

## Re: Committee of Adjustment Development Notices: Signage Redesign

Summary of Advice from the Planning Review Panel, June 15, 2019

### 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.

Advice re: Committee of Adjustment Signage Redesign

The City of Toronto is designing new public notices for the Committee of Adjustment with the goal of making them more engaging, informative, accessible, and attractive. Staff from the Planning Division and Committee of Adjustment provided the Panel with two updated design options — Sign 1, in landscape, and Sign 2, in portrait (see Appendix for images of both signs). The Panel provided input on what they found effective and ineffective about each, which sign they preferred, and high level general feedback on design, layout, and content. The Panel identified five primary recommendations for the Committee of Adjustment sign redesign:

1. Use simple language. Most Panelists felt that Sign 2 (the portrait design) did the best job of avoiding jargon, but also noted that both signs still used inaccessible language;
2. Organize the information so that the most important information goes closer to the top of the sign. Most Panelists felt that the most important information was the public meeting details;
3. Include calls to action such as “Give your feedback” that tells the public what the City wants them to do with the information on the sign.
4. Combine the organized, visual look of Sign 2 with the landscape orientation of Sign 1 and try to incorporate more white space if possible;
5. Improve the prominence and clarity of the icons to help the public quickly spot and understand the most important pieces of information.

### Detailed Summary

The City of Toronto is updating public notice signage for the Committee of Adjustment, a quasi-judicial citizen body that rules on applications for minor variances and consents. This project follows other recent updates to the City’s planning signage, including development proposal signage and new residential infill signs. The signs are intended to inform community members of the details of the application as well as details of the Committee’s public hearings.

The current signs are 11 x 17 and use bright green or orange paper. The City wants to update the signs to align with the design sensibilities of the new development application and residential infill signage, by using the same colours and fonts, making them larger, and printing them on coroplast material. The increased size may mean that the signs will need to go on lawns or fences rather than in the window of houses. The redesign's goal is to ensure that the new signs are more engaging, informative, accessible, legible, and attractive to the general public.

Carolyn Humphreys, Manager of Graphics and Visualization for the Planning Division, and Andre Robichaud from the Committee of Adjustment, provided background information about the role and purview of the Committee itself, and then presented two new options for the redesigned signs. The new sign options are 24 x 18 with one sign in landscape (Sign 1) and the other in portrait (Sign 2). Each sign also differed in their content, organization of information, and use of icons. See Appendix for images of the designs provided to the Panel.

The project team requested feedback on which elements of each sign were effective and ineffective, what sign the Panelists preferred, and any other feedback that could help the City finalize the design of the sign.

The Panelists discussed the proposed designs in small groups, and identified several recommendations.

## Discussion

The Panel broadly agreed on the following recommendations to the project team.

1. Language and Word Choice. The Panelists broadly agreed that the signs must use simple language that is accessible and clear to anyone who may read it, no matter their level of English comprehension or understanding of city planning. Panelists felt that Sign 2 did a better job of using simple language; for example, the heading of Sign 2 reads “A change is proposed for this site” rather than “Minor Variance from the Zoning By-law”. Panelists noted words like “ancillary”, which was present on both signs, could be too inaccessible to a broad audience. Panelists suggested that if there is a need to include specific less accessible terms — for legal reasons, for example — it should be at the bottom of the sign and not prominently featured.
2. Hierarchy of Information. Panelists agreed that the order of information on the sign should be reconsidered, with the most important pieces of information featured most prominently. The Panel felt that the public meeting information is the most important detail. Some Panelists also felt that the address of the site should be given more prominence, as demonstrated in Sign 1.
3. Call to Action. Panelists felt that the current signs do not clearly invite the public to participate in the Committee's work, and agreed that there should be more clear “calls to action” on the signs to help the public understand what the City wants them to do with the information provided. For example, the designers could add “Give your feedback” above the details of the public hearing, or “Learn more” above the contact information. Some Panelists

suggested emphasizing the text “public meeting” and the date and time for that meeting with an eye-catching colour like red or orange.

4. Layout. Although most Panelists preferred the content of Sign 2, the Panelists were split on which layout they preferred. Some Panelists liked the information flow and more visual approach of Sign 2 while others preferred the white space of Sign 1 because it felt less cluttered, more naturally readable, and was consistent with the layout of other City Planning signage. Some Panelists suggested as a compromise that the icons and more accessible wording of Sign 2 could be combined with the orientation of Sign 1.
5. Icons. The Panel had significant feedback on the sign icons. The Panel broadly agreed that the icons on both signs could be more prominent and eye-catching: some suggested they be larger, while others proposed adding another colour like yellow or orange to make them “pop”. Many Panelists had feedback on specific changes to the icon illustrations:
  - Panelists felt the “location” icon on Sign 2 wasn’t visually helpful, and also may mislead people into thinking that the application is specific to North York;
  - Panelists felt the “contact us” icon, currently a computer and a smartphone, could be simplified by replacing with a question mark or universal ‘i’ in a circle for ‘Information’;
  - Panelists thought the “participation” icon could better communicate opportunities to participate if the symbol was of a person with a megaphone or an open mouth with “sound lines”;
  - Panelists thought the “variance” icon could be confusing, because it shows a building with a planned height increase, but there are many types of variances that could be under review. They suggested using a variety of icons which would more closely represent the changes being made to the particular property in question. Some Panelists suggested the proposed change on the icon could be made more dramatic and eye-catching, either with another colour or with diagonal shading.

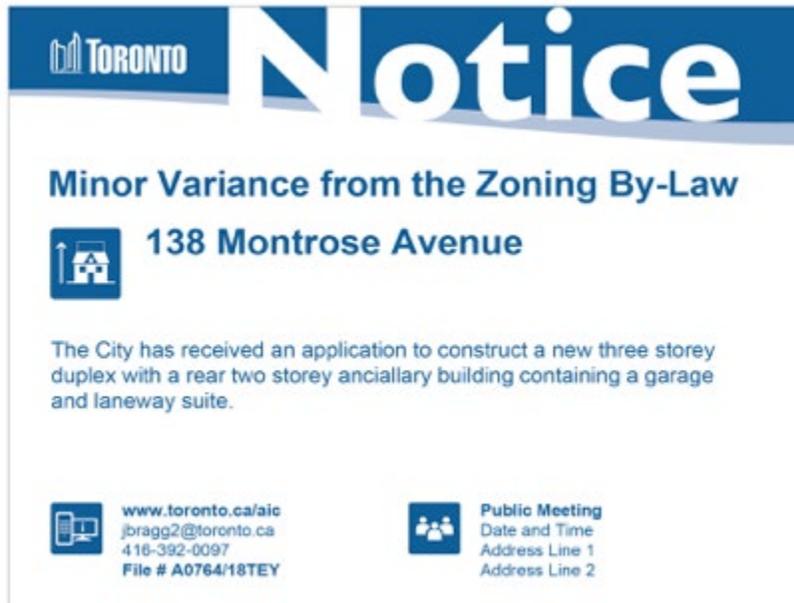
Panelists also discussed additional ideas and general recommendations. Though the Panel did not reach agreement on any of these recommendations as being essential, additions included:

- Combine the file number with the contact information. Alternatively, de-emphasize or get rid of it altogether. Some Panelists felt that people were more likely to use the site address for reference in an online lookup than the file number;
- Align the description of the proposed change to be off-centre so it draws the eye;
- Put a border around the description of change to isolate it from the other information and make it more prominent; and
- Reduce the number of ‘clicks’ people have to take to get to a webpage of information about the application in question, such as through putting a QR code on the sign, or generally streamlining the online lookup process.



## Appendix

### Sign 1



**TORONTO Notice**

**Minor Variance from the Zoning By-Law**

 **138 Montrose Avenue**

The City has received an application to construct a new three storey duplex with a rear two storey ancillary building containing a garage and laneway suite.

 [www.toronto.ca/aic](http://www.toronto.ca/aic)  
jbragg2@toronto.ca  
416-392-0097  
File # A0764/18TEY

 **Public Meeting**  
Date and Time  
Address Line 1  
Address Line 2

### Sign 2



**TORONTO Notice**

**A change is proposed for this site.**

The City has received an application to construct a new three storey duplex with a rear two storey ancillary building containing a garage and laneway suite.

 **MINOR VARIANCE FROM THE ZONING BY-LAW**

 **File # A0764/18TEY**  
138 Montrose Avenue

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 **PUBLIC MEETING**  
Date and Time  
Address Line 1  
Address Line 2