

## HARBORD VILLAGE RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

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April 9, 2019

### **RE: GV2.2 Special Committee on Governance Work Plan and Engagement Strategy**

To: Chair and Members, Special Committee on Governance  
Attention: Nancy Martins  
email: [gvc@toronto.ca](mailto:gvc@toronto.ca)

Harbord Village Residents' Association supports the staff report and its approach to the Committee's work plan and public engagement plan in general. However, we have a few suggestions, which we believe will improve the outcome of your work significantly.

#### **I. PARTICIPATION**

First, the community should be accorded a full partnership in shaping changes to our system. Council cuts have impacted communities every bit as much as Councillors themselves.

**Suggestion 1: The process your Committee is about to embark on should include a central, clearly defined role for Residents' Associations (RAs) and community groups. We propose the establishment of a Community Advisory Committee made up of representatives from the four Community Council areas to provide input to your Committee and staff on designing the content and form of the consultation process. This Committee could have between 16 to 20 members and would function much like the advisory committees that are now formed whenever there is a significant development application in any given neighbourhood.**

RAs and other community groups are at the centre of the democratic deficit and are now expected to play a much larger role in assisting in the municipal affairs. Some of our Councillors have told us as much already.

Residents' and community associations have one clear area of expertise: they know their neighbourhoods. They deal daily with the problems of the City and their communities. They act as local voices in the formation of City policy and relay information from the City to residents on implementation of policies and from community to councillors on problems as they arise.

Community Advisory Committee members should be imbedded in your process from the outset. They are uniquely positioned give advice on the shaping of content, particularly when their experience of the democratic deficit is quite different from those whose activities are

focused on City Hall. To ignore us is to miss an opportunity for a collaborative consultation from a major stakeholder: the community.

As the process moves along, neighbourhood organizations will be more than willing to facilitate the distribution of communications materials, engage in community-led discussions as suggested by staff and ensure that their area associations and residents understand and are encouraged to get involved in this important conversation online and in person.

## **II. FEEDBACK**

An informed and involved public can generate invaluable perspectives and ideas. To maximize the opportunity for community feedback, the suggested schedule should be expanded.

**Suggestion: We strongly recommend a second round of public engagement to collect feedback on the options staff will develop, including a second set of public meetings, online surveys and community-led discussions. The Committee's work plan should be able to accommodate this, since its one-year timeframe was confirmed at the February 21, 2019 meeting.**

The staff report envisages one round of community engagement, including public meetings, community-led discussions and presumably surveys and other online activities, from May to August 2019. Concurrently, research, analysis, and internal consultations with members of Council are to take place. First, these initiatives should speak to one another.

Secondly, the first round of engagement will be very unfocused, since it will have to fulfil too many functions at once: educating the public about the City's governance; describing the work of the Special Committee; and soliciting suggestions on the challenges Toronto's new governance system is facing with only 25 Councillors and with barely 6 months of experience. Responses from the public can be expected to be sparse, if they get involved at all. In our experience, people will respond far better, when there are specific alternatives to be weighed.

## **III. EXPANDED SUPPORT FOR RAs AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS**

The staff's Preliminary Summary of Submissions does not reflect one of the submissions which spoke to formal City support for Toronto's RAs in their expanded role in Toronto's civic life.

**Suggestion: We support the creation of a residents' association/community groups' support centre at City Hall, which can help volunteers establish an association and be a back-stop for other organizational issues. The City's BIA office can serve as a useful model for such a support centre.**

On April 6, some 220 representatives of RAs and community groups attended a City-wide summit, an initiative with the callname TANGO. In addition to the informal advice

overburdened volunteers from existing RAs are able to provide to each other, attendees expressed a need for some sort of organizational City support for their work in community-building. In future, stronger community organizations—and links between them—will be able to provide good information from a network of RAs and community groups in individual council wards and disseminate information through those organizations. They will also help bridge divides in the wider city.

We look forward to a creative partnership.

Respectfully,

Sue Dexter,  
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