

MEETING OF CURA RESEARCH ADVISORY COMMITTEE

6 MARCH 2006

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO FACULTY CLUB

PRESENT:

Larry Bourne, UofT

Philippa Campsie, UofT

Shawn Conway, SCH

Rick Eagan, SCH

Don Embuldeniya, United Way

Rob Howarth, Toronto Neighbourhood Ctrs.

David Hulchanski, UofT

Harvey Low, City of Toronto

Richard Maaranen, UofT

Prachi Mehta, UofT

Bob Murdie, York University

Sylvia Novac, UofT

Daniel Schugurensky, UofT

What's new with partner institutions

1. UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

David Hulchanski reported that the university is still considering the creation of a Cities Centre, which would bring new resources to the area of urban studies, including new courses on urban topics (the Centre for Urban and Community Studies has no teaching function).

2. UNITED WAY

Don Embuldeniya reported that the United Way has prepared a community development strategy, which will act as a framework for funding, particularly in the 13 neighbourhoods identified by the Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force.¹ The United Way will hire neighbourhood development coordinators to work with the residents and agencies in these areas to develop specific strategies for each area. Also, the province has announced the creation of the Youth Challenge Fund, chaired by Mike (Pinball) Clemons; the United Way will be the fund trustee. Finally, the United Way is updating its report, "A Decade of Decline" with information from 2003 tax files.

It was noted that the City and agencies are very much focusing efforts on the 13 priority neighbourhoods, which may leave other neighbourhoods with fewer resources.

¹ The 13 priority neighbourhoods are: Jamestown, Jane-Finch, Weston-Mount Dennis, Lawrence Heights, Westminster-Branson, Crescent Town, Flemingdon Park-Victoria Village, Steeles-L'Amoureux, Dorset Park, Eglinton East-Kennedy Park, Scarborough Village, Kingston-Galloway, and Malvern.

3. TORONTO NEIGHBOURHOODS CENTRES

Rob Howarth reported on a forum held on February 20, 2006, on community development, attended by representatives of agencies, the university, faith communities, and others (see: www.neighbourhoodcentres.ca/torontocd/02-20-2006-forum.htm). The participants expressed great enthusiasm for community development and identified several neighbourhood groups, some of which were more well-established than others, that were undertaking neighbourhood capacity-building activities. Rob echoed the concern about the focus on the 13 priority neighbourhoods, since it may deprive other needy areas of resources.

4. CITY OF TORONTO

Harvey Low explained that the city has a cross-divisional group focusing on six of the 13 areas, bringing together representatives of the police, TCHC, and other divisions. This group has not yet been in touch with agencies working in those areas. The City is also preparing demographic profiles of the 13 neighbourhoods; profiles for the rest of the city will also be prepared in due course. Studies on seniors and youth are also under way. A Street Needs Assessment (a survey of homeless people) will be conducted in April.

Harvey is also working with colleagues at York University, the Laidlaw Foundation, and Success (a Vancouver organization) on a study on the Chinese community in Toronto and Vancouver and their service needs. For example, the demand for services in Mandarin (rather than Cantonese) is increasing with increased immigration from mainland China.

5. ST. CHRISTOPHER HOUSE

Shawn Conway and Rick Eagan reported that SCH has completed and approved a new strategic plan. The historical boundaries of the catchment area (Roncesvalles, Bloor, Bathurst) have been relaxed, and SCH will work in partnership with other agencies in southwestern Toronto on service delivery. It will also support other organizations throughout the city that are trying to develop programs based on SCH models.

SCH is also working to develop a more visible presence in Parkdale, and looking for a new space there that can accommodate increased programming. The 248 Ossington Avenue space may be redeveloped. SCH is also reviewing its long-standing programs. For example, at a time when frozen meals are widely available, the Meals on Wheels service may have more of a future providing transportation rather than delivering meals.

Shawn Conway described the community forum held at St. Christopher House on February 7, 2006. About 60 people attended, and the discussion was diverse and lively. People are aware of changes, both good and bad, and of the problems in the area. They are enthusiastic about taking action and are looking for solutions, not just more studies.

He also noted that most of the people at the meeting were activists and community leaders already, and there was a need to engage tenants and others in the neighbourhood who are not yet involved. Also, some of the leaders are aware that their own habits (such as shopping outside the neighbourhood) may contribute to decline and are at odds with the ideal of inclusive neighbourhoods. Notes from the forum will be circulated shortly.

Harvey Low asked about outreach to underserved ethnic groups. Rick Eagan explained that SCH has to focus largely on the dominant groups, but tries to recruit workers who speak minority languages. Research materials from the CURA project will be translated into other languages.

Phase I research projects

Sylvia Novac reported that the phase I projects are substantially finished. One is posted on the web and three more are due to be published shortly. David Hulchanski noted that the format and method of publication will vary according to the content, quality, and long-term value of the report.

Larry Bourne stressed the need to produce visible research products that are accessible to others, including those outside Canada working on similar issues. He also recommended preparing a compendium of maps from the data committee. David Hulchanski pointed out that some of the information may date quickly and needs to be circulated in a simplified format; other research will be produced as formal reports. He intends to publish the maps with explanations in a 2-pages-per-map format.

Larry Bourne and Bob Murdie agreed to collaborate on a research bulletin focusing on the changes captured in the table that was made available in the agenda package. Some of the findings indicate interesting trends (such as the considerable increase in the number of one-person households and the decrease in the number of children).

Presentation of study on travel behaviour in the area

Prachi Mehta presented the results of her year-long study on travel behaviour in the CURA area, and comparisons with travel behaviour in other neighbourhoods and in the GTA as a whole. One of the findings that attracted particular interest was the fact that about 20% of the people in the area also work in the area and participants discussed what that finding might indicate (more people working at home? more workers in local businesses?). On the whole, the pattern for the CURA study area is one of shorter work trips, more transit use, and a larger drop in the number of walking trips over the 1986-2001 period than the rest of the GTA.

The analysis largely focused on 2001, and Larry Bourne asked if it could be performed for previous years, to identify long-term trends. Prachi responded that it was possible, but

she could not do it in the time available. The data committee will consider continuing the analysis.

Phase II research proposals

Sylvia Novac reviewed the table of proposals. About 10 are likely to proceed, although several are still in the early proposal stage and are being refined by the investigators involved. David Hulchanski pointed out the proposal by David Ley and Alan Walks, which will look at areas that might have (but didn't) gentrify in Toronto and Vancouver, and try to identify what prevents gentrification.

New proposals will be circulated to the Research Advisory Committee once they are substantially complete, although for larger projects, the committee needs the opportunity to review them as a group.

1. CARLOS TEIXEIRA PROPOSAL ON PORTUGUESE COMMUNITY

The Committee welcomed this proposal. It raised a policy discussion regarding dissemination and presentation of findings at conferences. The decision was made to separate the conference funding from the research budget and to deal with the conference funding separately in the future. In principle, the Committee felt academics should seek travel funding for conferences from other sources before approaching the CURA. In addition, there was a policy discussion about the type of conference. A conference presentation should reach a broad and multidisciplinary audience. Some questioned whether the Canadian Association of Geographers offered the most appropriate forum for disseminating CURA results. Others mentioned the need to situate the study in the context of the Portuguese community as a whole, which has several unique characteristics.

The group approved the proposal, with modifications to the dissemination budget.

2. BOB MURDIE PROPOSAL ON ETHNIC TRANSFORMATION AND GENTRIFICATION

Essentially, this proposal involves a contingency amount for a research assistant, although Bob Murdie expects that most of the support he needs will come from Richard Maaranen, who is already thoroughly familiar with the area and the data. It would take some time to bring a new research assistant up to speed.

Bob asked about purchasing special data tabulations from Statistics Canada. David Hulchanski said that if the data was useful to the project as a whole, and not just this one project, then it would come out of the general budget, not the project budget. Bob Murdie will find out the exact cost for the information he needs and the data committee will look into the question.

Daniel Schugurensky added that some data may be useful to other departments or groups within the university, and costs might be shared with those groups.

3. FUTURE PROPOSALS

The committee discussed methods for approving future projects. David Hulchanski noted the four-page proposal template, and said that the CURA does not openly advertise for research proposals, but has invited some researchers to develop proposals and is working to flesh out ideas from community residents, expressed at the forum.

Rick Eagan said that the community is particularly anxious to see policy-relevant research, and research that might lead to action. The community also wants to know what the research results mean for them; for example, the travel behaviour study – what does it mean for people living in the study area? Sylvia Novac noted that the proposed rooming house study is very much focused on policy and action to stabilize and improve rooming houses.

Shawn Conway asked how committee members could learn about proposals that are being considered and have some input in their areas of interest or expertise. The committee members discussed this question; the need to get input from knowledgeable people must be balanced with caution about circulating information prematurely to the public.

Committee structure

The committee discussed the working groups, which had been proposed at the beginning of the CURA project, but had not developed quite as planned. The first group, shown as “Neighbourhood Issues and Trends” is essentially the data committee. There is also the potential to create a working group on ethnic issues. A working group on rooming houses is starting to come together.

Harvey Low pointed out that as the link to the city, he could contribute to all the working groups, but he couldn’t possibly sit on all of them. He felt that people should be able to contribute in any area without having to be a working group member.

Dissemination

Sylvia Novac recommended creating a brief template for dissemination proposals (attendance at conferences, presentations, etc.) These activities should be separate from the research proposals.

May 8 Workshop on Policy Options

David Hulchanski reminded the committee about the upcoming workshop, which will bring in three important researchers from Australia/New Zealand, the United States, and Vancouver. He hopes to make the most of their visit, by asking them each to contribute a paper that could be published, and perhaps by arranging for a public talk, such as through the St. Lawrence Forum.

City of Toronto Act

The committee briefly discussed the implications of the new *City of Toronto Act*. David Hulchanski noted that it gave the city the right to require inclusionary zoning, but the city has not acted on this option yet. Also, the question of preventing the demolition of rental housing is still being reviewed by the Ontario Municipal Board.