



2015 HARBORD VILLAGE GREEN PLAN

**COUNCILLOR JOE CRESSY +
THE HARBORD VILLAGE RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION**

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Kahlin Holmes and Sue Dexter

Toronto, 2015

A Word from the Councillor...

Dear neighbours,

I am proud to have worked in partnership with the Harbord Village Residents' Association to develop this Green Master Plan – a comprehensive action plan to green forgotten concrete spaces in the neighbourhood.

As we grow as a City, we need to ensure that we are building neighbourhoods, rather than simply adding density. My office is working hard to ensure we have the physical and social infrastructure to support our neighbourhoods. One of my top priorities is increasing green space in our community - we are actively working to revitalize existing parks, but through this plan, we have been able to collaborate to identify additional opportunities to create new and vibrant public green space.

We are excited to begin work on implementing the plan detailed in the coming pages – in the New Year, we'll be working together to green flankage corners and laneways and plant trees in the neighbourhood. We look forward to continuing to engage the community and local partners, including our talented City staff, to implement this creative and local vision to expand our neighbourhood green spaces.

A special note of thanks to Kahlin Holmes, as well as Jane Perdue, Gail Misra, Carolee Orme and Sue Dexter from the Harbord Village Residents' Association.

I look forward to continuing our work together,



Joe

Joe Cressy

City Councillor, Ward 20 (Trinity-Spadina)

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I. INTRODUCTION

This spring of 2015 The Harbord Village Residents' Association (HVRA) approached Ward 20 Councillor Joe Cressy's office seeking assistance in improving public green space and addressing environmental and climate concerns of residents resulting from the intensification of downtown development. Having identified the imperative of reducing heat island impacts, restoring ecosystem health and improving air quality in the city, the association seeks to engage in a series of ongoing local-level neighbourhood greening interventions. The following has been prepared in consultation with HVRA representatives as well as members of the Bloor-Annex and Harbord Village Business Improvement Areas to outline the vision and preliminary plan of action for achieving the goals of the community.

Neighbourhood Context

Harbord Village is bounded on the east by Spadina Ave., on the west by Bathurst St., Bloor St. to the north and College St. to the south. Harbord St. itself runs approximately through the centre, parallel to College and Bloor. See Appendix A for an area map.

The majority of commercial business are located along Bloor and College, with a scattering along Spadina, Bathurst and Harbord. Along Harbord are predominantly independent businesses including restaurants, offices, and storefronts interspersed with residential uses. The rest of the neighbourhood generally consists of established Victorian homes, and mid-rise apartments situated along Spadina.

The Harbord Village Residents' Association

For decades the Harbord Village Residents' Association has worked to strengthen and preserve the character and quality of life of their neighbourhood. The association is made up of volunteers whose 'green' efforts in the past have inventoried and added to health of the tree canopy, and initiated a home-retrofit and solar energy project to bring renewable energy to the neighbourhood. These initiatives are demonstrative of the group's ongoing commitment to both the preservation of flora and fauna and the enhancement of the urban environment.

Harbord Business Improvement Area

Situated along Harbord St. between Spadina and Borden St., the Harbord BIA is comprised of mainly independently owned businesses including a fair number of restaurants and cafes. The BIA's public realm includes a buffered bike lane and extended street corners. The sidewalk width, however, is comparatively narrower than College St. to the south and Bloor St. to the north. In some places pedestrians must step to the side to allow another to pass. Closer to Bathurst the sidewalk is wider, allowing for a few sidewalk tree plantings.

The Bloor Annex Business Improvement Area

The Bloor Annex BIA located on Bloor St. West covers the businesses between Bathurst and Madison Ave. as well as the west side of Madison north of Bloor. There are a number of independent businesses in operation on the street, and an increasing number of franchises entering the neighbourhood. There is plenty of bike and automobile parking available. Despite wider sidewalks, space is encumbered with large above-ground planters. Coinciding with upcoming improvements along Bloor St the BIA will be working with the City to improve tree plantings. Several flanking sites and corners have been flagged as neighbourhood greening opportunities and coincide with objectives identified by the HVRA.

II. GREEN IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Walking in Harbord Village one cannot help notice prolific gardens cared for by residents in the neighbourhood. A lush tree canopy has been improved and maintained over the years by the HVRA's Treeing initiative, but is challenged by disease, development injuries as a result of construction, and age. Green ventures are supported by a core of engaged community members who volunteer regularly to care for existing green spaces and take on new projects. Existing landscaping, green space, and infrastructure are mainly located in the residential areas of the neighbourhood. While most Harbord Village residents are within 500m walking distance to two small parkettes in the neighbourhood, these areas lack the diversity of open green space required for both recreation and relaxation. Some are not welcoming to such activities, others are under institutional control and have restricted public use at best. Details of these spaces follow.

Aura Lee Playing Field

Situated in North East quadrant, the park is owned and operated by University of Toronto. The Metro grocery is to the north of the site and three apartment buildings across Sussex Mews Laneway flank the east side. The space is meant to be open for community use but in practice is inaccessible. A padlocked chain link fence surrounds the space. The fence is unsightly and unwelcoming and the locks are a prohibitory sign keeping access points shut. Primarily intended as a recreational park, the site contains a playing field as well as tennis courts which are sometimes also used for ball hockey and an abandoned hockey rink. A shaded parkette owned by the City at the South end of the site with dirt ground cover and a single bench is unfrequented and poorly maintained, but has potential for improved usage.

In 2011 the HVRA conducted a survey to better understand how the community might make use of the space as the University considered upgrades to the facility. Many respondents were supportive of continued shared use of space and of keeping tennis and rink facilities. Basketball courts and multi-use playing field, as well as more space for leisure activities were requested.

The future of the field is currently under discussion with relation to the development of University residences at the corner of Spadina and Sussex. Creating better access to the field would expand and diversify green space in the growing community which is lacking public recreational space.



Derelict and neglected space at Aura Lee Playing Field would benefit from improved community access.



Playground features at Margaret Fairley Park

Margaret Fairley Park

Named for a former resident who petitioned to have a park established in the neighbourhood, Margaret Fairley is Harbord Village's most substantial public-use park, but is modest in size compared to other parks in the city. It is primarily a family-oriented park with many child friendly features. Recent upgrades include a naturalized playground and wading pool. The yard is covered mainly in wood chip, while mature trees provide shade for small grassy areas.

Sally Bird Park (194 Brunswick)

An intimate "house-sized" park containing outdoor adult exercise equipment, a mural and garden beds. The project received funding from the Recreational Infrastructure Canada Program to make the improvements which have diminished vandalism in the park. This space is essentially an outdoor living room and gym, providing Harbord residents with a public outdoor green space to casually work out or relax.

Pinchpoint Planters

There are sixteen “pinchpoint” planters distributed along several residential streets in the neighbourhood (see map, appendix A) that perform a traffic calming function as well as providing opportunities for on-street greening. The HVRA replants the concrete planters each year and is responsible for maintaining these small gardens. Each year most of the containers are replanted as the survival of plants is compromised by poor growing conditions, little space for growth and expanding root systems.

Harbord Village Urban Forest

In 2007 Harbord Village undertook an assessment of its Urban Forest by engaging in a tree inventory. The resulting report led to the establishment of a Management Plan which includes an annual operating plan and 5 and 20-year management strategies to ensure the maintenance and improvement of the “village’s” trees. This document, along with a Management Plan to cope with the threat of the Emerald Ash Borer grants the community the tools and know-how to maintain their tree canopy, but requires greater support and resources from the City if the canopy is to survive for many more years. The forest is also challenged by aging tree decline and the damage done by construction. A mandatory tree replacement strategy is needed.



III. THE GREEN VISION

Why Green?

Thanks to green-thumbed residents and the hard work of community organizers and volunteers Harbord Village has a solid foundation from which to grow their green infrastructure. The HVRA recognizes that "greening" is not simply planting trees, sowing seeds, or watering a bed. It isn't just about providing a scenic landscape as one strolls down the street or grass to roll in and trees to relax under. For this project "greening" will also refer to projects and processes intended to restore and foster ecosystem health by mitigating the impacts of human development in the city such as air and noise pollution, the urban heat island effect, and by providing space for flora and fauna to grow, live and thrive. This vision is founded in the growing environmental imperative that is a direct result of human development--specifically the extent and scope of the impacts of extensive urban development in Toronto.

Ecosystem Health

There is a growing awareness that the survival of life on this planet depends on the health and diversity of the ecosystems in which we live. Developing neighbourhood green infrastructure is an opportunity to adapt these life-sustaining ecosystems. Adaptation, however, must go beyond simply increasing the amount of green space in the city. Planting native species, providing habitat and nourishment for "pollinators"—insects such as bees and butterflies, hummingbirds, and even bats who move pollen between plants strengthen the capacity of these systems. There is benefit for humans too, who are a part of this ecosystem, as native plants and non-hybrid species support pollinators who play an essential role in the reproduction of flowering plants and human food crops.



The Urban Heat Island Effect

As the city grows, so too does the surface area of concrete and asphalt from which it is made. These materials absorb, store, and eventually release heat over time in a process that contributes to what is called the Urban Heat Island Effect (UHIE). This, along with limited vegetation and permeable surfaces in the city has an effect on water cycles from the Earth's surface to the atmosphere. This is particularly true of unnecessary hard surfaces, such as the paving of yards for parking. Raising temperatures in the city may be reduced by increased vegetation to absorb the sun's energy. Maximizing soft landscaping, particularly soil and organic (not artificial) ground cover, augmenting our urban forests and establishing green roof infrastructure are some of the most effective measures to lower urban temperatures.

Stormwater Management

Toronto has recently been subject to increasingly extreme storms involving heavy rainfall that overloads the city's sewer system. This system was constructed at a time when the city was a lot smaller and when weather was less extreme. The concurrence of climate change consequences and an overburdened system affects both water quality and quantity, leading to flooding and erosion. "Greening" by way of increasing permeable ground cover in the city is one of the ways that the City (in its Wet Weather Flow Master Plan) suggests to mitigate the effects of heavy rainfall, which allows stormwater and runoff to return to the water table.

IV. OPPORTUNITIES

The HVRA has identified several public realm opportunities to expand and cultivate their green infrastructure and diversify green space. From a design perspective, these projects might be conceived as greening threads connecting larger park spaces to the various parts of the neighbourhood. A map showing the locations of these opportunities can be found in the appendix (B).

FLANKING AND CORNERS

Where residential streets meet the main commercial strips of Bloor, Harbord and College there is often unoccupied paved space where tree plantings, bike parking and sometimes seating might be provided. Such spaces are contingent on sight-line priorities for safe routing of drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians. In many places however, especially on corners along Harbord and flanking businesses on Bloor, there are lost opportunities to establish in-ground planting or raised container beds.

The HVRA has identified several spaces where planting opportunities exist:

- Corners of Harbord at Brunswick, Boys of Major and Robert
- Borden Street at Bloor (East and West flankings)
- Brunswick Street at Bloor (East and West flankings)
- Major Street at Bloor, West side flanking Kinkos
- 720 Spadina, large paved forecourt with no planting
- 666 Spadina, rear “threading” along fence
- Robert Street between Bloor and Sussex, east side threading along fence
- Robert Street at Bloor, East flanking Metro Grocery
- Lippincott Street at College (East and West flankings)
- Borden Street at College (East and West flankings)
- Brunswick at College West flanking
- Major at College (East and West flankings)
- Robert at College (East and West flankings)

The HVRA would like to coordinate with the City for upcoming and scheduled maintenance and roadwork at these identified areas to expedite the process and make efficient use of City resources.

LANEWAYS

Harbord Village is home to over 25 laneways that create a network of servicing and access corridors and alternative passages for some vehicles but more predominantly pedestrians and cyclists. They are varied in use and character and despite paved roadways are often peppered with growth along fences, between cracks in the pavement, and even a few laneway gardens. Some of the more popular routes have been the target of graffiti and tagging.

Croft Laneway and Sussex Mews have been identified as preliminary targets for substantial greening.



Croft Laneway has been the subject of a pilot project by the HVRA to formalize street greening. This July (2015), members took an inventory of opportunities for growth, and will be reaching out to the community to work on creating a lush corridor. Some of the ideas for the future of the laneway include growing vines up hydro poles, hanging baskets, seeding pavement crevices and encouraging residents to grow container gardens.

Sussex Mews is a comparatively more active lane that nonetheless is a candidate for laneway greening. Where a small parking lot backs on to the laneway at the rear of St. Vladimir's Institute (620 Spadina) there is planting potential which would serve to green both the laneway as well as the parking lot. Along the fence line at the rear of 666 Spadina is a "thread" of green and with consent from property owners could allow for vines or beds of wild flowers, reducing their landscaping costs.

LANEWAY GREENING ACTIONS

Encourage neighbours to plant containers in free space next to garage or in paving gaps along building walls

Hang flowering baskets from light standards where appropriate.

Create puncture along centre of laneway and introduce resilient plant species.

Introduce vining along walls and fences.

Seek opportunities for rain barrels and other catchments to provide water.



PINCHPOINT PLANTERS

Although pinchpoint planters do work to slow motorists, they are not sufficient to entirely prevent motorists from dodging around them. Most of the planters provide traffic signage, some of which face incorrectly in the street. Furthermore, most of the planters have been tagged with unsightly graffiti.

The Robert St. in-ground pinchpoint (R) demonstrates an alternative model for these street features. The 6 metre wide curb extension, modified to allow fire services neighbourhood access, provides ample space for the growth of a variety of plant species, shrubs and even trees. This in-ground model is more ideal both functionally and aesthetically than the concrete counterparts. The physical, immovable barrier of the in-ground model further discourages vehicles from making illegal maneuvers and slows traffic (without the use of signs), and hampers vandalism and graffiti.

The HVRA would seek to coordinate with the City to have in-ground pinchpoints established at a time when scheduled roadwork or construction takes place.



The Robert St. in-ground pinchpoint (facing North)



PARK DEVELOPMENT

Toronto's Parkland Acquisition: Strategic Directions Report defines local parkland as that which serves communities within reasonable walking distance. Such parkland falls further under the categories of 'parkettes' and 'local' parks. Sally Bird Park, and the forthcoming Brunswick/College Parkette may be considered examples of the former, while Margaret Fairley exemplifies the latter.

'Open spaces' are often partially-public, or 'publicly-accessible' institutional lands such as school yards and university or college campuses, such as the Central Tech yard and the University of Toronto Athletics Field.

With the upcoming construction of the Central Tech Athletics Dome, however, Harbord Village will find itself with significantly less green space, particularly when it comes to public open—and open-air space—for recreational activities.

As a long-term goal, the HVRA will seek to secure additional space in the neighbourhood for the creation of community parks. Ideally these spaces would improve green infrastructure by reanimating under-used, vacant and otherwise derelict spaces in the neighbourhood.

Under-capacity parking lots, abandoned recreational courts, and expanses of surplus lawn around apartment buildings are have potential to provide more diverse natural amenity space.

Presently, these environments of impermeable and tree-less surfaces only intensify the adverse affects of urban development. The HVRA considers these spaces as opportunities to rehabilitate weakened ecosystems while providing social, physiological and economic benefits to residents.

TREE PLANTING AND MAINTENANCE

In addition to residential tree care outlined in the Harbord Village Urban Forest Management Plan, the HVRA would like to have main street tree plantings (along Bloor, Harbord and College streets for example) adhere to City specifications for the planting environment of street trees including adequate volumes of good quality soil, sufficient watering and drainage, and ongoing care including pruning, pest control, weeding and litter removal.

A Final Word from the HVRA...

Harbord Village Residents' Association is grateful to Councillor Joe Cressy and his staff, particularly Kahlin Holmes, for their work in putting together this Green Master Plan.

Studies have shown a relation between human health and accessible green space. We need also to respond to the challenges of climate change and to ensure our cities are truly liveable spaces.

We recognize the pressures of infill and intensification, and rising concerns about loss of green infrastructure in the downtown core. The challenge has been where to find it, and how to build it into our communities.

One answer is in this plan. There will be others.

What we have identified are ways to capture the waste spaces in our community in a plan which could be a model for greening existing lower-scale neighbourhoods throughout the downtown.

Through such creative initiatives, the City and members of the community can partner in restoring full value green to our neighbourhoods.

Jane Perdue, Gail Misra, Carolee Orme, and Sue Dexter

Harbord Village Residents' Association



APPENDIX A: RESOURCES

LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS

Harbord Village Residents' Association
harbordvillage.com

Bloor Annex BIA
bloorannex.ca

Harbord BIA
harbordstreet.ca

The Laneway Project (TO)
thelanewayproject.ca

Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests
(LEAF)
yourleaf.org

Toronto District Beekeepers Association
torontobeekeepers.org

CITY PLANS & POLICIES

Ahead of the Storm: Preparing Toronto for Climate Change (2008)

City of Toronto Biodiversity Series

City of Toronto Parks Plan 2013 - 2017

Design Guidelines for "Greening" Surface Parking (2013)

Drought Tolerant Landscaping (2012)

Parkland Acquisition Strategic Direction Report (2001)

Toronto Official Plan

Toronto Street Trees Guide (2010)

Wet Weather Flow Master Plan



APPENDIX B: MAP OF GREENING OPPORTUNITIES

