

Session 1 Introduction

September 17, 2009

Group Discussion

Themed responses from small group discussions

At the first Toronto Civics 101 session on September 17, 2009, participants were asked: "what is the one thing you are curious about...?" Following the session staff sorted the questions and comments into general themes. On the next few pages, in no particular order, you will find the themes that emerged. Questions and comments as well as sub-themes are noted.

City Planning and Growth

Toronto Civics 101 participants are curious about:

General Planning and Growth issues

- As time passed, city grows, how to influence and be a part of growth?
- Why City does not provide public restrooms at different locations?
- Infrastructure, development, condo, green space
- Interested in mapping and neighbourhoods
- What is the process of municipal planning, i.e., how do things get started? Who has input and who makes decisions?
- What is the City doing to ensure growth in the terms of protecting the community so the community will give back to the City?
- How does planning work and who and how make decisions?
- How local planning and decisions are made?
- Interested in local planning demystified
- Interested in mater which impact the built form of the City and the social effect, i.e., public space development in Toronto and also in the suburbs.
- How can I get involved in bring a community feel to this neighbourhood (Bayview and Leslie along Sheppard where condos are being built in rate that disappointing)
- Interested in City planning on high rise buildings – condos; city infrastructure to meet the growth; City emergency Services plan to meet the growing population
- How is urban planning conducted in the City? What are the processes and steps involved?

Transportation and Transit

- The City holds a once-a-year bike week but where is the year long devotion? Bike Lanes! How do we make it happen?
- Why the Transit is only connected to downtown and back and not to everywhere else?
- How does the City make decisions around Transit expansions?
- How to make TTC and public transit move more efficient?
- What is the planning strategy for bike lanes on major downtown roads? What kind of education will drives get in regards to cyclists to increase safety?
- Transit planning initiatives. Hope to understand future planning for downtown core and traffic management, specifically automobiles.
- What goes into decision making about transit?

Waterfront

- Why is the City proud of having “cranes in the air” when it is those cranes cut off our waterfront and made it inaccessible?

Affordable Housing

- How developments like condos are decided? What is the criteria?

Toronto Civics 101 participants suggested:

- More roads
- Seniors need public restroom all the time, especially in the winter month
- We need better roads, TTC and services for homeless.
- Urban planning - Encourage mixed uses
- Urban planning - Encourage environmental health
- Remove the Gardiner Expressway and remove the 3rd (reversible) lane is the wrong way to go. Need to keep business and jobs there;
- Competition from Vaughan is too appealing. Need to combat this;
- Need to expand transit. Add new subways using the HWY 407 – private build model – private fees;
- Tunnel subway tubes through the City – use the hydro and conservation lands to lower costs.
- Bicycle commuter needs way to come downtown from the west of the City.
- Public transit sprawl, repair what we have before expanding.
- Bury the rail access:
- Modernize (suspension bridge) the Gardiner – expand ramp access
- Develop office, condo, park space
- Tunnels to all the islands
- Time to deal with Island residents.
- Waterfront development, cherry street, etc.
- Need affordable housing.
- More housing (affordable)
- Affordable housing for families in downtown

How Decisions are Made

Toronto Civics 101 participants are curious about:

Decision Making Process

- What is the criteria/process for planning and introducing new programs?
- How does City government make decisions that affect communities? Are communities consulted? What and who determines when and why services/resources are given/taken away?
- Interested in the checks and balances on decision making process. How decisions are appealed, etc?
- How City make decision for new policy?
- How does the City run? I.e., what determines how the City moves forward? with a specific issue like the Jarvis Bike Lane. Who is lobbying? How is the final decision made?
- How decisions are made every step of the way and who has the influences?

- How decisions affect everyone in our city are made, without apparently any regards to diversity of neighbourhoods – garbage bins – I live in Cabbage town, no room for bins if there is any snow.
- Who made the decision regarding the recycling bins and why wasn't there some decisions made about collection of the old bins?
- How a proposition/a suggestion to improve/make it better can become a law? For example, a ban to use cell phone while one is driving. What was the procedure?
- How decisions are made in the City Council?
- What is the evaluation process for the economic development plan that the City have completed for a term and the participation of the civil society in this process (consultation, debate, etc...)?

Prioritizing

- How council makes decisions on what our City "values", i.e., arts & culture? Affordable housing?
- What ideas are presented to City Council voted on and what are not? Why is this?
- How does Council decide on what issues to debate? If I send an email to my councillor, does he wait until 100 or so people ask the same question before he takes it seriously.
- How are priorities set? How is power achieved/distributed, especially in light of financial restrictions?
- What is City's process for establishing priorities - for planning initiatives, for implementation and for funding?
- How decision for the City and Torontonians are being made and how prioritize these decisions?
- How decisions are made and what influences these decisions? How does the City prioritize initiatives?
- Who makes decisions on a local level?
- What does the City government consider are the core, essential elements we need to have to ensure a healthy, vibrant city that works/functions well and can grow? Where do the resources to run things come from and does the city government go about prioritizing and allocating those resources and choosing the trade-offs?

How Do People Get Involved

- How do people get involved in the City and how it run?
- How can I be involved, participate in influencing policy makers, especially regards social justice issues, economic prospect for poor people living in Toronto to give back to City that I'm grateful to be a residents?
- How public opinions/consultations are incorporated into public policy?
- How to influence government?
- How the City makes decisions (big or small)? How can the common citizens influence these decisions (to what extent)? On the other hand, how does the City communicate with citizen to build public awareness on the decisions it's going to make?
- What does it take to be an active participant within a neighbourhood?

Toronto Civics 101 participants suggested:

- Citizen participation in decision making process.
- Involvement of the community in development issues.

Finance

Toronto Civics 101 participants are curious about:

- What is the direction Toronto is heading towards in terms of fiscal management? How can the City be more transparent, accountable and better managed financially?
- How is the decisions on where our money (taxes) is allocated and how much, what is the process?
- How the City runs? Where our dollars go? How \$ comes in and out? Spending/funding?
- How financial decisions are made, i.e., taxes and land transfer fees? Where money go? What is the future plan of the City?
- Tax dollars, where is it going?
- How the City finances the operation and allocate the resource to the program that are best to citizen of Toronto?
- How property taxes are arrived at plans for LRT?
- Budget – size of deficit, why do City run deficit of the size you do?
- What is City's fiscal budget, what is the income and what is the expenditures?
- What is the City's project spending? Forecast of committed funds. What is the true picture?
- How the City run, spending – clarify/understanding (financial)?
- What kind of service the City provide to the people who need financial assist?
- How are Toronto services funded?

Toronto Civics 101 participants suggested:

- I think we can do better with our existing funding as oppose to increasing property taxes and other taxes.
- City's spending is outpacing its income, people are tired of tax increase. Remember Metro Plan 2000 (1975), time to rationalize planning again.

Council and Councillors

Toronto Civics 101 participants are curious about:

- What is the mechanism of the increase of remuneration of the City Councillors? How come the citizens in the City has no say on the pay increase rate and decision?
- How can people help from City Councillors and what sorts of help?
- Why councillors argue so much? Is it necessary?
- Why the mood at City Council often seems to be confrontational and competitive rather than collaborative and working towards making Toronto more liveable, beautiful and efficient?

Toronto Civics 101 participants suggested:

- City Councillor – working with people

Governance Structures

Toronto Civics 101 participants are curious about:

- What goes on behind the scenes when it comes to the various standing committees in Toronto?
- How are committee chairs chosen?
- How different board members are elected and how much they influence the decision making?
- What is the role of the Executive Committee?
- What is the local government structure? How it affect the civilians and especially educational system.

Who-Does-What

Toronto Civics 101 participants are curious about:

- How the City functions/works?
- What lens do City staff (non-elected officials) employ when providing elected officials with research/analysis, e.g., economic, social and environmental?
- How the fire protection for the City are organized and how much it cost to administer?
- What different remits fall under the various city departments and how staff and councillors work together on issues that fall between departments?
- Interested in all the administrative aspects of running the City (City Clerk's Office, CAO, Finance, HR, Infrastructure, Records Management, etc)
- What is the municipal government structure? I don't understand the hierarchy, who does what and the terminology that is associated with municipal government.
- How the organs of the city work
- How are the many employees of the city re-oriented?
- How laws and policies late get implemented?
- How is the City governed in general, what are the City services?

Access to Information

Toronto Civics 101 participants are curious about:

- What can I do to contribute to the community and make Toronto more accessible to the public? Where to go for questions? What is the turnaround time to get a response?
- How to access to Council's agenda?
- What is the path of power? How to access them?
- Learn to become a more involved Torontonians based on the information and discussions here.
- Why do I feel that the City is running incompletely? (I don't know if it is or not, I believe that it is better than I feel it is. I want to know the answers and reasons, not rely on feeling)
- Why is it so difficult to get seemingly simple things done, i.e. TTC services restore emails took almost 5 months?

Elections

Toronto Civics 101 participants are curious about:

- Why don't we have online voting for elections? – Security issues do exist but we do our banking online
- How David Miller start his political life? How does City make election? The process
- How does Toronto Election work?
- What is the electoral process and how to get involved in supporting the efforts of City officials to make my Ward better (Scarborough East).
- How the people that run the City are elected? What criteria is used and what qualifications do they have to have?
- How do you engage more citizens to Vote in Municipal Election?
- How does one run for Council? For Mayor? Not just what makes a person eligible, but what makes a person do it and how do they succeed?
- How do you run for government?
- What is the election process?

Communities at Risk

Toronto Civics 101 participants are curious about:

- Poverty and Inequality – what mechanisms are in place currently or in the process of alleviating poverty in Toronto?
- What role does the City play or will play in reducing poverty in Toronto?
- How the decisions are made about priorities regarding neighbourhoods at risk? How to help those neighbourhoods that are not in the criteria of priority?
- City government – how I can impact it for the betterment of residences of Toronto who are impoverished, marginalized, being left behind in Toronto?
- I am interested in social aspects of development, maybe improvement of rules and regulations and opportunities for social assistance and Ontario Works recipients.
- There are 2.7 million people from many different backgrounds and cultures here, so it's definitely understandable to have challenges. Toronto has many challenges, the gap between rich and poor, the homelessness, the job/unemployment. The question I want to get answered through Civics 101 is "How can I help?"
- If we are to not leave anyone behind, how do we ensure and engage youths to harness fresh ideas, create future leaders and continue to be at the forefront? What systems are in place?
- Teenage Violence; Poverty (community gardens); Building Healthy Communities
- What City is doing to protect young people in Toronto?
- How to reduce Poverty?
- How the City is ensuring new immigrants or less-advantaged ones are being included (becoming less isolated)?

Toronto Civics 101 participants suggested:

- Culturally/reduction of ghettos – creating programs that, through arts, you (The City) can integrate our habitants.

Safety Policing

Toronto Civics 101 participants are curious about:

- How do I rebuild confidence in my ward and build a long term strategy for curbing gun violence? (Ward 11)
- Guns
- How could Toronto be safer from crime?

Toronto Civics 101 participants suggested:

- Public safety – community programs for our youth

Diversity

Toronto Civics 101 participants are curious about:

- How can we celebrate diversity in Toronto?
- Integration of new comers
- How is the City and it services going to cope and hang together with increasing population and cultural diversity?
- Why the City Council does not reflect the population of the city. We see some participation in the Provincial and Federal election but not for the City Council.
- Toronto Police Services – how the hiring process goes and who holds them accountable from public abuse of office? How do we make the hiring process reflect the cultural diversity of the city they are policing? Toronto Police should reflect the people they are protecting in order to gain people’s trust and respect.

Environment

Toronto Civics 101 participants are curious about:

- What incentives are available for developing green technologies?
- Interested in learning more about the City’s plan for renewable energy – wind turbines and solar powered.
- How ecological problems are approached and solved by the city government? How can Torontonians contribute to ecological empowerment? How can we help in improving water quality and air quality?
- Greener Toronto programs – how I can contribute to make Toronto cleaner, Greener, more beautiful?
- What are the environmental initiatives the City of Toronto currently in operation, as well as its success rate?
- The “Greening” of Toronto is very important to me and many others – what are some of the basic/intermediate challenges that face City Council in adding more bike lanes, creating a wind turbine grid/field, subway/LRT extensions, green roof mandates, etc? Why is it so hard to spend money now to save the environment/economy later?
- How clean is our water?

- In what ways is Toronto fulfilling the protection of our environment?

Toronto Civics 101 participants suggested:

- Initiatives for solar energy
- Educate people to keep it clean – flyer.
- I would like to be involved somehow with the City’s initiatives to introduce solar energy efforts to existing homes across the city. So many homes, not producing any energy. No hydro bill = more money to put back into the economy.
- Green Strategy

Training, Education and Employment

(Note - City’s role in education is limited)

Toronto Civics 101 participants are curious about:

- What is the City’s plan for newcomer assistance and employment services? Future/further aid.
- How the City accommodates immigrants regarding their foreign educational credentials, as well as the promotion of English or French language skills?
- Trades – is the city’s government working in changing the 3 to 1 rule? (3 journeymen to 1 apprentice) considering the push for trades and the recent unemployment rate in Toronto?
- Learn more about business, education and training services

Toronto Civics 101 participants suggested:

- It may be good if training employment programs would follow by real co-ops and job placements and not only good promises.
- Money allocated to special education (elementary)
- Education – healthy and fair education system. Improving the way we value success

Vision

Toronto Civics 101 participants are curious about:

- Council and Committee’s visions for Toronto? Where we are going in the next 5 years? Who has a vision and what is the vision for Toronto? Who will get us there?

Partnership

Toronto Civics 101 participants are curious about:

- What person/department/agency/etc. is responsible for partnering with other public sector orgs, private sector and non-profit sector orgs to do “socially-minded” good stuff in the city? How are those partnerships decided? What’s the process (is there a

formal one?)? This extends beyond funding, but does include it. Collaboration?
Planning?

Toronto Civics 101 participants suggested:

- This is a very rich city with many very wealthy citizens. Why not ask them to invest in supporting City Government programs? For a guaranteed investment with a minimal but tax free return, I believe you would harvest many patriotic city builders.

Amalgamation

Toronto Civics 101 participants are curious about:

- Has the amalgamation of the city met its objectives? If yes, how?
- How has the elimination of the Metro level of government benefited the city? Has it benefited the city, in fact?

Un-Themed Questions

- Where can I get a Toronto flag and buttons with the Toronto flag image (if you don't already have buttons with the Toronto flag image, you should – they'd be 'young & hip', I'm sure) I'd like them because I love this city (I should be a mascot)
- How is the water purification process undertaken? (and safely maintained)
- Why are city attractions pricy?

List of Themes and ratios

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|-------------------------------|--|
| • City Planning & Growth (42) | • Safety Policing (4) |
| • How decisions are made (28) | • Diversity (5) |
| • City Finances (15) | • Environment (12) |
| • Council & Councillors (5) | • Training, Education and Employment (7) |
| • Governance Structures (5) | • Vision (1) |
| • Who Does What (10) | • Partnerships (2) |
| • Access to Information (6) | • Amalgamation (2) |
| • Elections (9) | • Un-themed (3) |
| • Communities at risk (12) | |