

Meeting Summary

Midtown Planning Group

Thursday, Sept 19, 2013

2:30 – 5:00 pm, Anne Johnston Health Station

Overview

On Thursday, September 19, the City of Toronto hosted a meeting with the Midtown Planning Group (MPG). The purpose of the meeting was to learn about the *Midtown in Focus* Study Team's preliminary analysis, share ideas about Midtown's future parks, open space, and streetscape, and learn about the project's web portal. Participants rotated through working stations exploring three different elements of Midtown's public realm, while members of the Study Team annotated large maps of the area and wrote down participants' ideas.

Approximately 30 people attended the meeting, including members of residents' associations, City Staff, and the project team. Councillors Josh Matlow and Karen Stintz also attended the meeting.

Nicole Swerhun, Yulia Pak, and Ian Malczewski from Swerhun Facilitation prepared this Draft Meeting Summary and shared it with participants for review prior to finalizing it.

Key Messages

Midtown's parks, open space, and streetscape should be green. Many participants suggested the area should be greener, including all streets, parks, and laneways. Participants also felt that existing open spaces, such as those surrounding the towers-in-the-park, could be better used by the public.

Connectivity is a key issue in Midtown. Participants felt that improving opportunities for pedestrian movement was very important, suggesting strategies like creating more laneway or street connections, ensuring universal access to underground transit stations, improving the safety of street crossings, and improving existing pedestrian shortcuts and access points.

Better programming of open space that already exists is very important. Many participants felt that existing open spaces could be better programmed to improve them, including re-visiting scheduling of sports fields at Eglinton Park, finding a better home for the farmer's market, and creatively adapting underused green spaces or empty storefronts.

Detailed Feedback

We have organized participants' feedback into the three focus topics at each station: Green links and ravine connections; Streets, squares, and laneways; and Eglinton Park.

Green Links and Ravine Connections

Discussion at the Green Links and Ravine Connections working table covered a number of ideas and suggestions. (See Appendix A for table sketches).

- 1. Streets can be thought of as open spaces for pedestrians as well as green connections between open spaces. Specifically, the following ideas were shared:**
 - Use Roehampton/Mongomery as one of the green "fingers" in the area, along with the other suggestions put forward by the community and Terry Mills in the Yonge Eglinton Comprehensive Parks and Open Space Plan document
 - More midblock connections are needed between the green "fingers" (e.g. between Roehampton and Broadway)
- 2. There are a number of areas where safer crossing are required:**
 - Creating a safer crossing of Yonge Street at Roehampton/Orchard View
 - Consider creating an island to aid crossings at Duplex and at Orchard View
 - Change the timing of lights at Redpath/ Eglinton to allow for longer crossing (this is a major crossing points for students)
- 3. It's important that the streets be green:**
 - Want greenery on Yonge Street
 - Explore opportunities for a green median (like Oriole north of Chapman)
 - Want big trees and for the area to be lush
 - Eglinton East is total concrete, add some green.
- 4. There are opportunities for greening private properties**
 - Towers in park never really had publicly accessible forecourts, they were used for auto drop off
 - Lots of publicly accessible private space that can be improved (Towers in Park)
 - 123 Eglinton East did nice landscaping
- 5. Ideas for Eglinton Park**
 - Access to the park needs improving from all directions
 - Need parking for carrying hockey bags to arena
 - Soccer league – highest number of kids in City of Toronto
 - Use parking lot at back of arena for Environment Day
 - Need to improve access to Eglinton Park from the east
- 6. It's important to give thought to what happens in the laneways.**
 - Shouldn't allow adjacent developments without pedestrian access between properties (should be well lit, attractive, ideally green, maybe hanging flowers, etc.)
 - Junky back lanes are not nice for people to walk through – design lanes in another way to manage garbage so the public can enjoy the laneway

- Laneway south of Salvation Army (runs behind Minto, almost at Yonge Street) – use it to get to Eglinton – if could be green and soften it, that would be good
- Good examples of cut-throughs and links to parks (like Brentwood Towers)

7. People use the big rocks:

- Great big rocks – currently used as seating opportunities
- Eglinton School – Mt Pleasant and Eglinton – when the kids disperse they go up Redpath and first thing they want to do is sit on the rocks

8. Draw on existing examples of good use of courtyard spaces, including:

- A French Bistro called Coquine (located at Manor and Yonge) took advantage of a little space next door to the Bistro and created a little café with two umbrellas behind the building – this is the type of opportunity we should look for at Yonge and Eglinton; and
- La Boheme (café located on Yonge north of Erskine) has a nice backyard courtyard (good example).

9. It's important to facilitate access to ravines:

- Sherwood Park is a beautiful ravine, but no path to get to Bayview and Sunnybrook Park (this is major gap between the Yonge Eglinton area and the ravine system)
- Many people don't know about the ravine system – it would be good to make the access points more visible, let people know the ravines are safe and usable
- Look at the wonderful Beltline connection from Mt Pleasant Cemetery to the Don Valley
- Put links to parks, ravines and trails maps on the project website
- Interpretive signage would be nice
- Signage would be helpful – with maps, words, and potential a “Midtown app”

10. It's important to facilitate access to the Beltline and other trails:

- Get Cycle Toronto input into this parks plan – they have good knowledge of path connections
- Need to think about best connection to the Beltline Trail – and consider adding a bike lane (look at Lascelles Blvd., Oriole Parkway, Edith Drive as options)

11. Important to think about maintenance and immediate implementation:

- It's important that the City is able to commit to maintaining the green space and to have the political will to sustain it
- Consider radical things to create more public space in the short term

12. Other thoughts:

- Roehampton is wrongly labeled on the map as Fairfield;
- Existing sidewalks need to be widened to 3 metres (in some areas the sidewalks won't even accommodate an individual stroller);
- Need accessibility for people in wheelchairs;
- Mixed opinions on whether parks should be designed to accommodate places for food, snacks, coffee – or food trucks (some think it should be considered, others strongly opposed to the idea)
- Find ways to address liability concerns to enable highest and best public use
- Don't forget Muir Park and Sherwood Park connections to the ravine system
- Redpath Park needs restructuring

- Important that team is aware of street closures (there is a history in the area of street allowance that have been closed as part of developments)
- Need to have big increase in north/south connections north of Eglinton
- Setbacks should be at least as far back as the original (historic) house setbacks
- Most people drive to Sherwood Park to walk their dogs

Streets, Squares, and Laneways

Discussion at the Streets, Squares, and Laneways station focused on a number of ideas. (See Appendix B for table sketches).

1. Safety and accessibility need to be key considerations in the design of streets and laneways:

- Underground transit station access needs to be safe and convenient, especially for seniors. Make sure there are two sets of escalators and /or elevators, in case one is under repair
- At the Yonge-Eglinton intersection, consider creating underground walkways, similar to the PATH, to make walking in the winter safer. Provide light and views into the underground.
- Streets should be green, but raised tree trenches like the newer ones on Yonge require adequate clearance, or else they are dangerous and are impediments to people in wheelchairs
- Consider widening the sidewalk on Yonge Street between Eglinton and Montgomery. Ideally, two couples should be able to pass each other
- Yonge and Eglinton is very windy: look at ways to calm wind

2. Streets should have a strong retail presence:

- The Eglinton LRT should unlock new retail opportunities on Eglinton, so consider strategies to make Eglinton a more attractive, retail-friendly street
- Many people use side streets to navigate the neighbourhood, so creating new commercial uses (like cafés) would animate those areas
- Make retail at the bottom new Mixed Use Development smaller-scale to encourage independent business
- Empty storefronts are a problem. When a store closes, the windows should be covered with beautiful images or art instead of newspapers. Alternatively, empty spaces could be used to incubate / subsidize new start-ups
- Create a BIA for Midtown
- Consider closing some streets (like Henning) for pop-up shops and markets

3. Pedestrian connections are very important and need to be encouraged and improved:

- Helendale should become a green street
- Make Cowbell Lane a nicer environment. It's a well-used pedestrian connection and should be softened, greened, and turned into an amenity
- Generally, encourage smaller blocks, since these create more corners, more interest, and a better streetscape
- Improve the look and feel of Duplex – right now it's unattractive and unpleasant for pedestrians

4. Midtown should have a range of different urban squares, each with their own role and function:

- A future square at Yonge and Eglinton should be focused on mobility: meeting people, moving through the area
- All four corners at Yonge and Eglinton should have some kind of urban square.

- Montgomery Square should be a calmer, more relaxed square
- Extend Montgomery Square across Yonge Street
- The TTC block could become host to a public space that would be the “Rockefeller Center” for Midtown
- Avoid creating a place like Dundas Square in Midtown, which is too bright and loud for Midtown

5. The public realm should create enhance and encourage Midtown’s distinct identity. Specific suggestions to do this included:

- Creating visual coherence for the open spaces at each corner of Yonge and Eglinton with distinct lighting and paving. Maybe even pave the streets with special paving.
- Creating something iconic that’s local to the area (such as street-spanning architecture, or a large local icon, like a statue of a raccoon)
- Developing something similar to the Freedom Trail in Boston, but focused on the 1837 Rebellion. Historical information could be embedded on the sidewalk
- Indicating the date on heritage buildings

6. Other suggestions:

- Try to find a home for the farmer’s market. It has moved a number of times and needs a bigger space. Roehampton might be a good location
- Explore sinking the roads at Yonge and Eglinton and putting landscape on top
- Try to bring nature underground. In Berlin, there’s an underground birdcage that creates a beautiful atmosphere. Add greenery in transit access areas
- Encourage porous driveways and streets
- Find ways to calm noise in the area

Eglinton Park

Discussion at Eglinton Park focused on a number of different topics. (See Appendix C for table sketches).

1. General Park Considerations:

- Want to open the park to public, but the park is already full – how do you manage overcrowding? Reconsider programming, ensure scheduling
- The park needs to be wheelchair accessible
- Trees did not get a chance to grow, were destroyed by kids and lack of proper maintenance. Damaged trees require maintenance / pruning
- Bushes/shrubs adjacent to the walkway in the park should be better maintained to improve sight lines and appearance
- Eglinton Park can’t be assumed to accommodate projected increase in local population of 20,000. Accessible street parks need to be developed around the park as per Secondary Plan
- Ensure that dedicated areas for sports are public and not privatized
- Lighting is poor – improve this to extend “usable” park time
- Trinity Bellwoods Park is a good precedent because of its wide open access and variety of uses
- Consider highlighting a historic feature of the park

2. Paths, Connections, and Missing Links

- Path along east side is muddy, frosted/slippery in winter, full of garbage and puddles – drainage issues

- North edge doesn't work for pedestrians –there is no paved walkway
- Route from Anne Johnston Health (AJH) centre to park must be accessible – possible refuge / resting spaces between AJH building + park
- There are paths going north-south, but missing links east-west across the park
- From Oriole Parkway, people usually go right across the park eastward without any formal paths
- Create a celebrated entrance that leads through the garden and towards the hill.

3. Access Points

- Look into ownership of laneway between houses on east side that serves as an access point to the park, redevelop it
- Accessibility of park is poor
- Create an arch or other type of visible celebratory entrance to the park from Eglinton Avenue
- East Side driveway (at Orchard View) is very dangerous because everyone uses it as a walkway to the park
- East side access point (at Orchard View driveway) needs to be enhanced – because it is a back door service entrance for trucks, etc., and people use it as walk way to the park. Maybe green it?
- Consider southeast corner for a main gateway to capture more traffic
- Open southwest corner entrance that lead through a community garden

4. Purposes and Uses

- Path along the west edge of the park could be used for running
- Washrooms could be in a focal area
- Add walking paths around the park perimeter
- Improve sit-ability along the southern edge of the park by creating shade and providing more street furniture
- Tennis court area could be used by people in wheelchairs for active recreation
- Playground in Oriole Park is a good precedent
- Encourage south edge formal garden sitting + resting
- The soil at the south west corner is unstable - opportunities may be limited
- Consider use of the hill – top is used for boot camps; bottom – dog use next to garden. Take advantage of splendid views
- Create safer conditions for sledding – although illegal, it's the reality for kids
- Create a fenced / dedicated area for dogs off-leash
- Ensure there is a quiet/calm area for people without children or dogs
- Repurpose existing fields to keep all the sports and get Residents Associations' involved to help with scheduling, advertising, communications with residents.
- Need more sitting areas in the park
- Ensure that parking lots have trees
- Check the extension of the arena for underground parking and repurpose surface parking for park
- Northern expansion of the soccer field needs more trees
- Seasonal repurposing of active recreation areas to double up programming
- Consider southwest corner for farmers market

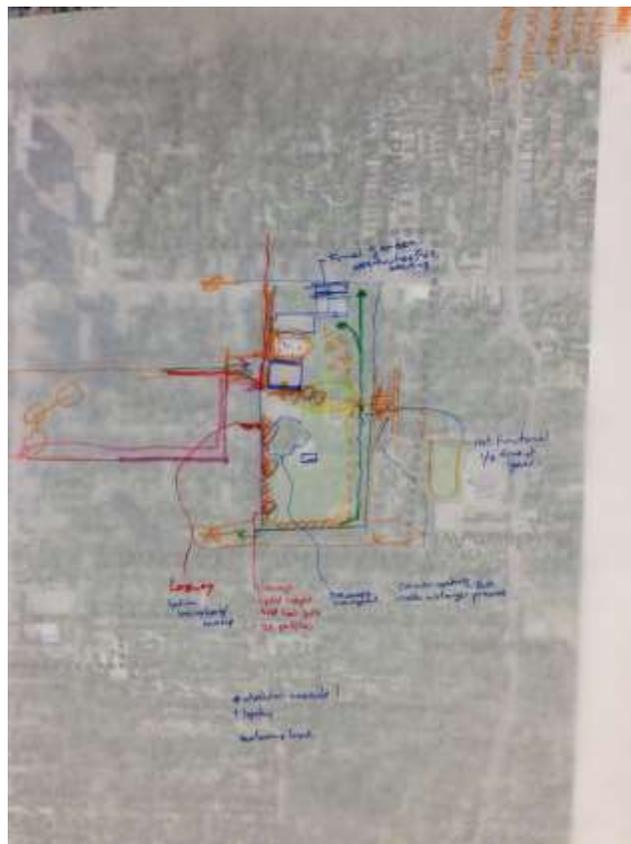
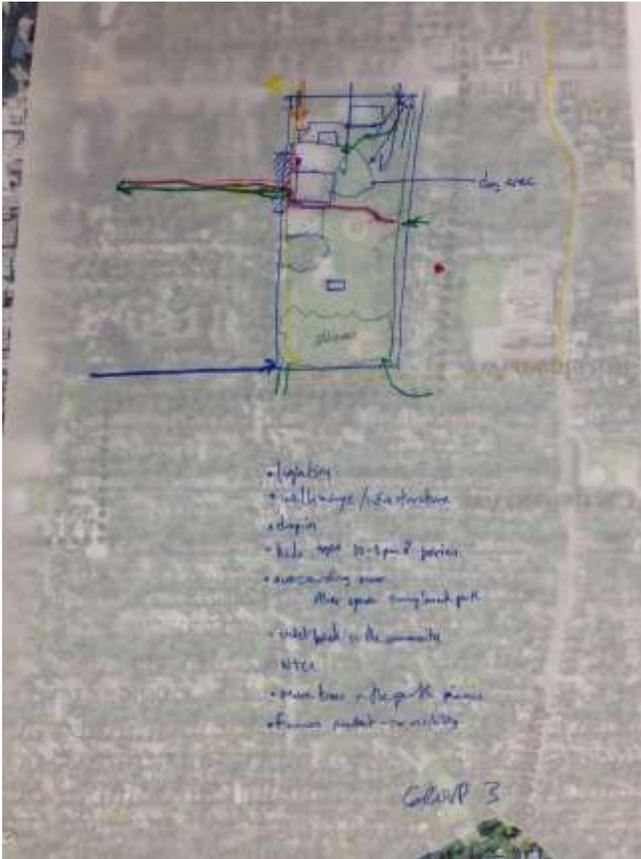
5. Programming

- The programmed sports are successful right now
- Facilities should be open to public and not completely programmed. Free play should be an option
- Preserve wildlife along west edge of the park
- Like MYATT Park in London, ON: community garden, whose veggies are served in a park café through special youth program. It also has dedicated poop 'n' scoop bins, the deposits of which are used as community garden fertilizer
- Increase public community programming
- Attract more music, food, arts festivals
- Overcrowding from North Toronto Soccer Club – create additional soccer fields in nearby parks, allow kids to play soccer sometimes. There should be better scheduling of these programs, and bring back cricket.

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. Some members of the Midtown Planning Group offered to publicize notice of the Public Meeting on September 26.

Appendix C) Eglinton Park Station Sketches



Appendix D) List of Participants

170 Roehampton: Rosanna DellaValle
Anne Johnston Health Station: Brenda McNeill
Anne Johnston Health Station: Sash Whiting
ARECA: Patrick Smyth
Central Eglinton Community Centre: Paula Cornett
City Councillor – Ward 22: Josh Matlow
City of Toronto: Rong Yu
City of Toronto: Kristina Reinders
City of Toronto: Lukasz Pawlowski
City of Toronto: James Parakh
City of Toronto: Leo DeSorcy
City of Toronto: Helene Iardas
City of Toronto: Andrew Au
City of Toronto: Sue McAlpine
EPRA: Tom Cohen
EPRA: Naomi St John
EPRA: Lancelyn Rayman-Watters
EPRA: Elizabeth Cohen
SPRA: Ted Shepherd
SPRA: Ben Daube
SPRA: Paula Greco
FoNTRA: Terry Mills
Public Work: Marc Ryan
Public Work: Gerardo Paez
Public Work: Adam Nicklin
Public Work: Seven Xiru Chen
Resident: Bruno Apollonio
Republic Residents' Association: Geri Berholz
Swerhun Facilitation: Nicole Swerhun
Swerhun Facilitation: Ian Malczewski
Swerhun Facilitation: Yulia Pak