

Design Review Panel Pilot Project – Incorporating Municipal Projects

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To:	Planning and Growth Management Committee
From:	Ted Tyndorf, Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning
Wards:	All
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SUMMARY

This report recommends project thresholds and procedures for incorporating municipal projects in the Design Review Panel Pilot Project. The Pilot Project was approved for implementation by City Council (June 27-29, 2006). The thresholds and procedures have been developed through consultation with City Divisions as directed by City Council.

A great City needs great design to foster and sustain a high quality of life for its citizens, attract investment and remain economically competitive. Design Review Panels are used in other Canadian and international cities, with proven success, to raise the design quality of the built environment by enhancing the development approvals process. By incorporating municipal projects in approved Pilot Areas in the Design Review Panel Pilot Project, the City is reinforcing its commitment to building the highest quality public realm for the citizens of Toronto.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Planning Division recommends that:

1. City Council approve the project thresholds and procedures outlined in this report for incorporating municipal projects in the Design Review Panel Pilot Project during the two year Pilot period.

IMPLEMENTATION POINTS

The recommendations of this report will be implemented by City Divisions responsible for designing and building municipal projects. The City Planning Division will assist with implementation by administering the Design Review Panel Pilot Project.

The two year term of the Pilot Project will commence at the first meeting of the Panel to review new development.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact resulting from this report.

DECISION HISTORY

To achieve the goals of the Official Plan and Council's Beautiful City initiative to increase the design quality of the public realm, City Council (June 2006) directed City Planning to implement the Design Review Panel Pilot Project for private development. In doing so City Council directed:

“That Deputy City Manager Fareed Amin be requested to submit a report to the Planning and Transportation Committee for its meeting to be held on September 5, 2006, in consultation with Deputy City Manager Sue Corke and the Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer Joseph Pennachetti, on project thresholds, procedures and financial implications that will be established to determine the inclusion of municipal projects in the Design Review Panel Pilot Project during the Pilot period beginning in 2007.”

At its September 2006 meeting the Planning and Transportation Committee received a ‘for information’ staff report from City Planning which outlined that more consultation with City Divisions was necessary to report on procedures to incorporate municipal projects in the Pilot Projects.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

City Planning carried out consultation with key stakeholders (including the public, development industry, design professions, and the Beautiful City Roundtable) to develop the Pilot Project. Council's direction responded to a strong message heard during the consultation phase that the City should reinforce its commitment to building a high quality public realm by including municipal projects in the Design Review Panel Pilot Project. Examples of municipal projects include new and renovated streetscapes, parks, public spaces and public building such as fire halls and recreation centres.

COMMENTS

Results of Consultation with City Divisions

Council directed City Planning to carry out consultation with City Divisions to create additional project thresholds and procedures to include municipal projects in the Design Review Panel Pilot Project.

City Planning identified the following City Divisions for consultation:

1. Facilities & Real Estate
2. Parks, Forestry & Recreation
3. Transportation Services
4. Technical Services
5. Shelter, Support & Housing Administration
6. Affordable Housing
7. Solid Waste Management
8. Toronto Water
9. Emergency Medical Services
10. Social Services
11. Public Health
12. Children's Services
13. Fleet Services
14. Homes for the Aged
15. Court Services
16. Fire Services

To facilitate this consultation City Planning requested Division heads from the above list to name representatives for an interdivisional work team. The work team included representatives from most of the above divisions and the City Beautiful Secretariat. Additionally, individual meetings with Divisions that have large building programs (Facilities and Real Estate, Transportation, Technical Services and Parks, Forestry and Recreation) were held to discuss their specific requirements.

Project Thresholds and Procedures for Incorporating Municipal Projects in the Design Review Panel Pilot Project

Project Thresholds for Municipal Projects

Project thresholds have been designed to integrate with existing processes for designing and building municipal projects, meet Councils goals for the Panel and to respect the time commitments of the volunteer Panel members. It is important to seek advice from the Design Review Panel on projects which have an appropriate level of impact on the public realm.

Projects subject to the following processes within the approved Pilot Area will be reviewed by the Panel:

1. Site Plan Approval, such as police stations, libraries, community centres,
2. Plans of Subdivision, such as new streets, parks and open spaces,
3. Environmental Assessments (including design development of Environmental Assessments) such as new streets, parks and open spaces.

Projects not subject to the above processes, but which have a visual and physical impact on the public realm, will be reviewed if they meet any of the following criteria:

1. Projects in prominent public locations regardless of scale including any changes to Civic Squares and arterial and collector streets and their edges,
2. Projects on lots contiguous with environmentally sensitive areas such as ravines and the waterfront,
3. Special streetscape design proposals for existing streets – e.g. Yonge St. in North York Centre,
4. Streetscape repair when adjacent to public parks or buildings, or
5. Park renovations above \$150,000 / acre.

Exclusions:

1. Maintenance and state of good repair work,
2. Projects with little or no impact on the public realm – i.e. projects or work located underground or interior renovations of public buildings in areas not visible to the public.

Project Selection Process

To facilitate management of the review of municipal projects appropriate City Divisions will submit lists of projects that fall within the threshold criteria outlined above. Project selection and timing of items going to the Panel will be based on the project thresholds outlined in this report.

City Planning staff will assist City Divisions in applying the project thresholds to their project lists or to new projects as they emerge. If changes to projects occur or new projects emerge during the Pilot period, changes can be made to the Panel agenda accordingly. City Divisions will advise of the appropriate stage to review projects based on the review process outlined in this report.

Review Process

Research of best practices in other cities with Design Review Panels and consultation with City Divisions has shown that the best opportunity for input to the design of proposed projects is review at an early, conceptual design stage, and then in later stages of the design process. The review process for municipal projects will include three stages:

1. Early review before budgets are finalized to discuss the site and design program with the Panel and relevant staff from other Divisions with a view to identifying issues which may inform the RFP and budget decisions. Information about projects available at this stage includes; program, budget, area requirements, other client requirements.
2. The second stage of review is at the schematic design stage. Conceptual alternatives, are evaluated at this point.
3. The third stage of review will take place after the design is revised with input from city staff, the public and Councillor (if applicable).

Staffing

Division staff responsible for project management as well as relevant consultants will present the project to the Design Review Panel to inform them of issues and hear their advice.

To coordinate the approvals process, City Planning and other relevant City staff assigned to project will be present throughout the design review process to hear the advice of the Panel and understand project issues and available budget.

Design Competitions

Design competitions for municipal projects are encouraged by the Official Plan and will continue to be judged by selected juries. Competition briefs for municipal projects in the Pilot Areas will be reviewed by the Design Review Panel before being made public.

Design Review Panel Pilot Project Procedures

Procedures for implementing the Design Review Panel Pilot Project including procedures for private development were approved by City Council in June 2006 and are available for viewing at:

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2006/agendas/committees/plt/plt060601/it004.pdf>

Design Review Panel Pilot Project Workload

The Design Review Panel was approved for implementation as a Pilot Project to test the Panel's procedures and make recommendations for their improvement. To achieve this goal it is important maintain a realistic volume of projects on the Panel's agenda during the Pilot period. Staff have evaluated the Panel's workload for the upcoming two year Pilot period. Private and municipal projects in the approved Pilot Areas will provide a full agenda for the Panel during the Pilot period.

As part of the approved monitoring program for the Pilot Project, City Planning will report back to City Council with recommendations on refining its procedures for private and municipal projects.

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