

Eastern Avenue Transit-Oriented Community Engagement Summary Report



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Contents

1	Project Background.....	1
1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	The TOC Program Background	1
1.3	Eastern Avenue Draft TOC Concept	1
2	Engagement Overview.....	3
2.1	Community Engagement Objectives	3
2.2	Engagement Activities and Tools	4
3	What We Heard.....	5
3.1	Housing	5
3.2	Density and Design Compatibility	6
3.3	Transit Integration	7
3.4	Transportation	7
3.5	Heritage.....	8
3.6	Public Spaces and Parks	8
3.7	Other	9
4	Next Steps.....	9

Figures

Figure 1-1. Eastern Avenue TOC Site Map.....	2
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Appendices

Appendix A. Eastern TOC: Local Advisory Committee	A-1
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1 Project Background

1.1 Introduction

This report provides a record of the first round of community engagement focused on the future Eastern Avenue Transit-Oriented Community (TOC), located near the future East Harbour Station along the Ontario Line (OL).

The first round of community engagement was conducted from January to April 2024. Community feedback gathered through this engagement effort will help inform the TOC draft concept. The second round of community engagement is planned for fall of 2024.

1.2 The TOC Program Background

TOCs are part of the government's plan to build new, sustainable transit. The province's TOC program will create vibrant, mixed-use communities that will bring more housing (including affordable housing options), jobs, retail, community amenities and entertainment at or within a short distance of transit stations.

The TOC program will:

- Increase transit ridership and reduce traffic congestion;
- Increase housing supply (including affordable housing);
- Stimulate the economy through major projects and create jobs;
- Bring retail and community amenities (for example, community centres) within a short distance of public transit stations; and,
- Offset the cost of station construction, which would save taxpayers' money.

1.3 Eastern Avenue Draft TOC Concept

The project team, in consultation with the City of Toronto, is working on a draft concept for the future Eastern Avenue TOC site. This draft concept will add housing and commercial space next to a planned transit station at the East Harbour transit hub and will serve the surrounding neighbourhood with connections to streetcar, bus, and subway service along the Ontario Line.

The following map shows the location of the Eastern Avenue TOC site as well as major infrastructure within the community.



Figure 1-1. Eastern Avenue TOC Site Map

1.3.1 Economic Activity

The Eastern Avenue TOC site will include approximately 900 square metres (m²) of commercial space for businesses and may include small-scale retail businesses that would contribute to the existing mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly, main street character of Eastern Avenue and help to create local jobs and support local economic development.

1.3.2 Environmental

The proposed draft concept supports sustainability objectives by:

- Adding housing and jobs directly adjacent to transit;
- Providing on-site bicycle parking spaces in excess of by-law requirements; and,
- Meeting requirements of green roofs and the Toronto Green Standard.

1.3.3 Housing

The proposed draft concept is anticipated to deliver approximately 142 residential units, and to provide a range of housing options. These would be complemented by high-quality communal indoor and outdoor amenity spaces to act as an extension of personal living space, contributing to the well-being of residents and overall livability of the area. Approximately 30 per cent of the proposed residential units within the Eastern Avenue TOC are currently planned as two or three-bedroom units suitable for families or larger households.

1.3.4 Connectivity

The adjacent East Harbour Transit Hub will provide connections to GO Transit and the Ontario Line subway, as well as the 501 Queen and 504 King streetcars, and the 503 Kingston bus.

These connections will make it easy for residents, employees, shoppers, and others to access the site and contribute to increased connectivity on a neighbourhood, city-wide and regional scale.

Transit-oriented and pedestrian-friendly streetscape improvements including widened sidewalks will contribute to the walkability of the area.

The proposed TOC supports the uptake of active transportation by providing over 162 bicycle parking spots with dedicated short- and long-term spaces available for transit users and future residents.

2 Engagement Overview

In October 2023, the province announced plans to build more homes near transit in Toronto, and proposed the Eastern Avenue TOC, along with four other TOCs on the Ontario Line. The EngageO website project page was launched in the new year and used to capture feedback from the public via an online survey. The first round of community engagement used a variety of communication channels and tools to inform community members about the TOC program and to gather feedback. The following section summarizes the engagement objectives and tools applied in the first round of engagement.

2.1 Community Engagement Objectives

Infrastructure Ontario, on behalf of the province, led a process to identify the community's priorities for the future Eastern Avenue TOC site, guided by the following objectives:

- Make information about the project available to the public;
- Build relationships with neighbourhood residents, commercial tenants, community organizations, and key stakeholders;
- Understand the aspirations, concerns and priorities of various stakeholder groups and audiences;
- Refine the draft concept to integrate and respond to feedback, where feasible;
- Maintain a two-way dialogue with engagement partners; and,
- Positively contribute to the growth and evolution of the city.

2.2 Engagement Activities and Tools

2.2.1 Notifications and Resources

To kick off the community engagement, Infrastructure Ontario notified community members and stakeholders of the TOC program and upcoming engagement opportunities using:

- **Postcard** – An invitation to the virtual and in-person community engagement meetings was mailed to residents and businesses within a 500-metre radius of the proposed TOC site.
- **Social media posts** – The Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure and Infrastructure Ontario shared social media posts to expand outreach of the upcoming virtual and in-person community engagement meetings.
- **The EngageIO website project page** – A dedicated Eastern Avenue TOC project page and online survey were launched at the start of the first round of engagement. The project page allows community members to find information about the TOC program, information about engagement to date, and the draft concept. The website domain is <https://engageio.ca/en/EasternAvenue> and website content will be updated throughout the engagement process.

2.2.2 Local Advisory Committee (LAC) Meeting

A LAC was convened to gain insights from local community stakeholders to help inform the province's TOC draft concepts for each site. The LAC's mandate is to provide collaborative discussions, feedback, guidance, and advice to the project team at key points during the public engagement process for the TOC draft concept.

A joint Eastern Avenue and Gerrard-Carlaw South LAC was established for this process. The LAC is composed of 11 community representatives from several organizations or community groups representing a range of community members, organized groups, and interests in the vicinity (one-km approx.) of the proposed TOC site. Infrastructure Ontario reached out to the Ontario Line technical advisors, City of Toronto, and the local councillor's office- for their input on community stakeholders who represent a range of voices.

On February 1, 2024, the project team and the City of Toronto met with the LAC representatives. The meeting format included an overview of the TOC program and high-level presentations of the TOC draft concepts, followed by questions and a discussion to gather feedback. All 11 members and the local councillor attended the first LAC meeting virtually from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

See **Appendix A** for LAC membership list.

2.2.3 Virtual Public Engagement Meeting

On February 15, 2024, from 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., the project team held a public meeting for the Eastern Avenue TOC with members of the public to share information about the proposed TOC site and identify community needs and priorities related to the draft concept. The local councillor was invited to give opening remarks. In the remarks, the councillor clarified for participants that Infrastructure Ontario is responsible for the delivery of the TOC program while

Metrolinx is responsible for the delivery of the Ontario Line subway. The local councillor further described motions made by the City of Toronto for the province to add a requirement for developers to provide 20 to 30 per cent affordable housing in all TOCs including Eastern Avenue. The virtual session, which was attended by 59 people via Zoom, included an overview of the TOC program, a detailed presentation of the draft concept for the Eastern Avenue TOC site, and a question-and-answer session.

2.2.4 Engagement Survey

On February 15, 2024, the online survey portal was made available on the EngageIO site, to further foster engagement and collect feedback from the community about the Eastern Avenue TOC. The survey was open for 30 days and focused on feedback on the TOCs proposed built form, sustainability, community services, economic activity, housing, mix of uses, and public realm among others. Overall, 26 online surveys were submitted.

2.2.5 In-Person Open House

On February 21, 2024, the project team hosted an in-person open house for the community to gather feedback, identify priorities, ideas, and concerns about the proposed future Eastern Avenue and Gerrard-Carlaw South TOC sites. The open house was hosted at the Ralph Thornton Community Centre between 6:30 p.m. and 8 p.m. and was attended by 45 people. The open house format included 15 project information boards that displayed the proposed neighbourhood context, concept overview, and design objectives of both TOC projects. Members of the project team and city staff were present to respond to questions and record comments from attendees, as well as inform the public of the online survey portal. No formal presentation was made.

3 What We Heard

The following is a summary of participants' feedback gathered from the first round of community engagement events outlined above. Community members provided feedback and asked questions, many of which were addressed at the meetings. However, there were some inquiries that the project team is still assessing that will be addressed during the second round of public engagement in the fall of 2024.

3.1 Housing

Respondents to the Eastern Avenue TOC public survey overwhelmingly expressed support for increased density on the proposed site. Many of the respondents raised concerns that the proposed building height is too low. Respondents encouraged the project team to build a taller building to accommodate more density and enable more people to have access to the East Harbour Station.

Many respondents also raised concerns about the portion of affordable residential units and requested that the proposed plan consider how to accommodate larger units and support a larger number of affordable units.

A community advocate for individuals with accessibility needs observed the lack of discussion on accessible units within affordable housing units and informed the project team that many individuals with accessibility needs are at or below the poverty line.

The project team acknowledged the importance of affordable housing to the community and emphasized that the process to determine the affordable housing parameters for the site must go through many steps before the distribution of affordable housing is decided. Ongoing conversations are being held with the city to help ensure that the proposed benefits, especially in terms of affordable housing, align with both planning goals and financial feasibility.

3.2 Density and Design Compatibility

Community members provided feedback on the proposed Eastern Avenue TOC site. For example, several LAC members expressed support for the TOC project because of its gentle density, alignment with good planning principles, opening of roads between Saulter Street, Eastern Avenue and Lewis Street, and its respect for the neighbourhood character.

Respondents at the virtual and in-person community meetings similarly supported more density at the Eastern Avenue TOC site while others commented that it was too dense or just right.

Some respondents questioned whether the proposed density and height are great enough for a major transit station area (MTSA) and why the proposal does not plan for a higher density. Further, respondents also raised a concern about the building heights in comparison to other developments, questioning the decision to build this scale of housing while having taller buildings further away, south of East Harbour Station. Other open house respondents expressed concerns that the proposed buildings were too high and will dwarf existing home structures.

The project team explained, considering financial and planning principles for this specific site, that they believe the proposed building form is appropriate because it balances transit considerations, maximizes density, and conforms with other planning policies.

The project team described the factors that determine appropriate building size, density, and height, including providing a transition in scale to the low-rise neighbourhood to the north. This balances the need for more housing near transit, mitigates the impact of shadows cast on adjacent properties, and transitions the TOC into the established neighbourhood context.

The project team explained that while tall buildings are inappropriate for the site because of the lot depth and other factors, the TOC is generally consistent with the city's mid-rise building guidelines. It also maximizes density within an MTSA with a floor space index (FSI) of 3.5, whereas the minimum density for the site is 0.5 FSI.

Respondents at the virtual meeting asked why rendering perspectives only showed the impact of the proposed TOC's shadows on homes on Lewis Street from the west. The project team explained that being a south-facing site, shadows primarily fall to the north for most of the year, with varying intensity throughout seasons. By concentrating the tallest portion of the site to the east near the rail corridor, shadows in the afternoon mainly fall on the rail corridor. The sun and shadow study for this TOC, available on the EngageIO project page, provides more detailed information.

Concerns that a building partner can make substantial changes to the TOC design (i.e., height, massing, and density), resulted in a recommendation for the project team to encourage the selected building partner to engage with the community to finalize design. Respondents at the virtual meeting also noted that the site is in a floodplain, indicating a potential environmental challenge for the TOC. Infrastructure Ontario is working with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) and the city to resolve the issue.

3.3 Transit Integration

Transit integration is one of the common areas of support in the public survey. Respondents to the public survey acknowledged that having the TOC site beside a major transit hub will provide sustainable transit options to local residents. Respondents at the virtual and in-person public meetings asked the project team to provide more information in future presentations on how the proposed site will connect to the nearby station and ensure appropriate accessibility.

Along with their feedback, respondents from the LAC requested clarification on which public agency is responsible for implementing the Ontario Line and TOC program.

Infrastructure Ontario is the provincial agency tasked with managing the execution of the TOC program. Metrolinx is the provincial entity responsible for overseeing the development of the Ontario Line subway project.

3.4 Transportation

Public survey respondents raised concerns about pedestrian safety when crossing Eastern Avenue and requested that Eastern Avenue be made safer. These respondents asked that pedestrians be prioritized when designing the right of ways and the neighbourhood overall. They also inquired about the type of security measures that will be offered for bicycle parking.

The project team informed virtual and in-person attendees that the proposed TOC draft concept envisions accessible pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly access only between Saulter Street and Lewis Street and Saulter Street and Eastern Avenue, which will address concerns for vehicles and provide a solution for pedestrians and cyclists.

Respondents at the virtual and in-person community meetings raised concerns about the proposed crosswalk on Eastern Avenue, which is about 100 metres from an existing traffic light and may pose a risk to pedestrian safety at the mid-block. These respondents also raised concerns that the proposed level of residential parking is higher than is typical in an area that will be well served by transit and where minimum parking requirements will be restricted.

The project team informed attendees the parking ratio will be comparable with surrounding developments and may be adjusted further so that an appropriate number of parking spaces is provided. Community members are encouraged to continue providing feedback on parking spaces so that the range of parking spaces being provided can be narrowed or widened through zoning in accordance with the City of Toronto's guidelines. There was also an interest in having additional information about proposed changes to bus stops and the locations of bridges resulting from the TOC.

When discussing traffic and connectivity, respondents in the virtual meeting expressed concerns about the proposed one-way street and potential for traffic jams on Broadview Avenue, which

could become comparable to traffic issues experienced today in Liberty Village. These respondents also sought to understand how vehicles will access the proposed TOC building and whether it will be from Eastern Avenue or from Lewis or Saulter Streets.

Respondents raised concerns about the prevalence of small streets with wide promenades and street alignments that do not match curb cuts, which create hazards for people with vision loss, poor depth perception, and mobility devices. These respondents also noted that Wheel-Trans service, which require designated pick-up and drop-off areas, are also affected.

3.5 Heritage

Respondents in the virtual meeting encouraged the project team to consider the buildings and businesses of heritage value to the neighbourhood, such as the Wonder Bread Factory, the City of Toronto Water treatment facility, and the Saulter Street Brewery. Leslieville's origin as a garden centre was mentioned as an important aspect to incorporate into the TOC design, which should also focus on access to nature and making spaces intentional. A historic sign for the Canadian Pacific Railway was also identified as a symbol of importance in the neighbourhood.

The project team noted that while none of the buildings or spaces on the TOC site are designated under the Ontario Heritage Act, the province is looking to hear what elements of the neighbourhood's heritage residents want to integrate as a part of the design and programming.

3.6 Public Spaces and Parks

Respondents to the public survey provided feedback on connections to local streets, the need for more parks and open space, and the benefits of enhancing the pedestrian experience.

Respondents at the virtual and in-person public meetings asked about protection and maintenance of trees on the site, especially mature trees. When discussing open spaces, respondents emphasized that parks require more space and go further than landscaping alone. When discussing the built form and sustainability of the site, respondents were glad to see conservation play a role in the plan for the site. Concerns were raised about the landscape being between tall buildings, potentially hindering plant growth.

Respondents expressed a desire for more parks and open spaces and asked about the type of frameworks that will be put in place to maintain the green spaces over time. Respondents emphasized the need for common spaces and that there is currently an insufficient number of community centers and services in the area. The impact of this TOC on local schools was another key concern for attendees.

The design, access, distribution, and use of public spaces and parks was brought up by respondents. Given the site's size, the existing Saulter Street Park nearby and the planned park in the East Harbour neighbourhood, integrating a park on the site isn't considered practical by the project team. Instead, the proposal focuses on providing more connections across the site that will allow people to connect between Eastern Avenue, Saulter Street, and Lewis Street and to parks in the surrounding neighbourhood.

When discussing the impact that the TOC will have on local schools, the project team emphasized that Infrastructure Ontario will work closely with the city's planning unit to forecast

increased capacity, and to plan for adjustments to existing facilities including schools, health services, traffic, and road upgrades.

3.7 Other

Respondents appreciated the mixed-use proposal and asked that the TOC concept feature more local shops, restaurants, grocery stores and space for film studios.

Respondents from the survey appreciated the widened sidewalks and flexible retail space in the proposed TOC but expressed concern about the vitality of the retail. These respondents also asked that a community benefits agreement be used for this TOC to ensure that economic benefits reach local residents.

Respondents in the virtual meeting sought clarification on whether the TOC site is subject to inclusionary zoning policies and is undergoing a zoning by-law amendment. The project team advised that discussions about zoning policies, including inclusionary zoning, are ongoing within the provincial government.

4 Next Steps

Throughout this first round of public engagement, the project team collected feedback and comments from various stakeholders and members of the public through various engagement activities, as mentioned above. Next, the project team will review the key messages summarized above – alongside formal city comments and those from organizations or offices responsible for enforcing standards and codes – and will explore options for refinement of the draft concept. The project team will engage with the city to confirm alignment on features of the TOC including the scale of retail units, public realm improvements, heritage conservation, etc. Finally, the project team will report back on its progress, sharing the refined TOC concept and, during future planned engagement activities, provide a response to the feedback heard from the public.

Upcoming planned engagement activities include:

- A second LAC touchpoint will be scheduled for summer of 2024, as an interim check-in on the team's progress with local stakeholders;
- A second virtual open house scheduled for the fall of 2024, at which the project team will present its responses to public feedback and the refined TOC concept plans; and
- A third LAC meeting in the fall of 2024 to share the final, refined TOC concepts with local stakeholders.

Throughout all stages of public engagement, the team will continue to track and make available all project-related materials and available recordings from public engagement activities. These materials are available on the EngageIO webpage at <https://engageio.ca/en/EasternAvenue>.

For any inquiries, please contact the project team through the EngageIO contact webpage at <https://engageio.ca/en/contact>.

Appendix A. Eastern TOC: Local Advisory Committee

Membership List

For the Local Advisory Committee (LAC), Infrastructure Ontario reached out to 20+ community stakeholder organizations within 1 km of the Gerrard-Carlaw South and Eastern TOC sites. The current LAC membership includes the following stakeholder groups:

- Crow's Theatre
- Gerrard Square Shopping Mall
- Lakeshore East Community Advisory Committee
- Leslieville BIA
- Leslieville Historical Society
- Leslieville Resident Association
- Nellie's Shelter for Women and Children
- Pocket Community Association
- Ralph Thornton Community Centre
- Riverside BIA
- The Opera House
- Toronto District School Board
- Woodgreen Foundation

Note: The City of Toronto facilities are not included in the LAC membership list, as the city coordinates consultation with their recreational facilities including libraries, arenas, and community centres.