

On Friday July 16, 2021 representatives of city-wide stakeholder organizations participated in a focus group that reconvened to discuss the future of 520 acres at Downsview. Participants represented: Cycle Toronto, 8-80 Cities, Habitat for Humanity, Options for Homes, Social Planning Toronto, Toronto Board of Trade, Toronto Community Benefits Network, Toronto Regional Conservation Authority, Toronto Youth Cabinet, and Walk Toronto.

The focus group was held online using Zoom video conferencing software, and included a presentation on the emerging Framework Plan from Northcrest Development and Canada Lands Company, followed by facilitated discussion between all participants. Consultants supporting Northcrest and Canada Lands also presented, including representatives of Urban Strategies Inc., and KPMB Architects.

The meeting was facilitated by Nicole Swerhun and Ruth Belay 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 assess the merit or accuracy of any of these perspectives nor does it indicate an endorsement of any of these perspectives on the part of Northcrest Developments or Canada Lands Company.

This 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.

id8 Downsview

July 2021 Focus Group City-wide Stakeholders

Friday, July 16, 2021, 9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

Overall sentiment

- The presentation was positively received, and participants said that they are encouraged by the inclusion of affordable housing, equity approaches, connectivity, and green spaces. Constructive guidance was shared to support and continue to strengthen the emerging Framework Plan.
- The importance of the context was emphasized, and particularly the opportunity for the scale of the Downsview project to have transformative impacts city-wide, regionally and globally (especially since the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area is one of the fastest-growing urban areas). There is support for doing something innovative, more environmentally sustainable, and more equitable with bolder action from Northcrest, Canada Lands and the City.

Detailed feedback

Feedback from participants is in regular text, and responses (where provided) from Northcrest, Canada Lands, and their consultants are noted in *italics*.

Equity Strategy & Impacts of Pandemic

- Existing inequities have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- It was suggested that Northcrest and Canada Lands develop an equity strategy that identifies communities that may be disproportionately negatively impacted by the development of these lands and strategies to minimize and mitigate those impacts. The equity strategy would need to include measurable goals and targets and should be embedded as part of the project vision to develop the social infrastructure and the partnerships that make vibrant and active spaces.

- The newly announced film studio is a great opportunity to dedicate a certain percentage of jobs to local employment and providing training opportunities for people to be qualified for these roles. Developing a legacy youth training and skills building centre was suggested as a great mechanism for enhancing youth and local employability.

Ecology and Habitat Creation

Many were happy to see that new green spaces were distributed throughout the proposed plan. One participant noted that in the previous Citywide Stakeholders Focus Group it was suggested that Northcrest and Canada Lands consider opportunities to include larger blocks of pure ecological habitat that can support higher ecological functions and provide connections for wildlife (e.g. for forest, wetlands, floodplains, meadows, etc.). Having a few blocks that are a minimum of 2 hectares in size and roughly square in shape (to minimize edge effects) would be ideal, layers of habitat (ground, medium and larger tree canopy) and explicit connections to the Humber and Don River Water Shed. The image of the rail underpass was a great example of a larger green space with water management design elements (recreating headwater streams). The ecologist team from the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) is available for further conversations on this. It was also suggested that these types of blocks be part of the early works onsite, so growth can happen before people come into the area (similar to approach taken in by Waterfront Toronto in Corktown Commons).

Phasing & Community and Social Infrastructure

- Some participants are interested in knowing when more details will be available from Northcrest and Canada Lands regarding community facilities (e.g. daycares), affordable housing, public areas where people can feel safe, and other community benefits.

There will be more detailed information to share when the scale of development is determined for each of the future districts (given the size of the site, each of the future districts will also be large – a size more typical of a secondary plan area elsewhere in the city). The opportunity of this project is not lost on us, we have the scale that will allow us to deliver a significant number of community benefits in the area that is underserved and faced with barriers and inequities.

Affordable Housing

- It was flagged that the City of Toronto's inclusionary zoning by-law, once implemented, will be an important means of securing affordable housing. Developers will be required to provide a minimum number of affordable housing units and/or surpass the minimum requirement.

Inclusionary zoning (IZ) will not apply to the Downsview lands. The settlement agreement reached in early 2021 has outlined a minimum requirement of 20% of land conveyed or equivalent to provide affordable housing. Note added after the meeting to expand on this response: At this time, the draft-IZ by-law will apply based on geography including stronger market areas and those areas designated as Protected Major Transit Areas. It is not yet clear if the Downsview area will be included. However, unlike most other properties in the City, there is a site and area specific policy (SASP) that applies to the entirety of these lands and requires affordable housing, regardless of how the inclusionary zoning by-law is implemented. Even if IZ is applied here it is likely that the SASP policy will result in more affordable housing.

- It was encouraging to see affordable housing included in the vision for the future. As part of building complete and stable communities, it's very important that people be able to access the property market. People with good perspectives and jobs are systemically denied access to the housing market and to the opportunity it provides to build household wealth and

intergenerational wealth. There are organizations, like Option for Homes, working with various models and financial tools to provide this access. Northcrest and Canada Lands are really well positioned to make big impacts by looking at the world a little differently because they can leverage their access to capital and think about long-term returns (as opposed to being focused on making a quick buck). Options for Homes is happy to share and discuss these models with Northcrest and Canada Lands, and to support the back-and-forth conversations that can support the work here.

Northcrest and Canada Lands are very familiar with Options for Homes model, and it is a great model to learn from. We're interested in seeing what opportunities we have when we get to that stage. The team is also open to new approaches, and creative solutions and innovative solutions.

Connectivity

- There are historic barriers to area-wide connectivity that the 520 acres can address. Prioritizing connectivity can help ensure that communities on the east side can access both Downsview Park and these new lands. One of the participants also happens to be a resident of the Ancaster community and was happy to see more connections to parks and other neighbourhoods.

What is not shown on the map is that two large facilities will remain in the area (TTC Wilson Yard and Department of National Defence). We have considered the basics of the mobility network to potentially allow for connectivity if these spaces evolve and become available. The City will also be reviewing connectivity to the broader area as part of their Secondary Plan review. There will be connections across the Allen that align with the plans for the Allen East CreateTO lands.

- Participants were happy to see that both cycling/pedestrian pathways and boarder network connections were included in the emerging framework plan. Representatives are interested in follow-up conversations, as more details emerge, and more input can be provided on strengthening network connections and safety measures.
- One participant shared an appreciation for the network approach to public space and early thinking on interim uses for the site.

NEXT STEPS

Both Northcrest and Canada Lands thanked everyone who joined the meeting and appreciated the feedback and constructive guidance provided. This feedback will shape the process for a project with city-wide, regional and global significance. Northcrest and Canada Lands encouraged everyone to apply to the id8 Downsview Community Resource Group as a mechanism for providing diverse voices and collaboration opportunities. Citywide interests would provide valuable perspectives for the resource group. Nicole Swerhun, Swerhun Inc., will send links to the application and the terms of reference for the id8 Downsview Community Resource Group ([also available here](#)). The id8 Downsview team acknowledged the continued support of participants and look forward to future collaboration.