

**City Council****Motion without Notice**

MM36.33	ACTION			Ward: All
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**Assessing the Impacts of Iceberg Houses - by Councillor Jaye Robinson, seconded by Councillor Mike Colle**

*\* Notice of this Motion has not been given. A two-thirds vote is required to waive notice.  
\* This Motion is subject to referral to the Planning and Housing Committee. A two-thirds vote is required to waive referral.  
\* This Motion has been deemed urgent by the Chair.*

**Recommendations**

Councillor Jaye Robinson, seconded by Councillor Mike Colle recommends that:

1. City Council direct the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning, in consultation with the General Manager, Toronto Water, the Chief Engineer and Executive Director, Engineering and Construction Services, the Chief Building Official and Executive Director, Toronto Building, the General Manager, Parks Forestry and Recreation, and relevant divisions as well as external agencies and research institutions including the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, to report back on strategies to address the impacts of developments referred to as "iceberg houses," single-family detached dwellings with multi-storey basements that extend significantly beyond the surface footprint of the building, such report to include:

- a. a review of issues including, but not limited to:
  - i. soil permeability and erosion;
  - ii. mature tree injuries and removals;
  - iii. damage and stormwater management; and
  - iv. impacts to neighbouring properties during and post-construction;
- b. mechanisms to address water management issues through the minor variance review process, with a specific focus on environmentally-sensitive areas;
- c. a review of soil depth requirements to achieve the functional benefits of softscaping, including soil permeability, water absorption and root health, as well as the implications of reduced soil depth due to an extended underground basement for on-site tree replanting agreements; and
- d. a jurisdictional review of best practices in other high-density municipalities, including London, England.

## **Summary**

"Iceberg houses" are single-family detached dwellings with large, multi-storey underground basements that protrude significantly beyond the surface footprint of the building. In London, England, iceberg houses have resulted in the collapse of neighbouring home foundations, shifting ground levels, and excessive noise and vibration during excavation. As a result, they are significantly restricted in certain areas of the City.

The environmental impacts of iceberg houses are also a cause for concern, particularly within sensitive contexts such as ravines and flood plains. The limited soil depth resulting from extended basements can reduce soil permeability, increasing stormwater runoff and disrupting root systems. These applications also often require the injury or removal of trees, while extended basements reduce the viability of on-site replanting post-construction.

In a recent example, an iceberg home was approved by the Committee of Adjustment in the Hoggs Hollow neighbourhood, which is a City-designated Natural Heritage System, despite a report from Urban Forestry recommending refusal. The approval resulted in the loss of nine trees, including a mature sugar maple tree estimated to be roughly 250 years old.

This Motion is urgent because a holistic review of the impacts of this form of development is urgently required to address current and future minor variance and building permit applications for homes with extended, multi-storey basements.

## **Background Information (City Council)**

Member Motion MM36.33