

Summary of Advice from the Toronto Planning Review Panel Meeting held September 15, 2018

Executive Summary

The Planning Review Panel is a representative group of 32 randomly selected Torontonians that help the City Planning Division guide growth and change in Toronto. They have been asked by the Chief Planner 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 aligned with the values and priorities of all Torontonians.

Wellesley-Parliament Square: Panel Recommendations

- Panelists learned and deliberated about a development proposal for the Wellesley-Parliament Square neighbourhood, and considered how much importance the City should give to a variety of different benefits and drawbacks posed by the project, when seeking to determine whether the application is in the public interest.
- Panelists broadly approve of increasing density in downtown neighbourhoods, including St James Town, and broadly approve of the increased housing supply the proposed development would bring to the city as well as the improved facilities, amenities, and services that the proposed development would bring to the neighbourhood.
- Panelists were concerned about the potential impact of increased density on already-strained community facilities, schools, and services, as well as certain transportation links. Additional density in a low-income area like St. James Town was not thought to be acceptable if it reduced the access existing residents have to these services and facilities.
- Panelists urged the City to find ways to support and maintain important components of community identity, especially given the high number of recent immigrants in St. James Town, such as familiar local businesses.
- Panelists provided some additional suggestions for the City, which included ensuring there is sufficient supporting infrastructure and services in the community, providing more flexible community spaces, working to keep the unique character of the neighbourhood, adjusting the heights of some of the towers, and ensuring there is adequate parking, electric car charging, and bicycle storage.

Detailed Summary

Panelists began the meeting by learning about and providing feedback on the most important benefits and drawbacks of a new development proposal for Wellesley-Parliament Square in the St James Town neighbourhood.

Thomas Rees, a Planner with the City of Toronto, presented to the Panel about the St James Town neighbourhood and gave a virtual tour on Google Maps to help Panelists understand the area. He also spoke about the City's planning guidelines and frameworks, which inform how neighbourhoods are planned, designed and built, as well as under what circumstances there can be amendments to those plans. He reviewed what the considerations are for amending the current Official Plan for St James Town, and what kind of issues will need to be addressed in the revitalization.

Next, David Hastings from IBI Group, the architecture firm on the application, presented the specific development proposal. He provided more detail on the proposed site plan, which includes new buildings, public spaces, transportation corridors and amenities.

Following these presentations, Panelists broke into small groups to discuss the different benefits and drawbacks of the proposal.

Broadly, Panelists felt that **introducing greater density to neighbourhoods like St James Town was a good thing**, because it helps address the City's housing and affordability issues. They felt that introducing new housing and new residents into the neighbourhood could produce many benefits, such as improved facilities, amenities, and greater safety for local residents.

However, they cautioned against development that doesn't come with associated increases in local supports, services and amenities, such as childcare and transit. They also felt it is important to maintain, as much as possible, the character of local neighbourhoods like St James Town, though they accepted that some change may be necessary to achieve other benefits. Several Panelists also thought it was important to consider how the height of the towers could negatively impact neighbourhood character and access to sunlight, especially given Toronto's long winters,.

This table summarizes how each of the four groups of Panelists felt about the importance of each possible benefit and drawback in the revitalization proposal.

Balancing Public Interests				
	<u>Likely and Possible Benefits</u>	How 4 groups rated importance	<u>Likely and Possible Drawbacks</u>	How 4 groups rated importance
For current local residents	New neighbours who change the community's composition and priorities	Important: 4/4	New neighbours who change the community's composition and priorities	Important: 4/4
	New architecture, more variety	Important: 3/4 Not important: 1/4	A new 51-storey tower may appear out of character (compared to adjacent tower heights of 29, 32 storeys)	Important: 4/4
	New local housing options	Very important: 1/4 Important: 3/4	New buildings mean more shadows and less sky view	Very important: 1/4 Important: 3/4
	More public parkland and improved outdoor spaces and pathways.	Very important: 2/4 Important: 2/4	Loss of some existing open spaces with mature trees, loss of outdoor pool and derelict tennis courts	Not important: 4/4
	More people using outdoor spaces and more at-grade uses, leading to increased safety ('eyes on the street')	Very important: 1/4 Important: 3/4	Increased demand for private and public recreation and amenity spaces	Very important: 1/4 Important: 3/4

	No more outdoor waste collection enclosures	Very Important: 3/4 Important: 1/4	Increased demand for local public schools that are facing capacity issues, and local public and non-profit facilities	Very important: 3/4 Important: 1/4
	New & improved indoor amenity space for existing tenants (e.g. improved ground floors, recreation spaces, shared facilities)	Very important: 2/4 Important: 2/4	Increased traffic congestion on local streets, and increased congestion on TTC, particularly the Wellesley bus	Very important: 3/4 Important: 1/4
	More local retail, more local jobs, and more customers for local businesses	Very important: 2/4 Important: 2/4	Rental unit relocation of <u>approximately 18</u> units	Important: 2/4 Less important: 2/4
	More improvements and maintenance to existing buildings	Very important: 2/4 Important: 2/4	Potential increases to commercial rents for existing businesses	Very important: 3/4 Less important: 1/4
For citywide residents	Increased supply and choice in housing, including rental housing	Very important: 3/4 Important: 1/4	Increased transit and traffic congestion downtown	Very important: 1 Important: 3/4
	A more mixed-income neighbourhood	Very important: 1/4 Important: 3/4	Perceived over-development in an already dense area	Important: 3/4

				Less important: 1/4
	More people living near a major transit stop and near downtown employment, which can reduce congestion	Very important: 1/4 Important: 3/4	Loss of the original 'Towers in the Park' vision	Important: 3/4 Not important: 1/4
	New development charges and increased property tax base to maintain or improve infrastructure	Important: 4/4	Strain on infrastructure	Very important: 1/4 Important: 3/4
	Increased density <u>mean</u> more efficient, less expensive use of existing infrastructure like roads, transit, sewers, electricity, & water	Important: 4/4	Increased population further demand on healthcare and city services	Very important: 1/4 Important: 3/4
	Increased supply and better design of publicly accessible spaces	Important: 3/4 Less important: 1/4		
	New architecture	Important: 3/4 Less important: 1/4		

The Panel added some additional benefits and drawbacks they thought the City and developer should consider:

Benefits to consider:

- Revitalization could lead to increased access to community services and amenities in the neighbourhood

Drawbacks to consider:

- Increased strain on existing public infrastructure such as waste management and sewers;
- Increased strain on existing public health services and city services.

Panelists also discussed additional ideas and general recommendations for the site. Though the Panel did not reach agreement on any of these recommendations as being essential, additions included:

- Maintain and enhance the “flavour” of the area in terms of diversity and culture by ensuring and providing access to different types of foods, recreation, services, and amenities. This would contribute to a sense of belonging and ownership, ultimately enhancing the neighbourhood’s resiliency;
- Provide recreation and amenity spaces that can be flexibly used for a variety of purposes;
- Ensure there are enough local amenities such as schools and libraries;
- Reduce the height of the 51-storey tower to reduce the impacts on sunlight, which is particularly important for winter months. Compensate by adding a little extra height to some of the other towers;
- Introduce an engagement and governance committee to capture the input of all residents (rents and owners alike), and to help build relationships between property owners, renters, and landowners;
- Provide space and start up funding for non-profit daycare to address the increased strain that added density may put on existing neighbourhood childcare facilities. This would also help attract more families to the area;
- Consider increasing the number of parking spaces. A panelist suggested that demand for parking may increase alongside a change in the income and demographic make-up of the neighbourhood, and in response to greater demand and strain on the Wellesley bus; and
- Ensure the parking areas also includes electric charging stations and bicycle storage.