

# Minutes

**Toronto Society of Architects  
October Meeting**  
2 October, 2007 – 6:30pm to 8:30 pm  
Arts and Letters Club, 14 Elm Street

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## Present:

Adam Vaughan  
Antonio Gómez-Palacio  
Baruch Zone  
Bindya Lad  
Bruce Semple  
Christopher McCormack  
Corinne Yap  
David Jackson  
David Sisam  
Irina Sozontova

Jeff Atchison  
Judy Sanz-Sole  
Jurij Leshchyshyn  
Ken Greenberg  
Kent Minors  
Klaus Dunker  
Lyn Northey  
Michael Fox  
Michael Wong  
Nancy Smith

Owen Peat  
Phil Goodfellow  
Rafid Kustou  
Ruben Reyes  
Scott James  
Stig Harvor  
Susan Lewin  
Tony Coombes  
Vivian Lo

## 1. Introduction

- Antonio welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted the handouts on the table. He advised that this month's meeting would start with the Urban Affairs component after the 'around the room introductions' as one of the guest speakers had a previous engagement.
- 'Around the room' introductions followed.

## 2. Current Affairs – Improving Planning, Now!

- Phil shared that during 2007 there had been a format change to the monthly meetings, through the addition of a discussion forum on current affairs. Past themes for discussion included: *landscape urbanism*, *'green' architecture* and *shaping communities*. Experts and peers are invited to participate in a discussion, and the outcome becomes material for newsletter content.
- Phil noted that the meeting's discussion will focus on improving planning, and introduced the guests that had been invited to lead the discussion:
  - Joe Lobko, Principal DTAH, involved on a number of urban design efforts in the City included the West Don Lands master plan;
  - Adam Vaughan, City of Toronto Councillor Ward 20 Trinity-Spadina;
  - David Jackson, Principal, Cityscape Development Corporation, involved with the Distillery District restoration and development;

- Ken Greenberg, Principal, Greenberg Consultants Inc., involved in a number of master planning exercises in North America; and,
- Scott James, Community Activist.
  
- Phil asked Joe to lead the discussion for the evening.
  
- Joe shared that he was asked to help organize a discussion on how to improve the planning process in Toronto. He noted that new Community-based processes had emerged with a focus on planning, which had spurred collaboration between the developer, community, planner, and councillor. When such collaboration was engaged early in the process, a better quality of design is achieved. A discussion amongst the guests as well as other in attendance followed:
  
- **Toronto Planning:**
  - Planning in the City of Toronto was identified as being in a reactive mode, where the planner responds to a development application. This situation has worsened with the financial crisis that the City is now facing.
  - It was noted the City spends 0.42% of its budget on planning matters.
  - The Planners role has become limited and their previous involvement in Community Planning has declined. Consequently, planning efforts are focused on responding to applications rather than community-based planning.
  - The turn around time for planning application approval has become lengthy, which poses problems for both residents and developers.
  - It was advised that if the City does not address some of these issues, they will only become compounded.
  
- **Ontario Municipal Board (OMB):**
  - It was noted that in a recent case, shadow studies were struck down by the OMB. This may have great implications for future decisions and requires further attention. Much concern was expressed by the idea that sunlight and shadow would not be determining factors in the future design of the city.
  
- **Other Processes:**
  - Concern with inconsistencies in the process, which result from Local Council operating differently from Ward to Ward
  - The role of the vision in the Official Plan was discussed. It was noted that each neighbourhood has a different character and therefore would have a different vision. Joe shared that in New York City they do not have an Official Plan, rather they have a number of Neighbourhood Plans
  
- **Community Planning Process:**

- Councillor Vaughan noted that political involvement in planning process could lessen the burden on the City. He shared that a community planning process had emerged in his ward out of countless conversations with residents, developers, etc., about inconsistency within the process, as Local Council operates differently from Ward to Ward. He advised that the sooner architects and residents talk, the more changes can be constituted as there is more 'wiggle room' earlier on in the process than later.
  - To facilitate community-based planning, in Ward 20, residents believed it was important to make sure developer understands the neighbourhood. They produced a 'kit' about the neighbourhood that informs the proponent about the area. The kit which was the outcome of a series of mapping exercises and includes social, cultural, and historical aspects of the area, and identifies things such as: areas where long- and short-term residents reside; schools; areas that are safe and areas that are troubled; areas of change and areas of stability; and, the community's strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities. Once the community is presented with an application, the Ward produces a report card that measures how the proposal fits into neighbourhood. Residents also created a list of community benefits that development could respond to and which provides strategic direction for future growth.
  - Councillor Vaughan noted that there are four quadrants: residents, planners, councillors, and developers. If any two quadrants touch, all four should meet. As when consensus is created, the planning process is simplified. As a result, there is a need for lots of meetings to bounce ideas around.
  - It was agreed that the Community Planning process is critical. In addition, residents are a resource and by tapping into community groups and making connections, the planning process becomes more successful.
- ***The Design Community:***
    - Councillor Vaughan noted the lack of public discourse on Planning and the fact that the Planning process is not highly valued.
    - It was suggested that architects should help lead the Planning debate. In Toronto, we have a strong design community that has the potential to take a leadership role in Planning. Publishing matters and writing letters to the editors were given as examples of how we could reach the public.
  - Antonio ended the discussion by thanking everyone for coming. As the current affairs had generated much discussion and taken up much of the meeting, previous meeting minute approval and discussion of the initiatives will be resumed at the subsequent meeting on November 6<sup>th</sup>. He invited anyone with ideas about future Current Affairs topics to contact himself or Phil, and also highlighted the dates for a few upcoming events:
    - 15 October - Heritage Toronto Awards



- 17 October - OAA Society Visit; and
- 10-11 October - Explore Design Conference.

**The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 pm.**

**The next TSA General Meeting will take place on Tuesday November 6th, 2007, at 6:30 pm, at the Arts and Letters Club.**