

Indigenous Community Sharing Meeting

Housing Now - Place-Keeping at 1631 Queen Street East and Kishigo Lane

Monday, December 14, 2020, 6:30 – 8:00 pm

MEETING SUMMARY

Meeting Overview

On Monday, December 14, 2020 CreateTO and the City of Toronto hosted an Indigenous Community Sharing Meeting that brought together Indigenous peoples as well as Councillor Brad Bradford, the City of Toronto's Indigenous Affairs Office and consultants retained by CreateTO including SvN Architects + Planners, Two Row Architect, Swerhun Inc. and Nbsiing Consulting to begin discussions about place-keeping opportunities for the Housing Now site at 1631 Queen Street East, including Kishigo Lane.

Frances Sanderson, the Executive Director of Nishnawbe Homes Inc. provided the opening and closing invocation and thanksgiving. Councillor Brad Bradford participated in the meeting, sharing opening and closing remarks. A brief overview of the Housing Now Initiative and the 1631 Queen Street East site was shared by Annelly Zonena (City Planning) and Chantelle Burgess (CreateTO). Sony Rai (SvN) and Matthew Hickey (Two Row) shared early ideas for the future of the site including design principles and opportunities for place-keeping. Two Row provided valuable Indigenous place-keeping principles and considerations to help provide some context for the place-keeping dialogue.

The meeting was facilitated by Bob Goulais of Nbsiing Consulting with support from Matthew Wheatley of Swerhun Inc. Matthew Wheatley delivered the Land Acknowledgement on behalf of the CreateTO and the City of Toronto's Housing Now team. As facilitators that are not advocating for any particular outcome of this project, the intent of this summary is to capture the perspectives shared during the discussion. This meeting summary was shared in draft with participants prior to being finalized.

Summary of Feedback

The purpose of this meeting was to introduce the Housing Now site at 1631 Queen Street East, the preliminary design concept, discuss and seek feedback on opportunities for Indigenous place-keeping on site and along Kishigo Lane, and early ideas for the preliminary development concept. This draft summary reflects the feedback shared by participants during the meeting and afterwards by e-mail.

Participants shared ideas about and expressed interest in:

1. Outdoor living spaces/access to outdoors;
2. Non-hierarchical buildings and spaces;
3. Incorporating natural relations with connections to plants as food and medicine;
4. A place for teaching;
5. Space for ceremonies including sacred fires;
6. Opportunities to celebrate Indigenous families;
7. Opportunities to bring people together around food; and
8. Affordable housing for families

More detail on each of these points is provided in the rest of the summary.

1. Outdoor spaces and access to the outdoors

Ideas Shared

- Think about ways to provide easy access to the outdoors. [Indigenous peoples] are outdoor beings and have a strong connection to the natural world; the outdoors should be seen as part of the living space, not something to get away from.

2. Non-hierarchical buildings and spaces

Ideas Shared

- What really resonated with me was the concept of having a non-hierarchical building and spaces. As an example, it would be great to have a building and spaces with smooth corners to create a sense of flow.

3. Incorporating natural spaces with connections to water and plants as food and medicine

Ideas Shared

- The connection to water is fundamental to Indigenous peoples. Although there are no natural water bodies on site, access to water may include fountains, water walls, or bottle refill stations. It would be convenient to source water for ceremony purposes.
- There is great potential to see benefits from having plants that are indigenous to the area, which can provide both food and medicine. This could include having plants that reach all the senses including bringing smells that are local to the area (e.g., traditional medicines like sweetgrass and cedar).
- Rooftop gardens will be very important; they are one way to respect the land that is being taken to construct the building.

4. A place for teaching

Ideas Shared

- I was particularly impressed with the recognition and discussion of the seven directions. Not everyone living here will be Indigenous; this creates a great opportunity and need to use this as a place for teaching. One way to do this would be to include signs for plants in local Indigenous languages other than English. These signs can provide people with an opportunity to learn what the different plants are and what they are used for.
- There is a great opportunity to provide teachings and education by connecting with the childcare that will be on the site.

5. Space for ceremonies including sacred fires

Ideas Shared

- Think about how to include ceremonial spaces, which include information of what the ceremonial spaces are and why they are special. Ceremonial spaces can help people understand and honour special spaces.
- Fire is one of those basic parts of our ways of life including, water, air and land. There are not many places where [Indigenous peoples] can come together and make offerings into the sacred fire.
- Consider including space where fires can be lit to bring the community together. *Brian Porter (Two Row) explained that they are currently going through a similar exercise with OCAD University where they are exploring ideas on how to create a fire pit that is below grade and can be covered when it is not being used, which would allow people to walk over it. Brian also explained that part of the process is working with the City (including the fire department) to figure out ways to overcome existing logistics and policies that act as barriers to having fires.*

Jennifer Franks from the City's Indigenous Affairs Office said there is broader work starting to happen in the city to break down institutional barriers and proactively creating more spaces for fires. She noted that the Etobicoke Civic Centre is one place currently being looked at to hold fires and thought this process could be part of a broader process to identify spaces for fires across the City. She also said, and others agreed, that it will be important to learn more about the work being done at OCAD University to help inform this work.

6. Opportunities to celebrate Indigenous families

Ideas Shared

- Consider some form of foundational wall in the lobby of the building that can be used to tell the stories of the Indigenous families who lived, worked, played, and died here. This could help people understand why [the Kishigo family] were so important to this land (their land), where this building is being erected.

7. Opportunities to bring people together around food

Ideas Shared

- The first thing that comes to mind for me is food. It can be difficult to find places in Toronto where people can gather and share food. This site could include space and facilities (e.g. a pavilion and outdoor oven) that could bring the community together to share food without having to rely on external organizations.
- I really appreciate the knowledge shared here tonight. The key word that comes to mind is thanksgiving; that is to understand and give thanks to our ancestors through a tribute. Whether that tribute be food, tobacco, or harvesting and maintaining crops. Having a place where we can all gather and share food would be quite wonderful and do a lot of good for our community. I know we are all feeling quite disconnected right now.

8. Affordable housing for families

Ideas Shared

- The affordable housing should be large enough (three to four bedrooms) to accommodate large families, including multi-generational families.
- *Note added after the meeting:* Following the meeting a participant shared an email with some comments and questions about affordable housing: I would like to understand if / how this project will promote housing for Indigenous peoples in Toronto. Appreciate the ideas about including references to Indigenous art, meeting places, etc. to honour and respect Indigenous heritage but did not see how this project creates opportunities for Indigenous housing specifically. Would also like to understand how long the affordable units will remain affordable where these units will be located in the building. The units on the exterior of the building (with great views of the lake and city) will likely have high rents, which may result in the affordable units being relegated to the interior of the building.

Responses provided after the meeting:

- *Opportunities for Indigenous Housing: The housing component of Housing Now is being discussed directly between the City of Toronto, CreateTO and the Indigenous housing providers. The Housing Now Initiative is one component of the City's HousingTO Action Plan which places a significant priority on Indigenous peoples and the need for more affordable housing options. For more information, check out the HousingTO Action Plan: <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/community-partners/affordable-housing-partners/housingto-2020-2030-action-plan/>*
- *Location of affordable units: All units are required to have access to indoor and outdoor amenities, regardless of affordability level. We can't say at this point where in the building they'd both be located. When it is rental, it is much easier from an operational perspective to have all the units blended throughout the building.*

- *Duration and level of affordability: The duration of affordability is 99 years. This is set out in the land lease and registered on title to ensure the development partner or any transferee is bound to maintaining the affordability requirement. Affordable rental units created through Housing Now will not exceed 100% of Toronto's Average Market Rent (AMR) and will on average rent for 80% of AMR. This means that rents will be affordable to households earning between \$21,000 and \$56,000 per year.*

Next Steps

Bob wrapped up the meeting by thanking people for sharing their voice and vision and asking participants of the meeting if they would be interested and willing to continue participating in the process and future meetings. By a show of hands there was general interest from participants to continue participating in the process. Bob also committed to sending a draft summary to participants for review and following up with invitations to the next meeting.

Councillor Bradford provided closing remarks, thanking everyone for their energy and input. Chantelle, Annely, and representatives of the consultant teams also thanked everyone for their time and input. Frances Sanderson delivered the closing invocation/Thanksgiving.