

Terms of Reference

Municipal Autonomy and Effective Local Governance

Program Advisory Body

September 2025

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1.0 Background

In February 2025, through [2025.EX20.13](#), Toronto City Council requested the City Manager to create a Program Advisory Body (PAB) to advise and inform the City Manager and Council on matters related to municipal autonomy and effective local governance.

Considerations for municipal autonomy can include exploring the idea of a city charter which is common in the United States and other global jurisdictions. A city charter provides municipalities with greater autonomy in the areas of governance, finance and the authorities to deliver critical services that Torontonians depend on.

Toronto, among municipalities in Ontario, has a unique legislative context with its own enabling legislation, the [City of Toronto Act, 2006](#) (COTA). COTA provides a foundation for Toronto's intergovernmental relationship with both the provincial and federal governments and provides unique powers to Toronto for taxation and other matters. While COTA enshrines a consultative relationship between the Province of Ontario and the City of Toronto, changes made to COTA are solely within provincial jurisdiction and do not require consultation with the City.

A city charter provides Toronto an opportunity to update the division of roles and responsibilities between the City and other orders of government in recognition of the evolving role of cities while also ensuring these distinctions are more transparent and therefore accountable to the public. A federal and provincial constitutional change, along with legislative requirements, may be required for the effective creation of a city charter. A program advisory body is the first step in the pathway to both create a better understanding of how greater autonomy, authority and financing tools for the City of Toronto could be structured, and to help inform discussions among Torontonians, other municipalities, and the provincial and federal government governments regarding the benefits and drawbacks of such changes.

2.0 Mandate

The mandate of this PAB is to provide advice to the City Manager and City Council on how to achieve greater municipal autonomy and effective local governance for the City of Toronto and recommendations for the establishment of a city charter for Toronto. The mandate for the PAB includes:

- Outlining the potential sharing and/or exclusive jurisdiction between the City and other levels of government;
- Considering the legislative requirements and constitutional considerations for a city charter;
- Identifying opportunities to establish broad, long-term, stable, City-controlled revenue sources that will enhance the City's financial position and autonomy; and

- Other potential recommendations related to a city charter and greater municipal autonomy.

The PAB will provide its summary advice through a report to the City Manager no later than the end of May 2026. The City Manager will share the report with City Divisions and City Council for information and consideration as appropriate.

3.0 Composition

The PAB will be composed of up to 12 members:

- 4 members of the public representing geographic parts of the City (one each who live in the Districts of Scarborough, North York, Etobicoke/York and Toronto/East York)
- 2 representatives of the Charter City Toronto organization
- 4 to 6 subject matter experts in municipal finance, governance, constitutional law, public engagement, Indigenous knowledge and expertise or other relevant fields.

Members of City Council, contributors and subject matter experts from outside the PAB's membership may attend PAB meetings as observers. City staff and subject matter experts may make presentations and respond to questions when requested by the Co-Chairs.

3.1 Member Qualifications

All members shall be at least 18 years of age and live in the City of Toronto.

Members will demonstrate a strong interest in empowering cities and have knowledge, skills or experience in one or more of the following:

- A broad and high-level knowledge of and experience in urban affairs, economic development, city building and land use planning;
- Knowledge of the function of different levels of government and intergovernmental roles and responsibilities related to cities;
- Knowledge of the academic research related to city empowerment, autonomy and funding and/or learnings from other jurisdictions; and
- Knowledge of constitutional law, municipal law, municipal planning, municipal finance, public administration and governance, Indigenous knowledge and expertise and public engagement.

3.2 Member Recruitment and Appointment

The City Manager or designate will seek interested individuals to participate in the PAB:

- Public members: Opportunities for public members will be promoted through the City's Public Appointments portal.

- A selection committee convened by the City Manager will review applications and nominate public members to participate in the PAB.
- Representatives of Charter City Toronto: The Charter City Toronto organization may nominate two representatives and one alternate as members. The alternate may attend a meeting if one or both members are absent.
 - Any changes made by Charter City Toronto to its nominated members or alternate member should be communicated in writing to the City Manager or designate as soon as possible.

The City Manager or designate, Charter City Toronto and interested Members of Council will solicit interest from the public representing geographic areas of Toronto and subject matter experts to be members of the PAB.

The City Manager or designate will review nominations and expressions of interest and make the final decision on appointments for all PAB members and alternates.

4.0 Term

The PAB will meet until the completion of its mandate or the end of the current City Council term, whichever comes first. Meetings will take place, at minimum, on a quarterly basis.

5.0 Expectations and Roles

5.1 PAB Members

All PAB Members have equal rights and obligations to:

- Be treated and treat others, including City staff and contributors and guests of the PAB, with dignity, respect and courtesy, consistent with the City's Policy on Human Rights and Anti-Harassment/Discrimination;
- Act with integrity and avoid actual or apparent conflicts of interest;
- Attend and participate in all meetings and working groups, as required;
- Be heard and allow others to be heard;
- Contribute to research, writing, discussions and other PAB tasks; and
- Maintain the confidentiality of any personal information of PAB members or subject matter experts (including email and other contact information) or information that is identified as confidential by the City or any member that may be shared in the course of PAB activities.

5.2 Co-Chairs

Members of this PAB will appoint, by majority vote, two Co-Chairs from among its members at its first meeting or as soon as possible thereafter. The City Manager or designate will act

as Chair until Co-Chairs are selected, or as Co-Chair in the event that a Co-Chair resigns and until another Co-Chair is selected. Co-Chairs may be replaced by a majority vote.

The Co-Chairs, in consultation and cooperation with the City Manager or designate, will:

- Chair meetings of the PAB, rule on procedural matters, maintain the decorum of the meeting; and act as the primary contacts for the PAB;
- Propose meeting agendas for consideration by the City Manager or designate;
- Invite subject matter experts to make presentations or otherwise participate in PAB meetings;
- Act as liaison with the City Manager or designate on PAB-related matters;
- Establish and convene working groups (if desired by the PAB) consisting of members of the PAB and subject matter experts to conduct activities outside of PAB meetings. The City Manager or designate will not provide meeting support for working groups – any working groups formed by the PAB will convene at the discretion and with the support of PAB members and will provide updates of their work at PAB meetings.

5.3 City Manager

This PAB is managed by the City Manager on behalf of the City. The City Manager or designate will:

- Set and approve its Terms of Reference;
- Appoint its members, with input from a selection committee for public members;
- Direct any allocation of City staff and budgetary resources, as approved by Council, to support the work of the PAB, including in the role of meeting secretariat, which includes supporting member participation, scheduling, setting agendas, preparing minutes and publicizing meeting information and minutes;
- Act as liaison between the PAB and Members of Council and staff of the City, its agencies and corporations;
- Provide financial oversight and approval, within delegated authority, including provision of honoraria for eligible PAB members;
- Coordinate communications as outlined in section 9.1; and
- Forward the final report of the PAB to City Council via a Standing Committee.

6.0 Governance

The PAB may not direct City staff or make binding decisions on behalf of City Council or the City of Toronto. The City Manager must first consider any PAB advice that requires action by City officials or City Council. The City Manager will forward the final report of the PAB to the appropriate City Division, Standing Committee or City Council for consideration.

7.0 Meetings

Meetings of the PAB and any working groups that it may establish are intended for deliberation and information sharing towards the compilation of a report with its advice to the City Manager and City Council. Efforts will be made to schedule meetings across all four districts of the City to foster greater civic engagement, participation and awareness.

PAB meetings will be open to the public and held in person at City Hall with the option for members and observers to participate electronically. Meetings will be hosted during regular business hours. Members of Council, Councillor' staff, and City staff may join as observers. At the request of the Co-Chairs, City staff or other subject matter experts may make presentations to the advisory body. There is no quorum required for meetings. Any votes taken will pass based on a simple majority of PAB members present.

In its role as meeting secretariat, the City Manager or designate will:

- Develop a meeting schedule with input from PAB members. The City Manager or designate may set a maximum number of meetings based on staff and financial resources.
- Confirm meeting agendas in consultation with the Co-Chairs.
- Ensure meetings are promoted and open to the public, and publish a meeting schedule, weblink/location, agendas and minutes on the City's website.

8.0 Honorarium

Eligible PAB members may receive an honorarium of \$125.00 per meeting attended in recognition of their contributions to Toronto.

The PAB's honoraria payments are subject to applicable City policies, by-laws and the following:

- Honoraria are not intended for members who serve on the PAB as representatives of organizations or businesses where they are employed;
- PAB members who serve as a Co-Chair are not eligible for any additional honoraria;
- Honoraria are not paid for attendance at working group meetings; and
- Non-members are not eligible to receive honoraria.

9.0 Communications

9.1 City support

The City Manager's Office will provide communication support to the PAB in the fulfillment of its mandate, including:

- Creation and maintenance of web content on Toronto.ca that includes a PAB description, its meeting schedules and minutes and work products;
- Promoting membership opportunities through the Public Appointments portal and related social media communications;
- Media and public communications approved by the City Manager or designate;
- Communication to Members of Council and City Divisions, Agencies and Corporations as appropriate.

9.2 Restriction

The final report of the PAB or any other communications by members of the PAB shall not be represented as being the view of or a decision by City staff, a Member of City Council or City Council as a whole.

10.0 Amendments

Members may propose amendments to the Terms of Reference for consideration by the Co-Chairs with input from the City Manager or designate. Approval is subject to authorization from City Council or the City Manager, as appropriate, depending on the nature of the proposed amendments.

Approved by:

Paul Johnson, City Manager
City of Toronto
Aug 28, 2025