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Planner: R. Nemis

TO:	CHAIR AND MEMBERS PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
FROM:	JOHN M. FLEMING MANAGING DIRECTOR, PLANNING AND CITY PLANNER
SUBJECT:	USE OF NEW TECHNOLOGY FOR ENGAGEMENT MEETING ON FEBRUARY 6, 2017

RECOMMENDATION

That, on the recommendation of the Managing Director, Planning & City Planner, the following report with respect to the use of new technologies to engage the public in planning processes BE RECEIVED for information;

PREVIOUS REPORTS PERTINENT TO THIS MATTER
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Improvements to Public Engagement in the Planning Process – Report to Planning Committee (March 23, 2015) – Report to Planning Committee to propose series of initiatives and request stakeholder consultation.

Improvements to Public Engagement in the Planning Process – Report to Planning Committee (December 15, 2016) – Update report to Planning Committee with respect to improvements to public engagement in the planning process.

PURPOSE AND EFFECT OF THE RECOMMENDED ACTION

The purpose and effect of the recommended action is to inform Council on the use of new technologies to engage the public in the planning and design process. The report further serves to identify additional planning processes where the use of such new technologies may be appropriate in engaging the public.

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BACKGROUND

1. The use of new technologies to engage the public in the planning process is consistent with, and will serve to implement Council's 2015-2019 Strategic Plan which identifies community engagement and the use of new technologies as a means to engage the public in the following areas:
 - Growing our Economy
 - Use new and emerging technology to improve quality of life and grow London's economy.
 - Leading in Public Service
 - Make community engagement a priority. Make the public a partner who has access to our information and helps make decisions with Council.
 - Use innovative and best practices in all organizational and management activities.
 - Create, explore, and implement new technologies or technology improvements
 - Deliver great customer experiences to residents, businesses, and visitors
 - Keep looking for new opportunities to share services and supports between the City of London and its agencies, boards, and commissions and;

2. The use of new technologies to engage the public in the planning process is consistent with, and will serve to implement, the value and vision policies of *The London Plan* which pledge to "...employ genuine and effective techniques to include all Londoners in our planning processes..."

3. *Future City Strategy* (Smart City) is looking at how staff can better use technology to improve the overall built environment and engage with citizens. The four pillars that are the basis of the *Future City Strategy* are as follows:
 - Smart Living
 - Sharing data to allow the public to use and republish data
 - Improve access to and education required to use digital technologies
 - Use of web-based citizen engagement tools/applications to enhance collaboration
 - Create digital service delivery methods to improve customer service
 - Smart Infrastructure
 - Optimize the construction/operation/management of infrastructure (water, sewer, transportation, energy, and information and communications technology)
 - Coordination and monitoring of physical assets through use of digital infrastructure
 - Data collection to assist with municipal decision-making
 - Smart buildings/green infrastructure
 - Smart Economy
 - Creation/enhancement of technology incubators/accelerators/business hubs
 - Attraction/retention of talent to grow digital economy
 - Provision of resources and organizations to support economic development
 - Workforce education/skill development opportunities to support digital economy

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- Smart Governance and Decisions
 - Use of data analytics/metrics to improve corporate decision-making
 - Governance model to support collection/maintenance/dissemination of municipal data
 - Improving and building the corporate digital culture
 - Governance structure for public/private partnerships to operate potential municipal assets

4. On March 23, 2015, Municipal Council resolved:

That, on the recommendation of the Managing Director, Planning and City Planner, the following actions be taken with respect to potential improvements to public engagement in the planning process:

- a) *the report dated March 23, 2015, from the Managing Director, Planning and City Planner, with respect to potential improvements to public engagement in the planning process, BE RECEIVED;*
- b) *the proposed “Improvements to Public Engagement in the Planning Process” BE CIRCULATED to the London Development Institute, the Urban League, the London Homebuilders Association, London Area Planning Consultants, London area architects, landscape architects and urban designers; and,*
- c) *the Civic Administration BE DIRECTED to report back at a future meeting of the Planning and Environment Committee with respect to the proposed “Improvements to Public Engagement in the Planning Process” as modified based on stakeholder consultations;*

This report included nine issues to explore where improvements can be made to the planning process engagement practices. These included:

- Plain-language and formatting improvements to planning reports to make them easier to understand
- Improvements to possible land use change signage
- Improving the web presence
- Plain-language and formatting improvements to public notices
- Provide mail notification to tenants
- Expand the existing 120m mailing radius
- Refine the newspaper notification
- Developing protocols for non-statutory Community Information Meetings
- Use of Social Media

RATIONALE

Planning Services of the City of London participated in the Lifestyle Home Show from January 27 – 29, 2017. With over 600 booths, 265 exhibitors and thousands expected in attendance, Planning Services along with many other service areas of the City of London took the opportunity to engage the community at the Lifestyle Home Show.

Planning Services used this occasion to educate and receive feedback regarding the Future City Strategy, as outlined in *The London Plan*. Planning Services developed a three-dimensional model of the downtown area that showed the existing structures as well as many of the proposed development applications that have been submitted to the City over previous years. In order for the 3D model to be viewed as well as to showcase an example of new technology that is reflective of Smart Cities, virtual reality headsets were used for the event. The feedback from the public was overwhelmingly positive as it allowed the public to view the

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downtown area and its proposed developments in a way that has never been experienced before.

What is Virtual Reality technology?

A computer-generated, three-dimensional environment which can be explored and interacted with by a person. In its simplest form, a user has the ability to navigate through a three-dimensional environment on their personal computer or tablet using hand gestures on screen, mouse control or keyboard control. More sophisticated versions of virtual reality involve the addition of headsets that allow the user to become more immersed into the virtual world. While wearing a headset the user has the ability to experience or control the environment by movement of the body. The user has the ability to “look around” the artificial world and in some cases, be able to move throughout the scene.

Benefits of Virtual Reality technology in Planning Services

- Visualization of the built environment that simulates the real-world experience
- Allows the user to experience the urban environment in a full 360 degrees
- Gives the viewer the opportunity to see how the contextual built environment could change with a development proposal in a scale that is reflective of a real world scenario
- Feedback and suggestions are often more informed based on the power of visualization
- Visualization can be customized in order to explore the possibilities of different materials, textures, colours, site layout, etc.
- Simple VR headsets are cost effective and portable
- Enhanced community engagement through the use of virtual reality extends well beyond Planning Services that could include Environmental Assessments, Rapid Transit, and more

Enhanced public engagement through the use of virtual reality is aligned with Council’s 2015-2019 Strategic Plan. This new technology will assist in providing the visualization tools necessary to fulfill the Strategic Plan in the following areas:

- Strengthening our Community
 - Support neighbourhood driven activities and decision making.
 - Support all Londoners to feel engaged and involved in our community.
- Building a Sustainable City
 - Invest in public spaces to be gathering places for more compact neighbourhoods.
 - Support more public art and continue maintaining what we own.
 - Create a more attractive city through urban design.
 - Invest in parks and recreation facilities and amenities.
 - Invest in making London’s riverfront beautiful and accessible for all Londoners.

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CONCLUSION

Virtual reality technologies has proven to be an effective method of communicating the changes in the built environment within the City of London. As we explore more opportunities and methods to engage with the public, the benefits of virtual reality technologies becomes more apparent. Through advanced technologies and the rapid expansion of technical knowledge, the future of planning in the City of London may see visualization techniques such as augmented reality to help guide the planning process and build a livable city.

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February 2, 2017

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