Planning in Toronto: What's the problem?
a presentation by Gary Wright, City of Toronto Planning Department
to the *All About Planning* symposium at the Munk Centre for International Studies
December 6, 2006

Some High Level Observations First

- The governance structure of the country does not effectively recognize that 80% of the population lives in urban areas

- We need an effective road map for how we are going to deliver infrastructure (both new and renewed) in the future

- The EA process doesn't work for delivering new or improved transit (e.g. St. Clair)

- We need to rethink the financial tools we have to address urban growth

DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

Overview ~   The City's Downtown

- approx. 160,000 people live Downtown

- 3rd largest office market in North America

- 10,000 families with children living at home

- a mix of built form including low-rise neighbourhoods

- nature of development applications → Downtown

  - half of all applications in last 5 years are for towers taller than 30 storeys

  - since 2001, there have been development applications for almost 56,000 units Downtown. About 18,000 of these have been built and occupied.

  - 300-400 major applications per year across the City; probably on average of 2 public meetings per application (600-800 meetings just on applications)

No wonder we're asking questions about Planning.

The biggest question is how do we keep up? And the answer is we don't always keep up – the bureaucracy and the public are hard pressed to keep up the pace.

The reality is we are in a strong local economy and have been for some time.

- One developer commented to me that we are in the 8th or 9th year of a 5-year development cycle

- There is strong competition for good sites and intense pressure for density and height

- We need to have the best possible architecture and design, and we get it on a number of developments: Radio City, 18 Yorkville, 1 Bedford Road, 1 City Hall and others.

- We need to enhance the public realm (parks, streets, open spaces)

- We need a robust planning process that can deliver these objectives

- We need to rethink our approach to civic engagement

'Planning is a Journey, not a Destination'

Much of our dialogue with the public is around destination events such as specific development applications.

We haven't been engaged enough in dialogue about the journey – what kind of downtown do we want?

How does intensification and growth express itself at the local level?

What are neighbourhood concerns and how does planning interact with that agenda?

We need to think about better mechanisms for dialogue and the resources necessary to support that:

Listening → what is important

Learning → public outreach & education

Leading → planning leadership/mutual appreciation

Annex discussion in Summer of '05 around 1 Bedford, leading to the Vision Study

Web-based communication:

- We need to rethink our website and get better at interacting with the community on studies and local projects. We do this from time to time on a one-off basis, but we need a sustainable strategy.

We need to get ahead of the curve on planning issues.

West Queen West example:

- It's not that we didn't have the basic tools in place (Secondary Plan, etc.) but we ended up in a position of reacting to development applications that resulted in a 7-week OMB hearing. That's not the venue to establish a vision for a new neighbourhood.

- Transformatic power of dialogue

- Inclusive/authentic/respect

- Collaborative/networked processes contribute to building institutional capacity

- Knowledge, information capability spreads and the civic capacity of society grows

- Examples of this are the many resident associations such as the Annex Ratepayers and groups that organize around issues, such as Active 18 in WQW

- There are many across the City and they reflect the interest and passion that people have for their neighbourhoods and their City

- A more collaborative approach is not just consultation, it's more about an active dialogue that helps to shape events

- And, it needs to involve many stakeholders: residents, developers, politicians – the reality of our governance system is a challenge

How to get from here to there?

- Resources and how they are allocated is one of the issues

- Making it meaningful and effective

- Setting priorities -- the most difficult tasks

- Finding the right structures:

  - dialogue with local groups

  - reaching out to the groups we don't see at meetings

  - partnering with departments that work in neighbourhoods at risk

  - enhancing the web

  - talking at schools (World Planning Day success)