

MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 28, 2010

TO: Chair and Members of the Planning and Growth Management Committee

RE: Public Space Policy

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that:

1. This matter be referred to the City Manager to undertake, in co-operation with Planning, Real Estate and Parks, a review of our Public Space Policy that will determine what we would like Toronto, from a public space perspective, to look like in 2050.
2. Staff consider:
 - a. What mechanisms are currently available to permit that to happen.
 - b. What changes in policy will be required.
 - c. What amendments, if necessary, will be required to the official plan to allow this to happen.
 - d. Who, other than the Parks department, should administer this new public space and how.

Background:

The recent debate about the open space at Yonge and Eglinton should be an opportunity to begin a discussion about public space in this city that is long overdue.

Our public space policies are rooted in another century. They make the assumption that when planning a new development we must have a 2 acre green park and that anything smaller is a burden on the parks department to maintain and needs to be shunned. The policy casts back to the view that the city is simply a pastoral setting that just has more people living in it. That view ignores the way cities have actually grown over the centuries.

Yes, great cities may be known for their mega parks like New York's central park and London's Hyde Park but what is equally defining is their other public spaces, their public squares. None have to be named here to immediately bring them to mind.

Toronto has a mechanism for securing public space through its park dedication policy in every development but for very narrow and sort sighted reasons has opted for the insidious cash in lieu. They take a bit of money instead of land for a number of reasons:

- Small parks are expensive to maintain
- They offer little in a pastoral setting in the way of "useful" recreational opportunities.

- The parks department hates to look after them.

By the same token we have ignored the benefit of securing public open space in higher density areas. One thing is certain. Cities will continue to grow and the option for sprawling outward is no longer a luxury our society can afford. Cities will intensify. While we can create housing, we can't create land. They're just not making any more of it. Think about the expense and effort the city had to go through to create Dundas Square when they could have, with a little foresight had it for nothing. It is time we changed the way we do development and use the powers that we have under the planning act to acquire public spaces that will benefit future generations rather than take a few bucks that gets spent on benefits that quickly evaporate.

If that means taking that space off the backs of the parks department and creating a city division that is dedicated to public spaces it should be done. It is time that planning and particularly urban design, our real estate department and our parks department put their heads together and began to think inside the box