

# Summary of Input from Neighbourhood Associations to the Special Committee on Governance

## 1. Executive Summary

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### 1.1. Introduction

The Special Committee on Governance, established by City Council to consider the impacts on the City's governance structure and processes from the reduction in the size of Council, asked staff to consult with the city's neighbourhood associations as part of its work. This report summarises the input received from associations during September and October 2019.

Neighbourhood associations (NAs) are local, geographically focused groups such as neighbourhood coalitions, groups and partnerships, organizations that receive City grants to support community networking, ratepayer groups and resident associations. The consultation was designed to support a conversation with neighbourhood associations -- their relationship with each other, City Council, and local and city-wide decision-making.

Neighbourhood association members and coordinators were invited to:

- Complete a brief online survey with twelve questions that asked about their membership, their activities and their relationship with the City and its governance processes,
- Attend a one-on-one discussion with staff at the City's the Civic Centres (3-7 pm at Scarborough Civic Centre on September 24, North York Civic Centre on September 25, City Hall on September 26, and Etobicoke Civic Centre on September 30), and
- Attend a workshop to discuss and share suggestions about the City's governance processes and explore ideas for an "Office of Neighbourhoods" held from 6:30-8:30 pm at Metro Hall on October 1, 2019.

Neighbourhood associations participated from across the City, particularly from Toronto and East York, and North York.

- The online survey generated 210 responses.
- The four pop-up consultations in Civic Centres were attended by 40 people, representing 27 neighbourhood associations.
- The workshop was attended by 35 people representing 28 neighbourhood associations.

This report summarizes the feedback received from the consultations with neighbourhood associations. The input will be posted to the City's Open Data website at [www.toronto.ca/Open](http://www.toronto.ca/Open) and at [www.toronto.ca/TOgovernance](http://www.toronto.ca/TOgovernance).

### 1.2. Key Findings

Neighbourhood associations were encouraged to discuss their groups' work, their relationship with residents and other organizations, their thoughts about the impact of the reduced Council size, their role in city-wide and local decision-making, and the City's role in working with them.

- Many neighbourhood associations expressed commitment to their local community, were familiar with many aspects of City governance, and participated regularly in civic engagement and community building.
- Some respondents were from new organizations, or had limited knowledge about how to communicate local concerns through City-wide governance processes; others indicated limited need to interact with the City.
- Through all engagement streams staff heard that associations and most community groups function on volunteer labour, have few resources and receive limited resources from the City.

The findings suggest that many neighbourhood associations, particularly resident associations, had similar concerns before the interim governance model was put in place in December 2018, but these concerns have been exacerbated as a result of the changes. They expressed that they are challenged to convey their concerns through local governance processes, and to have timely action taken to address them. Resident associations, in particular, would like improved communication, decision-making and civic engagement at the neighbourhood level.

Major themes include:

- A sentiment that Councillors are the critical connection for the public's voice to be heard in City decision making and concerns that the change in ward boundaries and size has limited the Councillors' availability.
- A frustration that City staff and services are sometimes slow or unresponsive to resident concerns, and that City services are operating in "silos".
- A sense that some governance processes are unreasonably difficult to understand, time-consuming and costly to challenge, and unfairly biased against resident association interests.
- A concern that residents are not well informed or consulted on new developments, that the densification is happening at a speed that is challenging the ability of existing residents to integrate, and that the traditional character of neighbourhoods is being altered in ways that are not always welcome or well-managed.
- A concern that the City could be doing more to support neighbourhood associations, who perform an important role as a link between local communities and larger processes, and suggestions for what support would look like, such as, dedicated staff to help navigate City processes on their behalf.
- A caution that resident associations are not generally representative of their neighbourhoods, that they differ drastically in focus, size and resources, and that they are faced with challenges to increase their membership, and be more inclusive.

### **1.3. Consultation Objectives**

Considerations that guided the consultation planning included:

- Understanding the role that neighbourhood associations play in local and city-wide decision-making; how they engage and outreach with their residents and neighbouring communities; and how the reduction in Council size has impacted them.
- How the governance structures and processes are functioning at the local level.

- Ideas neighbourhood associations have about an "Office of Neighbourhoods": what it would do, how it would function, and how they would interact with it.

#### **1.4. Communications and Outreach**

Communication materials, including an invitational flyer, an introduction to the online survey and a supplementary sheet about City resources, described the scope of the consultation and mandate of the committee to support participation from neighbourhood associations who were familiar with the City's governance issues and those were not.

The invitation and flyer about the consultation was emailed to approximately 400 neighbourhood groups and associations. Many of these emails were then forwarded by the recipients, e.g. one group forwarded to 230 email addresses. The invite was also mailed to 458 neighbourhood associations. As well, information about the consultation was posted to *Get Involved*, the City's public engagement portal.

City divisions and programs distributed information to their networks including the Business Improvement Area Office, Community Development Fund, Community Development Officers, Community Disability Steering Committee, Community Garden Network, Community Health Officers, Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit, Indigenous Affairs Office, Public Consultation Unit, Toronto Arts Council, Toronto Community Housing Corporation – Housing Stability Services, Toronto Public Health Access and Equity Team, Toronto Strong Neighbourhood Strategy, Waste Reduction Grants, Youth Outreach Workers, and any neighbourhood associations in their networks.

Staff forwarded information about the consultation as well to external partners including: The 519 Community Centre, Center for Connected Communities, Confederation of Resident & Ratepayer Associations in Toronto (CORRA), Federation of North Toronto Residents' Associations (FoNTRA), Rexdale Garden Network, Scarborough Civic Action Network, Social Planning Toronto, Toronto Atlas of Neighbourhood Groups and Organizations (TANGO), Toronto Food Policy Council, Toronto Local Immigration Partnerships, Women in Toronto Politics.

To supplement the survey and discussion material, staff compiled a resource sheet with information for associations including how to sign up for minutes and agendas, URLs for web portals of *Growing Conversations*, *Get Involved* and *Well-Being Toronto*, community grants, staff directory and service standards, etc. At the pop-ups and workshop, brochures and current reports from the various City departments were made available (Toronto Strong Neighbourhood Strategy 2020, *Get Involved*, Historical Society, etc.).

## **2. Consultation Activities**

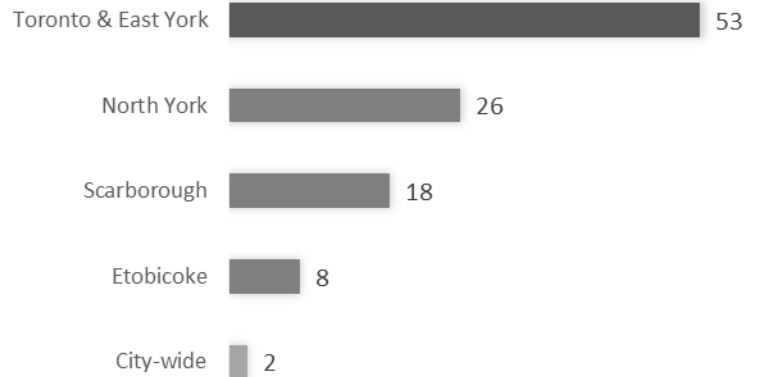
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### **2.1. Who participated in the Consultations?**

Staff received input from over a hundred distinct neighbourhood associations from across the city. Associations that indicated a name/location were in these areas:

- Toronto and East York Community Council Area = 53 (50%)
- North York Community Council Area = 26 (24%)
- Scarborough Community Council Area = 18 (17%)
- Etobicoke Community Council Area = 8 (7%)
- City-wide networks or groups = 2 (2%)

The 107 unique neighbourhood associations are located within these Community Council boundaries areas...



Some associations chose to participate more than once:

- 68 groups participated in 1 engagement opportunity (63%)
- 28 groups participated in at 2 engagement opportunities (26%)
- 11 groups participated in all 3 engagement opportunities (10%)

Of the groups that participated:

- 68 had the terms resident, ratepayer, tenant or community association in their name
- 11 were in City designated Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs)
- 1 was a Neighbourhood Planning Tables from an NIA
- 2 were Business Improvement Area (BIA)
- 20 groups related to green initiatives, local parks, networking, advocacy, or community building around food security, literacy, health and fitness, or increasing social interaction.

## 2.2. Online Survey

The online survey was open from September 10 until October 4 (25 days):

- 210 surveys were started
- 22 respondents indicated they were not members of neighbourhood associations
- 160 respondents provided the name of the group they belonged to
- 100+ unique groups were represented

The survey consisted of 12 questions that asked about the association, their activities, funding, relationship with other organization and the City.

Staff heard from many types of neighbourhood associations including social and advocacy groups and organizations, ratepayers, resident, tenant and community associations, with different compositions and ways of working. Some focussed on planning and development, others on park and neighbourhood improvements, or social and cultural activities.

- Some of the neighbourhood associations are incorporated and are run by board of directors, a few are informal networks of individuals with shared goals.

- Some associations have historical arrangements that guarantee use of a local meeting space, but most meet in members' homes, community or communal space, or a coffee shop. Many hold their annual general meetings in local churches.
- Most relied on a combination of membership fees, fundraising, donations, or local sponsorship to fund their activities. Some, such as those in neighbourhood improvement areas or whose focus is preservation of the natural environment, have municipal or provincial grants to support their work.
- Most connect with their members through email and social media like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Many publish newsletters and a few publish magazines.
- Many host events such as all-candidate meetings and annual general meetings to create a sense of community and connect with potential new members. Additional activities include BBQs, film nights, and community events, such as pumpkin parades, eco walks, sports related or arts activities.
- Many connect with other groups in their neighbourhoods such as other resident associations and BIAs. Some connect with community agencies, eco and advocacy organizations. A few connect with the local police or schools.
- Many mentioned being a part of, or supported by, a larger umbrella organization such as FoNTRA, CORRA, SCRO, the Federation of Metro Tenant Associations, Park People or the Green Neighbour Network.
- Some had an open or geographic-based membership, others represented only those who paid a fee; some stated their membership was diverse in terms of socio-demographics backgrounds and interests, whereas others said their membership was non-representative of the broader community: some groups had a growing membership, other groups found getting new members a challenge.
- Many associations meet regularly with their Councillor and report good relationships. Some said "getting the Councillor's ear" was difficult, and that working with staff in the Councillor's office was not effective to get concerns addressed.
- Many associations connect with City staff and mentioned staff from Planning and 311 in particular. They also mentioned Park, Heritage, Toronto Public Health, and Community Development staff.
- Quite a few associations attend Committee meetings and Community Council meetings when an item of the agenda concerns or intersects with the issues in their neighbourhood.
- Neighbourhood associations call 311, attend consultations, participate in decisions on developments and heritage designations, appeals, attend meetings, make deputations, submissions and write reports. Many members watch City processes very closely including the City's accountability and transparency.
- Associations focus on a range of issues from planning and development, transit planning, street safety, local parks and green spaces, TOCore, affordable housing, climate change, MetroLinx, RentSafeTO, Bill 108, and others.

## 2.3. Pop-up Consultations

Four pop-up sessions were held on weekdays from 3-7 pm in four locations:

- 10 associations attended the pop-up consultations held at Scarborough Civic Centre on September 24 (12 people in total)
- 6 attended at North York Civic Centre on September 25 (10 people in total)
- 7 at City Hall on September 26 (10 people in total) and
- 4 at Etobicoke Civic centre on September 30 (8 people in total)

City staff were available for one on one discussions with association members with staff typically spending 30 minutes to over an hour with each association. Staff used the online survey to guide the discussions and note taking. If associations had questions about the City, staff offered information including the resource list described above.

At the pop-up events staff heard from associations about:

- Their relationships with Councillors, their need to meet regularly, and how the communication has been affected by the increased ward size.
- Challenges with planning, development and infrastructure, including concerns the appeals process, and how Section 37 money is allocated.
- Concerns about local traffic, pedestrian safety, bike lanes, and difficulties of getting by-law infractions adequately addressed.
- Concerns about City-wide policies to address climate change, the health of ravines,; the City's investment in parks, the tree canopy, and community and pollinator gardens.
- Issues with Airbnb, affordable housing, tenant protection and advocacy, and food security.
- Analysis of the role of neighbourhood associations, the stress they are under and their need for support, as well as the challenges that they face to organize.

Notes from the sessions were included in the tabulation of the online surveys.

*"If the City has service standards that state there should be a response to emails within 3 days, and we don't hear back from a City department for more than a week, there is a problem."*

## 2.4. Workshop

The workshop, held at Metro Hall on October 1, 2019, and was attended by 35 people from resident associations, tenant associations, and local groups. The workshop was organized to support individual participation and group discussions as well as networking between groups.

Participants were invited to add their own information to a central resources table and join one of the round tables with a staff facilitator and session materials. An introductory sheet asked the name of their association and a few questions including where they were located. The completed sheets were posted on the wall.

A short presentation outlined the mandate of the Committee and consultations to date, and the contribution neighbourhood associations make to the City. A brief discussion on good

governance principles ended with participants adding their contributions to the sentence "Good governance is...". The word cloud from this exercise is shown below.

The first table exercise used a chart listing twelve City programs and governance processes. Participants noted with red or green sticky dots the ones they interacted with which worked well, and those that were not working well. Then participants chose one of the processes marked with a red dot and wrote down what would change the red dot to a green one. Participants then shared and discussed their worksheets with other participants at the table.



For the second table exercise each participant was asked to write down and discuss what they imagined an Office of Neighbourhoods to be, what it would do, how would it run, and how would it relate to their group. A few participants asked why the City was discussing an "Office of Neighbourhoods" and staff explained this was a request from the Committee. One participant asked specifically about the Office being like the Business Improvement Office, staff explained that the term had not been defined.

The findings from the table exercises include:

- Most associations noted that they had "Contact with a Councillor", and most reported good relationships, though recognizing that "it has been much harder for our Councillor and staff to make time for and actually work with local community organizations". Some neighbourhood associations mentioned that, if the Councillor "has already decided what they are going to support", "distrusts community-organized issues", was "unresponsive" to requests from the group, or if the staff are "overwhelmed", then the group was unable to get their concerns met satisfactorily. Solutions offered included "a neighbourhood office to represent the City in a neutral capacity", to "double [the number of] Councillors", and "Councillors need best practices".
- Most participants indicated that "Subscribing to receive Committee email notification for agendas, minutes, reports and decisions" was working well. Some associations have members who specifically scan agendas for items of relevance to the group, and track the progress of files for which they have concerns. Many commented they would like more lead time for agendas, and planning and development consultations in particular.
- Participants highlighted "Participating in an appeal process" as most the problematic for them, noting it is "extremely time-intensive", "daunting to the average citizen", "expensive to hire legal representation", "lacks transparency", and "rules heavily in favour of the applicant with much deeper financial pockets". Suggested solutions included, "more appeal processes", an "educational support group" to help citizens through the process, or legal supports for neighbourhood associations.

*"With the Councillor Office being so busy, we want more information directly from City Planning. We need enough information flow to be made aware of what is coming down the track before it hits us."*

The participants varied widely on their ideas about an Office of Neighbourhoods:

- A few said there was no need for an Office but rather, that the City needs to "unclog bureaucracy", or that associations only require "a web page on the City site" with a registry that would enable them certain privileges, like a free space at a library where they could hold their annual general meeting.
- Some participants suggested a legislated "Community Board" in each ward that would oversee infrastructure and deliver programming, with staff who would organize agendas to which appointed community members would convene and vote.
- The most commonly mentioned ideas about an Office of Neighbourhoods were to have City staff (1 or more) who would share resources and information, organize networking and consultation opportunities, and act as a system navigator to enable neighbourhood associations to accomplish their goals by advocating for their concerns and needs with and between City departments.
- Participants were split on a centralized or decentralized office.

*"There is a clear consensus that the resident associations need to work together, less consensus on the need for an Office of Neighbourhoods, but the City should move forward and consult widely."*

On the workshop itself participants said: "We all have similar issues", there is a "Diversity of opinions", "The City is seriously looking into civic decision-making models", "There is hope", "We will have to continue vigorously because we are left alone", and, "Not sure they will listen".

### 3. Consultation Findings

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From the pop-up session, online survey, and workshop the findings are grouped into the role of associations in civic decision making, concern and ideas about governance, and ideas about an "Office of Neighbourhoods". Additional information about neighbourhood associations (location, size, objectives, funding and activities) is included at the end of this report.

#### **How neighbourhood groups and associations get involved in the City's decision-making:**

On local issues...

Neighbourhood associations are "actively engaged on numerous files", particularly those in their area. The most common focus mentioned is development applications, followed by local planning, Committee of Adjustment and variances, and issues to do with traffic (i.e. traffic planning, calming, safety, and bike lanes) and transit improvements, and secondary plans. Also commonly mentioned was neighbourhood beautification, local parks (and dog parks) and heritage designations, and community safety. Some associations mention involvement in planning tables, neighbourhood hubs, providing feedback on grants, or functions related to tenant issues such as legal clinics, Metro Tenants Association etc.



*"We are concerned with affordable housing and have established a committee to work with other groups across the city."*

*"We would like to help promote more green spaces, community gardens and education of health and food choices."*

On decisions affecting the whole City...

- Many neighbourhood association work through umbrella organizations (e.g. CORRA and FoNTRA), and City Councillors to participate in City-wide decision making.
- The initiatives most frequently mentioned was transit planning such as Metrolinx, Crosstown LRT, as well as, city planning and secondary plans, and review City budgets (e.g. "highlighting illegal user fees"), and activities regarding climate change.
- Many associations participate in City strategies and consultations, like Transform TO, TOCore, RentSafeTO Program, and those around governance. Other concerns include storm water management and capital works, policing, property standards.

*"We've been involved in campaigns for better rules for Airbnb and have participated surveys and meetings rules around noise, and rooming houses"*

- A few groups mention meeting with political representatives at the Provincial and Federal level to discuss issues, including Bill 108, or participating in planning groups such as the Ontario Municipal Board, TLAB, LPAT, and Metrolinx.
- They also mention connecting with school board trustees, school councils, and academic institutions, such as liaisons or researchers.

#### **Neighbourhood association connections to groups in their neighbourhood and across the City:**

Associations noted that they connect most with other neighbourhood (or condo) associations; other neighbourhood planning tables; umbrella organizations for resident associations (like FoNTRA, CORRA, SCRO, West Side Community Council or TANGO) in order to "share best practices"; and local BIAs.

*"There used to be many little resident associations, but now we have had to band together as an umbrella organization in order to have our voice heard."*

- Many associations share event listings and connect with other groups by attending each other's activities, cooperating to raise funds or offer support. Some neighbourhoods are "highly connected and engaged – very diverse".
- Some groups find they have a common mandate with other neighbourhood associations: they work together and share expertise, for example, to "petition the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB)", which requires that they share "members with knowledge and special skills to be more effective in influencing decisions". Others mentioned common concerns like, "Walk Toronto, Cycle Toronto", or "advocacy organizations and groups for parks and trails".
- Others connect to programs, groups or agencies in their neighbourhood like "local meal programs, churches and mosques, library and community centres", arts groups, the

Legion, Neighbourhood Watch, or institutions such as the historical society, Toronto Police.

- Some groups, like neighbourhood planning tables, build partnerships with other agencies in their communities, have representatives that sit on board of directors of local agencies, connect by "sitting at a planning table, or participating in training on how to run meetings and how to get volunteers".

### **Representativeness, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion:**

Some neighbourhood associations commented on difference between groups, their "representativeness" in relation to the broader community, and the challenges that they have to be inclusive. One respondent noted that this is an important issue because "the 'who' drives the 'how' they act and function".

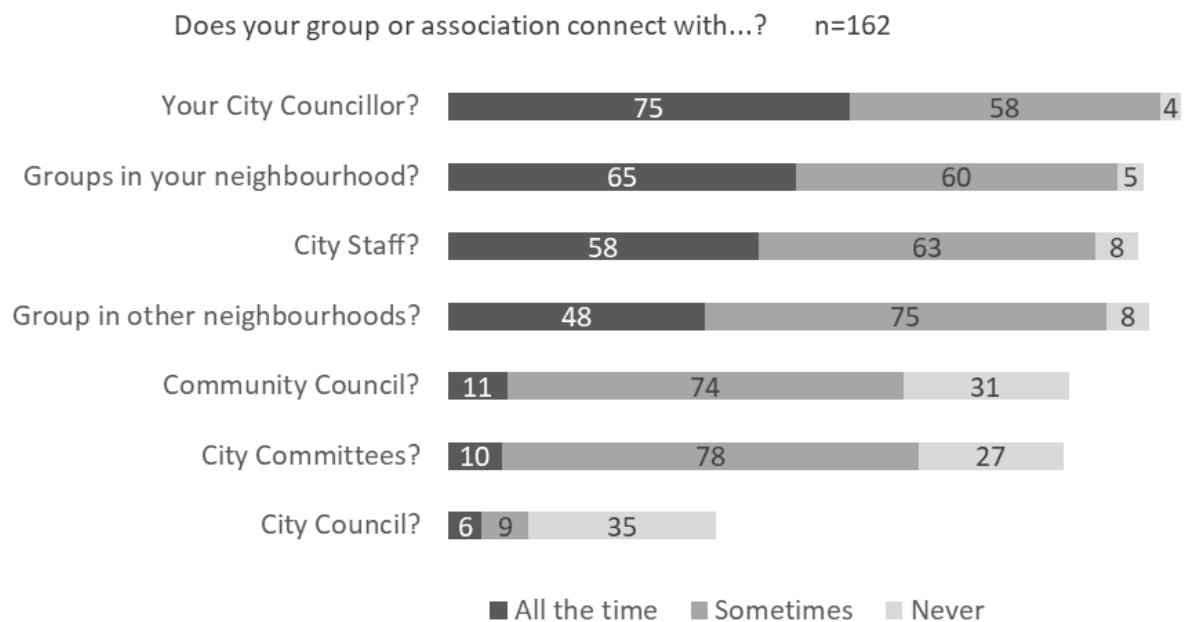
- One association said it had "a very diverse board of directors that includes many agencies, developer, local business and BIAs" which enabled it to pull resources together quite easily. However, others noted that resident associations are not all equal: some "are large and powerful and others are small and volunteer-based".
- A few respondents said that "some groups are more representative than others" and that "there are local resident associations that are exclusive". One participant said "resident associations favour property owners" although noting that the number of renters in communities is increasing. As well, they favour "citizens who can vote over permanent residents".
- One respondent noted that the councillor staff and associations are non-representative even while there are diverse people in the neighbourhood.
- While some neighbourhood associations take on a role as a liaison in their community on issues of neighbourhood importance, others said "residents associations are non-democratic and run by people who say they 'speak' for a community, but can't back that up with any proof that they do".
- Another respondent cautioned against "giving residents associations more official powers" as "all resident associations I know of, mine included, are terribly non-representative of the broader population" and "do not speak for the voice of the greater population" or "engage their whole community and allow for large differences of opinion". Another gave an example of an association that used its' power to limit others in a community to use a shared resource.
- The challenge of representation is also a challenge of inclusion as "large apartments, or 'vertical cities', are very challenging to integrate into a neighbourhood: there are few bridges between the new community and the old neighbourhood, and few supports that help the existing neighbourhood address change and integrate so many new people."
- One respondent advised other associations to have a "minimal test of representativeness" to "ensure your group is representative".

*"One of the challenges is to build the capacity of people living in communities unrepresented by an neighbourhood association...[We] recognize the need for representation, as neighbourhood associations function to protect the interests of the group in a way similar to how business improvement areas*

*represent the needs of businesses."*

### 3.1. How neighbourhood associations participate in civic decision making and their areas of concern:

Not only do neighbourhood associations network within and across neighbourhoods, the online survey results show they connect frequently with their City Councillor, followed by City staff, City committees and Community and City Council. In this section, results from the online survey, pop-up consultations and workshop have been merged to outline some of the challenges that neighbourhood association have when bringing their concerns to elected official, governance bodies, and City services and staff.



#### City Council:

Neighbourhood associations interact the least with City Council.

- Only a few respondents commented that they attend Council meetings in support of particular issues, such as development issues, the Climate Emergency declaration, to express opposition to the reduction in Council size. One said that City Council tends to deal with bigger issues and that "important issues, such as ravines, are getting lost at City Council".
- A few respondents said they attend occasionally "when there are issues that affect our area". One said they will attend "when they have a strategic plan", or they prefer to "deal with individual Councillors" because City Council is non-interactive. Another said the location was inconvenient.

### City Councillor:

Many neighbourhood associations, particularly resident associations, want and seek frequent contact with their Councillor, and report that communicating with the Councillor has become more challenging since the increase in ward size.

- Many resident groups report that they connect with the Councillor "less and less": with the "larger ward size the Councillor has missed the last 2 meetings", the Councillor is "good but stressed", "too busy to look into issues", the Councillor "does not follow-up on emails". A few groups mentioned that the relationship with their Councillor "has not changed" since the reduction in Council size. Respondents frequently said the Councillor needs to "pay attention to every road, every issue, small or large" but that it is "exceedingly difficult for Councillors to cover areas that are twice the size than they were". They no longer have time to "effectively understand the 'on the ground' reality". Councillors are "less accessible" and "can only deal with larger issues" so that "issues presented to them soon drop off of their priority list".
- A new association finds it "difficult to get the ear of the Councillor", another that they are not "familiar with our side of the new ward", that bigger resident associations "are better connected", or that the Councillor is "more interested during election time".
- A few respondents expressed that "staff seem to be confused", "overwhelmed, disorganized" and it "feels like [the resident association] is educating the Councillor staff on issues". Some respondents said they felt as though their voice was "minimized", that they are "getting in the way of business as usual" as staff are "unresponsive to ideas coming from residents for policy change".
- Participants said that "new associations are now being created" because "residents feel banding together is the only way to have their voices heard by a Councillor" and another noted that they have set meetings "3 times a year with our Councillor's office" and that they go as "a group of five joint resident associations" to discuss and resolve issues which is "very effective, time wise". "We work hard to maintain effective relationships with key staff and Councillors".
- Councillor staff have "become specialized" and "because of these silos, communication with councillor's office takes longer". Councillor's staff is "overwhelmed, disorganized, hectic", are "overly busy" and are "dropping the ball".
- Some respondents report challenges such as that the Councillor "hasn't been responsive", "is not informed or does not share", "listens to developers" more than resident associations, "doesn't like us", or has "favorite resident associations" who he rewards because they "most mirror his politic". Another complaint was that the Councillor "distrusts community-organized issues" and "tries to assume or position themselves as a lead to convey their power" to the community.
- Many neighbourhood association had positive things to say about their Councillor and saw a "good working relationship" as an essential factor in having their concerns addressed.
- Some respondents noted that they and the Councillor "have a mutual interest in sharing communications" and report frequent contact with the Councillor. For example, they meet "in person, via email or phone", they may "get information" and share

information, such as giving the Councillor "a monthly report of 'property challenges' that is passed along to the bylaw officers", or to "invite them to functions" or have a Councillor "chair the AGM".

*"The Councillor will gather a meeting of ratepayer associations to get their opinion on matters."*

- Some felt that there should be double the number of Councillors, and that Councillors need best practices and more effective office management.
- Suggestions included that a staff person should have a "mandate to respond to and keep up to date registered neighbourhood groups" and that it should be "less of discretionary choice of the councillor to meet with a neighbourhood association".

### **City Committees:**

Some associations report attending the City Committees related to their interests, when their resident association asks them, to support others who are deputing, or to depute themselves.

- A few respondents mention receiving notices or agendas for committee meetings. The committees most mentioned is the Committee of Adjustment, followed by Planning and Housing, include the Budget Committee, the Special Committee on Governance, and Economic Development. Issues of interest include TO Core, Airbnb, and Community Benefits Fund.

### **Community Council:**

Quite a few associations report receiving the Community Council agenda, attending, or giving deputations to Community Council, or sending letters to support/oppose particular initiatives.

- Community Council is an "issues oriented body" that is "for small stuff" but "not effective" for proposals with major impacts on the neighbourhood. One respondent sees "a trend to skipping Community Council on significant issues". They are "something of a formality" because resident associations are "often ignored" and the Councillor has "already decided what he is going to propose/support and support by other Councillors has been pre-arranged". One resident association was told to submit a complaint against the Councillor, but felt instead that they need more lead time on information to be debated, and that discussions that happen should include interested parties so that "recommendations can take into account resident views".
- Another respondent said that Councillors don't take Community Council "seriously", and that the functioning seems to be impacted by the reduction in ward size". One noted that "staff will need to have an increased roll as councillors are too busy to deal with smaller issues".
- Some respondents report that they attend meetings, particularly when there is an issue of interest or is something that applies to their area. One respondent goes to Community Council to "track where Section 37 money goes". One resident associations said they attend Community Council when requested in order to support a neighbours with issues.
- A few participants commented that deputations are time consuming, that the time of day of makes them challenging to attend.

- A few associations feel that there should be a legislated change to the structure of Community Council to "create a 'Residents Community Council', or 'Community Board' in each ward" so that there could be "more opportunities for input from the community". For example, one respondent wanted to increase the "formal and informal engagement with the Community Council outside of transactional business agendas" as this was seen as, potentially, a decision making body that was more neighbourhood oriented. Another suggested the solution to overcome the "even greater democratic deficit" created by the reduction of Councillors was to "empower the smaller councils (TEYC, for example) and have greater engagement with representative neighbourhood groups."

*"If community councils had more delegated authority to make local decisions, neighbourhood associations [could] help to build the fabric of vibrant, successful communities."*

### **Tribunals and Appeals**

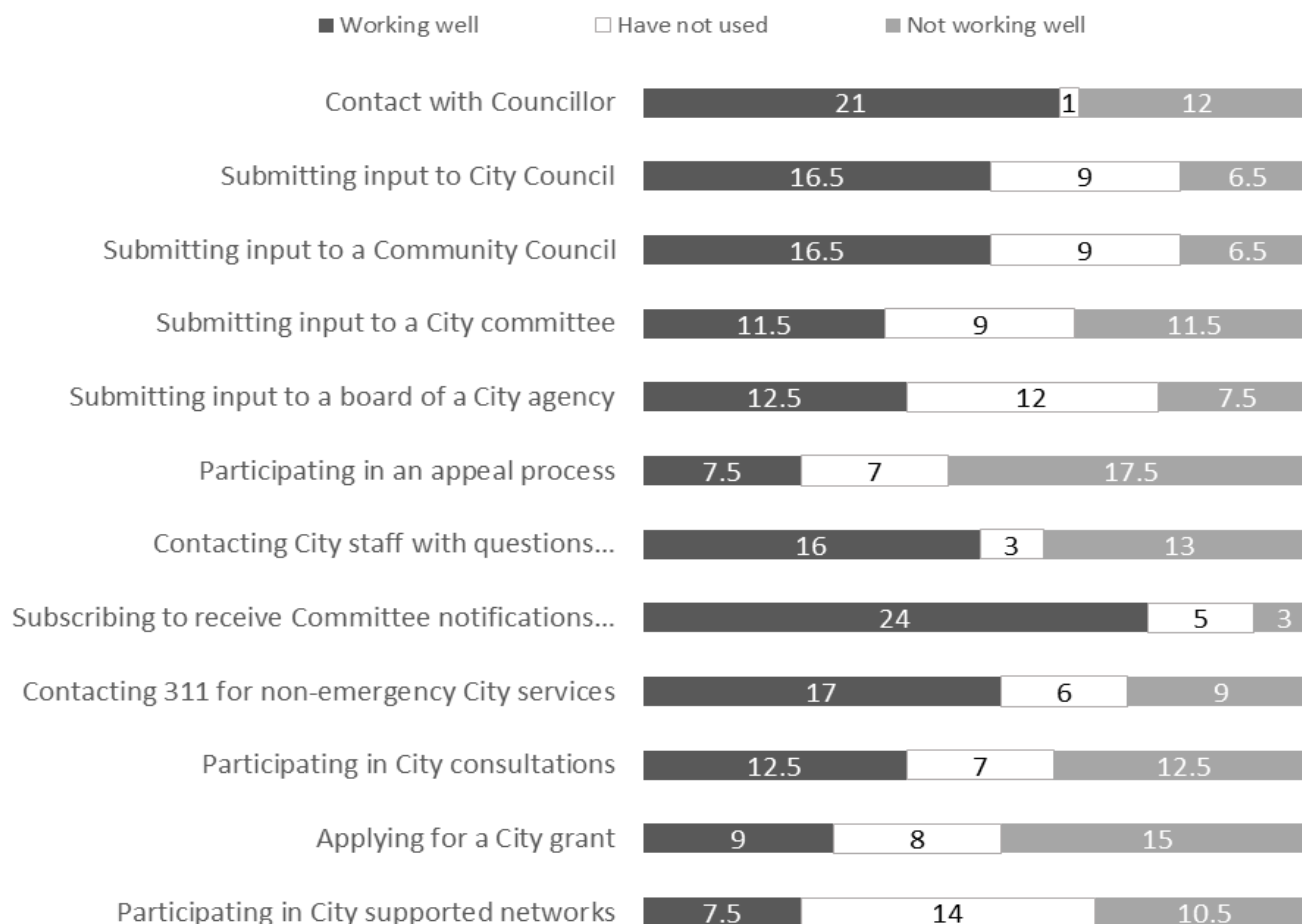
More than half of the neighbourhood associations who participated in the workshop expressed dissatisfaction with appeal process of the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal, Committee of Adjustment and the Toronto Local Appeal Body.

- With regards to the Toronto Local Appeal Body, now the "process is far more complex, expensive and biased to developers and away from residents", that it "fails to protect character of the neighbourhoods". Others note that neighbourhood associations are not-for-profit and legal costs are prohibitive, that "the procedure rules heavily in favour of the applicant with much deeper financial pockets".
- Another concern was about "silo planning" where "hidden densities" are approved in a community because adjudicators did not know the neighbourhood in which they were making a decision. Some said there is "a lack of confidence in the Ontario and City governments" because the chairs of planning and appeal bodies are "not professional planners but they get to make [binding] decisions".
- One group was advised to "'Get your experts together'" and to "continue to do research", which requires that the adjudicate "function at a professional level". Some stated the "zoning bylaw has become little more than a guideline". Some respondents said "Council needs to do a review" and "issue a firm set of guidelines for both the Committee of Adjustment and the Toronto Local Appeal Body."
- The "current paper-based systems are opaque, slow" and that "far too many applications are being heard by the Committee of Adjustment".
- Some associations' experiences lead them to conclude "Committee of Adjustment is biased" and staff should not be able to submit "Confidential Director Reports" about matters of the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal to Council to be discussed "in camera", these should be consulted on publically.
- Another association reported that when items go to appeal "engagement with City staff ceases abruptly and continuation by the community is dependent on having funds to engage counsel". Ideas for improvements included: block chain to build a distributed ledger consensus-based voting tool... Block chain and token-based systems will go a long way toward clearing backlogs, more appeal panels, increased staff support, an

"educational support group for neighbours to help them through the process", "legal services", and have an "anonymous data base for research".

#### Evaluation of the City processes that Neighbourhood Associations engage in...

n=33



#### Planning and Development:

Of the online survey responses over 60 % of members of neighbourhood associations are involved in addressing planning and development decisions in their neighbourhoods, and many of the concerns expressed in all the engagement streams focused on planning and development.

*"It is hit and miss if we hear about something, and always hard to get the critical mass assembled to do anything about it."*

- Neighbourhood associations said, "The pressure of intensification is immense", and that, while they are not against development, "the rules are not tight enough" and that "the fair balance between neighbourhoods and developers has now been reversed with BILL 108". Related to this is the challenge to maintain the affordability of an area when large development projects increase property values.

- Many neighbourhood associations said they want "an active voice in city planning decisions" and are "forming umbrella organizations to have more voice".
- Some suggested city-wide strategies do not reflect the local nature of communities, for example, if bike lanes in suburban wards where most people use a car, not updating long-term plans to reflect changes over time.
- Many respondents expressed concern about how planning decisions are made, "which data is being reviewed, who is being heard" and said "neighbourhoods feel that we don't have clout". Some pointed out that they "need to rely on Councillors to advocate on their behalf", which is not always possible to arrange.

*"An interesting question to ask, humbly, is whether Toronto is sufficiently transparent to itself, up at City Hall?"*

- Many respondents note concerns about communication between and external to City divisions, including timely and accurate answers to questions and status updates including process delays; staff need better knowledge of each area; more notice and consultations on developments; and challenges with issues getting lost when Councillors and planning staff change also requiring association's to rebuild relationships.

#### **City Staff:**

Neighbourhood associations come in contact with City staff frequently, particularly staff at 311, bylaw officers and staff in the planning department. Some staff were mentioned with praise -- particularly Parks staff, who are "responsive to requests". Associations mention connecting with staff in Municipal Standards and Licensing, Transportation Services, Heritage and Community Development Officers.

*"The stress on neighbourhood associations is great because of the speed of change in neighbourhoods."*

- Neighbourhood associations made good use of 311 but felt it worked successfully for some issues, but not for others. When issues are not resolved by contacting City staff, or through 311, quite a few neighbourhood associations say they "elevate the issues and contact Councillors". Other concerns related to how information can be sent to 311 and how and when information is communicated back to callers, ensuring calls are logged and followed up to completion, and coordination across multiple department.
- Some noted that many bylaw infractions happen on weekends when there are few staff available and then "inspectors arrive days or weeks later" when there is no longer a problem.

#### **Grants**

- Some associations felt that grants should be more "readily available" because resident associations are non-profit and don't have the money or resources to "challenge applications, make deputations, fund appeals", or that "accredited NAs" should be provided "annual funding". Another group said that grants are "not well publicized, and procedures and deadlines are far from clear" and this could be improved if there was "better information and communication", "more staff support and workshops" and a "customer friendly application".



## NIA Tables

- On participant commented that "the neighbourhood improvement area tables are working more closely with agencies and less with people in the neighbourhood". Another comment was that "the strong neighbourhood department should apply to all neighbourhoods and not just NIAs".

### Consultation and Engagement:

Many neighbourhood associations, particularly resident associations, expressed frustration with communication, consultation and engagement. The problem is how the City departments communicate between each other, to neighbourhood associations, and between "Councillors, wards and neighbourhood associations". Of particular concern is that information is not shared broadly enough, or early enough, in the process to allow neighbourhood associations to participate, and that their input is not given enough weight or decisions are made without their involvement, or with downtown-centric solutions.

*"Respect the residents, give them ample notice about development proposal and work with them instead of pitching an approved or already half way approved project."*

- Neighbourhood associations would like a "more formal engagement process", better promotion, to receive "better updates", "timely information", and more "networking opportunities". Communication should be early in the process as "advanced notice is necessary" and "neighbourhoods have competing interests". City staff should "be willing to reach out to us, hold meetings or set up focus groups within the areas that we represent".
- Associations noted that "the advertising of consultations is poor", and turnout to consultations is proportionally low, and that solutions include increased budgets for consultations and a fixed ratio of neighbourhood associations for attendance, officially recognise the role associations have in organizing the local voice. For example, the City could create a "toolbox of some kind" for use by neighbourhood associations to consult in their neighbourhood which would provide "a better picture of where residents stand on certain issues". Another respondent said that there should be "legislated public consultations that put public consultation in the hands of the residents."
- One group said the "largest lobby groups" get heard and this "is not a fair representation of stakeholders". Another group commented there "is no dedicated tenant voice in the city's governance structure" despite the fact that they are a growing population in the City.

*"There are zones where local energies are precious, our knowledge and expertise, and sometimes we locals can help mobilize citizens to do things."*

### 3.2. Support for Neighbourhood Associations:

This section summarizes supports requested by associations through the pop-up and online survey consultation, and ideas shared at the workshop about the idea of an "Office of Neighbourhoods".

*"The president gets all of the communications but is getting overwhelmed -- she has been in the position for decades".*

Support:

Some associations suggested they need "assistance in leveraging City resources, assistance with finding spaces, compile and distribute information on how to work with the City's various departments".

- Throughout the consultation process, staff heard frequent comments from neighbourhood associations that they are stressed by a lack of support and by City processes.
- Many neighbourhood associations said they want to "provide leadership on local issues" and should be "promoted by the City as a channel where people could get engaged on a neighbourhood level". Some respondents said City staff should hold "informal consultation sessions (small scale) in the neighbourhood", or have "a city worker to visit our association meetings".
- Neighbourhood groups "can't remedy local problems on their own, but they achieve something in partnership with the City", they are "open to determining new ways to work with the City to move the mandates forward in a positive and constructive way."
- They "work better in smaller areas" but "should be able to come together regularly; leverage resources and information; and build coalitions". Many respondents said they need "to be supported by strong umbrella organizations" to "surface bigger issues". At the same time, some neighbourhood associations feel "removed from other networks". A few associations said they like that they decide when to work together, and when, if their objectives are not aligned, they don't need to.
- Many respondents feel they "already volunteer time and expertise", and would like to be supported by paid staff to assist them address their concerns. Or that there needs to be one or more point people, or liaisons to address issues that arise and "a neutral set of eyes to look at the system and identify gaps", and "better information online with a critical path to who has what information so that there is less bouncing around".
- Many associations mentioned access to free space as a priority. It would be a space of "equal footing" to other organizations. Associations "shouldn't have to pay to meet in City space". It could be an "an office at city hall" or a "virtual or physical space". "Maybe fees can be waived for schools or library space", a central location for building communities, "a convening space". Neighbourhood associations would like to "meet each other and with Councillors".
- A few groups mentioned that funding would help. One requested that the City "provide funding and stay out of the way". The funds could be for things like "like beautification or community events". Or the City could offer "monthly incentives such as TTC Tokens, lunch vouchers to volunteers to encourage and to show appreciation of the work they are doing".
- One group asked that the City "post information about grants, send representatives to neighbourhood planning tables, and work in partnerships" Another suggestion was that the City "host events highlighting the urban agriculture movement and focus on

educating youth on food security and how to get involved" This could happen at a series of "roundtable meetings with the City", or an "organized annual event, like a summit, for Councillors and staff to meet with neighbourhood associations" and help keep them "plugged in to local issues" or to "increase awareness of Council and City initiatives".

- Some respondents said that the structure needs to change to allow more focus on issues at the local level. This could be accomplished through having two levels of elected representative: "one set of councillors who oversees city wide projects (public transit, etc.), and another level who deals with delivering services to residents".
- Some respondents suggested that the City appoint community leaders to help get things done, for example, a "Resident's Community Council" in each ward could "take some of the burden off of City staff" and create more opportunities for input from the community.
- Other associations do not want a formal structure as that would "add a layer of bureaucracy", for which they would have to pay, and would "suffer a lack of independence to run things as they wish".

### **An "Office of Neighbourhoods":**

There were many different thoughts on an Office of Neighbourhoods". Most workshop participants preferred an office over a virtual space or a Community Board. Some felt that there should be an "office" in each ward, others said that they should be in each Community Council area or have staff that go out to the different neighbourhoods. Some people felt that it should be a central office at City Hall. A few people mentioned a legislated body. Models included:

#### **No Office**

Some respondents said that they were "not sure why we need this" or that it would be "an added layer of bureaucracy as effective as the Official Plan to 'preserve neighbourhoods'". Others worried that it would "be like a BIA structure" in which community associations would be made "uniform" and "unable to take on the City when needed".

#### **Virtual space**

An office that would be a virtual space "where you can fill out a form to become a resident association in your area. All you need is a number of signatures and to pay the City a yearly fee. This entitles you to an AGM at a Library space for free once per year, and the opportunity to depute as a group rather than as an individual". "This portal would allow for greater networking among neighbourhood associations and the exchange of ideas and tips."

#### **An Information Depot**

"A resource centre on planning, social planning, and heritage matters" that would have "centralised information". The mandate would be to "gather and disseminate information from the City to neighbourhood associations". It would "provide assistance on options for participating with City processes" and "tracks issues and identifies trends, and develops policy initiatives".

#### **A Meeting space**

A space where residents could "participate on their own terms on decisions that affect their public lives" and "share struggles". Associations could "access resources on local governance" and "meet, discuss issues, comment and provide input on strategies". This space would

"facilitate access to municipal government" and advocate for the "diverse needs of the multitude of unique pockets of our City".

#### A Central Office

An administrative operation to serve as a "central registry, resource centre, and advisory of best practices", it would support the needs of neighbourhood associations for research and assist in implementing consultations by facilitating the gathering of "input from residents and escalate concerns to the City in a structured manner".

#### Navigator and Advocate

Better than a "Traffic director", a system navigator who would be the "first point of contact for an association seeking assistance with governance, grants and navigating city hall". "No matter what kind of issue or question, a connector [would be able] to address all." "Ideally the office would be actually help by going to bat for the neighbourhood association". An "ombudsman" to facilitate communication between neighbourhood associations and with Council" who would support "identification and prioritization of local issues that are long-standing".

#### An Office of Community Councils

A few people suggested that Community Councils could function as these "Office of Neighbourhoods" if they were further divided (suggestions ranged from 6-10) for "more efficiency and better access to municipal government on issues that are local to those neighbourhoods" as a centralized office doesn't "answer the problem which was created by the reduction of Council, which is a problem of democratic representation".

#### Office of the Future

One participant at the workshop said that an "Office of Neighbourhoods" should "be thinking about the future" and have a "large picture" but deliver locally. "An 'Office of Neighbourhoods' should be scalable: it should have a small and local inflection, be embedded with standards for social responsibility that meet those of the ISO 26000 (International Guidance on Social Responsibility for Enterprise) and be integrated at the global level through the use of Google technologies into a broader, international 'Office of Neighbourhoods'."

#### **What an Office of Neighbourhoods would do**

- Most respondents mentioned a web portal, share information and resources, space, facilitate networking or a "City supported network", offer support, and consulting with associations.
- Many respondents suggested staff people or some version of a system navigator, or "animator", or "independent facilitator", who would be a point person, advocate, gather materials, direct and assist neighbourhood associations making their way through City processes, track issues through processes and identify trends. It would maintain a registry or criteria to define a "resident association".
- Other common ideas were a hub, the involvement of volunteers, convening meetings, holding a summit, special events, workshops and trainings, offering grants or micro-grants.
- A few respondents suggested micro grants, legal advice or legal funds, blanket liability coverage, start up and printing costs, support with budgeting, outreach, policy development, a permanent archive.

## Legislated Community Boards

Throughout our consultations staff heard from members of neighbourhood associations who felt that the best way to improve local democracy was to legislate Community Boards, in a similar manner to what exists in New York City. Staff heard support for different versions of the model such as, "Community Review Groups", "Council of Neighbourhoods", an "Office of Community Councils", or "Resident Community Boards". In some versions of the model they would be more localized versions of a Community Council, for example, one in each ward. In other versions, the Community Board would have a variety of functions and be overseen and held to account by a "District Service Cabinet". Below are some of the structures of Community Boards that respondents spoke about.

- Community Boards could be comprised of a mix of citizens, business people, and the Councillor to a total fifty people including paid staff and a budget.
- Within this model these Boards would be hubs that attend to a variety of local needs including sharing information, conducting outreach, processing requests and complaints, reviewing the scope and design of capital projects, evaluating the quality and quantity of service delivery, and conducting engagement.
- At the Community Council level, there could be a "District Service Cabinet" in the four quadrants of the City that would coordinate service delivery, the programming of the agencies, work through inter-agency problems and impediments, and recommend joint programs.
- Membership elected or appointed by the City councillor to represent their neighbourhoods.

## 4. Information from participants about their associations

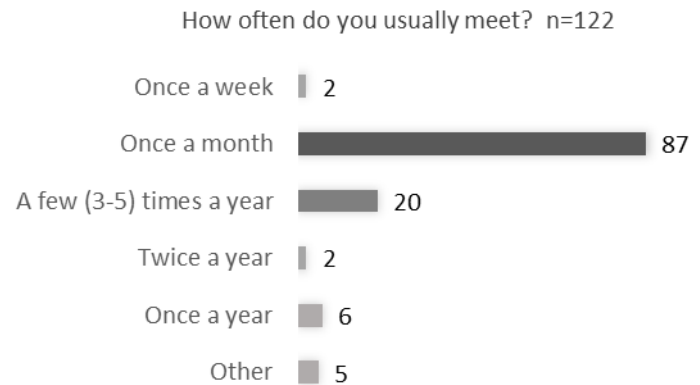
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### 4.1. About neighbourhood associations

- Some neighbourhood areas were distinguished by geographical features like ravines, transit, railway or hydro corridors, lakefront property, large parks, or were known for a specific local history.
- Some were in relatively stable communities, while others were in areas experiencing a substantial influx of new residents; intense densification or major infrastructure development, such as resident associations in the downtown core, or bridging established or planned transit corridors.
- Some residents associations are in small neighbourhoods of less than 1000 single family homes; others were from larger areas with a mix of businesses, homes, townhomes, condos, and apartments; others neighbourhoods were principally occupied by renters.
- Some of the associations have histories that extend back over 100 years; others have been recently formed, while others come together when new community issues emerge.

## How often do groups usually meet?

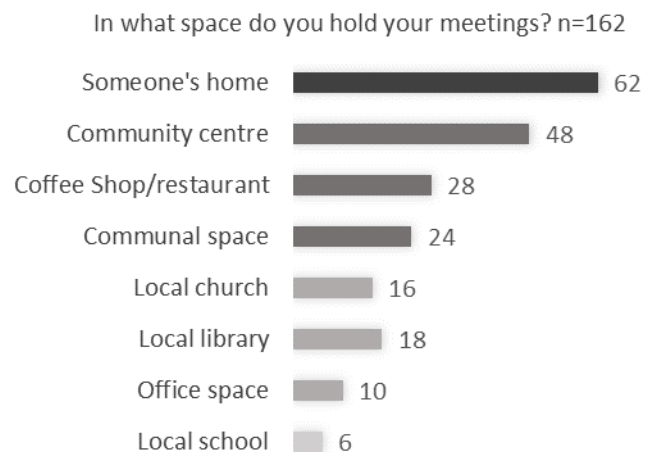
- Most groups report that they meet monthly (usually with a break over the summer).
- Some say they meet 3-5 times/year.
- A few groups meet weekly, once each year, or ad hoc.
- Many groups report that between regular meetings they communicate frequently by social media and email.



## Where do neighbourhood associations hold their meetings?

According to the survey

- Most neighbourhood associations hold their meetings in a member's home.
- Many meet in a space at a community centre.
- Other common locations were a coffee shop or restaurant, communal space (such as a Co-op party room). A few meet in a library, or an office space.
- Some associations mentioned meeting in a local church which was sometimes the site rented for the annual general meeting.
- Many groups mentioned that they did not have access to a free, public meeting space. This was a problem because the groups needed to use their limited funds to rent space, and the optics of meeting in people's home signalled to non-members that the group membership was closed.
- Some respondents pointed out that schools used to be a common meeting place but new rules addressing liability issues have made the cost prohibitive.
- A few associations mentioned having access to a regular meeting space that was free. Examples included a donated local space (like a hotel, or the Archives), spaces where there were historic agreements made between the association and the community centre, use of a community health centres or the local Legion.



*"It would be great to have funded space so we could invite younger residents and host town halls. Currently the cost of renting space is prohibitive."*

### **How do neighbourhood associations connect with members?**

Most commonly mentioned methods of communicating with members is through email, print or electronic newsletters, websites and social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp and blog posts).

- Some neighbourhood associations have a "very active and resource filled website" that gives many details of their structure, initiatives, local activities, and historical photos; some associations are challenged to keep their websites up-to-date. Other groups, particularly newer associations, rely more on Facebook pages and social media to communicate.
- A few groups publish a magazine once or twice a year.
- Some of the associations mention that they share information from the Councillor's office, community agencies and associations, or from the crime watch representative, to keep their neighbours informed of local happenings and issues.
- Newsletters can be an important tool for associations, both as a source of funds through subscription fees and ad revenue, and, when delivered door-to-door, as a means to increase membership and awareness about the association and its' concerns. The circulation of these newsletters varies from between 200 to "7000 homes and businesses". A few associations publish articles in the newsletters of their BIA office.
- Other groups mention they connect to "building representatives from a number of the residential buildings in the area".

### **How do association engage with neighbourhood residents beyond their members?**

While some respondents said their group did "nothing" to draw in new members, most neighbourhood associations made a variety of efforts to engage new residents including:

- Host political events (like all-candidates meetings), public meetings on community concerns and hold open AGMs.
- Many groups mentioned "get to know your neighbour" events like street parties and other social activities open to the whole community. Other events included farmer's market, or have a tables at local events, such as those hosted by neighbouring groups.
- "The Canada Day BBQ is the means to expand connections in the neighbourhood. Post the notices of the BBQ on the hydro poles."
- Groups said they post flyers, use an electronic signboard, lawn signs or post messages on community boards. As well, they send newsletters, or did direct mail delivery to all homes and condos, go knocking door-to-door, do leaflet or mail drops, offer welcome packages, or "plain word of mouth as we are all in the same few blocks."
- A couple groups mentioned offering social support for neighbours such as visits, phone calls, offering drives to medical and other appointments, as well as refugee intake, or addressing safety and security such as break-ins, etc.
- Some of the challenges to increasing membership include that "home and condo owners do not necessarily share concerns about snow, traffic or development in the same way". Some neighbourhoods have aging populations who "have other interests".

Some noted that membership rises when an issue galvanizes the community, and one noted that "when a crane goes up in the neighbourhood, people start to contact us."

### **How do neighbourhood groups and associations fund their activities?**

Staff heard that neighbourhood associations overwhelmingly rely on the volunteer labour of their core members. The availability of funds used by associations varied considerably depending on the fundraising activities of their volunteer base, their focus, the demographic of the location, and their eligibility for municipal or provincial grant money.

- Some neighbourhood associations report no sources of funds, typically newly established groups, or those with a limited focus, or low income membership base.
- Most groups, such as resident and condo associations, are reliant on yearly membership fees or dues to fund their activities – typically between \$5-20 per member collected online or at the AGM.
- The number of paid memberships range in terms of ratio to population. For example, "We collect an annual membership of \$5/year from residents inside our borders. There are 200 members which is about 10% of 2000 homes." Some associations collect from 3% of residents, others as high as 50-95%.
- Some groups host fundraising events like raffles, plant or bake sales, an annual BBQ (often on Canada Day, where neighbours gather and pay a household fee to eat).
- A few groups publish a newsletter as a source of revenue with local advertisement, or yearly subscriptions.
- Some groups mentioned donations from members ('passing the hat'), the local BIA, sponsorship of local business(es), payment from a film company, or a GoFundMe campaign.
- Some associations are able to secure municipal or provincial grants (e.g. those that exist for groups in neighbourhood improvement areas, or from the Park People or eco-initiatives).

### **What activities are the neighbourhood associations involved in?**

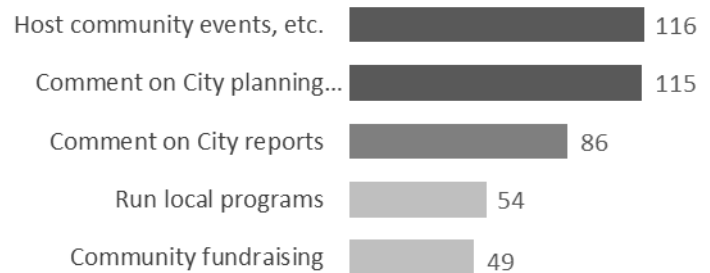
The most common activities mentioned by neighbourhood associations include that:

- 71% of respondents to the survey indicate their group comments on City planning proposals. Activities include reviewing and commenting on development and/or redevelopment applications, official plans, secondary plan amendments and zoning by-laws, participating in consultations (e.g. TOCore, Reimagining Yonge Street, Waterfront Revitalization), laneway development; addressing infrastructure issues such as tracking Section 37 funding and making recommendations for its use, organizing opposition to a casino at Ontario Place, addressing Bill 108.
- Many groups mention transit related issues such as: transit planning and infrastructure, participating in transit-related consultations (e.g. King Street Pilot, Crosstown LRT), bicycle lanes and cycling infrastructure.



- 53% of neighbourhood associations comment on City reports. Activities mentioned include: participating in city-wide consultations, typically related to the unique features of their local area such as Toronto Ravine Strategy or Waterfront Revitalization; or related to City-wide priorities such as the Long Term Waste Strategy, Vision Zero, Transform TO, Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy, Toronto Affordable Housing Strategy.

What activities does the group do? n=162



- Many associations mentioned that they liaise with their local councillor and office staff, as well as organizing all-candidates meetings, and supporting residents to address their concerns through City processes such as Community Councils, or Committee of Adjustments.

Depending on the location of the neighbourhood association, its focus, size or resources, other activities frequently mentioned included:

- Addressing by-law violations, particularly related to noise or traffic.
- "Place-making" through enhancement of local parks, including dog parks or addressing issues around wayfinding, murals, festivals, and neighbourhood beautification.
- Protecting the "character of the neighbourhood" by applying for heritage designations.
- Ecological enhancement and sustainability through naturalization, community gardens, pollinator gardens, biodiversity strategy, tree canopy and/or green space preservation.
- Enforcing environmental standards for air, soil and water testing, securing docking ports for electric vehicles.
- Pedestrian safety such as crosswalks, transit calming, neighbourhood watch, street signs, street lighting, snow-clearing, policing.
- Engaging tenants and neighbourhoods in issues related to health, including poverty reduction, literacy, reduction of structural violence, food security, affordable housing, addressing the opioid crisis, and homelessness, advocating for maintenance of apartments buildings.
- Working with local schools; organizing input on City budgets, including participatory budgeting, conducting their own studies.

Some neighbourhood associations engage in other social, cultural or community building activities such as:

- BBQ's, pub nights and community parties, organizing spring clean-ups, Jane's walks, pumpkin carving competitions, Easter egg hunts and children friendly events, street or music festivals, movie nights, ice skating or local sports activities like baseball, stranger engagement, educational activities, offering support for newcomers, seniors and/or youth.

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