

Neighbourhood Development News - Improving the Planning Process

It is clear that people in Ward 25 are fiercely proud of our neighbourhoods. The outstanding unique and well-kempt properties, our beautiful parks and ravines, our vibrant commercial areas and the friendly attitude of our neighbours are all reasons why want to live in our community.

This pride of community has led to a strong consensus that we must do everything possible to preserve this treasure within Toronto. As such, it is particularly important that applications for new development receive a high level of scrutiny from the local community; and that ratepayer associations as well as individual residents continue to pay close attention to proposals that will alter our precious environment.

The process for approving new development is therefore of great interest in our community. After learning of concerns that the current planning process involves citizens too late and gives them very little input, Council appointed a sub-committee, including Councillor Cliff Jenkins to propose constructive change.

Chaired by Councillor John Filion, the sub-committee consulted with citizens across the city at five public meetings and is preparing to recommend very significant changes.

The current planning process frequently involves an extensive two-way discussion between an applicant and city planning staff before any application is filed resulting in city staff effectively being used as unpaid consultants. Neighbours have expressed serious concern about being excluded from that initial dialogue as, too often, it results in planning staff coming to some measure of agreement with an applicant before local residents are even aware that a development proposal has been filed.

The proposed new process would engage citizens more quickly when an application is received. It would also provide for an optional step to permit pre-application consultation by an applicant with both city staff and the community. Other measures being considered include making some application information available on the Internet. Staff reports would include all concerns raised by the public at community consultation meetings and indicate whether or not the applicant is proposing mitigating measures to deal with them.

The sub-committee also heard a great deal about procedural problems at the Committee of Adjustment including concerns expressed about an inadequate notice period and difficult-to-understand notices and decisions. Consequently, we are proposing improvements to the Committee of Adjustment process as well.

Approval of the proposals will not be automatic and they could undergo significant change. The provincial government has proposed changes to the Planning Act that overlap some of our proposals. Reform of the Ontario Municipal Board and the City of Toronto Act will also bear on the issue. So, as we strive to preserve, protect and enhance our wonderful neighbourhoods, we'll be working with various stakeholders to find an improved planning model. For more information visit www.cliffjenkins.com