

**Toronto Walking Strategy
Summary of Public Consultation and Comments
April 2007 – April 2008**

Overview

Public consultation on the Toronto Walking Strategy began in April 2007. The Public Consultation Unit of Policy, Planning, Finance, and Administration supported Transportation Services in consulting with the public, stakeholder groups, pedestrian experts, and City staff.

The input received from the consultations ranged from detailed comments about specific intersections in Toronto, to broad, visionary statements about improving the experience of walking in the city. By and large, all of the participants in our consultations were passionate about walking and as such, staff had a significant amount of feedback to help with the creation of the final Walking Strategy. Moreover, the consultations demonstrated that pedestrian issues are of great interest to Torontonians and that there is strong public interest in making our city more walkable.

The following is a summary of the consultations held between April 2007 and April 2008, and the general comments received through each of those activities.

Summary of Consultations

April 25, 2007

“Visions for a Walkable Toronto”

Harbourfront Community Centre, Dance Studio

627 Queen’s Quay West

7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Staff:

Matthew Cowley – Public Consultation Unit

Bob Davis – Public Consultation Unit

Daniel Egan – Transportation Services

Jennifer Hyland – Transportation Services

Presenters:

Matt Blackett – Spacing Magazine

Jacky Kennedy – Green Communities Canada

Gil Penalosa – Walk and Bike for Life

Jim Walker – Walk21

This was the first consultation to announce the development of a Toronto Walking Strategy. The event was co-hosted by the City of Toronto and Spacing Magazine. The objectives of this event were to:

1. Introduce the public to the Toronto Walking Strategy - goals, timelines, how to get involved over the coming months;
2. Begin public dialogue about making Toronto a great walking city;

3. Raise local awareness about the Walk21 Toronto 2007 conference.

Over forty people from across the city attended this meeting. Jacky Kennedy and Matt Blackett each welcomed the audience and offered some brief context for the meeting and the issues at hand. Gil Penalosa then presented on the importance of walkability and how innovative solutions to improve the walking environment are being implemented around the world. Jim Walker followed by telling the audience about the International Charter for Walking.

Following the presentations the audience divided into two smaller discussion groups. The discussion was guided by broad questions to help staff get a sense of the many issues which people felt were important, and staff received a myriad of comments that night. If there was one common denominator it was that people clearly wanted a better pedestrian environment, e.g. larger sidewalks, more street trees, more benches, better crossings, better access and connections to transit, pathways, and buildings, better policies, by-laws, a reduction of barriers, and an increase in pedestrian zones.

At the end of the night, Jim Walker asked the audience to name their top three priorities for improving walking in Toronto as a message that he could give to the Mayor. The attendees that night suggested:

1. Involve people at every stage of the Walking Strategy.
2. Reallocate road space in Toronto by narrowing roads and widening sidewalks.
3. Place pedestrians at the top of the transport hierarchy in Toronto.

All comments were recorded on flipchart paper and attendees were encouraged to write to pedplan@toronto.ca with further comments and to be added to a project mailing list.

April 26, 2007

“Creating a Walking Strategy” – City of Toronto Staff Workshop

St. Lawrence Hall, Great Hall

157 King Street East

9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Staff:

Matthew Cowley – Public Consultation Unit

Pauline Craig – Transportation Planning

Bob Davis – Public Consultation Unit

Daniel Egan – Transportation Services

Jennifer Hyland – Transportation Services

[plus support staff from Public Consultation and Transportation Services]

Guest Presenters:

Paul Hess – University of Toronto

Beth Milroy – Ryerson University

Bronwen Thornton – Living Streets UK and Walk21

Gil Penalosa – Walk and Bike for Life

Rodney Tolley – Walk21

Jim Walker – Walk21

This workshop was primarily a staff training exercise, though it also helped us understand the significance of walking issues in other City departments. Over 70 City staff attended this event representing Transportation Services, City Planning, Toronto Public Health, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, Technical Services, Economic Development, the City Manager's Office, the Toronto Environment Office, TTC, and Toronto Police Services.

Both Rodney Tolley and Gil Penalosa presented an overview of the benefits of walking and the need to prioritize pedestrian planning within cities. They showed examples from Bogotá, Denmark and Australia where innovative walking initiatives and pedestrian infrastructure projects have taken precedence.

This was followed by a coordinated staff presentation with contributions from each department represented at the event. The presentations highlighted pedestrian-related activities from various departments within the City to help answer "Where We Are Now?" Afterwards, Beth Milroy and Paul Hess presented "Making Toronto Streets" which analyzes the institutional framework for street construction within Toronto.

In the afternoon, Jim Walker presented on the Walking Plan for London and the lessons learned through its development. This was followed by Bronwen Thornton's presentation on the International Charter for Walking, including its principles and how they are translated into pedestrian planning actions within cities.

The final segment of the day was group facilitated discussion of the issues, actions and major hurdles for Toronto in relation to the eight principles of the Charter. Each group assessed from their perspective the status of the principles in the Toronto context, what needs to be done, and how and when the outstanding work could be done.

July 9, 2007

"Visions for a Walkable Toronto – Urban Design and Walking"

Northern District Library

40 Orchard View Boulevard

6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Staff:

Matthew Cowley – Public Consultation Unit

Daniel Egan – Transportation Services

Jennifer Hyland – Transportation Services

Maogosha Pyjor – Public Consultation Unit

Presenters:

Leo Desorcy – Urban Design, City of Toronto

John van Nostrand – Architects Alliance

Workshop Objectives

1. To re-introduce the public to the Toronto Walking Strategy and report on work to date for public comment.

2. To specifically address the subject of “urban design and walking” as an element of the walking strategy.
3. Provide information on public involvement in the walking strategy and continue to encourage ongoing public dialogue about making Toronto a great walking city.

Approximately sixty people attended this consultation – some who were already active in pedestrian issues and others who were attending an event like this for the first time.

The evening started with presentations from Leo Desorcy and John van Nostrand who shared their professional perspectives on the role that urban design has on walkability.

After the presentations the audience was moved into smaller breakout groups. Attendees were asked two general questions to generate discussion. As the discussion progressed, each group was given enlarged photos of notably poor pedestrian spaces around Toronto. The photos were overlaid with trace paper and participants were offered markers to draw overtop of the photos and re-create these spaces to make them more pedestrian-friendly. Notes were also taken on flipchart paper throughout the discussion. The discussion questions were:

1. What are examples in Toronto of places that have been designed as great or/not so great places to walk? And why? What elements or relationships make those great walking places?

Examples of great places included those with wide sidewalks, a pleasant streetscape with trees and benches, vibrant streetlife, and links to other destinations (e.g. College Street in Little Italy, Queen Street West, Kensington Market, University Avenue, and the Beltline Trail).

Examples of not-so-great places included those with narrow sidewalks, spaces that are cut-off from others, places with no trees, and streets where cars create a hostile walking environment.

2. How do we design streets recognizing the need for social design and walkability as well as transport space? Use examples of streets and places that work.

The common themes here included connectivity, spaces that are designed for everyone (including seniors, strollers, etc.), upgrading sidewalks and maintaining them better, wayfinding, addressing the encroachment of cars, and better connections to transit.

Participants were reminded that the Strategy is a work in progress and they were encouraged to send in further comments to pedplan@toronto.ca.

**November 8, 2007
“Steps Towards a Walkable City” Public Open House
Toronto Reference Library
789 Yonge Street
7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.**

Staff:

Matthew Cowley – Public Consultation Unit
Lisa Di Clemente – Public Consultation Unit
Daniel Egan – Transportation Services
Jennifer Hyland – Transportation Services
Maogosha Pyjor – Public Consultation Unit
Jennie Weller – Public Consultation Unit

This was the third public consultation on the Toronto Walking Strategy and the first one to use the “Steps Towards a Walkable City” framework document as the basis for the evening discussion. Approximately forty people attended. The meeting started with a brief presentation from Daniel Egan who outlined the rationale behind the Strategy, what had been done on the on Strategy so far, and what the goals were for the future.

After the presentation a few minutes were set aside to take any initial questions or comments that people wanted to share with all the attendees. Then the audience broke into four smaller groups for focused discussion on the proposed framework. As in previous meetings, participants were presented with two questions for the evening that were relatively broad in their scope. However, in this consultation participants were encouraged to use the Proposed Framework to guide their comments and enlarged copies of the summary table which appears on the last page were printed on boards for reference.

The discussion questions were as follows:

1. A number of key current and ongoing as well as new actions have been identified within each of the 6 action areas. Are there any actions you feel we have missed or could be addressed more clearly?
2. From the actions identified in this document, which are most important to you in making Toronto a walkable city?

Notes were taken on flipchart paper and as participants identified priorities from the document, brightly-coloured dots were stuck onto the chart to give a clear visual reference of which issues were priorities. At the end of the night, each group reported back to the rest of the room, giving a summary of their most significant points of discussion. Overall, the comments were extensive, passionate, and ranged from the detailed to visionary. The elements of the Framework that were identified as the highest priorities at that consultation were:

1. 2.1 Public Realm Office
2. 1.1 Active and Safe Routes to School
3. 2.4 Staff Training
4. 4.4 Traffic Control Measures
5. 4.8 Improvements to Pedestrian Environments
6. 5.5 Plazas and Squares
7. 6.2 Walkability Pilot in Priority Neighbourhood

**December 4, 2007
“Steps Towards A Walkable City” – Toronto Pedestrian Committee Consultation**

Metro Hall room 302
55 John Street
6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Staff:

Matthew Cowley – Public Consultation Unit
Daniel Egan – Transportation Services
Jennifer Hyland – Transportation Services
Maogosha Pyjor – Public Consultation Unit

This consultation was organized specifically to gather input from the Toronto Pedestrian Committee. Eight members of the Committee attended in addition to Councillor Saundercook, Committee Co-Chair, and two of his staff.

The Committee had been asked to look at the Proposed Framework in advance of the meeting and the summary table was used as our guide for the evening. The two main areas of discussion were:

1. What are one or two insights you can offer about the document? For example, goals or action items that may be missing or things that you think stand out?
2. What do you think the City's priorities should be?

If the Pedestrian Committee were to put forth a vision or set of objectives to guide the development of the Walking Strategy, reflecting what it felt were the imperative elements to be addressed, what would it be? Would it differ from the three points outlined at the bottom of page 2 of the Proposed Framework [the three points put forth by the audience at the April 2007 consultation]?

The Committee offered comments which in many cases transcended our two discussion questions. In comparison to previous consultations, the Pedestrian Committee members generally had more insight into the internal workings of the City. Therefore, in addition to many visionary comments and some detailed, site-specific comments, members also discussed walking issues as they relate to policy, development review and planning processes, how to strengthen and better articulate the language in the Framework, and how the action items fit into the bigger picture of what the City does.

While by no means exhaustive, the following subject areas generated the most discussion at this consultation:

1. City processes and policies
 - Including the development review process, site plans, if there was any significance to the document being called a "strategy" instead of a "plan", and how this document will be acted upon by staff and Council. It was also noted that much of the language in the document could be more pro-active and goal-oriented.
2. Revising the content of Section 6
 - Under Section 6 were a number of current and proposed action items that were of interest to the Committee, though there was a lot of discussion regarding

- whether the components of the category should be re-positioned differently within the document.
3. The notion of “hierarchy”
 - Committee members spoke about how walking connects with other modes of transportation, but does advocating for a better pedestrian environment mean that pedestrians should be at the top of a transportation hierarchy? If so, what are the implications of that? If not a “hierarchy”, how does the public ensure that pedestrian issues are always given the attention they feel they deserve? Is there a way of positively expressing the importance of pedestrian issues while not implying an antagonism towards cycling, transit, or cars? Is it hard to make walking a “priority” while recognizing its strong connections to everything else?
 4. The notion of “safety” and comfort
 - Talking about “safety” got people talking about comfort, fear, crime, aesthetics, road danger, security, and more. An emerging theme was the distinction and/or confusion between “safety” (e.g. not getting hit by cars) and “security” (not being subject to crime or harassment) within the Framework. Safety is only specifically mentioned in the draft key principles of Section 4, and some members felt it was not explicitly clear what meaning of safety was being referenced here and if various notions of safety could be made more explicit throughout the document.

January 16, 2008

**“Steps Towards A Walkable City” – Consultation with members of the Toronto Coalition for Active Transportation (TCAT)
Metro Hall room 310
55 John Street
6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.**

Staff:

Matthew Cowley – Public Consultation Unit
Jennifer Hyland – Transportation Services
Maogosha Pyjor – Public Consultation Unit

One member of the TCAT Steering Committee attended along with seven TCAT community members. Three of those seven people were representatives of the following organizations:

- Feet on the Street
- Hoof and Cycle Active Transport Workers Guild
- Toronto Public Space Committee

The comments received at this consultation were overall the most negative and critical staff had received to date. While staff also heard some positive comments and what could be considered “constructive criticism”, several of the attendees were sceptical that any significant change was going to come about after years of the City working on these issues.

The agenda for the evening was as follows:

1. Staff review of comments received at public consultations so far and emerging themes
2. Review the Proposed Framework and identify priorities
3. Discussion of what's missing, would could be added, re-oriented, etc.

The discussion was lively and demonstrated that the attendees were engaged with the issues. The agenda items proposed to the attendees were useful, but much of the discussion expanded beyond the Framework to what attendees saw as root causes for many of the problems facing pedestrians in Toronto and what the City should do about them.

At the end of the evening each attendee was asked "If you could name one priority for the Strategy, what would it be?" Their answers were:

- Accountability and funding – give the Strategy some teeth and follow-up
- Accountability – need for leadership and reorientation of thought
- Walkability in Priority Neighbourhoods – have people in these areas even been included in consultation yet?
- Leadership and commitment – "people first" (instead of pedestrians first)
- Accountability – create a portal for people to report issues that automatically get a response, tracked, and create justification
- Reduce motor vehicle speed anywhere that a pedestrian can walk out; safety and enforcing speed limits
- Fix what we've got – use Vibrant Streets Guidelines, take what we have and use it better, provide leadership, accountability, and teeth
- Leadership, more attention to suburbs, giving staff better tools to work with, create standards, not just guidelines

March 25, 2008

"Steps Towards A Walkable City" Public Open House
Scarborough Civic Centre Rotunda
150 Borough Drive
6:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Staff:

Matthew Cowley – Public Consultation Unit
Jennifer Hyland – Transportation Services
Maogosha Pyjor – Public Consultation Unit

This was the first of three consultations specifically designed to gather more input from people in suburban neighbourhoods in an Open House format. Display panels based on the revised draft framework were on display and the central question asked of participants was "What could the City of Toronto do to encourage you to walk more?" Staff spoke with attendees one-on-one and comment sheets with more detailed questions were also distributed.

The main issues that emerged were:

- Improving pedestrian infrastructure and amenities, particularly in light of the fact that suburban neighbourhoods are generally not designed to be pedestrian friendly

- Neighbourhoods need to have shops, services, and amenities within walking distance to encourage walking; otherwise people will continue to drive
- Walking along suburban arterial roads can be unpleasant and intimidating; roads need to be made safer and more welcoming to pedestrians by changing design and infrastructure

April 3, 2008

“Steps Towards A Walkable City” Public Open House

North York Memorial Hall

5110 Yonge Street

6:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Staff:

Matthew Cowley – Public Consultation Unit

Pauline Craig – Transportation Planning

Jennifer Hyland – Transportation Services

The second suburban consultation was held at North York Memorial Hall. The format was the same the event at the Scarborough Civic Centre, though more people attended.

The main issues that emerged were:

- Better design of the pedestrian environment – putting crossing point closer together, reducing threats from cars (e.g. right turns at intersections), wider sidewalks, and better wayfinding;
- Integrating the Strategy with other City initiatives – making it work with transit, planning programs, development, the OMB, etc.
- Continued consultation with walking groups and community members
- Building neighbourhoods where amenities and services are within walking distance to encourage more walking; more washrooms, seating, etc., are also needed;
- Improve maintenance of existing infrastructure, including snow clearance, graffiti;
- Awareness – help improve the culture of walking
- Changing attitudes of motorists – taking action to take cars off the top of the hierarchy
- Strong leadership and action is needed from Councillors – take examples from other cities
- Better collaboration between cycling and walking community for planning, infrastructure, etc.

April 7, 2008

“Steps Towards A Walkable City” Public Open House

Sherway Gardens Mall

25 The West Mall

1:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Staff:

Matthew Cowley – Public Consultation Unit

Pauline Craig – Transportation Planning

Jennifer Hyland – Transportation Services

Maogosha Pyjor – Public Consultation Unit

In order to try and reach a different demographic, staff decided to set up an Open House display inside Sherway Gardens mall, a popular destination for people across Etobicoke. The idea was to take the message of the Walking Strategy to where people are already gathering in that neighbourhood, instead of asking them to always come to us. As a result, this event took a two-tiered approach to consultation:

1. Concise handbills were prepared for people who were passing by the display and did not want to stop and chat. The handbills had a brief description of the Strategy, a request for their input, and our website and contact information.
2. Panel displays and comment sheets were prepared for people who had more time to ask questions and share their thoughts with us. This latter category included people who had come to the mall specifically for the Open House as well as shoppers who saw our display and took the time to talk to us.

The main issues that staff heard were:

- Better sidewalk infrastructure, maintenance and design, including addressing portions of the sidewalk which slope towards the street at the end of driveways
- Better linkage of recreational trails to neighbouring streets and other pathways – Waterfront Trail/Lake Promenade was raised several times
- Keeping sidewalks clear from bicycles, parked cars, and encroachment from construction
- Negative impacts from malls and big box developments

Conclusions

Consulting the public on a topic like walking presents a unique opportunity, but also unique challenges. For many people, walking is an inherent part of everyday life. We might walk to the store or walk to the streetcar or even walk from the parking lot to our office, but we are not necessarily thinking about how walking can be the common denominator that connects so many different activities, let alone how the health of the pedestrian environment can have an impact on those activities. Therefore, announcing to the public that you want to hear their thoughts about walking doesn't necessarily yield the same type of response as other City-led issues like solid waste or major road projects.

On the other hand, because walking is indeed connected to discussions of public space, the environment, public health, transit, safety, recreation, urban design, business, community organization, and more, consulting the public on "walking" gives one the opportunity to gather a wide range of comments that illustrate exactly how significant a good pedestrian environment is to the people of Toronto. It is not a topic that brings simple "yes or no" answers. Instead, it encourages people to think about the ways we move through the city and how changes that impact walking can in fact have a greater impact on our communities as a whole.