

Summary of Advice from the Toronto Planning Review Panel Meeting held December 8, 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.

Pet-Friendly Guidelines: Panelist Reflections and Recommendations

The City of Toronto is developing Pet Friendly Design Guidelines to help developers better accommodate pets in multi-unit, high density communities. The project team first visited the Planning Review Panel in May 2018 to collect preliminary advice from Panelists, and were returning to get the Panel's final feedback on the near-completed document.

Panelists were broadly satisfied with the draft guidelines and felt that the document adequately addresses the opportunities and challenges presented by pets in high-density communities. They noted that while neighbourhood, building, and unit design can address many challenges, there are unresolved issues around owner etiquette and education that may require additional interventions from the City that lie primarily outside the Guidelines.

Panelists had several minor recommendations for the guidelines:

- Include more explicit acknowledgement of the perspectives of non-pet owners and people who don't like or feel safe around animals;
- Provide clear signage in pet zones to help people understand the intended use of spaces and avoid them if desired;
- Consider ways to reduce pet noise at the unit door, especially when owners are absent;
- Ensure that building and unit amenities are still aesthetically pleasing;
- Continue to consider ways to avoid passing additional cost for these interventions on to residents, especially non-pet owning residents.

Detailed Discussion

In response to high numbers of dogs and cats living in multi-unit high density communities in Toronto, the City is producing design guidelines for developers to encourage the creation of more residential units, buildings, and communities that can accommodate needs of pets, pet owners, and non-pet owning residents. The Pet-Friendly Guidelines project team previously visited TPRP on May 5, 2018, to get preliminary advice on the guidelines before beginning the drafting process. They returned to the Panel on December 8th with a draft document for the Panel's final reflections.

Ran Chen, a Senior Urban Designer with the City of Toronto, began by updating the Panel on progress and timelines to the introduction of the draft guidelines. The final document is due to go to Council for approval in Spring 2019. Ran then reviewed the Panel's previous feedback, as well as the feedback received from other public engagement carried out over the last year.

Next, Antonio Gomez-Palacio, consultant on the project from Dialog Design, presented an overview of the draft guidelines. The guidelines cover three levels of design at the neighbourhood, building, and unit level. It includes suggested amenities such as pet hygiene and grooming stations, designated spaces indoors and outdoors for pet relief and recreation, noise-proofing, and types of durable materials that can be used for floors and outdoor spaces.

Following the presentation, Panelists discussed whether the draft guidelines adequately addressed the opportunities and challenges presented by pets living in multi-unit, high density communities in Toronto.

Discussion

In small groups, the Panelists first discussed the overall adequacy of the draft document. The majority of Panelists agreed that the draft was appropriate and addressed most of the challenges that the Panel first noted at the May 2018 meeting, as well as others described in the presentation. Panelists appreciated the thoughtful way in which the guidelines were drafted, but emphasized that the document should be sure to equitably represent the views and needs of non-pet owners or people who don't like or feel comfortable around pets.

Panelists had several specific recommendations for minor additions or changes to the document:

- Include more in the preamble to the document about taking into consideration the safety, comfort, and health of people who don't like or feel comfortable around pets, or people allergic to pets, and that guidelines are but one way to support functional pet-friendly communities;
- Clearly mark pet zones in and around buildings to help make the intended use of the pet spaces clear, and help non-pet owners avoid animals if desired. Similarly have highly visible signage or other ways to emphasize pet-friendly entrances and distinguish from the other entrances;

- Ensure outdoor relief areas are still aesthetically pleasing and have security cameras to prevent misuse;
- Consider ways to ensure building amenities for pets don't increase cost for non pet-owners;
- Consider ways to design units so that dogs stay away from building corridors to mitigate against noise from barking at the door (e.g. integrated baby gates or dog nooks at back of unit);
- Consider additional ways to mitigate conflict at elevators, such as by including etiquette signage;
- Review and update the guidelines regularly as new ideas arise and new materials become available.

Panelists noted that while design can address many of the challenges that pets pose in buildings, there are a number of ways in which the challenges can only be addressed by better owner education and etiquette training, as well as proper enforcement of existing by-laws. One panelist also noted that there may be a need for the City to ensure that condos built to be pet-friendly don't later adopt anti-pet rules and policies. There was some discussion about how the city or broader community could address this unfilled need. Some Panelists proposed the guidelines at least include reference to the need for these other tools.