
XOXO DOWNSVIEW

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MARCH 8, 2023



FINAL SUMMARY

MARCH 27, 2023

Overview & Objectives

On March 8, 2023, members of the XOXO Advisory Committee (XOXO-AC) gathered online to learn about the arts and culture projects happening on the Downsview lands – including the XOXO Downsview projects developed with the Committee’s input since the last meeting in September – and to gather feedback on two emerging projects. The meeting was attended by twelve members, including representatives of the landowners, Northcrest Developments and Canada Lands Company.

The following is a summary of the discussions that took place. These notes were be reviewed and approved by participants before they were finalized.

Presentation of Arts & Culture Projects

At the start of the meeting, facilitators Jane Farrow and Mia Hunt took some time to clarify the intentions of XOXO Downsview and its focus on interim arts and culture activations. This was positioned in contrast to a separate process currently underway to develop a 30+ year strategy for more permanent public art on these lands. Both are initiatives of the landowners. This set the stage for David Anselmi, from Canada Lands, and Mitchell Marcus, from Northcrest, to provide updates on the arts and culture projects happening on their respective lands.

LANDOWNER PROJECTS

David shared that Canada Lands is working on a Master Plan for the Downsview West District, which will include an arts component. He flagged that he may reach out to the XOXO-AC for guidance as that plan is developed. David also noted that it’s a busy time for Downsview Park and that there are community activities happening almost every weekend through the spring and summer. As one example, Downsview Park is gearing up for Earth Day events on April 23rd.

At the start of his presentation, Mitchell provided an overview of the Northcrest lands, which largely centre on the Downsview runway. He shared details of recent and upcoming events on these lands, the development Bay 12 – which Northcrest recently gained access to – and plans for runway activations.

Three recent and upcoming events were discussed.

- In November, “Light Up Downsview” featured a drone performance on the runway by Toronto artist Katharine Harvey. The event was developed in partnership with Luminato and North York Arts, and brought in local DJs and food. Despite the adverse weather, it drew 2.5 thousand participants.
- In February, “Hangar Skate” occurred each weekend. It featured an ice rink and roller rink when things warmed up. It was run in partnership with North York Arts and Your Peak Performance and also included a workforce development piece with local hires. The events drew 4 thousand people.
- In May, a series of drive-ins are planned on the Northcrest lands in partnership with local organizations: Just B Graphic, MCFN, the Philippine Legacy and Cultural Alliance, Councillor Pasternak, and the Wilson BIA.

Bay 12 is continuing to develop as a multi-use space, including:

- a community room event space, which may feature weekend residencies;
- quarterly installations, including an upcoming mini golf course designed by local artists in collaboration with STEPS;
- an experience centre, which will soon feature a mural by MCFN artist Cathie Jamieson; and
- an attractions space, which will be leased to an entertainment tenant.

The Runway, which Northcrest will gain full access to in 2024, is being conceived in two parts.

- The northern section will be designated for concerts, large events, and major festivals.
- The area by Bay 12, will be more community-focused with sports fields, runway play opportunities, a marketplace made with stacked shipping containers, local festivals, and a series of residencies on the weekends. It will have both summer and winter programming.

Mitchell noted that even without the extra interest in arts and culture, with the City’s Section 37 alone, the amount of money for permanent public art projects on these lands is substantial.

Members expressed excitement about this long-term investment in public art. Some asked if and how arts events downtown could be moved to the Downsview lands, which are really at the heart of the city. FIFA events were provided as one example. Mitchell assured the Committee that both Northcrest and CLC are working hard to decentralize arts activities downtown and bring many of these events to Downsview.

RECENT XOXO DOWNSVIEW PROJECTS

Following the landowner presentations, Jane and Mia provided an overview of the XOXO Downsview projects which have developed with the Committee’s input since the last meeting in September 2022.

The Wind Rose Emerging Designer Competition

The Wind Rose Emerging Designer Competition took place last fall. The creative brief and a system of support for the teams were developed based on the Committee's feedback. Seventeen diverse teams submitted proposals. All teams are featured on our website and have been celebrated through social media. The teams described feeling supported and many told us it was a great professional development opportunity.

The jury selected three winning teams:

- "Landing, Take Off" is by three first-year Master of Landscape Architecture students at the Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design at the University of Toronto. Their installation celebrates local industrial history and the birds of Downsview Park.
- "See You Around" by emerging artist Sherri Gallowitz, highlights the diverse local community and Downsview Park as a gathering place through photographs and vibrant flags.
- "Wind Blessing in Red" is by two Bachelor students in Drawing and Painting and Environmental Design at OCAD University. The design includes long strips of red fabric hung from the arches and a central circle of stones. The designers are developing a process to collect local wishes for the future, which will be written on these strips in many of the languages of Downsview. Once hung on the mound, the installation sends these community wishes into the wind.

The Perimeter Project

The Perimeter Project emerged from XOXO-AC site walk feedback. It uses local fences as canvases for art framed in the shape of Xs and Os. Artists were identified by local arts organizations – a process endorsed by the Committee last September. Following the Committee's recommendations, XOXO paid the organizations a fee to identify possible artists for the project and left the creative brief open. As always, artists were also paid for their work.

The works of 25 artists are featured on durable Lexan boards on fencing around Bay 12. This location helps expand the reach of XOXO outside of Downsview Park and also responds to calls at the last meeting to have more arts and culture programming by the Ancaster neighbourhood.

XOXO DOWNSVIEW PROJECTS UNDER DEVELOPMENT

Play on the Runway 2.0 is currently planned for July 16th. It will include more of what we loved last year, including: music in more locations; different zones with animation, like roller-dancing and possible group instruction; equipment rentals, like bikes, scooters, and rollerskates; and free ice cream. We are also exploring documenting the event in collaboration with a number of emerging local photographers.

We are in the early stages of developing more murals for the site. This builds on the success of the Ulysses Curtis mural, the painted paths, and of course

ArtworxTO's ALLSTYLE mural on the Depot building. We are exploring ways to use a juried process and develop a creative brief that's connected to the surface/locations. As always, this would be guided by the XOXO Workplan and its priorities.

We are also exploring how to adapt the Turtle and Traveller graphic to different areas of the site. We presented how the Turtle and Traveller was first a component of the Wind Rose installation and then adapted for a fence project. Ultimately, it was decided that the piece would be better suited to, and honoured in, a mural on a wall. We are exploring how these figures could perhaps appear in different places on the site as a sort of "search and find."

Key Feedback from Discussions

Members provided essential input on two developing projects: Inside on the Outside and Talking Fences.

INSIDE ON THE OUTSIDE

Jane presented an overview of the project concept in which photographers explore and document a number of heritage buildings, which may otherwise be off limits to the public. Their images are then displayed in a number of ways, which could include an outdoor exhibition, building wrap, digital exhibitions, banners, etc. A number of buildings are being considered both as subjects for the photographic exploration and as "canvases" for the work. The buildings captured may not be the same buildings used for display. It was explained that the works on the outside of buildings could be up for about a year, maybe more. The photographers would be identified through a juried process.

To prompt discussion, members were asked what kinds of exhibition approaches could best engage the local community and how we could get the call out to the photographic community, in the local area and beyond.

AR/VR Engagement

Many members were excited about the potential of AR/VR experiences to offer an immersive experience to participants. For example, when you hold up your phone, a bird in a mural could fly away. Technologies such as Artivive and Stark AR were mentioned. We heard that participating artists would need some training and perhaps workshops in this technology if we take this route. If so, support could be sought by companies like Charles Street Video (<https://charlesstreetvideo.com>). It was also suggested that perhaps one artist could develop a VR experience across all buildings on top of the photographic works developed by non-VR photographers.

Members mentioned a number of precedents for AR/VR projects, including "Beyond the Plate" in Brampton, where installations about food culture in vacant shop windows come alive with animations and voices of the locals (<https://stepspublicart.org/project/brampton-window-activation-pilot-project>). As another example, the work of artist Will Selviz was discussed (<https://www.willselviz.co>).

There was an appreciation that this sort of digital transformation would require more resources than documentation alone. Of course, we heard that all artists need to be paid well for this project.

Locations and Exhibition Possibilities

Members asked us to think about buildings where audiences are already “built-in.” This could be around the sports hangars or in areas of public transit. We heard that there may be great potential for nighttime projections (see Projection Mapping: <https://www.barco.com/en/solutions/Projection-mapping>), but that again, the question of where people are and when is important.

Some members also wondered if the buildings were interesting enough to be the subject of this project, but others noted that creative interpretation could make these places come alive.

We also heard that barricades, like jersey barriers, could be used as canvases for local art, whether for Inside on the Outside or another project.

Outreach to Photographers

It was encouraging to hear members say that a great cross section of photographers would be interested in this sort of project. While some members thought that it may require a certain kind of photographer to do building work, others told us that we need to think broadly and invite diverse photographers to make their unique mark on this project. So, for example, an artist that addresses issues of perspective in their work may be interesting or one that does more artistic or abstract photography.

Members asked us to engage the greatest number of photographers possible. If necessary, we were encouraged to have fewer buildings rather than fewer photographers. We also heard suggestions to include photographic collaborations or local photographic collectives in the call to build new relationships. This could include youth and newcomer organizations.

Many organizations were suggested to help get the word out or to be partners for this project. These include: Gallery 44, Centre of Contemporary Photography (<https://www.gallery44.org/>); Contact Festival, which runs during the month of May (<https://scotiabankcontactphoto.com/>); Inter/Access (<https://interaccess.org/>); Images Festival (<https://imagesfestival.com/>); Reel Asian (<https://www.reelasian.com/>); and TIFF (<https://www.tiff.net/>).

Framing the Brief

Overall, members advocated for an open brief that would give the participating photographers freedom to interpret these spaces as they want. That said, we were told that it would be important that the ultimate platform, exhibition strategy, or technology be communicated as part of the brief.

Some members wondered how we can “avoid seven Burtynskys” and what

strategies might be used to diversify the photographic approach. We assured that the jury process will ensure a diversity of participants and approaches. On building local connections, members suggested that the artists don't have to be local if their work is informed by the area, as it would be in this case.

Programming Components

Many members expressed interest in a programming component to this project. This could be created by XOXO or requested in the photographers' proposals. It may include an opportunity for the photographers to talk about their work or another creative way to connect with the community.

We heard that a programming component could include a way for the public to reimagine these buildings. In this way, we were encouraged to think not only about the past of these places, but their future. Community programming would be integral to this. As an example IMAGInuity was discussed, in which Black inventions were reimaged by the community (<https://www.artworxto.ca/artwork/IMAGInuity>).

TALKING FENCES

Mia outlined this new project, which draws from the fence weaving system developed for the "I am right here" installation created as part of Paola's Fabric of Community project on the Wind Rose. In this project, we would identify a number of fences (perhaps four) and use a juried process to identify words to weave on them. This project offers low-barrier participation and a strong online component. A number of locations are under exploration.

Members were asked how we could frame the brief, if the brief should be site-specific or have a local connection, and about the jury and outreach process.

Framing the Brief

Members expressed great interest in this project. One noted it was reminiscent of protest banners (see: <https://www.artgalleryofhamilton.com/exhibition/in-movement-training-sessions-for-freedom-fighters/>) Another mentioned a precedent in which North York Arts asked locals to describe Toronto in 6-word poems (<https://www.northyorkarts.org/project/my-city-my-six/>).

To develop the creative brief, some members suggested identifying themes that are drawn from the local place and community. We heard that it could be location-specific, so, for example, the perimeter fences could be focused on welcoming people and drawing them in to experience the area and communicate that art lives here as much as sports and markets.

Some also wondered if there could be an interactive or tactile component.

Outreach and Participation

Many members told us that they appreciated the openness of this invitation to the community. There was some discussion about how to increase the community participation or alternatively how to scope it.

Some members wondered, for example, if XOXO could send ten artists into ten local schools to determine the words that could then be selected by a jury. Such a process could engage local creative writers. Others discussed the possibility of focusing on emerging artists only or to direct the call to youth and/or schools.

Ultimately, the Committee decided that the call should be left open, but that efforts should be made to get that call out to diverse groups and select the winning writers based on the Workplan to ensure diversity.

Locations and Installation

As above, we heard interest in focusing on fences at the perimeter of the lands as a way to signal that things are happening here. Sheppard and Chesswood was provided as one great example of this.

On the installation itself, we were encouraged not to treat all the text the same way. It was said that perhaps the final font/look/treatment should respond to the words and their intent. Ben Johnston was provided as one example of an artist who creates engaging graphic words in urban space (<https://www.benjohnston.ca>).

OTHER PROJECT IDEAS

During the conversation, other ideas emerged for possible projects. This included the creation of large inflatable works. The inflatable drum created by Born in the North was provided as one example, as was the work of artist Max Streicher (<https://www.maxstreicher.com>). We also heard caution about engaging artists to do inflatable work who do not regularly work in inflatables or have a practice that could be easily adapted to them.

We also heard that the Turtle and the Traveller design could be well adapted to merchandise or products for giveaways.

Wrap-Up

Before closing, Jane and Mia checked in on how the developing projects reflected the priorities of the XOXO Workplan and ask if there were any proposed changes to the Workplan at this time. Members did not have any comment, but were encouraged to follow up as needed. Members were thanked for continuing to share their experience and expertise. It was stated that notes from this meeting will be circulated for approval along with the Windrose briefing, which some member thought would be helpful as we develop the next set of creative briefs.

Participants

CANADA LANDS COMPANY

David Anselmi

NORTHCREST DEVELOPMENTS

Mitchell Marcus

XOXO-AC MEMBERS

Adriana Salazar

Ashley Beerdat

Cecilia Garcia, North York Arts

Felipe Noriega

Jessica Maurice, Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation

Lydia Hernandez, Sketch

Paola Gomez, MUSE Arts

Patrizia Libralato, Toronto Biennial of Art

Tracey Prehay, Artscape

Michael Vickers, Brampton Arts

XOXO-AC MEMBER REGRETS

Kayode Brown, Just B Graphic

DEPT OF WORDS & DEEDS

Jane Farrow

Mia Hunt