

Briefing Note Assignment

Prepared By: Christopher Evan Jones (500 325 518)

For: Professor David Amborski (PLG120)

Date: Saturday, October 17th, 2009

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1. Overview

The purpose of this document will be to not only portray the physical environ of the meetings attended (as set out in the *Setting and Procedure* section) but to provide personal observations and information excluded in detail from the official decisions document from the city (as set out in the *Observations and Discussions* section) and provide my own insight to the overall process (as set out in the *Conclusions* section).

All documents pertaining to the meetings can be found in the Attachments section at the end of this document or linked in context throughout.

2. Meetings

Planning and Growth Management Committee, City of Toronto, September 16th, 2009

Toronto Pedestrian Committee, City of Toronto, September 22nd, 2009

3. Attendance

Planning and Growth Management Committee

Norman Kelly, Councillor for Ward 40, Scarborough-Agincourt **(Chair)**

Peter Milczyn, Councillor for Ward 5, Etobicoke-Lakeshore **(Vice-Chair)**

Frank Di Giorgio, Councillor for Ward 12, York South-Weston

John Filion, Councillor for Ward 23, Willowdale

Michael Thompson, Councillor for Ward 37, Scarborough Centre

Adam Vaughan, Councillor for Ward 20, Trinity-Spadina

Invitees

Malcolm MacKay, TTC Project Manager, Toronto Transit Commission

Gary Wright, Chief Planner & Executive Director, City of Toronto

Calvin Brook, Principal, Brook McIlroy Inc. Planning

Unnamed Representatives, Quadrangle Architects Ltd.

Audience

Urban Planning students including our teaching assistant, Marina Hess; CTV News reporter and cameraman; and various members of the public at large.

4. Setting and Procedure

Environment

Committee Room One is situated on the second floor just east off the main rotunda. The room centres on a U-shaped table with banks of tables running parallel with either side of its length. The centre table would sit comfortably 12 members of a committee with extra space for stenographers and secretaries. The Chair sits at the bottom of the U, facing the public seating. Each seat to the Chair's left and right is equipped with both a microphone and call button. The rows of tables extending from either side are also equipped with audio capabilities.

The room contains a glass-enclosed media cubby in the far corner with a number of cameras throughout the room. Countdown timers around the room are visible to all members, including the public. A flat-screen panel greets entrants with the agenda which updates in real-time during the proceedings. Two projection screens flanking the Chair's position convey media and documents in relation to the current point of order.

Methodologies

The proceeding was pushed forward by the Chair, formal and structured, utilizing Robert's Rules of Order. The Chair would call to order the meeting, initiate votes for motions and organize questions and comments from members. He would also expedite the proceedings by limiting discussing from members, clarifying and summarizing positions of topic and directing inquiries to the proper resource. He can also elect his own motions of order for committee vote.

The first action was to confirm the last minutes, agree to current point of order and allow for declaration of interest – A reference to the possibility of conflict of interest that any member may have with the following agenda (Municipal Conflict of Interest Act, 1990). Following was each order in detail with motions to adopt, defer or refer and ends with new business and adjournment.

Involvement

The Chair had complete control who would speak next. The members of the committee would always direct questions to the Chair who'd first determine its validity then pass it to the other member. Members can then answer or pass to others seated outside the U – Invitees specific to that meeting. While there was small candour between members with regards to agenda topics and motions, strict protocol was enforced and members were reminded to speak professionally, in-turn and within context. Public members are not invited to speak or share comments.

5. Agenda

- PG31.1** Update on the Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Action Plan
 - PG31.2** 1100-1150 Caledonia Road Interpretation of the Official Plan
 - PG31.3** Request for Approval of the Scarborough-Malvern LRT Environmental Assessment Study
 - PG31.4** Transit City Light Rail Program: Sheppard East LRT Connection at Don Mills Station
 - PG31.5** Request for Report - Downtown Relief Line
 - PG31.6** Request for Report on Amendments to the Official Plan to Permit Toronto Housing Charter Opportunities
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Both items **PG31.2** and **PG31.4** were received by council prior to discussion of the other points of order.

Detailed agenda descriptions for current items (**PG31.1 - PG31.4**) can be found in the Attachments section of this document or online at:

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2009/pg/agendas/2009-09-16-pg31-ar.pdf>

New agenda items (**PG31.5** and **PG31.6**) can be found in the Attachments section of this document or online at:

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmismonitor/previewAgendaItem.do?meetingType=Committee&agendaItemId=17847> and

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmismonitor/previewAgendaItem.do?meetingType=Committee&agendaItemId=17849> respectively.

6. Observations and Discussions

PG31.3 - Request for Approval of the Scarborough-Malvern LRT Environmental Assessment Study

Overview

This agenda item opened with a brief presentation by Malcolm MacKay, TTC Project Manager, of the project boards first demonstrated at a public consultation meeting on June 29th, 2009. Contained in these boards is the end result of the Environmental Project Report (EPR) to be submitted to the Ministry of Environment for assessment under the Transit Project Assessment Process (TPAP).

Discussions

Concern was raised by Councillor Thompson about the distance between the proposed LRT and the Guildwood GO station, noting that walking distance would be 220m through a barren and windswept area. He requests a study to redirect the LRT toward the station for rider convenience. (See Diagram 1)

Mr. MacKay argued that the distance falls within expectations of walking distances elsewhere on the system and that the cost-benefit of capital expenditure and time-delay for through transit users outweighs expected use of the stop (citing the location and mode of transportation of current GO riders) and removes focus from the intended transit hubs, Kennedy Station and UTSC.

Councillor Vaughan submits a motion to find an alternative and have Metrolinx look into moving the GO platform closer to the Kingston Road alignment of the LRT stating it might be a more cost-effective way to eliminate the concern. (See Diagram 2)

The committee recommended to council to approve the report with the amendment to research this motion.

Observations

Obvious signs of animosity between specific councillors, including the Chair became immediately apparent.

Prior to Councillor Vaughan's motion, he admitted that he's *"not too familiar with this area"* which before he completed his thought was cut off by Councillor and Chair of the committee, Kelly, that *"Perhaps you should visit it more often, then"*. This quip elicited laughter from all council members representing former suburban areas on the committee (Filion, Milczyn and Thompson)

Little banter followed when MacKay sheepishly admitted that the TTC never thought of asking Metrolinx about the idea and it might be a sound solution.

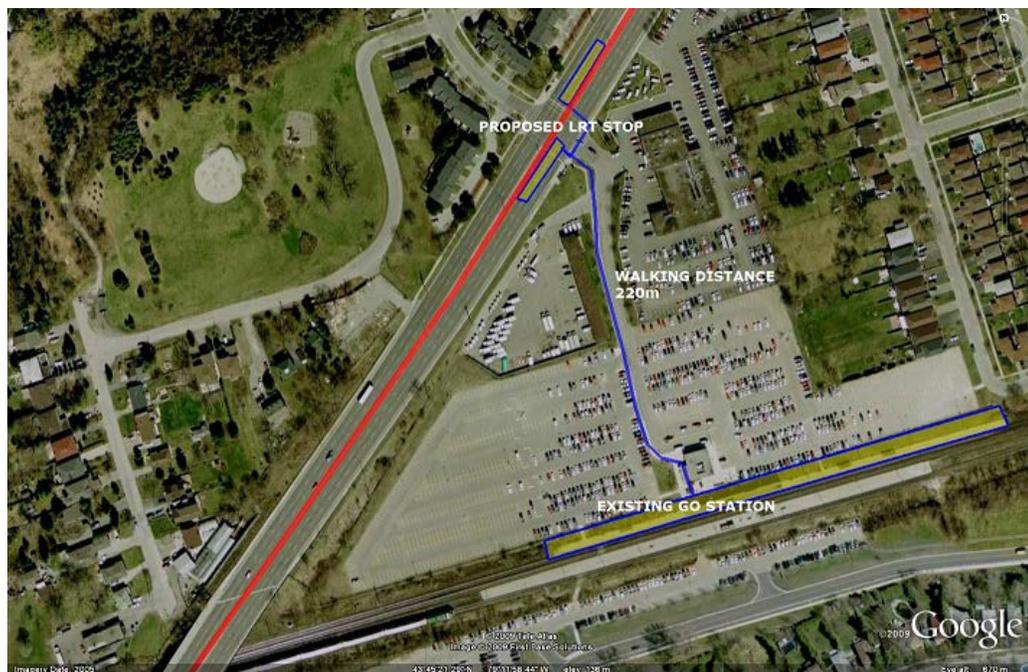


Diagram 1 – As proposed by the TTC



Diagram 2 – As suggested by Adam Vaughan

PG31.1 - Update on the Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings Action Plan

Overview

This report to committee is unique by means that it's a joint effort with City Staff and outside consultants. This incarnation of Toronto avenue intensification is meant to replace previous plans from the old City of Toronto and the Metropolitan Toronto governments and provide an overarching approach to all development along main transit corridors within the new city as a whole.

Discussions

Immediately, this report seems to be a contentious proposal, pitting former suburban against inner-city councillors.

An issue raised by suburban Councillor Milczyn that low-density, short-capital businesses (e.g., automotive supply, dry cleaners, etc.) would not be able to build their businesses

along any of the current corridors because of the increased development costs and there is no provision for them to find adequate and properly zoned land nearby.

Alternatively, inner-city Councillor Vaughan worried that the limitation within the Mid-rise component of the Avenues Plan would limit the potential of larger and visually significant developments that can be a keystone to a streetscape and that priorities were not sufficiently tied to future transit initiatives.

Councillor Filion worried that this plan would overlap on efforts already expensed in Secondary Plans, for example the Central Finch Area Secondary Plan in the City of Toronto Official Plan (Chapter 6.22)

Central Finch Area Secondary Plan (Toronto Official Plan, Chapter 6.22)

http://www.toronto.ca/planning/official_plan/pdf_secondary/22_central_finch_area_aug2007.pdf

Several motions combining these concerns were enacted and voted upon, referring the report to Planning Staff and the Executive Committee before public consultation would be able to commence.

Observations

Patience ran thin and the Chair calling the Councillors to order a number of times. Councillor Vaughan argued that *"suburban councillors should not have the right to decide what's best for my riding"* and numerous side-conversations occurred between planning staff and members of the committee while others were speaking in order to the Chair. Vaughan was also the first and only member to overrun his seven minute limitation, as indicated by the clocks surrounding the room.

Councillor Thompson used his time to acknowledge the students presence in the room and lightly admonish the others for portraying the planning process in a negative light as well as referring to members of the companies who were commissioned for the report sitting in the sidelines that their efforts were not in vain and – all in all and arguments aside – prepared a very excellent report.

Personally, I was surprised to see that architectural firm Quadrangle was commissioned and present at this meeting, considering it will be their bottom line that will be advanced if this proposal passed – Their firm being a predominate mid-rise designer within the city.

PG31.5 - Request for Report - Downtown Relief Line

Observations in Brief

Councillor Thompson puts forth a motion to amend the Official Plan's High Order Transit section to include the Downtown Relief Line (DRL – Diagram 3). Chair and Councillor Kelly immediately wanted to change the wording of the motion to include the phrase *potential* and Councillor Vaughan worried that any opposition of the amendment to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) may affect Transit City as a whole.

Gary Wright, Executive Director City Planning, Chief Planner then provided a little education to the committee: Any amendment to the Official Plan that is contested cannot affect other sections as it is already approved by the Ministry; and planning staff are already working on such a motion since Metrolinx sits above them in the hierarchy and they, byway of The Planning Act (1990), are compelled to change Toronto's Official Plan to match that of the Province's.

It is also interesting to note that CTV News was present during this committee meeting at the behest of Councillor Thompson, who then interviewed him afterward about the proposed line.

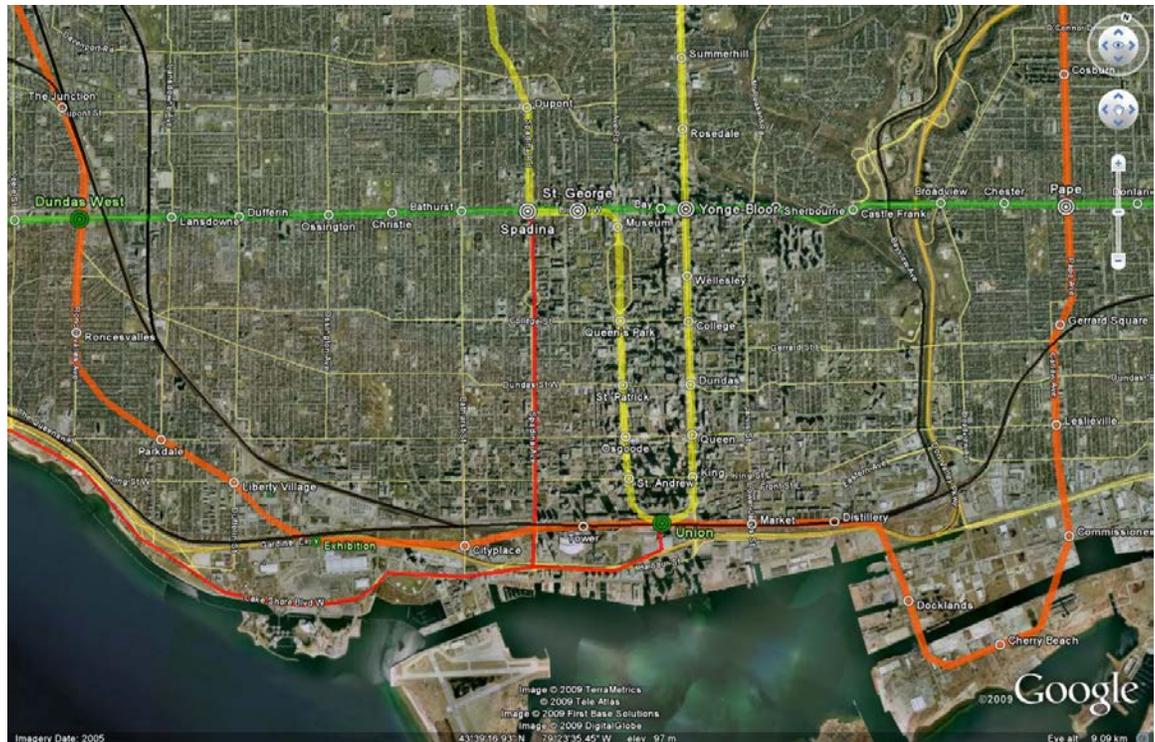


Diagram 3 – My interpretation (dream) of the DRL (seen in orange). Metrolinx argues a Queen Street/Railway Corridor alignment. Many others argue that it should align more with existing densities-of-need and future brown lands development.

PG31.6 - Request for Report on Amendments to the Official Plan to Permit Toronto Housing Charter Opportunities

Observations in Brief

Councillor Di Giorgio puts forth a motion to amend the Official Plan to expand on Section 3.2.1 referring to adequate and affordable housing to reflect local concerns in regard to rental units and new tenants from a recently passed Toronto Housing Charter. The Charter guarantees the right of one to affordable housing in any and without discrimination.

A lot of confusion came from other councillors and the Chair with this motion, unaware what it was specifically referring to. Di Giorgio offers little detail and loosely quotes OMB decisions overturning rental-condominium conversions and the development moratorium

along the Jane corridor until Transit City plans are solidified – Both limiting the availability of affordable housing.

City staff are quick to shutdown discussion, referring to an on-going legal situation and requests that the motion would better suited to an *in camera* session.

After some research, there apparently seems to be some history between Councillor Di Giorgio, The City and Planning Staff and the property owner R&G Management, Inc. dating back to at least 2001.

Apparently, Councillor Di Giorgio went against the City Planning Department at the OMB a number of times, specifically around one property in particular.

Reports on 1465 Lawrence Avenue West from City Planning Staff and the OMB

http://www.omb.gov.on.ca/e-decisions/pl001105_%230349.pdf

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2007/ey/bgrd/backgroundfile-647.pdf>

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2008/cc/bgrd/cc23.6.pdf>

<http://www.omb.gov.on.ca/e-decisions/pl070211-Jun-17-2008.pdf>

Full record of the decisions made by this committee can be found in the Attachments section of this document or online at:

<http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2009/pg/decisions/2009-09-16-pg31-dd.htm>

7. Conclusions

The Planning and Growth Management meeting was one of the more contentious of the two I attended with obvious signs of allegiance and outside politics making its way into the discussion. City staff appear to have little patience for councillors' questions and an aura of resentment with being told how to conduct their jobs seems clear. While not entirely defensive, they seem more put-off or bored with the proceedings.

Politics based on neighbourhoods, political leanings, former policy decisions and external forces all are integral parts of the process. Several Councillors used their time for showboating – either to the other members of the council or members of the audience including the media – or as their personal soapbox, airing out grievances they may not normally be able to do.

While not the most efficient method of conducting business – arguably if committees in the professional world were to perform in this method and provide such a heavy-handed approach to representation, companies would collapse from the lack of concise and expedient decision making – The inclusion of all parties to the process, including administration, councillors and the public, provided the necessary transparency to appease those affected. All things aside, decorum was kept throughout and decisions were made within a workable timeframe and with a clear consensus.

Since this meeting, I have also been to an OPPI presentation on the Avenues and Mid-Rises Action Plan and have been able to see the other side of the story, hearing unfettered from those present during the committee meeting. They too had some choice words for the process and roadblocks found with public involvement. It seems whatever side of planning one ends up in, politics is abound. Luckily, I like politics.

8. Attachments

- A) Meeting Agenda
- B) New Business Notes