

Resilient Toronto

Part 1: Define the Focus Areas

A summary of the first event of a three-part series designed to engage city-builders and citizens in the development of a robust Resilience Strategy for the City of Toronto. Parts Two (Opportunities) and 3 (Implementation Plan) will build on this discussion and take place in 2018.



+ PLACEMAKER

SUMMARY

On September 26, 2017 the Canadian Urban Institute, in partnership with the City of Toronto, and with the support of Mott MacDonald, hosted the first in a three-part Resilient Toronto Event Series to track the development of Toronto's new Resilience Strategy.

In 2017 the City of Toronto joined the Rockefeller 100 Resilient Cities Network and received funding to hire a Chief Resilience Officer and develop this Strategy. The event series provides opportunities for Toronto city builders to learn about and input to the Strategy development.

The first event featured an update from Toronto's new Chief Resilience Officer, Elliott Cappell, on the Preliminary Resilience Assessment (PRA). Elliott was joined by a panel of experts in:

- Parks and public spaces - Dave Harvey, Executive Director, Park People;
- Land use and regional planning - Marcy Burchfield, Executive Director, Neptis; and
- Innovation and inclusion – Adil Dhalla, Executive Director, Centre for Social Innovation.

100 Resilient Cities defines urban resilience as “the capacity of individuals, communities, institutions, businesses, and systems within a city to survive, adapt, and grow no matter what kinds of chronic stresses and acute shocks they experience.”





UPDATE FROM THE CRO: ELLIOTT CAPPELL

The PRA will allow the City to determine the areas of focus for the Strategy from amongst the range of challenges facing the city. Interestingly, the City's assessed and perceived risks point to different issues. For example, Elliott described how the Provincially mandated risk assessment showed that energy supply is the highest-ranking risk in Toronto while Torontonians are tending to identify housing affordability, income inequity, traffic congestion, and municipal finance and governance as the biggest perceived stresses. The City's Resilience Strategy will need to address this range of issues, a challenge Elliott summarized as, "In the context of a rapidly urbanising city, a changing climate, and a connected global economy, how do we enable inclusive, climate resilient growth?"

In a preview of potential City actions, Elliott described the need for "mainstreaming" - integrating climate change adaptation into all City activities. He also mentioned the importance of neighbourhoods in creating urban resilience, citing the example of the opportunity of the approximately 1200 post-war residential towers in the City. Changes in zoning would allow for the incorporation of retail stores, services and additional community facilities to service these towers and could contribute to the development of more resilient neighbourhoods.

The panel and audience responded with suggestions for the development of the Strategy.

SUGGESTIONS FROM THE PANEL AND AUDIENCE

MAKE THE PLAN ACTIONABLE

Dave Harvey encouraged Elliott to incorporate early wins that are connected to existing plans and initiatives - such as TransformTO, Tower Renewal and the upcoming Ravine Strategy. He also suggested that small tangible actions would help people feel more connected to the process.

CONSIDER THE REGIONAL SCALE

Marcy Burchfield pointed out that Toronto's significant stresses of climate change, housing affordability, congestion and equity all transcend municipal boundaries. She suggested that the resilience of the City will be tied to the resilience of the surrounding region, citing traffic congestion as an example of a stress that cannot be addressed at the City scale alone.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE CITY'S ASSETS

Dave Harvey described the opportunity for parks to play a greater role in supporting urban resilience. Both from an infrastructure perspective (such as the stormwater management functions of Corktown Common and Raindrop Plaza) and as a social connector. He indicated that in some neighbourhoods

parks are as important as community centres. An audience member suggested that the City's libraries are also a key resource from both a community engagement and neighbourhood resilience perspective.

CREATE A CULTURE OF RESILIENCE THROUGH INCLUSION...

Adil Dhalla stated that Toronto residents must feel meaningfully engaged if we are to create a resilience culture. He suggested that true inclusion is not just about inviting everyone to the table; it's about making sure that they have a role. And that we need to be prepared to accept that if people say that the table is not the right place to sit, it's not the right place to sit. True inclusion requires listening and responding to the needs of the people being engaged.

... AND WAYS WE CAN DO THAT

Several speakers urged governments to rethink engagement processes to allow for broader input and to develop solutions that better represent Toronto. Dave Harvey

suggested the need to 'go for a walk'. To talk to people in their own neighbourhoods about what resilience means to them. Marcy Burchfield recommended that the City partner with non-governmental organizations to make use of their strong, existing relationships and their ability to move more quickly. Adil Dhalla stressed that the development of the strategy needs to engage people that are the focus of the engagement. An audience member pointed out that this is not always possible when many government procurements require the design of the engagement strategy during the proposal process.

FIND NEW SOURCES OF FUNDING

The need for additional sources of funding to support increased resilience in Toronto was raised by many. Example approaches discussed included road tolls, increasing property taxes to reflect true costs, coordinating with other levels of government to more directly match income with responsibilities, and increasing the City's debt load, although it was acknowledged that each has its challenges.



NEXT STEPS

The development of the Resilience Strategy is generating conversations about the biggest challenges facing Toronto and the actions and changes in City operations and governance needed to address them.

The City will be working to incorporate the input and recommendations heard through these conversations in the Preliminary Resilience Assessment, which will be complete by the end of November, 2017. The City will then move into Phase II, Strategy Development, in early 2018.

CUI and the City of Toronto will host two more Resilient Toronto +PLACEMAKER sessions in 2018 to provide opportunities for city builders and citizens to input to and discuss the development of the Strategy as it is created. Information will be available at: canurb.org/events





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