

Toronto Planning Review Panel

Summary of Results from the Toronto Planning Review Panel Meeting held January 14, 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 January 14th, 2017, the Panel met to examine the heritage preservation process in Toronto. Panelists first discussed shared values and priorities for preserving heritage places before considering how Torontonians can be better engaged in the heritage preservation process.

Panelists concluded that:

- From the list of heritage values that City staff currently use to evaluate heritage places, Heritage Preservation Services should prioritize places that: have significant ecological features; display a high degree of overall craftsmanship; play a role in the religious, spiritual or sacred beliefs of a community; or represent significant technical or scientific achievement.
- In addition to the existing list of heritage values, Heritage Preservation Services should prioritize places associated with our past and present interactions with water, including specifically those of Indigenous communities, as well as places that explain our city's economic history.
- Heritage Preservation Services should consider the following three strategies for raising Torontonians' awareness of heritage resources across the city. First, online outreach should be strengthened through social media, with the use of geo-targeted advertising, and by sharing heritage information on platforms such as Google Maps. Second, heritage engagement opportunities should be showcased at related events including museum exhibits, cultural festivals, Jane's Walks, and Doors Open Toronto. Third, educational programming should be developed with a range of partners and media, with a particular emphasis on

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providing opportunities for heritage education to youth. Such partners could include existing committees within professional architectural associations.

- During a heritage conservation study in a particular neighbourhood, the study team should engage and consult a diversity of residents about their community by: continuing to use paper mail notices; using physical signage, and targeted online and print advertising in different languages; recording and streaming in-person meetings; and creating a small, representative, fairly-selected volunteer committee with youth representatives that can work on behalf of all residents.
- After an HCD is designated, Heritage Preservation Services should ensure that residents are involved in making the district effective by: sustaining relationships with active community members; creating a strong visual identity for the area through street signs and designation markers; and including regular updates in existing city communications (such as water bills).

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About the January 14, 2017, Meeting of the Planning Review Panel

On January 14, 2017, the Panel met primarily to examine the heritage preservation process.

Because the Panel was meeting at the Regent Park Community Centre, the day began with a short session on the history of the Regent Park revitalization process. Daniel Fusca from the City Planning Division spoke about the approach to the revitalization from the City's perspective, and Sureya Ibrahim, a Regent Park community member and Community Relations Specialist at the Centre for Community Learning and Development, shared her perspective as well as stories from members of the community before and during revitalization.

After a short break, Panelists completed a warm-up activity in which they were each asked to identify and write down a special place in Toronto that has heritage value, either for an individual community or for the city as a whole. Panelists then discussed the significance of their choices in small groups before sharing notable examples in plenary.

Alex Corey from the Heritage Preservation Services team at the City of Toronto then spoke about Heritage Preservation and Heritage Conservation Districts (HCDs). He shared examples of past and ongoing HCD studies and designations, and outlined the City's approach to using heritage as a city building tool.

Next, the Panel heard from Suzanne Kavanagh, President of the St. Lawrence Neighbourhood Association, about her experience working with Heritage Preservation Services to designate the St. Lawrence neighbourhood as an HCD.

Activity 1 asked small groups of Panelists to sort a series of heritage conservation values, adapted from provincial and municipal policy documents, into three categories: higher importance, average importance, and lower importance. Panelists were given cards with different values printed on them, as well as some blank ones on which to add values they felt were missing from the list. Panelists worked in small groups and then in plenary to identify shared priorities.

The Panel then heard from Pourya Nazemi, a Heritage Planner on the Heritage Preservation Services team at the City of Toronto. Pourya gave a detailed explanation of the HCD designation process and highlighted existing opportunities for Torontonians to be involved.

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Following the presentation, Panelists once again split into small groups and considered the following questions as part of **Activity 2**:

1. *How can the city's heritage team make more Torontonians aware of ways they can help identify and preserve heritage resources across the city?*
2. *How can a study team undertaking a heritage conservation study consult Torontonians about what heritage places need protection and how best to protect it?*
3. *How can city staff help ensure that, after a Heritage Conservation District is designated, a range of different Toronto residents stay involved in making that District effective?*

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

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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.

Activity 1: Exploring Community Heritage Values

Panelists generally agreed that the following values are of higher importance:

- Places that have a rare, unique or representative collection of significant natural resources. (Panelists suggested the wording "natural resources" was extractive in nature and should be replaced with "ecological features.")
- Places that display a high degree of overall craftsmanship or artistic merit.

Most Panelists agreed that the following values are of average or higher importance:

- Places that are directly associated with a theme, event, person, activity, organization, or institution that is significant to a community. (Some Panelists suggested focusing this value more specifically on places of historical events and stories important to a cultural group or a movement.)
- Places that play a historic or ongoing role in the practice or recognition of religious, spiritual, or sacred beliefs of a defined group of people that is significant to a community. For example, the Toronto Islands were noted as a place of high importance to the spiritual beliefs of some Indigenous communities, having long served as a place for meeting, for healing, and for performing ceremonies.
- Places that represent, or that exist as an outcome of, a significant technical or scientific achievement.

Some Panelists also felt strongly about including the following as values of higher importance:

- Places that are associated with the complex interactions that the city or residents have with water, as an essential component of life. Many Indigenous communities in particular have a long and inseparable history with bodies of water in Toronto, including the Humber, Don, and Rouge Rivers. (This could also include places where we have gathered and lived because of water; places where we cleaned up, protected, or safeguarded water for generations; and

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places where we celebrate our interactions with water through art and cultural events.)

- Places related to our city's economic history, including factories, markets, and neighbourhoods or facilities such as Liberty Village, St. Lawrence Market, and the Brickworks.

The Panel was divided in their categorization of the following values; while some felt strongly that they should be considered of higher importance, others ranked them among the lowest:

- Places with one or more rare, unique, representative, or early examples of a building or property style, material, construction method, layout, plan, landscape, or spatial organization.
- Places that are linked to a cultural group, an organized movement, or ideology that is significant to a community.
- Places that contribute to an understanding of the history, culture, or identity of a community or area; or that help define, maintain or support an area's history and sense of time and place.
- Places that are defined by, planned around, or are landmarks.
- Places that demonstrate or reflect the work or ideas of a planner, architect, landscape architect, artist, builder, designer or theorist who is significant to a community.

Many Panelists agreed that the above descriptions of values were too broad to provide clear direction about heritage places. Most Panelists agreed that if a place were sufficiently important, it would have been captured by earlier values.

Activity 2: Discussing How to Raise Awareness and Engage Torontonians in Heritage Preservation

Question 1 asked the Panel how the city's heritage team can make more Torontonians aware of ways they can help identify and preserve heritage resources across the city.

Panelists suggested the following strategies for raising awareness:

- Increase Online Presence.** Panelists suggested that Heritage Preservation Services:
- Post before and after pictures of preserved heritage places on social media;
 - Start social media campaigns that invited residents themselves to post, share, and tag pictures or respond to provocative questions;
 - Work with Google Maps to display detailed heritage information so that

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residents learn about heritage sites through day-to-day use; and

- Use geo-targeted online advertising to connect a local heritage site to heritage preservation services.

Showcase Heritage Engagement Opportunities at Related Events: Panelists suggested Heritage Preservation Services use existing events where large groups of potentially interested people are already gathered. For example, the city team could work with local museums, Jane's Walks, cultural festivals, farmers' markets, and the Doors Open program to share information about how to get involved in heritage preservation.

Develop Educational Programming with Partners: Panelists suggested that education about heritage preservation should begin at an early age. They suggested working with schools to develop programming; organizing heritage scavenger hunts for children; and creating opportunities for high school students to complete their volunteer hours through local heritage preservation projects. Panelists also suggested developing ready-made tours of heritage sites and districts that Torontonians could provide to visitors in order to highlight these locations, as well as collaborating with real-estate TV shows, such as those shown on HGTV, to highlight heritage sites and educate viewers about heritage preservation processes. Existing committees within professional architectural associations such as the Ontario Association of Architects might also prove to be valuable content partners.

Question 2 asked Panelists how a study team undertaking a heritage conservation study in a particular neighbourhood could better consult Torontonians about what heritage places need protection and how best to protect it.

Panelists suggested the following approaches:

- Continue using paper mail to provide notice of the study and solicit input;
- Post signage concerning heritage studies, and potentially set up physical information kiosks;
- Stream and record in-person meetings to increase the number of people who can access these consultation sessions;
- Implement Targeted Advertising – online, at TTC stops, and in different languages in free community newspapers to ensure a diversity of residents are reached;
- Create a small, diverse, and representative committee to work on behalf of residents. Reach out beyond the usual suspects to recruit volunteers, and select members through an arms-length process to ensure fairness; and

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- Engage youth – on committees and through school volunteer opportunities.

Question 3 asked the Panel how city staff can help ensure that, after a Heritage Conservation District is designated, a range of different Toronto residents stay involved in making that District effective.

Panelists suggested that the approaches described in response to Question 2 also applied to Question 3. They also suggested that Heritage Preservation Services:

- Sustain relationships with specific community members who already reach deep into community networks;
- Strengthen resident attachment to an HCD by helping to create a strong visual identity for the area through street signs and designation markers; and
- Support and invest in ongoing communication to keep a broad range of residents aware of what's required to maintain a HCD. This communication can include regular updates in community papers and notices on existing communications with the City (such as water bills).

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Additional Individual Commentary from Panelists

Albert Dowell

Heritage preservation is an issue that is very important to me. I strongly believe that if you don't know your past, you don't know who you are. I have three main suggestions regarding the heritage preservation process:

1. Despite heritage designations and related procedures, the fact that we continue to hear about heritage properties being ruined or demolished leads me to believe that the rules stating what is permissible by a developer on a heritage site are not clear enough. When someone applies for an adjustment, they should be required to sign an acknowledgement of a clear set of these rules. It should also be clear what the financial penalties are for violating these terms.
2. After an application has been submitted for a permit to develop or modify a heritage property, the review process should involve some form of committee made up of members of the public. This step would complement the existing process by which these applications are evaluated by HPS staff and others such as the Chief Building Official.
3. Physical notices similar to those used for development signage should encourage community members to provide their local knowledge to City staff during an HCD study or permit review. There is much knowledge to be gained from people with their eyes and ears on the street.

Peta-Gaye Ebanks

"Heritage," in my point of view, not only includes the significance that we give to a place/building as it pertains to a community or culture; it includes our relationship to the land, water, and all of creation. Part of our relationship to the land here, upon which this city is built and sustained by, is our relationship with the Indigenous peoples and nations who are and have been here for millennia. The city, including the leadership and Planning Division, need to have a sustained and respectful relationship with Indigenous nations here.

Creating, nurturing, and maintaining a long-term relationship with Indigenous peoples and nations is part of living out and fulfilling our responsibilities as Treaty people, because we live here. There is a long history of treaties that were made not only between nations, but with the land and creation, that we have the responsibility to take care of in order to ensure peace, prosperity for all (not just a few), and for the good life of present and future generations. We need not continue to live in ways that expense our grandchildren's grandchildren's future.

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We cannot live without water; we can't grow or cook food without it. We need healthy water in order to support healthy communities; how we treat, disinfect, and "dump" in the water affects all the living beings, including all the people who live in Toronto and those who live surrounding Lake Ontario, and who are connected to it by all the tributaries, rivers and creeks. We are all made of mostly water; our buildings contain water; the air contains water. Water naturally brings people together and is thus a beautiful thing to celebrate in community festivals like Water Day organized by Toronto's Waterfront as well as numerous Indigenous water ceremonies.

Al Eslami

I found the efforts of Heritage Preservation Services (HPS) very inspiring. Such efforts are certainly worthy of support.

It was also encouraging that HPS is open to reinterpretation or expansion of the concepts of "heritage" and "heritage value;" this was a theme that ran through all of their presentations to the Panel. I would like to offer my take on that question. Fundamentally, heritage is about people, not objects. It is about their lives and their struggles. The objects are merely material expressions of those efforts. Heritage value consists of labour, lives lived, and struggles to make a better place for oneself, one's family, and the world. In the case of Toronto, many of the places that represent those values are in parts of the city that are in fact being quickly lost, or have already been lost, such as former factories and working-class neighbourhoods – to such an extent that there is little visible evidence left of the city's *real* history. That real history has been replaced by the myth of a city that has been striving to be "world class." Care should be taken that the city's *real* history is not obliterated – a tale of struggle, particularly the struggle between society's lower strata and the "one percent." Vestiges of that history are visible in the city's less-"developed" parts, where townhouse developments, for example, are being parachuted into areas that they do not naturally belong. Old factories in the East End, for instance along Pape Ave., have been turned into unrecognizable new structures for residential and commercial use. There is no sense of the history of the working-class lives, struggles, and communities that used to inhabit those neighbourhoods.

One should also be careful that HCDs do not become an excuse to let the rest of the city "develop" as it will. For instance, the Historic Yonge Street HCD would improve the part of Yonge St. to the north of Carlton, while abandoning the part to the south to its fate. There is a similar dilemma where restored buildings are adjacent to luxury condo towers, as in Yorkville; whose interests do they serve? Would those heritage buildings have been saved had they not been "lucky" enough to have wealthy neighbours?

HCDs often seem to disregard the notion of restoration of a district to its original form. Therefore, instead of serving as an incentive to halt further degradation of historically important districts,

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they may in fact provide license for continued degradation. In the case of individual heritage sites, examples of this trend include heritage buildings where only the building's façade is preserved, and the new structure behind it in many cases has nothing to do with the façade. Should we not preserve the whole building, instead of this mishmash of old and new which in many cases have nothing to do with each other and have different architectural styles?

In addition, I feel the criteria of artistic or architectural merit may be discriminatory, because they tend to favour dwellings and premises of privileged folks over those of the working class. For instance, the reason "the average person" may like to witness efforts to restore Yonge St. between Queen and Carlton to something like its original form may not be an abstract concern with criteria of coherence, authenticity, and so on, but simply because the current form is so repellent. Heritage conservation should not turn into another version of gentrification.

Sharon Kemp & Jeannette Thornton

In some situations, a designated heritage building could be moved so that the city could move forward with a development. For example, we know that the David Duncan House was relocated to Don Mills Road, north of York Mills. Similar buildings could be converted into restaurants or other businesses when developments proceed. This should be taken into consideration when planning heritage districts.

In response to the recommendations that HPS should prioritize 'places that play a role in religious, spiritual or sacred beliefs of a community,' we think the physical structure of a place of worship could be preserved, but it would have to be primarily because of the architectural value. Repurposing these buildings in some way could have the added benefit of providing increased tax revenues.

Irv Rayman

I am an architect with considerable experience in the planning and historical aspects of the review of projects for application at the City of Toronto and other locations such as historic Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Most communities do have their own historical societies or associations with knowledgeable and trained professionals, and with strong rules and regulations regarding what merits historical significance. As well as Heritage Preservation Services, the City of Toronto is certainly well represented by the Toronto Historical Association and Heritage Toronto. As well, there are the North York Historical Association, the New Toronto Historical Association, and the Ontario Historical Society. There are also the Toronto Society of Architects, the Ontario Association of Architects, and several registered architects with extensive training in historical architecture.

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I sat at the meeting and thought that all of what was being discussed had been a topic of discussion for well over 50 years. I first became involved in historical issues with the huge uproar and historical discussions that took place over the proposed demolition and replacement of the old Toronto City Hall as part of the Eaton Centre development in the early 1970s. During the Panel meeting, it was frustrating to see what were essentially lay people reinventing a process that is well established, without a thorough understanding of the existing process. The views presented essentially represented their own ideas and self-interests.

My chief concern about the discussion during the meeting is that it was never discussed how or who would implement the rules, or determine and weigh the historical merits of a project. Since there is a well-established process in place to determine historical merit, no recommendations were made as to how to improve or change the existing system. It was also never discussed if a building of historical significance could be relocated such as has been done with Campbell House, Dempsey's Hardware, or the Gibson House.

Much of what was discussed was related to community involvement. While that has some merit, it too is fraught with many dangers. This also underestimates the vast amount of historical information already at hand about all buildings in the City of Toronto. Back in 1953, as a student at the School of Architecture in Toronto, I was one of hundreds of students that participated in the measurement, drawing, and cataloguing of historic structures in the city.

Further, as anyone who has appeared at a Committee of Adjustment meeting can attest, it has been my experience that neighbourhood residents already have a high involvement and communications network for what is happening in their neighbourhood.

Finally, I also differ with most Panelists on their recommendations about places of heritage value. I certainly believe that places with high merit as planning or architectural examples of work have the highest significance.