

Summary of Advice from the Toronto Planning Review Panel Meeting held November 3, 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.

Heritage Survey: Panelist Reflections and Recommendations

Heritage Preservation Services visited the Panel to discuss a potential city-wide survey of all of Toronto's heritage resources. Such a survey would likely take several years to complete, so the Heritage team will not be able to study everything that requires its urgent attention right away. The project team asked the Panel to review seven criteria and help them determine which criteria are most important, so they can in turn decide which areas to study first. The seven criteria were: amount of development activity; fragility of an area; archaeology; potential cultural heritage value; planning priorities; equitable distribution of study areas; and equitable distribution of eras.

While there was not complete consensus on how to prioritize the criteria, most Panelists agreed with the following recommendations:

- **High priority criteria included amount of development activity, planning priorities, and potential cultural heritage.** Panelists felt that high levels of development activity presents an obvious and pressing threat to heritage properties. Focusing on areas that are priorities for planning studies will enable the city to be more proactive about preserving heritage. Cultural heritage is important because places of cultural value are important for understanding the different stories of communities in Toronto, and often represent community values.
- **Medium priority criteria included fragility of an area and archaeology.** Several panelists felt strongly that places where there may be Indigenous archaeology, in particular, should be prioritized for the survey, as it is an under-recognized aspect of Toronto's history and should be surveyed for more proactively. They

felt fragile areas are important because they face a more immediate threat of being lost.

- **Low priority criteria included equitable distribution of study areas, and equitable distribution of study eras.** Panelists felt that it was necessary to trade-off prioritizing study areas in order to focus on areas of high development pressure. Panelists thought that equitable distribution of eras was already captured by other criteria, and that it was less important than study areas.

Detailed Summary

The Panel was visited by Tamara Anson-Cartwright and Gary Miedema from Heritage Preservation Services. At the direction of City Council, Heritage Preservation Services is studying the feasibility of conducting a city-wide heritage survey. Due to limited resources and capacity, heritage surveys are often currently conducted in an ad-hoc or reactive manner. This has meant some areas in Toronto, as well as some types and eras of Toronto's heritage, are underrepresented on the City's Heritage Registry. While being on the Heritage Registry does not necessarily confer protection on a heritage property, it helps the City understand what heritage exists so they can take more proactive steps to protect it if needed.

Panelists began by reflecting on heritage resources in Toronto that are important to them personally or to the city as a whole. Panelists cited different examples ranging from neighbourhoods like Kensington Market, to sites of natural and ecological history, such as the Scarborough Bluffs. Panelists discussed how there are many different types of heritage in Toronto, but that not all of it is well-known or visible.

Next, Gary and Tamara presented the current process by which heritage is preserved in Toronto, including both proactive and responsive methods, and the challenges associated with preserving heritage in a rapidly changing and growing city. They also spoke about how a city-wide survey could help address these challenges.

Finally, they discussed some of the different criteria they are weighing as they consider how to design a city-wide survey. The Heritage team anticipates that a survey of this length may take many years to complete. Areas of Toronto that are under high levels of development pressure could risk losing heritage resources before the City has time to properly survey and protect them. For this reason, Heritage Preservation Services asked for the Panel's advice on how to develop a clear, defensible prioritization of survey areas.

Discussion

Gary presented seven criteria their team is considering using to help them prioritize study areas. These criteria were:

- **Amount of development activity.** How many planning applications, applications for minor variances, and applications for building and demolition permits are being reviewed in a given area;

- **Fragility of an area.** How fragile the physical condition of properties in a given area are based on existing data that can identify lack of maintenance or neglect;
- **Archaeology.** How much potential archaeological material historians think is likely to be found in the area;
- **Potential cultural heritage value.** Whether or not an area has a particular concentration of potential heritage properties containing design, historical, contextual, social or community values. For example, did an important event take place there? Are the buildings particularly well designed? Does a community value them?
- **Planning priorities.** Whether a planning study is already planned or underway in a given part of the city;
- **Equitable distribution of study areas.** Whether or not the area is located in a part of the City that is underrepresented on the Heritage Register (ie few existing heritage protections); and
- **Equitable distribution of eras.** Whether or not the area is representative of a particular period or era of construction. (ie, mid-1800s, late 19th century, post-war, etc.)

Panelists were asked to consider each of the criteria, and then sort them into three categories: high priority, medium priority, and low priority, and provide a rationale for each of their rankings. While the Panel generally agreed to this prioritization, they also recognized that there may be overlap between the criteria in practice.

- Panelists generally agreed that **amount of development activity** in a given area should be given high priority. Panelists felt that development pressure presents an obvious and pressing threat to heritage properties.
- Most Panelists agreed that **potential cultural heritage value** was also a high priority. They suggested that places of cultural value are important for understanding the different stories of communities in Toronto, and that these places can also often represent a community's values. One group also noted that the more culturally valuable a place is, the more frequently it will be visited or used by a community, which makes it an even more valuable resource.
- Most of the Panelists agreed that **planning priorities** should be a high priority (though they noted that there is overlap between this criteria and the amount of

development activity). Panelists thought that focusing the survey where there are planning priorities is a proactive way to preserve heritage, because it would give planners better information at the start of their planning studies and could lead to more efficient heritage preservation efforts.

- Most Panelists felt that **fragility of an area** should be a medium-to-high priority. They felt it would be important to prioritize these areas because they are in immediate danger of being lost. Some also suggested that there can be a correlation between fragility and neglect by the City, making preservation an issue of fairness and equity. However, several Panelists suggested it might be less of a priority than other criteria because the City does enforce buildings standards, and these standards already help to prevent properties from being neglected, and thus prevents heritage from being lost.
- Most Panelists felt that **archaeology** was also of medium priority, though many felt strongly that prioritizing places of significance or potential significance to Indigenous communities should be a high priority. Panelists noted that archaeological findings in general can have an important impact on our understanding of history. They were concerned about leaving archaeological materials to be found by developers, and felt it would be more effective to proactively survey for them.
- Panelists did not agree about whether to rate **equitable distribution of study areas** as a medium or low priority. Some Panelists felt that there is valuable heritage across the city that is often overlooked as a result of focusing on development pressures. They suggested that historical ‘centres’ across the city could be used as a starting point. For example, each of the former boroughs had its own historic civic centre. Other, less significant centres could similarly be identified in a second phase. However, other Panelists felt that it was more important to focus on areas of high development pressure, which could be at odds with equitably distributing study areas. They also suggested it could be difficult to determine a fair methodology for equitably distributing study areas.
- Most Panelists felt that **equitable distribution of eras** should be a lower priority. They suggested that this criteria was captured by other criteria, such as study area or cultural heritage. Some Panelists also felt that eras didn’t necessarily correlate with value. However, a few Panelists disagreed and noted that heritage we don’t value today might be valued in the future.

A few Panelists suggested the inclusion of 'natural heritage value' as an additional piece of criteria for the Heritage team to consider, which may not be captured within the cultural heritage criteria. They felt this was an important way to acknowledge that not all heritage is in built form. Four Panelists also suggested expanding the definition of cultural heritage value to include popular culture.