



ORAL: A Secretariat to Assist Council and Residents' Associations

I'm Max Allen, from the Grange, an incorporated community association just west of City Hall, represented by Councillors Cressy and Layton. We act on matters both local and city-wide (as they affect us locally).

We're glad to think about and participate in new governance experiments – at little or no cost to the City. Many of us have the experience to do this. But like Councillors, we could use a bit of help.

Here are some of the things we have been doing:

The **Grange Park** project, a sensational popular success, was a decade-long effort that we're very proud of. For nearly two years, five Associations including the GCA have been helping the University of Toronto think about their **campus** secondary plan. We worked sometimes with the City and sometimes by ourselves to improve the design and function of a mixed use proposal at **170 Spadina** just north of Queen. We always **encourage public-realm joint ventures** among individual developers, at the moment between DREAM and Tribute on Dundas west of University. At 217 Adelaide, we're supporting a mixed office and hotel with a **POPS plaza** contiguous with adjacent public space. And we joined the City and neighbours in arguing successfully at the LPAT Tribunal against the predictable **bike-lane menace** and **servicing tangle** of a proposal at 46 Charlotte; the Tribunal agreed with us.

Associations are both a source of data and a source of practical ideas. Those practical ideas include ways we've learned to navigate the provincial LPAT. Associations are a reservoir of invaluable local knowledge that is otherwise not easily available to Council. As Council learns to navigate 25 wards, Associations are also learning to navigate new City Hall structures and appeal processes. Here's what else is needed:

In a word: **Secretariats**. It seems likely that Councillors may *collectively* need new resources in addition to expanded *individual* staffs. One possibility is the creation of one or more research and navigation Secretariats like the one that the BIA's currently have within City Hall and which, we argue, the Residents' Associations (and Councillors) need as well. The Secretariats might be modeled on the Congressional Research Service, the in-house research office and think tank associated with the US legislative branch. The CRS provides policy and legal analysis to committees and members of both the House and Senate, on a nonpartisan basis. The Parliamentary Library in Ottawa works in a similar way. Such a body in Toronto consisting perhaps of four staff – and a model already exists in the BIA secretariat – such a *secretariat*, we think, would benefit us all.

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BACKGROUND: A Secretariat to Assist Council & Residents' Associations

Giving, Working, Thinking, Advising. Citizens working – in addition to advising – selflessly for the public good are not just, or even mostly, elected officials. Associations including the Grange Community Association are glad to think about and participate in new governance experiments, and many of us have the experience to do so. We are happy to give away our expertise. [See Lewis Hyde: *The Gift* (1983); David van Reybrouck: *Against Elections* (2016).] How can Associations contribute most usefully in a 25-ward system? What are the pros and cons of four Community Councils organized by ward groupings stretched in vertical “stripes” roughly north-south (to effectively join together the inner-suburbs and the central downtown), versus the traditional “clumps” of geographically contiguous and more homogeneous wards? And where should Associations fit?

Examples. Associations can act in the public interest, effectively and at no cost to the City. The **Grange Park** project, a sensational popular success, was a slogging decade-long effort. At 400 University Avenue, the east-west **pedestrian connection** was preserved entirely because of efforts by the Grange Community Association. Likewise, independent of the Planning Division, the GCA preserved the **connection** between McCaul and Grange Park thru Butterfield and prevented the **dangerous scrim** on OCADU’s McCaul/Dundas building. In the past year, five Associations including the GCA helped the U of T think about their **campus** redesign. We are **encouraging joint ventures** among several developers resulting in public realm improvements at 250 Dundas (18 150969 STE 20 OZ) and 292 Dundas (PL180020, with a 322 sqm corner park) together totalling 899 residential units; and at 217 Adelaide, a mixed office and hotel with a **POPS plaza** contiguous with adjacent public space. And we joined the City and neighbours in arguing successfully (PL161030, a major Board/Tribunal decision) against the **bike-lane menace** and **servicing tangle** of a residential and office tower proposal at 46 Charlotte.

Local knowledge. Associations are a reservoir of easily accessible information when local knowledge is primary and invaluable. Examples abound regarding current municipal needs: The traffic and bike lane situation on Beverley. The upcoming construction management situation on St. Patrick and especially at the Dundas intersection arising from three-building Lanterra project on St. Patrick and Simcoe. The Tribunal intervention of the BBBD association combined with the housing expertise of St. Clare’s in the massive proposal at Bloor and Dufferin (PL180288). Associations are both a source of data and a source of practical ideas.

Charting new waters. At the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal, the LPA Support Centre is not yet helpful. As Council learns to navigate 25 wards, Associations are also learning to navigate new City Hall structures and appeal processes. The ongoing PL180210 appeal of various Rail Deck Park proposals, both public and private, is instructive, including the complex and contentious stated case to Divisional Court which the GCA is participating in.

Secretariats. Councillors may well need new resources in addition to expanded staffs. One possibility is the creation of one or more research and navigation Secretariats like the BIA’s currently have and which, it might be argued, the Residents’ Associations need. The Secretariats might be modeled on the Congressional Research Service, the in-house research office and think tank associated with the US legislative branch. The CRS works exclusively for the United States Congress, providing policy and legal analysis to committees and members of both the House and Senate, regardless of party affiliation. As a public policy research agency, the CRS works primarily and directly for members of Congress, their Committees and staff on a confidential, nonpartisan basis, producing *Reports* and *Issue Briefs*. Previously this work was available only to elected officials, but the September 2018 federal omnibus spending bill made all CRS reports available to the public; the official CRS search portal is <https://crsreports.congress.gov/>. See also <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/policy.html> (on the previous restrictions) and <https://www.everycrsreport.com/>