

On Thursday July 15, 2021 representatives of business and commercial interests in the Downsview area participated in a focus group that reconvened to discuss the future of 520 acres at Downsview. Members of the boards of the DUKE Heights Business Improvement Area (BIA) and the Wilson Village BIA participated, along with a representative from each of the Downsview Aerospace Innovation and Research Hub (DAIR).

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](mailto:info@id8downsview.ca).

id8 Downsview

## July 2021 Focus Group

### Business and Commercial Interests

Thursday, July 15, 2021, 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

## SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

### Overall sentiment

- There was support for how the id8 Downsview engagement process is unfolding, and the resources dedicated to it – it speaks well to how the work is evolving.
- The emerging plan was applauded by participants, noting that the film studio announcement is a compelling early step.
- Participants are excited about continued opportunities for collaboration, ways to improve connectivity to the existing Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) and to promote local industries/businesses.

### Detailed feedback

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

#### Business development and attraction:

- The presentation didn't talk about small businesses, incubation opportunities (for example, like the Centre for Social Innovation), and other investments that can act as catalysts and supports for individuals and entrepreneurs with ideas they're working to realize – this part of the city really needs this.

*Northcrest and Canada Lands are very committed to supporting those types of activities on the site. We see a combination of existing business and institutions (like Centennial College) and along with newly created spaces for start-ups, entrepreneurs, small businesses and non-profits, incubation spaces, and accelerators.*

- The film studio campus is an exciting opportunity that aligns with existing municipal efforts to promote film production in Toronto. It is great to hear that there will be more film production in the Downsview area. Employment areas in Toronto are scattered throughout the city. Those located in outer boroughs have not experienced the same level of support or growth as those located more centrally. The studio will be a great mechanism to support much-needed growth in the Downsview area.
- The local Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) would like to see their areas included in the id8 Downsview vision for the future (right now the BIA areas are outside the vision area and not represented visually on the maps and graphics) – access to the new infrastructure, the new employment, and the residents is a high priority for local businesses. Both BIAs are looking forward to working with Northcrest and Canada Lands to look for ways to integrate the surrounding commercial areas (Duke Heights and Wilson Village) into the new development.
- Organizing employment in industrial parks is really an old way of thinking. What we have here in Downsview is a site that can attract investment from corporations, both locally and globally and make it part of our neighbourhood. With the DAIR project we already have U of T, York, Ryerson, and Centennial coming together to do something unique here. It is at the centre of the Greater Toronto Area and has the potential to support region-wide growth.

### Connectivity

- Connectivity was stressed as being an extremely important feature for integrating existing communities with the new areas being developed. There was support improving connectivity through strengthening pedestrian and biking pathways. The connectivity gap between the new neighbourhoods and the existing neighbourhoods east of Allen Road was flagged as a potential hole to fill.

*One of the key challenges and opportunities for Northcrest and Canada Lands is connecting these lands into the city and surrounding areas to develop a new network of connections. The emerging plan has showcased some of the larger connections. During the district planning phase, there will be more details on local roads. The gaps on the east side of the site reflect the existing properties owned by the Department of National Defence and the TTC – who have indicated that they intend to remain in those locations for some time – being clearer on identifying these sites in future graphics and images is something that may be helpful in future meetings.*

### The Runway and Interim Activation

- The runway idea is being visionary and an excellent addition to the area, but make sure it's more like Los Ramblas in Barcelona than the Rideau Canal in Ottawa.
- For interim uses of the runway, consider adding electric and/or water infrastructure to allow for the runway as a site for festivals and other events or sports activities – this has been a foundational strategy used in other places in Toronto designed to support interim uses, including Exhibition Place. Interim uses will increase the visibility of the site and help people imagine how this space will be used.
- Consider providing temporary housing and workspaces on the sites. Mobile homes could be an option for addressing the housing and homelessness crisis.
- Start planting trees and other species early.

### Complete Communities

- Downsview has enough space to create distinct communities that also offer access to the runway, parks and other elements that are part of complete communities. The 520 acres of the Downsview lands could be 4 or 5 different towns with different identities.

### **NEXT STEPS**

Both Northcrest and Canada Lands thanked everyone who joined the meeting and encouraged everyone to apply to the id8 Downsview Community Resource Group. Business and commercial interests would be a valuable perspective for the resource group. Nicole Swerhun, Swerhun Inc., will send links to the application and the terms of reference ([also available here](#)). Id8 Downsview Community Resource Group will be a continued accountability mechanism and a space to represent the diverse interest of stakeholders. The id8 Downsview team acknowledged the continued support of participants and look forward to future collaboration.