

Improving Public Spaces and Public Connections in Scarborough Centre

STAKEHOLDER WORKING SESSION

Tuesday, January 25, 2011

7-9 pm Scarborough Civic Centre

150 Borough Drive, Committee Rooms 1&2

REPORT

35 people participated in the kick-off Stakeholder Working Session for the Public Space and Streetscape Master Plan project for Scarborough Centre. The purpose of the working session was to introduce the project and to begin seeking feedback on opportunities to improve public spaces and public connections in the area. Following welcoming remarks by Councillor Glen DeBaeremaeker and Robert Stephens (Manager, Urban Design, City of Toronto), the City's consultants from the firm duToit Allsopp Hillier delivered a presentation that reviewed the project purpose, the process that will be followed, and some preliminary concepts. The majority of the meeting was dedicated to small table and full room discussion seeking feedback from participants on opportunities to improve public spaces and public connections. This report summarizes the feedback received.

This report was written by facilitator Nicole Swerhun, and was distributed in draft for participant review prior to being finalized (suggested edits have been made). Note the following attachments: A. Working Session Agenda, B. Participant List.

KEY MESSAGES

The following key messages were shared at the meeting:

1. **This is a good project**, and improvements to public spaces and public connections would be welcome by the participating stakeholders and the broader community.
2. **This area can be difficult and dangerous for pedestrians.** There are a number of factors that discourage pedestrians now, including lack of sidewalks in some places and narrow sidewalks in others, limited lighting, long distances to travel (sometimes across parking lots), difficulty finding routes and places (e.g. the front door to Civic Centre) and concerns about safety (e.g. crossing Progress). The feeling was that many more people would walk around Scarborough Centre if improvements were made. Adding the mall to the pedestrian network was suggested.
3. **More green spaces are needed, and the woodlot needs to be improved.** Several people talked about the lack of parks in Scarborough Centre, especially to the north of the SRT. They'd like attractive green spaces to sit outside, a children's playground somewhere, and improvements to the routes through the woodlot (protecting some areas that are natural and where the Trilliums could thrive again, and other areas for seating and lighting to improve safety for pedestrians).
4. **Albert Campbell Square isn't always a thriving place, and it should be.** Several participants want to see the Square offer more for people to do and become a nicer place to be – more aesthetically pleasing. People mentioned elements of Yonge-Dundas Square as a model and furniture that would encourage people to sit and eat ice cream, drink coffee, and enjoy the area.
5. **Improving the movement of cars and parking options are also priorities**, with many supporting the early ideas presented about improving access from Ellesmere to Borough Drive. In terms of parking, several said that unless someone is going to the mall, it's very difficult to figure out where to park.

MORE DETAILED FEEDBACK

The City and their consultant team proposed the following three questions to guide discussion:

- Which public connections in the area work well? Which don't work as well? Explain why.
- Which public spaces and parks are well used? What improvements or changes, if any, would you like to see, and why?
- Do you have any other advice?

Participants discussed the questions first at the small tables where they were seated, and then as a full room. The following feedback was provided, both verbally (comments were recorded on the laptop and projected on the large screen at the front of the room) and in writing (a total of 16 worksheets were completed).

1. **There are a number of ways pedestrian safety could be improved.** For example, where sidewalks are right next to the curb there are concerns about pedestrians being so close to buses and snowplows. A number of people suggested wider sidewalks, though one person did mention that narrower footpaths and sidewalks can sometimes make the pedestrian feel more cozy and therefore safer (especially at night).

Many suggested finding a way to make it easier for pedestrians to connect between Scarborough Town Centre Mall and the surrounding stores, condos and streets (e.g. not many people walk the distance between the mall and Loblaws). Unless there's a way to get groceries and other goods from the stores to people's homes, people will continue to drive. Crossing from the mall to the north side of Progress was one location considered especially dangerous (with a history of pedestrians being struck). One participant suggested that the City consider underground connections (like the PATH system downtown).

It was also suggested that the mall be considered part of the pedestrian network. It was suggested that the mall consider leaving its doors open at night, and then people could cut through the mall as part of their route. Other pedestrian route improvements included: increasing access to City Centre, providing better access to Packard, and providing a sidewalk around the new townhouse development.

2. **Wayfinding needs to be improved.** Several people talked about the fact that it's hard for people to find their way around the area, especially getting to and from the Mall from the Civic Centre and Albert Campbell Square. There's also confusion between what routes to take through (or around) private property to access the Square. It can also be confusing for vehicles as it is sometimes unclear where roads end, and where vehicles and/or pedestrians are supposed to be. Differentiating areas with use of different pavers could be a solution to this (e.g. use interlocking stones).
3. **Improved lighting will lead to improved safety.** Building on comments regarding pedestrian safety and troubles with wayfinding, lighting was raised a number of times as a way to improve the pedestrian environment. Right now several participants feel that areas are too dark for nighttime use, and that pathways need to be much better lit, especially to and from the TTC/SRT entrance and across Albert Campbell Square.

4. **The wood lots are a great asset, but they could be improved.** Several participants talked about the fact that they value the woods, and several walk through them. They thought it important to keep some parts of the woodlot natural (which will also protect Trillium flowers), and that improvements to things like the walkways through the lots, introduction of benches and seating along the paths, and lighting would help provided clearer direction on how people are expected to use the area. Some participants said they didn't feel safe walking next to the woodlot along Ellesmere because there is not enough lighting. They said they liked the sidewalk on the north side of Ellesmere, and would like to see something similar on the south wide, with additional lighting.
5. **Additional park space is needed.** Participants didn't think that there's enough usable public space/park/squares. They would like have more places to sit outside, noting that all green spaces right now are to the south of the LRT and that there's nothing to the north. It was suggested that this project explore opportunities to the north, perhaps in a series of connected parkettes that people could take to around the town centre. The entrances to the mall could be part of this series of spaces, and made more attractive. This series of parkettes could be integrated with the mall by creating neighbourhood common areas along the blank outside walls of mega stores – like a parkette within the retail complex. The mall could also consider putting a terrace on top of some areas (like Sears or Bay).
6. **Albert Campbell Square could be improved.** Several participants talked about opportunities to improve the square, noting that right now there is too much concrete and that it's not aesthetically pleasing. As one person said, "it's not a beautiful space and it should be." They noted that people don't come to the Square unless something specific is happening, and that it's underutilized because people can't see it or access it. They described a vision of things like an ice cream parlour, coffee shop, or other similar amenities that would invite people to sit there and enjoy it, right in the square. Another participant compared this area to downtown Toronto, and encouraged people to think of this as similar to Yonge Dundas Square (e.g. with fountains, big screens, etc.). One person talked about bringing the ice rink up so people don't have to go down to see it.
7. **A number of comments focused on how to improve the movement of cars through the area.**
Comments included:
 - Several participants said they liked the ideas presented about improving access from Ellesmere to the area (with new all moves intersections).
 - Don't overcrowd Brimley and McCowan with more lights.
 - When travelling east/west along Progress, cars can't get to southbound on McCowan without going through the Town Centre. This is very frustrating.
 - Several participants liked the concept of improving access from Saratoga and Packard Blvd over to the Civic Centre and Town Centre, however there was concern that adding traffic lights along Ellesmere would create or exacerbate traffic congestion. The worst case scenario would be a situation like what's happening on McCowan between Progress and Ellesmere (too many lights too close together).
 - Some participants were concerned that too much traffic on Ellesmere would encourage cars to cut across residential areas to the south to get to Civic Centre or Town Centre (as a bypass).
 - Concern that the intersection of Omni and Borough Drive is dangerous. It is thought this is partly because the barrier to Omni is so close to the road. It was suggested that Borough Dr be narrowed (from north) into that intersection.

- Note that there is a traffic back up around the YMCA parking garage entrance/exit. This was raised because if the option of narrowing the road around the Y is considered, there were concerns that this would cause big problems. Right now the traffic backs people up onto McCowan (happens in morning, can't get into Y fast enough, and same around 7 pm) because of the line up to into the underground garage.
8. **Parking needs to be improved.** Many participants said that unless someone is going to the mall, it's very difficult for customers to figure out where to park. And even if people park at the mall, it can be a long walk to other destinations. And parking along Borough Drive is very far to get anywhere in the Centre. Some indicated that they think street parking is an important part of urban development as long as the roads are wide enough.
 9. **Cycling and jogging routes.** People talked about wanting to see designated bicycle routes in the area, noting that right now it can be a dangerous place to cycle. This is good for recreation, but also for getting people to ride (rather than drive) between destinations in the area. There was also a suggestion that a jogging route be set up around the City Centre.
 10. **Other comments and suggestions included:**
 - **Remember that Civic Centre is a designated heritage property** and the precinct around it should support that heritage character. Views of the CC are also important.
 - **Needing a children's playground somewhere.** This is important because there is nothing for children now, and nothing to attract families.
 - **Improving the streetscape.** Note that the new green parcel by the Federal Building is pretty boring, and could use benches or flowers to liven it up. Putting planters on the sidewalks is another suggestion – if there is space.
 - **Snow removal should be addressed.** As one participant noted, "We're all doing own snow removal and it's not consistent."
 - **Consider a landmark.** One person suggested something like a huge clock on Borough drive at the corner of Town Centre Court as an ideal spot.
 - **Take note of wind tunnels.** One participant talked about existing problems with wind tunnels, especially around the Civic Centre from fall to spring and the route between the Square into the Mall entrance, year round. It was suggested that new construction take this into consideration, noting that it is one of the factors that helps the area become more pedestrian friendly.
 - **Consider relocating the farmers market.** A participant commented about the lack of parking when people come to the farmers market. They thought moving the farmers market into the parking lot of the mall may be a better location (like at Sherway Mall), because right now it is hard to get to.

NEXT STEPS

Councillor DeBaeremaeker wrapped up the workshop by thanking participants for coming, and for the great feedback received. Nicole Swerhun let participants know that a draft of the notes from the workshop would be distributed to them for review prior to being finalized, and that a second working session would be held in the Spring to review and seek feedback on the ideas being explored for the Public Space and Streetscape Master Plan for Scarborough Centre.



Improving Public Spaces and Public Connections in Scarborough Centre

PROPOSED AGENDA

Stakeholder Working Session

Tuesday, January 25, 2011

7 – 9 pm, Scarborough Civic Centre
150 Borough Drive, Committee Rooms 1&2

Purpose of the Working Session: To introduce the Public Space and Streetscape Plan project for Scarborough Centre to key stakeholders in the area, and to seek feedback from stakeholders and City staff on opportunities to improve public spaces and public connections in the area

7:00 pm **Welcome**
Councillor Glen DeBaeremaeker
Robert Stephens, City of Toronto

7:05 **Introductions & Agenda Review**
Nicole Swerhun, Facilitator

7:10 **Overview Presentation**
Robert (Bob) Allsopp, duToit Allsopp Hillier
Brent Raymond, duToit Allsopp Hillier

Questions of Clarification

7:45 **Discussion** Review the map on your table of the Scarborough Centre area. Think about the public spaces and the way people move (by foot, car, bike, transit) to, from, and through the area.

1. CONNECTIONS

Which public connections work well? Identify the top 3-5 public connections that work well today and why. Which public connections (or lack of) don't work as well today? Identify the top 3-5 connections that are missing or could be improved and explain why.

2. PUBLIC SPACES & PARKS

Which public spaces and parks are well used? Identify the top 2 or 3 and describe how they are used. What improvements or changes, if any, would you like to see in the public space and parks in the area? Identify the top 2 or 3 and the reasons why you would like to see them improved.

3. Do you have any other advice regarding development of the Public Space & Streetscape Plan for Scarborough Centre?

8:50 **Wrap Up & Next Steps**

9:00 **Adjourn**

Attachment B. Participant List

The following people signed in at the meeting (listed alphabetically by affiliation, where an affiliation was provided):

Markwan Salem
CAPREIT, Gobal Mailwaganam
CD Farquharson Community, Stephen Basselman
City of Toronto, Councillor Glen DeBaeremaeker
City of Toronto (Transportation Planning), Saikat Basak
City of Toronto (Planning), Russell Crooks
City of Toronto (Transportation Planning), Dipak Dhrona
City of Toronto (Planning), Kelly Dynes
City of Toronto (Urban Forestry), Charles Kinsley
City of Toronto (Heritage Preservation), Marilyn Miller
City of Toronto (Real Estate Services), Joseph Sergnese
City of Toronto (Planning), Robert Stephens
City of Toronto (Transportation Services), Paul Connor
City of Toronto, Mark van Elsberg
duToit Allsopp Hillier, Robert Allsopp
duToit Allsopp Hillier, Brent Raymond
duToit Allsopp Hillier, Jacob Mitchell
Equinox I Condo, Alda Guevara
Facilitator, Nicole Swerhun
Glen Andrew Community Association, Iain McLeod
Glen Andrew Community Association, Mike Ehlers
Glen Andrew Community Association, Dieter Apits
Midland Park Community Association, David Barnes
MPCA, Carol Bake
MTCC 139, Jim Paterson
North Bendale & Mammoth Court, Gail Doehler
North Bendale & Mammoth Court, Joachim Doehler
Oxford Properties, Jai Lee
The Optical Lounge, Joyti Lall
Rostor Inv., Ana Rosa
Thomson Park Dog Owners Association, Chris Bensley
Toronto Parking Authority, Patricia Pearsall
Toronto Police Services, 43 Division, Amin Hafiz
Toronto Public Library, Harvey Mooradian
Toronto Public Library, Magdalena Vander Kooy