



May 13, 2011

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Dear Mayor Ford and Members of Council:

**RE: City Council May 17-18: EX 5.3 - Council Advisory Bodies and Working Committees**

Introduction

People Plan Toronto, a citizens' group that advocates for better planning and stronger citizen engagement in the planning process,<sup>1</sup> submits that:

- Council should **reject** the recommendation of the City Manager in Ex. 5.3 to eliminate the bodies listed in Table 2 of his report on Council Advisory Bodies and Working Committees for the reasons set out in our letter below;
- In the alternative, should Council accept the report, it **direct** City staff to consult with affected parties, councillors and interested community groups, and **require** the City Manager to recommend an appropriate format and mechanism to meet those advisory or engagement needs within six months of this decision; and
- Should it be of assistance to Council, People Plan Toronto would be willing to work with staff in order to help the City conceive of more efficient, streamlined and dynamic means of engaging citizens moving forward.

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<sup>1</sup> People Plan Toronto (PPT) is a group of active, engaged citizens committed to reforming urban planning in Toronto. PPT convenes grassroots forums and round tables to discuss planning issues, advocates for better urban planning and promotes a strong community voice in the planning process. For more information about PPT, please go to <http://peopleplantoronto.org>.

## Background

On April 6, 2011, the City Manager issued a report to the Executive Committee, entitled Council Advisory Bodies and Working Committees (the "Report"). In the Report, the City Manager recommended, among other things, that a number of citizen committees "not be established" but that City Council should request the appropriate Division Heads to determine whether alternative mechanisms are required to support ongoing divisional work of those bodies (specifically, those listed in Table 2 of the Report).

On May 20, 2011, the Executive Committee considered and passed the Report. People Plan Toronto, represented by Steering Committee Member Geoff Kettel, wrote a letter and deputed on this item before the Executive Committee. We note that approximately 100 people showed up speak on this item on May 20, 2011. Because the agenda was rearranged, deputations did not take place until the end of the day and the vast majority of those who had stayed all day to make their views known to Council were unable to be heard.

## Submissions

### a) *The committees listed in Table 2 should not be eliminated*

People Plan Toronto continues to oppose the recommended disposition of the committees in Table 2 of the Report, i.e. those "not recommended for establishment and referral to staff for future requirements".

The eleven committees listed in Table 2 are composed of volunteer citizens who have been asked to provide advice about services provided and/or about needs of clients or the community, in some cases for people who cannot speak for themselves, like the Advisory Committee on Homes and Services for Seniors. These committees are responsible for many singular achievements, for example:

- The Pedestrian Committee was responsible for championing the development of the Pedestrian Charter, which establishes the importance of providing for pedestrians as most egalitarian, and the most vulnerable of all mobility users;
- The Toronto Cycling Committee has provided a forum to introduce and discuss innovative ideas like complete streets, sharrows, bike boxes, and a downtown grid of protected bike lanes;
- The Advisory Committee on Homes and Services for Seniors advises on nursing homes owned by the City, supportive housing, nursing services, etc., all places owned and services delivered by the City, and
- The Task Force to Bring Back the Don has a 20 year history of significant, citizen-led planning and restoration of the lower Don River and its valley corridor.

The members of these committees provide advice and work to benefit both the residents affected and the population as a whole. They do not have a particular or personal “axe to grind”, nor do they benefit directly from the matters before the committee. Committee members have a track record of knowledge in their field, and are selected by Council itself through a competitive process. They receive no remuneration, no benefits, and they pay their own transportation. They do this as an act of citizenship – of commitment to what the City is doing in this area – and are proud of it. The cost to the city for the expert advice of these Committees is the cost of a meeting room and the time of the staff.

We submit that the City’s examination of advisory committees needs to be turned on its head. We need to ask the question: what advisory committees do we require to assist the city to become the great city that we all want? Put another way, how can the Mayor and council give Torontonians the opportunity to become more active, educated and constructive participants in their city? We are convinced that if this examination was fairly conducted the issue would become not one of too many advisory committees, but rather of too few.

*b) In the alternative, Council should direct staff to return with an “action plan” for alternate forms of engagement*

In his Report, the City Manager suggests that “alternate engagement methods” may be used in place of the committees in Table 2:

I am recommending that the bodies listed in Table 2 not be established but rather be referred to staff to determine future requirements. Several of the advisory bodies have developed plans or strategies during previous Council terms and will be referred to City Divisions for review and to determine future requirements. City Divisions are responsible for the implementation of these plans and strategies and may consider alternate engagement methods including town hall style meetings, social media applications, public forums, e-engagement or program advisory committees to provide input or advice on the implementation as required. Similarly, advisory bodies which have completed their term objectives or with long standing terms could benefit from a review by staff to determine the most appropriate engagement mechanism.

Accordingly, he recommends that “City Council request the appropriate Division Heads to determine whether alternative mechanisms are required to support ongoing divisional work of the bodies listed in Table 2.”

While we are encouraged that the City Manager appears to recognize that engagement is desirable, the recommendation in the Report is toothless. Requesting that “Division Heads determine whether alternative mechanisms are required to support ongoing divisional work” provides an easy opportunity for such Division Heads to determine that, in fact, no such mechanisms are required. From

there it is an easy step to rule out any meaningful citizen engagement at all in the work of the City, whether intentionally or by simple inaction.

If the City is serious about engaging its citizens, then leadership and direction must come from Council.

People Plan Toronto thus requests that, should Council accept the report, it go beyond the recommendation provided by the City Manager and direct City staff to consult with affected parties, councillors and interested community groups, and require the City Manager to return to Council with an “action plan” in the form of recommendations of an appropriate format and mechanism to meet those advisory or engagement needs, within six months of this Council meeting.

*c) Civil society can help*

The very existence of citizen committees shows the interest that people have in participating in the life of the City. And as we have stated above, many of these committees have proven to be constructive and cost-effective sources of positive change. But current mechanisms are certainly far from perfect, and there is room for improvement.

Last fall, in a paper entitled “Towards a Stronger Citizen Voice in Urban Planning” we noted: “Toronto needs a new model for public education and engagement; one that leads to a more inclusive, creative, and productive process with stakeholders.”

People Plan Toronto believes that there are many groups in the City of Toronto who would be willing to work with the City to create better, more meaningful, and cost-effective avenues of engagement. We are among them, and would be happy to play a role in helping the City conceive of more efficient, streamlined and dynamic means of engaging citizens.

Conclusion

As we submitted in our original letter to the Executive Committee, People Plan Toronto believes that the City needs more citizen involvement, not less. We should not eliminate the mechanisms for involvement that we still have by eliminating a number of highly productive citizen committees. However, if Council determines that it must do so, we request that (a) it direct City staff to consult with affected parties, councillors and interested community groups; and (b) require the City Manager to recommend an appropriate format and mechanism to meet those advisory or engagement needs within six months of this decision.

Toronto has much to benefit from the creative input of its citizens and has much to learn about how to do so in today’s rapidly changing social cultural and technological environment. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the City to take advantage of opportunities for effective, efficient and dynamic new ways of engaging citizens.

Thank you for the opportunity to input to this matter.

The Steering Committee of People Plan Toronto

c.c. Mayor Ford  
Councillors