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Toronto, Ontario

October 04, 2018

Waterfront Toronto, and my fellow Digital Strategy Advisory Panel members,

It is with deep dismay and profound concern that I am resigning from Waterfront Toronto's Digital Strategy Advisory Panel, effective today.

When I was asked to join the panel, my hope with this esteemed group of experts and city-builders was that we would be able to provide Waterfront Toronto with our advice on how to best engage in this high-potential and complex opportunity, and to help them gauge whether or not the proposed package of solutions from Sidewalk Labs is a sound and prudent deal in the short *and* long term for the City of Toronto and its residents.

In the last eleven months of the (now) approximately fifteen month consultation period, Waterfront Toronto's apathy and utter lack of leadership regarding shaky public trust and social license has been astounding. There is a growing list of squandered opportunities to take ownership of the narrative that would clarify the boundaries between who is in charge of how this "partnership" unfolds; bewildering for a public corporation that has historically done such a thorough job of bridging with the public by truthfully engaging them in co-design and responding to their concerns and advice regarding the development of Toronto's waterfront. And while a "smart city" venture might be new for Waterfront Toronto, we have example after example from New York, Seattle, and Westminster in the UK, to name but a few, of the lessons learned from Alphabet/Sidewalk Labs' foray into selling tech solutions to cities, and the resulting serious reservations put forth by those standing up to safeguard public interest.

My gravest concern is that while the panel is showing up in good faith, I have yet to see evidence that Waterfront Toronto shares the urgency and concern that has been raised in multiple fora - as evident through how the public meetings continue to be run, who is running them, and what is consistently left unsaid and unaddressed. The most recent public roundtable in August displayed a blatant disregard for resident concerns about data and digital infrastructure. Time was spent instead talking about buildings made out of wood and the width of one-way streets, things no one has contested or expressed material concern for in this entire process.

Waterfront Toronto's senior leadership is consistently dodging important questions from concerned residents and the media. The leadership has yet to comment on recent reports that Sidewalk Labs is asking potential local consultants to hand over any intellectual property that is developed to the Alphabet-owned company – and in cases where that's not possible, to give Sidewalk Labs an exclusive, royalty-free, worldwide licence to use it - a brazen departure from Waterfront Toronto's position on intellectual property as "TBD" in the shared planned

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development agreement, and a slap in the face of their professed goal of “encouraging local innovation”

Each of the public meetings so far has been a massive lost opportunity to honestly and meaningfully engage with the public on things that it is rightfully concerned about. Instead of admitting that this project is much more complex than perhaps Waterfront Toronto realized at the outset, when it did not widely consult with the public *prior* to issuing the RFP for Quayside; and therefore warrants pause, reflection, and decisive courage focused on public safety and value-creation for innovative Canadian companies first - we find ourselves forced into a disorienting loop where resident and local, national, and global tech community concerns are ignored, and willful misdirection has thus far been endorsed through Waterfront Toronto's silence.

As a panel member who entered this engagement with great enthusiasm and even greater hope, this resignation is a difficult decision for me to make. As the only person of colour on a panel that doesn't even have Indigenous representation to my knowledge, representing public interest for a city as diverse as Toronto, I do so with a very heavy heart. My intent from day one of this engagement was to contribute through my experience and expertise as a technologist, a Toronto resident, and a passionate advocate for public good. In the absence of even a single public record of any of our panel meetings and the myriad concerns raised within, I cannot in good conscience continue to participate in this advisory role when this continuation may imply to the public that I endorse and approve of Waterfront Toronto's consistent inaction and approach on both the process and this project. I don't.

In the last public roundtable meeting in August, a resident shared their serious concern with me about the fact that official Sidewalk Toronto materials and soundbites thus far do not address the blast radius of making mistakes on a city-scale. That is, a city's infrastructure has an obsolescence of many decades, it is not like a new phone that we can change in a couple of years if we find it to be problematic. I emphatically agree with their concern. Broad licensing that does not prioritize digital rights of the public can mean that surveillance infrastructure and valuable public data can lay latent for long periods of time, and avoid scrutiny easily, tucked in a foreign-owned company's proprietary vault. The question we need to be focused on is not *how can we build a better monopoly-tech-company led, surveillance-based city* (puzzlingly, something even some of my fellow panelists are lending their organizational credibility to) but the fact that we have enough evidence to know that we don't want to build that at all. There is nothing innovative about city-building that disenfranchises its residents in insidious ways and robs valuable earnings out of public budgets, or commits scarce public funds to the ongoing maintenance of technology that city leadership has not even declared a need for. As a technologist I know there are other ways to do this and I will be committing my future efforts to

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further developing those alternatives with community partners to ensure the City of Toronto thinks about all of its options, not just this option.

If Waterfront Toronto truly believes that the goal for developing Quayside is to encourage local innovation and build a livable, affordable city that prioritizes public safety and interest, then no progress on this venture is possible without its leadership standing accountable to the residents on whose behalf it has been given the responsibility to act, and do so with humility and courage. And there is no version of being a good steward for the people of Toronto, where Waterfront Toronto does not ensure that both the data and the digital infrastructure in all its developments is controlled by our public institutions.

Sincerely,

Saadia Muzaffar
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