

Toronto Planning Review Panel

Summary of Results from the Toronto Planning Review Panel Meeting, held May 14, 2016

About the Toronto Planning Review Panel

The Planning Review Panel is made up of 28 randomly selected Torontonians. The Panel was created so that a representative group of Torontonians could help the City Planning Division guide growth and change in Toronto. They have been asked by the Chief Planner, Jennifer Keesmaat, to work together over the course of two years to provide City Planning with informed public input on major planning initiatives. Members are tasked, in particular, with helping to ensure that these initiatives are well-aligned with the values and priorities of all Torontonians.

In September 2015, 12,000 randomly selected Toronto households received a letter in the mail from the City Planning Division inviting them to volunteer to become a member of this new panel. Over 500 Torontonians applied, and 28 were randomly selected to represent the city.

Members were selected using a civic lottery, a made in-Toronto method that is used to convene Citizen Panels that offer strong demographic diversity and ensure broad representation of the population as a whole. In this case, the civic lottery ensured proportionate representation of Toronto with regard to geography, age, gender, household tenure, and visible minority status, and guaranteed the inclusion of at least one Aboriginal member.

During the fall of 2015, Panel members each dedicated 40 hours to an orientation program that was held over the course of four Saturdays. During that time, they heard from seventeen guest speakers who introduced them not only to the tools of City Planning, but also to the trends shaping Toronto's economy, housing stock, demographics, built form, public realm, transportation system, parkland, and natural environment.

More information about the Planning Review Panel can be found at www.toronto.ca/planning/tprp

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About the May 14, 2016, Meeting of the Planning Review Panel

On May 14th, 2016, the Panel met to offer input to the Planning Division and its partners on two current projects: The Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan, which is a 20-year plan that is being developed to guide investment in parks and recreation facilities, and the 'Growing Up: Planning for Children in New Vertical Communities Study', which is a study that looks at how planning tools can help new high-rise communities better accommodate the needs of families and children. In advance of the meeting, the Panel was provided with preliminary reading material regarding both of the projects. All learning materials shared with the Panel can be accessed by visiting www.toronto.ca/planning/tprp, and clicking on "Learn with the Panel".

To begin the morning session, Matt Bentley, the lead responsible for developing the new Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan, provided an overview of the project. Then Yin Brown, an advocate for the inclusion of people with disabilities and President of the Alliance for Equality for Blind Canadians, and Alex Dow, current program director at the Malvern Family Resource Centre, joined the Panel to share their perspectives on the facility needs of different Toronto residents. After the presentations, Panel members had an opportunity to ask questions of the three presenters before beginning discussions.

The Panel was presented with a series of questions. These questions were discussed in small groups and then collectively as a Panel. The questions were:

"We've identified four important needs that the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan should address: Responding to a changing city; Reshaping facilities to fit evolving needs; Providing quality facilities; and Improving accessibility for everyone. Do you believe we have identified the most important needs facing Toronto's recreation facilities?"

Because of the "Funding Challenge" we've described, it's not always possible to provide everyone with the facilities they might want. Are there particular facility needs that you believe we should prioritize in this new Master Plan?"

Partnerships with others can help us meet as many needs as possible. Do you have any suggestions about how we should work with others to provide great facilities?"

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We want to engage all Torontonians, not just our current facilities users, in a conversation about the future of recreation facilities in our city. Do you have any suggestions about how best to engage those who don't regularly use our facilities?"

In the afternoon, Andrea Oppedisano, lead planner for City Planning's Growing Up Study, presented an overview of the project. Then the Panel was joined by guests Rafi and his son Sako Ghanaghounian, who advocate for families living in downtown high-rise communities through the I Live in the City campaign. Rafi and Sako shared prepared remarks, and so too did Irv Rayman, a member of the Review Panel, who is an architect and a developer who has built many high rise apartments and condominiums during his career, and also raised his family in a high rise. The presentation and remarks were followed by an opportunity for the Panel to ask questions of the guests and presenters before beginning group discussions.

The Growing Up Study Team, using what they heard during first phase of public consultations, created a list of issues that are faced by families living in high-rise communities. These issues were split into three levels: the unit level, the building level, and the neighbourhood level. This list of issues was the basis of the Panel's group discussions. The Panel was asked to first identify any issues that were missed and second, prioritize the issues within the three levels. The following questions were presented to guide the discussion:

1. Have we identified all of the important issues with units faced by families with children in high-rise communities? If not, what's missing?
2. Which unit issues do you think are most important for the City of Toronto to address?
3. Have we identified all of the important issues with buildings faced by families with children in high-rise communities? If not, what's missing?
4. Which building issues do you think are most important for the City of Toronto to address?
5. Have we identified all of the important issues with neighbourhoods faced by families with children in high-rise communities? If not, what's missing?
6. Which neighbourhood issues do you think are most important for the City of Toronto to address?

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Summary of Results

The results of the Panel's discussion are summarized below. Following the meeting, this summary was drafted by the Panel's support staff based on documentation from the meeting and circulated to members for edits and to approve that this summary reflects the broad consensus that the Panel was able to achieve during their meeting. Members were also welcome to submit additional, individual commentary for inclusion in this summary – this individual commentary is included, under the names of individual panel members, in the subsequent section.

Morning Discussion - Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan

Question 1 asked the Panel to reflect on four important needs that the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan is aimed at addressing: Responding to a Changing City; Reshaping Facilities to Fit Evolving Needs; Providing Quality Facilities; and Improving Accessibility for Everyone, and to offer input on whether any important issues have been missed. Members agreed on the following:

Even though this discussion was specifically about facilities, Panel members agreed that it is difficult to discuss facilities without a conversation about programming. The group wondered whether the quality of facilities may in some cases matter less than how facilities are programmed to meet community needs, or how great community programs find access to functional spaces in neighbourhoods. Many panel members believed that having a conversation about facilities without speaking about how facilities are programmed felt incomplete. They felt discussing the two together would ensure a more valuable conversation with the public that led to more substantive and creative outcomes.

However, Panelists did agree that the four broad needs that were identified were important and should be addressed in the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan. During their discussions, panelists raised and discussed a number of specific issues, but found that they all fit in under the four broad needs identified by the city.

In response to Question 2, which asked about how to prioritize facility needs while keeping in mind fiscal limitations, members agreed on the following:

Together, Panelists identified four facility needs that they felt should be prioritized in the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan.

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First, there was broad agreement that priority should be given to geographic communities which are currently underserved, such as Neighbourhood Improvement Areas. Many believed that this will improve accessibility to recreation facilities for the residents who need it the most and help allay growing inequalities between neighbourhoods in Toronto.

Second, they identified the need to create multi-purpose and flexible recreation facilities. As a diverse city, there would always be a diversity of demands. Plus, neighbourhoods in Toronto continue to change. For these reasons, panelists felt it was very important that facilities become more flexible and modifiable. Providing more multi-purpose and flexible facilities will allow spaces to accommodate different users with changing needs, while reducing the need to invest in costly renovations.

Third, Panelists thought that making facilities accessible for people with disabilities should be a priority. The Panel felt an important step towards creating inclusive and welcoming facilities was to ensure that old and new facilities can cater to the needs of people with disabilities.

Lastly, ensuring facilities are sustainable and environmentally friendly was also identified as a priority. This would help save costs while also decreasing the environmental footprint of the facilities.

In response to Question 3, which asked about how the city can partner with others to provide great facilities, members broadly agreed on the following:

The Panel felt partnerships were a useful tool to provide great facilities and help alleviate some of PF+R's fiscal constraints. Many saw Section 37 as an existing form of partnership between the city and developers, and some emphasized the need to rework the way Section 37 funds were allocated. Though they understood that Section 37 was primarily a way to fund increased demand for public amenities in response to new development, these panelists felt the way Section 37 funds are allocated should be reworked in order to distribute more funding to the neighbourhoods where the need for new amenities are greatest, regardless of the pace of local development. Panelists also agreed that the city should continue to explore corporate sponsorships and private donations, including through incentives such as naming rights or plaques.

Panelists were strongly in favour of a more expansive approach to partnerships between PF+R and external partners that would expand resident access to recreation and community building opportunities. Though they were supportive of the idea of

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partnering to build or repair public facilities, they also encouraged PF+R to take a neighbourhood-based approach. This would mean working more with owners of existing under-used spaces (for example in schools, buildings owned by religious and community organizations, and other local assets) to bring public recreational programming into these spaces. It would also mean working with property developers to build recreation spaces that serve the needs of the general public as well as the building's residents or tenants.

Panelists discussed how current programs in park facilities were sometimes not being used despite existing demand for programs in the local community. Panelists felt residents don't always know what programs are being offered. Panelists suggested partnering with local organizations and community groups to better plan and match programs with local demand, and also inform community members about the program opportunities that were available.

In response to Question 4 on how to better engage those who don't regularly use city facilities in the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan consultations, members agreed on the following:

Panelists agreed that it was important for the City to go where people already are, rather than necessarily asking people to come to special meetings about the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan. Attending local community events, for example, was a way to do so. The group also agreed that the conversation about the future of park and rec facilities can also be promoted through local organizations who have relationships with large user or membership bases. Members of the panel also suggested:

- Improving information-sharing and coordination between city departments so that they didn't cause confusion or 'engagement fatigue'
- Ensuring information brochures are available in different languages
- Providing opportunities for Torontonians to contribute to decision-making through panels like the Toronto Planning Review Panel Panels

Afternoon Session - Growing Up Study

In response to Question 1 and 4, which asked the Panel to first reflect on the list of identified unit issues faced by families with children in high-rise communities and propose any new issues, and second, to prioritize them, Panelists agreed with the following:

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Issues

Panelists agreed with the issues already identified but also felt a few were missing. Panelists discussed the need for flexibility and soundproofing at the unit level. The group felt that units had to be designed in ways that allowed their configuration to be changed as the needs of the families changed — to increase storage space or change sleeping arrangements, for example. There was also broad agreement that soundproofing in units was an important issue faced by families with children. Panelists also felt soundproofing guidelines should be strictly enforced by the city to better address sound and noise concerns.

Panelists also believed that affordability of units was also an important issue for families, and that addressing other issues should be careful not to make family-friendly units more expensive.

Considering the lack of affordable housing in the city, especially for families with children, Panelists believed that it is important to work towards creating affordable housing units through the Growing Up Study.

Priorities

Of the identified issues (either presented by Growing Up project staff or identified by panelists themselves), the Panel agreed that most important issues that the Growing Up Study should address was the flexibility of units, affordability of units, and safety of units.

The importance of affordability and unit flexibility are described above. The Panel encouraged the city to work with developers to ensure a sufficient number of units were priced affordably based on their square footage, and suggested the city use incentive programs to encourage developers to create such units

Safety around balconies and windows for children was also highlighted as a priority. Panelists felt the city should continue to enforce strict safety protocols for windows and balconies in high-rise buildings.

Some, though not all, panelist felt the following issues should be priorities:

- Improving soundproofing within units
- Lighting and access to natural light through windows
- Accessibility for those with disabilities

In response to Question 2 and 5, which asked the Panel to first reflect on the list of identified building issues faced by families with children in high-rise communities and propose any new issues, and second, to prioritize them, Panelists agreed with the following:

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Issues

Panelists agreed with the issues already identified but also felt a few were missing. The Panel felt that the issue of common spaces, building safety, easier ground level access, and a variety of unit sizes in a building were important issues that should have been more clearly articulated.

Panelists agreed that the lack of sufficient and appropriate common areas made high-rise buildings less attractive to families with children. For panelists, common areas included indoor play areas for children throughout the building, common terraces, cafes and restaurants on lower floors, and rooms for families to rent out. These spaces would give an spaces for children to play and for families to build community. They also suggested that these spaces be distributed throughout the building rather than only on the ground or basement floor. By distributing them throughout the building, they will be easier for families to access.

General building safety for children was seen also mentioned. Considering the limited amount of space within units, Panelists suggested there be extra locker or storage spaces in buildings for families to use.

Though less desirable than storage in the unit, storage elsewhere was still seen as helpful for families.

The panel also highlighted that families sometimes are forced to move out of a building when their needs outgrow their unit. Panelists believed that all buildings should have a good mix of unit sizes within them so that families are able to move from unit-to-unit as their needs change, without having to move out of the building or the neighbourhood.

Panelists felt families with children often need easier access to outside spaces, and buildings could be configured so that family-appropriate units have easier access to the ground-level, and for elevators to operate more efficiently.

Priorities

There was broad consensus that providing common spaces for families and children to play and gather was one of the most important issues that needed to be addressed. The Panel also agreed that a mix of unit sizes in each building was also a priority.

Some, though not all, panelist felt the following issues should be priorities:
Below is a list of a few other issues some Panels believed were important:

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- Easier access to outside spaces for family units was also seen as a priority.
- Overall safety and security of building
- Air Quality
- The number and size of elevators

In response to Question 3 and 6, which asked the Panel to first reflect on the list of identified neighbourhood issues faced by families with children in high-rise communities and propose any new issues, and second, to prioritize them, Panelists agreed with the following:

Issues

The Panelists emphasized the need to focus on ensuring the efficient provision of key services and amenities for families within the local neighbourhood. Panelists believed it is extremely important to build communities where there are enough schools, childcare facilities, parks, public spaces, and play spaces in close proximity to the high-rise buildings. Ongoing neighbourhood planning was seen as a way to help ensure these services were available over time.

The group also believed there should be more collaboration between developers and the city to invest in large, shared public spaces that families and communities can use, rather than limiting people to seeking amenities in their buildings or in City-owned facilities. These partnered spaces would help create a better sense of community among families, which the Panelists felt is often difficult in a high-rise building environment.

Spacious and safe design of streets would make it easier for families to walk, bike, and use public transit to get to and from local services and amenities.

Priorities

Panelists agreed that ensuring family-friendly services and amenities were nearby is the most important neighbourhood-level issue for the Growing Up Study to address. The Panelists also believe a priority should be placed on how families can get around high-rise communities by ensuring access to safe walking, biking, and transit opportunities.

Additional Individual Commentary from Members:

After reviewing and approving the Panel's summary of input, members had the option to submit additional, individual commentary for inclusion in this summary. None chose to do so.