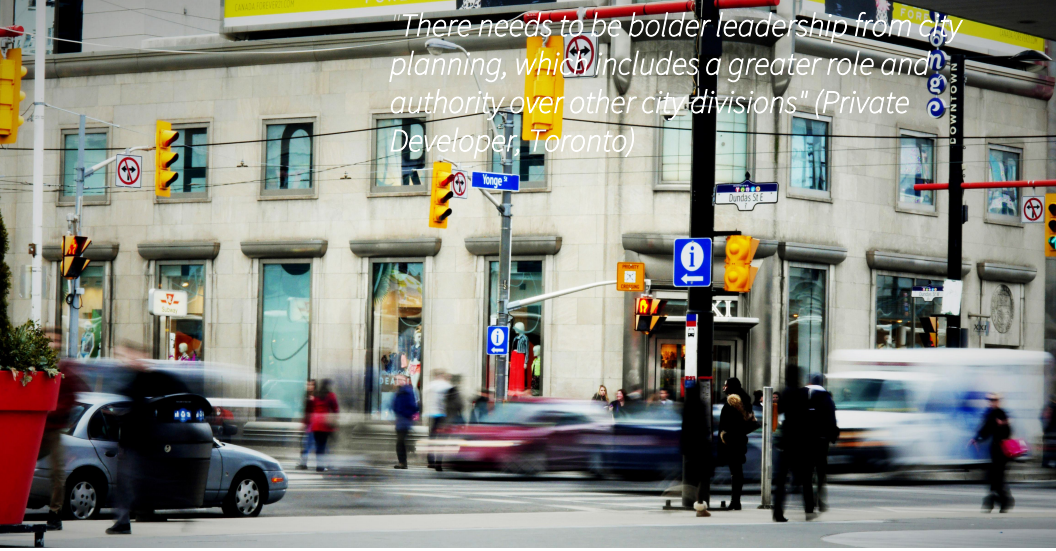

Yonge and Dundas, Source: Creative Commons

Planning and Development

The relationship between City planning and the development community is often contentious. At the core of most issues, is how to strike a balance between flexibility and certainty in planning decisions. The complex regulatory and jurisdictional environments tied to planning - zoning regulations, multiple city divisions with different rules, and the varied layers of inter-governmental requirements - often hamstring the planning process and stifle new ideas around urban design.

More flexibility and openness on the part of city staff around design guidelines and a basic level of coordination across departments to unlock the planning process from city bureaucracy was called for. Regarding the latter, Planning and Parks departments may share overlapping public realm objectives, but are managed in separate departments with little communication between them.

Toronto's market-intensive economy poses challenges for planning to get out in front of development in a way that sets a vision for the built form while balancing a public and private agenda. Planning needs more power to begin with so they can reorganize their operations and gain more capacity to make decisions regarding matters related to the public realm.

The research shows that that both the city and development community need to raise expectations of one another regarding the level of contribution to the public realm, which includes meaningful partnerships between these two groups, and devising strong incentives for public realm contributions.

Recommendations

1. The City of Toronto should lead by example in adopting recent changes in the *Provincial Policy Statement* to promote coordinated and integrated planning processes. This would entail more collaboration among city divisions (e.g., planning, transportation, culture, or parks and recreation) to achieve a comprehensive approach to planning cities.

2. The City of Toronto should develop a wide range of incentives to encourage developers to play an active role in forming the public realm above and beyond existing guidelines and standards.