

Toronto Planning Review Panel

Summary of Results from the Toronto Planning Review Panel Meeting held November 26, 2016

Executive Summary

The Planning Review Panel is a representative group of Torontonians, made up of 28 randomly selected Panelists. Panelists 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. Panelists are tasked with helping to ensure that initiatives are well aligned with the values and priorities of all Torontonians. On November 26th, 2016, the Panel met to discuss the progress of the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan and improvements to the design of development proposal signage.

On the topic of the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan, Panelists concluded that:

- Parks, Forestry and Recreation should prioritize expanding recreation facilities in neighbourhoods with projected future demographics that suggest high needs. Specifically, neighbourhoods that are projected to have more youth, lower incomes, lower health status, and higher crime rates should be prioritized. In addition, new and expanded facilities should be located to provide access (by foot or by transit) to populations that do not already have such access to public recreation facilities.
- Parks, Forestry and Recreation should seek partnerships that improve access to healthy food in community spaces; allow public access to under-used facilities belonging to institutions such as school boards; and animate community centres by providing no- or low-rent spaces to community groups and entrepreneurs in exchange for public programming and community animation.
- Parks, Forestry and Recreation should consider the following three strategies as part of their funding strategy. First, private sponsorship, within limits, should be explored as a way to fund new capital projects. Second, fundraising (such as crowdfunding with a city-wide redistribution mechanism to ensure geographic equity), should be explored to allow willing residents to fund community facilities. Third, development charges and parks levies under Sections 37 and 42 of the *Planning Act* should continue to be used, but also with greater redistribution of funds to support high-needs/low-development neighbourhoods.

As part of ongoing efforts to improve the design of development proposal signage, Panelists examined both the current and new prototype signage found in the Appendix to this document. Panelists concluded that:

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- The current signage is well-designed and includes appropriate content. The 3D model image is particularly effective in providing context about proposed changes. The use of icons to present quick facts is a good idea, though more intuitive icons could be used.
- In the new prototype sign that was shown to Panelists, the increased sign and font size are effective, though font size could be further increased in some instances. The addition of space for a few point-form details about the proposal is also deemed effective, though there seemed to be more text than would be necessary.
- The prototype sign should be changed so that a complete sentence written in the active voice replaces the subtitle. This sentence should include the address, applicant and type of change, and maintain use of the word “proposed” or “proposal” in order to indicate that a decision is pending.
- The prototype sign should be changed so that a customized short link leads directly to the information about the proposal on the Application Information Centre webpage.
- The city planning contact information for the proposal should be for an email and phone number that, if contacted, will definitely get a prompt response. Panelists were not confident that the current contact information would be effective for the duration of the sign's existence, due to staff changes.

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Summary of Results from the Toronto Planning Review Panel Meeting held November 26th, 2016 Background: About the Toronto Planning Review Panel

The Planning Review Panel is a representative group of Torontonians, made up of 28 randomly selected Panelists. Panelists 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. Panelists are tasked with helping to ensure that initiatives are well aligned with the values and priorities of all Torontonians.

In the fall of 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 Panelist. Over 500 Torontonians applied, and 28 were randomly selected to represent the city. Panelists were selected using a civic lottery, a made-in-Toronto method that is used to convene Citizen Panels. This method offers strong demographic diversity and ensures 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, Panelists 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. They also penned their "Guiding Document" – a report that covers their recommended principles and priorities for planning the city.

Over the course of their two year term, Panelists will meet 12 times to provide input to the Planning Division with regards to specific initiatives and decisions:

- In January 2016, Panelists published recommendations on City Planning's draft townhouse and Low-rise Apartment Guidelines;
- In April 2016, Panelists published recommendations on The City's Complete Streets Guidelines & the engagement strategy for Phase 2 of the TOCore Study;
- In May 2016, Panelists published recommendations on the Parks and Recreation Division's Facilities Master Plan, and City Planning's 'Growing Up' Study.
- In September 2016, Panelists published recommendations on The Neighbourhood

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Design Guidelines Project and the Toronto Ravine Strategy.

- In October 2016, Panelists published an evaluation of their work over the Panel's inaugural year, as well as recommendations on how to make the most of the remainder of their two-year term.

Reports and additional information about the Planning Review Panel can be found at: www.toronto.ca/planning/tprp

About the November 26, 2016, Meeting of the Planning Review Panel

On November 26th, 2016, the Panel met to examine two topics: Phase 2 of the Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan, and the Development Proposal Signage Review.

To begin the day, Susanne Burkhardt from Parks, Forestry, and Recreation presented an update on the Facilities Master Plan Consultation Process. They shared feedback from the project's first phase of consultation, including how feedback received during the Panel's May meeting had been incorporated into their new strategic framework and preliminary objectives. They also introduced the questions they hope to address in Phase 2 of their consultation. Panelists then split into three small groups, each to examine one of the following questions:

Question 1 asked Panelists how to identify the most important gaps in facility provision: What are the most important factors when deciding where to build new (or expand old) recreation facilities?

Question 2 asked Panelists to consider how the City can work with others to provide recreation facilities: Which kinds of organizations are most important for the City to partner with to provide recreation facilities, and what partnership outcomes are the most important, when it comes to these facilities?

Question 3 asked Panelists to identify methods of financing the facilities needed: What financial strategies should the City use, especially to address facility gaps in areas of low growth?

Panelists then reported their discussions to the larger group in plenary and built on their ideas through discussion.

Over lunch, Panelists heard from Helen Bulat and Mario Giambattista from the City Planning Division about recent changes to Ontario's Land Use Planning System, including those outlined in *The Smart Growth for Our Communities Act, 2015*. Helen and

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Mario then briefly answered Panelists' questions about the impact of these changes compared to the current system.

After lunch, Chief Planner Jennifer Keesmaat addressed the Panel. She thanked Panelists for their efforts and provided an update on the impact they have had on City Planning, including their recent recommendations regarding the Townhouse and Low-rise Apartment Guidelines. She answered Panelists' questions about current planning projects and about how to ensure their recommendations are useful.

Carolyn Humphreys from the Graphics and Visualization team in the City Planning Division introduced the Panel to the second topic for discussion: Development Proposal Signage. She began by presenting the guiding legislation and Council direction behind the ongoing review of development proposal signage. She also gave an overview of the consultation and research process that led to the current signs.

Panelists were asked to complete two activities.

Activity 1 asked Panelists to examine the current signage and to identify the most effective and least effective aspects of the design.

Panelists worked in small groups and then in plenary to identify a common response.

Before Activity 2, Carolyn shared some results of the consultation that occurred since the release of the current sign. John Canning, also from the Graphics and Visualization team, then presented a prototype sign that was designed in response to this feedback.

Activity 2 asked Panelists to examine the new prototype sign and to comment on which design changes they felt were improvements and which were ineffective. Panelists were also asked to recommend any further changes they would make to improve the design.

Panelists worked in small groups to respond to these questions, and then reported their discussions to the larger group in plenary, before adjourning for the day.

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Detailed 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 Panelists for edits and to approve that it reflects the broad consensus achieved during their meeting. Panelists were also welcome to submit additional, individual commentary for inclusion in this summary, which is included under the names of individual Panelists in the subsequent section.

Topic 1: Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan

Question 1: What are the most important factors when deciding where to develop or expand parks and recreation facilities?

Panelists suggested two types of factors to consider:

- **Projected Demographics of Neighbourhoods:** The Panel suggested that neighbourhoods should be prioritized based on their projected demographic characteristics. They believe, in particular, that neighbourhoods anticipated to have high numbers of youth, lower incomes, lower health status, and higher crime rates should be prioritized for new facility investment.
- **Location and Accessibility:** The Panel suggested that investment into new and expanded facilities should be made in areas that are accessible to those who don't already have easy access to public facilities. For some this meant being within walking distance. For others it also included considerations of easy access by transit.

Once a site is identified for expansion of services, Panelists agreed that the local community should be heavily consulted to ensure their needs are met.

Some Panelists also had the following suggestions:

- Make new investments in ways that create flexible spaces and longer service hours;
- Fund more small-scale improvements with relatively high impact, rather than a few large projects;
- Prioritize parks and recreation facilities for people rather than for pets;
- Complement, rather than duplicate, privately-provided services that are affordable.

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Question 2: Which kinds of organizations are most important for the City to partner with to provide parks and recreation facilities, and what partnership outcomes are the most important, when it comes to facilities?

Panelists suggested three main partnership outcomes. Each outcome directs Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PF+R) to partner with different organisations in the city to increase access to, and improve the quality of, facilities:

- a) Improving Access to Healthy Food:** Panelists suggested creating partnerships with businesses, nonprofits, or community groups to bring food into PF+R facilities. The goal of these partnerships is to use food to encourage community gatherings and to create lively and energetic community spaces. Panelists suggested developing partnerships that foster food-based programming opportunities, including cooking classes, and increased access to community kitchen spaces.
- b) Unlocking Under-used Space:** PF+R should partner with institutions that have underutilized recreation and meeting spaces, such as school boards, colleges, universities, libraries, and private recreation facilities (including condos), to expand community access to these spaces, especially at times when they are not already at full capacity. Partnerships should aim to complement existing PF+R facilities and create recreation nodes – for example, if a PF+R pool is sited beside a school, open areas of the school up for community use, allowing families to partake in multiple activities all at one location.
- c) Animating Existing and New Spaces:** PF+R should partner with community groups (e.g. youth groups, cultural groups, artists), nonprofits, entrepreneurs, and start-ups to help activate and draw people into existing and new facilities. PF+R could offer no or low rent space to these groups in exchange for community events, programming, amenities, or other activities that bring people into PF+R facilities.

Two additional outcomes were identified by a few Panelists:

1. **Maintaining Safety:** Some Panelists suggested partnering with Toronto Police to place community outreach workers in existing PF+R facilities to improve safety and build better relationships with Police.
2. **Generating Sustainable Electricity:** Some Panelists suggested PF+R create partnerships with local renewable energy corporations to use PF+R facilities as sites of local community energy generation.

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Question 3: What financial strategies should the City use to address facility gaps in areas of low growth?

Panelists suggested three strategies for funding capital projects:

- a) **Private Sponsorship:** Panelists noted that modest sponsorship of capital projects already occurs at some City facilities. Most were supportive of exploring private sponsorship opportunities with naming rights to fund new capital projects, within limits.
- b) **Fundraising:** Panelists noted that many residents are eager to fund their community facilities.
 - i) Some Panelists suggested small-scale local fundraising activities.
 - ii) Some proposed a crowdfunding model to select and support capital projects. Other Panelists were concerned that this model could deepen regional inequality in the city. Some suggested mechanisms to redistribute a portion of crowdfunded money city-wide as a way to combat inequity.
- c) **Development Charges:** Panelists supported the continued use of development charges and parks levies permitted in Sections 37 and 42 of the Planning Act. Though they understood that the levies are meant primarily to expand public amenities in new developments, Panelists felt that a portion of these funds should be reallocated in order to fund capital projects and expand facilities in high-needs neighbourhoods across the city.

Some Panelists also suggested the following methods of increasing operating revenue:

- While most Panelists were against increasing municipal taxes such as property tax to fund PF+R facility investments, some suggested working with higher levels of government that have access to more progressive taxation tools such as income tax;
- Designing new and expanded facilities with the goal of reducing operating costs;
- Raising awareness about existing fitness centre memberships and event space, rentals, while simplifying the permitting process, as a way to increase revenue to cover operating expenses;
- Expanding rental opportunities from large event spaces to individual lockers, as a way to increase revenue to cover operating expenses;
- Leasing retail spaces to businesses in recreation facilities, as a way to increase revenue to cover operating expenses;

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- Recruiting more volunteers and offering apprenticeships in order to reduce staffing costs; and
- Exploring more efficient operations for some facilities through outsourcing to private operators rather than City staff.

Topic 2: Development Proposal Signage Review

Feedback from Panelists was categorized into: effective aspects of the current signage, improvements made in the prototype sign, ineffective changes made in the prototype sign, and further changes the Panel recommends.

Effective Aspects of the Current Signage

Panelists were generally supportive of the current sign design, and agreed that:

- The general content is appropriate and useful;
- The 3D model image gives important context about the proposal in relation to its surrounding area;
- The size of the 3D model image is appropriate in relation to the rest of the sign;
- The use of icons where possible is a good idea in principle, rather than plain text;
- The choice of colour and consistency of use are effective;
- The City of Toronto logo lends legitimacy to the signage;
- The large header including the word “Notice” is effective;
- The simplicity of the design allows for clarity;
- Showing the applicant’s name is important.

Improvements Made in the Prototype Sign

Panelists agreed that the following changes made in the prototype sign were improvements on the current sign:

- Increase in font size overall, specifically near the icons as well as for the address and information about the applicant,
- Increase in sign size,
- Increase in space for detail about the proposal (i.e. through descriptive text),
- Addition of the legend indicating the proposal is coloured orange in the 3D model image, and
- Inclusion of district and ward information.

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Ineffective Changes Made in the Prototype Sign

Panelists agreed that the following changes made in the prototype sign were ineffective:

- Provision for too many bullet points in the descriptive text section, where three or four larger sized bullets of text would suffice,
- Removal of the text “A change has been proposed,” particularly because the word proposed (or proposal) is important to include — without it, the sign appears to announce something that is already complete, rather than notify people of their opportunity to participate, and
- Repetition of the file number in the bottom left corner of the sign.

Further Changes the Panel Would Make

Panelists made a number of other recommendations that build on the improvements made in the prototype sign. Panelists generally agreed that:

- Font size should be increased further and bolded where appropriate, especially for text that accompanies icons - removing amount of text from descriptive section would allow this;
- Simple language in the active voice should be used instead of passive voice for any text;
- A complete sentence should replace the address and applicant listing that also states the type of change proposed by the applicant. For example, “ABC Development Corporation is proposing a mixed-use residential and retail building at 123 Toronto Street”; this would reintroduce and re-emphasize the use of the word “proposed”
- The icons indicating size and use are not as intuitive as the icon for *parking*, and should be replaced; icons were generally seen as effective if designed to be clear and intuitive, and other icons could be developed for other aspects of the proposal that would be shared;
- The file number and AIC website link should be replaced by a customized short link leading directly to the proposal's AIC webpage. Font for this website link should also be enlarged.

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Panelists disagreed about three aspects of the signage:

- **Readability while Driving:** Some Panelists felt strongly that the signage shouldn't distract drivers for safety reasons. Others suggested that the signage should give drivers a basic understanding of the proposal, or clearly display a website address in large font.
- **Use of the word Notice:** A few Panelists suggested that the word 'Notice' implied a decision had already been made, and preferred the word "Proposal" or "Application." Others were concerned about the confusion that could occur if people understood "Proposal" to mean that the City was making a proposal. Some felt that "Notice" was the most appropriate term. Some felt with an alternate suggestion to use the phrase "Notice of Development" or "Notice of Proposal."
- **Contact Information:** Some Panelists noted that the Community Planner assigned may change during the time the signage is displayed and recommended hosting a number specifically for the project instead. Others suggested the sign simply direct people to call 311. Generally, Panelists worried that the contact information would become out of date, that the public wouldn't receive responses, and that there would be no way to track information requests that aren't responded to.

Some Panelists also suggested that:

- The 3D model image use different colours to show which parts of the proposal will be used for commercial or residential uses;
- Leaders from the icons be drawn to the corresponding area on the 3D model image;
- The percentage split of different uses be shown adjacent to the use icon, because square metres are not easily understood by all people;
- More explicit text be added to the sign that indicates public feedback on the proposal is being sought;
- A sentence be added to the "in-person" information section of the sign indicating that a letter will be mailed to all residents within 120 metre of the proposal, as required by law;
- A link to the applicant's website be included on the sign so that people can consider the applicant's previous projects;

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- Different languages be added to the sign or AIC website depending on neighbourhood demographics;
- A phone number that residents can SMS (text) message to receive information and share feedback be included on the signs, so as to better engage youth;
- Different size signs be used depending on the site;
- Some small signs be placed on bulletin boards at local community centres;
- Images of each sign be uploaded to the AIC website that can be easily shared through social media;
- The use of recycled, unbleached materials for physical signs is encouraged.

Additional Individual Commentary from Panelists

After reviewing and approving the Panel's summary of input, members had the option to submit additional, individual commentary for inclusion in this summary.

Al Eslami

I'd like to add two points:

First, the Parks & Recreation plan is usefully comprehensive. If implemented, it should have some impact in lower-income neighbourhoods. The thing that I wasn't quite sure about was the topic of public-private partnership. I guess that's the way things are going and one cannot stop "progress." What kind of interest would private enterprises have though, to develop new facilities in lower-income neighbourhoods, other than to sell stuff? I think it's fine if they want to put their names on a facility, but how far do they want to go? That's not very clear.

Another way of fundraising would be to go after wealthy individuals and ask them for large donations. Then, their name can be put on a plaque near the entrance. Also, selling food at those facilities is fine, but what kind of food and who provides the food? Will it be large corporations or local co-operatives? I think it should be emphasized that the food should be healthy and locally produced, rather than junk food with "healthy" labelling.

Second, I feel it would be useful for us to learn about the process through which the raw results of surveys and consultations with focus groups and panels like ourselves are refined and distilled into final policy recommendations. Learning about this process would, among other things, help us come up with ideas that policy makers find useful.

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Otherwise, there is a gap between the public's input and the policymaker's conclusions.

For instance, I felt there was a palpable gap in the content of the presentation by one of the staff members from Parks & Recreation. Once the staff member had presented the summary of the recommendations made by TPRP during its May 14 meeting, as well as the summary of results of the prior consultations with focus groups and so on, she went on to present the conclusions that her office had drawn from that process. However, the relation between those conclusions and the advice that had been offered was not clear, either in form or in substance. The original recommendations had been concrete and specific. The conclusions, on the other hand, felt like simple and straightforward common-sense maxims and guidelines that could apply to almost any project of whatever kind. In other words, I felt that any highly-informed and intelligent individuals could have come up with those conclusions, independently of any specific consultation process.

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Appendix - Development Proposal Signage

Current Sign:



Prototype Sign:

