

City Council

Motion without Notice

MM27.27	ACTION			Ward: All
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The Virtual World We Live In: Addressing Issues with Online Committee of Adjustment Hearings - by Councillor Jaye Robinson, seconded by Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam

** 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 Jaye Robinson, seconded by Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam, recommends that:

1. City Council direct the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning, to review ongoing public participation issues, in consultation with Members of Council and their offices, and to report back to the Planning and Housing Committee in the first quarter of 2021, with consideration of the following:
 - a. the feasibility of moving the comment submission deadline closer to the hearing date to provide residents with sufficient opportunity to review the submitted plans and provide written comments; and
 - b. a plan to improve the current public notification approach to ensure that notices are received well in advance of the scheduled hearing date.
2. City Council request the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning, to develop and implement protocols for virtual Committee of Adjustment hearings to address technical issues in a timely manner and to provide options to ensure that residents are given an opportunity to participate, with consideration of the following:
 - a. providing real-time technical support; and
 - b. altering the agenda and returning to an application once the technical issues have been resolved.

Summary

In June, the City of Toronto began conducting virtual Committee of Adjustment hearings for the first time since March, when all in-person meetings were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since then, several issues related to public participation have arisen as a result of the new, virtual format. These issues include, but are not limited to, late Public Notices, a reduced timeframe to submit public comments, and an inconsistent approach to technical problems which can prevent residents from deputing.

In some cases, neighbours have reported receiving their Public Notices in the mail only one or two days before the submission deadline. This leaves residents and neighbourhood associations with a very limited timeframe to review the requested variances and complex architectural plans, determine how the proposal might impact their property or neighbourhood, ask questions to City staff and the applicant, and compile the resulting feedback into a written submission.

This Motion builds upon the recommendations approved by City Council at its meeting held on October 27, 28 and 30, 2020 on Item PH16.4, entitled "Addressing the Committee of Adjustment COVID-19 Related Application Backlog". City Council directed the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning to report back on potential improvements to virtual Committee of Adjustment hearings in the first quarter of 2021.

While the system is far from perfect, City Council has made significant strides in recent years toward improving transparency, accessibility, and public engagement in the Committee of Adjustment process. Virtual meetings will likely remain with us for some time, and it is critical for the City to ensure that all interested residents have an opportunity to participate.

Background Information (City Council)

Member Motion MM27.27