



MID-RISE CITY BUILDER CAMP NEIGHBOURHOOD SUMMIT: SUMMARY

Gathering representatives from residents' associations across Toronto to begin a conversation about density and development and shape the content and form of the Mid-Rise City Builder Camp



**CENTRE FOR
CITY ECOLOGY**



ABOUT THIS SUMMARY DOCUMENT

On November 05, 2014, the Centre for City Ecology (CCE) held a Neighbourhood Summit to prepare for the Mid-Rise City Builder Camp, gathering together Residents' Associations from across Toronto to open up a dialogue about density and development in the city. At the Neighbourhood Summit, these community representatives workshopped ideas to help shape the conversation and content of the CCE's City Builder Camp program.

To begin a conversation about density and mid-rise development in Toronto, Summit participants were introduced to the CCE's *How Does Your Neighbourhood Grow?* exhibit and accompanying interactive density model, on display at Urbanspace Gallery from September 2014 - January 2015. In small groups, residents participated in guided discussions to workshop ideas for the City Builder Camp.

With the help of volunteer facilitators and note takers, resident participants explored discussion topics created to address the following key questions:

- What would your organization like to get out of a one-day City Builder Camp workshop?
- When your neighbourhood engages in the development process, what's missing from the conversation? How can we open the process up and improve it?
- What input and advice would you like to hear from key stakeholders in the development process?

The report that follows is a summary of the information and ideas collected at the Neighbourhood Summit and will help to shape the content and format of Mid Rise City Builder Camp program. It is organized according to the discussion questions presented to participants, with summaries and examples of responses included.

ABOUT THE MID-RISE CITY BUILDER CAMP

The Mid Rise City Builder Camp is a day-long workshop that will break open a productive conversation about density and development in Toronto's neighbourhoods. It is intended for an audience of representatives from local Residents' Associations as well as various stakeholders from the city planning, design, and development community. The Camp is a project of the CCE.

PARTICIPANTS

Invitations were sent to 88 Toronto-based Residents' Associations (all those for which the CCE was able to find contact information). 30 community members attended the Neighbourhood Summit, representing the following 22 local Residents' Associations:

- ABC Residents' Association
- Annex Residents' Association
- Beach Hill Neighbourhood Association
- Beach Waterfront Community Association and Greater Beaches Neighbourhood Association
- Bloor West Village Resident's Association
- Christie Pits Residents Association
- Davenport Neighbourhood Association
- DECA (Danforth East Community Association)
- Deer Park Residents Group
- Don Mills Residents Inc.
- Fergus-Elora Community Development Foundation
- FoNTRA
- Greater Beaches Neighbourhood Association
- Greenwood Community Association
- Harbourfront Community Association
- High Park Residents Association
- Indian Grove Heights Residents Group
- Mimico Residents Association
- Moore Park Residents Association
- Roncesvalles Macdonell Residents Association
- Swansea Area Ratepayers Association
- Humber Valley Village Residents Association

ABOUT THE CENTRE FOR CITY ECOLOGY

The Centre for City Ecology (CCE) generates constructive conversations on architecture, planning and development. By creating opportunities for meaningful civic dialogue and action, the CCE strengthens participation in Toronto's city building processes. Read more at cityecology.net.

1. STABILITY

Q: The City of Toronto is set to absorb 100,000 people a year for the next decade. In light of this, what does the term “neighbourhood stability” mean to you? Is it even possible? Is this term interchangeable with “sustainability”, or is it something else entirely?

SUMMARY

While some participants felt that stability and sustainability were connected but distinct, others felt that the two were so interdependent and closely related that they must always be considered as a pair, not as separate categories. Participants discussed the importance of neighbourhood stability with respect to preserving and maintaining unique character and quality of life, but the necessity for flexibility and change to achieve true sustainability.

EMERGING THEMES

- Some participants expressed a view that stability is the capacity for a neighbourhood to evolve, while maintaining a good quality of life for the greatest possible number of residents, while sustainability is the maintenance of that quality of life.
- Participants felt that both stability and sustainability are interdependent and need to be considered together. The key to doing this successfully is to find the balance between demand for intensification and the community desire to maintain valued historic character and quality of life.
- Stability means maintaining the character and livability of the neighbourhood while not driving out existing businesses or residents. Ideally, sustainability is consistent with stability.

“If you have sustainability, you will have stability.”

“Change is the only constant; stability is relative.”

2. DENSITY

Q: Create a word cloud based on the following question: What words, phrases, or themes come to mind when you think about density? On the right side of the word cloud, write a list of fears you and your community associate with density. On the left side of the word cloud, write a list of opportunities you and your community associate with density.

SUMMARY

To most participants, density was not considered a bad word. While density brings with it fears of change to neighbourhood character and livability as well as potential strain on local infrastructure and services, participants were quick to identify the potential benefits of appropriate, well-planned density increases, like streetscape improvements, enhanced green space and parks, increased population to support commercial areas, and improved transit service.

EMERGING THEMES

- Some key themes emerged around density, including overcrowding and congestion requiring increased amenities, finding a medium between “too little” vs. “too much”, the balance of density and services, and the unpredictable, erratic population growth of cities.
- Change in neighbourhood character, increased crime, gentrification, loss of heritage, overwhelming density increases, infrastructure strain, diminishing green space, development pressures, and NIMBYism were key fears associated with density.
- Vibrant streets, pedestrian friendly environments, enhanced green and public spaces, thriving commercial areas, heritage preservation, and transportation opportunities were key opportunities associated with density.

“Density can bring diversity, but density alone does not bring diversity.”

“Change is scary.”

3. PARTICIPATION + THE PLANNING PROCESS.....

Q: On the development process flow chart provided (included on page 6 of this summary document), circle the points in the process that you feel are working well and where your input as a community is meaningful.

Above the flow chart, identify points at which the process becomes difficult for your community or where issues arise. Why do these difficulties arise? What is missing from the conversation?

Below the flow chart, identify points at which you see opportunities to improve the process and make it more transparent, responsive, or open to meaningful input. What are some mechanisms to make these improvements?

SUMMARY

While participants acknowledged that opportunities exist for citizen input in the design phase, this often requires an engaged and supportive Councillor who is willing to facilitate collaboration between a developer and the community. Residents felt that the static, uniform nature of the development process does not provide enough flexibility to account for local context and neighbourhood specificities, often leaving residents and Residents' Associations disengaged from the process. Participants suggested creating tools to better equip Residents' Associations to engage in the development process, including an organizing and process Toolkit as well as introducing an official role for Residents' Associations in the development and consultation process, like a Community Planning Board structure.

EMERGING THEMES

- Residents felt encouraged by the potential for citizen input in the design phase, in collaboration with active, engaged Councillors and the possibility for positive partnerships between RAs and Councillors to influence this phase in the development process.
- The existence of a singular, 'blanket' set of guidelines for the whole city does not recognize the unique character and local specificities of different neighbourhoods across the city.

- Residents feel frustrated at the lack of opportunities for Residents' Association involvement in the Site Plan Approval stage.
- A Toolkit to assist Residents' Associations in developing their structure and connecting with Councillors and the City would improve opportunities for meaningful engagement in the early stages of the development process.
- Officially incorporating the RAs into the development process would help to solidify their place at the table and facilitate consistency in engagement across diverse neighbourhoods.
- Establishing an "Office of Neighbourhoods" within the City where Residents' Associations can connect and discuss developments affecting multiple neighbourhoods would help to balance the demand for intensification with the community desire to maintain neighbourhood qualities, character, and historic value.

"Large pieces of land owned by one owner is risky."

"Every site is unique and should maximize its potential accordingly."

4. LEARNING + SKILL SHARING

Q: There are other key stakeholders in the development process - architects, developers, city planners. Are there any skills, knowledge, or tools that you would be hoping to gain from a conversation with these stakeholders? What would be the most useful for your group?

SUMMARY

Participants had many questions for key stakeholders in the development process, ranging from financial analysis strategies to citizen engagement tools to details about the Section 37 process. The number and diversity of the questions indicates a desire for a more open and transparent relationship between these stakeholders and communities. The opportunity to gain information and skills from key stakeholders could allow communities to better understand and participate in the development process, to the benefit of their own neighbourhoods. This is the opportunity that the Mid-Rise City Builder Camp seeks to provide.

EMERGING THEMES

Participants identified some key questions for the following stakeholders:

- ARCHITECTS
 - What are the barriers to “good design” and what are the possibilities?
 - What are the existing design standards?
- DEVELOPERS
 - What are the economic realities of development?
 - Are you willing to collaborate with proactive neighbourhoods or architects at the outset of the development process?
 - How can you, as a developer, make a fair return on your investment and yet also satisfy the need and aspirations of community?
 - What makes a development financially feasible, and how can the community understand the process of developing a pro-forma for a project?

- CITY PLANNERS
 - Is there any possibility for instituting Community Planning Boards and giving them specific responsibilities and powers to affect policy, such as small changes to zoning?
 - How is Section 37 funding allocated, budgeted, and distributed/spent?
 - What are the mechanisms/processes by which the OMB could be abolished in Toronto?
- OTHERS
 - How do we bring more people into the conversation? (i.e. NIMBY residents in the community)
 - How can communities access tools from experts on how to better involve their respective Residents’ Association members in planning issues and engage appropriately with residents, some of whom may not want development at all?

“How do we make Residents’ Associations more visible?”

“City-wide plans rather than neighbourhood battles.”

“The biggest failure is that we are in a reactive place. There needs to be proactivity in order to produce good results.”

“We should be thinking, ‘What is the good life,’ and what does it look like?”

