

On Monday, June 1, 2020 representatives of business and commercial 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. 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) and FlightSafety International.

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 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.

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 Business and Commercial Interests

Monday, June 1, 2020, 11 am – 12 pm

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

Overall sentiment:

- Many said that the meeting was very encouraging.
- Some said that they'd like to see Northcrest and Canada Lands use the lands to their best possible potential, to be creative, and to use the site to strengthen employment and address issues like connectivity, traffic, transportation, and the fact that there's not enough affordable housing. It was also emphasized that integration is very important.

Land Uses and Growth

- Support for growth around the three subway stations was expressed by some, as was the need to think about the area like a town. It's not just a place for people to work – as one person said: "Especially with the subways, we hope people realize that this is where people can live, work, and play all in the same place".
- One person focused on the need to unite the whole area together. Greenspaces have to stay, we should be able to move freely, and small businesses need to be supported. "I'm not against mixed use" but things need to be well thought out and beneficial to everybody, including the entire city of Toronto.
- One person noted that the world has changed because of COVID, and that it's important to have the interests of businesses at heart and at the same time recognize that things may never be the same again. We'll have social distancing for a long time, and many are working remotely – so we need to keep an open mind when thinking about the best land uses to support how we are (and will be) living.

Employment and Jobs

- Small local businesses in the area have benefited from the large numbers of people employed at Bombardier that support their businesses, and there are concerns about what the impact will be on local businesses when Bombardier leaves. It's important to recognize that projects like this change the nature of the surrounding neighbourhoods.

- Particularly for the Wilson Village BIA, the more jobs and employment that stay in the area, the better. Businesses were hurt when the Department of National Defence (DND) operations were decommissioned.
- One participant said that we shouldn't get hung up on old terms like "employment lands" because runways by themselves don't create jobs. With the runway gone, "we have a chance to rethink not only the 520 acres under development but the whole sector from 401 to Finch", which is an area that could really blossom.

Aerospace and Tech Sector Opportunities

- The DAIR initiative (Downsview Aerospace Innovation and Research Hub) sees the aerospace sector evolving and is working to attract knowledge to Downsview. Notwithstanding the challenges of the pandemic, the amount of growth in the sector was sufficient that even if that growth drops in half, there's still a potentially significant employment opportunity there.
- While uncertainty remains, Toronto is emerging as a tech leader, and incubation, colocation, research, academic, acceleration can all happen here.

Connectivity and Traffic

- One person raised the fact that these 520 acres have opportunities that can't be realized in neighbouring areas. For example, the DUKE Heights BIA area faces challenges because the lands there are wedged between tank farms, railway tracks, and at the same time face height restrictions. This means that in terms of roads and transportation, in many ways they're blocked in. Bringing connections to Downsview – some straight lines connecting streets and the area to the rest of the city – would be welcome.
- Transportation is an issue and will continue to be an issue. There was a missed opportunity at Stanley Greene to better connect the area.

Green Space and Nature

- One person flagged that ecological integrity is very important when talking about development. Nature will make people happier, healthier, and can also combat the urban heat island effect. Please keep green development in mind.

Process and Timing

- It's important that the overall project timeline be clear to participants. It's also important to involve stakeholders before decisions are made and throughout the process. To do this, one participant encouraged Northcrest and Canada Lands to consider establishing a stakeholder advisory group that connects with stakeholders on a regular basis throughout the project.

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 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.