



WATERFRONTToronto

Waterfront Design Review Panel Minutes of Meeting #167

Wednesday, April 24th, 2024

Meeting held in-person hybrid at Waterfront Toronto

Present

Waterfront Toronto Design Review Panel

Paul Bedford, Chair
Betsy Williamson, Vice Chair
Matthew Hickey
David Leinster
Fadi Masoud
Emily Mueller De Celis
Pina Petricone
Brigitte Shim
Kevin Stelzer
Eric Turcotte

Regrets

Gina Ford
Pat Hanson
Janna Levitt
Nina-Marie Lister

Emilia Floro, City of Toronto
Chris Glaisek, Waterfront Toronto

Recording Secretary
Leon Lai

Overview of Review Agenda

The Chair opened the meeting by providing an overview of the agenda, which included reviews of:

1. Villiers Island Precinct Plan: Proposed Amendments – Stage 2: Preliminary Draft Plan
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GENERAL BUSINESS

The Chair asked if there were any conflicts of interest for disclosure. No conflict was declared.

The Chair then asked Leon Lai, Manager, Design Review Panel with Waterfront Toronto, to give an update on last month's projects.

Design Review Panel Report Back:

Mr. Lai noted the Consensus Comments for **McCleary District Precinct Plan** have been shared with the team as they continue to work on massing, building typology, and public realm options. Mr. Lai noted stakeholder engagement is in progress and the project is scheduled to return to the WDRP for Stage 2 review in June.

Mr. Lai noted the **Basin Media Hub** team has received the Consensus Comments, studying art integration opportunities, refining entrance gateways, and providing more landscape buffer at Carlaw Ave. The team is working with City Planning and Urban Forestry to resolve plant species, and Waterfront Toronto will report back on the next design update.

Waterfront Toronto Updates:

Mr. Lai provided an update on **Queens Quay East Lakefill**: TRCA completed the fishing investigation, and no fish were found, therefore dredging commenced in the first week of April and will take four weeks to complete. Mr. Lai provided photo updates on the construction progress of **Port Lands Flood Protection**: canoe cove construction continues, and the formwork is in progress for the Badlands landscape.

Chair's remarks:

The Chair concluded the General Business segment and motioned to go into the project review sessions.

PROJECT REVIEWS

1.0 Villiers Island Precinct Plan: Proposed Amendments – Stage 2: Preliminary Draft Plan

<i>Project ID #:</i>	1039
<i>Project Type:</i>	Precinct Plan
<i>Review Stage:</i>	Preliminary Draft Plan
<i>Review Round:</i>	Two
<i>Location:</i>	Villiers Island
<i>Proponent:</i>	City of Toronto + Waterfront Toronto
<i>Presenter(s):</i>	Anthony Kittel, Project Manager, City of Toronto Chris Glaisek, Chief Planning and Design Officer, Waterfront Toronto Rei Tasaka, Senior Urban Project Manager, Waterfront Toronto
<i>Delegation:</i>	Paul Arkilander, CreateTO Tharmiha Kanagathan, CreateTO

Julie Bogdanowicz, City of Toronto
Carly Bowman, City of Toronto
Pina Mallozzi, Waterfront Toronto
Margot Shafran, Waterfront Toronto
Nigel Tahair, City of Toronto
Josh Hilburt, Waterfront Toronto
Kristal Tanunagara, Waterfront Toronto
Mira Shenker, Waterfront Toronto
Aaron Barter, Waterfront Toronto

1.1 Introduction to the Issues

Anthony Kittel, Project Manager with City of Toronto, began the introduction by noting the team will present the 2024 Villiers demonstration plan that will be enabled by Zoning, including key urban design considerations, and identify next steps. Mr. Kittel noted the timeline, Council direction, density study scope, study outcomes, and the overall zoning approach. Mr. Kittel provided a recap of the density increase strategies presented back in June 2023 to the WDRP and summarized the feedback from Panel on density, height, and public realm.

Chris Glaisek, Chief Planning and Design Officer with Waterfront Toronto noted the public realm context including parks and streets. Mr. Glaisek noted there is no funding yet for streets, a design team has yet to be hired, and the work will come to the Panel for review in the future. Mr. Glaisek noted the streets are conceived of as a hierarchy: multi-modal streets and transitways, local streets, pedestrian priority, and non-vehicular. The notional designs were completed for the purpose of costing to help determine an order of magnitude for budget. Mr. Glaisek noted that Cherry Street and Commissioners Street have been constructed but are not yet fully completed, and the rest do not have designs yet. Mr. Glaisek suggested to focus comments on the massing and zoning for the purpose of this review.

Mr. Kittel then summarized the areas for Panel consideration including approach to increased density, zoning flexibility, and future public realm work.

1.2 Project Presentation

Rei Tasaka, Senior Project Manager with Waterfront Toronto, began the presentation by summarizing the approaches to density increase presented at the previous review. From the 2017 VIPP to the 2024 demonstration plan, there is approximately an increase of 60% density. Ms. Tasaka noted the island-wide approach to building heights and sun criteria for the public realm, radiation study, shadow studies, and city-wide elevations comparing increase in building heights.

Ms. Tasaka noted the tower locations and separation distances, tower zoning zones, setbacks, base building stepbacks and streetwall heights, for key blocks and streets. Ms. Tasaka compared the proposed amendments with the 2017 VIPP while noting key 3D views. Ms. Tasaka presented the approach to mid-block connections and block porosity: each block has a maximum GFA based on demonstrative massing which considers mid-block connections. Ms. Tasaka concluded with mid-block connection

precedent projects.

Mr. Kittel then noted the next steps as zoning by-law and official plan amendments, renaming the island and further Indigenous engagement, and finally phasing and implementation plans and streets and public realm design updates.

1.3 Panel Questions

One Panel member noted the presentation showed primarily the demonstration massing and asked how much flexibility there is in the loose fit zoning. Mr. Kittel noted the zoning creates a broad box based upon the limits of the demonstration plan, carving out essential setbacks and stepbacks, and defining tower zones. On p.46 the drawing shows the tower zoning and the cyan line extruded up with the stepbacks – the intention is to not be too restrictive.

Another Panel member asked if the team would have density restriction per block. Ms. Tasaka responded that each block would have a GFA cap which is a development cap that incorporates base extrusion minus setback and midblock connection so the building cannot cover the entire footprint of the site. The Panel member asked what is included in the OPA versus the zoning, and if land use is included. Mr. Kittel noted the precinct plan provides overall policy direction, the land use here is mixed-use across the island and from a policy perspective there is a decrease in non-residential uses except for priority retail along key street frontages.

One Panel member asked for information on the grey block. Mr. Kittel noted that the grey block is private land that is subject to appeal, and that the OPA and zoning applies only to the public lands. Mr. Kittel noted the private development is primarily residential, if the appeal is approved the project would be referred to the WDRP for review at Site Plan Approval.

Another Panel member asked if a wind study has been completed. Mr. Kittel noted since this is a demonstration plan, the team studied sun and shadow impact to help refine the zoning. Emilia Floro, Director of Urban Design with City of Toronto, noted the team is aware of wind impact and has employed setbacks and tower podium form to mitigate at a zoning level, and will rely on SPA studies to further refine. The Panel member asked for more information on the school site and how the program is determined. Mr. Kittel noted the school is a Toronto District School Board elementary school, they will evaluate the size required, furthermore the location of community programs is notional at this point and will have to determine through the development process, co-location and phasing opportunities will be discussed.

One Panel member asked if the midblock connections are locked in through the zoning. Ms. Tasaka noted that the only part locked in as part of the 2017 Precinct Plan is the 15m connection east of Foundry Street, the other ones are notional. Ms. Tasaka noted the proposed amendments would not preclude that scenario, instead the max GFA would ensure midblock connections and limit contiguous street wall above a certain distance. The Panel member asked if there is land use policy on key streets. Mr. Kittel responded that there is: the entire precinct is mixed-use with other commercial activation uses permitted throughout the ground floor.

Another Panel member asked the team to elaborate on the cultural interpretive plan. Mr. Kittel noted the team is working with Indigenous Affairs Office and Minokamik, looking at it through the lens of economic development building off the work being undertaken. The Panel member asked if that plan would have any effect on massing or zoning. Mr. Kittel responded that he is not sure at this point. The Panel member asked if there is a consideration for increased green space along with the increased density for other forms of habitat. Ms. Tasaka noted that the adjacent parkland is sufficient for the density.

One Panel member asked if the setbacks and stepbacks of the private development are part of the zoning. Mr. Kittel noted that they are outside the zoning amendment work.

1.4 Panel Comments

It was noted that a Panel member who was unable to attend the meeting and so did not see the presentations to the Panel by City of Toronto and Waterfront Toronto Staff has provided written comments. These were summarized by the Chair at the meeting and are included in full in the minutes of the meeting.

One Panel member noted that as the heart of the new Port Lands community, Villiers Island marks a new precinct on a new island created from the post-industrial era, surrounded by some of the most progressive and innovative nature-based landscape designs for parks in North America, if not anywhere. Truly, the Port Lands Flood Protection work and the surrounding park projects have led with landscape in every way we could have imagined and intended. As such, they help launch a new climate-resilient and nature-positive approach to planning and design that is urgently needed. Unfortunately, despite the promising language in the preamble, the same cannot be said of the Villiers Island plan before us.

The Panel member appreciated the efforts of Waterfront Toronto and City staff here; the comments are not about their work, but rather the direction to which these plans respond. The Panel member understood very well the pressures on staff to deliver a timely project that optimizes densities at a time when all new buildings must demonstrate better, increased densities and provide more diverse and affordable housing alternatives. To be clear, these are goals that all Panel members understand and support, including the innovative and creative ways needed to increase density and affordable housing supply.

The Panel member felt that the issue here is not the density: it is the 20th century process-and-form of the development, and the result this project looks backwards rather than forward. The Panel member noted in this proposal is a look backwards at 20th century grid dominated by podium-and-tower massing, around which the dominant mode of mobility is the car. The wide perimeter roads in particular, signal the dominance of private automobiles and car-based transit, to which public transit and walkable options are subservient. More concerning still is the lack of an evolved, active, and nuanced public realm, shown currently holes in the plan, apparently being left to resolve at a later date. The combination of these moves is hugely problematic. At

best it is an unintelligent, lost opportunity, and at worst, it is irresponsible and will not in any way deliver on the promises made in the preamble to the plan.

The Panel member is deeply dismayed that this project not only does not "lead with landscape" (as is oft-proclaimed to be Waterfront Toronto's signature move) but rather, it appears to avoid it altogether. Despite being surrounded by some of the most progressive and innovative new parks anywhere, Villiers appears stalled in the 1990s. The idea that one could insert an active and engaging public realm after the massing is developed is as misguided as it is outdated an approach. As an island and a lake-centred project, Villiers Island has incredible opportunities to activate the increased densities with a welcoming, engaging and nuanced ground plane, with narrower streets, at multiple scales, all of which open up more space for social activation, a diverse tree canopy, urban rewilding, and engagement in the uniqueness of this neighbourhood's character — as an island in a Great Lake — not nowhere-in-particular, or even anywhere, but here, specifically, in this special place. In previous comments, the Panel emphasized all this and more: a need to prioritize people and nature (biodiversity, which is declining everywhere). How? By activating the densities across the grade (not only the podium perimeters), along more and narrower fine-grained streets, with wider walkways, more interior courtyards, bioswales, meandering pedestrian paths and bike corridors, diverse and stratified greenways, linking pocket parks (not POPS), to provide a rich variety of interconnected microclimates, layers of thermal comfort and atmospheric moderation along with ample permeable soft-surfaces and spaces for urban nature to thrive. Sunlight is certainly important, but the future will demand the right to shade, to living-landscape cooling and respite from wind. In the same respect, rain is a resource (some would say it is a gift, to be held and released gently), trees are oxygen and shade — not an afterthought — and vegetation provides habitat and comfort — it must not be reduced to decoration, pasted along a podium face as a nature band-aid. The Panel member knows from experience that an active social and public realm flows from a healthy functioning landscape, from a vibrant ecology of place. The Panel member noted these are essential activation tools for civic life. But none of this can happen after the building massing is planned and developed, which inevitably will dictate and subsume both the landscape and its atmosphere.

The Panel member noted the plan before us is grey: it signals a return to mid 20th Century city planning rather than the forward-looking climate resilient future that Villiers and Toronto deserve. As the society faces down increasingly unavoidable heat waves, violent and frequent storms, flooding and other effects of global heating and biodiversity loss, my role as a public servant is to advocate for and ensure that any design decisions are as climate resilient and as biodiversity supportive as possible — even in ways that are unfamiliar or perhaps make us uncomfortable in the short term. But elsewhere in the world, from the Netherlands to Qatar; from Sao Paulo to Singapore, there are flourishing examples of biophilic communities already in place. The Panel member encouraged the team to avoid the trap of the old patterns known. In planning and designing for an uncertain future, the Panel member commented that courage and commitment are needed. Please let us be brave: our future city needs us to imagine and to design a different path. The Panel member offered these comments with the intention to give voice to renewed and good relations with our land, water, and all beings,

Another Panel member noted that like the McCleary District Precinct Plan review, the focus here should be pursuing zoning that allows density and built form that are unique to the site. The Panel member felt the private blocks are problematic if they do not have any alignment with the proposed zoning of the precinct, and asked WT and City to work with them. The Panel member appreciated that some of the streets are designed to be able to be converted to fully pedestrian in the future. They felt that it is difficult to create a real neighborhood with just tower and podium blocks and encouraged loosening the GFA cap, eliminating setbacks, and determine a massing that is regulated while providing flexibility for design. If the GFA cap is based on the lot area, i.e. higher density means more midblock connections, the Panel then can review each block based on these criteria when they are designed.

One Panel member commended the team for an extensive and comprehensive presentation. The Panel member appreciated the north-south midblock connections as they break down the scale and improve porosity to the water, and asked if these connections will be public realm or right-of-ways – it is possible to imagine a strategy through the precinct to create a system of small right-of-ways. The Panel member noted Villiers Island is a great dense community surrounded by parks and water, it would be great to create a unique community with little to no car requirements. The Panel member encouraged the team to ensure a fine-grained public realm and it should be well articulated in the precinct plan.

Another Panel member commented that more density should be located at transit stops. The Panel member recommended simplifying the zoning, such as reducing the setbacks around Centre Street which raises construction cost and will ultimately encourage variance requests. Instead shift the density to other more major streets. Along Old Cherry, the Panel felt that one setback is already sufficient. The Panel member felt that there are some blocks with deep floor plates, and these should be refined as a developer might propose narrower blocks with more height instead. The Panel member cautioned that perimeter blocks with many corners are also difficult to develop and commented that midblock connections work well on smaller buildings but once they go above 7 FSI coordination with servicing at-grade becomes very challenging – ensure these principles are tested and they are compatible with real developments. The Panel member encouraged the team to strengthen ground floor land use policies, especially retail.

One Panel member appreciated the work and presentation, noting that it is difficult to reconcile zoning and the public realm being designed separately because there is a reciprocal relationship, so it is important to ensure the public realm is not an afterthought. The Panel member commented that the midblock connections are critical and encouraged the team to further develop these principles and present a robust strategy. The Panel member recommended to study the precedents by mapping a figure-ground block plan to understand built form grain, grid, and its relationship to the pedestrian network. The Panel member encouraged more flexibility in the building form and location while providing more control and a finer grain in the public realm.

Another Panel member appreciated seeing the potential of the plan and encouraged the team to consider a loop-like retail strategy early on – a 5min walk. The Panel

member felt the midblock connections should have a hierarchy to ensure there is a variety of them, i.e. some that are at an angle and more intimate, while others are more straight-through connections – develop this in the next iteration of the plan. The Panel member encouraged the urban design guidelines to include aspects of wind mitigation strategies for building elements at grade, i.e. overhangs, supports for canopy, trees, etc. The Panel member suggested the team consider additional park land that can be located above ground where the built form steps back.

One Panel member agreed that the midblock connections should create another network of nodes and facilitate pedestrian movement to destinations. The Panel member noted that this area used to be one of the largest wetland and watersheds, and since we are re-rerouting the river, it is important to consider how natural history can honor the place.

Another Panel member supported access to sun on public space and codifying the midblock connections to ensure a strong sense of publicness on the ground floor. The Panel member encouraged more diagonal connections as they will help add a unique and magical dimension to the character of the precinct.

One Panel member noted this is a unique district and cautioned that the developments could feel like an island within an island. It is important to test the massing and zoning to ensure they will produce the desired results. The Panel member appreciated allowing sunlight to the eastern park and river valley. The Panel member suggested to look at the larger context of the overall Port Lands to determine recreational needs.

Another Panel member supported the plan. The Panel member noted that TGS requirement would evolve to be at the upper levels for these future developments, and with increased density one of the most challenging requirements would be the stormwater management for large buildings, and encouraged the team to study how can the infrastructure help improve the management of stormwater.

1.5 Consensus Comments

General

- Appreciate the work, presentation, and responding to previous Panel comments.
- Supported the increase in density and recognized that this project is delivering high density comparable to other sites in the City, i.e. 1/3 more population than West Don Lands, with a 7.7x coverage.
- It is important to ensure the district will be unique and feel different than other neighbourhoods in Toronto and deliver the objectives of Port Lands Flood Protection. Think and look towards the future in the planning and designs of built form, public realm, land use, and community amenities, as this project will have a 25-year buildout period.
- Appreciated the explanation of the street ROW hierarchy and objectives that provide space for transit, green infrastructure, wider sidewalks, etc. and look forward to seeing the designs in the future.

Zoning

- Simplify and further 'loosen' the zoning:
 - Loosen the zoning envelope and eliminate some setbacks to allow more flexibility in the design of each block to deliver housing, consider the impact of mass timber structures, ambitious sustainability performance, and minimizing construction cost.
 - Consider more density along Commissioners with a strong street wall and fewer setbacks.
 - Maximize tower location zone to provide flexibility.
- Strong support for a finer grained public realm network that will help break down the scale of the blocks, further develop ideas around the midblock connections and encode them in detail into the zoning:
 - Develop a precinct-wide midblock connections strategy to ensure they will be located to facilitate meaningful movements and further increase visual connections to the water.
 - Study successful precedents such as from Cumberland to Yorkville and how the connections were mandated and implemented.
- Consider breaking down the blocks even further to reduce instances of deep floor plates.
- Continue to test the zoning with demonstration buildings to ensure they will allow developers to create expected results, including required midblock connections and reasonably deep floor plates.
- The 'out of scope' private blocks can greatly impact the precinct vision, depending on the results of the appeal. Encouraged the City to work with the private landowners to seek understanding and alignment on built form.

Public Realm

- Appreciated that some of the streets are being conceived of for potential conversion to pedestrian only.
- It is important to consider the public realm experience while developing the built form – intertwine the two as much as possible.
- Suggested to complete a figure ground comparison of Villiers Island with other successful neighbourhoods to understand scale.

Sustainability

- Consider the relationship between built form and sustainability, ensure they will support environmental standards 25 years into the future as the precinct builds out.
- Consider that stormwater management will be a challenge for large blocks especially targeting the future higher tier of TGS.

1.6 Vote of Support/Non-Support

8 Panel members voted Conditional Support. 2 Panel members votes Non-Support.

The Chair then asked if the proponent would like to provide a brief response.

The team thanked the Panel for their comments.

CLOSING

There being no further business, the Chair then adjourned the public session of the meeting.

These Meeting Minutes are formally adopted and approved by Panel on June 26th, 2024.

Signed--

Paul Bedford

Paul Bedford, Waterfront Design Review Panel Chair

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Emilia Floro

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Emilia Floro, City of Toronto Urban Design Director

DocuSigned by:

George Zegarac

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George Zegarac, Chief Executive Officer, Waterfront Toronto