

Midtown Planning Group Meeting
Toronto City Hall, Meeting Room 'C'
Monday November 12, 2012
10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

In attendance: Councillor Josh Matlow, Chair, Councillor Jaye Robinson, Jennifer Keesmaat, Chief Planner and Executive Director, City of Toronto, David Oikawa, Susan Smallwood, and Neil Cresswell, Community Planning, City of Toronto, Leo DeSorcy and James Parakh, Urban Design, City of Toronto, Angela Drennan, Constituency Assistant to Councillor Karen Stintz, Mike Varey, Executive Assistant to Councillor Jaye Robinson, Andrew Athanasiu, Executive Assistant to Councillor Josh Matlow, Peter Baker, Co-Chair, FoNTRA, Greg Russell, President, South Eglinton Ratepayers' and Residents' Association (SERRA), Tom Cohen, Chair, Eglinton Park Residents' Association (EPRA), Joy Seth, EPRA, Frank Peters, President, Avenue Road and Eglinton Community Association (ARECA), Patrick Smyth, Director of Planning and Development, ARECA, Ben Daube, President, Sherwood Park Residents' Association, Paul Hanson, Stanley Knowles Housing Co-op, Paula Greco, Sherwood Park Residents' Association, Geri Berholz, 70 Roehampton Avenue, Malcolm Martini, Sherwood Park Residents' Association, Terry Mills, B.Arch., RPP, MCIP, Planning and Design Consultant, Chris Sellors, Oriole Park Association, Richard MacFarlane, Secretary, Oriole Park Association, Robert Smyth, Sharon McElroy, Ivana Marzura, Richard Cassels, Ian Byers, Susan Kee, Central Eglinton Community Centre, Kevin McKeown, The Madison Group.
Regrets: Councillor Karen Stintz; Terry West, President, Don Mills Residents Inc.

Councillor Josh Matlow -- Introduction

Good morning everyone. I'd like to thank you all, the ratepayer association representatives, for being active and vocal on our issues. I'd also like to thank the councillor's staff for being here this morning -- the executive assistants to Councillor Karen Stintz and Councillor Jaye Robinson. We have created this Midtown Planning Group because it is important to bring their voice to City Hall. We want to ensure it is people friendly. We have had challenges in planning that relate to boundaries. Yonge/Eglinton

Councillor Josh Matlow (cont'd)

cuts through three political wards and we're in two different planning council areas. We want to ensure that we approach this public realm master plan in a holistic, comprehensive way. Our objective is to complete a public realm master plan. We are going to hire an urban design firm through an RFP [Request For Proposals]. Today, we're going to hear from our city planning staff. Then this is your opportunity to make comments, to offer your vision, to ask questions as we move forward. Once funding is approved, we will invite firms to submit proposals. The master plan study will then begin and then public consultation will begin. We also need input from the larger, wider community.

Terry Mills: Point of order. I would recommend a broader mandate than coming through this public realm.

Councillor Josh Matlow

That's a fair question. It isn't easy because the tendency is to focus only on one thing. We either focus only on height and density, and not on the ground, or we focus only on the ground, and not height and density. This master plan for public realm will allow us to connect the dots. Certainly, the focus should be on the public realm. But it also relates to everything else. If you feel other elements should be included in this plan, by all means, let us know about that. This process, it's not restrictive. Our mandate includes more than public realm. This is designed to have feedback to this study.

Councillor Jaye Robinson

I'm interested in this process. I agree, the boundaries are somewhat bizarre. I'm very involved in the BIA. I am happy to see the residents' involvement.

Jennifer Keesmaat, Chief Planner and Executive Director, City of Toronto

I've had a great opportunity to meet with residents in the past few days. I view this public realm master plan as an absolute, critical priority. My hope is that this can become a demonstration project for public realm

Jennifer Keesmaat (cont'd)

initiatives in other areas of our city. I recognize the importance of this project in terms of professionalism as we move forward. We have an opportunity to show how we can get together in planning the public realm.

Councillor Josh Matlow

It demonstrates the passion and interest, the fact that you are all here today. This Midtown Planning Group has been established to help set the narrative so we're not always reacting, to establish the public realm, to have a city that is liveable. At Yonge/Eglinton, for instance, there is the problem of wind. We've had too many wind tunnels in the past.

I'd like us to now listen to the presentations given by our city planning staff.

Neil Cresswell

The Midtown Planning Group was created by council. It advocates proactive local planning. There is coordination across wards and districts.

What is midtown? It is a unique area, Yonge/Eglinton, and there are opportunities to connect the public realm while recognizing the importance of how it connects. A coordinated approach is required.

It is well known that Yonge/Eglinton is in an area of growth and change. The question is, how do you react, respond, and use the energy that's created? We are blessed with community interest and planning opportunity. It has its challenges but it also has opportunities.

What about the planning framework? Establishing the framework involves an examination of policies, plans, the zoning bylaw, and so on. The one gap, and the community has said it loud and clear, is the lack of a coordinated public realm.

What is the public realm? This continues to be a very important aspect.

Leo DeSorcy

What is a public realm master plan? It is a tool to guide decisions about public realm. It is a tool to create a shared vision among the users and land owners, those using the public realm, and how we can guide the public realm. As part of this initiative, we will do an inventory.

Instead of the traditional approach to public realm, we will push back. In a manner of speaking, we will let open space push the building around, instead of the building defining public realm. We will ask questions such as what kind of setbacks? What kind of functions? And there is the aspect of securing Section 37 money for improvements – public art, landscaping, park improvements, and community facilities. This will all come together and add up to a greater tool.

What might the midtown public realm master plan include? At Yonge/Eglinton, so much of the public realm already exists. How can we change it and make it a better public realm? I can't think of Yonge/Eglinton, as we know it today, to be a beautiful place. I'm showing you example photographs of Kensington Market and Derrydown Park where changes were made to improve the public realm.

For the public realm master plan area, we've started to put together an inventory – Keewatin, St. Clement's School, Berwick, Mt. Pleasant, Northern Secondary, and Eglinton Park. We need to study a larger area as part of the public realm. We want to go to the other side of the street, we want to go further north, to areas not considered part of the Yonge/Eglinton growth area. We want to examine it from the perspective of architects and planning consultants and we want to study servicing issues.

Terry Mills: And I presume you will look at transit stations, how they interlace with the public realm?

We will be working with an internal working group, ratepayer groups, and a larger stakeholder group. We will be starting in the Year 2013 and hopefully finishing it by the end of Year 2013.

David Oikawa

Where do we go from here? We want to add more land owners, businesses. The cost of the public realm consultant study will be paid out of our city capital budget. Part of the developer capital fees can be used for this study.

City staff will prepare an RFP [Request For Proposal]. We will release it, once the capital budget is approved at City Council. Individual candidate firms, if they wish, can go beyond the 'minimums' in the RFP. They can specify the deliverables.

The City is not required to agree to the lowest bid. We're looking at a multi-disciplinary approach.

Questions from Stakeholders

Q1. Joy Seth, EPRA: Where in the planning perspective are the important principles in this document and will they be moving forward? I'm referring to an economic and employment plan. This is the key issue at Yonge/Eglinton. I don't expect just to have condominiums. It's all in this document. I want to see where it's going to be embedded.

Jennifer Keesmaat

It's a very important issue and one we are struggling with. The market is beginning to shift. I was at a meeting recently where the discussion was about the tools we have at our disposal. It's very tricky. We have a limited amount of tools. On larger sites, we think there are tools we can employ. We won't be looking at the massing, the built form. We don't want to make this study about everything else. Otherwise, it will never finish.

Q2. Frank Peters, President, Avenue Road and Eglinton Community Association: It's about timing. The horses are out of the barn door. What kind of teeth will this have?

Jennifer Keesmaat

We need to keep our parameters tight. We're going to drive forward and keep very focused. Currently, monies get allocated ad hoc. One of the key aspects is to ensure the monies go to the greatest need, as a result of this study. For example, the Ontario Municipal Board can become a very important input and the public realm master plan guidelines can be considered very carefully. A good rationale carries greater weight at the OMB. This becomes very important.

Q3. Tom Cohen, Chair, Eglinton Park Residents' Association: I believe that we should all step back. We're all feeling excited and creative. To whom do we address our ideas, and at what point?

Q4. Is the growth area part of this group?

Councillor Josh Matlow

The scope is wider to take into consideration the wider part of the public realm. It's never been like this before, having all the players come together. I invite each of you to go back to your ratepayer association, tell your board of directors that we're part of the Midtown Planning Group. And discuss and try and answer the question, "What do we need to do to define how we need the ground to grow?" You come back and give input to city planning staff.

Jennifer Keesmaat

It is the consultant who has to realize that there will be very important input, that there's a very engaged public that needs to be embraced. We will test the consultant candidates on this. The risk is that ideas don't get fully incorporated.

Q5. What happens to developers who are applying? Can you stop them? Could we have a moratorium on development applications at Yonge/Eglinton?

Jennifer Keesmaat

It's not something I'd advise, an interim control bylaw. An appeal would go on for years. The best way is to proceed and expedite the study. An interim control bylaw is very problematic. You need a very strong rationale for proposing an interim control bylaw. The minute a developer sits down, you say, we're doing a midtown study, and collaborate.

Q7. Ben Daube, President, Sherwood Park Residents' Association: It's been my delight to hear the new chief planner, who spoke twice in the last week. She, and he, are singing from the same hymn book. She agrees completely with Terry Mills and having street parks, with trees. As Terry said, the Sherwood Park area anticipates 15,000 extra people in the next 15 years. What we need to be thinking about is not just a transportation solution for the city but a regional transportation plan.

There are a couple of dozen ways to fund that. Metrolinx has already got most of the plan going. That conversation is easy to start – road tolls, taxes, etc. How do we get our plan to be effective with the people we have to talk with, which is the developers? How do we get an interim set of guidelines circulating so we can get the most traction?

Jennifer Keesmaat

Our planning department is embarking on a transportation strategy, with a soft launch in December 2012 and a real launch in January 2013.

It's very important to create an excellent public realm master plan. I wouldn't want to whip it together in the next two months. We will generate the materials, then distribute it to the public. The Yonge/Eglinton Focused Review is an excellent example – it's being built out.

Q8. Greg Russell, President, South Eglinton Ratepayers' and Residents' Association: We want to ensure that this is being utilized. We are concerned about The Art Shoppe.

Councillor Josh Matlow

I do know that developers like predictability. We're going to be putting this on the web site, to share information about the Midtown Planning Group. As you are now probably aware, I always have ratepayer representatives come to the table at the very beginning of a development proposal, to ensure that the community is involved in the discussion right from the start of the planning process.

Q9. Peter Baker, Co-Chair, FoNTRA: As opposed to Section 37, the way that it is being used in some instances, I have always been of the view that height and density are important considerations, that Section 37 should not be used as an either/or declaration, exclusive of limits to height and density. Is there any consideration given to increase development charges?

Councillor Jaye Robinson

There is a report about this coming forward next April, May, or June 2013.

David Oikawa

I want to clarify that development charges, by law, are not allowed to increase the level of service.

Neil Cresswell

It can be very difficult to apply in an area like this.

Q10. Malcolm Martini: I'm really pleased to hear all of this. I'm delighted to hear all I've heard from Mrs. Keesmaat. However, the 'but' goes back to the barn door. Here's my suggestion. There are already planning guidelines in the slide show. For instance, the minimum of a 10 foot sidewalk is required. We need to use the guidelines that are already written. Stressing the guidelines in your own internal memos, that there is a sidewalk design guideline. Let's make sure they apply, make sure we use them. Regarding Bazis International Inc. [northeast corner of Yonge/Eglinton – Roehampton], we need to negotiate that.

Councillor Josh Matlow

They [Bazis] think they're more underway than they are. I take great exception to the Bazis advertisements that portray the site as already approved. We've been working very closely, taking every tool we can, to make sure we restrict what they're doing. It should never be the number 1 thing that should be discussed. You need to argue for the right kind of building. Don't just say, "You can rise to the sky because you're going to get a better public realm and some kind of greater benefit."

Q11. Geri Berholz, 70 Roehampton Avenue: I'm excited but I wonder if there is a sustainability for the planning. A lack of foresight about the public space – will it be maintained?

Councillor Josh Matlow

You are asking, how do you make sure we keep it beautiful? Good point.

Q12. Robert Smyth: The elephant in the room. The issue I see is that the city has all of these things and none of the developments comply with them in any regard. These are developments that are constantly pushing the bylaws. There are many examples where the transitions and setbacks are ridiculous. This is a great study but I feel it is nipping at the edges. I'm not a NIMBY but we have to ask ourselves, "what kind of community are we building?" The developers are operating in a vacuum. Nothing has been built within the bylaws in 15 years. The OMB is the approval agency.

Councillor Josh Matlow

You may be aware of our work. Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam and I put forth a motion brought to City Council in February 2012 to abolish the OMB, that was approved. I'm hoping that provincial politics will get it on the table. A question to ask is, "what is being done in creating credible zoning bylaws that will help to put this process more in the hands of the city rather than the OMB?"

David Oikawa

Do we put the revised zoning bylaw in place or deal with it on a case by case basis? There's validity in both. The developers view it as a floor, not a ceiling. Sometimes, it can work. Often, it doesn't. In terms of land value, developers have to add a premium on top.

Q12. How many meetings are we going to have?

Councillor Josh Matlow

We should certainly have four meetings. As the work progresses, we can always decide to come back together.

Councillor Jaye Robinson

We want to make it more productive. Otherwise, it can go on forever.

Q13. Chris Sellors, Oriole Park Association: I'm really glad it's happening and being put on the web site. Who would be part of the selection committee for the consultant RFP? Who would be sitting on that? So the councillors aren't sitting on it?

David Oikawa: No.

Chris Sellors (cont'd)

Where does this overlay? Is this the top, above all of those planning documents? Would it not make sense to pull these out, list what has already been established as guidelines for public realm?

Leo DeSorcy

I think it's not necessary to do that. That's not to say that we won't go back and look at the other documents to see that they won't be sharpened or tweaked. Our experience has been, that we usually utilize the existing

Leo DeSorcy (cont'd)

planning guidelines on a site by site basis, that we will continue to do it this way, rather than risk the opening up of an appeal process regarding these guidelines.

Chris Sellors (cont'd)

These documents have to be congruent.

Q14. Patrick Smyth, Director of Planning and Development, ARECA: We're here to to discuss how we can shape the public realm and a lot of you have worked with Terry Mills on the public realm. Jennifer Keesmaat is a big fan of The Berwick plan [at Duplex Avenue]. However, we did not get the outcome from the north side. We're very unhappy with the way things are done. Are you saying that nothing will be done until this master plan is finished?

Councillor Josh Matlow

Until we are free of the Ontario Municipal Board, we need to have a fundamental change in the planning regime. We need to answer the question: how to ensure that no matter what happens, to ensure it is people friendly. We haven't had the ability to state things clearly. For the Bazis proposal [northeast corner of Yonge/Eglinton], I've said very clearly that Bazis cannot go over 54 storeys, not higher than Minto Towers.

Q15. Will this midtown group have input into the RFP before it's published?

Leo DeSorcy

We don't normally do that. Again, we hadn't planned on it. We understand the vitality and energy in the room. We will structure a most inclusive process. I'm not sure reviewing the RFP will add to that.

David Oikawa

We have an idea of how much can be done with a certain amount of money. Trying to get too much gets the result too watered down.

Q16. How are lessons learned from The Berwick going to be brought into that?

David Oikawa

I would like to have some public consultation done before the summer, when city council has a break. That means we have to get moving.

Councillor Josh Matlow

You can let the planner know about that.

Q17. Terry Mills: What we're doing so far is not working. Our biggest public realm element happens to be at Yonge/Eglinton. Regarding Build Toronto and the city-owned lands, Canada Square, Canadian Tire, can we get a firm hold on what the TTC is trying to do? That's got to be on the table right now. We have to look at this tomorrow. To use Ken Greenberg's expression, 'the freight train of development is coming down the tracks.' The current public realm is fragmented.

Angela Drennan, Constituency Assistant to Councillor Karen Stintz

The transportation initiatives are in accordance with Metrolinx. This will have its own planning process.

Q18. Joy Seth, EPRA: Thank you, Councillor Josh Matlow and Jennifer Keesmaat, for your leadership. There is a need to do something right now but to consider Phase 2 and Phase 3. There has to be a place where it needs to be considered.

Q19. Ben Daube, President, Sherwood Park Residents' Association: Sherwood Park Residents' Association was not in Neil Cresswell's big outline. Let's meet in the neighbourhood, please. Where are the developers? I got a meeting arranged with developers. They all want to be here. It's a must. Let's make it easy.

Q20. Chris Sellors, OPA: I'm not sure the developers need to be at the same table.

Q21. Ben Daube: Would you include a ring road, getting trucks away from the public realm.

Q22. Chris Sellors: I'd like to propose two more meetings of the group, right after the community consultations.

Councillor Josh Matlow

I'm sure you can appreciate that this needs to be discussed with Councillor Karen Stintz, of course, who could not attend today's meeting.

Councillor Josh Matlow – Concluding Remarks

To round this up, I'm so glad you've been champions of the community, how we can work together to make this community like it should be. For too many years, there's been a focus on mediocrity. I think it's a great idea to go into the neighbourhood.

I look forward to our next meeting and we will let you know when the details have been finalized.

Thank you very much.

Midtown Planning Group

Introduction and Purpose

“On July 11, 2012 City Council established the Midtown Planning Group (MPG) to assist with, and provide input on, land use planning issues in the Yonge-Eglinton area. The MPG is to be comprised of the three local Councillors (Josh Matlow, Karen Stintz and Jaye Robinson) and local resident association members invited to participate by the Councillors.

The City of Toronto Planning Division will be conducting a review of the public realm in the Yonge-Eglinton area which is expected to result in the creation of a Public Realm Master Plan (PRMP) for this area. The MPG will serve as reference group to the development of the PRMP, providing input into the PRMP itself as well as the broader stakeholder consultation undertaken in support of this initiative.

The purpose of the November 12, 2012 meeting is to formally introduce the proposal to undertake the PRMP in the Yonge-Eglinton area to local resident associations, to establish the membership and roles of the MPG and to outline the timetables for the PRMP.”

Source: City of Toronto Planning Department, Terms of Reference, Midtown Planning Group, 2012.

Meeting minutes recorded by Richard MacFarlane, Secretary, Oriole Park Association.

Please note: Every effort was made to record the dialogue as accurately as possible. Some replies to questions are missing, not as a deliberate omission but because I was unable to document every comment made. Not everyone could be identified as attending this meeting.