

Toronto Planning Review Panel

Summary of Results from the Toronto Planning Review Panel Meeting held April 2, 2016

About the Toronto Planning Review Panel

The Planning Review Panel is made up of 28 randomly selected Torontonians. The Panel was created so that a representative group of Torontonians could help the City Planning Division guide growth and change in Toronto. They have been asked by the Chief Planner, Jennifer Keesmaat, to work together over the course of two years to provide City Planning with informed public input on major planning initiatives. Members are tasked, in particular, with helping to ensure that these initiatives are well aligned with the values and priorities of all Torontonians.

In September 2015, 12,000 randomly selected Toronto households received a letter in the mail from the City Planning Division inviting them to volunteer to become a member of this new Panel. Over 500 Torontonians applied, and 28 were randomly selected to represent the city.

Members were selected using a civic lottery, a made in-Toronto method that is used to convene Citizen Panels that offer strong demographic diversity and ensure broad representation of the population as a whole. In this case, the civic lottery ensured proportionate representation of Toronto with regard to geography, age, gender, household tenure, and visible minority status, and guaranteed the inclusion of at least one Aboriginal member.

During the fall of 2015, Panel members each dedicated 40 hours to an orientation program that was held over the course of four Saturdays. During that time, they heard from seventeen guest speakers who introduced them not only to the tools of City Planning, but also to the trends shaping Toronto's economy, housing stock, demographics, built form, public realm, transportation system, parkland, and natural environment.

Members meet 12 additional times over two years to provide input to the Planning Division with regards to specific initiatives and decisions.

More information about the Planning Review Panel can be found at www.toronto.ca/planning/tprp

Toronto Planning Review Panel

About the April 2, 2016, Meeting of the Planning Review Panel

On April 2, 2016, the Panel met to offer input to the Planning Division on two projects: the Complete Streets Guidelines that are in development, under the leadership of the Transportation Services Division and TOcore: Planning Downtown, an inter-Divisional project that is leading to a new Downtown Plan. The Panel was provided with preliminary reading material regarding the Complete Streets Guidelines to prepare for the meeting. During the morning session, Toronto Transportation Services representative Adam Popper, Manager of the Complete Streets Guidelines, provided an overview of the project. Nancy Smith Lea, Director of the Toronto Centre for Active Transportation, and Brian Moore, Accessibility Expert, were invited to provide their perspectives on Adam's presentation and the Guidelines. Before beginning their morning deliberations, Panelists were able to ask all three speakers questions about the Complete Streets Guidelines. All of the learning materials shared with the Panel are available at www.toronto.ca/planning/tprp under "Learn with the Panel".

Members of the Panel were then asked to work together to answer three questions. These questions were discussed in small groups and then together as a Panel. The questions were:

- 1- What value do you see in the City's proposed approach to street design?
- 2- Is there anything that you believe could improve the City's proposed approach to street design?
- 3- What are good ways to explain these new guidelines to Torontonians so they can understand how decisions about streets get made?

In the afternoon, the Panel's coordinator, Daniel Fusca, provided a refresher presentation on the City Planning Division's TOcore Project. Daniel and Andrew Farncombe, Project Manager of the TOcore Project, introduced the Panel to the public engagement strategy for Phase 2 of the TOcore Project, which was being launched in the near future, and asked the Panel to test out activities designed to engage the broader public. The Panel's input would thus serve dual purpose: input to feed into the public consultation process, as well as feedback concerning the effectiveness of the new engagement activities being rolled out. The Panel was asked to examine a number of 'avatars' developed as consultation tools, and also to provide input on the following four questions:

- 1- How do Torontonians use Downtown?
- 2- What prevents Torontonians from using and enjoying Downtown?
- 3- What should be Toronto's vision for Downtown?

Toronto Planning Review Panel

- 4- What's your advice on how we can achieve that vision and make sure Downtown is great for all?

Summary of Results

The results of the morning's deliberation are summarized below. This summary was drafted by the Panel's support staff with the material generated during the day's discussion, and was sent to all members of the Panel to edit and review. Panelists were asked to ensure the summary reflected the consensus achieved in the session. Panelists were also invited to submit individual commentary for inclusion in this summary. You will find this additional commentary, individually attributed, at the end of this document.

In response to Question 1, which asked about the value of the City's approach to street design, members broadly agreed with the following:

There was broad agreement among Panelists that the approach to street design taken by the project team represents a meaningful improvement to how streets are planned in Toronto. Panelists agreed that the Guidelines are likely to allow the City to consider a greater diversity of street users when designing its streets, including pedestrians, cyclists, those on E-bikes, and vulnerable users, as opposed to the previous approach, which focused more heavily on motorists. Panelists believed the focus on all users of Toronto's streets, as well as the focus on safety for vulnerable users, will help to humanize Toronto's streets and create more inclusive public spaces. The Panel also agreed that the Guidelines were likely to modernize the City's approach to designing its streets and allow the City to be more proactive in adding features that are important for all users, such as additional trees and consistent signage.

Additionally, some thought that consistent design principles across Toronto might allow the City to address inequity across the city by ensuring that infrastructure is designed and maintained consistently across the city.

In response to Question 2, which asked about improvements to the City's approach to street design, members broadly agreed about two priorities:

Accessibility

There was broad agreement that the City should pay even greater attention to the accessibility needs of its residents. Panelists thought the Complete Streets Guidelines should place greater emphasis, for example, on textured surfaces and consistent

Toronto Planning Review Panel

placement of TTC stops for the visually impaired, reducing mobility barriers for those using wheelchairs and other accessibility devices, and appropriate lighting. They encouraged the project team to reach out and host additional consultations specifically with people who experience access challenges in the city.

Access to Information and Local Input

Panelists believed that the City should provide supports for local residents who want to understand how the Complete Streets Guidelines might impact their own neighbourhood. Panelists suggested FAQ sheets or guides for important components of the Guidelines, as well as information targeted specifically to upcoming projects in different neighbourhoods. There was agreement that where different stakeholders have incompatible needs, the City should ensure that it provides transparent information about its decision-making process. This will help ensure residents understand how priorities are identified and decisions made. Finally, residents strongly agreed that when a street project is happening in a neighbourhood, the City should create greater opportunities for input from local residents, who have important, detailed information about how streets are or are not working well for all.

Although consensus was not achieved about the following items, various Panelists also identified the need for:

- More emphasis on preserving and celebrating local heritage, specifically indigenous heritage, in street design;
- Creating specific design approaches for street areas which experience frequent crowding and bunching, such as in front of schools and at TTC stops;
- Ensuring greater enforcement of proper uses, for example, concerning bikes and e-bikes on streets and sidewalks;
- Shifting the focus from 'vulnerable users' to 'addressing vulnerability and safety for all users' to recognize that all street users are vulnerable in some ways
- Including women as vulnerable users under the Guideline, and considering how women's safety in public space is distinct from that of men;
- Documenting all the ongoing needs for system upgrades on Toronto's streets, so that the City can leverage emergencies or unanticipated repairs as opportunities to also do planned repairs at the same time;
- Providing tools so that planners and City staff are able to explain the Guidelines to its own staff and designers, and ensure the Guidelines do not end up "on the shelf";
- Forming a centralized expert committee that would:

Toronto Planning Review Panel

- help the many staff meant to use these guidelines actually understand and use them effectively;
- help resolve difficult decisions about how to balance different user needs;
- ensure regular updates based on what is being learned.

In response to Question 3, which asked how best to explain the Guidelines to the general public, members agreed about the following:

What to communicate to residents

The details of the Complete Streets Guidelines might be complicated (and often unnecessary) for the general public to understand, given its complexity and its connection to so many other important City standards and rules. The Panel suggested that the City focus on ensuring clear information is available about why the Complete Streets Guidelines are necessary. Specifically, the Panel suggested emphasizing how the new Guidelines differ from the current approach to street design, and what tangible improvements the Guidelines can offer to various different residents of Toronto in their neighbourhoods and places of work. The Panel suggested that residents will be less interested in how the Guidelines connect to existing City initiatives, and more interested in how the Guidelines might impact their own neighbourhood and how they might use the Guidelines to better understand how decisions are being made about a project of interest.

How to communicate the Guidelines to residents

The Panel suggested that the city use visuals to explain the Guidelines, and before and after photos with annotations which describe the changes made and how those changes were informed by the Guidelines. The Panel also agreed that it would be helpful for the City to create guides or FAQ sheets for some of the more common, specific concerns that people will have about the Guidelines' impact in the neighbourhoods they frequent. The Panel suggested that short, accessible video clips might also allow the public to learn about different aspects of the Guidelines. Panelists told the City that they need to communicate the Guidelines to residents using fewer acronyms and less policy language, as it makes them harder to understand.

Some Panelists also suggested:

- Incorporating the Complete Streets concept into high school civics classes using the "Blue Box Model" and educating children on Complete Streets so they can

Toronto Planning Review Panel

educate their parents, including field trips to sites where the Guidelines have been used;

- Using social-media-based design competitions to raise the profile of the Guidelines and Toronto's new Complete Streets approach;
- Providing the public with information about how streets are chosen for more extensive re-design, in order to explain how these decisions are made equitably;
- Profiling local businesses that have seen tangible benefits from street improvements informed by the Guidelines, perhaps in newspapers or on the City's website;
- QR codes on well-traveled streets that have been re-designed according to the Guidelines that explain the approach and the changes made;
- Developing Jane's walks or neighbourhood tours of successfully redesigned streets, run by City staff for residents to attend;
- Being as transparent as possible about the concerns different individuals might have about the re-design of their streets rather than promising that everything will be better for everyone.

Summary of Results from TOcore Consultation

TOcore Avatar Discussion

Before the Panel's main deliberation for the afternoon, Andrew Farncombe introduced the City's engagement strategy for the TOcore project. In order to better understand the full diversity of ways that Toronto's residents use the downtown core, the Planning Division has created a number of 'avatars' – fictional individuals with different experiences of downtown. Each of these 16 avatars has a name and a distinct set of social circumstances that influence how they interact with, and what they need from, Toronto's downtown. Panelists were given a printed set of all 16 avatars, and were asked to review the set and suggest changes in order to ensure the avatars were sufficiently relevant, comprehensive, and relatable for use by members of the general public. Small group feedback from this activity was given directly to Andrew Farncombe so that it could be quickly incorporated into future iterations of the avatars and has not been reproduced here.

ToCore Discussion

In response to Question 1, members agreed that the following are important uses of Toronto's downtown core:

- Work;

Toronto Planning Review Panel

- Residence;
- Entertainment, including retail shopping, museums, restaurants, sporting events, and the waterfront.

In addition, individual members commented that other relevant uses of the downtown core included: hospitals and health care, tourism, political demonstrations and protests, access to government offices, “downtown-specific experiences”, including festivals and international events that are hosted by Toronto, cultural amenities, and conventions.

In response to Question 2, members agreed that the following factors prevented Toronto’s residents from using and enjoying the downtown:

- Traffic;
- Perceptions of safety and crime;
- Distance from their homes and workplaces;
- Cost and affordability of residences;
- Transit capacity and dependability;
- A lack of family-friendly spaces (including family-friendly washrooms, nursing stations, and change rooms).

In addition, individual members commented that the following factors also prevent some of Toronto’s residents from using and enjoying downtown: Water quality for swimming in and enjoying Lake Ontario, mobility and accessibility for people with disabilities (specifically regarding Wheeltrans), limited late-night TTC availability, large crowds, construction, and lack of nearby larger/full-service grocery stores for those without cars.

In response to Question 3, members agreed the following factors should inform Toronto’s vision for its downtown:

- Downtown should be easy to get around, congestion should be eased, and transit should be improved;
- There should be more cultural centres and interesting buildings;
- Toronto’s downtown should demonstrate global leadership in energy efficiency;
- Downtown should support multiculturalism and diversity;
- Downtown should have multi-use roads with more sidewalk space;
- Downtown should have great services;
- Downtown should continue to be a vibrant place for people and businesses;

Toronto Planning Review Panel

- Downtown should be more affordable, including more affordable housing downtown;
- Downtown should be more family-oriented and generally friendly;
- There should be unique city amenities like Public wifi and green outlets for electric vehicles;
- Green spaces should be preserved and empty spaces should be filled with greenery, even inside buildings;
- Downtown should be accessible to those with disabilities and other access challenges;
- The Downtown vision should reflect a desire to spread jobs and density to other parts of the city.

In response to Question 4, members collectively advised that to achieve this vision, the City would have to:

- Make priorities out of transportation, affordability, economic vibrancy, a diversity of uses, coherent and enforced regulation, and an engaged citizenry; and
- Encourage mixed uses, smart transit investments, speed up traffic flow on major arteries, use inclusionary zoning and tax incentives to create smart development, improve accessibility for those with disabilities, get creative about new partnership ideas with local businesses and other groups, increase celebration of culture and diversity, and encourage investment in R+D and start-ups.

Toronto Planning Review Panel

Additional Individual Commentary from Members:

After reviewing and approving the Panel's summary of input, members had the option to submit additional, individual commentary for inclusion in this summary,

Al Eslami

I am very impressed by the range and quality of our Panel's contributions on the two topics of our April 2 meeting. My thoughts on the meeting's two topics follow.

1. Complete Streets:

- a. First, some criticism of the plan as a whole. The Complete Streets project has a set of ambitious goals that, in my view, do not match the city's actual trajectory. There are a number of stable residential neighbourhoods in the city that are not undergoing any appreciable changes. Their residents generally have at least one car, and a majority of them drive to work, either in the suburbs or in the downtown core. Then there are many stable commercial districts, almost exclusively made up of commercial buildings and some hotels. A good transportation system already serves these areas. The only areas that are in a flux are the ones around the major corridors like Yonge Street. Even in those areas, the flow of transportation is highly unidirectional. Concentrated construction around those corridors has put more pressure on the transportation system than it can bear. However, instead of spreading out the population and creating livable neighbourhoods, planners continue to concentrate more people in these areas, resulting in greater congestion and less vibrant communities. As a result, people do not see their neighbourhoods as places where they can get together and socialize, or even as places that they can call home. They merely live there, the same way that they see the commercial districts as places where they work.
- b. In any case, the plan's objectives should be prioritized, with first priority given to social objectives, then to environmental ones, and lastly to economic ones. Otherwise, those objectives will tend to negate and neutralize each other. In fact, economic objectives will sideline other objectives.
 - i. Social objectives: Safety, transportation choices, attractive public space
 - ii. Environmental objectives: Healthy neighbourhoods, sustainability
 - iii. Economic objectives: Supporting prosperity (with a focus on prosperity of lower-income strata). What about the environmental impact? (Economic efficiency is a two-edged sword: it can lead to a rise in consumption and use – for example, consumption of fuel and use of private cars – and therefore harm the environment).

2. TOcore:

- a. Economic stagnation in Toronto and the rest of North America began in the mid-1970s. Among other things, it meant a loss of manufacturing jobs. The Council's "Central Area Plan" in that period may in fact have exacerbated the economic inequality brought about by stagnation – partly by failing to counter the loss of manufacturing jobs, and in fact by encouraging the loss by bringing "mixed use" into the city. The "former industrial lands" that have been turned over to the developers were places where people used to work at well-paying jobs. The fact that one-third of all jobs are concentrated at the city's core is not something to celebrate. What it really means is

Toronto Planning Review Panel

that so many jobs have been lost in the rest of the city. It is a part of the process that has created the “three cities” in Toronto.

- b. TOcore has been defined as “master planning in an infill context,” but the definition fails to say who the planning is for – in other words, whose interests is it to serve. In recent decades, downtown Toronto has turned into a laboratory of an intensified conflict between people’s needs and business’s imperatives – in such areas as:
 - People’s need for human services and community centres versus business’s need for labour “flexibility” and a reduction of public space.
 - Economic, residential, and cultural needs and priorities of the upper-income echelons versus those of the common people.
 - The conflict between the mandate of the city authorities to serve the people and business’s profit imperative.
- c. Although the population of the city’s core has risen by several hundred thousand in only a few years, it is not clear how many affordable rental units have been provided. Not everyone can afford to buy a living unit or rent a luxury condo. It should be kept in mind that a lot of people lived in the core even before the recent influx. They enjoyed living in an urban environment and being close to community centres, libraries, shops and night-life. Their concept of shopping and night-life was quite different than the people who reside in luxury condos and townhouses. A city planner should recognize that what is good for the people who already live in the downtown core could be quite different from the demands and aspirations of those who are arriving there.