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Date: April 21, 2021

To: Planning and Housing Committee

**Memorandum: Suggestions to enhance the Virtual Committee of Adjustment Public Hearing Process**

**Committee Members:**

Thank you for the opportunity to make suggestions to enhance the COA Process. We would like to say that our impression is that City Staff has been doing their best to adapt to these challenging times.

The LBNA regularly attends COA hearings and TLAB hearings and has made the transition to the virtual platforms. We have also done our best to coach residents in making the same transition. We acknowledge that the declared “State of Emergency” is still in effect, but in light of day-to-day business resuming, barriers to residents still exist that need to be addressed.

**1) Access to information for upcoming applications.**

- a) Notification notices may meet the statutory requirements however it is assumed that the people that are receiving these letters are sophisticated enough to participate fully in the new virtual process in a very short timeframe. This is often not the case. The City Offices are still closed and available only by email. This does shut some residents out of the process. There are no staff designated to answer questions or to coach residents on how to participate effectively in a COA hearing.

**Suggestion 1** – This is a scheduling problem that could be solved if the timelines were stretched out and residents were notified earlier. We aren’t aware why the **Application form** can’t be posted online once an application has been received by the COA and prior to the final plans being posted. This is a simple method to give residents a small notification that a change is happening in their neighbourhood. There is no financial impact to this solution.

**Suggestion 2** – There should be a help line specifically for COA matters accessible by phone. The purpose of this staff member would be to address matters that you used to be able to go to the COA offices and ask questions about.

**2) Staff Planning and Urban Forestry Reports are not available prior to the residents' letters being due.**

- a) Important issues such as conformity with the OP and impact of a proposed development on protected trees are addressed from the City point of view in these reports. It is important that this is shared with residents. Residents can also assist in identifying errors (missed protected trees on abutting lots and variances, etc.).

**Suggestion 3** – Staff Planning and Urban Forestry reports need to be disclosed a week earlier to give residents a chance to respond. We are not saying this is an opportunity for the applicant to make further changes that the residents would not have the opportunity to respond to.

**3) Opportunity for settlement in the virtual world.**

- a) With the Virtual platform, the “talk in the hall” to explore settlement options has been lost.

**Suggestion 4** - Web Ex has the ability to use virtual break-out rooms for discussions amongst the applicants and residents.

**4) Ability to visually track the Agenda.**

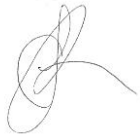
- a) The agendas are full and rarely run according to schedule resulting in delays. This is a strain on resources, specifically the bandwidth available to run the virtual meeting. Lengthy sessions were always a problem with the in-person public hearings where you were committed to the entire session.

**Suggestion 6** – Have a visual cue on screen so attendees can track where in the agenda the Committee is at. This can be as simple as a whiteboard. Attendees can then log in for the sound check, then monitor the session until their turn in the agenda. There is no financial impact to this solution.

Resources should not be a barrier. OREA has reported in 2021 astronomical increases in sales, average price and number of new listings in homes and BILD reports that they are responsible for 7% of the province’s GDP. In short, fees could be raised and the City should not be shy in collecting them.

Thank you for this opportunity.

Sincerely,



Christine Mercado

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