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Design Review Panel

NECESSARY INPUT

By Geordie Gordon

Toronto's Design Review Panel attempts to raise the bar for architecture and urban design in the city, but experts stress the importance of framing the right questions and the role of the chair in focussing the input.

Urban design panel vice chair and **Diamond Schmidt** principal **Michael Leckman** told *NRU* that the level of conversation around design has been evolving and improving in the six years since the DRP was made permanent.

"When we started, [the panel was] something that was unknown to the profession and the development community, and I think we're well known now. I think the conversations that take place are highly constructive conversations, and the conversations have matured... I think the panel has had feedback from the city, from the professionals, from the development community and in response to that I think the conversations have become constructive and I think successful," he said.

Leckman acknowledged that while the opinions put forward by panel members may vary, the chair's role is to focus the discussion into meaningful feedback for the applicant.

"It's true that because these are, in many cases these are very forward thinking, independent

Sharing economy opportunities

TAKING ADVANTAGE

By Leah Wong

Local governments have the opportunity to harness the sharing economy to improve city services and meet sustainability goals.

"Rather than being overwhelmed by the sharing economy… I think there is an opportunity [for local governments] to take a more strategic approach and actually view the sharing economy as an opportunity and as a tool to help achieve a lot of local sustainability priorities," **One Earth** senior associate **Rosemary Cooper** told *NRU*. "The [sharing economy] has overwhelmed a lot of municipalities and a lot of local governments are in a reactive mode."

Cooper co-authored a report on local governments and the sharing economy with One Earth executive director and co-founder **Vanessa Timmer**, which was released last week. In addition to discussing strategic opportunities for governments to advance city objectives, the report discusses how to put the sharing economy through a sustainability filter.

"We're encouraging [municipal governments] to step back and view the sharing economy more broadly and as a strategic opportunity to try and get ahead," said Cooper. "What we found is that the sustainability impacts

INSIDE

Future city
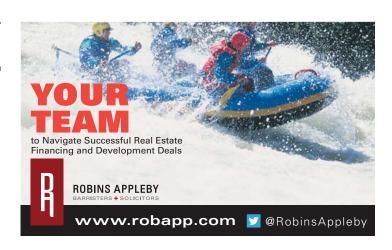Planning for
the long term

Concerning chemicals
Eco groups seek more
pollution prevention

Ratepayers unsettled
Board approves
revised proposal

TAKING ADVANTAGE

of different sharing economy sectors and activities really vary."

It can be difficult for local governments to understand the impacts of sharing economy activities and how these activities change the way residents interact with the city and the services it provides.

At Toronto city hall, much of the discussion about the sharing economy has centred on **uberX** and the taxi industry in regards to fair business practices, safety and insurance. However, uberX is only one platform within the transportation sector of the sharing economy.

"Ride-sourcing can be an opportunity to achieve some of [the municipality's] broader sustainable goals," said Cooper. Presently there is an attempt to shift people away from single-occupant vehicle travel and towards more shared or active modes of transportation. Cooper sees a role for ride-sourcing in achieving that goal.

Ride-sourcing has the opportunity to fill gaps in existing transportation networks, by getting people from transit to their final destination, or allowing a transit user to share a car to do an errand. The newer version, known as ride-splitting, offers another set of benefits similar to a traditional carpool arrangement, but splits the costs among users. While carpooling isn't a new concept, in its traditional format, Cooper says it has peaked.

These modes of transportation can be beneficial in more suburban areas with limited transit, as they can deliver service cheaper and offer a more convenient service.

One challenge municipalities have with incorporating shared mobility into transportation networks relates to data limitations. While sharing economy platforms are driven by data, companies typically do not share data on how their platform is used with the public because of privacy or competitiveness concerns.

"Data is at the heart of a lot of these platforms," **Mowat Centre** intergovernmental, economic and social policy practice lead **Noah Zon** told *NRU*. "Governments could be a lot better at capturing and learning from that data on an ongoing basis."

If sharing economy companies were to share more data, there are opportunities for municipalities to use it to understand the impact on city services. For example, Zon said data from uberX on the routes people are taking and when they are using the service could show gaps in transit service in Toronto.

If municipalities want to regulate aspects of the sharing economy there is an opportunity to build data sharing into the regulatory framework. Portland city council, for example, included a data-sharing requirement as part of a 120-day pilot to test new for-hire transportation regulations that would make ride-sourcing companies such as Uber and **Lyft** legal. In return, Portland took a lighter regulatory approach to issues related to insurance and price-surging.

"It's the notion of giving preferential access to city markets to companies that are willing to share data," said Cooper.

Data allows municipalities to better understand the impacts of the sharing economy. When this data is available municipalities need to ensure ensuring staff has the skills and capacity to utilize the data in a meaningful way.

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• Noah Zon

"Without knowing how specific sharing economy activities impact city priorities that are outlined in policy and plans, it's hard to build a case to invest municipal resources—money or staff time—into embracing or engaging the sharing economy when there are so many other pressing issues," said Cooper.

Using shared mobility to create a more sustainable transportation network is just one aspect of the sharing economy that can be used to meet local goals.

Cooper said the diverse group of community-sharing innovators, who work on a very local scale, are also finding ways to address sustainability goals. Organizations such as the **Toronto Tool Library** and **Kitchen Library**, which lend equipment to users, help work towards goals of waste reduction while also building more connected communities.

The sharing economy can also be beneficial for tourism as accommodation-sharing platforms such as **Airbnb** encourage users to stay where locals reside. This has been evident in Brooklyn, for example, where there aren't a lot of hotels but there are a lot of Airbnb units available to rent. Zon said this promotes local businesses in the area. nru