



West Don Lands Precinct Plan Public Consultation – Summary Report

JUNE 2004





This report was prepared by Lura Consulting. Lura Consulting provided TWRC with consultation services for the West Don Lands Precinct Planning process.

**For more information about the West Don Lands Precinct Plan
public consultation please contact:**

Tanya Hardy
Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation
207 Queens Quay West, Suite 822
Phone: 416.214.1344
Fax: 416.214.4591
E-mail: thardy@twaterfront.ca

WEST DON LANDS PRECINCT PLAN: PUBLIC CONSULTATION SUMMARY REPORT

| | | |
|------------|--|-----------|
| 1.0 | INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| 2.0 | THE CONSULTATION PROCESS | 1 |
| 2.1 | Public Forums | 1 |
| 2.2 | Environmental Assessment Open House | 2 |
| 2.3 | Stakeholder Roundtables | 3 |
| 3.0 | CONSULTATION RESULTS: WHAT WE HEARD | 3 |
| 3.1 | Strengths and Weaknesses of the Area | 3 |
| 3.2 | Vision for West Don Lands | 4 |
| 3.3 | Design Principles | 5 |
| 3.4 | Strengths: What People Like About the West Don Lands Precinct Plan | 6 |
| | 3.4.1 Neighbourhood Character | 6 |
| | 3.4.2 Urban Design | 7 |
| | 3.4.3 Parks, Open Space, and Natural Areas | 7 |
| | 3.4.4 Community Connections | 8 |
| | 3.4.5 Mix of Housing Types and Affordability | 8 |
| | 3.4.6 Sustainability | 9 |
| 3.5 | Concerns: Issues and Community Advice | 9 |
| | 3.5.1 Building Height and Density | 9 |
| | 3.5.2 Transportation | 10 |
| | 3.5.3 Implementation and Development Control | 10 |
| 4.0 | NEXT STEPS | 11 |

WEST DON LANDS PRECINCT PLAN: PUBLIC CONSULTATION SUMMARY REPORT

1.0 Introduction

From December 2003 to May 2004, the Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation (TWRC) implemented a comprehensive public consultation program as an integral part of the West Don Lands precinct planning process. Consultation meetings were held at strategic points in the planning process to give the design team an opportunity to communicate their vision and design concepts for West Don Lands to participants and to receive feedback.

This report captures the feedback provided by individuals and organizations participating in the public consultation process and is based on comments received during public and stakeholder meetings, completed feedback forms, and written submissions. The body of this report presents a high level summary of the results, focusing first on “what we heard” in the design stages, to the strengths of the plan, and then on the major issues raised and participants’ ideas on how those issues could be addressed. The summary highlights the key messages raised and common themes heard throughout the consultation process.

For a more detailed compilation of the consultation results, please refer to TWRC’s website at www.towaterfront.ca.

2.0 The Consultation Process

The West Don Lands Precinct Plan emerged from an inclusive consultation process designed to reflect and balance the diverse ideas and concerns of participating stakeholders. The consultation process also provided the design team with an effective way to communicate and receive feedback about their design concepts. The consultation process was comprised of three public forums and three stakeholder roundtables. Members of the public were also invited to contact TWRC throughout the process, or visit the TWRC website.

2.1 Public Forums

The public forums were large open meetings that attracted between 100 – 200 participants. Each meeting was intended to serve as an opportunity to communicate ideas about West Don Lands with the broader community and to receive their feedback on the design team’s work. Notification for each forum was provided through paid advertising, direct e-mail invitation, and via the TWRC website.

The first public forum was held on December 2, 2003. It was designed to give the public an opportunity to help the design team understand the area's strengths and weakness, and to share their visions for the West Don Lands. Ninety-eight people, representing 52 organizations, participated in this meeting.

The second public forum was held on February 12, 2004 and was part of an intensive week-long charrette hosted by TWRC and the design team. Different design alternatives and solutions were developed throughout the week in consultation with stakeholders and representatives from local and provincial governments and their agencies. On February 12, the design team presented a set of design principles and two alternative precinct plan concepts for the broader public to consider. Over 200 people attended this forum and were given the opportunity to share what they liked and disliked about the design alternatives. The design team used this information to refine the design alternatives and to develop a draft proposed precinct plan.

On May 6, TWRC held the third and final public forum for the West Don Lands precinct plan. The purpose of this forum was for the design team to present the draft proposed precinct plan, and for TWRC to present the implementation plan, as well as sustainability and affordable housing strategies. Approximately 170 people attended this forum.

2.2 Environmental Assessment Open Houses

The Municipal Class Environmental Assessment (EA) Master Plan consultations were an important part of the precinct planning process. The first EA open house was held on February 12 as part of the second public forum. Participants were asked to review a series of displays related to the EA process including the four types of infrastructure that require EA approvals:

- transportation
- water
- wastewater
- stormwater

Participants were asked to comment on the process and to provide feedback on the proposed infrastructure strategy and to provide suggestions of their own.

A second open house was held as part of the May 6 public forum. Participants were asked to review displays of alternative design concepts for the four types of infrastructure noted above. They were also asked to provide comments on what they liked and disliked about the proposed design alternatives for the four types of infrastructure.

2.3 Stakeholder Roundtables

Stakeholder roundtables were designed to ensure local issues and concerns were addressed during the precinct planning process and involved approximately 25 participants who represented a range of local interests. Notification of stakeholder roundtables was provided by e-mail invitation to participants.

The purpose of the first stakeholder roundtable, held on January 7, 2004, was to receive feedback from the first public forum and to obtain input on a set of design principles to guide future stages of the precinct planning process.

The second stakeholder roundtable was held on February 10 and was part of the week-long charrette. This roundtable was intended to get feedback on the design principles and alternative design concepts prior to the February 12 public forum.

The final stakeholder roundtable was held on April 1 and was used to obtain input on a refined version of the draft proposed precinct plan.

3.0 Consultation Results: What We Heard

Public consultation participants provided a wealth of insights and opinions regarding the future of the West Don Lands during the precinct planning process. This section summarizes the feedback that was instrumental in helping the design team develop and refine the West Don Lands Precinct Plan.

3.1 Strengths and Weakness of the Area

A central goal of the first public forum was to give the public and members of the precinct plan team an opportunity to share ideas on opportunities and issues for the future of the West Don Lands. As part of the working session, participants were asked to identify the area's existing strengths and weaknesses. Throughout the precinct planning process, the design team worked to develop a plan that builds on the West Don Land's strengths and addresses its weaknesses. The table that follows captures the issues identified by participants.

| STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE WEST DON LANDS AREA | |
|---|---|
| Strengths | Weaknesses |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Heritage resources – First Parliament site, Canary restaurant, CN police building ▪ Access to the Don River and the waterfront ▪ Proximity to Downtown ▪ Adjacent neighbourhoods – Corktown, Distillery District, St. Lawrence, Old Town of York | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Barriers – Richmond/Adelaide ramps, rail lines to the south and east, Gardiner Expressway ▪ Eastern/Front Intersection ▪ Lack of connections to the north and south ▪ Isolation from the rest of the city ▪ Lack of community services ▪ Channelized Don River |

3.2 Vision for West Don Lands

Participants at the December 2, 2003 public forum were also asked to tell the design team what their dreams and visions are for the West Don Lands. There were many ideas provided and considerable consistency in the responses. A review of the feedback received from participants at subsequent consultation sessions shows support for the visions identified at the first public forum remained strong throughout the entire precinct planning process. The key dreams and visions for the West Don Lands are listed in the table below.

| VISIONS FOR WEST DON LANDS |
|---|
| Sustainable, vibrant, mixed use community that reflects the historical significance of the area |
| Fine grain development pattern with lots of variety |
| High quality and environmentally sound urban design |
| Strong central core with vibrant commercial services |
| Multiple transit options |
| Strong connections to other parts of the City |
| Integrated community services |
| Pedestrian and cyclist friendly streets |
| Creative parking solutions |
| "Green Network" of parks and trails |
| Accessible and re-naturalized Don River |
| Enhanced views to downtown, the Don River, and the waterfront |

3.3 Design Principles

Based on feedback received from participants at the December 2003 public forum and a stakeholder roundtable, held on January 7, 2004, the design team developed a set of design principles to guide the design and planning process. The design principles were presented to stakeholders at a February 10 stakeholder roundtable and to the public at the February 12 public forum. Participants at each session generally supported the design principles.

| DESIGN PRINCIPLES | |
|--|--|
| Frameworks and Streets | Character & Image of the Community |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create a pedestrian-friendly street network that connects West Don Lands with the adjacent communities ▪ Create a street and block pattern that reflects the eccentricities of surrounding neighbourhoods ▪ Reduce reliance on the automobile by providing access to a high-quality range of transportation options ▪ Transform Eastern Avenue into a pedestrian friendly street ▪ Front Street should be a primary entrance to the West Don Lands as it is a landmark street in the city, connecting major parks across the city ▪ Preserve the capacity of the street network | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish a range of architectural guidelines (massing, materials, and proportions) that reflect the range of scales and characters of surrounding communities ▪ Retain heritage resources wherever possible ▪ Respect the heritage of the area; however, create a “living” community with contemporary buildings, not historical replicas ▪ Use a variety of building types and styles to create a varied, eclectic, organic, and creative community |
| Flood Control Measures & Open Space | Land Use |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Design the berm as an amenity; it should accommodate usable open space and recreational options ▪ The river’s edge should be re-vegetated as part of the Don River Park system, linking the City to the waterfront ▪ Create multiple points of access between the community and the River’s edge ▪ Create parks for both the local community and the City ▪ Balance open space for the local community, the City, and the Region ▪ Create both active and natural open space along the Don River | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide a mix of land uses appropriate for an urban neighbourhood, which include residential, retail, and employment ▪ Limit auto-oriented land uses to sites with high access and/or to locations where the impacts are minimized ▪ Provide building types that are flexible and can accommodate a range of land uses depending on market demands ▪ Provide appropriate community facilities in accessible locations related to open space |

3.4 Strengths: What People Like About the West Don Lands Precinct Plan

Generally, the public response to the West Don Lands Precinct Plan has been very positive since the first design concepts were presented at the second public forum. Most people generally agreed that the overall plan: is beautifully designed; contains an excellent mix of land uses; appropriately deals with complex issues; integrates stakeholder ideas well; and is exciting. By the final public forum, participants were generally supportive of most aspects of the plan.

Throughout the precinct planning process, consultation participants were asked to identify what they see as the main strengths of the West Don Lands Precinct Plan. Based on a review of all the feedback received, the following six themes were the most commonly identified:

1. Neighbourhood Character
2. Urban Design
3. Parks, Open Space, and Natural Areas
4. Community Connections
5. Mix of Housing Types and Affordability
6. Sustainability

3.4.1 Neighbourhood Character

Participants consistently expressed a strong desire for a community that would be characterized as vibrant, authentic, intimate, and rich with potential for diverse experiences. Throughout the consultation process, people stated their praise and support for the rich sense of neighbourhood character the design team created by focusing on a mix of uses, attention to scale, and concern with the look and feel of West Don Lands.

Key Strengths

- The blend of street patterns and city blocks, which will encourage a rich street life and provide for a variety of experiences
- Emulation of the old street pattern
- Good mix of land uses
- Integration of architectural styles from adjacent communities
- Retention of heritage resources, such as the Canary Restaurant

3.4.2 Urban Design

Similar to the support for a community with a strong sense of character, there was widespread support for excellence in urban design. Many people were happy to see the designers' strong attention to design details that will help create a unique and authentic sense of place in West Don Lands. Most participants commented favourably on the variety of building types and their relationship to the streets. Overall, there was considerable support for using elements of design to enhance the pedestrian experience, with awnings, wide sidewalks, building step backs, and a variety of architecture.

3.4.3 Parks, Open Space, and Natural Areas

The desire for a good mix of small and large green spaces, with programmed and natural areas, to serve local, regional, and citywide needs has been one of the most significant issues during the Precinct Planning Process. Participants who took part in the second public forum were generally supportive of the parks and open space plan presented at that time.

While many said they liked the amount of green space and expressed support for ideas such as, placing the large park in the flood control area, and using green space as a buffer to the railways, some people had concerns about the overall approach to parks and open space. Specifically, many said they would like to see the berm naturalized. Others expressed concern about Don River Park being isolated from the community and blocking access to the Don River. There were many questions and concerns raised about the proposed linear park along Front St.

At the final public forum, the design team presented a refined plan, which addressed many of the concerns previously expressed by participants. Feedback from the final public forum suggests that people are generally more supportive of the plan for parks, open spaces, and natural areas.

Key Strengths

- Strong connections between the Don River Park, the Don River, and Commissioners Park
- Creation of natural areas around the Don River
- Accessible greenspaces
- Good mix of large and small greenspaces
- Extension of greenspace into the community with tree lined streets
- Front Street will give West Don Lands a distinct identity
- Connectivity of Don River Park with the community and adjacent communities, such as Riverdale

3.4.4 Community Connections

One of the most significant concerns expressed by participants at the beginning of the precinct planning process was that the West Don Lands is currently isolated from the rest of the city, and has been for several years. Throughout the consultation process, people continually stressed the importance of restoring linkages – roads, transit lines, pedestrian routes, vistas, and green spaces – between the West Don Lands and adjacent communities.

Feedback from the final public forum, suggests that people are very pleased with the design team’s efforts at integrating the West Don Lands with the rest of the city.

Key Strengths

- Good connections to surrounding communities through roads, views, and building design
- Extension of city grid into the community was done very well
- Linking pedestrian paths and trails
- Strong access to the Don River and Commissioners Park

3.4.5 Mix of Housing Types and Affordability

Building a community that features a mix of housing options in terms of tenure, design, and affordability so anyone who wants to live in the West Don Lands can, is a common goal of TWRC, public consultation participants, and other stakeholders.

During the early stages of the precinct planning process, participants consistently said they were pleased to see a good mix of housing types and designs and a commitment to building a full mix of housing options. At the same time, there were questions raised about the amount and location of affordable housing units. In addition, some people shared concerns about the likelihood of getting a significant amount of truly affordable ownership and rental units built.

Following the second public forum, TWRC released its affordable housing strategy and presented it at the final meeting on May 6. Participants are generally very supportive of TWRC’s affordable housing strategy. Specifically, people like the proposed mix of market and affordable rental and ownership housing. Participants also said they were pleased to see TWRC aiming to exceed the City of Toronto Official Plan requirements for affordable housing. There are still concerns about the amount of affordable units that will ultimately get built.

Key Comments

- Good mix of housing tenure, design, and price
- Pleased with commitment to providing affordable housing
- How will affordable housing targets be met?
- Affordable housing units must be designed to accommodate families

3.4.6 Sustainability

One of TWRC's main objectives is to make Toronto's waterfront both a national and global model for sustainability. This strong commitment resonated with public consultation participants, who expressed a desire to create an environmentally sound alternative to suburban sprawl. Following the second public forum, many people felt they did not have enough specific information on how TWRC would achieve its sustainability commitments.

TWRC presented its draft Sustainability Framework at the third public forum on May 6 and people generally felt satisfied with the framework. In addition, many participants acknowledged that the design of the West Don Lands - as a very urban, compact, and transit friendly place - would go a long way toward achieving sustainability objectives. Some participants provided suggestions for making the West Don Lands even more sustainable.

Key Comments

- Pleased with commitment to sustainability
- Good focus on sustainable design
- The linkage between the Oak Ridges Moraine and Lake Ontario must be preserved
- Green buildings could be greener
- There should be an integrated energy systems plan

3.5 Concerns: Issues and Community Advice

Although public consultation participants were generally quite supportive of most aspects of the West Don Lands Precinct Plan, there remain three issues that create some level of concern for people. At the final public forum, participants were asked to share their concerns as the precinct plan goes for approval and how those concerns could be addressed. This section highlights some of the concerns and advice presented by participants.

3.5.1 Building Height and Density

During the precinct planning process, participants said they felt building heights and densities were generally very good. At certain sites, however, several people

consistently stated that buildings were too tall. Participants expressed concern that the tall buildings proposed for the area along the railway berm are too tall and will cut off the community from the Lake Ontario. Another area where people said the buildings are too tall is at the intersection of Parliament and Mill Streets.

Community advice to address this issue

- Place the towers along the railway berm on a north-south axis instead of east-west
- Construct medium density buildings or townhouses at the intersection of Parliament and Mill Streets

3.5.2 Transportation

Participants were supportive of most aspects of the transportation plan, such as improving access to transit, creating a mix of local and regional roads, improving road connections to adjacent neighbourhoods, and replicating the original street network. There were mixed reactions to the proposed treatment of the Richmond/Adelaide Ramps. Concerns that were raised include:

- Eastern Avenue as a busy thoroughfare and unsafe for pedestrians
- Intersection of Trinity Street, Front Street, and Eastern Avenue not suitable for pedestrians
- Potential for too much automobile traffic entering the community through both Bayview Avenue and Front Street
- Concern about handling parking requirements
- Possibility of the proposed Cherry Street streetcar acting as a barrier that will divide the community

Community advice to address this issue

- Put a signalized intersection at Trinity Street and Eastern Avenue to slow down cars and make it safer for pedestrians
- Do not build a streetcar right-of-way like on Spadina Avenue
- Demolish the Richmond/Adelaide ramps and integrate these streets into the City's grid

3.5.3 Implementation and Development Control

Given the high level of support for the West Don Lands Precinct Plan, one of the greatest concerns stated by participants relates to whether the plan will get built and how to ensure developers do not compromise the goals of the plan.

Community advice to address this issue

- Community input is essential in the development phase to help ensure development controls are strong
- Create a design review panel, like in Vancouver, to prevent the City of Toronto from making amendments to the Official Plan
- TWRC needs to be more than an advisory body to determine how development proceeds; it should be a strong regulatory body

4.0 Next Steps

The results presented in this report will be used by decision-makers at TWRC, City Council, and the provincial and federal governments as the West Don Lands Precinct Plan is finalized and implemented. The final West Don Lands Precinct Plan will be submitted to the City of Toronto in June 2004. City staff will review the submission during the summer. The final plan will be presented to City Council in fall 2004.

TWRC is committed to using consultation reports similar to these, as well as other mechanisms, to continually update the record of feedback received through consultation activities. TWRC is also committed to responding to the issues raised through consultation on a regular basis to demonstrate how the feedback and advice has been considered and/or addressed.