



Parkdale Community Hub Preliminary Feedback, Insights & Directions September 6, 2018

The Parkdale Community Hub project aims to consolidate City property and community services at several sites near Queen Street West and Cowan Avenue in the Parkdale neighbourhood to expand and improve services. From January to June 2018, CreateTO in collaboration with the City of Toronto Real Estate Services division held several preliminary stakeholder and community meetings to learn what Parkdale residents, community organizations and local City agencies would like to see included in a future community hub. This report summarizes the feedback received during this preliminary phase of consultation.

Stakeholder and community meetings

Date (2018)	Feedback opportunity
Early 2018	City of Toronto Inter-Divisional Agency feedback received in writing
January 26	Inter-Divisional Agency workshop
April 12	Parkdale Arts and Culture Centre Residents Meeting
May 4	Community Organization Meeting
May 16	Community Information Meeting
May & June	Online and paper survey
May & June	Community organization questionnaire

Public Feedback Summary

This section summarizes the feedback from the May 16, 2018 Community Meeting at the Parkdale Toronto Public Library branch, as well as the online survey that was open in May and June.

1. Vision for the hub

There was a sense that many participants wanted the hub to reflect and facilitate the unique character and spirit of the Parkdale. Many participants noted that Parkdale is a diverse community of different cultures, languages and ages. This is highly valued by residents, and the new facility should support, preserve and celebrate this diversity. The hub should be a place where people of all ages and from all walks of life interact.

Participants used several adjectives to describe their vision for the hub, including:

- Integrated
- Responsive and adaptive
- Innovative
- Creative
- Adaptable
- Multi-functional

2. Community services

There is a desire for the future facility to offer more services and amenities than what exists now – as demand for services is high and there is risk of many agencies losing their spaces in the next several years. Further, those who are offering community services in the area would like to be able to continue their work. More flexible, longer hours that accommodate different work schedules would also be welcome. Any new services and programs should take advantage of the diversity of cultures, languages and demographics in the area, while ensuring accessibility for people with different disabilities.

There were a number of specific community programs suggested and broadly supported, including:

- Expanded child care,
- Maker spaces with technology workshops and incubator space,
- Space for urban farming and community gardens,
- Programs that address food security challenges and provide food education,
- Programming for school-aged children (most existing programs are full or seasonal),
- Programs and space for youth, for example homework space, clubs, and civics and legal rights education classes,
- Financial services and institutions,
- Financial empowerment courses, and
- Affordable housing.

3. Planning and design

There was broad consensus that the site should be open and welcoming, and could constitute Parkdale’s “living room” or town square. There is broad desire for public realm improvements, including benches, flower planters and public gathering space. Protecting heritage while creating a beautiful building was desired as well.

There was a strong desire for well-maintained outdoor activity spaces, though there was some debate on whether outdoor space or all-season recreational space is more valuable. It was suggested that the new building be energy efficient and accessible. There was broad agreement that parking lots are not useful for this site, and that some existing streets could be closed or changed. A community benefits agreement would also be welcome during the construction phase.

4. Public engagement and communication

There was broad support for more community engagement in advance of, and during, construction. There were suggestions for meetings and meeting materials in different languages, more lead time and hiring local residents to inform others. It was also suggested that a community liaison committee could be established to share information, advocate for the community and keep government accountable.

Challenges and concerns

1. Existing issues in the area

It was noted by a number of participants that the project site and surrounding area have a number of existing issues that need to be taken care of in the short term, before community planning, including public realm improvements, trash removal, dealing with abandoned properties and cleaning blocked laneways.

2. Risk to character of Parkdale

Community feedback highlighted the risk of losing the unique character of Parkdale. There was concern that new development could catalyze or accelerate gentrification in the area, which would reduce diversity, inclusivity, and affordability.

3. Reduction of services

Participants made it clear that the new site should not have fewer programs and services than what exists now.

4. Transition phase and relocations

Services and residents using existing spaces would like to see the transition between facilities carefully managed, suggestions included finding nearby sites to use in the interim, building the hub in stages, and securing replacement housing for those displaced by construction.

Stakeholder Feedback Summary

This section includes feedback from community organizations, the residents of the Parkdale Arts and Culture Centre and City of Toronto divisions and agencies. Feedback was collected from:

- Inter-Divisional Agency feedback received in writing – early 2018
- Inter-Divisional Agency workshop – January 26
- Parkdale Arts and Culture Centre Residents Meeting – April 12
- Community Organization Meeting – May 4
- Community organization questionnaire – May and June 2018

1. Community organizations

This section summarizes the feedback from the May 4 Community Organization Meeting, community organization questionnaire distributed throughout May and June. Also included here is the feedback from the Parkdale Arts and Culture Centre Residents Meeting on April 12.

All of the organizations operating out of the City-owned facilities at Queen and Cowan were invited to the May 4 meeting and to submit feedback via questionnaire. The following organizations attended the meeting and/or submitted feedback in writing:

- Lua Shayenne Dance Company
- Gallery 1313
- Artscape
- Alcoholics Anonymous
- Parkdale Community Information Centre
- Sistering
- Kababayan
- Tapshoes and Tutus

Vision for the hub

There is consensus that the new facility should reflect the diversity of the surrounding community and serve its diverse needs. The hub should be warm, inviting and a safe place for clients, staff and volunteers. One organization would like to see a vision statement that directly honours the immigrant history of Parkdale.

Many organizations note that Parkdale has a high concentration of arts and culture workers. There is a desire for a new facility that can act as a catalyst and focal point for arts and culture in the community into the future.

The future space should also support collaboration and capacity-building between different organizations. It should meet or exceed the current amount of space being used, and should be flexible enough to serve the diverse needs of residents – a one-stop-shop of community services and programs.

Future space needs

Overall, the organizations would like the future hub to be flexible with different types of spaces – some shared and some private – including:

- Multi-functional and purpose-built spaces that can host arts programming of all kinds (theatre, dance, music, visual arts, etc.),
- Offices and rooms that can host a range of community programs and drop-in services,
- Commercial-sized kitchen and community gardens,
- Sports and recreation areas (gyms, outdoor sports fields, etc.), and
- For the artist live/work units, there is a desire for additional units that are designed with artists in mind (ventilation, accommodation for “dirty” work areas, etc.).

There is a desire for community and stakeholder engagement and input throughout the process, and some organizations are engaging their own stakeholders in their vision for the future space.

Parkdale Arts and Culture Centre residents’ feedback

A number of considerations and concerns were raised by residents of the Parkdale Arts and Culture Centre, including:

- Concern surrounding displacement during construction and the resulting effect on livelihoods,
- A suggestion to look to nearby properties for temporary housing and construction phasing,
- That artist live/work studios have unique needs (large spaces, sound insulation, lighting, etc.)
- Concern that the character of the existing space will be lost. It was noted that the context and history of the space informs the art,
- Residents would like access to green space, and
- A desire to have a tenants' representative throughout the planning and construction process.

2. Inter-Divisional Agency feedback

This section summarizes the feedback received by different City of Toronto divisions and agencies in writing in early 2018, as well as the feedback from the January 26 Inter-Divisional Agency workshop

Agencies that attended the workshop and/or submitted feedback in writing include:

- City of Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation
 - Masaryk-Cowan Community Centre
 - Masaryk Park
- Toronto Public Library – Parkdale Branch
- Toronto Parking Authority
- Toronto Community Housing Corporation
- Artscape - Parkdale Arts & Culture Centre
- Toronto Public Health
- City of Toronto Shelter, Support & Housing Administration

- City of Toronto Affordable Housing Office
- City of Toronto Economic Development & Culture
- Toronto Employment & Social Services – Parkdale/High Park

Vision for the hub

Overall, the divisions and agencies listed above share a vision for a welcoming, inclusive, modern and animated facility that serves the needs of Parkdale’s diverse community, welcoming to all cultures, generations and abilities. This facility would foster community connections and opportunities for the Parkdale community.

The new hub should also be forward-thinking, accessible, modern and technologically advanced. The community, art and design should be integrated in the process, the outcome, and the operation.

Being welcoming includes being gender neutral and providing space and support for vulnerable people and communities. It should also be adaptable, designed for future needs but also responsive to emerging, unknown needs. Part of this is the inclusion of unprogrammed gathering spaces.

Future space needs

Across the divisions and agencies that submitted feedback, there is broad support centralizing and integrating services in a community hub. Many of the divisions have similar room and space requirements, this includes:

- Large multi-function rooms for group programming,
- Exhibition space, auditorium and performance space,
- Unstructured open spaces such as atriums or lobbies,
- Commercial-sized kitchens,
- Modern technology – internet connectivity, computer and technology spaces,
- An incubator or shared space for community groups and non-profits, and
- Private offices, examination and counselling rooms, and administrative space.

It was noted that there are many existing collaborative relationships and space-sharing partnerships (e.g. several non-profit organizations operate in Masaryk-Cowan Community Centre and Park). The future hub must be supportive of these existing arrangements.

Challenges and concerns

Participants identified several challenges that will be faced over the course of development the project through to operating the facility, including:

- Developing a governance model for the future operation of the new facilities and for the construction process.
- Balancing the vision and the desires for space with the reality of the size and space of the new facility. There is a need to manage expectations.
- Effectively aligning resources, acquiring City Council buy-in and maintaining momentum for this project. There is a need to discover where this project falls on the City’s list of priorities. The project needs to be positioned to meet political and strategic needs to attract interest and funding.

- Mitigating construction impacts for the organizations currently operating on the site. Managing relocations, operation impacts and alternate service plans. There is a need to also mitigate the impact of construction on the streetscape.
- Protecting heritage may be an obstacle to development.
- There may be homeowners or other community members in opposition to increases in certain types of services (*e.g.* shelters).
- There may also be opposition from those who believe more services should be added, that the redevelopment does not go far enough. Importantly, any decrease in service will create community opposition. Further, there is a desire to increase affordable housing units within the future development.
- The construction process itself, and the risk that approvals could hold up the project. This is a challenge because development timelines must be made in coordination with service delivery.
- Information about the operating model of the future hub will be important throughout the process: We need to know how the space will operate in order to design and create a useful space.
- Community opposition to the perceived risk of increasing gentrification. There is a need to inform the community about private development early in the process.
- The consultation approach will be challenging. There is a need to make some baseline guarantees about current space or programming being maintained, in order to overcome community scepticism.
- Setting and managing expectations. The consultation process will need to incorporate many voices, and manage conflicting interests, and must be clear up front about what is, and is not, possible.
- There are competing desires for Queen Street frontage and visibility.
- There may be competing needs for specialized spaces and rooms, examples mentioned include sound-proofed music rooms, study spaces, child care, counselling or examination rooms, and different types of storage (public health, kitchens, stroller parking, program-specific materials).