

Toronto Planning Review Panel

Summary of Results from the Toronto Planning Review Panel Meeting held October 15, 2016 Topic: Evaluating the Panel So Far

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 October 15th, 2016, the Panel met to evaluate the Panel's work over its inaugural year. They concluded that:

- The Panel is more diverse and representative of Toronto than expected; both the orientation and regular panel sessions have been more educational than expected; and the Panel environment has been more open, cooperative, and respectful than expected. That said, there is less clarity than expected about the impact the Panel is having on City policy.
- Ideally, topics brought to the Panel would have an obvious relevance to many different Torontonians; involve actions on the part of the Planning Division that have obvious power to shape the issue at hand; and be presented to the panel in a manner and at a time point where it was obvious they could actually influence the Planning Division's actions.
- Future meetings this term should be used to examine transit and transportation in Toronto, as well as planning topics that have more direct impact on the socio-economic health of the city, such as affordable housing, homelessness, gentrification, achieving broad-based economic prosperity, and addressing growing inequality.
- Preparation materials provided before Panel sessions have been useful for those Panelists that had enough time to review them, but were not easy to scan for those who only had a short amount of time available.
- Expert and staff presentations at meetings were made in a balanced manner, and the diverse range of presenters is appreciated (though an even greater diversity would be beneficial).
- Facilitators helped the group make the most of small group discussions — helping to keep the discussions focused and opening up space so that all voices are included. Going forward, the Panel agreed every small group should have a facilitator who plays an active role moderating their conversations.
- Summaries should be formatted so that readers could draw out the main conclusions more

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quickly. Many suggest an Executive Summary.

- As a group, they were somewhat unclear about their role in the overall planning process and uncertain about the impact of their input. One year into their term, Panelists were eager to see the tangible impacts of their input, as many are motivated to participate in the Panel in large part by the promise of helping to improve City policies and practices. Panelists requested the impact of their efforts be tracked and communicated back to them and to the public through their website, through email, and through in-person updates.

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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

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Division's Facilities Master Plan, and City Planning's 'Growing Up' Study.

- In September 2016, Panelists published recommendations on The Neighbourhood Design Guidelines Project and the Toronto Ravine Strategy.

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

About the October 15, 2016, Meeting of the Planning Review Panel

On October 15th, 2016, the Panel met to evaluate its work over its inaugural year, and discuss how to make the most of the remainder of its two-year term.

The Panel was asked to examine 5 questions:

Question 1 asked Panelists to recall their expectations before joining the Panel and consider: Which had been met or exceeded? Which have not been met?

Question 2 asked Panelists to examine a list of topics from previous meetings and rank which were more or less important for Toronto as a whole, as well as offer suggestions about other important topics they believe should be examined in the remaining seven meetings.

4 **Question 3** asked Panelists how effective the readings and presentations have been in giving them the information they need to then offer back valuable input to City staff. Are there other learning opportunities that Panelists felt would be valuable?

Question 4 asked Panelists to reflect on the deliberation process by which the Panel arrived at its conclusions. Panelists were asked to consider the discussion questions, the small group discussions, and the small-group report-backs. Panelists were also asked about trainings that might help improve their deliberations during meetings.

Question 5 asked Panelists whether post-meeting procedures were effective and clear. They were asked to consider the summaries produced from each meeting, general communications between meetings, and how they would like to hear about their influence on the planning process.

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

To end the day, Diana Birchall, Program Manager, Urban Design from Toronto City Planning, provided an update on the Townhouse and Low-rise Apartment Guidelines, which the Panel had examined during their January session. Panelists provided Diana with brief feedback on the changes made to the Guidelines before they adjourned,

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and were made aware of the opportunity to provide further feedback through email correspondence with Diana.

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 this summary 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.

Question 1: Has the Process met Panelist Expectations

Panelists were asked in what ways the Panel had or hadn't met their expectations. Many Panelists stated that:

- The Panel is more diverse and representative of Toronto than expected;
- Both the orientation and regular panel sessions have been more educational than expected, and have helped ensure that Panelists have an adequate understanding of the issues being discussed;
- The Panel environment has been even more open, cooperative, and respectful than expected;
- There have been adequate opportunities to amend summary documents;
- Organizers have met expectations regarding communications with Panelists and general expectations; and
- There is less clarity than expected about the impact the Panel is having on City policy.

Some Panelists stated that:

- Other Panelists have been more committed than expected to the process;
- City planning was more complicated than expected; and
- The needs of individual Panelists have been better taken care of than expected.

Question 2: Assessing Past Topics and Discussing Future Topics for the Panel

Panelists were asked to assess the topics discussed to date, in terms of how important the topic is for Toronto as a whole. The topics discussed to date are:

- The 'Growing Up' Study: Families in New High-rise Communities;
- The Townhouse and Low-rise Apartment Guidelines;
- The Complete Streets Guidelines;

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- The Parks and Recreation Division's Facilities Master Plan;
- The Neighbourhood Urban Design Guidelines (NUDGs); and
- The Engagement Strategy for Phase 2 of the TOcore Study.

Different groups reached different conclusions. Taken as a whole, none of the topics were collectively seen as much more important than the rest.

Panelists agreed that, ideally, topics brought to them would:

- Relate to issues having an obvious relevance to many different Torontonians;
- Involve actions on the part of the Planning Division that had obvious power to shape the issue at hand; and
- Be presented to the Panel in a manner and at a time point where it was obvious the panel could actually influence the Planning Division's actions.

Panelists generally agreed that at future meetings, the Panel should offer input about:

- Transit, transportation, and congestion in Toronto;
- Planning topics that have more direct impact on the socio-economic health of the city, including affordable housing, homelessness, gentrification, broad-based economic prosperity, and growing inequality

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Some members of the Panel suggested that, at future meetings, the Panel should offer input regarding:

- The influence of the OMB and the role of the Committee of Adjustment;
- Heritage preservation;
- Mixed-use communities;
- Ageing-friendly planning;
- Legibility and simplicity of publicly available information about planning processes and by-laws;
- Infrastructure issues including water, electricity, sewage, with an eye to sustainability and resiliency of these systems; and
- Indigenous approaches to planning and engagement, and historical context.

Question 3: Preparation Materials and In-person Presentations

Panelists generally agreed that preparation materials provided before sessions were useful if one had the time to look at them, but weren't easy for busy people to scan if they only had a short amount of time available. Some Panelists suggested that preparatory materials should:

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- Have a shorter and more direct main section, with optional items for those who have the time to examine them;
- Include a statement of the goals for the session;
- Use more quick links and bullet points;
- Include more visual materials when possible;
- Include more information about speakers and links to their organizations' websites; and
- Be sent out to Panelists two weeks prior to the meeting instead of one week prior.

Panelists generally agreed that expert presentations at meetings were made in a balanced manner, and that the diverse range of presenters was appreciated (though an even greater diversity would be beneficial). Some Panelists provided the following suggestions for improving presentations:

- Provide more time for Panelists to ask presenter's questions, and use a variety of ways to solicit questions from a greater range of Panelists;
- Encourage more interactive presentation styles, as opposed to only PowerPoint slides;
- Short, general re-orientation presentations would sometimes be useful before examining specific topics;
- Increase the diversity of guest presenters. Panelists suggested more diverse cultural representation, representation from social advocates, businesses, developers, as well as those who are the most vocal and effective opponents of development and change; including people who have lived with the negative consequences of certain planning decisions;
- Rather than having one presenter after the other, have presenters on stage together and moderate conversations amongst them so that differences in perspective can be highlighted.

Some Panelists suggested that they would be better prepared to offer input if they were provided with the following additional learning opportunities:

- A refresher on how the City Planning Division is structured, how planning decisions get made, and the different tools the City Planning Division uses to guide change in Toronto;
- More information about the different ways that the Panel could ultimately influence City policy, and how the Panel can track their influence;

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- The powers and roles of different decision-making bodies – the Committee of Adjustment, Community Council, City Council, the OMB, and the Provincial Government;
- How the city is projected to grow and change in the coming decade(s).

Question 4: Evaluating the Deliberation Processes

Panelist generally agreed that the discussion questions were helpful in guiding their deliberations, but that they could be shortened and simplified further. They recommended that discussion questions include both more specific questions that focus on specific issues facing the project team as well as broad catch-all questions that allow for unexpected insights to emerge. Ideally, discussion questions would be circulated in advance.

Panelists agreed that facilitators helped the group make the most of small group discussions — helping to keep the discussions focused and opening up space so that all voices are included. Going forward, the Panel agreed every small group should have a facilitator who plays an active role moderating their conversations. In addition, some Panelists suggested:

- Using a full team of independent facilitators rather than one mixed with City staff, due to concerns about potential bias;
- Having facilitators do more to create opportunities for quieter Panelists to share their perspectives;
- Creating opportunities for Panelists to write their perspectives as part of the deliberation process
- Structuring meetings in ways that encourage Panelists to work in different groups
- Use a wider variety of deliberation tools when appropriate

Panelists agreed that full-panel discussions were generally effective but could be improved in a number of ways. Panelists generally agreed that microphones should always be used, that each table's representative should be chosen at the beginning of the small-group discussions, that the facilitator should play a larger role ensuring that the representative's report on the table's discussion is accurate. Some Panelists also suggested using flipcharts to track what is being said in real-time, while others suggested more could be done to ensure there were opportunities for dissenting viewpoints to be raised.

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Many Panelists felt they had appropriate training and skills to enable them to participate in the Panel and felt comfortable about the group's dynamics. Some suggested there be some short refreshers on small-group work, public speaking, meeting procedures, and the Panel's Terms of Reference.

Question 5: Post-meeting Procedures

Panelists generally agreed that the summaries of their input have been accurate, clear, and comprehensive, and that members have had appropriate opportunities to review, adjust, and approve these summaries.

Panelists suggested that summaries be formatted so that readers could draw out the main conclusions more quickly. Many suggest an Executive Summary. Some thought the inclusion of graphics and pictures about the Panel could help convince readers of the relevance and importance of the Panel's work.

Many Panelists suggested that the process by which Panelists review and approve summaries could be made easier if the main points of the summary were included in the body of the draft summary email.

9 Panelists were somewhat unclear about their role in the overall planning process and uncertain about the impact of their input. One year into their term, Panelists were eager see the tangible impacts of their input, as many are motivated to participate in the Panel, in large part, by the promise of helping to improve City policies and practices.

Some Panelists suggested additional learning opportunities be provided concerning how decisions are made by City Staff and by City Council, while others suggested that more detailed updates be provided about how the Panelists' input had influenced the projects they have examined to date. Panelists requested the impact of their efforts be tracked and communicated through their website, through email, and through in-person updates.

Some suggested that:

- The City create a standard template that they fill in for each Planning project the Panel examines, which shows the various ways that the Panel's input is having an influence. These templates could be updated on a regular basis and shared on the Panel's website. This template could include:
 - a list of decision makers who received a copy of the Panel's summary;

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- a list of the main recommendations from the Panel;
- a statement from the project team about the influence of the Panel's recommendation; and
- links to the documents that track the project's progress, including revised project reports and minutes from Committee and Council meetings related to these projects.
- The hosts include a more detailed update at the start of each meeting (or every second meeting) to update the Panel on the impact of their work on each of the projects they have examined;
- An online collaboration space where they can continue conversations with other Panelists between meetings; others wanted to ensure communication methods do not privilege people with greater access to the internet.

Update: Townhouse and Low-rise Apartment Guidelines Project

After the update from Diana Birchall, Project Lead, about changes made since the

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- The new document appears to be clearer, more concise, and easier to navigate
- The added visuals and photos are helpful in the document. These could be improved further by adding location information for each photo.
- The updated layout with colour-coding is effective
- Referencing related bylaws and guidelines and providing links to relevant documents is appreciated.

Panelists had the option of offering Diana more detailed feedback after the meeting and through email.

Additional Individual Commentary from Panelists

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

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Albert Dowell

I'm concerned that the work of the Panel may be superfluous when the unelected Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) retains decision-making power over planning matters in the city and the province at large. I believe the OMB should be reformed to be more accountable to, and controlled by citizens.

Al Eslami

I'd like to add comments about three questions discussed:

- **On Question 1: Has the Process met Panelist Expectations**

I came to the Panel with the impression that local government was more democratic than the other levels of government. So, I hoped to see my impression confirmed, and to learn whether and how the modus operandi of local government was different and more democratic than that of other levels of government. My impression so far has been that local government is not very different than the other levels, in that its operations are rooted in the priorities and interests of a bureaucracy and the business class.

I also hoped to learn whether citizens can have a real influence to change things, or whether they will simply be co-opted into the existing way of doing things.

- **On Question 2: Assessing Past Topics and Discussing Future Topics for the Panel**

On page 6 of the Summary, we read: "*Panelists generally agreed that at future meetings, the Panel should offer input about . . . planning topics that have more direct impact on the socio-economic health of the city, including affordable housing, homelessness, gentrification, broad-based economic prosperity, and growing inequality.*"

The agendas of the Panel's meetings have so far given the impression that the Planning Division does not see socioeconomic issues as falling within its purview in the first place. Apparently, the Planning Division's work is based on the assumption that socio-economic issues are political issues handled by politicians, not issues that have to do with planning as such.

On the same page, we read: "*Some members of the panel suggested that, at future meetings, the Panel should offer input regarding . . . Indigenous approaches to planning and engagement, and historical context.*"

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Indigenous approaches to planning and engagement provide much more than a "historical context." From a strategic viewpoint, with the environmental catastrophe at hand, which has become even more perilous following the election of a radical climate-change-denier to the US presidency, indigenous approaches should be seen as the path to the kind of future we should all strive for. Tactically, too, tying indigenous liberation to the environmental cause helps bring more people on board, because it will help make it clear that the indigenous person's fight is everyone's fight.

- **On Question 3: Preparation Materials and In-person Presentations**

On page 7 of the Summary, we read: *"Some Panelists provided the following suggestions for improving presentations: . . . Increase the diversity of guest presenters. Panelists suggested more diverse cultural representation, representation from social advocates, businesses, developers, as well as those who are the most vocal and effective opponents of development and change . . ."*

The issue is not about diversity of presenters, but rather about their interests. Nearly all presenters so far had an interest in preservation of the status quo, at least as far as ways of doing things are concerned. Very little or no critical perspectives regarding the planning process itself have been offered, including its strictly sociopolitical aspects.

The label of "opponent of development and change" is a pejorative one (little different than calling someone a "Luddite"). Many people are not opposed to development and change, but rather favour a *different kind* of development and change -- for instance, the kind of development and change that is not focused primarily on the needs and priorities of businesses, city contractors, and developers themselves, and which does not seek to adapt the rest of society to those needs and priorities.

Mark Richardson

In addition to the printed/PDF draft of the **Townhouse and Low-rise Apartment Guidelines** that we reviewed, City Staff should be encouraged to develop interactive web-based tools and short instructional videos to make the guidelines both easily found and consumed by the general public.