

Toronto's digital resource

OPEN BY DEFAULT

By Leah Wong

While the **City of Toronto** launched an open data portal in 2011, it has failed to keep up with demand for valuable open data sets that could fuel innovation and entrepreneurship in the city.

In a deputation to executive committee Tuesday **Rose-Richardson Enterprises** chief technology officer **Mark Richardson** told committee that the open data community has been waiting for a long time for the city to take meaningful actions to embrace open data.

“The experience of the community is that [the city] is often unresponsive to specific data requests, [the data] released have relatively low value and there are a lot of internal silos with no clear mandate or enforcement about who is in charge [of open data],” said Richardson.

Since Toronto's open data policy launched in 2012, the city has released 213 data sets. Richardson noted that within the sets released there are examples of “bad data,” such as the release of the most commonly registered dog and cat names in the city. He noted that while this kind of data is fun, it is useless when it comes to decision-making.

“We can't continue on this way if you

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Don Dialogues

BALANCING USE AND PROTECTION

By Peter Pantalone

As the conversation about a potential 200-hectare Don Valley superpark evolves, stakeholders are cautioning that a balance must be struck between recreational use and protection of the ravine's rich biodiversity.

West Don Lands Committee co-chair **John Wilson** warned participants at the May 25 **Evergreen** event that the superpark could become a victim of its own success.

“Dream big and think big, but impact small and step lightly,” Wilson urged designers and planners.

He suggested that areas of high-intensity use could be concentrated to “perform double, or even triple duty.” For example, he noted pathways could be situated below hydro lines and above wastewater pipes, thus leaving more natural areas of the valley undisturbed from human use.

The park, spanning from Pottery Road to the north to Corktown Common to the south, would stitch together several disparate parks and greenspaces along

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City budget
process needs
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UPCOMING DATES

MAY 30

Board of Health Budget Committee, 1:00 p.m., committee room 1

MAY 31

TTC, time and location TBC

JUNE 7-8

Council, 9:30 a.m., council chamber

JUNE 13

Government Management Committee, 9:30 a.m., committee room 1

JUNE 14

Etobicoke York Community Council, 9:30 a.m., council chamber, Etobicoke Civic Centre

North York Community Council, 9:30 a.m., council chamber, North York Civic Centre

Scarborough Community Council, 9:30 a.m., council chamber, Scarborough Civic Centre

Toronto & East York Community Council, 9:30 a.m., committee room 1

JUNE 15

Planning & Growth Management Committee, 9:30 a.m., committee room 1

JUNE 16

Parks & Environment Committee, 9:30 a.m., committee room 1

City of Toronto Design Review Panel, time TBC, committee room 2

JUNE 20

Public Works & Infrastructure Committee, 9:30 a.m., committee room 1

Affordable Housing Committee, 9:30 a.m., committee room 2

JUNE 21

Build Toronto, time TBC, 200 King Street West, Suite 200

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CITY OF TORONTO EDITION

Round-up

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Fiscal framework

Council is being asked to have a serious conversation this fall about the city's financial framework and how it intends to fund city services and infrastructure needs in the future.

At its meeting Tuesday, executive committee considered a report from city manager **Peter Wallace** and the three deputy city managers that outlines the need for council to make some difficult decisions about the city's budget. He said that the fact that all three deputy city managers' names are on the report, in addition to his, signifies a unified concern about the long-term financial stability of the city.

"The staff report says we need to grow up fiscally as a city," said Ward 36 Scarborough Southwest councillor and budget chief **Gary Crawford**. "We are the sixth largest government in the country and we still make decisions as a small municipality."

Before council starts its discussion about whether it should increase sources of revenue or decrease city services, a number of community advocates made deputations about the implications these decisions will have on all residents, including the most vulnerable.

"We have spent years lowering costs for the most affluent while raising costs for the lowest-income families in our city. That is hardly sustainable or an equitable strategy," **Social Planning Toronto** executive director **Sean Meagher** told committee. "We want to

see the city adopt progressive taxes. What we have is a system that is regressive."

Meagher noted that as the city's reliance on the property tax has decreased, user fees have risen sharply. Some, including TTC fare and recreation fee increases, disproportionately affect lower-income families.

Commitment 2 Community representative **Michael Polanyi** challenged committee to think more creatively about sources of revenue so they do not adversely affect vulnerable residents. For example, he suggested a tiered system if the city were to reintroduce the vehicle registration tax—\$30 for a household's first vehicle and \$90 for the second.

If council adopts committee's recommendations, Wallace will report back in the fall on a framework for a multi-year financial and budget process, as a way to improve the city's financial management. Committee is also recommending that council direct staff to submit reports on multi-year expenditure management and revenue generation.

Re-drawing the lines

The ward boundary review is heading back to the drawing board after executive committee asked for the consultants to report back with additional information.

The consultants had recommended that the city adopt a 47-ward system, with two new wards being added downtown and one in North York. The recommended boundaries include

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Ian A.R. Graham, Publisher
iang@nrupublishing.com

Lynn Morrow, Editor
lynnm@nrupublishing.com

Geordie Gordon
Planning Reporter
geordieg@nrupublishing.com

Leah Wong
Municipal Affairs Reporter
leahw@nrupublishing.com

Peter Pantalone
Planning Researcher
peterp@nrupublishing.com

Jeff Payette, Design/Layout
jeffp@nrupublishing.com

Irena Kohn
Sales and Circulation
irenak@nrupublishing.com

Twitter @nrupublishing

SALES/SUBSCRIPTIONS
circ@nrupublishing.com

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NRU Publishing Inc.
Editorial Office
26 Soho Street, Suite 330
Toronto, ON M5T 1Z7
Tel: 416.260.1304
Fax: 416.979.2707

Billings Department
34B McMurrich Street
Toronto, ON M5R 2A2
Tel: 416.440.0073
Fax: 416.440.0074
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OPEN BY DEFAULT

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want to have the benefits of being a start-up city or an innovation city,” said Richardson.

If Toronto does not improve its access to open data, Richardson suggests it will become a less desirable location for the tech industry. He noted that many companies can exist anywhere in the world with just a laptop and they will seek out cities where data sets are flowing.

“Data is like a natural resource. But, it’s a natural resource you tap by undamming the rivers. There are a lot of dammed rivers here at city hall,” said Richardson. “You just need to release that data and get out of the way and let the community bring economic and social benefits.”

Civic Tech Toronto co-founder Gabe Sawhney told committee that while Toronto has limited financial resources it has a lot of a data that could be used by innovators.

“There are lots of things that we’d like the city to do to make Torontonians happier and more prosperous, but there’s only so much money to go around,” said Sawhney. “However the city has lots of data and there are talented people outside [of city hall] who can use that data to analyze, visualize and create websites and apps that can be enormously valuable to Torontonians.”

When given access, the open data community has demonstrated it can act more quickly than city staff.

Rentlogic CEO Yale Fox, one of the creators of the recently launched LandlordWatch.com, an online database of the worst landlords in the city, said it took them about a month to create. Ward 43 Scarborough East councillor Paul Ainslie noted that city staff was directed to develop a similar tool more than two years ago.

The website used the city’s municipal licensing and standards data set on by-law enforcement to show the 100 apartment buildings that have had the highest number of inspections in the last two years. The site was launched ahead of the Licensing and Standards Committee debate on landlord licensing.

“The site shows that nobody truly knows where the bad landlords are in the city,” said Fox. He noted that there are building owners on the list who made deputations against landlord licensing at the committee meeting.

“This is just one example of how open data can be used to trigger social change, equality and innovation within the City

of Toronto,” said Fox. “I believe that open data is one of the simplest, cheapest, easiest ways to improve all aspects of life in Toronto and strongly believe that more resources ... should be directed towards them.”

Ainslie noted that while Toronto lags on releasing open data, other North American cities have demonstrated what is possible when it is made a priority. He noted that Chicago launched its open data portal one and a half years before the Toronto portal was launched and it has more than 1,400 data sets online, compared to Toronto’s 213.

Data is like a natural resource. But, it’s a natural resource you tap by undamming the rivers. There are a lot of dammed rivers here at city hall.

• Gabe Sawhney

The Ontario Government has also made open data a priority. In April the province’s open data directive went into effect, requiring all Ontario ministries and agencies to make data public, with some exemptions. This open-by-default system requires existing data sets to be released retroactively and new sets to be continuously released.

Executive unanimously supported Ainslie’s motion recommending that the city develop an open data strategic plan and adopt an open-by-default standard for all city and agency data. To ensure that the city actually makes progress on releasing its data sets committee asked for progress reports every six months, with the first anticipated at the executive meeting in October. [nru](#)

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BALANCING USE AND PROTECTION

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the Don Valley. Over 250,000 residents reside along the Don Valley river basin and that number is projected to grow by a further 50-60,000.

Part of an ongoing series called Don Dialogues, which is intended to stimulate discussion and enhance public awareness of the future park, Wednesday’s panel considered the need to ensure that increasing recreational pressures do not compromise the ecological integrity of the Don Valley.

City of Toronto natural environment specialists **Julia Murnaghan** and **Cheryl Post** explained that the purpose of the urban forestry division’s Natural Environment and Community Program is to balance the intersection of people and the natural environment.

“Ultimately we recognize that management of natural environment areas in urban centres in Toronto invariably has to include managing [the] public use within them. The best way to protect the environment in high-use areas is appropriate use in appropriate places,” said Post.

Murnaghan and Post stressed that the urban forestry staff is particularly concerned with activities that are harmful in a cumulative way, such as people not keeping to designated trails or letting their dogs run off-leash.

Murnaghan explained the city is currently evaluating the potential impacts of increased trail use, proposed programming activities and art installations, and minor trail and parkland improvements. An environmental assessment may be required in the future once major infrastructure components have been identified.

“Ecological land classifications and environmental impact studies are scientifically-based processes that help the city to make ecologically-informed decisions regarding our ravines. We note that environmental protection is the core value and



[staff has] a commitment to analyzing the potential impacts of any proposed activities, installations or infrastructure, finding appropriate uses for appropriate places and monitoring, mitigating and taking an adaptive management approach,” said Murnaghan.

Toronto’s Ravines and Urban Forests author and **Toronto Field Naturalists** member **Jason Ramsay-Brown** noted the Don Valley sustains a tremendous biodiversity including both common and exceedingly rare plant and animal species.

“We must take personal responsibility for our interactions with these natural places. We must practice responsible use, exercise restraint and self regulation, or we risk loving these places to death,” Ramsay-Brown cautioned.

Evergreen and the City of Toronto are working on the first phase of the park, which will include the completion of strategic investments by the end of 2019, as part of the Lower Don Master Plan. In Phase two staff would implement a series of bold moves beyond 2020, such as the construction of crossings connecting the east and west sides of the valley, a new valley wetland and orchard, and the consolidation of rail, hydro and highway infrastructure to the east side of the Don River. **nr**

Toronto joins 100 Resilient Cities

May 25 the **City of Toronto** announced it has been inducted into the 100 Resilient Cities global network that is working to build urban resilience. Membership gives

the city access to tools and resources, as well as eligibility for a grant to hire a chief resilience officer to oversee the city-wide resilience building process.

Created by the **Rockefeller Foundation**, the Resilient

Cities network leverages tools and services valued at \$200-million USD in such areas as innovative finance, technology, infrastructure, land use, and community and social resilience.

100 Resilient Cities

president **Michael Berkowitz** said Toronto was chosen “Because of its leaders’ commitment to resilience building and the innovative and proactive way they’ve been thinking about the challenges the city faces.” **nr**

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

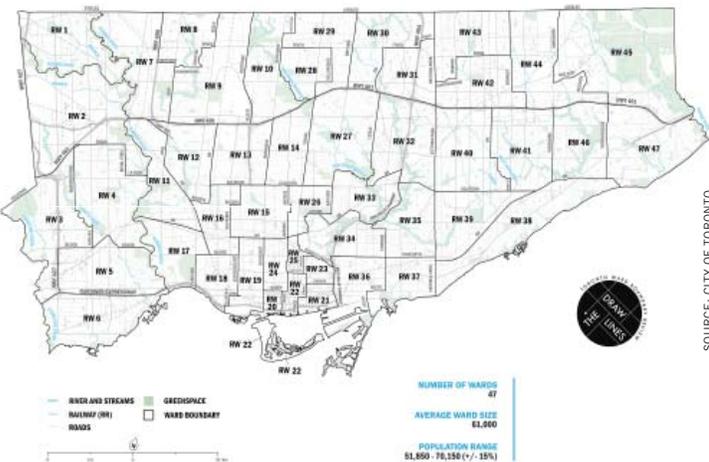
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alterations to 38 of the 44 existing wards, with only wards 1, 2, 6, 10, 11 and 35 unchanged.

Mayor **John Tory** said he wanted to refer the item back to staff so that the consultants can reconsider how much change is required under the 47-ward system. He said he wants to know whether effective representation can be achieved by only altering the areas with the highest population discrepancies. He also asked for extra work on the option to keep 44 wards, with boundaries adjusted to improve voter parity, and consideration of a 46-ward system.

“I am not in favour of adding any more politicians here,” said Tory. “I think there are ways we can address representation through staffing and so on... And do some alterations to those wards that have the greatest population discrepancy without adding more politicians.”

The consultants will complete another round of public consultation and report back in October.



SOURCE: CITY OF TORONTO

Map of recommended revised ward boundaries

Bid decisions

Committee heard 27 deputations concerning a report from the mayor’s advisory panel on hosting future mega events in Toronto, with much of the discussion centred on a potential bid for Expo 2025. The deputants represented residents and art, labour, development and business interests in the city.

Committee is recommending that council accept the offer from a group of Toronto business leaders to undertake a privately funded feasibility report on the incremental cost and

associated benefits of hosting Expo 2025. The report will be submitted to Wallace in mid-August, who will provide further comment and analysis to committee by October.

Committee recommends that a city bid for expo be contingent on funding from the federal and provincial governments specifically for Expo 2025 and that Economic Development and Culture general manager **Michael Williams** report back on whether hosting Expo 2025 would impact bids on other mega events. **nru**

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- Utilize current resources of contacts to advise and achieve the highest level of efficiencies on all projects
- Manage all subcontractors required in Land Development in keeping them competitive and accountable
- Lead the department and manage all aspects to take the reins from the owners and lead the company to new growth levels based on current land holdings

REQUIREMENTS

- University graduation in a related field or an equivalent combination of training and experience.
- Individual must possess a minimum of 15 to 20 years in the industry and at least 10 years’ experience at a senior management level.
- Must have direct management experience with large-scale initiatives involving significant dollar amounts and implications, and a medium-sized staff
- The ability to lead and motivate groups and individuals. Able to think creatively and strategically to successfully mediate and negotiate with individuals and groups internally and externally. Able to overcome obstacles to cooperation and to foster harmonious relations.
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TORONTO OMB NEWS

Settlement reached over Avenue-Lawrence variances

In a May 3 decision, board member **Laurie Bruce** allowed an appeal by **Parivash Boresh-Navard** against the **City of Toronto** committee of adjustment's approval, with modifications, of her minor variance application. While the committee had approved the application in part it refused a variance for building length. Boresh-Navard sought the variances to build a two-storey detached dwelling with an integral garage at 19 Otter Crescent.

Prior to the hearing a settlement was reached between Boresh-Navard and neighbours **Edward Purdy** and **Craig Warren**, which addressed privacy concerns but resulted in the need for further variances.

Planner **Andrew Ferancik** (WND Associates) provided evidence on behalf of Boresh-Navard and in support of the settlement. He testified the massing of the proposed house complies with the city's urban design policies and will reinforce the neighbourhood character.

He stated that some of the requested variances are technical in nature, others will result in an improvement over existing conditions and that all satisfy the four tests of the *Planning Act*

and will create no unacceptable impacts.

The board agreed with Ferancik's uncontroverted evidence and allowed the appeal subject to conditions outlined in the minutes of settlement.

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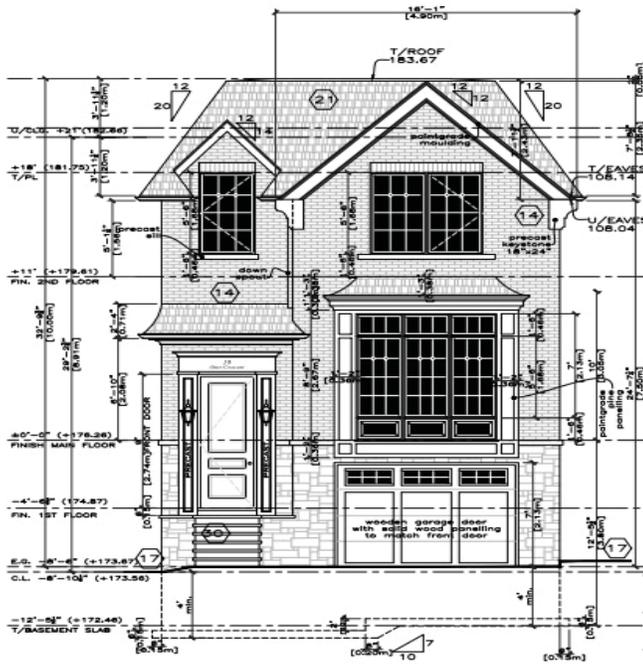
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SOURCE: ONTARIO MUNICIPAL BOARD

Revised proposal for 19 Otter Crescent by Arcica Design Studio

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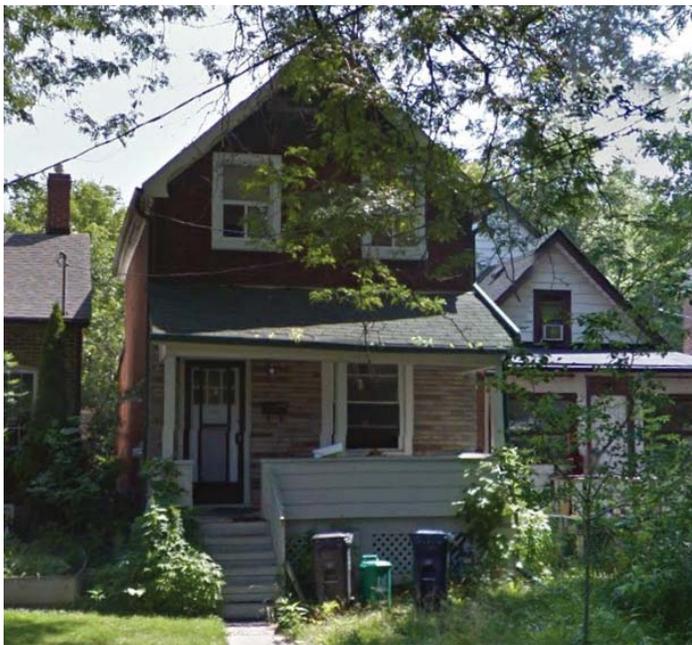
Solicitors involved in this decision were **Amber Stewart** (**Amber Stewart Law**) representing Parivash Boresh-Navard and **Ronald Kanter** (**Macdonald Sager**) representing Edward Purdy and Craig Warren. [See OMB Case No. PL151005.]

Gerrard-Coxwell variances approved

In a May 2 decision, board member **Laurie Bruce** allowed an appeal by **Ashkan Mehdi-Azad** against the **City of Toronto** committee of adjustment's refusal of his minor variance application. Mehdi-Azad sought the variances to build a two-storey rear addition and basement walkout onto his 233 Rhodes Avenue two-storey home.

City planning staff did not prepare a planning report for the committee of adjustment and did not attend the hearing. At the outset of the hearing a revised application was proposed that sought additional variances for setbacks. The board found the additional variances to be minor and thus required no further notice to be given.

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SOURCE: GOOGLE MAPS

233 Rhodes Avenue



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Planner **Eros Fiacconi** (EGF Associates) provided evidence on behalf of Mehdi-Azad and in support of the appeal. He testified the proposed development would continue to look like a smaller house from the street and would not create undue shadowing or overlook impacts.

He stated the variances with respect to side yard setbacks arise from existing substandard conditions on the adjacent properties, which are built almost to their property lines. He explained that the requested setback variances, for the north and south sides of the house, are to permit small bump-out sections that do not run the entire length of the building.

The board agreed with Fiacconi's uncontroverted evidence and allowed the appeal.

The solicitor involved in this decision was **Alan Heisey** (Papazian Heisey) representing Ashkan Mehdi-Azad. [See OMB Case No. PL151068.]

Industrial building variance application partially approved

In a May 9 decision, board member **Richard Makuch** allowed an appeal, in part, by **2129152 Ontario** against the **City of Toronto** committee of adjustment's approval of a minor variance application by **1118038 Ontario** (**Toronto Research Chemicals**). Toronto Research Chemicals sought the

variances to permit construction of a two-storey addition on the northeast portion of its industrial building at 2 Brisbane Road.

The approved variances relate to front and side yard setbacks, loading bay size and parking relief. 2129152, the owner of the property across the road at 4646 Dufferin Street, appealed the committee's decision.

Planner **David McKay** (MHBC), transportation planner **Ralph Bond** (BA Group) and environmental scientist **Nigel Taylor** (Novus Environmental) provided evidence on behalf of 2129152 and in support of the appeal.

McKay testified he had no issue with the requested loading bay variances as long as a condition was imposed to provide adequate landscaping and screening. McKay and Taylor expressed concerns with the requested setback variances to facilitate the proposed two-storey addition. They indicated the addition, which is next to smokestacks atop the one-storey portion of the building, could affect fume dispersal. They stated that the application should have triggered a study to consider compliance with **Ministry of Environment and Climate Change** guidelines regarding compatibility between industrial facilities and sensitive land uses.

Bond testified there is insufficient parking to meet the needs of the current building and that it would be inappropriate to further reduce the parking requirements for the proposed addition.

Employee **Larry Dime** provided evidence on behalf of Toronto Research Chemicals in opposition to the appeal. He testified the company intends to double its business and needs the additional space for new employees and laboratories. He stated the company owns the property at 65 Alness Street and intends to demolish the building to provide additional parking for 2 Brisbane Road.

Preferring the evidence of McKay, Bond and Taylor, the board authorized the front and side yard setback variances, subject to the results of a study under the MOECC guidelines, and the loading bay variances, subject to conditions requiring screening and landscaping. The board refused the variance to reduce the minimum number of parking spaces.

The solicitor involved in this decision was **Dennis Wood** (Wood Bull) representing 2129152 Ontario Inc. [See OMB Case No. PL151037.] [nru](#)



SOURCE: GOOGLE MAPS

2 Brisbane Road