

**City Services Town Hall
East York Civic Centre
June 8th 2011**

Introduction:

On June 8th 2011, Councillors Fletcher, Davis & Fragedakis held a Town Hall meeting with residents of their respective wards to discuss City Services. Over 110 people participated in group sessions designed to elicit their opinions on the importance of City services and measures to ensure proper funding to maintain them. The following is a brief qualitative summary of the opinions expressed by local residents.

The Importance of City Services:

Participants stated that **all City Services were very important**. Many pointed out that all City services had been developed as a response to a community need.

Most were not comfortable trying to rank City services but did say Emergency Services (Police, Fire & EMS) were essential. However, several participants ranked TTC as the most important service.

In fact, **TTC was highly valued by almost everyone** and participants wanted to express their concerns about the TTC. There was a strong sentiment that the City should stop talking about transit expansion and "get it done." Accessibility of TTC services should extend beyond subway elevators to include accessible buses on every route. Reductions in service levels on transit routes were unacceptable.

Though most participants did not think the ranking City services wise, the importance of the following services was specifically mentioned: Public Libraries, 311, Garbage, City Social Services, Long-term Care, Public Health, Childcare, City Forestry, Cultural Events, Heritage Preservation, Public Housing, Parks & Recreation, Animal Services, Transportation and Streetscaping. Several people cited the need to protect services for the vulnerable including children and seniors – whose "needs are too often forgotten."

Recreation programs for children were also highly valued. There was a strong support for key recreation programs being free for children and youth. There was support for youth initiatives and programs for low-income housing as well as long-

term care and homecare services. Mention was made of the 13 Priority Neighbourhoods.

Others felt City infrastructure was damaged and that there was a back-log of much-needed repairs. Some felt that we need to make our city more attractive.

Delivering City Services: Advice to City Council

The most often repeated comment to Councillors on service delivery was to **consider the long term benefits as opposed to just the short term costs**. In this vein, many residents pointed out that services like public housing, social services, and youth programs help to reduce crime. More generally, participants felt Councillors need to consider the impact of cuts on investors, tourists and residents.

Participants did not think privatizing services was a good idea. Although no residents spoke in favour of the notion that contracting out or privatization would cut costs, some residents felt that some "efficiencies" could be and should be found by the City within its own operations and those of its agencies.

A commonly cited and very specific example of this was the need to consider all infrastructure at once when doing work. For example, don't replace sidewalks one year and tear them up for water main replacement the next.

Improved communication and consultation on how to deliver City services was also seen as valuable. Many felt the City should bring back the Advisory Councils in order to obtain free advice on how best to deliver City services. Some stated that City departments and agencies need to get better at working with one another or as it was often put, "break down silos." It was also said that "**The City needs to engage in more lateral thinking.**"

The planning process itself was mentioned as something that needs to be refocused on the long term. For example, some residents felt the City should be doing more to encourage activities, like cycling, that ultimately will reduce costs.

Participants offered a range of money-saving ideas:

- Bring back Transit City
- Keep 311 online infrastructure but remove/reduce 311 call centre

- Look at the cost of governance – can we cut the salaries of senior bureaucrats or reduce management?
- Examine operations of non-profits and look at new ways to deliver social services to youth.

But overall the advice to Councillors did not focus on efficiencies but rather the importance of City services to a liveable and prosperous City.

Funding City Services:

A large number of participants suggested the City was facing **a revenue problem rather than a spending problem**. Many felt strongly that the provincial and federal governments should be paying a bigger share of Toronto's costs – "\$40 billion goes to Ottawa and only \$25 billion comes back". They suggested it was time for Toronto to negotiate a new fiscal arrangement with both levels of government.

Several expressed concerns about provincial downloading. It was suggested that the province fund more public housing. One individual felt they should also consider an increase in their support of arts, culture and heritage projects. There were multiple calls for people to make "a fairer deal for cities" an issue in the upcoming provincial election.

Generally, participants voiced considerable concern about the size of the Toronto Police Services budget and the impact it has on other City Services. Several participants suggested that the police contract and the paid duty arrangements should be revisited. Others noted that while "crime rates are going down, police fees are going up". It was suggested that some of these monies be re-allocated to youth programming for low income families. As noted above, many residents stated that social services and housing programs were seen as reducing crime in Toronto.

A small number of participants were prepared to review user fees but the majority had misgivings about the consequences of user fees - particularly on low income families. Several participants cited concerns related specifically to the Welcome Policy and recreation program user fees. A number of people cautioned that "**user fees are a slippery slope**".

Participants favoured fair tax increases over user fees. A significant number of residents raised the Personal Vehicle and Land Transfer Tax – they felt they were

innovative. Several asked why the Mayor had rejected these new tools when revenues were needed to fund and sustain vital City Services. There were a considerable number of people in favour of revisiting the vehicle tax. Some suggested it should be used to fund road improvements.

Many residents wanted to explore innovations in taxation. Road tolls and congestion fees were both cited as responsible ways to raise revenue with the proviso that people with disabilities who rely on cars be given special consideration. One individual raised the idea of a bicycle tax.

Several people suggested that the corporate tax cuts be reversed and that commercial property taxes on large properties be raised. More than one individual strongly objected to the "\$300 million tax cut to corporations" and suggested it did nothing to enhance Toronto's business climate. Taxes are how we "take care of each other."

In addition to raising taxes and finding efficiencies, some participants felt the City should look for other ways to generate revenues. Several suggestions and comments were offered including:

- Make smart investments
- Increase Section 37 money and Development Charges from new developments and community investment by businesses
- Make Toronto Bonds available for purchase by all citizens

Many felt that the City needs to help get more people working to fuel the economy. The general theme of these comments was that innovation and long term thinking are needed to solve the City's challenges.

An Open Dialogue:

Many residents stressed that it would be helpful to the overall process if they were consulted on these matters through **an open and democratic process**. The City's Core Service Review process was strongly criticized. The most popular criticism was that it did not allow residents to give a true accounting of their views. As well, the process only gave a sense of the cost of services - little information was provided on the impact and value of these services.

Some saw a general theme in this lack of information. They felt that citizens were not made aware of all penalty fees paid by the City - fees associated with cancelling projects which were already signed such as Transit City. Some participants felt they were faced with an artificial crisis with financial problems exaggerated to generate support for service cuts. One resident asked for "a liveable sustainable City for our descendants rather than tax cuts."