

## **Improving the Community Planning Process Through Public Engagement**

<b>Date:</b>	November 14, 2013
<b>To:</b>	Planning and Growth Management Committee
<b>From:</b>	Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning
<b>Wards:</b>	All
<b>Reference Number:</b>	P:\2013\Cluster B\PLN\PGMC\PG13098

### **SUMMARY**

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At its meeting of September 12, 2013, the Planning and Growth Management Committee requested that the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning, report on a process for exploring a new “community planning” model designed to enhance the planning process by strengthening relationships with residents.

This report provides information related to the existing engagement efforts of the City Planning Division, and outlines a process for the development of the new community planning model that provides more opportunities for engagement and community-based discussions around city-building themes.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning Division, recommends that:

1. The Planning and Growth Management Committee adopt the consultation approach outlined in this report.

2. Staff schedule consultations in January and February 2014 across Toronto with residents and representatives of key stakeholder groups to discuss engagement opportunities around community planning.
3. Staff report back to Planning and Growth Management Committee in May, 2014, on a proposed new community planning model designed to enhance the planning process by strengthening relationships with residents through engagement.

### **Financial Impact**

The recommendations in this report will have no financial impact.

### **DECISION HISTORY**

At its meeting on September 12, 2013, the Planning and Growth Management Committee adopted a motion requesting:

The Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning, to report to the Planning and Growth Management Committee no later than December 4, 2013 on a process to explore a "new community planning" model designed to enhance the planning process by strengthening relationships with residents.

This report responds to the above direction of the Committee.

### **ISSUE BACKGROUND**

The planning process in Ontario is outlined in the *Planning Act* and the *City of Toronto Act, 2006*. The *Planning Act* outlines the approvals process for land development, minimum requirements for public consultation, as well as appeal rights to the Ontario Municipal Board. The Act requires the City to hold one public meeting when considering applications for amendments to the Official Plan or Zoning Bylaws and Plans of Subdivision, as well as for City-initiated Official Plan and Zoning Bylaw amendments. It also enables a municipality to identify additional requirements, beyond the prescribed minimum, by having complete application policies within the Official Plan.

The City's Official Plan addresses the issue of public engagement in the planning process in Section 5.5 (see Attachment 1 for a full list of policies related to public engagement in Section 5.5 of the Official Plan). The Plan encourages applicants to engage in pre-application consultations with the community, and requires at least one community meeting in addition to the minimum statutory requirements of the *Planning Act*.

A new Community Planning model for the City of Toronto needs to be focused on creating increased opportunities for dialogue with residents and other stakeholders,

including businesses, institutional partners, the development industry, property owners, and external organizations, as well as Council, the local public sector, and other levels of government. These stakeholders all have an active interest in the outcomes of the planning process, and represent a significant supply of human and intellectual capital that is engaged in thinking about how the city can be improved and re-imagined.

A greater effort can be made to harness this energy to support the Official Plan Vision, enable coalition building, and enable better city building.

Such an effort would be in line with the City's new *Strategic Actions, 2013-2018*. Strategic Action #14 of the Plan, which calls for enhancements "to the City's capacity to engage, inform, and consult the public..." In particular, the Plan calls for:

- Enhancing the way the City engages the public and stakeholders to plan, innovate and evaluate City strategies, initiatives, and policies;
- Enhancing the City's use of web-based tools to engage, collaborate and consult with the public and stakeholders;
- Ensuring information provided to the public about City meetings, consultations, events and how to engage with their local government is coordinated and accessible; and,
- Developing tools to support organizational civic engagement capacity, collaboration and knowledge exchange including how to ensure access, equity and human rights objectives are integrated into City engagement activities.

The City Planning Division's new *Strategic Plan, 2013-2018* also includes a set of key directions related to improving engagement, including the development of new public engagement strategies (Action 38), new community and external partnership strategies (Action 39), and informal Planning Division outreach programs (Action 32).

## **COMMENTS**

### **Objectives of Stakeholder Engagement**

Generally, when the City Planning Division engages its stakeholders, it does so in order to achieve one of three objectives:

#### *1. To build capacity and inform participation*

A major objective of any engagement process is to build capacity and generate the kind of mutual learning that is necessary in order for constructive dialogue to occur. This means ensuring that residents and stakeholders are equipped with the right information that will allow them to engage meaningfully in a process. This is a major objective of the Official Plan, which calls for the promotion "of community awareness of planning issues and decisions through use of clear, understandable language and employing innovative processes to inform the public..."

Currently, the Division builds capacity using a variety of tools that include dedicated project webpages; “toolkits” that are designed to both inform and engage; PowerPoint presentations; videos, such as the whiteboard video created for the *Feeling Congested?* process; and Discussion Panels. In addition, the *Planners in Public Spaces* (PiPs) initiative, which saw a series of ‘pop-up’ City Planning information booths set up at various events and in public spaces across the city, was intended to help achieve this objective by creating a positive environment for residents to learn about planning issues, understand what planners do, ask questions, and find out how they could get more involved in the planning of their city.

## 2. *To inform planning processes*

The Official Plan also calls for the provision of “adequate and various opportunities for those affected by planning decisions to be informed and contribute to planning processes.” Another major objective of many engagement processes, therefore, is to inform planning processes. This includes, most typically, the development review process, but also occurs through processes related to planning studies and Official Plan reviews. Typically, this objective is achieved through Community Meetings, Open Houses and Focus Groups. It also occurs through the use of specialized online surveys and tools, as well as through the use of innovative meeting formats, such as the ‘Meeting-on-the-Move’ format used in the context of the *Feeling Congested?* process. These meetings took participants on walking, cycling, and transit tours that highlighted some of the specific planning issues related to each mode of transportation.

## 3. *To facilitate city building*

A key objective of the City’s new *Strategic Actions, 2013-2018* is city building, including the implementation of smart urban growth strategies that ensure growth positively contributes to Toronto as a place to live, work and play. Ensuring that this occurs requires positive dialogue with residents and stakeholders around issues of city-wide importance and that impact quality of life. Currently, there is no formalized regular process dedicated to city building, although, recently, initiatives such as PiPs and the Chief Planner Roundtables have been convened with the objective of enabling more effective discussions around city building.

### **Stakeholder Engagement Today**

In 2012, the City Planning Division conducted 295 non-statutory community consultations, or more than one meeting every weekday. Through those meetings, the Division reached over 17,500 residents and stakeholders. Most of these interactions are directed towards the objective of informing planning processes, and generally occur within one of five main forums:

#### 1. *City-Wide Planning Processes*

These include Official Plan review processes, such as the recent reviews of Heritage and Employment policies, or the ongoing *Feeling Congested?* process, as well as other processes of city-wide importance, such as that related to the creation of the

new Harmonized Zoning Bylaw, The Tall Buildings Guidelines, the Toronto Green Standard, or the condo consultations.

2. *Neighbourhood-based planning processes*

These include processes related to the development of Area Studies, Secondary Plans, Avenue Studies, Heritage Conservation Districts (HCDs), and Urban Design studies.

3. *Site-specific planning processes*

These are largely triggered through development applications, and are related to development review.

4. *Special Studies*

These include initiatives such as *Eglinton Connects* and waterfront revitalization, or can be related to current issues such as the Billy Bishop Island Airport expansion, or the casino proposal.

5. *Special Outreach Initiatives*

Special outreach initiatives are designed to facilitate city building and include initiatives such as PiPs and the Chief Planner Roundtables.

Except in the case of Special Outreach Initiatives, the majority of City Planning Division's stakeholder engagement occurs in the context of some proposed change, either to the built form of the city through a development application, or to specific policies. As a result, there tends to be a perception, particularly among residents, that City Planning is merely a processor of change; particularly developer-initiated change. This perception can also create an atmosphere of distrust with community members, particularly in the absence of a common understanding and shared language around community planning.

### **Broadening Engagement Opportunities Through a New Community Planning Model**

A new Community Planning model should provide increased opportunities for resident and stakeholder engagement that are directed towards the objective of building capacity and informing participation. In addition, these interactions should be designed to develop a strong working relationship between the City Planning Division, residents and stakeholders that is built on mutual understanding and trust. Building such a relationship with the Division's stakeholders will improve planning processes and make collaborations more effective.

The model will be developed through a three-month process to begin in January, 2014. The process will:

- Engage residents and stakeholders through a series of consultation sessions, to occur throughout the months of January and February. The purpose of the meetings will be to assess the state of “Stakeholder Engagement Today” through

an understanding of what we do well as a Division and where there are gaps or areas for improvement;

- Include an online component to allow residents who are not able to attend in-person events to access all engagement materials and provide feedback on their own time;
- Be directed at specific audiences, including internal City Planning staff, residents, and other stakeholders;
- Specifically address alternative means of engaging the public through the use of web-based tools; and,
- Include an implementation framework.

Findings from the consultation process will be used to inform a new community planning model that will emphasize engagement. The recommended model will be brought forward to the Planning and Growth Management Committee at its April 15, 2014 meeting.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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City Planning Division

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 1: Official Plan Policies on Public Engagement in the Planning Process

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## 5.5 THE PLANNING PROCESS

### POLICIES

#### 1. Public Involvement

A fair, open and accessible public process for amending, implementing and reviewing this Plan will be achieved by:

- a) encouraging participation by all segments of the population, recognizing the ethno-racial diversity of the community and with special consideration to the needs of individuals of all ages and abilities;
- b) promoting community awareness of planning issues and decisions, through use of clear, understandable language and employing innovative processes to inform the public, including the use of traditional and electronic media; and
- c) providing adequate and various opportunities for those affected by planning decisions to be informed and contribute to planning processes, including:
  - i. encouraging pre-application community consultation;
  - ii. holding at least one community meeting in the affected area, in addition to the minimum statutory requirements of the *Planning Act*, for proposed Official Plan and/or Zoning By-law amendments prior to approval;
  - iii. ensuring that information and materials submitted to the City as part of an application during the course of its processing are made available to the public; and
  - iv. ensuring that draft Official Plan amendments are made available to the public for review at least twenty days prior to statutory public meetings, and endeavouring to make draft Zoning By-law amendments available to the public for review at least ten days prior to statutory public meetings, and if the draft amendments are substantively modified, further endeavouring to make the modified amendments publicly available at least five days prior to consideration by Council.