



The redevelopment of approximately 20 acres of former industrial land in the downtown of any city requires very careful consideration and planning — especially when it fronts onto what is surely that city's most important cultural street containing one of the country's most dense concentrations of artists and cultural producers.

Discouraged by the plans for the site being proposed by three developers in the Queen West Triangle, as well as with the City's alternative presented at a community meeting November 2005, a group of citizens decided to take matters into their own hands and come up with their own plan for the site.

The community design Charrette held on 5 March 2006, led by architect and urban designer Ken Greenberg (until recently serving as Interim Chief Planner for the City of Boston), was the culmination of months of meetings and community consultations and hundreds of hours of *pro bono* assistance from a stellar cast of urban planners, designers, architects, development economists, landscape architects and cultural producers across the city. This report outlines the discussions which took place over the course of that day. There was a remarkable amount of crossover and consensus which emerged among the seven groups which examined different aspects of site. Active 18 is encouraged by this outcome and will now work with architects to put these ideas into a master plan format.

Queen West Triangle Charrette

Executive Summary

Eight important ideas emerged as crucial elements to any master plan being developed for the area:

1. 48 Abell should be retained:

This historic building, currently containing 100 live/work studios, is the anchor and will set the tone for the whole redevelopment of the West Queen West Triangle lands architecturally, culturally and socially. It is the best of the industrial buildings left on the redevelopment parcels in the Triangle. It frames a remarkable south facing 'courtyard' which has the potential to become a great new public space.

2. Respect for scale and nature of Queen Street:

Queen Street along its entire length (with the exception of a few blocks in the downtown core) has a distinctive scale and character, which should be maintained. The buildings along Queen between Spadina and Roncesvalles are consistent in scale — two to four storeys high — due to a 13-meter height limit which developers have been forced to respect for decades. This also has the effect of allowing sun to penetrate for much of the year on the north sidewalk making Queen a great walking street.

Why should an exception be made on this particular stretch of Queen Street? An exemption to the existing scale would set a dangerous precedent that other developers could use as an argument to erode the nature of the street.

The fine-grain retail pattern of small storefront widths is also consistent along Queen Street, with few exceptions. This is what makes the street vibrant, diverse, and safe. It is important to preserve this scale and character on Queen in new construction. However, the community is willing to consider carefully placed higher elements — small footprint towers — in the context of a comprehensive well-thought-out Neighbourhood Plan. Unique strategies and tools must be employed (as they have been in other cities) to ensure that these characteristics are not lost when new development takes place.

3. The establishment of truly mixed-use zoning:

The zoning of the Triangle, currently light industrial with the exception of Queen Street which is mixed commercial/residential, is the foundation for the what makes this community unique: Light industrial zoning fosters the production of contemporary art & new media, commercial on Queen promotes it through galleries and performance spaces, while nearby residential provides living spaces to those who create and appreciate it. All proposed developments ask for a rezoning of this area into residential to build a homogenous mass of largely 1- and 2-bedroom condominium units. In order to promote this area's distinct character, it must be mixed-use zoning (residential, commercial, *and* light industrial). In addition, all efforts should be made to encourage mixed income residents and mixed unit sizes for a variety of resident demographics.

4. Streets and Blocks must be introduced into the site:

Now that different uses are being contemplated for these industrial lands and intensification of the site is being proposed, it is essential that a system of public streets and laneways are introduced into the site. A network hierarchy with narrow streets with a strong pedestrian character is appropriate

5. The need for green space:

A large public park, along with extensive subsidiary green-space, was identified by all and several creative solutions discussed built around the 'greenway' and multipurpose trail along the rail corridor and the south-facing courtyard behind 48 Abell.

6. A pedestrian/cycle link to the areas south of the tracks:

A public pedestrian/bicycle bridge going over the railroad tracks which would link the Queen West Triangle to King Street and Liberty Village to the south would knit these two vibrant areas together and provide a link to the waterfront. (Plans are currently underway further south for a pedestrian bridge over Lakeshore Boulevard to Ontario Place on the Jefferson axis).

7. A sustainability strategy for the precinct must be developed:

Our world and our city are currently facing an environmental crisis. There is a tremendous opportunity through economies of scale (many developers building at one time) to employ a bold sustainability strategy for the site. Such a strategy was recently employed in the Quartier International, in Montreal.

8. A high quality of design:

Could the Triangle be one of the City's test sites for the proposed Design Review Panels? This would ensure that the architectural quality of this historic neighbourhood would be enhanced by contemporary buildings that future generations will want to preserve.

Active 18 revels in the cultural, social, and economic diversity of the existing neighbourhood. But we are in danger of losing what makes the area special. Gentrification has become vicious. Three galleries have closed in the last few months along the stretch between Dufferin and Dovercourt (one replaced by a Starbucks) due to skyrocketing rents. Cultural workers are being priced out of the rental market. The tragedy is that the ultimate losers will be the people who move into the overly dense condominiums we are fighting. They are attracted to this neighbourhood by its current vibrancy. That vibrancy will be gone by the time they arrive.

Active 18 supports and welcomes new development and intensification in the Triangle, but let's make sure that what is built does not destroy this special part of Toronto.