

City of Toronto Executive Committee
Toronto City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, Ontario M5G 1P5

April 14, 2026

RE: Towards a Beautiful City: Update on Priority Items

Her Worship Olivia Chow and Members of the Executive Committee,

On behalf of the Toronto Society of Architects, we would like to express our support for the work being undertaken under the City's "Towards a Beautiful City - A Path Forward" and the positive impact it can have on the everyday life of Torontonians.

As an organization which advocates for design excellence in our city, we are encouraged by the report's recognition that "best value" in our built environment is not about lowest fee, but the long-term, multigenerational impact of what we build. Quality is critical in creating spaces that are more livable, attractive and resilient, capable of serving not only the current generations of Torontonians but the many yet to come, and creating high-quality spaces should be a paramount goal for our city.

Of the many updates contained in this report, we would like to express our particular enthusiasm for the review of Toronto's procurement practices, a process we have long advocated for. Back in 2004, the TSA penned a letter to then Mayor David Miller titled "Toward a Clean and Beautiful City Initiative - 10 Suggestions" [see appended]. In it, reviewing the City's procurement process for design services was identified as a critical issue affecting the quality of our city's built spaces, and we are encouraged to see this important review finally take shape.

The move towards competitions, Qualifications Based Selection (QBS), and median-priced scoring are all positive steps towards a system that prioritizes quality and best value, rather than lowest fee and process. So too is the increased focus on encouraging and facilitating the participation of small local practices in the procurement process.

However, the success of all of these initiatives will depend on the details of their implementation, and we ask the City to commit to working closely with industry partners to ensure any new policies, templates and processes created will lead to the intended results of this review. Feedback from our membership through multiple roundtables and

discussions indicate that there are still many challenges when it comes to responding to and working on City-led projects, including cumbersome RFP requirements, onerous contract conditions, unclear scopes of work, and lack of coordination between departments. Reforming procurement is an opportunity to address many of these fundamental issues which discourage participation, make inefficient use of resources, and detract from the shared goal of building an excellent public realm.

We are also encouraged to see this report's focus on maintenance, another critical issue deeply affecting the quality of our built environment. While designing excellent new spaces is important, so too is ensuring the state of good repair of the many significant parks, art pieces, plazas, and buildings we already have—including ensuring any repairs and updates take into consideration the space's original design intent and quality.

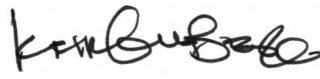
We look forward to seeing the implementation of these long overdue reforms to how we procure, build and maintain our built environment, and remain committed and available to assist the City in this work—including facilitating discussions with the industry and design community.

Let's work together to give Torontonians the built environment they deserve.

On behalf of the Toronto Society of Architects,



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May 10, 2004

Your Worship Mayor David Miller
City of Toronto
100 Queen St. West, 2nd Floor
Toronto, ON
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Re: **“Toward a Clean and Beautiful City Initiative – 10 Suggestions”**

Dear Mayor Miller:

We are writing to congratulate you and members of council on the “Clean and Beautiful City Initiative”, and to offer the support of the Toronto Society of Architects in our collective efforts towards achieving that goal. We also applaud the initiative of the Board of Trade, as described in their December 2003 letter to you, in suggesting strategies to “...*foster excellence in urban design and architecture.*”

In that spirit we offer the following **10** suggestions. As noted below, we wish to indicate our support for various initiatives that have already been identified and to suggest some others:

1 A Series of Public Discussions on “Beautiful City”

Last Friday, the TSA, in partnership with the Ontario Association of Landscape Architects (OALA), sponsored the first in what we hope to be a continuing series of public discussions and presentations on “Beautiful City”. The first in this series featured noted Pittsburgh urban designer Ray Gindroz, (here in town for a public meeting on the well received urban design plan for the West Don Lands), who spoke to the theme, “*The Beautiful City: What is it, why is it important, and how do we build it?*” The event was well attended and included a panel of city staff representing Urban Development Services, Works and Emergency Services, and Economic Development, Culture and Tourism, as well as a representative from the Board of Trade. We have a number of other speakers in mind for this series of public forums, and by way of a copy of this letter, invite the Board of Trade to join us in co-sponsoring future events.

We also wish to extend an open invitation to you, to be one of the future speakers.

2 Improvements to the Urban Design Awards Program

We support the suggestions of the Board of Trade regarding improvements to this valuable program. We suggest that the timing of the next awards program be scheduled for May of 2005, to coincide with, and to build upon, the City's already quite successful Doors Open event, and with the TSA's emerging plans for a series of events next May to be titled "*Toronto Architecture Month - 2005.*"

If we wish to truly recognize those who strive for urban design excellence in this city, then we need an event that appropriately celebrates their achievements. Notwithstanding the significant efforts of the staff of the Urban Design Section to coordinate the current program without any financial support from the city, the current, less than impressive, presentation held at the end of a typical working day in the dimly lit, rear hallway of the main floor of City Hall, next to the tax collection wicket, (rarely with any councilors in attendance), hardly seems to fit that bill.

3 Recommended Budget Increase to the Urban Design Department

We join the Board of Trade in recommending an overall increase to the budget of the Urban Design Department and suggest that the grossly inadequate current capital budget of \$1.2 million be increased to \$5 million for 2005. While the challenges related to the objectives of "Beautiful City" are far more than financial, the current budget for improvements to urban design infrastructure across the amalgamated city is less than the \$ 3.7 million it was in the old City of Toronto alone, and pales by comparison to the \$20 million (US) we understand is budgeted annually by the City of Chicago for comparable objectives.

4 Establish an Urban Design Review Panel

While provincial planning legislation seems to limit the current potential of an urban design review panel, we agree with those who have suggested that the concept holds great promise for improving the level of urban design. We understand that the TWRC is planning to establish an urban design review panel for all projects on the waterfront and we suggest the possibility of coordinating their effort with that of the City. We understand that City sponsored projects would not be subject to these relevant provincial regulatory limitations and therefore recommend that Council establish a design panel to review City sponsored projects, including those of "arms length" city agencies such as the Toronto Community Housing Corporation and TEDCO.

Through this effort, the nature of a design review panel, its role, power and mandate, could be explored and potentially result in a recommendation for a city wide panel and potential future legislative reform. We also recommend that the manner in which these panels successfully operate in other jurisdictions (Vancouver, Ottawa/NCC, Boston etc.) be evaluated by city staff. We have recently obtained a City of Ottawa policy paper on this topic, which may serve as a useful reference point as well.

5 Establish Sustainability Standards for Publicly Funded Projects

We encourage the City to begin a process to establish clear objectives and criteria in sustainable design for all city funded projects. The TWRC has indicated their intention to establish a sustainability design objective for all of their projects, and we support and applaud that effort. The City of Seattle has been using the increasingly recognized LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) criteria for all projects funded with public resources for a number of years now, and it would be worth learning from their experience.

6 Review of City's Procurement Process for Design Services

While encouraging developers and architects to improve their level of investment in design and design services, the City needs to significantly improve its own conduct in this regard. The City's current process for hiring design consultants, which emphasizes lowest fee and process over good

value and quality, serves as a serious deterrent to many design oriented consulting firms, who might otherwise be interested in competing for publicly funded projects in this city.

During the last municipal election campaign, all five major candidates for mayor indicated support for a review of the City's procurement process. This comprehensive review is long overdue and should include participation of consultants from private practice in addition to councilors and city staff. An immediate change to the ill advised policy of refusing to disclose city project budgets during a procurement process would be a good (and easy) place to start.

7 Design Charettes

The City's Urban Design Section has organized a series of design charettes over the past couple of years which are intended to help facilitate community consensus on design issues under typically challenging circumstances. These efforts bring together a broad range of parties with an interest in a particular project or neighbourhood plan (including various city departments), in order to work together in generating ideas and objectives. We encourage the City to continue to explore the potential of this approach and to direct necessary funding and staff resources required to ensure success with this effort.

8 Design Competitions

As a signal of the seriousness with which this council intends to pursue the objective of "beautiful city", we suggest that the City sponsor more architectural design competitions for its own projects. This is the norm in most European cities, which generally seem to demand a much higher level of design in relation to all public buildings and spaces.

The TSA is currently committing a significant amount of our volunteer and financial resources in a partnership with the City's Let's Build Program, to organize an architectural design competition for an affordable housing project in the city core. This initiative is intended to increase awareness of affordable housing issues, raise the bar on the design of these projects, (including the establishment of a sustainability standard for design), and to encourage innovative solutions. We congratulate the Let's Build Department on this effort and are hopeful that this process may provide a model for more competitions in the future.

9 Architecture Tourism

There is much to celebrate in the architecture and urban design of our city. Programs, such as those recently announced by the City and encouraged by the Board of Trade, which strive to achieve that goal, ought to be supported. These efforts help to foster our own unique sense of identity as a city, encourage us to collectively maintain a high standard of design and increase awareness of our surroundings.

The very successful Doors Open annual weekend, now in its 5th year and expected to attract 200,000 people to 150 buildings over the last weekend in May, helps us to discover the very best of our city. The TSA has been pleased to work with the Culture Division of the City, in assisting with this year's event focusing on post war architecture, including the May 28 forum at the ROM titled "*Imagining Toronto – How do we build a better city*".

Intended to help raise public awareness of the value of good architecture and urban design, the award winning "*TSA Toronto Architecture Guide Map – 1953 to 2003*", published last year, provides an overview of the last 50 years of architecture and urban design in the greater Toronto area. We are quite interested in achieving a much broader distribution of the guide map and would welcome any suggestions in this regard.

10 Appointment of a New Director of Planning

Paul Bedford provided 31 years of very dedicated service to this city and his vision, energy and commitment will be hard to replace. As the City embarks on this beautiful city initiative, leadership within the planning department will of course be a critical ingredient in its success. We encourage the city to make this appointment a very high priority, based on a broad international search and through the efforts of a knowledgeable selection committee, which ought to include representatives from outside of City Hall.

Thank you very much for your consideration of these suggestions. We would welcome an opportunity to review these with you at your convenience and wish you and the rest of council the very best success in achieving these goals.

On behalf of the Toronto Society of Architects,