

For Information

DATE: March 29, 2012

REPORT TITLE: **RESIDENTIAL PREFERENCES SURVEY**

FROM: Janette Smith, Commissioner of Health Services
David L. Mowat, MBChB, MPH, FRCPC, Medical Officer of Health

OBJECTIVE

To present progress on the Region of Peel's 2011-2014 Term of Council Priority promoting supportive environments for health and active living in Peel, specifically the findings from a Residential Preferences Survey.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Through a nationally funded grant, Peel Public Health partnered with leading health units throughout Canada to conduct a survey that measured market demand for different types of built communities.
- The survey entitled, Residential Preferences Survey, was conducted in the Greater Toronto Area, Metro Toronto, Metro Vancouver and the Greater Vancouver Regional District in 2011.
- To determine preferences for walkable neighbourhoods, the survey asked respondents to indicate the types of neighbourhoods they would choose to live in if they had to move.
- The results of the survey demonstrated that there is unmet public demand for walkable communities in the Greater Toronto Area, which includes Peel.
- Other Regional departments, municipalities and Peel Public Health will use the survey results to inform future policy development work aimed at increasing the opportunities for Peel residents to lead active lifestyles.
- New Affordable Housing development in Peel will give consideration to walkable locations and design.

DISCUSSION

1. Background

To help prevent ill-health, particularly obesity, Regional Council has recognized the need for built environments that provide greater opportunities for healthy living in Peel. To advance the Region of Peel's 2011-2014 Term of Council Priority promoting supportive environments for health and active living, Peel Public Health studies and makes recommendations for changes to planning policies to create more health promoting communities.

To develop and implement policies that could improve the built environment and create opportunities for healthy lifestyles and increased physical activity, Peel Public Health has

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identified, through stakeholder consultation with municipalities, that there is a need to understand the current preferences of Peel residents and the market demand for walkable communities. With knowledge of residents' preferences, Peel Public Health can work with other Regional departments and the municipalities to make policy changes that address unmet need and match public demand.

In 2010, Peel Public Health joined five leading health units throughout Canada and three national organizations in a collaborative project, called Healthy Canada by Design. The initiative was funded by a grant provided by the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer. As part of this national project, in 2011 Peel Public Health with Toronto and health units in British Columbia implemented a Residential Preferences Survey in Toronto, the Greater Toronto Area (including Peel), Metro Vancouver and the Greater Vancouver Regional District.

2. The Residential Preferences Survey

i) Introduction and Purpose

The purpose of the Residential Preferences Survey is to document the demand for different types of residential community environments comparing neighbourhoods oriented to walking, cycling and transit versus neighbourhoods oriented to driving. Research has shown that people's levels of physical activity are determined by both intrinsic attitudes toward physical activity and by the walkability of the neighbourhoods in which they live. Determining whether there is unmet demand for walkable neighbourhoods is an important first step in removing the barriers to creating healthy built environments.

In the survey, respondents were asked to choose the types of neighbourhoods in which they would prefer to live, and then asked to describe whether the neighbourhood in which they currently live resembles their preference. The survey assessed the relative importance of different "trade-offs" people make when selecting where to live. The survey then examined how walking behaviour was influenced by people's preferences for neighbourhood types as compared to the actual neighbourhoods in which they chose to live. For instance, those who stated a preference to live in a walkable neighbourhood and who currently live in a pedestrian-friendly neighbourhood may engage in more physical activity than those who stated a preference for walkable neighbourhoods but currently live in a neighbourhood that requires an automobile for travel.

The results of this survey help to determine if walkable neighbourhoods are undersupplied relative to public preferences, and will have important implications for policy changes that can promote the development of health promoting built environments.

ii) History

The Residential Preferences Survey was designed and first implemented by Dr. Lawrence Frank in Atlanta, Georgia to understand whether people's preferences for neighbourhood design matched with the neighbourhoods in which they actually choose to live. A unique feature of this survey is that participants define their own neighbourhoods as potentially being different from the neighbourhoods they prefer.

The survey was also recently undertaken in Waterloo, Ontario.

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iii) Methodology

Participants were recruited by Ipsos-Reid (a market research company) through an online consumer panel in 2011. Eligible participants were at least 25 years of age, had moved in the past seven years, or were planning to move in the next seven. Only one participant was selected from each household.

Survey participants were categorized into three income levels (less than \$50,000, between \$50,000 and \$70,000, and greater than \$70,000) and four neighbourhood types (from least walkable to most walkable). Participants were shown diagrams of neighbourhoods with different characteristics and were forced to make decisions ("trade-offs") about where they would prefer to live. Sample survey questions have been attached in Appendix I and the complete Residential Preferences Survey report is available in the Clerk's Office.

Participants selected neighbourhoods and made "trade-offs" based on the following neighbourhood characteristics:

1. Neighbourhood type (Low walkability/medium-low walkability/medium-high walkability/high walkability)
2. Proximity to shops/services and walking
3. Level of activity and housing mix
4. House size and travel options
5. Lot size and commute distance
6. Street types and travel options
7. Access to and size of public versus private recreational space
8. Access to food retail types and mode choice

Participants were also asked to describe or select the type of neighbourhood in which they currently live.

iv) Results

A total of 1525 surveys were completed in the Greater Toronto Area (including Peel), out of which 1133 respondents lived in Toronto and 392 respondents lived in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Overall, the characteristics of survey respondents matched the 2006 Census statistics for the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area. The average age of respondents was 50 years with almost an equal mix of men and women. About 80 per cent of respondents in the GTA owned their own dwelling, compared to 52 per cent in the City of Toronto. More than 40 per cent of respondents had a university degree and more than 60 per cent were employed.

Based on the results of the neighbourhood "trade-offs", there was a strong demand for access to commercial services and food outlets. In the GTA, more than half (52.9 per cent) of respondents chose a neighbourhood with high walkability and proximity to services over a neighbourhood with low walkability and distant services. About 30 per cent of GTA residents surveyed wanted to move to a neighbourhood that was closer to commercial services. Access to and size of food outlets were also an important "trade-off" decision for survey respondents. Almost 48 per cent of residents surveyed in the GTA said that they would choose a neighbourhood with smaller and nearby food outlets as opposed to large "big-box" shopping centres.

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More than 15 per cent of GTA residents surveyed who currently lived in neighbourhoods oriented to cars and driving wanted to move to a more centrally located, walkable neighbourhood. With regards to street design and travel options, a large percentage of GTA residents surveyed wanted a pedestrian/transit-oriented neighbourhood. While many respondents chose larger lot sizes with longer commute distances over shorter commute times and smaller lots, the desire to move to a neighbourhood that was pedestrian and transit-oriented among GTA participants indicated that market demand for larger homes in walkable neighbourhoods with proximity to shops and services may still be unmet in the Greater Toronto Area.

3. Implications for Peel

The results of the Residential Preferences Survey indicate that there is unmet demand for more walkable neighbourhoods in the Greater Toronto Area, with many people currently living in neighbourhoods that are very different from the neighbourhoods in which they would choose to live if they had to move. This finding is significant because it suggests that individuals would be more physically active and thus healthier if they were able to live in walkable communities. This survey demonstrates that the environment in which people live influences their behaviour. In this case, their desire to lead an active lifestyle is hindered by the lack of opportunities to walk in their neighbourhoods. The survey has increased our understanding of the important relationship between an environment that is supportive of physical activity and health behaviours and ultimately health outcomes. To that end, Peel is giving consideration to location and design that promotes walkability and healthy living in Requests for Proposals and Requests for Expressions of Interest for new affordable housing in Peel over the next several years.

It is important to note that the number of people surveyed in the Greater Toronto Area was smaller in comparison to the number of people surveyed in the City of Toronto. These survey results may therefore underestimate the actual demand for walkable and transit-oriented neighbourhood types that exist in the Region of Peel. The Residential Preferences Survey, however, provided a good opportunity to partner with leading health units in Canada to assess public demand for walkable neighbourhoods. Peel Public Health will apply the lessons learned from this study to future efforts to further understand market demand for neighbourhood types in Peel.

Peel Public Health's opportunity to participate in this nationally-funded initiative and partner with other leading health units and organizations has advanced joint efforts to decrease chronic diseases through changes to the built environment.

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CONCLUSION

The Residential Preferences Survey has provided valuable insights on public demand and acceptance for walkable, healthier communities across two major cities in Canada. The results of this survey and future work of a similar nature will enable greater collaboration among policy makers, decision makers and private sector partners in incorporating features into the built environment that protect the health of current and future residents.



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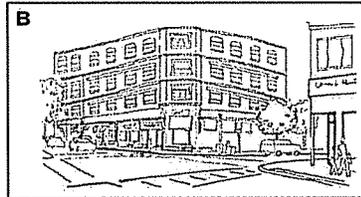
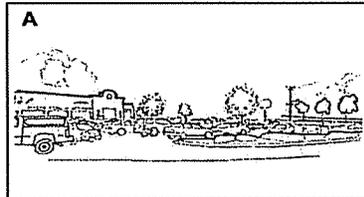
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c. Legislative Services

APPENDIX I

Sample Survey Questions from the Residential Preferences Survey

[TRADEOFF2]



If I were to move, I'd like to live in a neighbourhood...

A. where the commercial areas are kept separate (over 2 kilometres/1.5 miles or more than a 30 minute walk away) from the houses, even if this means that I cannot walk to stores, libraries or restaurants.

B. where houses and commercial areas are within a 1 kilometre/half mile or 10 minute-walk of each other so that I can walk to stores, libraries or restaurants

[SHOW QUESTIONS 2a-c ON THE SAME SCREEN]

2a. Your neighbourhood preference is:

[HORIZONTAL SCALE 0-10. LABEL TAILS ARE 0= "Strongly prefer A", 3= "Somewhat prefer A", 5= "Neutral", 7= "Somewhat prefer B", 10= "Strongly prefer B"]

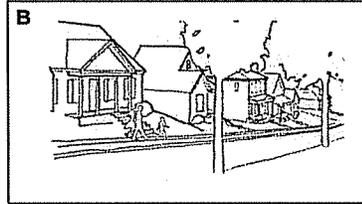
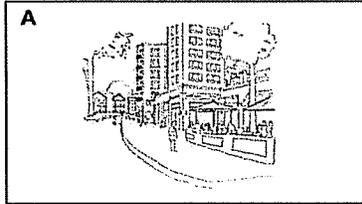
2b. Please indicate whether your current neighbourhood is more like "A" or "B".

[HORIZONTAL SCALE 0-10. LABEL TAILS ARE 0= "More like A", 5= "Equally like A & B", 10= "More like B"]

2c. Regarding the ability to walk to nearby shops and services, the neighbourhood you'd hope to find would be:

[HORIZONTAL SCALE 0-10. LABEL TAILS ARE 0= "More like A than your current neighbourhood", 5= "Like your current neighbourhood", 10= "More like B than your current neighbourhood"]

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If I were to move, I'd like to live in a neighbourhood...

A. with lots of services and activities nearby, even if this means it has a mixture of single family houses, townhouses, and apartment buildings that are close together on various sized lots with less private backyard space.

B. with single family houses farther apart on lots 10 metres (35 feet) wide or more with more private backyard space, even if this means it is not an area with services or activities nearby.

[SHOW QUESTIONS 3a-c ON THE SAME SCREEN]

3a. Your neighbourhood preference is:

[HORIZONTAL SCALE 0-10. LABEL TAILS ARE 0= "Strongly prefer A", 3= "Somewhat prefer A", 5= "Neutral", 7= "Somewhat prefer B", 10= "Strongly prefer B"]

3b. Please indicate whether your current neighbourhood is more like "A" or "B".

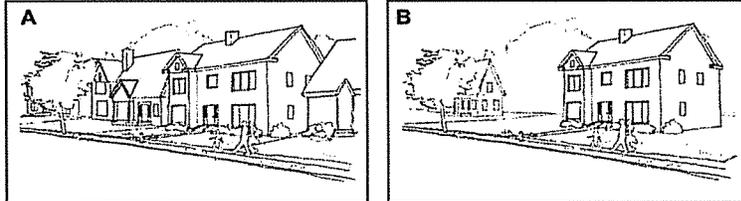
[HORIZONTAL SCALE 0-10. LABEL TAILS ARE 0= "More like A", 5= "Equally like A & B", 10= "More like B"]

3c. Regarding the level of activity and mix of housing, the neighbourhood you'd hope to find would be:

[HORIZONTAL SCALE 0-10. LABEL TAILS ARE 0= "More like A than your current neighbourhood", 5= "Like your current neighbourhood", 10= "More like B than your current neighbourhood"]

[TRADEOFF4 IS ASKED AFTER TRADEOFF8]

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If I were to move, I'd like to live in a neighbourhood...

A. within 5 kilometres or 3 miles (10-15 minute drive) of work, school or my other important destinations, even if this means that houses are close together – on smaller lots approximately 6 metres (20 feet) wide.

B. with houses farther apart – on large lots 15 metres (50 or more feet) wide– even if this means traveling more than 25 kilometres or 15 miles (over 30 minutes) to work, school or my other important destinations

[SHOW QUESTIONS 5a-c ON THE SAME SCREEN]

5a. Your neighbourhood preference is:

[HORIZONTAL SCALE 0-10. LABEL TAILS ARE 0= “Strongly prefer A”, 3= “Somewhat prefer A”, 5= “Neutral”, 7= “Somewhat prefer B”, 10= “Strongly prefer B”]

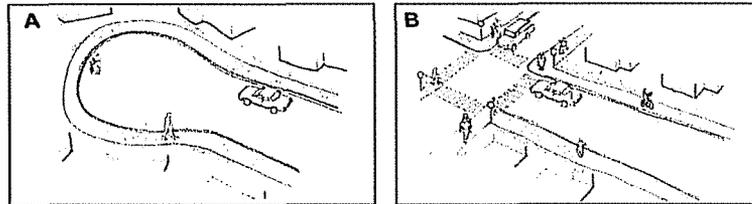
5b. Please indicate whether your current neighbourhood is more like “A” or “B”.

[HORIZONTAL SCALE 0-10. LABEL TAILS ARE 0= “More like A”, 5= “Equally like A & B”, 10= “More like B”]

5c. Regarding lot size and commute distance, the neighbourhood you’d hope to find would be:

[HORIZONTAL SCALE 0-10. LABEL TAILS ARE 0= “More like A than your current neighbourhood”, 5= “Like your current neighbourhood”, 10= “More like B than your current neighbourhood”]

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If I were to move, I'd like to live in a neighbourhood...

A. with cul-de-sacs and few people from other neighbourhoods walking or driving on them, even if this means I must drive for all my trips.

B. where I can walk, cycle or take public transit for some of my trips, even if it has through streets and people from other neighbourhoods walking or driving on them.

[SHOW QUESTIONS 6a-c ON THE SAME SCREEN]

6a. Your neighbourhood preference is:

[HORIZONTAL SCALE 0-10. LABEL TAILS ARE 0= "Strongly prefer A", 3= "Somewhat prefer A", 5= "Neutral", 7= "Somewhat prefer B", 10= "Strongly prefer B"]

6b. Please indicate whether your current neighbourhood is more like "A" or "B".

[HORIZONTAL SCALE 0-10. LABEL TAILS ARE 0= "More like A", 5= "Equally like A & B", 10= "More like B"]

6c. Regarding street types and travel options, the neighbourhood you'd hope to find would be:

[HORIZONTAL SCALE 0-10. LABEL TAILS ARE 0= "More like A than your current neighbourhood", 5= "Like your current neighbourhood", 10= "More like B than your current neighbourhood"]