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Digging Deeper, Rising Higher

FRIDAY,  
MAY 1, 2020

Vol. 24  
No. 18

**Scribe**  
TECHNICAL WRITERS & EDITORS  
Clear, concise communication for city builders.

## PRE-ZONING LANDS

# NECESSARY, BUT NOT SUFFICIENT

**Rob Jowett**

While pre-zoning land is a necessary tool for increasing density in neighbourhoods across the City of Toronto, it does not significantly help to reduce development approval timelines.

That is the conclusion of a recent [report](#) from **Ryerson University's** Centre for Urban Research and Land Development (CUR) that examines the attempts of the **City of Toronto** to reduce development application approval timelines through city-led rezoning efforts. In reducing approval timelines, pre-zoning is believed to help improve the flexibility of developers to respond to the needs of the housing market as they change over time. Specifically, the report considers the results of the Kingston Road Revitalization Study and subsequent development proposals for that area that sought to take advantage of the new zoning policies that emerged from that study, which was intended to intensify the

Kingston Road area.

While rezoning efforts are usually led by development applicants and pertain to one site, pre-zoning larger areas has increasingly been considered as a way of incenting specific forms of development as ostensibly, it removes the need for months or years-long efforts to change zoning by-laws to accommodate development. Pre-zoning has become a major policy tool to define what type of development the city wants on

its avenues, where around one-fifth of Toronto's development is happening.

"The idea of [pre-zoning] is [it's] supposed to speed up the process," CUR senior research fellow and report author **Frank Clayton** told *NRU*. "So when a developer buys a piece of property, he knows that he can put... 12 storeys on [it], and that's it. If he does that, he doesn't have to go through any rezoning process... the idea was that once you get pre-zoning, you should be able to

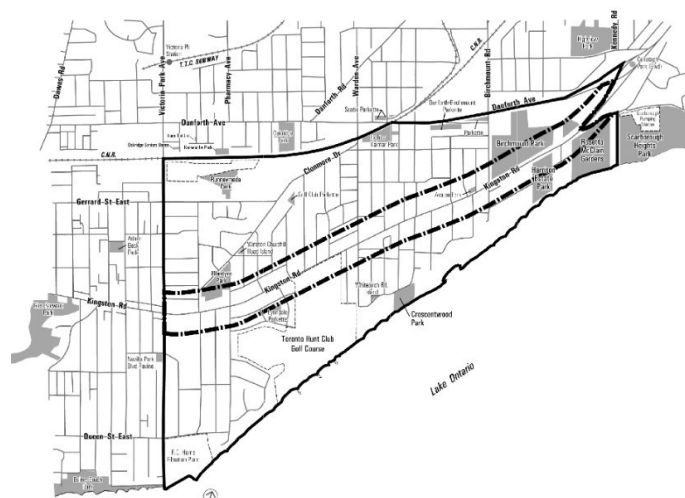
go very quickly to get building permits."

Clayton says without pre-zoning, it can take years—up to ten years on high-rise sites—to change zoning by-laws, even when other policies that support the type of proposed development, such as Official Plan amendments, exist. He says these lengthy delays mean that housing supply is highly inelastic because landowners cannot react quickly to changing market dynamics, such as rising housing costs.

"What we're saying is that pre-zoning is a necessary condition," says Clayton. "But it's not a sufficient condition. It won't necessarily help things happen."

The Kingston Road

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Map of the Kingston Road Revitalization Study area which led the City of Toronto to pre-zone the area in an attempt to prepare it for intensification and to reduce development approval timelines.

SOURCE: CITY OF TORONTO

## UPCOMING

### MAY

- 1 Toronto Preservation Board, 9:30 a.m., committee room 1 (CANCELLED)
- 4 General Government & Licensing Committee, 9:30 a.m., committee room 1 (CANCELLED)
- 5 Infrastructure & Environment Committee, 9:30 a.m., committee room 1 (CANCELLED)
- 6 Economic & Community Development Committee, 9:30 a.m., committee room 1 (CANCELLED)
- 11 Board of Health, 9:30 a.m., committee room 1
- 12 Etobicoke York Community Council, 9:30 a.m., council chamber, Etobicoke Civic Centre (CANCELLED)  
North York Community Council, 9:30 a.m., council chamber, North York Civic Centre (CANCELLED)  
Scarborough Community Council, 9:30 a.m., council chamber, Scarborough Civic Centre (CANCELLED)  
Toronto & East York Community Council, 9:30 a.m., committee room 1 (CANCELLED)
- 14 Planning & Housing Committee, 9:30 a.m., committee room 1 (CANCELLED)
- 20 Executive Committee, 9:30 a.m., committee room 1 (CANCELLED)
- 21 Budget Committee, 9:30 a.m., committee room 1 (CANCELLED)
- 27-28 Council, 9:30 a.m., council chamber (CANCELLED)

### JUNE

- 1 General Government & Licensing Committee, 9:30 a.m., committee room 1



## ■ RECOGNIZING THE ROLE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN COMMUNITY HEALTH

# ESSENTIAL SERVICES

Andrew Reeves

Public libraries, including 100 branches in the **City of Toronto**, have long excelled at meeting the evolving needs of the communities they serve, whether they're acting as a municipal service provider, as a caregiver for seniors, or as a common gathering space. And despite the widespread changes occurring in libraries across the city as a result of COVID-19, **Pam Ryan**, director of service development and innovation with the **Toronto Public Library (TPL)**, told *NRU* its mandate remains unchanged – it's only the needs that have shifted.

In Toronto, and across Canada, libraries have demonstrated their versatility as community hubs during the current pandemic by providing resources to local communities ranging from access to food and to WiFi, to production of personal protective equipment. Currently, providing access to food has become a significant new component of TPL's mandate during COVID-19.

With the provincially-mandated closure of all non-essential services on March 16, dozens of mosques, churches,

community centres, and other public buildings were forced to shut their doors. This emergency measure had the unintended effect of derailing the operations of most of the non-profit, volunteer-run community groups who use these community spaces as storefronts for delivering goods on behalf of food banks. Here, it seems, was a gap that TPL was uniquely qualified to fill.

"We are in every neighbourhood," Ryan said. "With upwards of 40 per cent of the city's food banks closed, we could match them one-for-one in neighbourhoods where they had been closing by using our physical infrastructure." A dozen pop-up food banks throughout Toronto have opened to help meet the needs of the city's highest-priority residents.

One local partner is **North York Harvest Food Bank**. "We had food in our warehouse, we had trucks, we had drivers, our operation was up and running," **Ryan Noble**, executive director of North York Harvest, told *NRU*. But after public facilities were forced closed, he said, "Our ability to actually get food out

to people in the community was effectively – if not wiped out, then dramatically reduced."

The partnership formed with TPL was "game changing," Noble said. In weeks, rather than months, the library's warehouse on Ellesmere Road in Scarborough was rejigged into a food drive facility – books were moved out and loaded onto trucks, and in their place came food delivered by North York Harvest and **Daily Bread Food Bank**. The goods are packed by library volunteers and food bank staff and are delivered to participating libraries around Toronto. To date, more than 8,500 people have been helped at TPL's temporary food banks.

"Libraries have re-envisioned themselves for years as community hubs, and the people that work at libraries are used to dealing with people in the general public, some of whom are in marginalized groups," Noble said. These same groups are most likely to be food insecure. Currently, three branches in North York are distributing food packages out of library foyers, and a fourth

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Annual subscription rate is \$409 +HST (ON).

Complimentary trial subscriptions are available.

Advertising rates available upon request.

Novæ Res Urbis Toronto is published 50 times a year and is not to be redistributed without the written consent of the publisher.

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ISSN 1918-7548

# TRANSIT PARADOX



**Rob Jowett**

New mass transportation construction methods and political interference in transit planning decisions are the biggest reasons for the rising costs of subway and LRT construction, a new [report](#) from the **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario** (RCCAO) says.

There have been nine subway and LRT construction projects completed in the **City of Toronto** to date, beginning with the Yonge Line which opened in 1954. Another six projects are currently under construction or being planned. In the past 20 years, the costs of building subway or LRT tunnels and stations have increased significantly compared to earlier projects, which has led to significant criticism of the governments and agencies involved, and made approval of future projects more challenging to gain.

The report compares the costs of the city's first seven subway and LRT projects, up to the opening of the Downsview extension in 1996, to those that followed. When adjusted to 2019 dollars, each of the first seven major transit projects completed before 1996 cost somewhere between \$83-million and

\$112-million per kilometre to build. By contrast, the city's two more recently completed projects: the Sheppard subway line, which opened in 2002, cost the city \$203.1-million per kilometre to build, and the Toronto-York Spadina Subway Extension (TYSSE—the extension of the University line to Vaughan, which opened in 2017) cost \$383.7-million per kilometre. The cost of future projects, such as the proposed Ontario Line, the Scarborough Subway Extension, and the Yonge North extension to Richmond Hill are projected to cost \$703.2-million, \$723.7-million, and \$756.8-million per kilometre respectively.

“One of the key things that we found early on was that in the 20th century, subway-building... very rarely involved the tunnels,” report author and transit researcher and journalist **Stephen Wickens** told *NRU*. “We either built these shallow box tunnels with cut-and-cover construction, or we used open trenches... But in the 21st century, we totally ignore the possibilities of using cut-and-cover. We go with these tunnel-boring machines that go really deep. And it appears that that's where [costs begin to rise].”

Wickens says that in addition to the change in construction methods, subway stations have become much larger and almost turned into underground buildings because they are being built so far underground, in some cases, to depths the equivalent of seven storeys.

New methods for constructing subways are also far slower than they were in the past: the original Yonge Line was built at a rate of 1.6-kilometres of track and 2.7 stations per year, and the University-Bloor-Danforth line, which opened in 1966, was built at a rate of 2.6-kilometres of track and four stations per year. In contrast, the TYSSE was built at a rate of 1.1-kilometres of track and 0.7 stations per year.

The main reason for the changing construction methods is the decreasing public tolerance for the kind of surface-level disruption caused by the construction. According to Wickens, construction-

related disruptions to street activity became increasingly unacceptable during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, even as improvements to deep tunnel boring technology improved timelines and lowered costs. The report notes that a TTC spokesperson told Wickens that the organization considers cut-and-cover construction to be more costly than boring and did not consider it as a possible construction method when building the Toronto-York Spadina Subway Extension.

“Toronto is certainly becoming more dense, and the disruption [caused by cut-and-cover construction] the public would experience now would be different than, 40, 50, 60 years ago when even Toronto's financial district wasn't as built up as it is right now,” RCCAO executive director **Andy Manahan** told *NRU*. “In the downtown core, the Ontario Line would have to go deep, and I think [tunnel boring] would be more cost-

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We are arguably some 30 years behind where we should have been had we been paying attention to transit all along.

- Bern Grush

# TRANSIT PARADOX

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effective because there are so many water utilities that are, you know, the core parts of the city that [it] will be best just to avoid them.”

Wickens says he agrees that the central part of the Ontario Line will need to be built deep underground, especially as it also crosses existing subway lines. However, he says most of the benefits associated with deep tunnel boring, such as reduced surface disruption, are eliminated by the much higher cost of the technology, and it still causes significant disruption on the surface.

Compounding the problems of rising costs of construction, increasing political involvement in transit decision-making has pushed the costs of projects up, Wickens found. He says rather than presenting decision-makers with a series of potential projects to assess which makes the most sense, politicians are deciding in advance which projects to back based on political calculations or campaign promises.

“Obviously, politicians have [an] important role. They need to be the ones who decide which projects get funded or approved,” says Wickens. “But what’s happened is that we seem to have really messed up the whole process of assessing

which projects are worthwhile. And we basically are deciding which projects we’re going to build, and then studying them.”

Manahan says in particular, the planned Scarborough Subway Extension has been subject to considerable political interference which has delayed or altered the project several times. Originally it was planned to be an LRT, but in 2012, this plan was replaced with a subway in Toronto’s OneCity transit plan, which was subsequently rejected by the provincial government. The provincial government then said it would fund a three-stop extension, which was then reduced to one stop by city staff. Currently, **Metrolinx** and **Infrastructure Ontario** are planning a three-stop extension following a decision by the current provincial government.

“It’s not just the dollar cost,” says Manahan. “It’s the opportunity cost, I think, where we’ve missed out to a certain degree on a generation of building where we just weren’t doing very much from the 80s to the early 2000s.”

Wickens identified secondary factors that have also contributed to raising the costs of transit projects, such as approval and study delays caused by factors other than

political interference, rising labour and materials costs, construction productivity (the output of one person, machine, etc), and the public-private-partnership financing model. However, he says these factors are much less significant than the construction methods being used and ongoing political interference.

“We are arguably some 30 years behind where we should have been had we been paying attention to transit all along,” **Harmonize Mobility** co-founder and chief mobility officer **Bern Grush** told *NRU*. “To make matters worse, we have focussed building downtown with buildings that draw lots of workers all at the same hour of the morning in subways that were designed for the 60s, and that can no longer handle the load. On top of that, we want to add subways in from the suburbs, which would make that fundamental problem worse. But we can’t not pay attention to this, because congestion has also gotten out of hand by a long shot.”

Grush says Toronto has not effectively balanced city-building and transportation, and the situation regarding transit is far worse here than it is in other cities. He adds that the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to lead to significant changes in the way people work and how many workers will commute each day in the future, meaning that many of the business cases and other underlying studies supporting

individual projects will no longer be relevant and many projects could re-assessed yet again.

“What we have is the perfect storm given by naturally compounding costs that far outrun inflation... and the decades of added political and planning errors,” says Grush. “The problem would have been bad due to natural processes, but we managed to make it so much worse. This is like COVID-19—there was a process that was destined to bring the virus around the world, but there are many delays, decisions, and missing preparations that made it so much worse.” 🌸

# NECESSARY, BUT NOT SUFFICIENT

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Revitalization Study was undertaken from 2004 to 2010 to examine a stretch of Kingston Road between Danforth Avenue and Victoria Park Avenue in order to determine the best way to transform the low-rise, low-density, commercial and residential area into a main street more typical of downtown. Following the study, three core commercial areas were identified and replaced existing zoning permissions along the street with Limited Industrial and Commercial-Residential zoning codes. The height limit for buildings was increased to four to eight storeys, depending on the site, and the permitted densities were increased to match those increased heights.

“I think [the revitalization study] was very much needed when you’re looking at that particular section and any other section or any other avenues in the city to... ignite development and revitalization,” Ward 20 Scarborough Southwest councillor **Gary Crawford** told *NRU*. “I think it really helped in that because we have now... buildings going up. We have many [development] applications in. And I think it’s been very successful in reigniting that particular

area... I’m assuming in four or five years, you will find the vast majority of that area being redeveloped.”

Since the new zoning was implemented in 2010, there have been five developments that have been approved in the new Kingston Road zoning areas, an additional two have received notice of approval conditions, and two more still are in the approvals process. In total, these projects represent over 610 residential units. On average, it took 38 months from the time an application was submitted for a development proponent to obtain a building permit. Clayton says this is much longer than it should take with the pre-zoning efforts. Even with the pre-zoning, two of the proposed projects still needed to go through a rezoning process.

“[The report] reflects similar planning issues on the avenues across the City of Toronto. And I think it also reflects some of the growing pains reflected [along] other... transit corridors and in maturing communities... like Kitchener, like Hamilton, and like Ottawa,” **Ontario Home Builder’s Association** policy director **Michael Collins-Williams** told *NRU*. “It’s almost frustrating to read because it’s a

case study of the exact specific locations [to which] planning policy is attempting to direct a significant portion of the newcomers that are coming from all around the world to live in Toronto.”

Collins-Williams says Ryerson’s report demonstrates that the city’s planning system is out of date and does not reflect the needs of a city the size of Toronto. He says pre-zoning is an important policy tool that has worked in other places, such as Kitchener, but that it is insufficient on its own to bring in the type of development the city is looking for right now. He adds that there are also often issues with the nature of the actual uses and permissions that are pre-zoned and that the zoning can often be inflexible and does not reflect the realities of particular aspects of a site, such as its dimensions or adjacent uses.

“In a lot of cases, pre-zoning is... described as shrink-wrapped zoning,” says Collins-Williams. “So the zoning itself is too tight for the site. Sometimes, even though it’s pre-zoning an avenue, it may be too short to be economically viable... There’s often issues with setbacks... [and] there’s a lack of design flexibility.”

Given the size of the city, it is difficult to assume that the report’s findings are true across Toronto, Ward 19 Beaches-East York councillor **Brad Bradford** told *NRU*. He says pre-zoning sites is an important planning tool because it gives landowners and development

proponents certainty around what is permitted for different sites, and that it benefits the city to be able to define what it is looking for in major growth areas, particularly on large, impactful sites that can host a lot of needed municipal infrastructure or advance other city initiatives. He adds that many development projects are slowed down because of delays on the proponent’s side, not the city’s.

“[Pre-zoning is] a great way to... provide that certainty in the market. It drives investment, especially on avenues or transit corridors,” says Bradford. “It’s not the be-all end-all. It’s one of many things that we need to move forward in terms of our planning tool kit.”

Bradford says development approval in Toronto does often take too long, but feels that timelines will improve once recommendations, such as improving interdivisional communication and updating technology used to review and track applications, are implemented from the end-to-end review recommendations of the planning department. 🌟

# ESSENTIAL SERVICES

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location may open soon.

Not all new library services offered during COVID-19 are as urgent as food distribution. For many libraries, the pandemic has accelerated the transition of many programs and services to the digital realm. Use of online services with TPL – everything from streaming movies and music to borrowing eBooks or taking an online class – have risen 130 per cent.

“Digital services have long been part of what Toronto Public Library offers,” **Jennifer Jones**, president of the **Toronto Public Library Foundation**, told *NRU*. The pandemic is simply helping people appreciate that their local library branch, and the broader services it offers, are resources they turn to regularly. “What we’re realizing is that with our library cards, we can still go [to the library] every day. And people are still coming to the library every day to take advantage of the free content,” Jones said, despite their doors being closed – it’s just all online.

As the organization responsible for driving private donations to TPL, Jones’ team has had to rethink how to connect with donors and tell the story of how the library remains a vibrant part of the

city’s fabric. Pandemic or no, “the bottom line is that the library has always been at the heart of Toronto,” Jones said. “And it still is for the more than 70 per cent of Torontonians who use it, regardless of whether the branches are open or closed.”

In responding to other community needs, some libraries have connected with local shelters to loan out technological gadgets, while others have turned over 3D printers to local universities and hospitals like **Toronto General Hospital** to create personal protective equipment needed by frontline medical workers. In Hamilton, **Hamilton Public Library** (HPL) staff are even sewing cloth masks and donating them to frontline agencies working in the city.

“During a crisis you can either freeze or take action, and we’re trying to be as proactive as possible,” **Paul Takala**, HPL’s CEO and chief librarian, told *NRU*. “It’s good for our morale, and it’s good for our ability to help our community to get through this crisis.” In recent weeks, HPL staff have also begun calling older patrons to check in and see how those that are often prone to social isolation are weathering the storm. “We’ve had some people

say, ‘I haven’t talked to anyone in weeks,’” he said: “These have been really impactful conversations.” A third of those seniors that speak with Takala’s staff request a follow-up phone call.

Like many other librarians, Takala grappled with how to ensure those without internet access or computers at home could continue accessing services online, an especially acute need when applying for federal financial assistance is typically done electronically. “People that don’t have access to that tech – normally we are their access point,” he said. While HPL cannot open their doors to allow access to public computers, they have left their WiFi running at all locations so people can access it from library grounds. “We intentionally bleed it out onto the property,” Takala said.

In Toronto, an estimated 50 per cent of all library computer users report that they have no other means of using a computer or connecting online. “That is a huge digital divide that we’re aware of every single day,” TPL’s Ryan said: “It’s even more acute when there’s no access to it. There are no other public alternatives.” In future crises, she added, internet access may need to be treated more like a public utility and not a “nice to have.”

This may lead to a debate in future over what constitutes an essential service, given the importance that libraries and food banks have played during the current pandemic. North

York Harvest’s Noble would like to see food banks declared an essential service in any future public health crisis that requires the large-scale shut down of public buildings.

Library design, meanwhile, could be shaken up to ensure that more space is made available for patrons; public computers and other common elements could be out of service more frequently for more frequent cleaning. “How long should a book stay in quarantine after it’s been returned?” asked **Maureen Sawa**, CEO of the **Greater Victoria Public Library**, during a webinar on the future of public libraries hosted recently by the **Canadian Urban Institute**. “These are issues we’ve never had to consider.”

The library’s role “is about helping people get through what they’re facing, and that’s always what public libraries have been about,” Åsa Kachan, chief librarian and CEO of the **Halifax Public Library**, told webinar participants: “We’re just finding new ways to do it.” While the use of other municipal services have declined, she noted, library use in Halifax is up. Kachan’s staff are leading online literacy programming for children, hosting cooking classes for adults, and, like in Hamilton, connecting with older patrons on the phone as a sort of mental health check-in. As seems to be happening at libraries across Canada, use

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# TLAB NEWS

## CABBAGETOWN SOUTH VARIANCES APPROVED

In an April 15 decision, TLAB member **Sean Karmali** authorized several minor variances, subject to conditions, to facilitate a proposed three-storey rear addition to an existing 2 ½-storey Victorian Bay-n-Gable townhouse at 237 Seaton Street.

The applicant, **Jordan Allison**, had applied for and been granted variances by the **City of Toronto's** Committee of Adjustment, however neighbour **Sorin Selagea-Popov** appealed the variances for what he perceived to be

possible negative impacts on his property.

Both parties were self-represented at the TLAB hearing. Selagea-Popov objected to the rear addition, which he felt to be too large and without precedent in the vicinity of the South Cabbagetown neighbourhood. He took particular issue with a proposed third-floor rear deck and third-floor windows, which he said would enable views into his master en suite bathroom from the applicant's house.

Allison, an architect, stated that the addition was designed to achieve an appropriate fit within the tight physical

context of the site, hemmed in at the north and south by similar dwellings with existing rear extensions. He indicated that neither City Planning nor Heritage Preservation Services staff had voiced concerns about the variances, and noted that the rear addition would not impact the appearance of the historic dwelling in the streetscape.

Although no expert planning evidence was tendered by the applicant or the appellant, the TLAB found that the variances satisfy the statutory *Planning Act* tests as there are similar rear additions in the area, and the proposal

will not give rise to adverse negative impacts.

The TLAB authorized the variances, subject to a series of conditions including a requirement for the third-floor windows overlooking Selagea-Popov's en suite to have obscured glass to limit sightlines. 🌸

## ESSENTIAL SERVICES

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

of digital services is increasing dramatically.

But Kachan warned that as valuable as digital services

have been during the current crisis, they are no substitute for all that libraries offer. "It's great to lean-in to digital," she said, "but there are some things we can't lose sight of. Digital does not replace human connection, and it's not equitably available," given disparities in broadband

access in rural communities, or among vulnerable populations. "And the library as a physical place? We can't lose that, or we lose so much as a community."



## PEOPLE

**Deloitte Canada** partner **Saad Rafi** has been appointed to lead the **City of Toronto's** office of recovery and

rebuild to create a COVID-19 recovery and rebuild strategy. Public health consultant **Dr. David Mowat** has been

appointed to lead the public health section of the recovery and rebuild strategy.

**Loopstra Nixon** partner **Allan Ritchie** has been appointed **LawExchange International** chairman

for a two-year term. He replaces outgoing director **Zirngibl** senior partner **Dr. Hans-Jörg Krämer**.