

HARBORD VILLAGE RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

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To: Members of the Special Committee on Governance
City Hall,

June 8, 2019.

As we watch the demands on council mount, we are all the more convinced that the Committee on Governance must have widespread public engagement and be open to real structural change. If the Committee dodges this responsibility, it will have indirectly extended limitation to effective representation beyond the direct effects of the reduction in council from 47 to 25 members.

Recommendations:

- Review outreach to ensure you are contacting the widest possible audience
- Ensure notice of engagement is a minimum of two weeks
- Expand consultation to include major structural change
- Set up an advisory group to achieve maximum public input to your work and timely advice from the community
- Allow simpler adjustments to proceed while clearing the way for a thorough consideration of structural change

Your constituents deserve no less.

As deputants to your previous meetings, we were surprised that we have not been directly informed of your detailed public engagement plans and the contents of your online survey. We are unaware of any media or Committee-driven publicity on the open sessions. To schedule open houses within days of this committee meeting means there can be little effective input from this meeting into planning those sessions.

This is disquieting.

Structural Change

In his initial letter to the Special Committee on Governance, Councillor Holyday called on members of the public to express their opinions on:

*"How the reduction in the size of Council has impacted, or may impact, the City's governance;
and*

*Suggestions for changes to the City's governance structure, including modernizing governance,
following the reduction in the size of Council."*

The Survey

As we read it, the survey only addresses half of the Chairman Holyday's vision and does not zero in on how the reduced Council size has affected respondents' relationships to their Councillors.

There appears to be no room for discussing an expanded and different partnership between Council and community groups in light of Council's much reduced capacity to deal with issues. Nor does there appear to be any consideration to creating together new structures to deal with the shortfall.

Based on what we have seen, it is unlikely residents' associations will be holding their own consultations. A basic precondition for successful meetings of this kind is to have something concrete to work on. Proposals for change spark ideas and engagement. The process outlined, with a single direct contact with residents in each area, reads, at best, as a baseline: a helpful snapshot in time, but not a design for creative engagement with the community.

The Advisory Group

In our first submission, we suggested setting up an advisory group—simply in the interests of informing us and community groups of all kinds across Toronto, but also to have a way to give you our best advice on your plans for outreach before you are committed to a course of action.

Had such a stakeholder group been in place, we would have requested a minimum of two weeks' notice for the open houses and we would have asked for a number of changes to the survey. Instead, on short notice, the schedule has your committee meeting in the same time frame as the only public meetings contemplated and the survey has already been posted online. We hope it is not too late for meaningful comment.

The Work Plan

After listening to the discussion at the last meeting, it might seem sensible to divide the committee's work into two sections.

Changes to processes directly impacting Councillors are the low-hanging fruit. Based on the 6-months' experience with the re-organized Committee structure and external Agencies, Boards and Commissions, modifications may be in order. Establishing a support function for community groups, so that they are able to assist Councillors better and more consistently, is a matter of allocating the necessary resources. These types of changes can be implemented quickly.

Longer term, we believe it is essential the Committee not exclude in depth consideration of major changes to deal with the democratic deficit. Electoral reform has already been mentioned. This could include topics such as major restructuring modifications, expanded use

of working groups or the creation of community boards empowered by delegated powers from community councils.

It would be short-sighted to preclude major change.

This is both about you, and about us. The reduction in the number of councillors directly impacts those they serve. In the interests of democracy and full consultation, this Committee should be given time and staff to ensure residents are not further short-changed.

Respectfully,

Sue Dexter
Board
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