



Member Motion

City Council

Motion Without Notice

MM5.28	ACTION			Ward: All
--------	--------	--	--	-----------

Defending Design in the Site Plan Process - by Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam, seconded by Councillor Brad Bradford

** This Motion has been deemed urgent by the Chair.*

** This Motion is not subject to a vote to waive referral. This Motion has been added to the agenda and is before Council for debate.*

Recommendations

Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam, seconded by Councillor Brad Bradford, recommends that:

1. City Council advise the Province and the Minister of Municipal Affairs that the current site plan approval process as written in the Planning Act provides for higher quality buildings, including greener and more sustainable materials, improved safety, provides for an improved public realm, protects the vision of architects; and, is a matter of public interest.
2. City Council advise the Province and Minister of Municipal Affairs that the current site plan approval process as written in the Planning Act properly supports the role of Design Review Panels to help provide expert advice to city staff, developers, and architects to improve the quality of the finished built-form.

Summary

The Provincial Government has announced, most recently through a letter to the City of Toronto at the beginning of March, 2019 from Municipal Affairs Minister Steve Clark, that it will continue to review changes to the Planning Act and Provincial Policy Statement. One of those suggested changes would reduce the scope of review for municipalities during the site plan process to only public realm matters. One of the suggested changes by the Ontario Association of Architects that may be contemplated would reduce the scope of review for municipalities during the site plan process to only public realm matters. The City of Toronto is opposing such a change.

In early 2019, the Ontario Association of Architects submitted a letter to the Municipal Affairs Minister Steve Clark requesting an amendment to the Planning Act to remove “the colour, texture and type of materials, window detail, constructions details, architectural detail and interior design of buildings” from the Site Plan Approval process. This change was proposed by the current Provincial Government through Bill 66, Restoring Ontario's Competitiveness Act, although the proposed Planning Act changes in Bill 66 were later withdrawn. I understand from speaking with Ontario Association of Architects members here in Toronto that the

Ontario Association of Architects did not consult with their membership before releasing this letter.

Ontario Association of Architects stated goal by requesting design exclusions is to reduce the time it takes for site plan applications to receive a notice of approved condition, therefore saving developers money. A proper review of the Site Plan Process in Toronto would likely indicate that the bulk of the review for your typical tall building is spent not with architects, but with engineers whose job it is to ensure there is adequate infrastructure to provide power and water to a building and to ensure trucks and other delivery vehicles can properly service a building.

The current Site Plan Process in fact protects the architect's vision. Most architects will proudly show off their work at public meetings. Indeed, the design is often used to help convince both local residents and future homeowners that they are investing in quality architecture that is fully expected to have a lasting, positive impact on our streetscapes and neighbourhoods. The design of our buildings would become threatened by potential value engineering, allowing developers to replace high quality brick and stone with stucco or other cheap materials should they choose, as happened in the past in Toronto before site plan considerations were broadened for municipalities.

There are many important pieces that contribute to building a healthy and resilient city that are secured through the Site Plan Process. One key Toronto initiative is the Toronto Green Standards. Through the Site Plan Process, the City secures mandatory attributes such as green roofs, bird-friendly and energy efficient design in our new tall buildings. Measures such as these are threatened if staff cannot secure them through Site Plan. The Ontario Association of Architects supported the introduction of Version 3 of the Toronto Green Standards in a letter dated to City Council on October 10, 2017. It is difficult to understand why the Ontario Association of Architects has shifted their position on this within a year and a half.

Furthermore, the City has both a Design Review Panel, composed of volunteer architects, landscape architects and urban designers who provide their expertise to City staff and applicants to improve the quality of our built form. While the Ontario Association of Architects claims to support design review panels, their effectiveness is challenged if panel comments cannot be implemented and secured through the site plan process. Both the Toronto Design Review Panel, as well as the Ottawa Design Review Panel, have submitted comments to the Minister of Municipal Affairs requesting that amendments to the Site Plan Process, as proposed by the Ontario Association of Architects, not be implemented.

The Provincial Government has made it clear that they expect to introduce changes to the Planning Act, if not through Bill 66 than through a future bill. Given the public comments by the Ontario Association of Architects, it is appropriate that the City affirm the current Site Plan Approval Process serves Toronto well and should not be weakened in any manner that will compromise high-quality design.

This Motion is urgent as the Province has provided notice that it is actively reviewing the Planning Act.

Background Information (City Council)

Member Motion MM5.28

(<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2019/mm/bgrd/backgroundfile-131290.pdf>)

