

On Friday, June 5, 2020 representatives of organizations in healthcare, seniors living, and seniors community interests in the Downsview area 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 Lumacare, Revera, North York General Hospital, and the York Centre Seniors Steering Committee (YCSSC).

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.

id8 Downsview

June 2020 Focus Group

Aging in Place/Health

Friday, June 5, 2020, 1 - 2 pm

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

Overall sentiment

- Acute and primary care services are already at capacity for the area. Seniors need access to a continuum of care options. Any future development here also needs to recognize that many local communities are already struggling with poverty, limited job opportunities, stigma, etc. and COVID-19 is resulting in them falling further behind.

Acute care is a major challenge in the area

- Development here will have significant impact on the catchment of North York General Hospital. Humber River Hospital and North York General Hospital are beyond capacity for acute care. Delivery of primary and secondary care is also challenging. We need projections of how this area will be serviced from an acute care and primary care perspective.
- The time is now to begin planning so services are in place on time. From concept to opening day, it takes 10 to 15 years for health care to be delivered.

A continuum of care is needed for seniors, and it needs to be integrated with the rest of the community

- Toronto has lost over 1,000 long-term care beds in the last few years and COVID-19 has only highlighted the major challenges the city faces. The Province committed to building 15,000 new long-term care beds, and we know that COVID-19 will fundamentally change how the long-term care is delivered.
- People don't want to be institutionalized. We need a comprehensive approach that provides a continuum of supportive services. Communities need to be integrated, with services like daycares integrated into comprehensive villages along with seniors and others.

Support for a Seniors' Village

- The York Centre Seniors Steering Committee has been working closely with Canada Lands and many others (elected officials, City of Toronto staff, local residents,

Baycrest, etc.) for some time advocating for a Seniors' Village in the William Baker neighbourhood. The community here isn't interested in retirement homes built as big boxes. Instead they need to be diverse and integrated, with places for people to be together.

Support aging in place

- There are thousands of seniors currently being supported in their homes in and around Downsview, and with COVID-19 the need for supports has grown. Especially in the towers to the west of the site, communities are already grappling with a number of challenges – job opportunities are limited, seniors housing is not affordable, many people are house poor or living in poverty, and the communities face stigma.
- Seniors need opportunities to be outside and have age-appropriate outdoor spaces. Benches with canopies are good, as are raised garden beds (so seniors don't have to get down on the ground) and gardens accessible by wheelchair.
- Interconnectivity is an issue. Seniors need more options on how to move around. Right now we're forced to use cars because the distances between places is too far. The city was created in a way that requires us to drive.
- Seniors also need FUN in our life – think about places where seniors can come together to play games and have fun.
- What is a village and what is a neighbourhood? There could be many neighbourhoods in a village. A village is self-sustained– people don't need to leave the village to get almost anything they need. Be sure to ask seniors what a “village” means for them.

Seniors living needs new thinking

- There are many seniors living in properties in the area providing a range of care, including both retirement homes and long-term care. These buildings were designed at a different time and new thinking is required to meet the needs of seniors in the future. It is not just about buildings, it is about community and integration.
- A comprehensive approach with a range of options is required to support varying needs, from seniors apartments through to assisted living, long-term care, and hospitals.
- Supports for seniors need to be physically close to each other to provide a continuum of care without requiring seniors to move several times.
- Many seniors are in a large home, living alone, and physically isolated. They can care for themselves, but lonely. They may consider moving into a seniors apartment, but leaving a family home is very stressful – so it's important that they only have to move once. After that, the location should be able to support them as their needs change over time (e.g. when they want or need help from a registered nurse, assisted bathing, medication management, etc.). This means having seniors apartments adjacent to high care services.
- Downsview has the opportunity to develop a new model for communities that could result in other jurisdictions coming here to learn from us.

Seniors housing needs to be more affordable

- Costs need to come down so all options are more accessible to the general population.
- Something like the City's Housing Now program is needed, with a focus on seniors.

Regulatory challenges with providing long-term care

- One challenge with long-term care is zoning. Long-term care doesn't fit into Employment Uses, even though there are many full-time jobs provided. It's also not Institutional and not Residential.

As soon as a stove is included in a unit, the costs go up because of the required Development Charges . Fees are going up, in part, to address the risk and uncertainty associated with this type of real estate investment.

Think about Downsview as a destination

- Downsview is well connected to the TTC, GO, and the 401. It's possible that people would be able to park their cars here and settle in – they'll be able to access care and take advantage of local amenities. Don't think about the market as only within 5 km of the site – people will migrate here from farther away for housing or jobs.
- The community feels disconnected from the rest of the city and from downtown. We need to give tourists a reason to come here from downtown, to come to Downsview Park.

Process

- People know each other and the area is well connected. Get local youth involved early in the process.
- The YCSSC is working with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the City of Toronto on a proposal for seniors. Northcrest and Canada Lands should consider creating a working group for seniors and it should start with identifying proper standards (e.g. defining who is a senior).

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 team will follow-up with all participants after the meeting, including outreach to those invited but unable to attend. They reinforced that while the Framework Plan for these 520 acres will not get into the level of detail largely discussed during the focus group, it's important to understand the detail at this stage so that opportunities are not precluded in the future. They also encouraged participants to share any precedent projects they've seen that could help inform the thinking at Downsview.

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.