

On Thursday, June 4, 2020 representatives of organizations working in the Downsview community participated in a focus group that represented the first of what will be many conversations regarding the future of 520 acres at Downsview. Participants represented the Bird Studies Canada, Our Greenway Project, and the Toronto Beekeepers Collective.

The focus group was held online using WebEx video conferencing software and included a brief introduction of the project from Northcrest and Canada Lands, followed by facilitated discussion between all participants. Consultants supporting Northcrest and Canada Lands also participated, including representatives of Urban Strategies Inc., Henning Larsen, and SLA Architects.

The meeting was facilitated by Nicole Swerhun and Khly Lamparero from Swerhun Inc., who also wrote this summary. As facilitators that are not advocating for any particular outcome of this project, the intent is to capture the perspectives shared during the discussion, not to assess the merit or accuracy of any of these perspectives. This summary does not indicate an endorsement of any of these perspectives on the part of Northcrest Developments or Canada Lands Company.

**The summary was subject to participant review prior to being finalized. If you have any questions about what's here, please contact the id8 Downsview team at [info@id8downsview.ca](mailto:info@id8downsview.ca).**

id8 Downsview

## June 2020 Focus Group Community Development

Thursday, June 4, 2020, 1 – 2 pm

### SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

#### Overall sentiment

- These 520 acres of Downsview – as they are today – are an important place for nature, especially birds and insects. At a minimum, any future development (if contemplated) needs to draw on best practices in green buildings, green development, and sustainability to make sure species are protected. The [City of Toronto Biodiversity Strategy](#) is an important resource.
- A greenway is proposed to meet the mobility needs of the Downsview area and northwest Toronto.

#### Unique and important habitat for birds

- Nature is losing most of the time when we develop. Habitat is getting poorer. If development goes ahead, we have to design buildings that think about people, but also biodiversity.
- The grasslands adjacent to the runway are valuable habitat for several bird species, including two Ontario Species at Risk, Bobolinks and Meadowlarks. This is possible because the land is inaccessible to humans and (for example) supports ground nesting. To best support birds, this land should not be developed.
- Birders regularly see extremely rare species in Downsview Park, including Snowy Owls, Red Tail Hawks, and many others – it's a migratory spot. See eBird database for additional species.
- Development brings lights, cats, reflective windows and other dangers that will make these birds even more vulnerable. In the past 50 years, 1 in 4 birds have been lost due to development. For example, if you don't properly treat the windows you might kill birds (see work of the Fatal Light Awareness Program – or FLAP – in Toronto).
- We need to think beyond traditional practices for deliberate interventions in the landscape that support specific species. For example, green/eco roofs need to go well beyond just absorbing water and be designed to meet the needs of specific species. They need to be

intensive rather than extensive (i.e. they need to be deeper to replicate habitat, support small bushes, etc.). For example, create habitat for cliff-dwelling species such as the Peregrine Falcon or Kestrels at the top of buildings, with green “ladders” to enable insects to reach the roofs; or build a chimney specifically for Chimney Swifts. Imagine the amazing spectacle of a large chimney built for Swifts that visitors could see. Look to Europe for examples of landscape interventions to support biodiversity.

#### Important location for bees (and other insects)

- The Toronto Beekeepers Collective has been at Downsview for several years and really like the area. It’s a wilderness in the middle of the city and the bees have been happy here.
- There needs to be a level of commitment to green building and green development, including a clear definition of what is meant by sustainability. Native species are preferred.
- There was a time when a lot of herbicides were used, which is bad for the bees. When changes are made to the habitat it is important that there be a gradual/natural transition over time – it can’t be dramatic because that relies on herbicides, which means we lose bees. One of the reasons birds are being lost is because we are also losing insects.

#### Support Mobility with a Greenway (see graphics attached)

- Our Greenway Conservancy is using the conservancy model to advocate for a Greenway in the area managed through a Use Agreement. The potential for the Greenway is to connect northwest Toronto – from Downsview Park, DUKE Heights and York University through to the Emery Business Improvement Area (BIA) by Highway 400, Albion Islington BIA, and ultimately Humber College. The Greenway is a wide pathway for cycles, mobility devices and people walking, with parkettes beside the Greenway for people along with nature and biodiversity corridors. It also allows cargo cycles that can carry groceries and ultimately serve the needs of business and community members. One model cargo bike is already in use and the team is looking to build an inventory of these bikes as part of a pilot project launching Summer 2020 – with smaller models carrying up to 300 lbs and larger models carrying much heavier loads.
- Our Greenway Conservancy is a non-profit and has applied for charitable status. A model for this type of approach can be seen in Indianapolis where the trail started out with a mix of public and private investment, but now is managed through an endowment, fundraising and an adopt-a-trail approach. Their recent expansion was 96% privately funded. Sample illustrations of the Mobility Greenway are attached.
- The Greenway model means we can re-think the site transportation plan. We can have pathways that are calming for people while providing practical and economical goods distribution networks. Our Greenway Conservancy is happy to work together and be a long-term partner with Northcrest and Canada Lands to work the Greenway into the fabric of the development and future activities at Downsview.
- The challenge of these suburban communities is not always the lack of assets, but the lack of accessibility. For example, the Black Creek Farm is a wonderful community asset, but a bus is required to get there.

#### Process

- Suggestions of other groups to connect with included: Seeds of Diversity (to get insight about native seeds and plants), the Toronto Ornithological Club, and Ontario Field Ornithologists.

Other

- “We live in a very racialized community where housing is hard. I’m hopeful about how the project will think about sustainability and how it will be framed – particularly with respect to access to housing and justice within housing.”

**NEXT STEPS**

Northcrest and Canada Lands thanked everyone who joined the meeting and encouraged people to reach out to their networks to pass on information about the project. The id8 Downsview team committed to staying in touch and encouraged people to not hesitate to get in touch with any follow-up questions or thoughts at this early stage in the process.

**Graphics provided by Our Greenway Conservancy**



Spring/Summer



Winter