

Summary of Results from the Toronto Planning Review Panel Meeting, held June 23, 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. On June 23 the Panel met to discuss Toronto's first Resilience Strategy.

Toronto Resilience Strategy: The Panel's Suggestions

- 1. Focus on power outages**
The Panel concluded that power outages are perhaps the most important threat to the City, due to the frequency with which they can occur and the widely-felt consequences for citizens, especially vulnerable populations. Since cold and heat shocks can be alleviated by access to power, not having access to this vital resource would drastically impact a person's ability to cope with weather-related shocks.
- 2. Broaden focus beyond climate shocks**
In addition to climate related shocks (cold, heat, wind), the Panel suggested that the Resilience Strategy include preparations for economic shocks (eg: a global recession), public health emergencies (eg: epidemics), and public safety crises (eg: gun violence).
- 3. Continue focus on six major stresses**
The Panel agreed with the six stresses that the Resilience Strategy proposes to focus on; poverty and inequality; access to housing; getting around; aging infrastructure; long-term municipal financial sustainability; and emergency preparedness. They also suggested including mental health and accessibility as major stresses to address.
- 4. Consider including a variety of actions in resilience strategy**
The Panelists proposed action items to improve Toronto's Resilience, highlighting the need for improved City governance, strengthened community bonds, improved individual resilience, better contingency planning and preparedness, and improved physical infrastructure.

About the June 23, 2018, Meeting of the Planning Review Panel

On June 23, 2018, the Panel met to provide input concerning the City of Toronto's first Resilience Strategy. The Strategy is currently being developed by Toronto's Chief Resilience Officer and the Resilient Toronto Team. Materials shared with the Panel can be accessed at www.toronto.ca/planning/tprp.

Amy Buitenhuis, Senior Policy Advisor - Strategy Development with Resilient Toronto, gave a brief presentation to the Panelists about the concept of resilient cities. She described resilience as the ability to bounce back from the physical, social and economic challenges. She described 'shocks' – sudden events that threaten a city's wellbeing – and 'stresses' – the chronic challenges that can weaken a city.

Over the coming year, the Resilient Toronto team will consult Toronto citizens and ask people to share their experiences encountering shocks and stresses in Toronto, as well as what resilience strategies they used to cope.

The Resilient Toronto team asked the Panel to provide high level feedback on the most important shocks and stresses that the Resilience Strategy should consider, and provided the Panel with a list of identified shocks and stresses. The Panel was also asked to suggest actions that the City of Toronto should take to address these shocks and stresses.

The Resilient Toronto team committed to return to the Planning Review Panel at a later date so that Panelists can provide additional feedback on the Resilience Strategy as it is further developed.

Toronto Resilience Strategy: 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, who provided edits and then approved that this summary reflects the broad consensus achieved during their meeting. Panelists were welcomed to submit additional, individual commentary for inclusion in this summary.

Amy presented four environmental shocks that the Resilient Toronto team has identified as major threats to Toronto's long-term well-being: flooding, heat waves, blizzards and cold snaps, and power outages. She also presented six 'stresses' that affect Toronto's ability to recover from shocks: poverty and inequality; access to housing; getting around; aging infrastructure; long-term municipal financial sustainability; and emergency preparedness.

For each of these shocks and stresses, Panelists were asked:

- Are these the most important shocks and stresses for Toronto to prepare for? Why or why not?
- What other shocks and stresses are among the most important for Toronto to prepare for?

Shocks

Panelists quickly agreed on the importance of preparing for power outages, due to the immediate negative consequences on the health and well-being of a large number of Torontonians. Power outages are also relatively frequent, and can be caused by many different types of events.

There was disagreement about the importance of the other three shocks. Some Panelists noted that power outages are a likely outcome of the other three identified shocks, which could mean specifying additional heat or cold related shocks was somewhat redundant. However, other Panelists felt that extreme weather conditions have more impact on residents than just power outages, particularly for vulnerable populations, and thus should remain on the list of the City's priorities.

A few Panelists disagreed with the inclusion of floods in the list of priorities, due to the relative infrequency of floods and the fact that a low number of neighbourhoods are affected by flooding. However, Panelists agreed that floods, when they do occur, have spillover consequences on important transportation networks such as the Don Valley Parkway and the subway.

Panelists suggested adding wind storms to the list of shocks due to their increasing frequency and tendency to cause power outages.

Panelists also suggested that there may be other non-weather crises that are important for the strategy to consider, such as:

- Economic crises (eg: global recession, trade war);
- Public safety crises (eg: gun violence, cyclist deaths, etc); and

- Public health-related emergencies (eg: epidemics and superbugs).

Stresses

Broadly, the Panel agreed that all six of the stresses proposed by the Resilient Toronto team should be prioritized in the Strategy.

The Panel agreed that stresses like poverty, lack of access to secure housing, and high housing costs may negatively impact a person's ability to prepare, navigate, and recover from shocks. Some Panelists also noted that an insecure housing environment in Toronto would make it harder to shelter and re-home people who might be displaced in the event of a major shock.

Panelists noted that regular service disruptions due to aging transportation infrastructure are already a major issue that impacts Toronto's local economy. They were concerned that shocks could further degrade this infrastructure and make getting around even more difficult.

Some panelists suggested that the Strategy's proposed category of 'aging infrastructure' could include social and community facilities. Panelists felt that lack of access to community facilities is a stress on a community that has a negative impact on inclusivity. A few panelists also suggested that digital infrastructure be included in this category, as a breakdown in the City's digital infrastructure could have major impacts on the City's wellbeing.

The Panel agreed that ensuring municipal financial sustainability is important, since access to sufficient resources will greatly impact the City's ability to adequately build and maintain infrastructure and provide services. Panelists agreed that unstable funding arrangements make coping with shocks and stresses more difficult.

On emergency preparedness, Panelists agreed it is important to ensure that the City has effective and efficient contingency plans and protocols in place so that people can get access to food, shelter, medical care and other necessities.

The Panel suggested the Resilient Toronto team take into consideration other stresses that might impact residents' resilience:

- Accessibility and disability. Lack of accessible infrastructure and services for people living with disability would likely negatively impact some people's ability to cope with shocks. This will be increasingly the case due to aging.
- Mental health. The ability to prepare for and respond to a shock may be limited if an individual is also coping with mental health challenges. Individual resilience is a characteristic of good mental health.
- Exclusion. It may be more difficult for communities to respond cohesively and effectively to a shock if individuals or whole groups of people are isolated and disconnected.

- Food security and nutrition. Physical health, which is closely linked to food security and nutrition, could be a determinant of someone's ability to cope with shocks.
- Gradual economic shifts. Major changes in Toronto's economy, such as increased automation, could create stresses that make it more difficult to have the resources to prepare for and cope with a shock.
- Lack of access to necessary health care. Toronto's aging population could strain public resources and the health care system's capacity.

Actions to Improve Resilience

Next, Panelists were asked to propose solutions or action items that the City should consider including in the Resilience Strategy. Though the Panel did not reach agreement on any particular actions as being essential, suggested actions included:

Improved Governance:

- Improve City governance generally by making it more transparent and responsive to citizens. This allows citizens to influence City decisions and ensure they are investing appropriately in Toronto's resilience challenges.
- Ensure City bureaucracy during crises can respond flexibly (rather than being slowed by protocols that are not crisis-appropriate) so it can respond effectively to the needs of citizens, no matter the shock. Ensure that there are City-wide response strategies in place in the event of a shock.

Strengthening Community Bonds:

- Promote and support neighbourhood-level responses during an emergency by investing, in advance, in community and social infrastructure that increases inclusivity and cohesion.

Strengthening Individual Resilience:

- Address housing insecurity.
- Improve access to education, including encouraging technology access and literacy.
- Increase access to mental health education and services.
- Improve food security by encouraging local food production.
- Increase technology literacy and improve access to online resources.

Strengthening Physical Infrastructure:

- Reduce reliance on cars by prioritizing cyclist and pedestrian safety and investing in sustaining and improving the quality of public transportation.
- Ensure 'future proofing' of infrastructure and buildings, both to be able to cope with shocks and also avoid contributing to future shocks.
- Ensure future developments are flood-proof.

Contingency Planning:

- Use modelling to demonstrate the potential impact of shocks on Toronto in order to focus investments appropriately and make the case for why those investments are essential.
- Prepare a strategy for how to house vulnerable people in the event of a shock.
- Address the threat of a public safety crisis by developing safety protocols and response procedures, and invest in support systems to promote emotional recovery when violence does occur. Some Panelists noted that such protocols and systems should be careful not to create or exacerbate a culture of fear in communities.
- Provide public education on emergency preparedness with particular focus on schools and workplaces.