ResilientTO: Neighbourhood Resilience Working Session Summary

November 30, 2017

Overview

On November 17th 2017, the ResilientTO office hosted a three-hour session with key stakeholders involved in work related to 'neighbourhood resilience' in order to:

- Review, confirm and identify the barriers and opportunities associated with 'neighbourhood resilience' in Toronto;
- Understand the work that is currently taking place within the city to determine how we can build on it; and
- Prioritise potential areas for work in key Discovery areas in Phase II and eventually the strategy.

With over 20 representatives from different City divisions, community organizations, non-profits and neighbourhoods in attendance (see attendance list in Appendix 1), the session also provided an opportunity for capacity building and collaboration between the stakeholders.

At the start of the workshop, the Chief Resilience Officer (CRO) provided a brief overview of ResilientTO, including both the shocks and stresses identified during the research phase. He further provided a preliminary definition of 'neighbourhood resilience': the capacity of a local community to respond to chronic stresses, such as housing, and acute shocks, like floods or blizzards.

Breakout discussions followed, where participants provided feedback on both community-level and citywide barriers and opportunities to neighbourhood resilience.

Key Messages

Throughout the session, a number of key messages emerged:

Prioritize relationship building. Capacity building, collaborations and connections across City divisions, as well as between communities, organizations and policy makers, were identified as essential in addressing structural issues within Toronto.

Specifically, **it is important to ensure both horizontal and vertical forms of social capital exist within neighbourhoods and within the city**[1]. While many neighbourhoods have

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[1] Horizontal social capital refers to networks and connections among equals within a community. Vertical social capital refers to ties between individuals/social groups, which cross social divides. For more information on definitions of social capital, visit
https://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/explanation-types-social-capital/

excellent social networks and community groups, they may not have access to those with decision-making power. Therefore, a focus on relationship building includes:

- **Building connections between diverse communities and organizations targeting isolation.** Services and physical spaces are key elements that can assist in building social cohesion. Learning from existing community hub models and connecting them across the city may assist in developing an understanding of how to best combat isolation and alienation.

- **Developing opportunities to better connect community organizations, nonprofits and individuals from marginalized communities with those who have decision-making power.** Uneven access to power (due to race, class, gender and mental health) was defined as a key barrier especially within certain neighbourhoods. Better connecting community organizations, with those with decision-making power should be prioritized through this process.

Foster a holistic and proactive approach to resilience. Many service providers (nonprofit organizations and city divisions) have particular focuses and therefore offer band-aid solutions to larger systemic issues. Instead, the resilience strategy should consider long-term approaches to problem solving. This includes building capacity from both the bottom up (grassroots, community organizations) and top down (municipal, regional and provincial governments).

Develop a common vision for resilience in the City that can help to cut through silos in the government. This core vision should include concrete, actionable goals, developed by and with City of Toronto employees to ensure shared goals and principles within the workplace.

Develop neighbourhood-specific visions of and policies for resilience, to recognize that distinct issues exist within the diverse neighbourhoods of the city and to help establish necessary priorities for investments in both social and physical infrastructure in these areas.

Determine how to capitalize on underutilized spaces for neighbourhood resilience. Physical space across the city is increasingly unaffordable. This unaffordability relates not only to housing but also to rents for small-scale businesses, community groups and nonprofit space. Developing tools to better advocate for and acquire for affordable space for neighbourhood resilience purpose should be prioritized.

Prioritize communication and engagement throughout the process. Determining the best way to frame this strategy is essential moving forward. Specifically, participants discussed the need to **"put blood on the issue"** to ensure the city issues are made real and tangible to both stakeholders and the general public. Considering the best language and approach to communication should also be prioritized. As one participant indicated, resilience is a loaded term. It can mean "no matter how much you beat us down, we bounce back." Whether or not 'resilience' is used in communications should be determined.

Ensure action is taken. Toronto has a plethora of strategies and plans, often with no funding attached. The resilience work needs to prioritize the strategies already in existence and help develop actionable steps to achieve their goals and recommendations. A

common set of criteria to evaluate and assess progress should be developed. These evaluation criteria could be borrowed from other plans and strategies, to avoid duplication and ensure consistency (such as Urban HEART).

Issues Review

A number of issues were presented to the stakeholders. These issues were identified through previous consultations and research:

- Affordable housing
- Mobility (transit)
- Income (poverty)
- Food insecurity
- Aging infrastructure
- Spatial nature of inequality

Stakeholders were broken into small groups and asked to consider the following questions:

- Do the issues identified in the presentation resonate with you and your experiences in Toronto?
- What's missing from this conversation? (Are there other issues not represented in this presentation?)
- What are the barriers to neighbourhood resilience?

Below is a summary of the discussion, including key issues and barriers that emerged:

Additional issues:

There are many other structural, socio-economic issues (stresses) in Toronto including **racism, mental health, unemployment and the experiences of newcomers (lack of social and economic mobility)**. There was an in depth discussion amongst stakeholders about the changing nature of social and economic mobility in Toronto. Anecdotally, participants discussed how it is more difficult for all Torontonians, especially new immigrants and people in poverty, to build socio-economic capital today than it was a generation ago.

There was recognition that **Toronto has a good baseline for community centres, schools and the health system.**

Barriers

Social capital:
There is a need for both vertical and horizontal social capital within neighbourhoods.
Many neighbourhoods have incredible social networks at the community-level (horizontal forms of social capital) that are already involved in resilience work. However, even if strong ties exist at the community-level, these networks may not have access to decision-makers and people in power (vertical social capital). Participants identified a democratic deficit in the City, where many Torontonians have limited access to power, often based on race, religion, class, gender. Participants also identified an absence of neighbourhood voices. In some cases, many organizations work in neighbourhoods but don't necessarily offer a voice for the local community. Participants identified that it is important to recognize the

community-level work that is currently happening within neighbourhoods but also to ensure connections to decision-makers.

Participants discussed a lack of resources (time and financial) to make neighbourhood-level projects happen. There was a specific discussion about the lack of philanthropic funds targeted toward city-based or community-level projects. with over 80% of philanthropic funding going towards hospitals, universities and private schools. The need to build partnerships between city staff and philanthropists to maximize the effectiveness of projects was discussed.

Alienation and isolation are major issues both at the personal and community level. Specifically, there was discussion on the lack of spaces, both physical and otherwise, where communities can build social cohesion. This is especially true in marginalized communities and neighbourhoods.

Governance:
Silos need to be broken down. The 'silo-ing' of institutions was particularly identified as a barrier to addressing issues within the City. Specifically, the lack of integration and coordination amongst City divisions often results in an inability to move forward on initiatives and approve projects. Narrow mandates can result in a lack of flexibility and inaction. An example discussed in one of the groups reflects the larger systemic issues: A traffic light in a community needed to be moved in order to ensure safer crossing. When a community organization raised this to the City, the individual divisions were so focused on their individual mandates (separation distances to sidewalks, for instance), that this issue took years to resolve.

"The transactional nature of many of the services supersede systemic/structural solutions." Many participants discussed the need to be more proactive and forward thinking when addressing issues within our city. Participants indicated that while solid service-delivery organizations exist, they often prioritize imminent problems, expediency, efficiency and cost saving approaches, which can ignore the root (systemic and structural) causes of the problems. In addition, there was a sense that the focus on service provision can perpetuate individualism (where people are required to fix their own problems) instead of taking a community approach to problem solving. The need for longer term, holistic and proactive solutions was identified.

Physical space:
Physical infrastructure limitations across neighbourhoods exist. Specific issues discussed include:
- **Lack of investment outside the downtown:** Some participants indicated that while there is social and programmatic investment in neighbourhood improvement areas, there is a lack of investment in physical infrastructure, with development concentrated in the downtown core.
- **Unaffordability of community space:** Community organizations cannot access affordable space (both temporary and permanent).
- **Development across neighbourhoods is increasingly standardized**, with the influx of chain and condominium developments. Participants discussed how they want to see the social diversity in their neighbourhoods reflected in the physical infrastructure.

Opportunities

After identifying the major issues and barriers, participants were asked to consider opportunities: The specific questions to consider included the following:

- What opportunities exist to address the issues/barriers?
- What does large-scale change look like?
- What's going on already and how can we build on it?
- How do we best engage communities?

Participants looked at a number of opportunities to address the issues and barriers identified above. Specifically, one group added a consideration: "**What can the CRO do within the City structure? What is the opportunity for the CRO?**" A number of opportunities were discussed, summarized below:

Develop a cohesive corporate vision, values and principles: Consider the values and vision for resilience in the city and how resilience can be embedded within the city structure (both within the city government and within the entire city more broadly).

Facilitate streamlined processes and establish an integrated approach for City divisions to collaborate. There was discussion about the CRO acting as a facilitator (or hiring a facilitator), who could put in place processes to cut across silos and ensure that divisions speak to each other and find alignment on large-scale issues.

Establish a resilience fund and/or reward system: Provide opportunities for divisions, organizations and individuals to apply to a resilience fund. This could include a rewards system, similar to the Toronto Green Standards model. This would be an implementable action item.

Build relationships with community organizations and hubs across the city to combat isolation and uneven power structures. Participants discussed the need to a) understand the assets (services, organizations, hubs) that currently exist in Toronto; and b) determine how to better connect them. This could be done by creating an inventory of the organizations using a participatory mapping process.

Develop neighbourhood (ward) specific visions, policies and governance models. Establish neighbourhood-specific visions and policies that better utilize community benefits agreements across the city, push for smaller retail footprints (to address chain store issues) and consider updated zoning regulations such as inclusionary zoning. In addition, consider innovative political and community-based tools such as participatory budgeting and community councils to better empower local councilors and encourage neighbourhood-specific responses to resilience challenges.

Push the political discourse. Encourage a groundswell of partner organizations, communities and individuals to advocate for local, regional and provincial collaborations and change.

Next Steps

Phase One of the 100RC process, (the preliminary resilience assessment (PRA)), is nearing completion. Participants discussed potential actions to take during Phase 2. These include:

1. Establish a holistic understanding of 'what is going' within the city, both with regards to policies and projects in order to identify gaps and opportunities for action. Recommendations from participants include:
   a. **Create an inventory of community hubs**, organizations and services across the city through a mapping activity. This inventory could be a first step in establishing collaborations and relationships.
   b. **Conduct a review and prioritization of municipal, regional and provincial strategies** and policies that relate to resilience in order to determine the best actionable items. This can help to avoid duplication of strategies and ensure implementable actions.
2. **Develop a communications and engagement plan** in order to: a) communicate the purpose of the resilience strategy; and b) to build capacity amongst Torontonians to participate in resilience thinking and actions. As part of this development, participants suggested the following questions to consider:
   - Ensure residents from across Toronto (not only in the downtown core) are brought into the process.
   - Does the word 'resilience' best communicate the purpose of the strategy or is it an alienating term?
   - Consider how to communicate why this strategy is different from other strategies (TransformTO).

Appendix 1: Neighbourhood Resilience Attendee List		
	Name	Organization
1	Imara Rolston	City of Toronto
2	Domenico Calla	Toronto Public Health, City of Toronto
3	Martin Canning	Evergreen
4	Graham Haines	Ryerson City Building Institute
5	Brenda Roche	Wellesley Institute
6	Sean Gadon	Affordable Housing Office, City of Toronto
7	Sonya Meek	TRCA SNAP
8	Kevin Tudhope	Toronto Water, City of Toronto
9	Sharon Avery	Toronto Foundation
10	Richard Joy	Urban land Institute (Toronto)
11	Anne Gloger	East Scarborough Storefront
12	Alex Dow	United Way (Toronto and York Region)
13	Daniel Fusca	Toronto City Planning
14	Aderonke Akande	Tower and Neighbourhood Revitalization, City of Toronto
15	Michelle Francis	Community Action Planning Group (CAPG)
16	John Smith	Social Development Finance Administration, City of Toronto
17	Sabina Ali	Thorncliffe Park Women's Committee
18	Priya Hawkins	Local Champions Project
	Staff/Facilitators	
19	Elliot Cappell	Chief Resilience Officer, City of Toronto
20	Stewart Dutfield	Resilience, City of Toronto (Facilitator)
21	Ana Maria Medina	Resilience, City of Toronto (Facilitator)
22	Sara Udow	Gladki Planning Associates, Crazy Dames (Facilitator)
23	Paul Kulig	Perkins and Will (Facilitator)
24	Hannah Brash	Perkins and Will (Facilitator)
25	Leah Birnbaum	Leah Birnbaum Consulting
26	Olivia Stinson	100 Resilient Cities
27	Paul Lillehaugen	100 Resilient Cities