

TOPCA Statement re: Announced Scheduling Change for PDC Meetings



February 26, 2019

The TOPCA Executive is surprised and disappointed with the City's announcement that, effective March 2019, the City of Mississauga's [Planning and Development Committee \(PDC\)](#) meetings will move to a **1:30 pm** start time (from the current **6:30 pm** evening time slot). Evening sessions will be added "only in special circumstances".

This decision was announced on the afternoon of Friday, February 22, 2019. The [Press Release](#) issued per the City Clerk's Office states:

"Participation by residents, Resident and Ratepayers' Associations (RAs) and their members are an important part of the planning and development process. The (PDC) committee's main responsibility is to provide an opportunity for the public to express their views on planning-related policies and development applications. This forum for public participation serves to fulfill the requirements of *The Planning Act*."

Now, with a daytime meeting schedule, the public's ability to attend at PDC in person will be greatly diminished. **There is no doubt of this.** Residents and RA representatives would need to take time off work in many cases to attend an afternoon meeting, and this is a hardship many cannot afford or even be able to do.

While technically still 'fulfilling the requirements,' elimination of regular evening sessions of PDC is *not in the spirit* of citizen engagement the City prides itself on. Although the City press release further states:

"Written comments are considered with the same weight as verbal submissions at PDC,"

anyone who has attended at PDC knows that verbal presentations are far more effective in demonstrating the support of many dozens of citizens for a position (e.g. through applause), and provide the opportunity for real-time Councillor and Planning staff interactions.

The impact of this decision goes well beyond the mechanics of scheduling and the convenience of all parties (*except of course, the citizens who must attend on their own time*). It is the loss of our municipal government being truly open to the public by welcoming residents into what is essentially our civic living room, at a time we can most likely attend.

We don't want to be told to 'mail it in'. We want the public accountability that comes from having citizen concerns acknowledged by our elected Council, the Planners, and the Developers, in an open forum with the Citizens in attendance.

This is a time of dramatic transformation in our city -- of urbanization, of mobilization. No other civic forum is so critical to the process of city-building. Evening meetings enable the widest possible participation by citizens living in the midst of the transformation.

Yes, evening meetings can go long on occasion. If under the new LPAT* rules there is to be less time restriction placed on public comment, or if more applications come back for review, then solutions can surely be found. Councillors already hold Community Meeting(s) before a contentious application goes to PDC, which serves to refine the issues list and focus residents' comments. The PDC Chair can still ensure that points once made are not repeated. Scheduling routine items (e.g. signage) for an afternoon session can clear the evening for development applications impacting residents.

* *Local Planning Appeal Tribunal, Ontario*

Process is a concern here. This matter does not appear on a previous Governance Committee Agenda, where we would expect to see provision for public input and a recommendation directed to Council for a decision. The method of communication by the City implies this is a minor, administrative matter.

While not an item on the Agenda for [General Committee: Wed. February 27, 2019](#) (*and therefore not subject to Public Question Period*) we are pleased that our Ward 1 Councillor **Stephen Dasko** will be raising this matter under **Item 12. Councillors' Enquiries**. Note that the GC meeting will be [live-streamed](#) and then video-archived.

The citizens expect to know where the Mayor and all Councillors stand on this (*both*) practical and symbolic matter which should be more than a bureaucratic decision announced on a Friday afternoon.

Should the default start time for PDC meetings *not* revert back to an evening time slot at the direction of Council, we request that the parameters and procedure for scheduling an evening PDC session be clearly defined for the information of all parties.

The TOPCA Executive
TOPCA.net/contact.htm