

How Might We Design Honest Ed's Alley for Micro-Retail?



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In collaboration with our partners [Westbank Corp.](#), [Centre for Social Innovation \(CSI\)](#) and [The Next Practice](#), ThinkFresh Group recently hosted a design charrette to discuss how we might design the [Honest Ed's Alley](#) at the new [Mirvish Village](#) to be geared for micro-retail.



The purpose was to learn what could make the space successful, what would make for a great vendor and customer experience and how we could help micro-vendors scale up. Indeed, we recognized very early on in this project was that we needed to get both the vendor and customer experiences right in order to make this a successful market and incubator space. We had already

learned a lot about vendor needs and the elements that made micro-retail markets work around the world through a variety of case studies and a detailed micro-retail

survey that we conducted across Toronto. We now needed to see how this all fit together and test out our assumptions with the community at-large.

Bringing together 35 of the brightest minds working on micro-retail and design in Toronto, we assembled at the [Markham House City Building Lab](#), which had been setup by Westbank as an information and community meeting space about the Mirvish Village redevelopment. Attendees included representatives from [Evergreen](#), [City of Toronto](#), [ERA Architects](#), [The Annex Flea](#), [Newcomer Women's Services Toronto](#), [Dufferin Grove Farmer's Market](#) and various Toronto-based micro-vendors.



We opened the day with a series of context speeches. Jonah Letovsky from Westbank discussed the developer's motivations behind the Alley. Jeb Brugmann from The Next Practice then talked about the inputs we hoped to achieve through the charrette. Our own Howard Tam then reviewed some of our motivating case studies and survey results. The groups then got down to work examining 2 key questions: what makes for a great retail experience? And what are the elements that will help a vendor succeed in a market incubator setting?

Running through two different ideation activities, we asked participants in the first activity some deep questions about what they felt could be great experiences as a potential customer followed by a second activity where we walked through a mock vendor scenario and discussed different incubation ideas that would address the particular vendor character's needs. During the session, we also led walking tours of the proposed site so that participants could get a sense of its size and scale.



The diversity of ideas received was nothing short of remarkable – from night markets to rent-geared-to-income units to specialized programs to help vendors graduate from temporary tables to permanent units. At this time, our team is still working to go through the results and expects to have a report available in January 2016.

We ended the day with some closing thoughts from Susan McGibbon and John Archer of **Three Sixty Retail**, a retail consultancy in Toronto. Susan and John reviewed the ideas from the day and commented on what they felt could work well. They were most impressed by the quality of the ideas and the discussion that had happened during the session.

Our team will now be working with The Next Practice and CSI to incorporate the key ideas into an overall model and designing out some potential programming scenarios for the Alley. More details will be posted as this work progresses!