

Toronto Official Plan and Municipal Comprehensive Reviews

OPEN HOUSE SUMMARY REPORT

Stage One Public Consultation Open Houses

September 2011



Metro Hall Afternoon Session, September 13, 2011



Metro Hall – Survey Station, September 13, 2011

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September 2011, six Open Houses were held at civic centres across Toronto as part of the first stage of the Official Plan and Municipal Comprehensive Reviews. Approximately 300 people participated representing a broad range of perspectives and interests, including resident associations, school boards, businesses, industry associations, developers, planning firms, environmental and affordable housing advocates, students and the general public. Discussions focused on what's working with the Official Plan and what areas could be improved. This report is a compilation of the feedback received. Stage Two will take place in 2012 when the City will present and seek feedback on proposals to refine the Official Plan.

Summary of what we heard:

- **Considerable support for where the City is directing growth and change**
Participants expressed considerable support for where the Official Plan directs growth and strongly supported the Official Plan policies that protect neighbourhoods. Minor refinements to these policies were suggested to: ensure the scale of new development on Avenues is compatible with the character of the local community; limit the encroachment of incompatible uses in Employment Areas; and to address concerns about “monster home” developments that dramatically change the character of a particular neighbourhood.
- **Transit, services and affordable housing need to keep pace with development**
Several participants discussed the relationship between land-use, density and transportation. Transportation and affordable housing were consistently raised as areas in need of improvement and investment. Many participants felt that a greater emphasis should be placed on providing improvements to transit and cycling infrastructure. Many also felt that there was an important need to build more affordable housing in Toronto.
- **Opportunities to strengthen community engagement and OP implementation**
There were participants who expressed concern about the process through which the Official Plan is implemented. Specific proposals to make public participation in the planning process more integral to the Official Plan were offered including, enshrining community consultation earlier in the development review process, increasing communication between City Planning and communities, and creating more secondary plans.
- **Interest in stronger Urban Design & Heritage policies and more Mixed-Used developments & Parks**
There were a number of specific policy areas in which participants suggested minor refinements including strengthening urban design policies, revamping heritage policies to align with strengthened legislation, encouraging sustainable practices through additional environmental policies, incorporating elements of the Tower Renewal Initiative into the Official Plan, maintaining and expanding parks in growth areas, and ensuring mixed use buildings are truly mixed.
- **A lot of agreement on what makes Toronto liveable**
Unique neighbourhoods, cultural diversity and an exceptional system of ravines, parks and natural areas were all viewed as Toronto's key strengths.

I. OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS

In September 2011 the City of Toronto conducted Open Houses as part of Stage One of a two-stage public consultation process designed to inform the Official Plan and Municipal Comprehensive Reviews. The consultation process is designed to seek feedback on what's working with the current Official Plan and what areas could be improved. This Consultation Summary Report reflects the input and advice received from participants at the six Open Houses held across Toronto (Etobicoke, Scarborough, North York, York, East York and downtown). It is intended to be read along with the six individual Open House feedback summaries written and posted under the "Events and Meetings" tab on the City's Official Plan Review website (www.toronto.ca/opreview). Stage Two of the public consultation will take place in 2012, and will present and seek feedback on opportunities to refine the Official Plan.

Who participated?

Approximately 300 people participated in the Open Houses, representing resident associations, community groups, local school boards, local businesses, Business Improvement Areas, industrial associations, the development industry, planning firms, planning students from local universities, sustainability interest groups, and the general public. In addition Councillor Milczyn, Councillor Doucette, Councillor Vaughan and Councillor Wong-Tam also attended.

What was the format?

Each Open House ran between 3:00pm and 9:00pm with a presentation and facilitated discussion occurring at 4:00pm and again at 7:30pm. At the Open Houses, participants had the opportunity to view display boards, share insights with City Planning staff and complete the Fast Feedback Survey. The presentations were delivered by City Planning staff and included:

- a broad introduction to the Official Plan and Municipal Comprehensive Reviews process;
- an overview on what an Official Plan is and how it influences daily life;
- facts and figures on population and employment growth in Toronto;
- information on different areas in the urban structure of the City; and
- information on specific planning policy areas such as urban design, housing, the environment and heritage; and
- a look at how the Official Plan has been performing since it came into effect in 2006, including information on where new development is going, and how job and population growth figures compare to provincial forecasts.

Participants were provided with a Discussion Guide that provided an introduction to where and how the Official Plan directs growth (75% stable, 25% change), the elements of a liveable city and the three focus questions. It also provided the dates and locations of all Open Houses, a link to the Official Plan and Municipal Comprehensive Reviews website, and City Planning staff contact information. The Guide along with the display boards and slide presentation are available on the website (www.toronto.ca/opreview).

What feedback was sought?

Participants were asked to consider the following focus questions:

1. Think about where and how we direct growth and change in the city. What do you like about where and how the OP directs growth and change? What don't you like, and why? What, if anything, would you like the City to consider doing differently?
2. There are a number of different city-building elements that are important to consider when thinking about how and where Toronto will grow. Which 2 or 3 elements do you see as Toronto's strengths as a liveable city? Which 2 or 3 elements do you see as areas to improve, and why?
3. Is there any other feedback you would like to provide on the Official Plan?

II. WHAT WE HEARD

Feedback shared by participants was extremely thoughtful and in many cases similar perspectives were shared at each of the six Open Houses. These areas are highlighted below, along with those topics where opinions differed. The feedback is organized into the following five broad categories: Directing growth and change; Investing in communities; Process and implementation; Policy recommendations; and elements of a liveable city.



Etobicoke Afternoon Session, September 14, 2011

1. Considerable support for where the City is directing growth and change

75% Stable and 25% Change is working well

Across the city, participants expressed considerable support for where the Official Plan directs growth. In particular, many participants liked how growth is directed to Avenues, Centres and Downtown and away from the Neighbourhoods. Some participants raised concerns that the amount of growth occurring in the Downtown negatively impacts the character of existing low rise neighbourhoods in this area.

Opportunity to evolve neighbourhoods?

The importance of preserving the character of neighbourhoods was brought up several times, with most participants strongly supporting the Official Plan policies that protect stable neighbourhoods. That being said, concerns about “monster homes” in stable neighbourhoods were raised in almost all sessions, with some participants interested in seeing neighbourhood protection policies strengthened to address these concerns. It was suggested that neighbourhoods, especially suburban neighbourhoods, should have some flexibility to evolve to allow for a greater mix of uses, services and building types to facilitate greater walkability.

Opportunity to evolve Avenues?

While many participants were supportive of directing growth to Avenues, some felt that the Avenue policies are in need of some refinement to ensure the right scale of development. Suggestions included: creating a greater level of distinction between urban and suburban Avenues; finding a better way to protect the character of urban Avenues; limiting development to 6-8 storeys; and revisiting Mid-Rise policies because in some areas six-storey structures are high when compared to the width of the Avenue.

Important to protect Employment Areas

Many participants supported the protection of Employment Areas. Concerns about incompatible and sensitive uses (such as residential) encroaching on Employment Areas were raised, including perceived conflict between policies that protect Employment Areas and the

mixed-use designation of Avenues where these two growth areas are adjacent to one another. It was suggested that the enforcement/strengthening of buffers between residential and employment uses was one solution to encroachment. It was also suggested that Employment Areas policies be refined to recognize existing retail areas within Employment Areas.

2. Transit, services and affordable housing need to keep pace with development

Transit needs to keep pace with development

Several participants discussed the relationship between land-use, density and transportation, and the main message was that implementation of the transit component of the Official Plan is too slow. Some felt strongly that all areas with high density growth should be well served by public transit. Some participants were eager to see a greater emphasis on bicycle infrastructure in the Official Plan such as designating a city-wide bike network along major arterials and increasing bicycle parking availability in areas where cycling use is high or could be higher if cycling infrastructure was in place.

Community services need to keep pace with development

There were participants who expressed concern that there are insufficient community facilities, parks and amenities for some growth areas, and that there is not enough investment in these areas to ensure the availability of services keeps pace with development, particularly downtown. Some participants expressed concern about the lack of investment in certain areas of the city, as well as income and tenure polarization. The importance of having a local services and amenities within a short distance of neighbourhoods was also raised by a number of participants.

Support for more affordable housing

Many participants expressed concern about a general lack of affordable rental and ownership housing in Toronto. Some participants were particularly concerned about affordability in the downtown core and by a lack of family-sized units in high density areas. Others felt that what is considered “affordable” is increasingly not affordable for many people. Some expressed support for inclusionary zoning to spur affordable rental housing construction.



Metro Hall Open House, September 13, 2011

3. Opportunities to strengthen community engagement and OP implementation

Strengthen connection between planning and communities

There was concern about the degree of influence that community consultation has in the planning decision-making process. To improve community consultation, it was suggested that:

- public input have a stronger influence over and occur earlier in the review of local development proposals;
- communication regarding all aspects of city planning decisions be strengthened and ideally made available all in one place; and
- there be more city planners who are more tightly linked with communities (e.g. local offices).

Need to improve implementation

Some participants expressed concerns related to implementation of the Official Plan, including:

- a disconnect between what happens on the ground in communities and actual civic investment versus what is in a policy;
- that the City is not adhering to the Plan enough because 20% of growth is occurring outside of where it is directed;
- that developers can change the Official Plan, for example, in terms of changing the scale of buildings; and
- that the Ontario Municipal Board overrules municipal decisions too often and that this power should be limited.

More of a role for Secondary Plans?

Some participants felt that there should be more secondary plans and that they should be stronger, especially to enforce and defend consistent policies around height and density.



North York Afternoon Session, September 27, 2011

4. Interest in stronger Urban Design & Heritage policies and more Mixed-Used developments & Parks

Stronger Urban Design policies

It was felt that the Official Plan should contain stronger urban design policies to promote things like improved streetscapes and greater variation in building design and built form, particularly along Avenues. It was suggested that Toronto's urban design policies should incorporate best practices from other jurisdictions, that more attention should be paid to streets in areas of high density development, and that the Design Review Panel should have a broader mandate so that the overall quality of architecture in Toronto is improved.

More Mixed-Use development

Generally, participants were supportive of mixed-use developments that are truly a mix of uses. Some people recommended that mixed use policies be strengthened to ensure that mixed use developments are more than just predominantly residential.

Great to see strengthening of Heritage

The opportunity to strengthen heritage policy was seen as important and necessary. Suggestions for specific heritage protection policies included incentivizing retrofits of existing buildings, improving heritage conservation district policies and moving to preserve complete structures rather than just facades.

Support for expanding parks & green space

A number of participants expressed support for both maintaining and expanding parks and green space in the City to keep pace with growth (particularly in the Downtown), and encouraging sustainable practice through environmental policies in the Official Plan. Specific policy proposals included the "greening" of surface parking lots with trees and solar panels, the encouragement of green-related industries in employment areas, strengthening sustainable design requirements.

Thoughts on other policies

Participants offered a number of other specific policy recommendations including:

- incorporating the major elements of the Tower Renewal initiative into the Official Plan; and
- incorporating food planning policies in the Official Plan.



North York Open House, September 27, 2011

5. A lot of agreement on what makes Toronto liveable

Neighbourhoods

Several participants strongly felt that Toronto's diversity of unique neighbourhoods is one of its key strengths. Some participants also felt that the emergence of an attractive and liveable downtown that is walkable, dense, diverse and safe is another key strength.

Diversity

Several participants also strongly felt that Toronto is a cosmopolitan and culturally diverse city and that this quality is a key strength. Some participants felt that an effort should be made to make sure that this diversity of population is evenly spread (rather than clustered) throughout Toronto.

Ravines, parks and natural areas

Participants felt that Toronto has an exceptional system of ravines, parks and natural areas and these are an important strength. Public areas were noted as especially important as a lot of Toronto's population growth is being increasingly accommodated in smaller units with limited private outdoor space. Some participants felt that access to these amenities was not evenly distributed throughout Toronto.

III. NEXT STEPS

The City will be using the feedback received during the six Open Houses, along with other feedback received during Stage One of the public consultation (i.e. through the online survey, emails, stakeholder meetings, etc.) to help identify opportunities to refine the Official Plan. These opportunities will be presented and feedback on them will be sought during Stage Two of the public consultation, scheduled to take place in 2012. Updates on the Official Plan and Municipal Comprehensive Reviews will be provided periodically to all those who have signed up on the City's OP Review website.

This report was written by Alex Heath and Nicole Swerhun, members of the **SWERHUN | Facilitation & Decision Support** team retained by the City to support the design and facilitation of the Open Houses in the Stage One public consultation for the Official Plan and Municipal Comprehensive Reviews.