

**1<sup>st</sup> DRAFT**

**Toronto Social Development Network:  
Developing an Inclusive Framework for  
Social Planning in the City of Toronto**

*A Preliminary Paper for Discussion Purposes Only  
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## **Imagine A City...**

Where community and difference is celebrated, where neighbours talk to each other, share ideas and get involved in their neighbourhoods. Where individuals feel they have a voice and are reflected in the political, institutional and societal structures of the City. Imagine Toronto as a City where everyone regardless of what community they live in can have access to affordable housing, childcare, healthcare and other services; where income security is adequate to live on and where no one needs to go hungry or lives on the streets. Imagine a City where immigrants of colour are not just the dishwashers and taxi drivers, but share in the wealth of the City and are able to use their skills to gain access to better jobs. Imagine youth leading local decision making and engineering their futures. Imagine the frail, elderly and seniors being supported as vibrant elders in their communities and not institutionalized into passivity. Imagine a city where the disabled are able to move freely with everyone else and public transportation is affordable and accessible. Imagine a city where there are no unsafe neighbourhoods that residents are afraid to walk through. Where children in lesbian and gay families are not harassed on the school playgrounds, where there are no ghettos of immigrants and Jane-Finch doesn't equate to black-on-black violence. Imagine what Toronto could be if every individual is given the support to be informed, engaged and active in shaping the future of their communities and their City.

## **Introduction:**

It is time to recognize that the perceptions of significant discrimination among racial minorities are much more prevalent than many Canadians would like to believe, that these perceptions seriously erode commitments to Canadian society, and that a much more sympathetic response is centrally important to the future of Canadian society and identity. - *Jeffrey G. Reitz, "Canada's growing racial divide" Toronto Star Oct 20, 2005*

The Toronto Social Development Network (TSDN) is a newly formed "table" that has come together to develop an equity focused and inclusive social planning framework for the City of Toronto. The Network was convened by the City of Toronto's Social Administration and Planning Division as a result of a review of social planning activities conducted by the City in June 2004.

The initial members of the network have met this summer and established a Work Group<sup>2</sup> that has undertaken the stewardship of this process.

We believe that the ultimate goal of planning should be to facilitate the engagement of communities themselves to identify their needs, overcome barriers and engage in strategies to improve social conditions. Communities should be at the centre of shaping their own solutions to decrease inequality and exclusion and build more equitable, just and sustainable futures. Community social planning is a process, a way to get where we want to go. It is one way of working together to realize the vision you have just read.

Along the way, **the outcomes** of successful community social planning will include:

- **Transformed programs and services** to ensure equitable access to all residents, so that community members marginalized as a result of race, gender, ability and sexual orientation are no longer excluded.
- **Improved social and economic policies** that will reduce inequities, for example in the areas of income security, employment, childcare, affordable housing and public transportation.
- **Increased community services** to address our city's "social infrastructure deficit" the fact that not all areas of our city and communities have the kinds of government services and community-run programs that they need
- **More democratic and participatory relationships** between community members, policy makers, politicians and institutions (public and private sector).

As the TSDN Work Group, we have prepared this paper to get people thinking about the kinds of supports that need to be in place in order to have effective community social

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<sup>2</sup> \* The **TSDN Work Group** is comprised of representatives from the following city-wide organizations: African Canadian Social Development Council, Council of Agencies Serving South Asians, Hispanic Development Council, Chinese Canadian National Council – Toronto Chapter, Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, Aboriginal Peoples Council of Toronto, Portuguese Interagency Network, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, Toronto Neighbourhood Centres, and Toronto Women's Network.

planning happening in our city. We already know that some valuable tools and practices of community social planning include:

- engagement of diverse and marginalized residents
- community education/ community development
- leadership development
- local advocacy and action planning
- service planning
- creating links across sectors and groups
- community-directed research and policy development
- city-wide or broader advocacy, research, policy initiatives and campaigns designed to improve our communities

Some key questions have helped us think about how these tools and practices should be made available for all communities in our City:

- What do community members need to be able to engage in planning and policy issues that affect their lives?
- How can the voices of those who usually have the least power or opportunity to influence decisions be made central?
- How can the Toronto realities of immigration, racialization and poverty be reflected in our planning processes?
- How could government decision-making processes be more accessible and responsive to community input?
- How can communities be more involved in social planning and policy development at the city, province and national levels?

In the next pages we identify some of the key principles that we think community social planning should be based on, and the kinds of supports or components that would need to be in place so that planning in our city could really make those principles come alive.

This work builds upon the efforts and ideas of many community groups in our city; a number of our suggestions are not new. What we are trying to do is bring previously

unconnected ideas together into a comprehensive framework or picture that could help transform how policy makers and institutions think about and support community social planning in our city.

We want you to explore these ideas with us and tell us the best way to include your knowledge and perspective in the discussion. Together we hope to continue to broaden the vision, relevance and impact of community social planning in our city. Please read on to learn more about our ideas so far, and tell us what you think.

## **I) Key Concepts and Principles:**

### **a) Moving beyond simplistic representation to more complex models of engagement and participation that tap into the true breadth of identity, community and engagement.**

How can we ensure that representation moves beyond tokenism to true engagement of the complex communities that make up our City? Immigrant communities are not one homogeneous brand as often perceived by the mainstream. For example the South Asian Diaspora includes several languages, religions, and ethno-cultural groups as well as the poor, women, seniors, youth, disabled, LGBT communities and more. Within these identities are individual values and beliefs such as political ideologies, cultural practices and personal rituals that vary with individual lived realities or regions.

During the past two decades the increased diversity of the City has created pressure for the City to become more representative of equity seeking groups. However, in these attempts to include the ethno-cultural community and traditionally marginalized groups such as women, seniors, youth, disabled and the LGBT community a representational model of participation has emerged. This usually means that individuals are chosen or invited to sit on various committees or participate in decision making, based on their perceived identity.

This approach is limited in its scope since it does not truly reflect the integrated realities of the individual's lived experiences; the complexities of the community they represent, nor does it truly empower the individual's full participation in the process. Often individuals feel the pressure of speaking for a complex and dynamic constituency that cannot be located in their singular identity within the representational model. The shared power of the decision makers often overrule the individual voice of these representatives and continue to dominate the outcome.

In order to move beyond token representation and truly engage and include the complex communities and diverse realities of this City, we need to nurture and act on the awareness of the integration of all of the lived realities of communities and individuals in Toronto.

**b) We need to have planning and engagement capacity in the city that can truly respond to the realities of immigration, racialization and poverty in our City...**

Recent studies have highlighted the racialization of poverty in the City and the growing divide between the rich and the poor. The number of poor neighbourhoods in the City has risen dramatically over the past decade or so and there is an increase in the ghettoization of immigrants and communities of colour.

How do we support an integrated equity framework that encourages and ensures the active participation and inclusion of individuals, groups and communities that are not reflected in the current decision-making structures of the City?

We believe that communities are engaged in local planning, both within their geographic communities and within various communities of common bond. These local community planning activities may range from grassroots organising around a local issue or ongoing conversations on service planning and community needs identification initiated by local

agencies or community groups. However, often these local planning conversations are removed from the broader city policy making and planning functions for a number of reasons including lack of capacity and resources and a disconnect between local planning and broader city wide planning and policy development.

There must be support and resources for local communities to build leadership and capacity for effective community planning. The Regent Park Revitalization Process is an example where significant human and financial resources have been invested over the past three years to encourage the broad participation of residents in the redevelopment initiative. Local community animators were hired to conduct outreach in several languages and engage residents in the consultation process; and leadership development has been nurtured through reinvigorating the residents' council.

There also needs to be linkages between communities, in order that they can access information and knowledge on issues of significance to their local communities and begin to develop capacity and leadership on social development issues. Local communities must be recognized as valuable contributors to the broader social planning agenda of the City and empowered to take on a more active role at city wide tables.

At the same time, there needs to be a more comprehensive strategy to include voices of disenfranchised communities and marginalized groups within these planning and policy making structures of the City that moves beyond representation. Integration must include a commitment to sharing of information, resources and knowledge and nurturing of diverse views and capacities in order to create more equitable participation at all levels.

## **II) Central Components that would deliver the above Concepts and Principles:**

In order for community planning to be encouraged and nurtured locally and across the City, there needs to be a range of supports and initiatives in place which may include:

- An integrated equity framework that ensures the active participation and inclusion of individuals and communities that are not reflected in the decision-making structures of the City.
- City wide networks of community individuals, planners and social advocates, who share ideas, debate their merits and engage in social action and advocacy together.
- Support for local engagement, capacity building and planning in neighbourhoods and communities of common bond.
- Real connection between government decision-making and policy development processes and the residents affected by those policies.

**a) A Network of Community Planners?**

The Work Group feels quite strongly that the Toronto Social Development Network should not become another institutional space where the voices of disenfranchised communities are silenced and local groups and individuals feel left out of the decision-making process. However there is an interest in nurturing community planning conversations in order to develop capacity at the local level, mobilize communities in city wide issues and support the development of new and emerging groups.

The network could become a place where information is shared, joint initiatives on city wide issues are developed, opportunities for linking with broader initiatives and sharing of resources are explored and conversations about critical local and city wide community planning issues can take place. It could be a place where shared agendas of planning issues from various localities and commonalities converge and are able to link back to local initiatives in communities across the City. It could be a place where communities begin to articulate their needs and the resources needed for them to engage in community planning in their communities. It can nurture the organic development of new initiatives and groups as well as future communities that may not be ready to engage at present. It can help forecast anticipated social changes on the ground and inform the future realities of city wide community planning.

What would the most effective strategies in engaging local community planning groups and linking with the planning structures that exist in the city? How can we ensure that issues of marginality are addressed in this process?

- If the Toronto Social Development Network has a continuing role beyond this project, what would be useful to individuals, community planning groups and local neighbourhoods in terms of its ongoing role and scope?
- Is there a role for City wide networks of community individuals, planners and social advocates, who share ideas, debate their merits and engage in social action and advocacy together? Would the network be accountable to their constituencies or be a City lead process?
- Who would be the constituents and participants of this network? Some suggestions include local community organizations; municipal government; city-wide social planning organizations; issue based mobilizing campaigns; community residents organized locally somehow (e.g. TCHC buildings)

## **b) Models to Enable Grassroots Engagement and Advocacy:**

How do we support local engagement, capacity building and planning in neighbourhoods as well as communities of common bond?

We believe that communities need to be adequately resourced to incubate planning capacity at the local level. For example, to begin to effectively engage and mobilize community members a community animator/development worker needs to be resourced for each of the neighbourhoods and communities of common bond in Toronto. Grassroots models of engagement offer effective issue based responses to local needs.

The City of Toronto has identified 140 geographic planning neighbourhoods in Toronto. We believe that these “communities” should incubate “community round tables” where local issues are discussed. Resources should be provided by the City to support local

discussions and action to address community priorities such as: a neighbourhood clean-up of vacant lots, community gardening, starting after school clubs or a community safety audit.

Community members can be trained as facilitators to lead kitchen table discussions about key issues and concerns within in a given community. These local leaders can then be supported to mobilize individuals and take ideas forward to advocate for policy changes both at a municipal and provincial level through their respective engagement strategies. Community organizations and groups could provide skills development training and supports needed to sustain local leadership development.

**c) Re-Vitalize Existing Community Organizations as sites that integrate community engagement, planning and service delivery.**

Over the past two decades the role of government has changed significantly as the economy has experienced major transformations. Nonprofit community agencies providing a range of human services have assumed wider responsibilities while addressing more needs with fewer resources. Funders have imposed greater accountability measures through short term project based funding that does little to support ongoing community building strategies. This has resulted in an increased focus on service delivery and a reduced capacity to support community development and education, advocacy and engagement as well as local leadership development. Nonprofit community agencies form an integral part of local communities and they need to be supported to take on a more active role in community building and local engagement.

In addition to existing organizations, there needs to be support for emerging groups and organizations. The City has recently launched the Social Development Investment (SDIP) Program to support the development of new and emerging organizations in Toronto. However, this envelope of \$250,000 does not begin to adequately address the needs of these groups. In addition, this fund has been targeted in the first year to

organizations whose work is tied to neighbourhood projects. This does not address the needs of emerging groups supporting geographically dispersed communities of common bond. We believe that the SDIP fund should be expanded to adequately resource the development needs of emerging groups. In addition the City should leverage the support of other funders to support these initiatives.

The introduction of user fees has had an impact on community spaces that are available for grassroots groups to come together. These spaces create support for traditionally marginalized communities and groups. The Toronto Women's Network has suggested that there is a need to develop a network of women's houses across the City to support low income women of colour in particular to come together. Promoting the development of youth drop-in centres across the city is another example of a strategy to create spaces that support local leadership and engagement.

**d) Properly resourced City-Wide Community Social Planning Organizations:**

To support community organizations and groups engaged in local community based planning or issue advocacy, there is also a need for broader social planning organizations in the City. There are a number of social planning bodies that have a city wide mandate, significant constituencies of members and that carry out community based research, advocacy, policy development, engagement and education on a wide range of issues. These organizations need to be adequately resourced through dedicated funds set up for this purpose. Many of the existing groups have little or no ongoing funding for their planning activities at present. In order to support these planning organizations adequately each organization should receive base funding for their activities. These organizations could then use some of these core resources to sustain broader networks that enable joint activities, and ensure that their initiatives are mutually supportive of a shared equity-based planning agenda.

It is to be expected that similar to local community based organizations, city wide planning groups will emerge over time as more “communities’ come together over multi-issue planning agendas. The proposed community planning fund should be structured to enable new members to be supported as planning groups develop over time and organize at a city-wide scale to undertake social planning work. A key example of this would be the further development of a “Cross Cultural Women’s Social Planning Group” that has been proposed by the Toronto Women’s Network.

**e) Established links with key institutions and other sectors  
(school boards, faith groups, unions, local business, etc):**

Our model will engage and draw upon the existing capacity of the schools boards, faith groups and their resources, local business (e.g. BIA’s), labour unions, professional associations and other community stakeholders. These groups are key players in terms of strengthening community life and the capacity to engage residents. Many of these organizations provide spaces for community members to come together in various ways and are engaged in issues at a local as well as a broader political level. They have resources to bring to the task, can support the emergence of local leadership and have political impact in furthering the advocacy agenda. They also have complementary (and sometimes conflicting) agendas around issues of equity and social justice and can serve an important function in mobilizing the community and engaging members in debate.

**f) Linking globally to share inclusive practices:**

The forces of Globalization, Colonialism and Imperialism have had a significant impact on societies and the social development of our cities. The forced migration of individuals due to regional wars; the increasing economic disparity between the rich and the poor in both the North and the South, the emphasis on economic development as opposed to social development and the increased role of cities as urban engines are all factors in the

acceleration of global poverty and the continued marginalization of individuals and communities.

How are communities in Toronto able to respond to the increasingly global realities of poverty and disparity in our communities? What can we learn from other Cities grappling with these common issues across the world? What practices have proven to be effective in transforming the participation of communities in determining their own needs, goals and outcomes?

Although Toronto is in many ways addressing these issues at a local level, we believe that have a lot to learn from other Cities and communities about truly transformative inclusionary practice.

Residents of Toronto are also increasingly linked internationally through family ties that enable their participation in community building both locally and in communities across the world. How can we build upon the richness of these connections to promote equitable development internationally?

**g) Decentralize the Mega-City and Ensure Investment in Community Planning and Social Development in Toronto:**

For social planning and development to be effective we know that the practices of our amalgamated megacity need to be more responsive. What local decision-making structures would better support the inclusion and engagement of communities across Toronto?

What are the efficiencies of scale that would make local government more responsive and effective? Although four community councils have been set up in the city to represent four geographic quadrants in local issues, it is not clear that this model has enabled any real opportunities for residents to influence key decisions.

How should the City link to local community groups and individuals so that political structures facilitate local engagement, inclusion and diversity? Is better cooperation between the province and city is needed to create diversity friendly policies and civic engagement at the City level? What role can the Federal Government play in supporting diversity and inclusion of immigrants and refugees in Cities? How can private sector and foundations be engaged in social investment strategies? Some suggestions include joint agreements between governments so they can work together in a more coordinated way to improve community conditions. Also the development of a “Funders Table” to create shared investment in social development goals for the City of Toronto.

There is a need for real connection between the three levels of government and their social policy agendas through ongoing discussion; shared policy development and adequate investment of resources. There is also a need for community to shape these agendas by being educated, informed and empowered to influence these decisions that are realized in their communities and City.

### **Community Consultation Process:**

The Toronto Social Development Network currently comprises ten organizations and groups from the non-profit sector. Provisionally called the TSDN Work Group, the role of this committee is to steward the process of community consultation on developing an inclusive planning framework and the development of the broader network of social planning groups in the City.

The Work Group members:

- Are Organizations/groups whose primary purpose is social planning, social policy development and research?
- Are engaged with their constituencies in service planning and service coordination for the broader communities they represent.
- May engage in service provision directly or in partnership with their member organizations.

- Have a shared vision of an equity based planning agenda for the City of Toronto.
- Have participated actively in the Review of Social Planning activities conducted by the City in 2004.

In 2005, City Council approved funding to support the activities of a Toronto Social Development network, which would include consultation on implementing an inclusive and equity focussed framework for social planning as well as developing links between social planning groups in the City. The TSDN Work Group came together over the summer of 2005 to hire a Director for the process; explore alternative models of social planning aimed at inclusionary practice within an integrated equity framework; develop the terms of reference for the work group and begin to develop the community consultation process.

The Work Group shares a vision of communities articulating what supports would be needed for effective community planning to take place locally as well as for local initiatives to link to a broader discourse and action on city wide social planning initiatives. There is recognition that a lack of resources both in terms of funding and capacity may limit the participation of local groups and organizations in this process. Recognizing these limitations, the working group will attempt to create a space where disenfranchised groups can link to this process in whatever way is possible at this time.

The TSDN is expected to report back to City Council in April 2006, with the results of this process and recommendations on:

- Implementing an inclusive planning framework for the City of Toronto, based on community consultations and best practice.
- Developing a mechanism/process for the sharing of information, supporting the development of emerging groups, joint research initiatives and sharing of resources.

The Work Group anticipates holding three broad consultations with community organizations and groups that are engaged in social planning activities in November

2005, January 2006 and March 2006. The Work Group will steward the process of developing this framework and make recommendations to the City in April 2006 based on the results of community consultations and best practice.

As part of this process we are inviting community members and groups that are involved and interested in local planning to envision the future of community and social planning in the City. Although we are limited by our timelines and capacity to link with all stakeholders. The work group believes that this process of engaging with existing and emerging community planning initiatives across our city is critical to defining a new and more appropriate social planning framework that can truly benefit all communities.

We invite your thoughts, ideas and feedback at the community consultation meetings and/or through your participation in the broader discussion on social planning within your communities and with the network members or in any way that you are able and that you feel will be useful to this process.

***For more Information please contact:***

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