councillor Karen Stintz added that some Section 37 monies (\$500,000) from the Neon development at Duplex and Orchard View were used to upgrade the Eglinton Park play area in response to the community's view that the play area was not adequate and needed improvements.*

TTC Bus Yards at Yonge & Eglinton

Several participants asked about the vision and status of the plans for the centrally located TTC bus yards on the southwest corner of Yonge Eglinton. *City staff explained that Metrolinx will use the TTC bus yard as a staging ground for the construction of the Eglinton LRT for eight to ten years. Staff also explained that it had undertaken a Focused Review on the future of these lands and, through community consultation, proposed a concept plan for the TTC lands that was translated into a zoning by-law and Urban Design Guidelines. The diagrams and words in the plan respect those plans but make it clear further open space is possible through negotiation in the future. Councillor Matlow stated that one of his goals for this site was a large public square. He added that he has asked Metrolinx to create hoardings around the staging site that would offer information about the coming LRT, construction schedule and future uses of the site.*

Implementation and Financing Plans

Participants felt it was important to identify what the priorities in the vision should be, and some felt that the Midtown Planning Group could help host that conversation.

Mid-Block Connections and Laneways

Several participants said they would like to see a clearer vision for the mid-block connections and alleyways, one that brought a “European” sensibility. Such an approach would enliven these small pockets with options for hang-out space, cafés, and small market stalls while leaving enough room for deliveries and servicing. One participant mentioned enjoying the temporary closure of Orchard View Blvd for a market and encouraged the continuation of this practice. Another participant asked the study team to put more thought into plans for Cowbell Lane since it is heavily used by pedestrians and in need of improvement (for example, draw inspiration from Turkish Bazaars).

Privately Owned Public Spaces

One participant suggested the team explore strategies to encourage the sharing of private spaces with the public. Two suggested strategies were the social investment model used by the Centre for Social Innovation with its community bonds program, and another was the community ownership model used by the Green Bay Packers and Saskatchewan Roughriders. Another suggestion was to attract impact investment owners to help implement the vision.

Local Business and Retail

One participant asked that the study be more proactive and engaged in promoting vibrant and sustainable business strategies. There was concern about the loss of small, family run stores and services in the area. Another participant suggested the report find a way to encourage shop owners to make the streetscape vibrant even if they're renovating and constructing new storefronts.

One participant, a member of the local BIA, suggested that all attendees could help invigorate the local retail sector by getting in touch with real estate agents and businesses to alert them

about opportunities as they come up. Another suggested strategy was to invite pop-up stores and art installations on short-term rentals to keep the retail sector vibrant and attractive.

Councillor Robinson said she was encouraged by the input and involvement of the local business community, and committed to continue working to address retail vacancy rates and promote foot-traffic and street-level vibrancy.

Animating Small Spaces and Parks

One participant asked the design team to consider adding moveable furniture, chess tables, or large-scale chessboards that could be used with ‘giant chess pieces’. Another commented that paying closer attention to creating and animating small spaces and little squares was critical for the community to feel connected and social. One participant suggested the proposed square at Yonge and Soudan should be more of a square shape instead of a wedge.

Sharing the Road – Cars/Pedestrians/Cyclists

Some felt the report could have gone further in reassigning some of the street parking spaces as public realm space, while others felt this was inadvisable given there was a shortage of car parking throughout the area. Many participants considered underground parking a good solution, but some participants said that developers tend to resist building underground facilities given their high cost.

Some participants said that the tensions and conflicts between cyclists and pedestrians are on the rise, in particular on the pathways that run north and south through Eglinton Park. They suggested the Study Team address this more directly in the report.

One participant thought the plan should recommend making pavement ‘bumpy or ridged’ where it approaches intersections to slow down traffic and reduce the potential for pedestrian collisions.

The Park Loop

One participant asked about the implications of the designation of her home as the location for a future connection to Eglinton Park. *The Study Team and Councillor said that the vision was proposing a potential future connection and that the City was not proposing expropriating the property. Both the property owner and City staff agreed to continue the discussion after the meeting.*

Planters and Tree Pits

Some participants raised concerns that the maintenance of open tree pits and open planters along Yonge Street was inadequate and that they even present tripping hazards in some areas.

Mount Pleasant

One participant lamented that very little attention had been paid to Mount Pleasant in the study. They felt it was a lost opportunity as this area was in desperate need of a make over and improvements.

Next Steps

Nicole Swerhun said that the Team would upload both the North Toronto Soccer Club and Study Team’s presentations to the project website and would share a draft of the Meeting Summary with participants for their review.

Feedback Shared After The Meeting

After the meeting, some participants shared additional feedback via email and the project website. Key comments in this feedback were:

- Remove the surface parking lot in Eglinton Park and replace it with underground parking to create more green space in the park.
- Support for: maintaining active uses in Eglinton Park, improving pedestrian pathway lighting in Eglinton Park, creating additional spaces for trees throughout Midtown, prioritizing cyclists and pedestrians, and creating additional green spaces throughout the area.
- Re-name the project to “North Toronto in Focus” to preserve the historical identity of the community.
- Do not attempt to squeeze motorists into becoming cyclists – distances and extreme weather make it challenging to cycle in the city.
- Include provision for another school to cater to population increases.
- Limit the heights of new buildings.
- Do not implement one way streets – they increase traffic.
- Do not remove street parking – it is already difficult to park in the neighbourhood, and removing parking could deter visitors from coming to the area.
- Do not implement single-lanes roads – they are difficult for maneuvering busses and garbage trucks.
- Create underpasses at major junctions (such as Yonge-Eglinton).
- Focus on widening street rights of way to create more spaces for tree plantings and separated bicycle lines.