



Mimico Lakeshore Community Network  
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November 22, 2019

Re: 2019.GV5.1, Special Committee on Governance - Summary of Findings

To Councillor Grimes, Mayor Tory, and Council members:

I am writing on behalf of the Mimico Lakeshore Community Network, an umbrella group that brings together eight community organizations concerned with planning and other issues in the Etobicoke Lakeshore area.

Our current system of governance, as it has developed in the years since amalgamation, suffers from a serious “democratic deficit”—a deficiency in the structures and practices that should serve to ensure a democratic form of governance.

First and foremost, current systems and processes lack transparency. Key determinations of too many planning matters are decided by the remote and inaccessible Local Planning Appeal Tribunal, through a settlement negotiated behind closed doors with developers, lawyers, and lobbyists, and/or by City Council in a confidential, in-camera sessions. The final outcome can be, and often is, vastly different from what members of the community discussed, desired, and thought they had achieved.

Another central problem is how much is left to the discretion of the local Councillor without adequate inclusion of local communities. There is too little opportunity for the desires and opinions of residents to be brought to bear on the decisions of our elected representatives.

As a partial remedy for both of these problems, we favour the study and future establishment of citizens’ advisory boards – one in each ward – to provide input and advice to the local Councillor. These boards would be entitled to receive information that is supposed to be made public – for example, the allocation of Section 37 funds – and the Councillor would be obliged to attend the board’s meetings and receive its advice.

The method of selecting the members of the advisory boards needs to be approached with the greatest of care. We do not believe that it is necessary or desirable to have an additional layer of elected representatives. The City already has procedures whereby committees of elected Councillors appoint representative bodies made up of community members with appropriate background and. However the local Councillor could not and should not be allowed sole discretion over appointments to these advisory boards, or the new system would simply reproduce the flaws of the old. There will be a need for extensive study and debate to resolve the issues that arise in this connection.

We perceived these concerns when Toronto had 44 wards. Plainly, it is much worse now that we have only 25 Councillors and some wards contain well over 100,000 people—equating to a mid-sized city. The ongoing review of the City’s governance is an opportunity to mount a radical attack on the problems we have noted and more.

We therefore support study and consideration of other reforms and means of expanded public participation, much of which was expressed via Councillor Carroll’s and Councillor Perks’ motions at committee. We request Council’s support for their expected motions at Council, notably those regarding proper study and consideration of ranked ballots, public campaign financing options, expansion and bolstering of Toronto’s public consultation and stakeholder engagement processes, additional means of increasing civic literacy, permanent resident voting, and increased supports for neighbourhood associations.

Finally, the MLCN joins other voices in suggesting the Special Committee on Governance’s work is just beginning. With so much left to do, we strongly urge Council not to let this opportunity pass you by.

For the Mimico Lakeshore Community Network,

Marabelle McTavish  
President