



Toronto Planning Review Panel

Summary of Results from the Toronto Planning Review Panel Meeting held January 23, 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



Toronto Planning Review Panel

About the January 2013, 2016, Meeting of the Planning Review Panel

On January 23, 2016, the Panel met to provide input concerning the draft townhouse and low-rise apartment guidelines that are being developed by Toronto City Planning (see Appendix A for the full meeting agenda). Members were provided with [introductory reading material](#) in advance of the meeting. During the meeting, Diana Birchall, Program Manager, Urban Design, and project lead for the guidelines, presented an overview of the guidelines. Panel members also heard short presentations from Danielle Chin, Senior Manager of Policy & Government Relations at the Building Industry and Land Development Association, and Cathie Macdonald, Co-Chair of the Federation of North Toronto Residents' Associations. Panel members then had an opportunity to ask questions of these three guests before beginning their deliberations. All learning materials shared with the Panel can be accessed by visiting www.toronto.ca/planning/tprp, and clicking on "Learn with the Panel".

Members of the panel were then asked to work together to answer three questions. These questions were discussed in small groups and then together as a panel. The questions were:

1. Do you agree that the challenging issues we've described are the most important issues concerning new townhouses and low-rise apartments in Toronto? Are there additional issues that you believe should be given a high priority in the townhouses and low-rise apartment guidelines?
2. Do you agree with the general approach (as it has been described to you) that the guidelines take to addressing challenging issues?
3. Do you have any other input that you think we should consider?

Toronto Planning Review Panel

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.

In response to Question 1 (Challenging Issues), members broadly agreed with the following:

a. Members generally agreed that many of the challenging issues with townhouse and low-rise apartments that were presented by staff are problems worth addressing. Members see none of the issues presented as being irrelevant or unworthy of attention. They agree in principle that townhouse and low-rise apartments can play an important role in Toronto's housing mix and in densifying the downtown core. They are particularly supportive of aspects of the Guidelines that aimed to address the following challenging issues:

- the need for environmental sustainability in design and for longevity of construction materials;
- the importance of accommodating the needs of families with children;
- the need to ensure the visual appeal of new developments, including the need to have new developments complement the character of the surrounding area;
- the need for sufficient and easily accessible parking for residents and guests;
- the need for sufficient and easily accessible storage that ultimately reduces clutter in public view;
- the need to ensure sufficient outdoor lighting in order to maintain and improve safety; and
- the need to address the lack of shared amenity spaces.

b. Members suggested that several other challenging issues with townhouses and low-rise apartment buildings were also important. Yet given the many policy tools available to the City Planning Division, members were not necessarily clear about whether the Guidelines were the appropriate tool through which to address these other issues. They encouraged City Planning to ensure sufficient emphasis was placed on these issues, via the Guidelines or other tools. The additional issues put forward were:

Toronto Planning Review Panel

- The need to place even greater emphasis on environmental sustainability of design (with regard to both construction materials and the use of these buildings over its lifespan);
- The need for these buildings to be designed to be adaptable to various future uses, future circumstances, and new technologies (i.e. 'future-proofing' for solar panels etc.);
- The need for these buildings to meet the demands of aging individuals;
- The need for these buildings to meet the needs of individuals with physical disabilities (concerning, for example, above-grade first floors);
- The need to consider the demands of pets on both the indoor and outdoor spaces;
- The need for these developments to complement public transit when it is located nearby;
- The need to ensure that design is creating safe spaces at entryways and around the whole building; and
- The need for appropriate soundproofing between units.

In response to question 2 (approach to addressing challenging issues), members broadly agreed with the following:

a. Members agreed that many of the guidelines that they were presented with were reasonable and appropriate. No individual guidelines were singled out as being inappropriate or wrong-headed.

b. Members also recommended that:

- The Guidelines ensure that site design includes clear and easy access to public transit for residents and members of the public when it is nearby;
- City Planning staff include or reference relevant aspects of the CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) Guidelines, especially with respect to sight lines; and
- City Planning staff consider the anticipated financial cost for consumers, along with the anticipated design benefit, of implementing specific guidelines when determining whether to include that guidance in the document. Members felt it was acceptable for the guidelines to lead to increases in cost for consumers, if the increase in design quality (for the user or for the surrounding community) is sufficiently large.

c. Members also encouraged the City Planning Division to consider incorporating the following suggestions in the Guidelines or via other relevant policy tools:

Toronto Planning Review Panel

- The required amount of parking could be made to fluctuate depending on the proximity and frequency of public transit;
- Encouraging shared rather than private storage space in order to reduce costs and use space more efficiently;
- A mandatory greenery-to-built-form ratio could be recommended for each development;
- Financial incentives could be developed that encourage developers to use environmentally sustainable materials that recoup costs due to savings on utilities over the course of their lifespan;
- Minimum accessibility standards could be applied to all new buildings of this type, in order to accommodate the aging population and residents with physical disabilities;
- A requirement could be put in place that ensured a set number of fully accessible units be constructed in developments of various sizes;
- The guidelines could recommend that shared amenity spaces respond to the social needs of the broader community, and that public access to shared amenities be encouraged;
- The guidelines could encourage multiple developments in an area to 'co-sponsor' shared amenity spaces to create a greater diversity of amenities for residents; and
- The guidelines could encourage mixed-use developments with both commercial and residential spaces where appropriate.

In response to question 3 (other input concerning the guidelines), members broadly agreed with the following:

a. Members agreed that at least some issues with townhouses and low-rise apartments likely require more forceful policy tools than Design Guidelines, since Guidelines are not treated as requirements. Members encourage the City Planning Division to consider integrating some solutions into the Official Plan, Zoning Bylaw, or other more forceful policy tools, where appropriate.

b. Members encouraged City Planning to explore creative methods of encouraging Guideline adoption. For example, members suggested creating a ranking or grading system that helped communicate how closely a proposed development adhered to the Guidelines. This could take the form of a grade or colour code assigned by City Planning staff and then used as a marketing tool by developers, or a grading sheet that potential buyers and nearby residents could use to evaluate the development.

Toronto Planning Review Panel

c. Members encouraged City Planning to make the materials presented in the Guidelines more accessible to those who are not technical or design experts. They felt that residents living near proposed developments should be given resources that help them understand what good design of townhouses and low-rise apartments looks like, and how they can use the Guidelines to help articulate their concerns about proposed developments. Members encouraged City Planning to:

- Include a more resident-friendly introduction that made it clearer who these Guidelines are for, how they are meant to be used by these parties, and how they fit within the broader set of policy tools that affect the development of townhouses and low-rise apartments;
- Include more pictures, which were seen to be quite helpful;
- Consider graphical representations of the relationship between different policy tools;
- Include hyperlinks to connect the different policy tools for online readers; and
- Consider a 'cheat sheet' of acronyms or terminology

d. Members also encouraged City Planning to produce a companion document or checklist that is targeted at conveying important elements of the Guidelines to nearby residents of developments and to prospective buyers.

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. A single submission was received, written by member Al Eslami. It is reprinted below in its entirety.

Al Eslami

I feel deeply impressed with the range and quality of our Panel's suggestions, as well as with all the thought and work that has gone into producing the Guidelines themselves.

I feel the issue of the relationship between affordability and environmental impact, particularly during the current period of an uncertain economic future and the prospect of an environmental crisis, may need more emphasis. We do not live in ordinary times, and things cannot continue to go on the way they have gone before. A fundamental re-thinking of the way we have done things is called for. The Guidelines, which understandably seek to adapt to the current interests and priorities of residential developers, should take account of the new economic and environmental picture as well, including the rising proportion of low-income populations in Toronto.



Toronto Planning Review Panel

Also, faced with the growing climate crisis, a prudent approach is to look for ways to reduce consumption – not only consumption of fossil fuels, but consumption of any and all products. So, an environmentally conscious approach is at the same time an economically conscious approach. The existing economic inequalities should be fought at every turn, both because inequality means excessive consumption by certain social strata, and because inequality exacerbates and expedites economic decline.

The first priority of housing policy should be to provide housing for all. The Guidelines repeatedly stress quality materials and quality methods. Quality is, of course, an important consideration. However, it often simply implies a higher cost, which can mean provision of quality housing for those who can afford quality housing, and waiving any responsibility towards the rest of society as far as housing is concerned. In other words, the Guidelines should actively seek to counter gentrification. There is already far too much housing for the upper middle class in this city. What we need are guidelines that direct developers to build affordable housing for the working class. In addition, “quality housing” that leads to gentrification is contrary to some of this Panel’s basic values, such as inclusivity and affordability. It pushes the relatively disadvantaged sections of society away, instead of bringing them in and including them.

My overall conclusion in the area of housing is that the highest priority in residential development should be to build affordable housing, because it is good for the environment and good for the economy. Luxury consumption in any form is the last thing we need under the existing conditions. We need an acceptance of, and a liking for, a lower standard of living. A more humane society that is based on a different set of values is essential to saving the planet from a climate catastrophe. If everyone looks only after his or her own interest, it would not be realistic to hope for a collective solution.