

Toronto Planning Review Panel

Summary of Results from the Toronto Planning Review Panel Meeting held March 4, 2017

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 March 4th, 2017, the Panel met to discuss two topics: the proposed TOcore Policy Directions, and the Scarborough Centre Transportation Master Plan (SCTMP).

TOcore Policy Directions

Panelists first attended a larger TOcore public consultation and participated in workshops before discussing what issues were well addressed or missed in the proposed TOcore Policy Directions. Panelists concluded that:

- Planners had effectively emphasized the importance of creating mixed-use neighbourhoods with a variety of housing types, though mixed density neighbourhoods could be emphasized further.
- The expansion of the Central Business District and designation of the Health Sciences District should proceed, though there was concern that downtown's waterfront area might not be sufficiently protected from development, as it is valuable public space.
- Mobility planning was well done, though consideration of the PATH network, electronic vehicles, and carpooling could be included or expanded.
- Water should be a more important consideration in the Secondary Plan for the downtown. The Plan should include a focus on ensuring the long-term availability of clean water. That said, the inclusion of stormwater management, green roofs, and other green infrastructure was thought to be effective.
- Planners had recognized the value of partnerships amongst City services and facilities, including co-location in order to improve access for residents without

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necessarily constructing new facilities; though there was a desire for even further focus on the needs of commuters, of an aging population, and the availability of childcare.

Scarborough Centre Transportation Master Plan

Then, Panelists discussed the Scarborough Centre Transportation Master Plan (SCTMP), and provided recommendations for the plan. Panelists concluded that:

- When evaluating network alternatives, the planning team should use criteria that prioritize and promote a shift towards walking, cycling, and public transit over the use of cars. Ease of connections, including connections between different modes, was also seen as particularly important.
- Place-making should be an important consideration for the Transportation Master Plan. Taking place-making into account will help facilitate a sense of pride within the community and will promote Scarborough Centre as a destination for residents across the City and neighbouring regions.
- Affordability should not be an overarching concern for the Transportation Master Plan. Instead, the SCTMP should focus on achieving high quality transportation solutions that have reasonable lifecycle costs, given their value.

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About the March 4, 2017, Meeting of the Planning Review Panel

On March 4, 2017, the Panel met to discuss two topics: the proposed TOcore Policy Directions, and the Scarborough Centre Transportation Master Plan (SCTMP).

In the morning, Panelists participated in a larger TOcore public consultation event with members of the general public. Chief Planner Jennifer Keesmaat began the day with an update on the draft of the Secondary Plan for the downtown. She then joined a panel with Janie Romoff, Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, and Barbara Gray, General Manager, Transportation Services, who shared their views about the needs and opportunities in the downtown area, as well as the feedback received during previous consultation about TOcore.

Panelists and other attendees then joined workshops hosted by city staff, which explored the proposed Policy Directions in greater detail. Each workshop focused on one of four topics: Built Form, Parks & Mobility, Community Services & Facilities, and Water, Energy, Culture & Housing. Panelists were asked to participate fully in the discussion, having shared feedback in their April 2016 meeting about how the downtown is used by all Torontonians. Panelists were also asked to listen closely for issues raised by other attendees.

After the workshops, Panelists gathered for a short **debrief and discussion** away from the larger event, and organized themselves into small groups according to the workshop that they attended. In each group, Panelists were asked to consider what is important to the City as a whole, and to answer two questions about the Policy Directions discussed in the workshops:

1. What issues were well addressed by presenters or participants?
2. What issues were missed or not given enough attention?

Panelists then shared their reflections in plenary.

In the afternoon, Panelists turned their attention to the Scarborough Centre Transportation Master Plan (SCTMP). They first completed a warm-up activity that asked each Panelist to write down a point where they regularly make a transportation connection. Panelists then discussed what they like or dislike about those particular connection points in small groups before sharing notable examples in plenary.

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Gary Papas from the Transportation Planning team gave a short presentation on the work being done to plan the Scarborough Subway Extension, including the proposed bus terminal and subway alignment.

Alan Filipuzzi, a Senior Planner with Transportation Planning in the Scarborough District, then spoke about the SCTMP study and planning process. He provided context about the study area and policy context, including the land-use pattern and existing transportation facilities in Scarborough Centre, and outlined some opportunities for improved transportation to help create a more vibrant urban centre.

Next, the Panel heard from Craig Lametti, a Planner from Urban Strategies Inc., representing Oxford Properties Group, the company that owns Scarborough Town Centre and much of the land in Scarborough Centre, about their vision for the centre. The Panel also heard from Vincent Puhakka, a member of the SCTMP Local Advisory Committee, about the experiences of residents who use Scarborough Centre on a regular basis.

The subsequent activity asked small groups of Panelists to sort potential evaluation criteria for the Master Plan alternatives identified by the SCTMP team, into three categories:

- a. high importance
- b. average importance,
- c. low importance.

Panelists were given cards with different evaluation criteria printed on them. They were also provided with the Evaluation Principle that each criterion belonged to. Panelists were also given some blank cards on which to add criteria they felt were missing from the list.

Panelists worked first in small groups and then as a large group to identify shared priorities.

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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 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.

Debrief and Discussion: TOcore Policy Directions

Workshop A: Built Form

Panelists generally agreed that the following issues were well addressed:

- Planning for a diversity of housing types, including a focus on family-sized units and building amenities;
- Expanding the size of the Central Business District (CBD) and designating a new Health Sciences District;
- Designating mixed-use neighbourhoods; and
- Allowing for sufficient access to sunlight.

Panelists suggested the following issues be further discussed:

- Designating the waterfront area South of Queen's Quay as mixed-use. Panelists felt that this area should be protected from certain types of development and preserved for public access. Some Panelists suggested that the use of infill could be further explored as a way to expand public green spaces along the waterfront;
- Planning for aesthetically-pleasing buildings and for areas of varied density; and
- Integrating ongoing work being done to reimagine the PATH network into the TOcore study.

Workshop B: Parks, Mobility, and Public Realm

Panelists generally agreed that the following issues were well addressed:

- Connection of existing parks and public spaces through improved cycling paths, including the rationale for prioritizing certain routes. This included some useful data captured from the ongoing pilot of cycle tracks on Bloor Street;

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- Increased pedestrian traffic in both public spaces and on pathways through parks; and
- Methods of increasing the available green space and park lands despite the densification of downtown.

Panelists suggested that the following issues were not addressed:

- Integration of carpooling and bicycle hubs into planning. Panelists suggested more data could be provided about the share of vehicular traffic on downtown streets;
- The use of electronic transportation options, including the location of charging stations, and the use of electric scooters in parks;
- Seasonal differences in park usage, including the challenges of using public spaces in the winter months;
- The provision of greater protection for trees in parks and the public realm;
- Expansion and increased safety of washroom facilities. It was suggested that creative partnerships could help in this regard. For example, parks could allow community vendors in exchange for help to maintain the washrooms;
- Systems to accommodate the needs of both families with small children and tenants with dogs in dense neighbourhoods with tall condo buildings. This could include limiting allowable uses in public parks or designated times for walking dogs.

Workshop C: Community Services and Facilities

Panelists generally agreed that the workshops addressed the issue of a lack of available land downtown. They noted that, in line with their recommendations at previous meetings, city staff acknowledged the significant potential for collaboration and partnerships amongst city services and facilities, such as libraries and schools, as one method of resolving this issue. Panelists also learned about the complexity of implementing these types of partnerships.

Panelists suggested that the following issues be further discussed:

- Maintaining and improving facilities rather than building new facilities;
- Expanding services according to more segmented needs, such as commuters from the suburbs who may use downtown facilities after work in a different manner than downtown residents. In addition, the provision of childcare was

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seen as important element in some areas, and an important driver of social equity;

- Co-locating different services in the same facility to create community hubs and expand access;
- Planning for the aging population to ensure that seniors can thrive downtown; and
- Improving access to healthy food in food deserts.

Workshop D: Water, Energy, Culture, and Housing

Panelists focused their recommendations on the topic of water. In general, Panelists felt that water was not emphasized enough, and noted that both water treatment capacity and sewage capacity are essential to sustainable growth. Panelists did find that the concepts of net-zero usage and storm-water management, particularly related to green infrastructure in the public realm, were well-addressed.

Further, Panelists suggested a stronger focus on actions that can be taken to address root causes rather than planning for resiliency alone.

Activity: Considering Evaluation Criteria for Scarborough Centre Transportation Network Alternatives

Panelists believed the criteria of highest importance related to three themes:

- **Mixed-modes:** The reorganization of land use and street space to better accommodate walking, cycling, and transit was identified as most important. Panelists prioritized criteria that explicitly referenced these types of transportation over driving.
- **Interconnectivity:** Panelists felt strongly that the quality and ease of connections, including inter-modal connections, and those to neighbouring communities as well as other municipalities is vital to the success of Scarborough Centre.
- **Placemaking:** Many Panelists specifically suggested the SCTMP consider its role in making Scarborough Centre a destination with a stronger sense of pride. Some Panelists mentioned the strength of food and culture in Scarborough, and hoped that planning for the potential increased urban activity recognized this asset.

Panelists generally agreed that the following criteria were of high importance:

- Provides more travel choices, promoting a shift towards sustainable modes of transportation (Choice)

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- Reconfigures street geometry to allow for the convenient and safe travel of all users. Some Panelists suggested the adoption of a grid network was most important. (Experience)
- Maintains consistency with mixed-use transit-oriented development principles, in order to create a vibrant urban centre (Shaping the City)
- Ensures safety and accessibility for all users -different modes, ages, special needs. (Healthy Neighbourhoods)
- Removes barriers for active modes of transportation - walking and cycling. (Healthy Neighbourhoods)
- Uses the appropriate street type to encourage walking and cycling (Healthy Neighbourhoods)

Most Panelists agreed that the following criteria were of average or higher importance:

- Improves inter-modal connectivity, providing an efficient and integrated transportation network for all users (Choice)
- Improves quality, security, comfort and convenience of all modes of transportation. (Experience)
- Uses the appropriate street type to allow for safe and comfortable travel across all modes of transportation. (Experience)
- Creates accessible connections between major destinations and transportation facilities within Scarborough Centre (Social Equity)
- Improves mobility for vulnerable users. Many Panelists interpreted this as referring to all users without cars. (Social Equity)
- Improves connectivity to surrounding communities (Healthy Neighbourhood)
- Minimizes impact on climate change (Public Health & Environment)
- Unlock the potential for development, encouraging public and private investments (Supporting Growth)

Some (but not all) Panelists felt the following criteria should be treated as of higher importance:

- Incorporates user-friendly signage and wayfinding (Experience)
- Minimizes impact on built/cultural heritage and areas with archaeological potential. (Public Health & Environment) Panelists rewrote this criterion to state "areas with archaeological significance." They also suggested that areas of significance to Indigenous peoples' history be included, and stressed the need for proper consultation around these issues.

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- Minimizes impact on area ecology (Public Health & Environment)
- Improves open space connections in the study area (Public Health & Environment). A couple Panelists suggested that improving connections to the ravine network could be important in providing respite near urban centres.

Panelists generally agreed the following criteria were of lower importance:

- Reflects existing planning policies, and supports the mixed-use and transit-oriented vision of the Secondary Plan (Shaping the City)
- Implements improvements with affordable construction and maintenance costs. (Affordability). Most Panelists agreed that the SCTMP should prioritize achieving high quality transportation solutions over deferring likely costs to a later time, though some panelists were cautious about increased maintenance and operating costs that could arise from larger capital spends. Some Panelists specifically recommended that designs allow for future improvements as well.
- Allows the strategic movement of goods in Scarborough Centre (Supporting Growth)
- Uses the appropriate street type for the safe and efficient movement of goods (Supporting Growth)

Most Panelists felt that the criteria related to the movement of goods were of lower importance, though some noted that Scarborough Centre does need to consider goods movement more so than other centres, given the surrounding industrial lands.

In general, Panelists felt that many of the criteria would be more useful to the project team if specific but similar criteria were summarized and combined.

Additional Individual Commentary from Panelists

Al Eslami

The Panel's contributions during the meeting were outstanding and thoughtful, as usual. My comments below are mostly about the suggested readings for the meeting.

About the seven TOcore Building Blocks: Buildings & Neighbourhoods; Parks & Public Spaces; Mobility; Community Facilities; Economy; Water; and Energy:

Insufficient attention is paid to the issue of how to involve the citizenry in the process of realizing the seven building blocks. One part of the problem is that all of the building

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blocks are about workers, as opposed to citizens. They are about how to help sustain and extend the current way of doing things, rather than about how to enable a long-term transformation towards citizen empowerment and environmental sustainability.

About the TOcore Proposals:

The proposals take it for granted that the financial district is the heart of Downtown and that all future development should be centered around and radiate from that district. This vision is a conservative one. The *Proposals Report* seeks to define the “emerging form, function and structure of Toronto’s future Downtown” by managing long term growth. Any outlook that is built around existing function and structure is an attempt to curb social conflict, that is, the engine of *real* progress. For instance, the current discussions on creating “resiliency” to climate change are mostly about implanting safeguards such as diversification, so that the existing economy can withstand the impact of climate change. Little thought is given to enabling the current socioeconomic structure to transform itself in response to climate change.

Far from addressing the underlying issue, efforts based solely on emission reduction and increased resiliency to climate change will simply allow the growth-based economy to extend further and deeper into the natural environment, rather than meet the challenge of population growth.

What “economic growth” alone really means is that the upper layers of society who would be threatened by a systemic shift to a new economy, are making more money. I believe that even larger populations than the current one can be supported with a smaller economy that is not profit-driven. Instead of encouraging GDP growth, we should urgently focus on alternative economies that can provide society’s needs.

This shift would require an expanded democracy that involves everyone in figuring out how to proceed. This could supply a huge amount of skill and mental prowess to such a large project, as well as socialize the idea of economic slow-down as shared sacrifice. Immediate steps could include redefining accepted standards of liveability, and a more equitable distribution of existing resources instead of ‘quality improvements’ to existing services.

About the Scarborough Centre Transportation Master Plan (SCTMP):

I wonder how affordability should not be a primary concern for the SCTMP. Right now the City has an ill-advised plan for a one-stop subway extension that will serve only Scarborough Centre, and which will replace an existing LRT that serves several communities. The new subway extension will cost billions of dollars and most likely take away funds from other major plans to develop Scarborough Centre.