



## McCleary District Indigenous Engagement Circle #2: Meeting Summary

March 27, 2025, 12:00pm-1:30pm

### Circle Participants

#### Circle

- Fred Martin: City of Toronto, IAO
- Keitha Keeshig-Tobias
- Kris Narhgang
- Luanne Cunningham
- Lyla Hatt
- Niigaunii Conroy
- Spring Noganosh
- Stephanie Pangowish
- Tannis Nielsen

#### Regrets

- Dominic Ste. Marie
- Jeff Monague
- Jonathon Redbird
- Joshua Lipscombe

- Jules (KJ) McCusker
- Rob Lackie
- Sage Petahagoose
- Tuesday Johnson-MacDonald

#### City of Toronto & partners

- Paul Arkilander: CreateTO
- Asha-Keyf Dahir: CreateTO
- Colin Wolfe: City of Toronto
- Julie Bogdanowicz: City of Toronto
- Danny Brown: City of Toronto
- Elder Shelley Charles: MinoKamik (facilitator)
- Liz McHardy: LURA (co-facilitator)
- Zoie Edwards: LURA (notes)

### Meeting Summary

Circle participants met online with CreateTO, the City of Toronto, and partners to discuss the vision for the McCleary District, located in the Port Lands, and seek feedback on parks, streets, PIC uses, public art, structuring moves, housing, built form, economic development, and anything else that could be considered. The circle invitations included diverse representation from Indigenous Peoples, encompassing First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban Indigenous community members. Specific demographics such as youth, elders, knowledge holders, and multidisciplinary artists were also included in collaboration and engagement, ensuring a broad range of perspectives and

voices were reflected. The summary was written by LURA and MinoKamik, and reflects the main points shared and is not intended to be a verbatim transcript.

## Highlights

### Connection to Nature and Sustainability

- Water is life and without the Don River and New Credit, we would have never survived, and we need to put all of that information out to communities. There could be a tour of the Don River that includes history, archaeology and ethnobotany information and different schedules for different seasons.
- The building vision with cutouts for plants and trees is exciting. There should be vertical farming, outdoor spaces, gardens, and plant patios where you can see the new Don River and all the new products going down into the Port Lands, including the film industry. Immersive and self-sustaining aspects should be considered.

### Shared and Interactive Public Spaces

- This area could provide a hub in Toronto like Crazy Horse Memorial with space for museums, galleries, restaurants with Indigenous foods, market for Indigenous made products and spaces for presentations, dances and events.
- The park next to the school is a great opportunity for sharing knowledge and incorporating different ideas with children. There could be a children's gallery and workshop space for education and artistic activities.

### Indigenous Culture, Creativity, and Visibility

- We need to be inclusive and introduce our culture back into the culture of Toronto. There are lots of opportunities to tell the true history of Canada, as this belongs to us all.
- We need more acknowledgment of our people in the City and to truly get a sense of our culture through visual arts.
- The Civic Heart area is an opportunity for setting up Indigenous history of travel and how significant this land was and continues to be for Indigenous people today and into the future.
- Story Poles with light features, candles or stained glass with stories shining through them that would invite people walking around to see the stories of different nations that have come to the area, all in one place. This could be enjoyed day and night and invite families and friends to enjoy the lake and sky, similar to places in Mexico.
- Other ideas discussed include visual Indigenous language displays, a water filtration system disguised as landmark and a framework for visual arts across the waterfront and a framework for revitalization to celebrate and promote Indigenous people.

### Community and Cultural Gathering Spaces

- None of us should be houseless on our homelands. Addressing housing issues is a physical act of reconciliation.
- Affordable studio spaces are important and could show the rest of the City where they could go if they wanted to invite Indigenous artists into their shops, offices, and businesses.

- New innovative ways to have spaces on top floors of buildings where artists could also see across the water and bring their inspirations into their arts is important.
- Many people come to Toronto to seek health services, and this area could give them a feeling of home while they are away from home.
- Creating physical spaces for Indigenous people is very important, especially after so much has been stolen. This includes housing and space allotment such as galleries, performance centres, studios and theatres. The ability to host cultural exchanges is important.

## Circle Discussion

**Traditional Opening:** Elder Shelley Charles led with opening words of welcome in the language and translations. She acknowledged all of our relatives to help us focus for this time and bring all of our best thoughts together as one voice. Shelley shared that she is always mindful of her own grandfather and all the gifts that have been shared from her family through her: historic past, present, to the future. She acknowledged the 13 moon phases and the beginning of the maple water flowing: and our relationship to water and the teachings on the back of the turtle.

**Circle Introductions:** Given by all

**Kris:** Interested in the project and love seeing the styles of the buildings with cutouts of plants and trees. It would be great to see more visual components and visual arts in the area. We need more acknowledgment of our people in the City and truly get a sense of our culture through visual arts. The Story Poles I did at the CNE had more than 1.5 million viewers in the first season. Story Poles could be introduced across the entire shorelines of Toronto for people to have along their walks. The Don River is important and there is an opportunity to tell the story of people coming here.

**Shelley:** The Water's Edge Promenade reminded me of how we traveled throughout this region, and the last huge council meeting we had on the shores (in a couple of spaces) was in 1840. This was when clans and families came from all over (Wampum gathering), and we said we would come back together yearly or at certain times, and Story Poles could be part of this. The Civic Heart is also a good opportunity for setting up Indigenous history of travel and how significant this land was and continues to be for Indigenous people today and into the future.

**Fred:** Dr. Duke Redbird told me recently that he will be turning 87 years old this year and continues to look for opportunities (walking, tours, boats) for cultural revitalization and ways that prevent the erasure of our culture. We should be proud of our history, and these projects are about reestablishing and celebrating language, culture, and spaces. A framework for revitalization is needed to celebrate and promote Indigenous people.

**Tannis:** The presentation and visuals were great. Interested in the Housing TRCA and RCAP recommendations because none of us should be houseless on our homelands. Addressing this is a physical act of reconciliation. Creating physical spaces for Indigenous people is very important, especially after so much has been stolen. This includes housing and space allotment such as galleries, performance centres, studios, and theatres. Places for people to sustain their economic development and reciprocate back into our economy are needed. 401 Richmond Street is a good example of an arts hub.

**Keitha:** The buildings with the plant cutouts are very impressive, and it would be very interesting to be up in buildings with plants all around you and see the development surrounding them. This would also bring more green/nature into our life which is good for mental health as well as cleaning up the air. There should be plant patios in the area where you can see the new Don River and all the new products going down into the Port Lands, including the film industry. I also like the idea of the Story Poles. There could be smaller Story Poles that are also light features, candles or stained glass with stories shining through them that would invite people walking around to see the stories of different nations that have come to the area all in one place. Art centres and affordable studio spaces for Indigenous artists are important. Creating from your home is limited to the art produced, but to be able to afford studio space is hard and some spaces are very far and expensive. Creating subsidized studio spaces for the community would be great. These spaces could prioritize Indigenous artists and be open to other City artists. This would also show the rest of the City where they could go if they wanted to invite Indigenous artists into their shops, offices, and businesses.

**Spring:** I like the presentation and ideas that have been shared. Immersive buildings that serve purpose more than just a building – more than aesthetically modern, more than art. The design of a building could be a lot of upkeep and so it's important to think about creating things in ways that it can sustain itself.

**Niigaunii:** Multi-floor buildings with trees are very cool. Reminds me of the game Minecraft. Curious about the purpose of the buildings (housing, studios, businesses, etc.). Shared spaces are safe spaces, and wondering if the public would be able to drop by as this raises a lot of questions. The highest floors of the building (penthouse levels) should be used as settings other than what it is typically used for. I also like going to Spadina station and wish that all TTC stations had visual Indigenous language displays. I like night aesthetics, and having light features for streets would be cool.

**Colin:** We are currently in the land-use design stage and the demonstration plan is residential uses, and studio spaces would be closer to the ground floor along with other larger spaced opportunities such as retail and event spaces. We don't get into the specific building designs and functions at this stage. Public access would come up later on in the process, but we know that the parks will have a big public access component and that the creative focus of the arts should be apparent.

**Shelley:** I once organized a silent auction on the top floor of the Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) near King St and Bay St and the notion of having a gallery or event space on the top floors is great. New innovative ways to have spaces on top floors of buildings that artists could also see across the water and bring their inspirations into their arts is important.

**Tannis:** Studio spaces are important. This could also include live/work studios. It would be great to have Indigenous art fairs on greenspaces in the summer months. Harbourfront Centre Craft & Design Studios is a good example (<https://harbourfrontcentre.com/program/craft-design/studios/>).

**Lyla:** There is a huge need for studio spaces for artists and I'm really glad to see that is being included. I love the idea of space on the top floors which could also include outdoor space and gardens. We need visual art representation. I like the Story Pole with lights and visual Indigenous language displays ideas as these are important for visitors to see. Are there specific partnerships for housing being explored? Will some of it be supportive housing?

**Fred:** Affordable to who is always the question in these processes. We are exploring partnerships with Missanabie Cree Business Corporation (MCBC) with specific requests for energy and sustainable construction projects. There are Land Back and economic opportunities that can be applied to these neighbourhoods.

**Colin:** We are targeting around 30% of housing on public lands for affordable housing and to include a range of different types, including supportive housing. These will be similar targets for Ookwemin Minising as well.

**Luanne:** The park next to the school is a great opportunity for sharing knowledge and incorporating different ideas with children. Children are like sponges and they just want to learn and absorb information. My grandchildren are asking more questions about our history and our ancestors and they want to share it with their classmates. Water is so important to our lives and must be well incorporated.

**Shelley:** There could be a children's gallery and workshop space for education and artistic activities.

**Stephanie:** The Crazy Horse Memorial in South Dakota is part museum and part restaurant with Indigenous foods and a market with Indigenous people selling products as well as space outside for presentations and dances. The McCleary District could provide a hub in Toronto like Crazy Horse Memorial. We also cannot forget the health sector as many people come to Toronto to seek health services, and this area could give them a feeling of home while they are away from home.

**Colin:** Thank you for that suggestion on the health connection. PIC uses include life sciences and health uses as well as education, so it is certainly more than just art/film.

**Kris:** I would like to see a framework for visual arts across the waterfront. I love the idea of the lights on the Story Poles as this could bring you outside to walk at night with family and friends and take advantage of the lake and sky, similar to places in Mexico. The Story Poles could have landmarks and stories, and it could be designed and painted with children from the school. There are lots of opportunities to tell the true history of Canada as this belongs to us all. We are huge participants in the history of the country. I love the idea of gallery spaces sponsoring more artists and supporting Indigenous-owned elements. We need to be inclusive and introduce our culture back into the culture of Toronto. Water is life, and without the Don River and New Credit, we would have never survived. We need to put all of that information out to communities.

**Tannis:** There could be a tour of the river that includes archaeology and ethnobotany information and different schedules for different seasons. This could be like the Great Indian Bus Tour in Toronto.

**Spring:** Vertical farming would be good to include. The ability to host cultural exchanges is important. We used to have pow wows at the SkyDome, and that was something I looked forward to. There could be a large venue that can host community events and allow artists to showcase their work, maybe even mobile booths. A water filtration system disguised as a landmark and a museum that educates and attracts listeners would be great.

**Shelley:** We should do another circle in person with a walking site tour.

**Lyla, Stephanie, and Niigaunii:** Joy and excitement were expressed from previous project tours, as well as appreciation for the experience.

**Fred:** walking tours, artist collectives, studios, Indigenous Procurement, housing and economic development symposiums are all part of the Reconciliation Framework vision and looking forward to continuing those conversations.

**Shelley:** In closing, our contributions together are so significant. Having youth involved and visiting and walking the sites are impactful and the right way to do things.

**Fred:** We are showing what the right way to engage is, and this is quite impactful.

**Traditional Closing** Elder Shelley Charles led with gratitude in closing the circle.