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# XOXO DOWNSVIEW

## ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING OCTOBER 25, 2023



FINAL

NOVEMBER 24, 2023

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## Overview & Objectives

On October 25, 2023, members of the XOXO Advisory Committee (XOXO-AC) gathered online to learn about the arts and culture projects happening on the Downsview lands, to share feedback on a draft call for muralists, and to discuss the future of XOXO Downsview. The meeting was attended by eleven members, including representatives of the landowners, Northcrest Developments and Canada Lands Company.

The following is a summary of the discussions that took place. These notes were reviewed and approved by participants before they were finalized.

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## Presentation of Arts & Culture Projects

### LANDOWNER PROJECTS

The meeting began with presentations by David Anselmi, from Canada Lands, and Mitchell Marcus, from Northcrest, who provided updates on the arts and culture projects happening on their respective lands. Though the projects have been executed individually, through the presentations, Mitchell and David highlighted how the projects have drawn from the priorities of the XOXO Workplan.

David provided an overview of Canada Lands' portfolio and stressed how important the Downsview lands are within it. He provided a short recap of the Secondary Plan process and its component parts. In particular, he highlighted the "Downsview Lands Public Art Strategy," which falls under the Secondary Plan process and is a joint project with Northcrest.

Two of Canada Lands' districts were presented: the Arbo Neighbourhood and the Downsview West District. Both may include opportunities for future arts and culture initiatives, as would a potential Community Recreation Centre in Downsview Park.

In the shorter term, Downsview Park continues to be the centre for many arts and cultural initiatives, including: events to mark days of significance; music and

cultural festivals; community BBQs; outdoor movies; charity events; education programs and nature walks; urban farming; and sports and recreation. Together, the Park and the sports and rec programming in the Park Commons serve over 800,000 people every year.

At the start of his presentation, Mitchell provided an overview of the Northcrest lands, which largely centre on the Downsview runway. He shared that Northcrest is working on a placemaking strategy for its 370 acres, which incorporates the values of the XOXO Workplan. He then shared details of recent and upcoming events and activations on these lands.

Since the last meeting in March 2023, Northcrest hosted drive-in movie nights that raised funds for local charities and developed a mini-golf course with nine holes each designed by a local artist in collaboration with STEPS Public Art. Mitchell told the group that 15,000 people have now visited the Downsview Airport Lands to attend one of Northcrest's activities.

In anticipation of Bombardier's departure in spring of 2024, Northcrest is now focusing on a five-year interim activation strategy and how arts and culture will play a part. This includes: a Bay 12 Experience Centre, which will provide space for community groups; multiple indoor and outdoor public art commissions; ongoing free community programming; and various leases and licenses with third-party tenants to animate the area with interim activations.

We heard excitement among members about the potential of the landowners' future projects. Members encouraged landowners to engage with the City of Toronto's culture plan. We also heard calls to engage local organizations, many of which remain under-resourced. Instead of creating new organizations, Northcrest and Canada Lands may look to these existing grassroots groups which are already embedded in the local community and which could become more viable with the support of the landowners. These sorts of collaborations were described as "win-win."

## **RECENT XOXO DOWNSVIEW PROJECTS**

Following the landowner presentations, facilitators Jane and Mia provided an overview of the XOXO Downsview projects which have developed with the Committee's input since the last meeting in March 2023.

### **The Wind Rose Emerging Designer Competition**

The Wind Rose – a set of beautiful square aches designed by Future Simple Studio – has supported different community-based art installations and projects over the last two years. Mia provided a recap of the Wind Rose' final project. In fall 2022, a competition was held for emerging designers in the GTA. Seventeen teams were supported through the competition – from their initial expression of interest through to the submissions of the concepts. Three winning proposals were realized with design and installation support.

The first installation, called “Landing, Take Off,” was created by Fion Kong, Georgia Sa, and Natalie Ko. When they won the competition, the three were first-year Master of Landscape Architecture students at the Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design at the University of Toronto. Their installation celebrates the industrial history and biodiversity of Downsview Park. The overall form was inspired by the flight of the Red-tailed Hawk as it adapts to the wind and also by the geometries of aviation.

Secondly, “See You Around” by emerging artist Sherri Gallowitz was installed. The project highlights the diverse local community and Downsview Park as a gathering place through the use of colourful flags and large-scale photographs of Downsview Park visitors. In a participatory element, park visitors were invited to climb to the top of the mound and share their photo.

Finally, “Wind Blessing in Red” was created by OCADU students, Zishuo Li and Yifu Ding. These artists collected local wishes for the future at a series of local engagement events and online. Hundreds of community wishes were written on fabric for their installation. They were then set free on the mound in a beautiful and poetic installation.

These winning installations were up from December 2022 to September 2023. Members were told that the Wind Rose itself was also recently taken down.

### **Play on the Runway 2023**

Jane provided an overview of the 2023 Play on the Runway event, which saw around 3,500 people come to enjoy the open tarmac of the Downsview runway. The event built on the success of the first Play on the Runway in 2022. It included roller dancers and a DJ, hula hoop demos, an ice cream truck, pickleball courts and demos, and more. People brought wheels of all kinds, family members of all ages, and many furry friends.

To build in an additional arts and culture component, in 2023, XOXO commissioned three photographers, who were runners-up in the Inside on the Outside competition, to take photos of the day of play. Cindy Blazevic, Jon Laytner, and Mina Nowzari got behind the scenes in new and exciting ways, capturing different perspectives of the event.

### **Talking Fences**

Mia provided an overview of the Talking Fences competition, which took place in May 2023. Following a brief developed with XOXO-AC feedback, the online competition encouraged short phrases that spoke to the spirit of Downsview. 137 original submissions were received – each exuding Downsview love.

A selection panel chose four winning entries. The winners each received a \$100 gift certificate to a Downsview business of their choice or equivalent. The winning words were woven into local fences in August 2023, each with different, playful fonts and colours chosen by colleagues at Future Simple Studio.

“See the Other Side” was submitted by Mark Nisenholt. The selection panel liked this reminder to consider other points of view and thought it was apt, and just a bit cheeky, on a fence.

Glendale Lazaro submitted “Embrace Kindness.” The selection panel agreed the world would be better off if we all remembered to start from a place of goodwill.

“And Still Growing” was sent to us by Evelyne Goulet. She thinks we all have a kid inside who needs to play and make mistakes to grow. Her words remind us that, at any age and in any circumstance, we’re still growing.

“Aandi Wenjibaayan?” are Anishinaabemowin words that translate as “Where are you from?” They were submitted by Lakhvir Sandhar, who worked with our Indigenous engagement advisor to tweak the language into a local dialect.

Some XOXO-AC members encouraged replicating this project for other fences around the Downsview lands.

### **Inside on the Outside**

An overview of Inside on the Outside photography project was provided by Jane. A competition was held last spring to identify four photographers to capture the interior of four old buildings. The brief was crafted, and the outreach was coordinated, with XOXO-AC support.

We received over 90 submissions and the selection panel chose four photographers. The panel members elected to focus on supporting emerging talent with their choices.

The four buildings were documented in summer 2023. The resulting images are featured on the building exteriors or adjacent fences and in an online exhibition at: [www.id8downsview.ca/inside-outside](http://www.id8downsview.ca/inside-outside). An on-site exterior exhibition is also in the works.

Stephanie Avery was selected to capture the Steam Plant. Stephanie is a Toronto-based multi-disciplinary artist with a degree in visual art from York University. Her practice intervenes with familiar spaces, objects and imagery to imbue her subjects with new meanings and narratives. Her images capture a version of the future without humanity, and she was really excited by the Steam Plant’s pristine state of decay.

Bay 2 was captured by Daniel Huszar, an emerging artist specializing in architecture and landscape photography. A goal of his work is to prompt viewers to question the permanence of the structures and landscapes in frame, and how they clash or mesh with the realities of our world today. He was really struck by the contrast between the historic building and the modernized manufacturing techniques and aircraft being assembled there.

Tanja-Tiziana captured the Quonset Hut. Tanja-Tiziana is a photographer, mixed-media artist, and writer whose work examines our notion of time in the bustling

modern metropolis. Her images of the Quonset Hut seem to transport the viewer to another place and time. They juxtapose the frame of this historic structure with evidence of its current use — a huge mountain of salt. The images provide a strange and magical visual journey.

The Pump House was captured by Augustine Wong. Augustine is an architecture student at the University of Toronto. He was inspired by the sense of latent energy embodied within and underneath the building. The Pump House has huge water reservoirs, used to supply water to the local fire ring. He used light painting as a contrast to the typically static nature of architectural photos.

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# Future Call for Muralists

## **DRAFT BRIEF**

Members provided input on a developing mural project. Mia outlined the draft call, provisionally titled “People of Downsview: Past, Present, Future.” She shared that the call would be launched soon and the mural painted next spring. One location has been identified and a second could follow.

In this project, artists will be asked to explore and respond to the social and cultural histories of Downsview. Downsview Stories, available online, could be provided as an optional resource. Mia communicated that Northcrest and Canada Lands have confidence in this brief, as they don’t want the mural to focus strictly on military or aviation history, but would be happy for these themes to come through a social and cultural lens. They also want the call to be open to all and not scoped narrowly on emerging artists.

Though they expressed openness to feedback on the theme of the brief, Mia and Jane shared that they were particularly keen to get committee feedback on how to craft the brief to bring both artistic excellence and satisfy the principles of inclusion and diversity from the XOXO Workplan. Mia asked how XOXO should weigh excellent with diversity in the call and how to manage it through the selection panel process.

Mia and Mitchell both discussed the “Inside on the Outside” competition process as a learning experience on this issue. For that call, artists were not explicitly asked to share details of their backgrounds in their submissions, which put the selection panel in a difficult position when they wanted to factor these details into their decision. XOXO-AC members heard that we want to be more intentional this time, and are considering asking for a statement about how the artists’ background relates to the opportunity.

## **COMMITTEE FEEDBACK**

Committee members shared their support for the approach to inclusion demonstrated in the past calls; we were told it’s working and that we are already getting a diverse group of submissions.

We were told that the budget will determine who may apply to the call. Jane

assured the Committee that the budget would encourage submissions from accomplished muralists.

There was a great deal of conversation about including a mentorship component in the call. It was said that this may limit the number of people who applied, but would allow the call to achieve excellence and support emerging talent. We heard that more can always be done to support diversity and inclusion. Emerging artists and newcomers need exposure and asking for collaboration in the call is one way to open up opportunities. Teams could be formed of members who have different roles, and we heard examples of how this can work successfully.

We were cautioned against thinking that emerging talent and diversity are not synonymous with excellence. It was said, however, that mural-making demands specific expertise, including scaling-up and working at heights. Again, encouraging mentorship could ensure that emerging artists are brought through a process that is usually done by specialists.

There was some debate as to whether the XOXO team should pair mentors and mentees, and if perhaps XOXO should reach out to local high schools, but ultimately members agreed that the artists should identify those collaborations themselves. XOXO should not impose pairings.

For the call, members offered helpful examples of text to encourage equity, diversity, and inclusion and position it as an essential part of the process.

We were encouraged to change the title of the call, as the area has not always been called “Downsview.” “The Downsview lands” was considered as an alternative that is more inclusive and may also reference pre-contact histories. Finally, we were encouraged to share the call in multiple languages and consider the power relations inherent in the mentor/mentee relationship and its language.

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## The Future of XOXO Downsview

The meeting’s final topic was concerned with the future of XOXO Downsview and the XOXO Advisory Committee. Mitchell discussed how XOXO Downsview was a pilot project. It was an exploration of how arts and culture could lead community engagement as part of the id8 Downsview Secondary Plan process. Now that the Secondary Plan is coming to an end, the landowners will be operating more independently within their own districts. This will mean a change for the XOXO-AC.

The XOXO-AC has been essential to ensure XOXO projects are of the community, have artistic integrity, and follow the XOXO Workplan. There is commitment on the part of both landowners to ensure the group continues to stay relevant as the lands change and as development continues. Indeed, both Mitchell and David shared that there will most likely be more opportunities for engagement as a result of this shift, rather than fewer.

The main changes are that: the group will most likely be meeting with landowners individually; the name of the XOXO Advisory Committee will change to the Arts & Culture Downsview (ACD) Committee; and the Workplan will be revised so it

can live on and continue to guide arts and culture projects. The Dept of Words & Deeds will continue to engage the group and run the selection panels as needed. Members will still be paid CARFAC rates.

David shared that id8 Downsview too would be coming to a close after the Secondary Plan is approved in May. XOXO Downsview has always been a project of id8 Downsview.

It was confirmed that XOXO Downsview would come to a close at the end of 2023. The upcoming mural call would be the last XOXO project.

A retooled committee with some new voices and perspectives would be formed in the new year and the selection panel pool would remain from which both landowners could draw. We were encouraged by Committee members to draw from local artists as we form this new committee.

Members asked who their main contact would be and encouraged the landowners to ensure that the channels of communication were clear. Mitchell noted that Jane and Mia would continue to support the committee, but would not be leading the curation of the projects. That role would be opened up to other leads and groups directed by the landowners.

We heard appreciation for the XOXO process and projects and for the fact that the group will continue in some way. Many expressed gratitude as artists and cultural leaders for being included in XOXO. It has been a learning experience for all.

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## Wrap-Up

Members were thanked for continuing to share their experience and expertise. They were told that notes from this meeting will be circulated for approval as well as more details on how the XOXO-AC will evolve into the Arts and Culture Downsview Committee.

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## Participants

### **CANADA LANDS COMPANY**

David Anselmi

### **NORTHCREST DEVELOPMENTS**

Alana Mercury  
Mitchell Marcus

### **XOXO-AC MEMBERS**

Adriana Salazar  
Ashley Beerdat  
Christina Giannelia, North York Arts  
Lydia Hernandez, Sketch  
Paola Gomez, MUSE Arts  
Patrizia Libralato, Toronto Biennial of Art

Tracey Prehay, Artscape  
Michael Vickers, Brampton Arts

**XOXO-AC MEMBER REGRETS**

Casey Jonathan, Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation  
Kayode Brown, Just B Graphic

**DEPT OF WORDS & DEEDS**

Jane Farrow  
Mia Hunt