Promoting Diversity, Inclusivity and Multiculturalism in City Planning Public Engagement: Lessons from Toronto's Planning Review Panel

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ABSTRACT

Public engagement is integral in city planning. It gives residents opportunities to have their voices heard and participate in the shaping of urban form and other planning initiatives that take place within city boundaries. Public engagement is also an essential democratic exercise that is indispensable if planning is to be inclusive in a diverse and multicultural city. The City of Toronto's Planning Review Panel (the Panel) was introduced to ensure that participation by residents in city planning public engagement mirrors and is representative of the city's diverse residents. Panel members are selected using a civic lottery system that ensures residents of all ages, races, genders, social classes, levels of education, and housing tenures take part in city planning public engagement by being involved as members of the Panel for two-year terms. The Panel assists Toronto's City Planning Division by giving input on city-wide planning initiatives such as public transportation, affordable housing, and neighbourhood urban design standards. The Panel compiles its deliberations into reports. The City Planning Division makes the reports publicly available (on the City of Toronto's website) and infuses some of the Panel's recommendations in its own reports to Council. The Panel model presents lessons which can be applied by various cities that are characterized by diversity and multiculturalism to improve their residents' planning knowledge and participation in public engagement.

1 INTRODUCTION

Exclusion and selectivity have characterized planning for a long time (Sandercock, 2003). In response, most cities across Canada and beyond are continuously looking for ways through which they can promote inclusivity, diversity, and multiculturalism in their planning policies and practices. Multiculturalism is demonstrated by the diversity that can be seen amongst the residents of a city. Accordingly, planners should not only be responsive to individual and group needs, but they also need to change the scope, breadth, and techniques of residents' participation in planning processes (Qadeer, 1997). This is important because cities such as Winnipeg, Toronto, Calgary, Vancouver, and many others have diverse residents whose views and needs differ and planning departments' ability to engage everybody despite their race, social class, gender, and cultural background is integral in cities' success (Qadeer, 1997). One of the ways to promote residents' participation in city planning is public engagement. Public engagement offers a platform for everybody to share their views and thoughts on various city planning policies and projects taking place within the city. After all, planning has the capacity to support diverse and multicultural cities through policies and participatory tools that enable all residents to be involved (Tuohy and Talen, 2017).

2 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

This case-in-point is based on the City of Toronto's Planning Review Panel (the Panel). The Panel was introduced to promote the participation of a wider cross-section of Toronto's residents in city planning issues (Figure 1). The Panel was conceptualized to improve public engagement by enabling a diverse set of residents to assist the City Planning Division in managing development across Toronto (City of Toronto, n.d). The City Planning Division (City of Toronto, n.d) works with the City Council to:

> "… shape how the city looks and feels, and develop plans that ensure residents can work, live, play, and move throughout the city. We review applications for new buildings; promote well-designed streets, parks and open spaces; guide how buildings are located, organized, and shaped; plan transportation; work to transform Toronto's waterfront; and undertake in-depth research used by other City Divisions on land use, housing, community services, and the environment".

Figure 1 Showing Panel members in a session. *Retrieved from Consulting the Toronto Planning Review Panel (MASS LBP, 2018)*

The inaugural Panel was formed in 2015 for a two-year term. It was made up of 28 members who were randomly selected. The City of Toronto underscores the fact that the Panel was formed to augment, and not to replace other public engagement strategies that are already being used by the City's Planning and Development Department. According to the City of Toronto (2019), other strategies that are used for public engagement include:

a) *The Design Review Panel*

The Design Review Panel (DRP) is made up of design professionals who work in the private sector (Figure 2). The role of the DRP is to advise city planners about design issues within the public realm. Members offer independent advice on both private and public development projects and they draw from their professional experience and expertise.

Figure 2 Showing members of the DRP in one of their working sessions. *Retrieved from: https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/planning-development/outreach-engagement/design-review-panel/*

b) *Planners in Public Spaces*

This public engagement strategy (YES) is aimed at making city planners accessible to residents to talk about concerns or issues they may have on the development of the city. The city planners can be found in public spaces such as parks, recreation centres and at public events.

c) *Youth Engagement Strategy*

The Youth Engagement Strategy is a plan that is aimed at making young people between the ages of 18-30 years aware and interested in city planning issues within the city of Toronto. A research group made up of local youth was formed to engage fellow youth in various neighbourhoods on issues that are of concern to them and how they can be made to understand the development of the city.

d) *Chief Planner Roundtable*

The Chief Planner Roundtable is an initiative that gives Toronto residents a public forum on which to discuss various city development issues. This enables the City Planning Division to connect and form partnerships with different stakeholders such as non-profit organizations, other city Divisions, ordinary city residents and others.

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e) *Growing Conversations: Making Engagement Work*

This initiative (Figure 3) is driven by the need to build better and stronger community engagement processes between the City Planning Division, city residents, and other stakeholders to build better relationships and understanding among them.

Figure 3 Showing the Growing Conversations logo. *Retrieved from https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/planning-development/outreach-engagement/growing-conversations-making-engagement-work/*

3 FACTS OF THE CASE

The current Panel's mandate started in January, 2018. It is made up of 32 members who will serve for a two-year term. Panel members meet will attend 16 meetings on Saturdays between January 2018 and December 2019 (City of Toronto, 2018). The randomly selected members help the City Planning Division by examining, commenting and making recommendations on major planning issues and projects across the city. They also help in ensuring that various planning policies reflect and respond to the needs and views of the residents. The Panel's outputs are infused into city planners' reports to Council and posted on the City's website (City of Toronto, 2018).

3.1 Selection of Members of the Panel

A civic lottery system is used to select members of the Panel. This system was designed by a company called MASS LBP that specializes in public engagement, research, and strategy (MASS LBP, n.d). According to the City of Toronto (2018), letters of invitation to participate in the Panel were sent to 10 000 randomly selected households. A total of 425 people responded and volunteered to participate. Using the civic lottery system, 32 people were randomly selected from these respondents while ensuring proportionate representation of all city residents based on age, gender, household tenure, geography, and race (Figure 4). The lottery also ensured the inclusion of Indigenous and people living with disabilities.

Members of the Panel are not required to be citizens or permanent residents of Canada. However, they should be at least 18 years old, reside in Toronto and at an address that received a letter to participate. They should not be a City employee; an elected or seeking office at local provincial or federal levels, and a former member of the Panel.
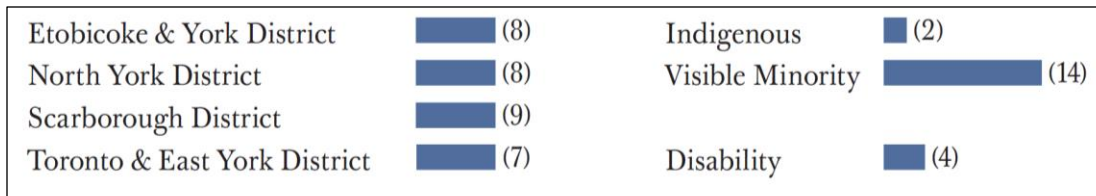
Etobicoke & York District	(8)	Indigenous	(2)
North York District	(8)	Visible Minority	(14)
Scarborough District	(9)		
Toronto & East York District	(7)	Disability	(4)

Figure 4 Showing the breakdown of the composition of the Panel. *Retrieved from the City of Toronto Planning Review Panel Guiding Document, 2018.*

3.2 Roles and Responsibilities of the Panel Members and City Planning Division

The roles of the Panel (City of Toronto, 2018) include offering input to the City Planning Division. The Panel members have leeway to freely comment and make recommendations on the Division's strategies, policies, plans and planning projects that are brought before them. The advice given by Panel member is expected to broadly support or complement the Divison's mission and professional planning standards. In doing their work, Panel members are expected to be respectful towards each other, consider the needs of all city residents, collaborate to attain consensus on what they advance to the Division, declare conflict of interest if they have any, transparent, and attend the first four meetings and at least ten of the twelve remaining ones.

The role of the City Planning Division is to request and encourage city residents of different backgrounds to participate as members of the Panel. The Division provides support to the Panel by suggesting planning topics or projects for the Panel to review; ensuring Panel members have the independence to give advice as they see fit, giving serious consideration to views advanced by the Panel; reporting back to the Panel on the impact of their input on city planning goals; informing other City Divisions and Council on the input received from the Panel; and publishing Panel input on the City's website. The Division offers logistical support for Panel meetings that include venues, extra support for members with different physical or learning abilities, food, and the reimbursement of costs incurred by Panel members. Members of the Panel are reimbursed costs that include childcare, eldercare, and transportation.

3.3 How the Panel Chooses Issues/Projects to Focus on?

Guiding principles and priority areas are set by the Panel members during their orientation. Selected priority areas are included in a publicly available Guiding Document. The City Planning Division also suggests topical planning issues to the attention of Panel members which include Official Plan amendments; planning initiatives like the development of Design Guidelines and environmental assessments, affordable housing, and transit projects. The Panel focuses on planning projects and initiatives that have city-wide implications (City of Toronto, 2018).

4 CONCLUSION AND OUTCOMES OF THE CASE

Both the 2015 and 2018 Panels have led to the diversity of participants that take part in the City of Toronto's Planning Division public engagement initiatives and programmes. The diversity of residents makes it possible for those who do not usually participate in public engagement to be included and be heard. It also brings out the strength and positivity of people from multicultural backgrounds working together to plan for the kind of development that they want to see. This goes a long way in mitigating the condemnation of multiculturalism by some residents in cities across the world (Fincher, Iveson, Leitner and Preston, 2014).

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For public engagement to be meaningful and inclusive, the residents who participate must be representative of the city's diverse population. Those who usually do not participate (for example new immigrants and refugees, and shift workers) must be especially encouraged to do so. Diversity, inclusivity and multiculturalism are particularly important in city planning initiatives which help gather different perspectives from all residents in the shaping of urban form, public spaces, public transportation, affordable housing, and other planning-related issues.

The 2018 Panel's work has so far produced different reports. The reports include the Biodiversity Strategy; Transportation Official Plan Review; Heritage Survey, Inclusionary Zoning for Affordable Housing; and Pet Friendly Guidelines for High Density Communities. Some of the reports produced by the 2015 Panel include Townhouse and Low-Rise Apartment Guidelines; Rail Corridor Planning Framework; Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan; Neighbourhood Urban Design Guidelines; and the Toronto Ravine Strategy (City of Toronto, n.d).

5 LESSONS LEARNED

The Toronto Planning Review Panel model of city planning public engagement presents learning opportunities for other cities that are characterized by diversity and multiculturism. The City of Winnipeg is among cities that have diverse residents.

5.1 Importance of the Case to the City of Winnipeg

The City of Winnipeg already has different city planning public engagement methods that are implemented by the Planning, Property and Development Department. They include online engagement, open houses, and pop-ups (City of Winnipeg, 2019). The City also has the *OurWinnipeg* Community Advisory Committee that enables residents to be heard during the reviewing process of *OurWinnipeg* (Speak Up Winnipeg, 2017). Participants were selected based on their experience and planning knowledge. It is a way of engaging city residents that precludes many interested residents who neither have the experience nor the expertise required. A method of engaging residents such as Toronto's Planning Review Panel would go a long way in promoting diversity, inclusion and multiculturalism in Winnipeg's city planning public engagement. This is would be valuable for Winnipeg since its population is made up of many people of different ethnicities and backgrounds as shown in Table 1 (Statistics Canada, 2017).

Table 1 Showing the ethnic representation in Winnipeg's population

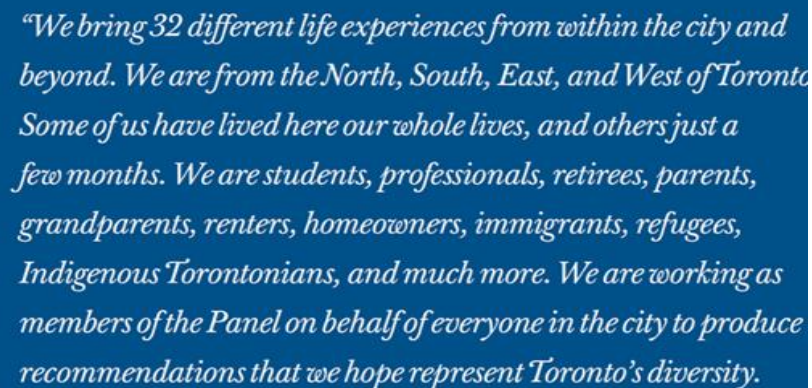| ETHNIC ORIGIN	PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION
North American Aboriginal	12.5
Other North American	17.7
European	66.1
Caribbean	1.2
Latin, Central & South American	1.5
African	3.4
Asian	21.3
Oceania	0.1

Retrieved from Statistics Canada (2017)

5.2 Lessons Learned

This case in point demonstrates a method that cities across the country could use to ensure diversity, inclusivity and multiculturalism among residents who participate in city planning community engagements. The lessons learned from this case in point include:

- Equitable representation of all residents

The City of Toronto Planning Review Panel programme was designed to improve the equitable representation of all city residents in city planning public engagement. The City is achieving this by implementing the civic lottery system of recruiting prospective Panel members. The civic lottery system helps to ensure that residents from all backgrounds have an equal chance to participate (Figure 5).

"We bring 32 different life experiences from within the city and beyond. We are from the North, South, East, and West of Toronto. Some of us have lived here our whole lives, and others just a few months. We are students, professionals, retirees, parents, grandparents, renters, homeowners, immigrants, refugees, Indigenous Torontonians, and much more. We are working as members of the Panel on behalf of everyone in the city to produce recommendations that we hope represent Toronto's diversity.

Figure 5 Showing a quote on diversity from one of the 2018 Panel members. *Retrieved from the City of Toronto Planning Review Panel Guiding Document, 2018.*

- Elimination of barriers faced by residents who want to participate in city planning community engagement

The Toronto City Planning Division takes extra steps to eliminate some of the barriers to participating in community engagement faced by residents. Although Panel members are not paid for their participation, they are reimbursed for costs to make sure that every interested resident can participate despite their financial or time constraints.

- Long-term involvement and participation of residents

The Panel programme engages members for a two-year term. This means that members are actively engaged for longer and in numerous planning initiatives. Members can improve skills such as communication, planning, and group work. The crash course that is given to members at the commencement of their terms helps them gain city planning knowledge and prepare them for tasks ahead.

- The Panel model supplements other methods of city planning public engagement

The Panel programme complements other city planning public engagement methods in Toronto. The implementation of the different strategies enables the City Planning Division to attract more residents from all walks of life to share their views on planning issues.

- Panel members do not participate because of personal interests

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MASS LBP (2018) states that unlike other city planning community engagement platforms in which many residents take part because of self-interests, Panel members work for the benefit of a wider section of Toronto residents. This is a result of the requirement that Panel topics and areas of deliberations ought to have city-wide implications.

- Panel decisions consensus driven

Decisions and recommendations made by Panel members are consensus-oriented. This helps provide the City Planning Division with a clear way forward agreed to by all members for the benefit of city residents (MASS LBP, 2018).

- Identities and brief biographies of Panel members publicized

The publication of the identities of Panel participants and brief background information helps in demonstrating the diversity of the members.

- Transparency and publication of Panel reports

The reports produced by the Panel are publicly available on the City of Toronto's website. This helps interested parties to establish how the Panel's contributions to city planning are treated by both the City Planning Division and Council as reflected in the decisions they make vis-a-vis recommendations made by the Panels in their reports.

6   REFERENCES

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