

Employee Talent, Retention and Attraction - City Planning

Date: June 20, 2022

To: Planning and Housing Committee

From: Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning

Wards: All Wards

SUMMARY

This report responds to a request from City Council to report to the Planning and Housing Committee on strategies to retain and attract Planning staff. This report was prepared in consultation with People and Equity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning recommends that:

1. Planning and Housing Committee receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

City Planning confirms that there are no financial implications resulting from the recommendations included in this report.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed and agrees with the financial impact statement.

DECISION HISTORY

City Council at its meeting of February 17, 2022 adopted the 2022 Operating and Capital budgets. The link to the Council decision is below:

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2022.EX30.2>

City Council also adopted Motion 13 requesting the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning report to the Planning and Housing Committee in the second quarter of 2022 on strategies to retain and attract Planning staff.

COMMENTS

City Planning, together with our many partner divisions across the Public Service, is helping to build Toronto's future by managing the growth and physical form of the city - how it looks and feels, how people and goods move and the opportunity it provides in terms of homes, jobs and services to its current and future residents. The division structure is designed to deliver both current planning and development review services through 4 community planning districts (North York, Etobicoke York, Scarborough and Toronto East York) and long range and city wide service units covering a range of disciplines: Strategic Initiatives, Policy and Analysis; Transportation Planning; Urban Design (which includes Heritage Planning), Zoning and Committee of Adjustment; and the Waterfront Secretariat.

City Planning has an approved complement of 477 full time equivalent staff. The vacancy rate as of April 30, 2022 was 12.8%. Given constant promotions, resignations and retirements, there is substantial change happening in the staff complement. Twenty five percent (25%) of the staff are new to the Division since January 2020, indicative of the dynamics discussed below.

Changing circumstances around recruitment and retention of employees is a recognized international situation presenting new challenges in a world emerging from the global pandemic. In what has been referred to as the "great reassessment", employees everywhere are reassessing their life choices including their employment opportunities. Employers too are reimaging their services and their operations for changing circumstances and evolving interests of employees. City Planning is not immune from these dynamics and indeed, many divisions across the City are challenged in the same manner given the labour market and the myriad of disciplines the City requires to provide the broad range of services necessary for a diverse City of 3 million people.

The pace of turnover in the organization is a symptom of many drivers including the demographics of the employees, compensation, work environment, the nature and satisfaction of the work and perhaps most importantly, the overall culture. From recent exit interviews and discussions with staff undertaking interviews and recruitment in City Planning in particular, prominent factors include:

Compensation: pay scales for both unionized and non-unionized staff are not competitive with both public and private employers; this has been a fast moving situation where the City is often outbid at certain levels in a like for like situation, often with an offering that has other attributes that contribute to the decision to exit; this is perhaps taken centre stage much more so than it has in the past.

Flexibility in making offers: flexibility in making offers is sometimes limited by temporary employment status, vacation and benefit entitlements for new employees. This has been identified as one of the biggest deterrents from applicants accepting temporary positions at the City and for attracting new staff coming from positions where vacation and entitlements are already established.

Life cycle: retirements at the City reflect the aging workforce; in City Planning, it is likely that the retirement cycle has or is peaking as the median age of employees is getting younger; the Division has many new staff many of whom are earlier in their career developing their work experience.

Work characteristics and work/life balance: the intensity of work in a municipal planning context where everything can and is tested in the public domain often including providing evidence or your opinion in public; often being in conflict situations or in negotiations and in litigation such as the Ontario Land Tribunal are all part of the job that can be challenging; being disciplined about work/life balance given the environment is often cited by departing employees.

Portability: planners are problem solvers and the experience they gain at the City makes them attractive candidates for other divisions and the private and non-profit sectors; in professional disciplines, employees have portable skills and talent suitable for a competitive market and allows people to choose multiple opportunities in their career and change jobs with greater frequency including to other locations

Cost of living: typically, people are spending much more than 30% of their income on housing in Toronto; depending on where you might be in your life, whether you have children or other dependencies or whether you require daycare or what your transportation needs are for a commute. These are all factors that make Toronto a comparatively expensive city for prospective employees.

A number of the issues identified above and applicable specifically to unionized staff, are discussed by the City when negotiating a collective agreement. All terms and provisions of the collective agreement are in effect for the duration of the agreement and no changes may be implemented outside of any negotiations with the Union.

Workplace culture is generally the overall atmosphere of the work environment. Values around how "people centred" the organization is, how innovation is encouraged, how risk taking is considered, how respect is valued and how many other elements all shape an organization's culture. An added element for the City is the "fishbowl environment" where interaction with the public is front and centre, where expectations are high and where attitudes about trust and confidence in government are typically "shared", sometimes very assertively and often with a negative bias. Ultimately, issues are also discussed in a political context which can shape the manner of discourse

The culture relates in part to the front line experience of many of the staff in City Planning who deal with the constant balancing of public and private interests. What attracts staff to municipal planning is the chance to influence and make a difference, to

make the City a better place to live for everyone and contribute to the need to make Toronto more inclusive and climate adaptive. In a professional role, staff have to separate themselves from personal interests and provide their best professional advice to City Council who make the decisions. That is the nature of the role and is no different in the private sector where at times, the decisions may not align with the direction the employees have recommended.

Being able to accommodate staff who wish to stay with the City and / or the Division is an ongoing objective and can sometimes lead to concerns about current roles limiting career growth. Being mindful and deliberate about creating a career growth plan is important for staff and managers across the City as the City can offer incredible opportunities for change while "staying" a City employee.

City Planning has been addressing recruitment challenges on a regular basis in an effort to consistently manage and fill vacancies that are created by resignations, retirements and normal turnover. City Planning and other divisions involved in development review have been provided support from the C2K team to advance and coordinate hiring as a priority. In addition, a dedicated team of HR Consultants was created to work with the Division to ensure job competitions are advanced in a timely manner. Staff in People and Equity as well as senior staff in the organization recognize the challenges the City is currently facing to attract and retain talent and as noted, is not exclusive to City Planning. A number of measures by People and Equity are underway to expedite recruiting, address market competitiveness and internal compensation.

Despite the actions and strategies implemented to date by both the Divisions and People and Equity to fill positions, we continue to experience challenges filling vacancies especially in the temporary classification.

More broadly, City Planning has prided itself on building a positive workplace culture of engagement, team purpose and professional development. Tradition around town halls, team events and learning at all levels is central to maintaining support and professional growth including opportunities for internal reassignments, promotions, working on staff teams, stretch exercises and work variety. Two other areas that are meaningful to stay competitive include working to provide modernized technology tools that respond to today's practices, market and employee skill set - both divisionally and at a city wide level and improving how on-boarding and training is provided especially when there are a high number of new employees. There is always more than can be done but a focus on people, on supporting mental health and realizing our growth are all essential. There was a focus on communication during the pandemic and has more recently been a focus on reconnecting as the teams reunite in person. The Division also seeks feedback from staff on process, operations, wellness and culture including recently views on how to make the hybrid workplace work for everyone.

The evolution of work from home and the hybrid work environment including undertaking virtual engagement in addition to in-person engagement has had its benefits and challenges. Overall, where services can be performed remotely, the hybrid

environment has supported a better work life balance for many staff and has helped to keep the organization more people centred and stay competitive with organizations that operate hybridly.

Recruitment is supported by a number of activities including:

- hiring from the annual Employment Survey students
- ongoing engagement with Urban Planning programs at post-secondary institutions
- participation in urban planning and development organizations such the Urban Land Institute and the Canadian Urban Institute
- professional development opportunities and engagement
- direct recruitment through the Ontario Professional Planners Institute and the Canadian Institute of Planners and other professional associations

Overall, recruitment and retention challenges are significant and without precedent in recent times. The response to these issues are highly influenced by many factors that have been outlined in this brief report. Currently, the most significant challenges are to find ways to remain competitive with compensation especially for key strategic roles, and to manage the risks associated with meeting service levels and ambitious timelines called for by legislation whether for policy development or development review. Notwithstanding, the City Planning Division remains committed to a mission to provide service excellence and the best possible advice to City Council with choices that meaningfully address the need to make the City more inclusive, sustainable and competitive.

CONTACT

Gregg Lintern, Chief Planner and Executive Director
City Planning
Tel. No. 416-392-8772
Email: Gregg.Lintern@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

Gregg Lintern, MCIP, RPP
Chief Planner and Executive Director
City Planning