



Mimico Lakeshore Community Network
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To the members of the Special Committee of City Council on Governance:

We are writing on behalf of the Mimico Lakeshore Community Network, an umbrella group that brings together seven community organizations concerned with planning and other issues in the Mimico area.

In our opinion, the system of governance in the City of Toronto, 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, the entire system is severely lacking in transparency. After a reasonably transparent process that has included community consultations, a statutory public meeting and open meetings of City Council, the final determination of all too many planning matters is made by the remote and inaccessible Local Planning Appeal Tribunal, or through a settlement negotiated behind closed doors with developers and their lawyers and lobbyists, and approved by City Council in a confidential session. 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, as we see it, is that too much is left to the discretion of the individual local Councillor, and 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 would favour the 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 board members would be chosen so as to reflect different strands of opinion in the ward. Thus, in a ward that elected a Councillor with views of a left-of-centre character, the opinions of residents with a right-of-centre orientation would not be excluded from the discussion of matters concerning that particular ward; and vice versa.

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 of the residents. The City already has procedures whereby committees of elected Councillors appoint representative bodies made up of community members with appropriate background and expertise – for example, the Heritage Boards. Plainly the local Councillor could not be allowed sole or excessive discretion over appointments to the advisory boards, or the new system would simply reproduce the flaws of the old. There will be a need for extensive examination and debate to resolve the issues that arise in this connection.

We perceived these things to be problematic in the days when Toronto had 44 City Councillors and each ward had a population equal to a small city. Plainly it is much worse now that we have only 25 Councillors, and some wards, such as our own Ward 3, have a population well over 100,000 – enough to make a middle-sized city.

The present review of the City's governance is an opportunity to mount a radical attack on the problems we have noted. We strongly urge you not to let the opportunity pass you by.

For the Mimico Lakeshore Community Network,

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