



2010 City of Toronto Municipal Election Questions for Candidates

People Plan Toronto (“PPT”) believes that those elected to Toronto City Council should understand the importance of urban planning and bring positive ideas to the table. The following questions are designed to be used for local candidate forums and debates. A brief backgrounder is provided for each of the issues to assist both constituents and candidates.

PPT has highlighted what we believe are some of the most important issues, but this questionnaire does not attempt to be fully comprehensive. If you have other questions you think should be asked of candidates, please email them to us at info@peopleplantoronto.org or, even better, share them on our [Facebook page](#).

Questions

Community involvement

Background: Extensive consultation by PPT has shown that Torontonians have a strong desire for a meaningful say in how their neighbourhoods grow and evolve, but are confused by the planning process and frustrated by dealing with city bureaucracy. One of the most common complaints is that community consultation is often minimal and comes too late in the process for residents to fully understand the issues and influence the outcome. Torontonians also want urban planning to be more holistic: to incorporate consideration for environmental, economic and social issues that affect neighbourhoods.

The key players in the current system are landowners/ developers, city staff and politicians. Citizens are the fourth leg of the planning system but are often barely represented.

Q. How would you ensure your constituents are better informed about planning and development issues?

Q. How would you attempt to engage residents more effectively in the planning process in your ward?

Q. How would you work to better explain the process to your constituents?

Q. Would you support the creation of Neighbourhood Action Councils (NACs) to participate in significant city and neighbourhood planning and development projects? NACs would include a cross-section of representatives from residents' associations, Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) and other key community stakeholders, including renters and other typically underrepresented groups.

Toronto's Official Plan

Background: Under the provincial Planning Act, every municipality must have an Official Plan that guides growth with high-level policies and objectives for land use. Official Plans generally mark out the larger categories of land use across a municipality, e.g. residential, commercial, industrial, park and natural. They are supposed to be updated every five years to accord with provincial legislation and to ensure they continue to address local priorities and changing needs.

Official Plans are implemented via secondary plans. Secondary plans are more detailed plans typically applied to specific areas. They demarcate land uses on a block-by-block basis. In Toronto however, many areas of the city lack secondary plans, leaving neighbourhoods either experiencing or anticipating development pressures without a road map. Although both developers and community groups have complained about the lack of secondary plans, the plans are expensive and time-consuming to produce.

Q. What is your solution to the lack of secondary plans?

Toronto's current Official Plan was passed by the city in 2001 and approved by the province in 2006. Toronto will soon enter its review process.

Q. What do you think the new Official Plan needs to include - or remove - to reflect the city's changing needs and priorities?

The current Official Plan has four principles: diversity and opportunity, beauty, connectivity, and leadership and stewardship.

Q. Are these principles still relevant? If not, what new principles would you suggest?

Stable Neighbourhoods

Background: One of the key goals of Toronto’s current Official Plan is to protect stable residential neighbourhoods, while intensifying growth in the centres of Scarborough, North York, Etobicoke and downtown Toronto, as well as along major avenues and transit corridors. Although neighbourhoods are not intended to stay frozen in time, new development should ideally respect the existing physical character of the neighbourhood.

Some neighbourhoods are threatened by development that is out of scale and out of character.

Q. Do you think this is an issue in your ward and what would you propose to do about it?

Q. Do you think Nimbyism (“not in my backyard”) is an issue in your ward? If so, what would you do about it?

Intensification comes in different forms. For example, the city is studying mid-rise development along major avenues that are adjacent to residential neighbourhoods. (“Mid-rise buildings” are no taller than the width of the street on which it is located, or between 5 and 11 storeys). It has also created design criteria for tall buildings (i.e. a building that is taller than the width of the street on which it is located).

Q. Do you believe intensification along major avenues should emphasize mid-rise buildings? Is there a role for tall buildings along avenues and if so, when and where? Please explain.

Design Review

Background: The City of Toronto set up a Design Review Panel (DRP) as a pilot project in 2006 for selected areas of the city. The DRP is made up of volunteer design professionals including architects, landscape architects, urban designers and engineers. The panel's role is to provide the city with objective advice on design matters affecting the public realm (including streets, parks, open spaces and buildings) for both private development and public capital projects. The DRP's mandate includes raising design standards, promoting design excellence and fostering informed debate about the importance of good design.

In November 2009, the DRP was awarded permanent status and an expanded mandate. The panel will now review all public capital projects with a "significant visual and physical impact upon the public realm". The DRP will also review private developments in targeted growth areas of the city, including avenues and priority corridors, as well as in downtown areas with secondary plans. The panel will continue to advise staff in the development assessment process.

Q. Do you think the Design Review Panel has been effective? Why or why not?

Q. Do you consider the Design Review Panel a necessary tool to help improve the quality of design in the city or a waste of money? Please explain your answer.

Q. Do you think design quality is an issue in the city?

A Local Appeal Body for Committee of Adjustment decisions

Background: Currently all appeals of development issues, including those which have gone before the Committee of Adjustment (COA), are heard by the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB). Although the board must "have regard to" a municipality's decision, the OMB can overrule elected councils and substitute its own decisions. The revised City of Toronto Act gives Toronto City Council the ability to establish its own appeal panel for minor variances and consent applications heard by the Committee of Adjustment. This would eliminate the OMB as the appeal body for COA decisions.

Some people feel a local panel would be better suited to hear appeals of Committee of Adjustment decisions in Toronto, while others believe such a body would simply recreate the OMB at city taxpayers' expense.

Q. Would you support the creation of a local appeal body or do you consider it unnecessary? Please explain.

Built Heritage

Background: The city has many buildings, neighbourhoods and landscapes that deserve to be protected and preserved. However there is no proactive program to put eligible properties on the city's Inventory of Heritage Properties (known as "listing" a property). The owner of a listed property is required to give 60 days' notice of an intent to demolish the building so Council can consider whether it should be designated as a heritage property. "Designation" allows Council to protect a property's heritage attributes - i.e., to prevent the demolition. Where a property has not been listed or designated, it is impossible to protect. So, for example, community members may not know the status of a property until an owner seeks a minor variance at the Committee of Adjustment (CoA) in order to demolish his or her existing building and build something new. Since the CoA has no jurisdiction to deal with heritage matters, such demolitions frequently end up being approved despite last-ditch community efforts to have endangered properties listed and designated as heritage. This leaves the Ontario Municipal Board as the only appeal option available, which is an expensive process that is out of reach for many people.

Q. What does built heritage mean to you?

Q. What would you do to improve the process by which heritage properties are protected?

Q. Are there some built heritage resources in your ward that you would like to see protected?

Q. What changes, if any, would you like to see in Toronto's new Official Plan regarding heritage preservation?

Public Space and Placemaking

Background: Placemaking is the process of creating public spaces such as streets, parks, plazas and waterfronts that attract people and build stronger communities. Vital public spaces evoke a strong sense of “place” and are interesting and enjoyable to spend time in. Landscaping, for example, is often an important element to help create an appealing synthesis of nature and culture. Public spaces should be as inviting, accessible and user-friendly as possible. Placemaking encourages social encounters and immersion in the sights, sounds and general atmosphere of a particular location, making the space iconic and memorable. Successful placemaking transforms public spaces to highlight local assets, spur rejuvenation and serve common needs.

Q. Is there a public space in your ward that you think is noteworthy for its success? Please describe why you think it works.

Q. Is there a public space in your ward that is underutilized, or that doesn't work? Why do you think that is? What should be done to improve it?

Q. Should community members have more input into the design and intended use of their public parks and spaces?

Q. Should citizens have more responsibility for the maintenance of their public spaces?

Complete Streets

Background: As Torontonians, we drive, we ride and we walk. “Complete Streets” ensure our streets can safely accommodate users of all ages and abilities. That means designing and retrofitting our streets to provide room for everyone including drivers, cyclists, transit riders and pedestrians. The idea is to offer choice so that everyone can travel safely. Complete Streets function both as sustainable transportation routes and vibrant destinations to help bring us closer to Toronto's stated goals of being green, clean, competitive and diverse.

Q. Do you support the notion of Complete Streets? Please explain your answer.

Q. Is there a street in your ward that you would like to see transformed into a Complete Street?

Q. If so, how would you go about making this happen?