

On Tuesday, October 6, 2020 Northcrest and Canada Lands hosted a public workshop that shared and sought feedback on emerging ideas related to the future of Parks & Nature on the 520 acres that are the focus of the id8 Downsview process. There were 20 community and stakeholder participants including: 10 local residents (with several from the Ancaster area), as well as a local teacher, a local realtor, and representatives of the Toronto Ornithological Club, Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre, Toronto Kite Fliers, the TRCA (Toronto and Region Conservation Authority), and the DUKE Heights BIA (Business Improvement Area).

The public workshop was held online using Zoom video conferencing software and included a brief overview of the project from Derek Goring (Northcrest) and Deana Grinnell (Canada Lands). Accompanied by a more detailed presentation by Daniel Baumann (Henning Larsen) and Rasmus Astrup (SLA), consultants supporting the id8 Downsview process. This was followed by five breakout discussions and a wrap-up plenary. Other consultants supporting Northcrest and Canada Lands also participated, including representatives of Urban Strategies Inc., as did staff from the City of Toronto's Planning Division.

The meeting was facilitated by a team 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 or Canada Lands.

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.

Parks & Nature

id8 Downsview Public Workshop
Tuesday, October 6, 2020, 4 – 6 pm

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

This summary reflects an integration of the feedback shared in the five breakout rooms and the plenary discussion. Key themes and topics shared by participants are listed below, with more detail provided on the following pages. Please note that feedback from participants is in regular text, and responses (where provided) from Northcrest, Canada Lands, and their consultants are documented in *italics*.

Key themes and topics shared by participants

- 1. Support for recognizing the value of nature;**
- 2. Support for connectivity;**
- 3. Feedback on park design and use;**
- 4. Support for the role of parks in connecting people;**
- 5. Support for public art; and**
- 6. Different perspectives on priorities and phasing.**

Overall, many participants said they liked the presentation and the ideas shared, saying that they were encouraged and excited about the potential of the project and with one participant saying that “the video clip was awesome – I never dreamed of that here”.

1. Support for recognizing the value of nature

- **Many supported the presentation's focus on sustainability of the land for different users – plants, birds, animals, and people.** One participant reinforced the importance of “giving back so everyone can thrive” while another said that “it’s exciting to see that the proposed approach will help restore the area closer to the natural state that existed pre-development”.
- **Many supported the efforts to try and weave natural systems into the urban design, respecting systems and connectivity.** They said that even simple steps like planting native species and providing enough soil for them to thrive will strengthen ecosystems. This included support for thinking about and implementing stormwater management in a way that’s integrated into the urban design and used as an amenity. It also included comments about the intrinsic value of nature, along with the value of outdoor space for a range of users – from families to birds to kites. Parks also support overall health and mental wellbeing. It was also noted that many tools are available to help implement some of the ideas shared and that many existing City policies require a green approach to development, including protection and accommodation of certain species.

2. Support for connectivity

- **Several participants expressed their support for connections,** including connections to, from, and through parks and natural areas within Downsview, the communities surrounding Downsview, and to the broader city. Right now, residents don’t really have a very direct route from their houses to Downsview Park and they want improved connections. Broader connections are also important to allow people from across the city to access parks/natural spaces, especially Downsview Park. It’s also important to provide connections to transit, local neighbourhoods, and other local destinations. Some specifically liked the idea of leveraging transit stations to bring in people from other neighbourhoods to use the park. Some were reinforcing the need for better bike connections.
- **The rail line was identified as a big barrier to travel and at the same time as a biodiversity opportunity.** Some participants suggested that the team find a way for the whole site to be more integrated (instead of existing in “two halves”), while another suggested a grade separated crossing to help with this. Another participant encouraged the team to think about the potential for a linear park along one (or both) sides of the rail corridor, identifying it as a “golden opportunity” to create a biodiversity corridor north-south through the site, inspired by and connected to Toronto’s ravines.
- **Given the scale of the site, there is a unique opportunity to connect the Don Valley system to the Black Creek,** and ultimately to the Humber River system. It is a valuable opportunity from a connectivity perspective.

- **A potential gap in park connectivity was identified**, with a participant noting that the east side of the id8 Downsview site doesn't seem to have as many parks (with a potentially big gap between the Don and Humber systems).

3. Feedback on park design and use

A lot of feedback focused on the design of parks, things people would like to be able to do in parks, implementation considerations, and examples of good and bad parks.

- **Park design:** There were participants who said that they like the idea that parks are not static and that they should evolve as the community changes. They would like to see parks that are flexible and adaptable. Some suggested that the id8 team “go for simplicity” and not over-design or over-program parks. It was suggested that the runway be used as a linear park that connects to other parks. Ensuring safety and security was emphasized by some, including safe pathways to and from the parks and good lighting, especially at night.
- **Things to do in parks:** Many would like to see a mix of things to do in parks (and outside of parks), including:
 - things to do in all seasons (skating, cross country skiing, other activities, lovely pathways, place for bikes);
 - storm shelters;
 - shade and seating;
 - room for kite flying (especially access to the open space at higher elevation for kites);
 - water features;
 - outdoor entertainment spaces; and
- **Implementation considerations:** It was suggested that usage of parks be monitored to show that people are in fact using them (which supports continued investment in parks). Also, the maintenance and capacity of parks are important to consider and plan for, especially since parks are seeing increased demand due to COVID-19.
- **Both good and bad examples of parks were identified**, including:
 - Good examples: Evergreen Brickworks, G. Ross Lord, Earl Bales, High Park, the Bentway, and Central Park NYC. These are good examples because they have many different things you can do, many continuous trails throughout, restoration of natural areas (especially the Brickworks), a variety of play spaces for children, great and creative programming (especially the Bentway) and when in Central Park (for example), you are within walking distance to restaurants, bars, and other social things – so you can walk out of the park to these places and back into the park after visiting these places.
 - Bad examples: Lisgar Park (the park is over-designed for uses that are inconsistent with how many people want to actually use the park, now it can't be adapted), and Regent Park (the displacement of residents had a negative impact on the community).

4. Support for the role of parks in connecting people

- **A few participants reinforced the important role of parks in connecting communities**, including the different communities around Downsview. They talked about parks as places where different communities can meet, connect, and enjoy each other. Look at opportunities to hold festivals that bring together different cultures and people can come together.

5. Support for public art

- **There were participants that focused their comments on public art**, noting that they “would love to see public art throughout the area”. They encouraged the id8 team to think about public art in terms of making it visually appealing and interactive for adults and children. The Bentway was identified as a good example of this, noting the power of the park to transform the area and that it’s “amazing how one park can create such atmosphere” using an example of a recent art project where a river was projected onto an open space so “it felt like you were actually in river water”.

6. Different perspectives on priorities and phasing

- Several participants shared thoughts related to phasing, including:
 - some who think that improving existing connectivity with the neighbourhood should be prioritized first, followed by constructing a park and letting it grow and evolve, and then growing the neighbourhood around the park;
 - some who would like to see nature (including mature trees) being put in as early as possible because it takes time to get established;
 - some who expressed the desire to see nature and the community grow together (rather than have parks and nature be an afterthought after development); and
 - some who emphasized the importance of ensuring access to Downsview Park during construction phases.

7. Other comments focused on:

- an interest in learning more about how the thinking about parks and nature connects to the current employment lands designation;
- an interest in recognizing the importance of heritage, but also noting that it shouldn’t be the top priority and that it shouldn’t stop any great ideas;
- given the size of the site, there was an interest in seeing the team consider accommodating a small forest (e.g. 5 hectares) that is not totally accessible to people so it can be healthy – this could also be an opportunity to rethink parkland dedication because forests can be beneficial to society as a whole; and
- an interest in seeing water as an asset that’s used in the site’s design and the functioning of parks to enable carbon storage through green infrastructure.

Questions raised (and responses provided) during the meeting included:

- What’s the timeline for when we will start seeing the new plan implemented on the site?
We’re in the early stages of consultation for the Framework planning that will take us

till the end of the year and early into the next. We will then submit an application to the City of Toronto to amend the Secondary Plan. The Secondary Plan Amendment will take a year or two. Some changes on site will start in 2023 when the airport is scheduled to leave. It will take decades for the site to be fully redeveloped.

- *What's the timeline for the William Baker project? William Baker is at a more advanced planning stage. To date, two separate phases of public consultation have been held. The first phase was held in June 2019 and the second in November 2019. The third public consultation phase is planned for later this year. Following this third phase of consultation, Canada Lands will be submitting a proposed William Baker District Plan to the City. With the review, approval processes, and securing necessary permits, we anticipate the construction to start in 2023.*
- *Are there any plans for Denison Armoury by Sheppard Avenue West and Allen Road? Can the Canadian Armed Forces expand their site if they need to? From the id8 Downsview team's perspective, we're not aware of any plans for change at the Armoury. We haven't been approached by the Canadian Armed Forces or the Department of National Defence with any requests of this nature.*
- *Is more information about the project and the upcoming workshops available on the project website? Yes, all of the information is available on the project website, including information for the three upcoming workshops – Getting Around and Across the Site, Jobs and Employment, and People and Neighbourhoods (www.id8downsview.ca).*
- *Will the site need to be remediated as a result of previous activities here? We have identified a couple spots that need cleanup and it is manageable. Remediation will be done to Provincial standards.*
- *Has an existing bird survey been done? Is there an intent to preserve bird habitat? We have learned a lot about the existing species on site, and a big part of our work has included thinking about how to create the right habitat for current and new bird species, including the possibility of creating habitat in the greenspaces, and also in new places such as on roofs.*
- *Have you thought about creating a wetland to help manage water runoff and stormwater? Yes, we will be placing wetlands around the site. The graphics shared today were more general, and in the future there will be more specifics.*

NEXT STEPS

Derek Goring (Northcrest) and Deana Grinnell (Canada Lands) thanked people for making the time to participate and for the robust discussion. They wrapped up by noting that the common themes among the small group discussions are remarkable and will really help direct the id8 Downsview team. They also expressed appreciation for comments that challenge the team to think about new things, reiterating the many opportunities on this large site. Deana and Derek concluded by encouraging people to continue to participate, and confirming that the id8 team will be back for another round of consultation in a few months – noting that they're looking forward to talking with the community again soon.