Commentary on "A Practical Blueprint for Change", the Final Report of the City Hall Task Force

July 2017

By Steve Munro

Introduction

After a rather contentious Twitter exchange, I have decided to put down my thoughts in a separate document rather than try to make my points 140 characters at a time.

On Twitter, I described this report as "Trumpian", and I hold to that view. The fundamental structural issue I have with it is that there is a straw man – an ineffective, raucous Council – set up as a problem for which a number of "solutions" is proposed.[1]

Toronto's government dynamics are more complex than the report acknowledges, and the "fixes" it proposes could very well work against the type of open, participatory style for which Toronto is known (or notorious, depending on your point of view).

The pattern is set early on. Under "Key Concerns", the first section is "Strategic Priorities" which begins:

> "City Council spends a considerable amount of time dealing with ward and neighbourhood-level issues that often distract from, or in the worst cases conflict with, city-wide priorities. The City needs a mechanism to encourage strategic, long-term decision making focused on the big picture, not ward-level grandstanding.
>
> The Task Force's deliberations concentrated on the limited role and authority of the Mayor, and the often-parochial nature of the city budget process." [p. 16]

By addressing the wrong problem, the report attempts to justify changes that are more about centralization of power under the Mayor than they are about improving Council.

Concentration on ward and neighbourhood-level issues, typified by the classes of reports that come to Council rather than staying at the local Committees, is a completely separate issue from city-wide priorities and how these are set. Moreover, the report makes no attempt to distinguish between the *number* of "local" issues on Council's agenda and the *time* that these consume.

Ward-level grandstanding has been on full view in recent debates for various transit plans, and these necessarily must be dealt with at the full Council because they are "big picture" issues.

---

[1] The stated purpose and context of the report are summarized here:

Our goal for the Task Force was deceptively simple: to propose reforms that could improve the quality of decision making at City Hall. All options were on the table, with one important restriction: the Task Force could only propose reforms that City Council could accomplish on its own, without provincial intervention or legislative changes, using powers the City already enjoys.

All too often, debates over local governance in Toronto descend into diatribes against provincial meddling and control. Meanwhile, the shortcomings of the city's own decision- making processes go ignored. If City Council wishes to be treated as a "mature" level of government, it must first demonstrate a capacity for introspection and self-improvement. [p. 9]

As for the City Budget process, it can become parochial because, after procedural changes instituted by the Ford administration (about which more below), it is almost impossible for any amendments beyond very small, local level issues to be instituted by Councillors who are not part of the "insider" group controlled by the Mayor's office.

Further along, the report observes:

> "In the end, however, the Task Force agreed not to recommend any formal alteration to the Mayor's existing powers.
>
> There was no consensus among the group on the value of strengthening the Mayor's authority relative to council. The Task Force agreed that councillors serve an important check on the Mayor's authority and help keep Council responsive to local needs." [p. 16]

This statement suggests that there was a split among the advisory group about the direction this report was headed. Despite this, concentrating on the Mayor's "limited role and authority" suggests an up-front bias in favour of reducing or eliminating these limits. This not the only section where division within the advisory group is noted. However, one has to read the detailed sections to learn that recommendations with the presumed authority of unanimity are at best compromises.

In turn, that begs the question of whose editorial voice we are really hearing at the service of what agenda.

The Budget Process

The description of the budget process on page 18 suggests that there is little political direction until quite late in the process. This is simply not true.

The budget process is a sequence of events that clearly shows the Mayor as the stage-manager of the municipal theatre:

- The Mayor muses on what next year's tax increase, if any, should be, and this arrives at Budget Committee and the City Manager's Office by way of a Mayoral Memo.
- The Budget Committee (like all committees of Council except for the four geographically-based subsets) is controlled by friends of the Mayor, and it rubber stamps the target tax increase.
- The City Manager dutifully produces a budget based on the level of revenue this will generate, and a lot of cuts have been made along the way without any public debate. Some of them require line by line review just to find them.
- The Budget makes its way through the Budget and Executive Committees with zillions of deputations, and usually a three-minute limit on speaking and questioning time. This process is endured by the Mayor's friends, some of whom are openly abusive of members of the public who have no right of "personal privilege" to challenge insulting remarks made by some members.
- Eventually, the Budget gets to Council, but the first motion on the agenda sets the new tax rates. Once this is passed, it would require a 2/3 majority to reopen and add funding for any

programs that might have enough support to garner a Council majority even if they failed at committee.[2]

- The big fight is to get enough awareness among other members of Council, the media and the public of what is going on. So-called "rogue" amendments arise as an attempt to undo the tightly controlled process of setting the budget in the first place. Some are parochial, but many address major policy issues which the Mayor's team has chosen to ignore.
- Any proposal for new spending must, therefore, find an offset to pay for it. This reached a ludicrous point in the 2017 budget where a last minute addition was "funded" by some sleight-of-hand at a dollar value considerably higher than other items that were rejected as "too expensive". Some Councillors are the Mayor's friends-with-benefits.

To claim that this is such a "weak mayor" that he cannot dictate the budget process is fundamentally misleading, but this sets the stage for proposals to "fix" a problem that does not exist.

The report continues:

Although the Mayor appoints an Executive Committee, comprised of the chairs of council's standing committees, and may designate one or two "key items" for debate at the beginning of a given Council meeting, ultimately, the Mayor is just one vote among forty-five.

By law, the Mayor has very few formal powers to influence the will of council, and instead must rely on powers of persuasion, such as negotiation skills and personal charisma, to drive his or her agenda. [p. 17]

This statement ignores the fact that all of the standing committees as well as the boards of agencies are formed by the Striking Committee which has, during the Ford and Tory eras, disproportionately populated all of these bodies with the Mayor's friends. It is extremely difficult to get any business through these committees without the Mayor's support. The important issues go to Exec where the Mayor always is in control by virtue of having appointed most of its members as standing committee chairs.

It is clear that the report's advisory committee was far from unanimous on the rosy view of the budget process described by the report.

While some members strongly supported the idea, others specifically rejected it, favouring the preservation of the existing approach. The group concluded that the budget should remain subject to full debate and approval by Council, but that there are considerable opportunities for the Mayor to set out his or her key priorities with respect to the City's Strategic Plan and long-term fiscal plan, as well as the operating and capital budgets, earlier on in the process. [p. 18]

Because the process is described in a misleading manner, those who do not wish to further concentrate power in the Mayor's office are made to appear resistant to change, or even counterproductive.

This is a case of outright bias, or shall we say "false news".

---

[2] Rob Ford's Chief of Staff, Mark Towhey, is particularly proud of having introduced this scheme which effectively throttled debate on the tax rate by setting it before the budget itself was voted on.

Monitoring the ABCs

This section ignores the fact that there are a few ABCs like the TTC, TCHC and TPS that are very large and for which both policies and budgets have significant effects at the City level. However, to suggest that these agencies lack monitoring is laughable.

The TTC Board has a majority of Council members and in many ways operates as if it were a committee of Council, much to the distress of "citizen" members (even that term suggests their outsider status). Those "citizens", by the way, don't get on the Board without going through the Public Appointments process which the Mayor controls through composition of the vetting committee. At least two of the four "citizens" now on the Board are closely related to the Mayor politically.

If there is a problem at the TTC, it is that the Board chooses not to exercise oversight or to have substantive discussions of policy alternatives. The TTC's Budget Committee, chaired by a budget "hawk", routinely cancels its meetings. Board level strategy meetings have been proposed, and even get onto the annual schedule, but are cancelled.

It is quite clear that there is no desire for an "independent" TTC to start musing about policies that could place the Mayor in the awkward position of refusing to fund improvements.

One notable exception, late in the Ford era, saw a short-term TTC Chair who was not under the Mayor's thumb because Rob Ford had been relieved of his powers. TTC management produced a number of recommendations for system improvements. For his troubles, CEO Andy Byford was thoroughly reamed out by incoming Mayor Tory's staff. That is the context, along with fears of being "Webstered", in which the TTC operates.[3]

The TPS is populated with close friends of the Mayor including its Chair.

TCHC is an ongoing disaster combining poor management (some of whom were appointed through Mayoral input of Ford and Tory) with an absolute refusal by Council to address the long-standing problems with capital repairs needed to keep buildings habitable.

Efforts to change budgetary policies for all three of these organizations routinely fail at Council.

Being more open and accountable would involve exposing shortcomings of Mayoral policies and their effects on agencies, and the likelihood that this will happen is miniscule. A Mayor with greater powers will not correct the situation, it would only make problems of opaque policy development worse than today.

The smaller ABCs don't represent as large a dollar exposure as the three big ones, but they do receive regular scrutiny from the Auditor General. The very recent bollocking of the Toronto Parking Authority in public at the Audit Committee shows that this process can work. If there is any problem, it is that this type of thing most often happens in private where problems are kept from public view as "personnel matters" or some such.

---

[3] Former TTC Chief General Manager Gary Webster was fired shortly after he would not support Mayor Ford's plans for the Scarborough Subway at Council.

> The group concluded that a more pragmatic approach would be to establish a cyclical review program that allows for case-by-case evaluation methods, as opposed to leaving it up to the discretion of Council or council committees to initiate reviews on an ad hoc basis. [p. 19]

This is effectively what happens now via the AG's reviews, although extending this to BIAs on a regular basis could prove interesting considering that some might be personal fiefdoms of individual Councillors masquerading as independent community organizations. The "need" for this level of review and direction to ensure consistency with strategic priorities ignores the level of control Council already has through appointments to ABC boards. If there is any problem, it is that these boards do not perform their oversight job properly. Of course this assumes that the Councillors appointed to represent City interests actually have the skills and interest to do so.

Some agencies really are separate from the City in that they exist to manage specific properties or activities. The Exhibition Place board is an example. It has Council representation, but it is run as an "old boys club" over which Council as a whole has limited control. In the current term, the Councillor representing the ward in which the park is located had to fight to get on the board.

Toronto Hydro is a separate agency with a minority Council presence on its Board. Other than by issuing a "shareholder's direction", Council has no day-to-day control over its activities. Hydro is self-funding and so Council does not have the same leverage as it does with the TTC, an agency dependent on Council for over $1 billion in annual operating and capital support.

ABCs and their boards also exist to insulate Council and the Mayor from accountability both by acting as scapegoats when things go wrong, but also through their population with friends of the administration who are not necessarily representative of Council as a whole.

Delegate Authority

This section deals with items that make up a lot of the chaff in Council Agendas.

> Tree removals, parking pads, liquor licences, bike lanes, construction permits, traffic signals, road alterations, heritage designations, community gardens, farmers markets, improvements to local community centres, local environmental assessments — the list of neighbourhood concerns that routinely bog down the Council agenda and distract councillors from more important city-wide priorities seems to grow longer every meeting. [p. 20]

The list of issues reserved for Council appears to be too long, but this has nothing to do with Mayoral powers. Many of these items are reserved for Council from a deep concern that balkanization of City policies would occur if they were left to local Councils. For example, but for a few Councillors who believe that property owners should have unfettered rights to cut trees on their property, tree removals would have little debate at Council, and most would be rejected. Left to its own devices, Etobicoke would be deforested.

These may seem like trivial issues, but they have city-wide importance. If they are to be delegated, then city-wide policies need to exist that could not be overridden locally without reference to the full Council as a check on abuse.

Traffic signals and road alterations are not always the preserve of the full Council, but the policy is that on major roads, notably those with transit service, Council has the say.

A big problem with many of these issues pre-occupying Council comes from a combination of two effects: bad meeting management by the Speaker, and a reluctance to simply "call the question" as a way of ending needless debate on issues where only one or two Councillors are pushing an agenda. The Speaker is appointed by the Mayor, and if they are ineffective, then it is the Mayor's fault for putting them in place. Council generally runs well when the incumbent speaker is out for a smoke break. The Ford era Deputy Speaker, John Parker, is much missed.[4]

The single biggest time-waster in the Ford era was the Mayor's insistence on holding recorded votes for every decision, no matter how trivial. Any member can request a recorded vote so as to be on record (and to ensure everyone else is too). These votes can take some time while members scramble to return to their desks from wherever they might be in the chamber. Council runs amazingly briskly when members who continue this practice are not present.

> … the group proposed a "made-in-Toronto" approach that delegates further power to Community Councils while retaining Council's ultimate authority to ensure that local preferences do not undermine city-wide interests. [p. 19]

I agree with this basic premise subject to the existence of a mechanism that prevents subversion of those "city-wide interests". However, in a proposal clearly intended as a patchwork fix for the long agenda of Toronto & East York Community Council, comes this scheme:

> The review should also determine resources necessary to support Community Councils with expanded mandates, and steps required to balance workloads between Community Councils. For example, the busiest Community Councils, such as Toronto & East York, could, on the advice of staff, refer certain planning applications to the Planning & Growth Standing Committee. [p. 30]

This ignores the fact that P&GM is dominated by suburban members[5] who have no concept of nor sympathy for issues within Toronto and East York. The level of workload is indicative of the amount of development in the "old" City, of which the suburbs may be envious, but that is no reason to give them planning approvals. I look forward to the day when a committee dominated by "downtowners" is allowed to rule on planning for Scarborough.

The whole point of local committees is to have people who are familiar with the context of local issues. Proposing that this change simply to balance out the agendas is both anti-democratic and a bureaucratic response to the basics of Toronto's development patterns. It is not for staff to tell local politicians they should give up control over local decisions.

---

[4] Parker's re-election was thwarted by Tory's backing an alternate candidate, and he was the only incumbent to lose his seat.
[5] Four of the six members, including both the Chair and Vice-Chair, come from suburban councils, North York and Etobicoke respectively.

Streamlining Debate

This section begins with a review of the nature of Council meetings and quotes research from the Manning Centre as follows:

> The Manning Centre recently published an [sic] quantitative summary of how Toronto City Council spends its time, based on data compiled from official minutes, agendas, and voting records. It concluded that Toronto City Council "goes through substantially more business [at the Council level] and takes longer per item" than other large Canadian cities, such as Calgary.
>
> In nineteen meetings held between December 2014 and June 2016, Council voted on approximately 1,800 items. On average, they considered 96 motions per meeting, and debated each for 9 minutes and 32 seconds. The vast majority of these items, noted the report, were procedural in nature, not policy decisions.
>
> Source: McCaffrey, Peter. 2016. Council Tracker: Midterm Report, Toronto 2014-2016. Calgary: Manning Centre. [p. 21]

Of course this summary gives no indication of how long was spent on each of the "procedural" motions as opposed to more substantive issues. Moreover, a review of the source data for McCaffrey's report[6] does not reveal the basis on which the "vast majority" were "procedural". In fact, the source data suggest completely the opposite.

The source data include 1,825 votes ordered by the span of results ranging from unanimous adoption to abject defeat. These were subdivided as:

441 Adopt item	3 Adopt minutes
544 Amend item	9 Adopt order paper
225 Adopt item as amended	17 Adopt order paper as amended
54 Amend motion	30 Amend the order paper
26 End debate	14 Excuse absences
17 Defer item	11 Extend the meeting
56 Introduce motion without notice	122 Introduce confirming or general bills
10 Introduce report	2 Nomination
20 Receive item	9 Petition filed
18 Reconsider item or vote	1 Point of privilege
19 Refer item	1 Recess
11 Waive notice	6 Remove from committee
10 Re-open an item	3 Resolve to Committee of the Whole
125 Waive referral	
1 Waive the rules	
10 Withdraw a motion or item	

---

[6] The report including the source data are available at https://www.manningcentre.ca/report/2016-toronto-council-tracker-report

Leaving aside the low number of motions on some subjects such as resolution into private session, I defy anyone to explain how the "vast majority" of these are procedural. Certainly there are some that may appear trivial such as the introduction of confirming bills, or excusing absences, but these take almost no time, and are a legally required part of Council's operation.

Many items are adopted with little debate, and indeed the act of adopting the Order Paper includes the adoption of all reports that have not been held by any member. This is, in effect, an omnibus approval of many reports without debate.

By citing McCaffrey's paper without delving into its contents, the report, and by implication its advisory panel, have made only a superficial review of Council business.

To deal with the perceived inefficiency and chaos at Council, the advisory group considered various options, but in the end could not agree (again).

> In general, the group did not come to agreement on broader reforms, opting instead to propose a small number of procedural rules to encourage more streamlined, intelligent debate. [p. 22]

At the risk of pointing out the obvious, "intelligent debate" has very little to do with the rules of procedure, but a lot to do with the quality of individual members, not to mention what passes for leadership in the Council.

I must reiterate the importance of having a good Speaker who will keep debates in line, on topic and free of the slurs that inevitably lead to points of privilege. The current Speaker routinely has to be assisted by the City Clerk in responding to points of order, in part because the Speaker gets lost (or was not paying attention) in the debates and motions.

Nothing will prevent an asshole member from speaking and showing his true colours, so to speak, unless the Speaker is more forceful in controlling such drivel. There is, however, a challenge in that a too-powerful Speaker can shut down valid debates because they touch on politically sensitive subjects. It is a balancing act even with the best Speaker imaginable in the chair.

Having hard time limits on meetings will not encourage brevity, and could even lead to some mischief-making. At the June 2017 meeting, the Deputy Mayor (not just some unimportant rogue) refused to let some items come to a vote and forced them to be held over to the July meeting.[7] Debates are already time-limited in the sense that there are set speaking times, but when these are compounded by the ability to question movers of amendments, and the desire of every member, no matter how ill-informed, to speak on the record, well, meetings to drag on. Some members are concise, others are blowhards, but they were all elected, and have a voice.

Shifting more debate to standing committees is not the same as bringing out issues at Council due to the Mayor's control of committee membership. Moreover, not all members attend all committee meetings – they have other things to do with their time. Important issues do deserve briefings and discussions in detail, but these would simply shift time spent in Council proper to the special meetings. There could be merit in special-purpose meetings for major issues, but this should be used only for extraordinary issues

---

[7] This was possible because there was a hard stop due to sunset on the Jewish Sabbath.

to avoid overwhelming the schedule. The budget, usually the most important issue each year, already has its own special meeting.

Engage the Public

At this point, the report shifts from the operation of Council to the question of public participation. This can take various forms, but the two examined here involve deputations and data sharing. In both cases, the underlying assumption appears to be that Council will better informed. Whether this will have any effect on proceedings is quite another matter.

Indeed, it is rather bizarre that the report appears to favour more public input (something that can take a great deal of time and attention) while it also seeks to trim the amount of debate and information sharing at Council. A major problem for anyone making a deputation is that the effort is a crap shoot – one may get a sympathetic hearing including meaningful questions that allow more time to elucidate details, or one may simply be heard and thanked (if the chair is paying attention) perfunctorily. One might present to a fresh committee early in the day eager to here one's opinion, or one may come after a long, tiring parade and face a committee that just wants to go home.

Timed items, even timed speaking slots, simply will not work. One never knows in advance how long each speaker will take thanks to questions from committee members, and of course each item will be debated following all of those deputations. It's a pain in the butt waiting one's turn, and at best a chair can give general guidance about when issues will come up for debate.

> Task Force members noted that "the list of speakers tends to be dominated by familiar faces."
> [p. 22]

Yes, those "familiar faces" do exist, and they can bend almost any issue to their world view. However, many issues, particularly those involving local neighbourhood issues, do bring out speakers specific to the issue. To the degree that issues are decided at Community Councils, this would at least shift the venue from City Hall downtown to the three suburban meeting locales, but the problems of timing and access will remain.

Meetings held in the evening will necessarily be short, and would-be deputants will not sit around for hours awaiting their turn. There could also be problems with maintaining quorum for evening meetings.

The single biggest challenge is to get respectful attention from members of committees.

On the subject of budget presentations, the report states:

> However, despite recent efforts by staff to make budget documents more user-friendly, it remains remarkably difficult for most Torontonians to understand the details of the budget, the process by which budget decisions are made, or see how their input fits into the final budget package.

> This undermines what scholars describe as "fiscal trust": the perception that budget consultations are conducted in a fair and open manner, and that Council makes decisions in a transparent, thoughtful way that reflects (or at least respects) the positions expressed by residents and stakeholders. [p. 23]

As someone who has been following budgets at the City and at its largest agency, the TTC, for many years, even I have problems ferreting out information and I know where to look. The City's $12 billion operating budget cannot be conveniently reduced to a few summary sheets.

Typically, members of the public want to know specifics about programs of interest to them, and this sort of micro-level presentation would be challenging. There are two related issues here. One is the sheer number of programs, departments, staffing arrangements, contracts, and so on. The other is that detailed information on program changes is not the sort of thing some Mayors want to see in a public document, much less one prepared by staff whose job is perceived to be protecting the Mayor from criticism.

The matter of "fiscal trust" is important here: the Mayor already sets target for tax increases, and changes to the budget are controlled by his allies. All the consultation in the world will not change the perception that "the fix is in" and that fighting City Hall is a worthless effort.

There is a more fundamental issue at work here: does staff work for the Mayor, for Council as a whole, or for the general public? The mandate is very different depending on how one answers this question. Should staff be mandated to be more open and impartial in budget analyses?

> For instance, budget documents that emphasize year-over-year percentage changes should be "translated" into figures that are relatable to residents and indicate potential service impacts, such as changes in the number of front-line staff, or service schedules. [p. 33]

This is precisely what the Mayor does not want, exposure of the actual effects of budge policies.

On the subject of public consultations, the report notes:

> In several Australian cities, for instance, residents are able to sign up for email "planning alerts" to stay informed on planning changes in their neighbourhood. [p. 23]

The City maintains an "Interested Persons List", although it is unclear how one can join it today (there does not appear to be any reference to it on the City website). However, it should be possible to provide a sign-up mechanism with the ability to select areas of interest for alerts.

There are still many people who do not have online access to information, and this begs the question of whether they should be relegated to a second-class status.

I have been on the Interested Persons List for decades with respect to the old City of Toronto, and the result can be a torrent of hard-copy mail from the Clerk's office and from parties who are required to give legal notice to "Interested Persons".[8] I am also on many issue-specific email lists as a result of attending meetings, workshops, etc. The machinery to provide notices exists – it is merely a question of figuring out how to make it more widely available while avoiding the cost and clutter of hard-copy mailings.

---

[8] There does not appear to be any way to get off of this list. I have tried.

Share Information

This section is the weakest in the report, and it strays a very long way from the matter of improving Council's operations.

The important point made here is:

> Ultimately, the Task Force ended its deliberations convinced that there must first be buy-in inside government. To this end, the conversation must shift from a technical discussion about open data platforms to a practical discussion about shared data.
>
> Data exist on a spectrum, from closed to shared to open. Currently, most City data qualifies as closed, inaccessible not only to the public, but also internally to staff working in various city departments and agencies. Encouraging departments to share data early and often would help build a culture of transparency that has the potential to yield more informed decision making. [p. 25]

Maintaining data in an externally useful format and keeping it up to date is an "overhead" function that does not necessarily bear fruit, at least in the short term. Data can exist in dissimilar formats, and merging everything in a way that simplifies use across projects, departments and divisions requires considerable discipline.

A further problem can arise if data are presented through an API [Application Program Interface] because the data must now "behave" in a consistent manner even as content and usage of the underlying data evolve. "Raw" data are harder for the outside world to deal with, but they have the advantage of being whatever they are from one instance to another with at best a "ReadMe" file to point the way.

There are also significant issues with privacy and confidentiality that require public-facing data (or even data visible across department lines) to be filtered. Mailing lists and client/working group information should automatically be publicly visible just because this might help some future collaborative activity. There are also levels of privacy where some data might be visible to everyone, but other data might have restricted access.[9]

This does not happen by magic, but by design and by adherence to standards.

The implication here is that a lot more would be published as a matter of course, and this implies more citizen input, albeit by those in a position to mine the available data. It is unclear how this would streamline Council, or if citizen-generated reports would be given much credibility.

Finally, there is an odd sidebar about purchasing procedures that is far, far away from the alleged purpose of this document. Moreover, the City has gone through a major purchasing overhaul with a view to consistency and freedom from dubious or criminal activity. It is unclear why this issue is even in the report unless it is someone's hobbyhorse that escaped final editing.

---

[9] One of the most trying elements in my professional IT career was dealing with people who simply wanted to streamline access to information without understanding its sensitivity and the need to restrict access, sometimes for legal reasons including corporate or personal liability.

The Recommendations

The report has a set of recommendations that supposedly address issues raised above. I will not comment on them at length as much of what I have to say has already been covered.

Mayoral Address

This recommendation shows that the focus on Mayoral powers remains strong. However, there is a rather odd perception that the Mayor actually is capable of producing a cohesive plan as opposed to issue-specific speeches.

Mayor Tory makes lots of speeches now promising the sun, moon and stars, but he has no money to pay for them. He is the worst offender on Council in this regard, and he simply makes up financing schemes or vague projections. (SmartTrack was going to be self-financing. Other governments will pay for housing/transit. "Efficiency" will solve every problem without the need for new taxes.)

It is naïve to believe that simply requiring an annual speech will change any of this. Also, such a speech necessarily will speak only to a handful of major issues. This is not a speech from the throne introducing a legislative agenda.

If we are looking at a Parliamentary model, there is also the small matter of the "loyal opposition" who deserve a platform to rebut and critique the Mayor's proposals.

Start of Term Budget Consultations

The idea that the staff will somehow pull together widespread, detailed budget consultations shifts the responsibility for public participation away from the politicians to the staff, but it is not their job. A fundamental problem at the beginning of any term is that the new crowd has barely figured out where the bathroom is, but they want to be seen to have an effect "now". This is the "first hundred days" problem. That political imperative would run headlong into an extended consultation period. Imagine Rob Ford being told that he could not actually do anything about the budget for months after his election, and having his goals (from his inaugural address) filtered through staff presentations.

The proposal that Community Councils would review service levels against Mayoral goals ignores the fact that there is a suburban-downtown divide in the city, and the goals of each area do not necessarily mesh with the Mayor's overall plan. Also, the local Councils have no power to compel the Mayor to achieve his goals, and any "promise" is always subject to funding priorities.

New Budget Sequence

See previous comments.

Financial Offsets

Council already requires financial offsets during budget debates by virtue of having set the tax rate (and hence revenue level) before determining on a budget. Items approved by Council over the course of a year can fall into (at least) three types of funding arrangements:

- Staff are directed to include funding in the next year's budget. This is comparatively rare, but it sets a priority on new spending in the budget.
- Staff are directed to take the new requirement into consideration, but can choose not to include it in the budget. This is the fate of some hard-won approvals, a pocket-veto by staff likely with the tacit approval of the Mayor and/or Budget Chief.
- Explicit funding is drawn from existing reserves or known new revenues such as Section 37 monies.

As I wrote above, the worst offender for unfunded promises is the Mayor himself, and these often occur outside of the formal Council setting, typically at a press conference.

Rolling ABC Review & Enhance Community Councils

See previous discussions.

Question Period

The concept of a question period misses the point that issues would be debated separately from a Q&A session, and these would not directly inform each other. There is a natural flow, turgid though it might be, from presentations (if any) to questions to debate. It is unclear how (or if) questions arising from motions during debate would be handled (for example, if Council enacts a motion, what are the implications for operations, legal, finance, etc.).

Conducting staff questioning at committees does occur now, although more commonly by Councillors from central wards who are more often at City Hall than in their local offices. Questions at Council gain a wider audience than at committee, and there are valid reasons for placing them in a larger forum. There is also the basic issue that information on major topics routinely becomes available between the committee meeting and Council, sometimes arriving at the last minute.

> Council should establish a single "question period," conducted at the beginning of each Council session — not, as is currently the case, at the start of each agenda item — to discourage leading, redundant, or politically motivated questions. All questions related to specific agenda items should only be asked during this question period, and not at any other time.

> A single question period would motivate councillors to "do their homework" prior to Council meetings, and limit councillors' urge to treat questions to staff as an opportunity for grandstanding or cross-examination. [p. 31]

This statement has a dismissive air about questions in general and seeks to reduce the opportunity for questions because the process is abused by Councillors who are either too lazy to "do their homework" or who are grandstanding. This insults the Members who pose quite cogent, if challenging, questions on matters of important public policy. If anything, the time constraints already placed on questions (both at Committee and at Council) can limit the degree to which alternative viewpoints are explored.

13

Cap Meeting Times

Council typically runs over time only in cases where it is attempting to finish an agenda, or a major contentious item. Reconvening on the following day is not always practical. Budget meetings always run long at least in part due to the managed, contentious nature of the process.

A notable problem with late meetings is that some Councillors will "rag the puck" speaking at length to run out the clock.

Electronic Submissions

Many holds on items are already placed in advance, although the report implies that all of this happens at Council. It would be possible to make advance holds mandatory, but this should only apply to items that are "complete" on the agenda when released a week in advance, not to late breaking reports/additions for which Councillors have received little notice.

Requiring advance holds could have the unintended consequence that some members would place blanket holds on everything they might possibly be interested in (or more likely their staff would do so on their behalf).

Petitions are few in number, appear archaic, and could be done in advance, but are intended to show strength of support (numbers) for issue before Council. Also, many petitions are not received in electronic format. They do not consume much time at Council.

Conflicts of Interest could be declared in advance, but it is useful that all present know where these exist, not as footnote to agenda/minutes.

Deputation Process & Citizen Summaries

See previous discussions.

Shared Data Strategy, Office of Data Analytics and Synchronized Data Releases

The concepts advanced in these recommendations are basically sound, subject to caveats I raised earlier. The challenge here is for the City to *want* to make data public in a meaningful, useful format. Doing this can be quite challenging even without the possibility that hiding information might be the preferred way for some departments to operate.

Some data are very complex (e.g. transportation demand models) and others are quite voluminous (e.g. transit vehicle tracking). Packaging these in a way that allows review is not simple, and even the process of consolidating information could introduce bias or hide important details.

It is important to remember that just making data public will not automatically trigger better understanding. Citizen analyses based on such data are likely to be challenged by staff and Councillors for inaccuracies of interpretation.