



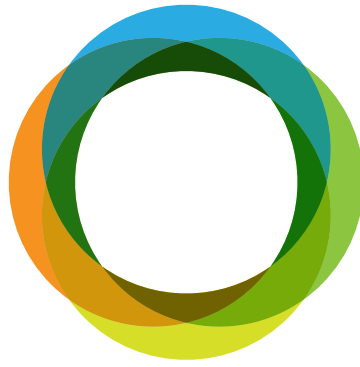
IDEAS AT THE CROSSROADS OF INSPIRED COMMUNITIES



THIS ISSUE:

Rethinking social and physical infrastructure investments 06

How planners and allied professionals are creating and sustaining the public realm 05



PlanON

AWARDS

Honouring Excellence in Planning

The Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI) introduces the PlanOn Awards, a brand-new awards program to honour the exceptional achievements of OPPI members who demonstrate professional excellence and a commitment to advancing the planning profession in Ontario.

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The call for submissions is open
until **May 1, 2023**.

Find more information on page 56.

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Susan Wiggins
Eugene Park
Sarah Bradbury

Editor

Carolyn Camilleri

Design

Tenzing Communications Inc.

Print Production

14forty

Digital Production

Seventyeight Digital Inc.

For advertising inquiries:

Chantelle Bonham and Liz Buttigieg
advertising@ontarioplanners.ca

For feedback and story ideas:

editor@ontarioplanners.ca

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Ontario Professional Planners Institute
4881 Yonge Street, Suite 401
Toronto, Ontario, M2N 6Y9

T: 416-483-1873 or 1-800-668-1448
E: info@ontarioplanners.ca
W: ontarioplanners.ca

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INSPIRE



THE PLANNER'S RESPONSIBILITY TO THE PUBLIC INTEREST

As Members of the Ontario Professional Planners Institute, Registered Professional Planners have a primary responsibility to define and serve the interests of the public. Good planning is the key to building great communities and is guided by public interest. Good planning results in well-planned and enjoyable communities that have the amenities people need and contribute to well-being and to long-term societal goals, like housing affordability, increasing economic activity, and fighting climate change.

Registered Professional Planners:

- Practice in a manner that respects the diversity, needs, values and aspirations of the public and encourages discussion on these matters;
- Provide full, clear and accurate information on planning matters to decision-makers and members of the public, while recognizing both the client's right to confidentiality and the importance of timely recommendations;

- Acknowledge the inter-related nature of planning decisions and their consequences for individuals, the natural and built environment, and the broader public interest; and
- Identify and promote opportunities for meaningful participation in the planning process to all interested parties.

Inherent in this commitment to the profession and the public is the responsibility to be asking continually: Who is the public? What is important to the public? Is everyone's voice being heard? How can we be sure? How can we bridge the differences in perspectives and experiences?

Serving the interests of the public is at the core of everything Registered Professional Planners do every day while working to build healthy, sustainable communities for everyone in Ontario.

Excerpt from The Professional Code of Practice, the basis of the planning practice for Registered Professional Planners.

“The public realm creates the sense of place that binds us to our neighbourhoods and our communities.”

The public realm – streets, parks, squares, courtyards, alleys, and other publicly accessible and owned spaces – is of critical importance to our work as planners. It's where our work interacts the most with people. It's where we window shop, meet our neighbours, walk our dogs, hike, and recreate. The public realm creates the sense of place that binds us to our neighbourhoods and our communities.

As planners, our work in the public realm has the greatest impact on the public's daily lives. The importance of this was brought to the forefront during the pandemic, when it was our only means of entertainment and socializing – from a distance, of course. The public realm remains important to our daily lives now – perhaps, even more so with increasing focus on intensification and compact development.

Residents trade off larger units and backyards for living in dense urban communities, but that trade off should come with greater opportunities to experience the outdoors, not in one's backyard but in one's neighbourhood. It is in the public interest for planners to create those opportunities and the sense of place so important for physical and mental health.

For those reasons, we need to be proud of what we do as planners to create, improve, and sustain the public realm. We need to promote that good work amongst our friends, neighbours, and colleagues, so they can appreciate the value a Registered Professional Planner brings to their community.

Bill 23 may have changed some of the tools we use to plan the public realm, particularly in the areas of site plan control and parkland dedication. It's a complex topic. OPPI, as the voice of the profession, is forming relationships with the government and responding to legislation that impacts us all. You can read OPPI's letters on the subject here: www.ontarioplanners.ca/policy-corner.

Even with the changes from Bill 23, many tools and opportunities to plan the public realm still remain. In this issue of *Y Magazine*, we look at how planners and allied professionals are creating and sustaining the public realm. Leela Viswanathan asks us to rethink how we invest in the public realm, particularly with respect to social infrastructure. Paul Shaker offers a model for making school routes safer and more active for kids, while Andria Sallese and Will Lamond propose looking at the street as an untapped resource for providing public places and spaces. And Miranda Jimmy reminds us to think carefully about who the public is when considering what truly is in the public interest.

Those are just a few of many thought-provoking articles in this packed, 60-page issue of *Y Magazine*. You will see some new sections have been added, and we encourage you to consider how you can contribute to future issues.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Lowes".

Paul Lowes, MES, MCIP, RPP
President
Ontario Professional Planners Institute



Sustaining the heart of the city: Rethinking social and physical infrastructure investments in the public realm

BY LEELA VISWANATHAN, RPP, FCIP

**“...the interconnectedness
of physical and social
infrastructure...”**

In 2016, OPPI's *Healthy Communities and Planning for the Public Realm: A Call to Action* report showed how the public realm is crucial to community building and placemaking. The report focused on physical infrastructure (e.g., parkland, streetscapes, multifunctional spaces, and places, etc.) while challenging planners to address safety, accessibility, and age-friendly design. But it did not mention the crucial role of social infrastructure in the public realm, namely the people, organizations, social networks, and cultural gathering spaces that support community life.

→ FURTHER READING

More recently, social and health inequities, exacerbated by COVID-19 and extreme weather events, have driven governments and organizations to rethink how they invest in social and physical infrastructure. To address these inequities and better support communities over the long term, planners can start by recognizing the interconnectedness of physical and social infrastructure and work with communities to innovate on ways to invest in the public realm.

“...gaps in social infrastructure serving Black communities in Toronto...”

COMMUNITY-LED INFRASTRUCTURE

New approaches to infrastructure investment are needed to better support community-led development in historically under-served and under-resourced Black communities. For example, *Inhibited Growth: Examining Public Investment Gaps in Black Infrastructure Needs*, a report by the Somali Centre for Culture and Recreation (SCCR), in partnership with the University of Toronto's Infrastructure Institute, revealed gaps in social infrastructure serving Black communities in Toronto.

Among the report's five recommendations is a call to policy makers to come up with a framework for social infrastructure spending that prioritizes the needs of under-served and under-resourced Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour communities and that facilitates community-led infrastructure planning. According to the SCCR, current bilateral agreements between the federal government and the provinces or territories, through the federal Investing in Infrastructure Canada program, do not include criteria that prioritize projects addressing the needs of Black, Indigenous, and other racialized communities.

Intergovernmental partnerships with under-resourced communities, and that prioritize funding to those communities, could support an equitable approach to planning and development that also invests in long-term community relationship building.

SPACES TO THRIVE

Vancouver is rethinking infrastructure investment to meet the needs of equity-denied groups and communities and to enhance the city's preparedness to respond during times of multiple crises. In December 2021, Vancouver City Council adopted the Spaces to Thrive: Vancouver Social Infrastructure Strategy Policy Framework.

The framework refers to social infrastructure as a *relationship* among physical buildings, spaces, and gathering places; services or programs associated with these spaces and places; and networks (i.e., social but also possibly technological) that link physical and social spaces where people gather. The framework focuses on services and facilities owned and funded by the city government and includes an implementation plan, financial strategy, four-year capital investment plan, and pilot projects.

The Spaces to Thrive framework has the potential to ensure infrastructure systems in the public realm are agile and sustainable over the long term and a step to fostering equity, when all too often the onus is on equity-denied people to be resilient and to fill in the gaps of what their contexts and life circumstances may not afford them, sometimes with the aid of charities.

“...social infrastructure as a relationship among physical buildings, spaces, and gathering places...”

City governments, human-service organizations, and charitable foundations must work with historically under-resourced and equity-denied communities to find ways to invest in and enhance the connection between physical infrastructure and social infrastructure. This is crucial to sustaining the public realm over the long term. City planners can help in this endeavour by looking deeper into how they can foster connections among all aspects of infrastructure – social, physical, and technological – that make up the public realm and in relation to the diversity of people who are, collectively, at the heart of the city. ♻️

City of Vancouver. (2021). *Spaces to Thrive Phase I: Vancouver Social Infrastructure Strategy Policy*. Report to the Standing Committee on City Finance and Services, from General Manager, Arts, Culture, and Community Services. <https://council.vancouver.ca/20211208/documents/cfscl.pdf>

Ontario Professional Planners Institute. (2016). *Healthy Communities and Planning for the Public Realm: A Call to Action*. <https://ontarioplanners.ca/OPPIAssets/Documents/Calls-to-Action/Healthy-Communities-and-Planning-for-the-Public-Realm.pdf>

The Somali Centre for Culture and Recreation (SCCR). (2022). *Inhibited Growth: Examining Public Investment Gaps in Black Infrastructure Needs*. Toronto: Infrastructure Institute – School of Cities, University of Toronto. https://infrastructureinstitute.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/SCCR-Brief-v4_Final.pdf

Urban Land Institute (ULI). (2021). *The Pandemic and the Public Realm: Global Innovations for Health, Social Equity, and Sustainability*. Washington, DC: Urban Land Institute. https://knowledge.uli.org/-/media/files/research-reports/2021/april-2021-uli-thepandemicandthepublicrealm_interactive.pdf



Dr. Leela Viswanathan, RPP, FCIP, is a Member of OPPI and founder and principal of Viswali Consulting. Email: leela@viswali.com

Our park, in the middle of our street?

BY ANDRIA SALLESE, RPP,
AND WILL LAMOND

→ LEARN MORE

What is public space?

“Public space” can mean many things depending on who you ask, from a highly programmed formal space, such as a public park, to an informal space, such as the parking lot of a suburban shopping mall where teenagers skateboard. For the purposes of this article, we are defining public space as municipally owned lands intended for active or passive recreation, with municipally controlled design or programming.

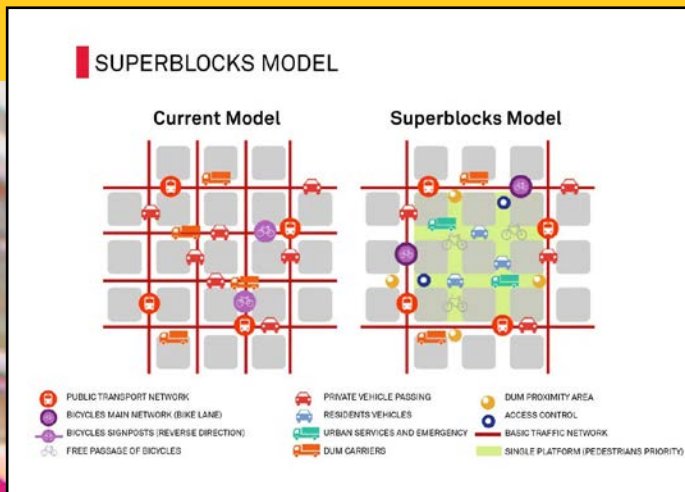


Figure 1: Diagram showing the fundamentals of the superblocks model © Ajuntament de Barcelona

The difficulty of parkland acquisition will be compounded by recent changes to Section 42 and 51.1 of the *Planning Act* enacted by Bill 109 (the *More Homes for Everyone Act*, 2022) and Bill 23 (the *More Homes Built Faster Act*, 2022), which in many cases will reduce or restrict the amount of parkland municipalities can acquire through the planning process.

So, as planners, we face a dilemma: public spaces, which in many municipalities are already scarce, are becoming harder to come by. As a result, many municipalities are having to think outside the box. Some are considering giving full parkland conveyance credit to privately owned, publicly accessible spaces (POPS). Others are looking at building “strata parks,” where a municipality retains ownership of a public space over a private encumbrance (e.g., a parking garage).

ENTER THE STREET — A PLACE, NOT JUST A SPACE

If an outside-the-box approach is required, planners may want to look inside the box of the municipal right-of-way (ROW). One way to increase public space where space is at a premium (e.g., urbanized spaces and places) is to re-examine the function of the ROW.

Traditionally, the street has been considered a space primarily reserved for the movement of people and goods. However, this is a relatively modern notion. The concept of the street pre-dates the car by thousands of years. For most of humanity, the street was not just space for movement and circulation but a *place*: for commerce, for politics, and for social movements. It was a place both of revolution and of mundane daily life, mostly undertaken on foot.¹ Gradually, as the popularity of the car increased, along with car speeds, non-motorists were pushed to the edges of the street’s ROW onto narrow sidewalks, if any.

Fortunately, this line of thought is changing. In cities all over the world, temporary COVID-19 measures transferred space normally allocated to cars and set it aside for pedestrians and cyclists (to varying degrees of success). Some cities have gone further and begun formalizing the transition of the street to public space.

Can you conjure a park out of thin air? Maybe not, but what about out of asphalt? As opportunities to provide municipally owned public spaces become scarcer and more expensive, planners need to start thinking outside the box regarding where to find places for people to gather, socialize, recreate, and relax. Land-use and parks planners, whose focus typically ends at property lines, should start looking at the street as an untapped resource for providing public places and spaces.

THE NEED FOR PUBLIC SPACE

Planners and political decision-makers across Ontario, particularly in municipalities facing intense development pressures, face a constant quandary: how do we provide enough public space for residents?

Access to outdoor spaces for recreation, leisure, solitary contemplation, or socialization is essential for public well-being and health. The COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in the periods of lockdown and restricted travel, made this especially clear: the ability to get outside and around, either on our own or with other people, proved invaluable.

Despite the importance of public space to the health of our communities, it can be a long and challenging process for municipalities to acquire new parkland or open space, even with the formal tools available to them under the *Planning Act*. A municipality can acquire new parkland conveyed through the development process, purchase or expropriate land at a high cost, or hope that a benefactor donates or bequeaths land for a park.



02



03

“For most of humanity, the street was not just space for movement and circulation but a place...”

As of 2015, 60 per cent of Barcelona’s public space was devoted to the car. The city had some of the highest levels of air pollution in Spain, and the considerable number of impermeable surfaces had led to an extreme heat island effect where the temperature in the city could be up to 7.5°C higher than the surrounding area.

“[Barcelona’s] superblocks project has had a measurable positive impact on public health.”

To combat this and help with climate change mitigation and adaptation, the city government of Barcelona embarked on an ambitious journey to restructure the urban fabric to reduce car use, open up more space for public life and green infrastructure, and thus increase its sustainability and liveability. Under its Urban Mobility Plan (2019–2024), the city intends to implement a series of *superilles* (“superblocks”), groups of Barcelona’s iconic chamfered-corner square blocks in which through-traffic is prohibited in the interior streets and car speed limited to 10 kilometres per hour. The limiting of traffic opens up space for pedestrians, public life, and green spaces for the neighbourhood within the superblock area.

The superblocks project has had a measurable positive impact on public health. The implementation of the Sant Antoni superblock in Barcelona’s historic

Eixample district has resulted in a drastic drop in certain air pollutants (–25 per cent nitrogen dioxide and –17 per cent PM10 fine particulate matter).

In 2015, the City of Montreal launched the Programme d’implantation de rues piétonnes et partagées (PIRPP or Program for the Implementation of Pedestrian and Shared Streets). The PIRPP is city-run and funded: Montreal’s transportation department takes proposals from the city’s devolved borough governments for potential intervention sites in their jurisdiction and selects a number per year to support. The selection of intervention sites has a high consultation threshold, and many stakeholders are involved in both the proposal/selection and implementation parts of the process, including the boroughs and their councils, community groups, businesses, religious groups, and individual borough residents.

Intervention sites are chosen based on their pedestrianization potential with a focus on vulnerable populations: elderly, children, and those with disabilities. Target areas for pedestrianization include neighbourhood cores whose focal point is the front of a church; streets with existing commercial activity, character, or other qualities making them tourist destinations; and streets between or bordering a park or a public building (e.g., school, market, museum).

Under the PIRPP, there are variations in the type of intervention and the degree to

which pedestrians are prioritized under them. The plan defines four types:

Temporary or seasonal pedestrian streets, which are closed to vehicular traffic for periods of time (hours, weekend, months) at a cheap but recurring cost;

Permanent pedestrian streets, which come at a greater up-front cost;

Placettes or small squares, where street parking and car lanes are permanently or temporarily encroached on to increase pedestrian space, while sometimes retaining a lane for the circulation of cyclists, buses, or other vehicles at low speeds; and shared streets, which can be used by all modes of transport, but where pedestrians are favoured and vehicular speeds are limited to 20 kilometres per hour.

“The PIRPP has been highly successful, with 35 sites across the City of Montreal that have been transformed into pedestrian or shared streets as of 2022.”

The implementation stage is comprised of three phases over three years, with the City of Montreal providing funding for partial to full costs. In the first phase, a temporary installation is implemented, and its success and impact on the community are assessed. In the second phase, the temporary measures may be improved, while planning



Figure 2: The central intersection of the Sant Antoni superblock after its transformation to public space

Figure 3: St. Denis Street, downtown Montreal, pedestrianized

Figure 4: Chemin Gilford, post-pedestrianization
© Mélanie Dusseault/City of Montreal

and consultation for a permanent installation continues. In the third phase, permanent measures are implemented.²

The PIRPP has been highly successful, with 35 sites across the City of Montreal that have been transformed into pedestrian or shared streets as of 2022.

ADVANTAGES OF REPURPOSING STREETS

Municipalities that choose to rethink the function of its streets for the purposes of providing public space will certainly have to contend with many complexities, such as access for loading and emergency vehicles, snow removal, and potential political backlash. But as land values and development pressures in Ontario grow, it is important for planners to make decision-makers aware of tools available to help municipalities achieve a network of dynamic and flexible public spaces.

Community improvement plans are already used for streetscape improvement projects and can help fund pedestrianization projects. Official plans and secondary plans generally designate both the street network, including ROW widths, as well as land uses and activities lining streets to ensure streets are co-located with uses that activate them.

Beyond the inherent social benefits, repurposing ROWs partially or entirely for public space can have practical advantages for municipalities:

Expediency – Street ROWs are already in public ownership at the local municipal level (or upper-tier level, in some cases). A lengthy

conveyance or acquisition process, through the development process, is not necessarily required. Streets account for a significant proportion of municipally owned land. For example, a municipality has 50 kilometres of streets within its downtown core. At an average ROW width of 25 metres, those streets represent 125 hectares of publicly owned land.


Flexibility – ROWs offer many options for programming (e.g., street furniture, patios, performance spaces) that can be impermanent and respond to the needs of users, providing municipalities with opportunities to experiment with programming before finding more permanent solutions.

Cost – The advantages listed above could contribute to significantly lower costs in implementing new public spaces. In repurposing a street for public space, a municipality may not need to acquire new land or negotiate land conveyances. The municipality can also experiment with programming in the public space at a variety of price points.

Connectivity – Streets are linear and provide the opportunity to connect other public spaces. Additionally, streets offer a built-in permeability with the land uses lining them, whether commercial, employment, institutional, or residential.

NEXT STEPS IN THE ONTARIO CONTEXT

Barcelona and Montreal show that the street-to-public-space concept can be put

into practice successfully. Planners and municipalities in Ontario can use a number of tools already in place to take an outside-, or inside-, the-box approach to providing public spaces. Increasing and improving access to municipally owned public spaces and places cannot happen in isolation and requires political will and a combined effort of many champions, including but not limited to planners, local municipalities and the public, members of council, as well as local business improvement areas and associated businesses. 

¹Fyfe, Nicholas (ed). *Images of the Street: Planning, Identity, and Control in Public Space*. Routledge, New York (1998).

²City of Montreal. Programme D'implantation de Rues Piétonnes et Partagées [Program of Implementation of Pedestrian and Shared Streets]. August 29, 2016. http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/pls/portal/docs/PAGE/TRANSPORTS_FR/MEDIA/DOCUMENTS/PROGRAMME_RUES_PIETONNES_2017.PDF



Andria Sallese, BES, MPA, MCIP, RPP, is a Member of OPPI and a practice lead with WSP in the urban and community planning group.

Will Lamond is a Candidate Member of OPPI and a project planner with WSP in the urban and community planning group.



Region of Waterloo connects Grand River Transit's light rail line to famous apple fritters with Market Trail

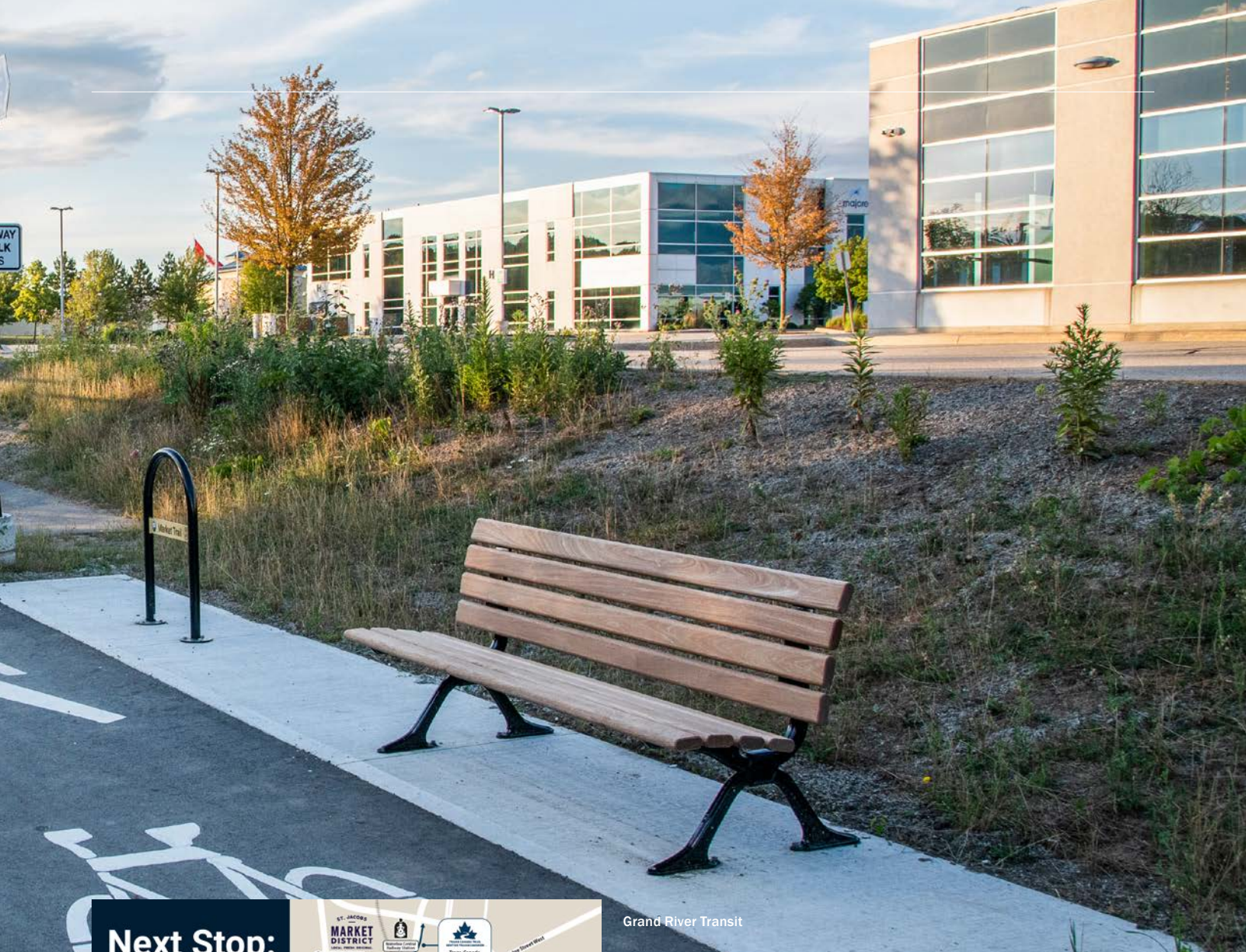
BY KEVAN MARSHALL

Last summer, the Region of Waterloo and Grand River Transit (GRT) officially opened Market Trail – a new 1.5-kilometre multi-use pathway that connects light rail transit directly to St. Jacobs Farmers' Market and key employment areas.

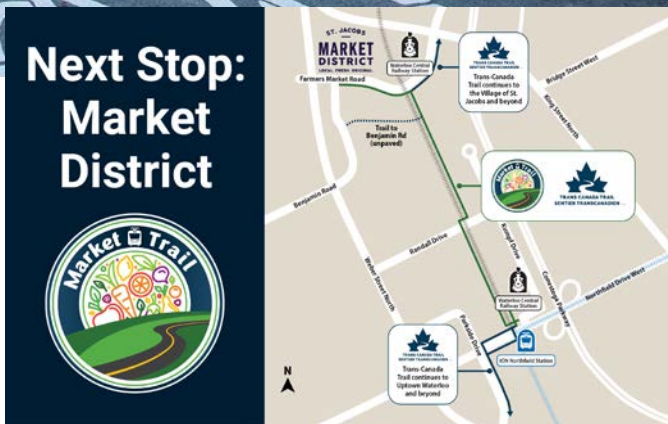
This new, all-ages-and-abilities, all-season, shared-use trail runs along the Region of Waterloo-owned rail corridor from GRT's Northfield ION LRT station in the City of Waterloo to Farmer's Market Road in the Township of Woolwich. The trail is winter maintained to support sustainable transportation and access to transit year-round.

Market Trail features lighting designed to support decorative installations, benches, and bike racks with additional space for a future bike and scooter share program the Region of Waterloo and cities of Cambridge, Kitchener, and Waterloo are launching in 2023. To support workers, residents, and visitors accessing the market, surrounding hotels and other destinations, the Region of Waterloo

"...a world-class initiative that supports the Region of Waterloo's Strategic Plan priorities..."



Grand River Transit



built access ramps to connect key employers to the rail corridor and a connection to Woolwich's multi-use trail network.

This first stage of Market Trail is a unique “Rail with Trail” project that gives residents and visitors more ways to travel across the Region of Waterloo and access GRT services. This section of the railway is used primarily by Waterloo Central Railway, which offers historic passenger train rides to the Village of St. Jacobs and Town of Elmira from its stations next to the LRT line and market.

A second stage (approximately 200 metres) of Market Trail is underway to connect the first stage to the City of Waterloo’s multi-

use path network. Once complete, this will serve as the realigned Trans-Canada Trail route between Waterloo and Woolwich. Trail users will be able to travel from Downtown Kitchener and Uptown Waterloo to the Village of St. Jacobs and beyond along a dedicated off-road active transportation corridor with multiple connections to bus and light rail.

“Market Trail received unanimous support from residents and visitors who participated in the public consultation program and other pop-up information sessions...”

Market Trail is a world-class initiative that supports the Region of Waterloo’s Strategic Plan priorities of growing a thriving economy, offering more environmentally sustainable travel choices for residents while reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving connections between urban and rural communities.




“This project was a collaborative success...”

Market Trail will help:

- Improve high-frequency transit access for residents and workplaces near the corridor;
- Increase transit ridership outside of traditional peak periods (like weekend market days);
- Mitigate traffic and parking demand on market days;
- Realign the Trans-Canada Trail route to make it easier to travel sustainably between the region’s urban and rural communities; and
- Support local businesses, local tourism, and access to local food.

This project was a collaborative success with funding from the Government of Canada’s (\$1,124,000) Public Transit Infrastructure Fund (PTIF) and Public Transit Infrastructure Stream (PTIS) through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure (ICIP), as well as the Government of Ontario (\$940,000), Trans-Canada Trail funding, and the Region of Waterloo (\$750,000), totalling approximately \$2.85 million for design and construction of Stage 1.

Market Trail received unanimous support from residents and visitors who participated in the public consultation program and other pop-up information sessions hosted at St. Jacobs Market. The City of Waterloo, Township of Woolwich, Waterloo Central Railway, the St. Jacobs Market District, and other key employers were valuable contributors and champions of this initiative.

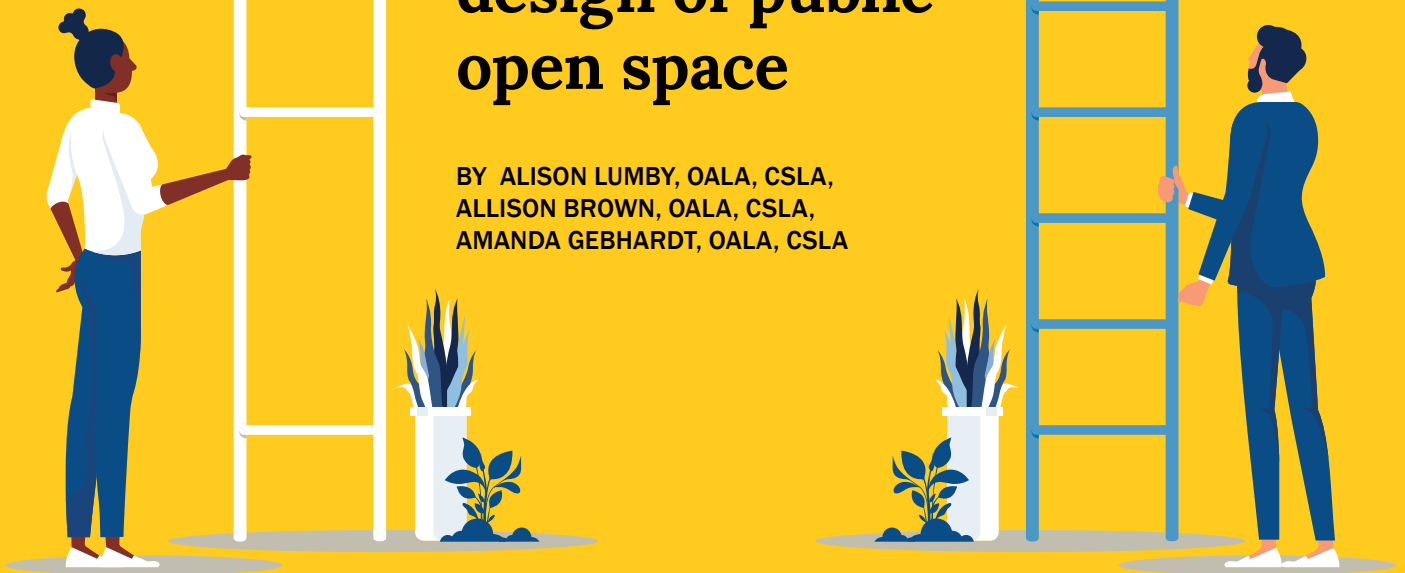
For more information on Market Trail and how the Region of Waterloo and GRT invest in transit-supportive active transportation projects, subscribe to aroundtheRegion.ca and visit grt.ca/PTIF. 



Kevan Marshall is a Pre-Candidate Member of OPPI and principal planner with the Region of Waterloo’s Transportation Demand Management and Transit Integration programs.

Equity in planning and design of public open space

BY ALISON LUMBY, OALA, CSLA,
ALLISON BROWN, OALA, CSLA,
AMANDA GEBHARDT, OALA, CSLA



Equity is by definition freedom from bias or favoritism. It is vital to recognize that equity is not the same as equality. Achieving equity requires directing more resources and responding to voices of those having a greater level of need, rather than offering a blanket level of service.

As professionals, we all need to do the work to acknowledge that our experiences – professional and personal – shape our perspective and can form unconscious biases, and that it is imperative that we recognize that our own personal values influence us in our professional lives. We need to be self-aware. At their foundation, inclusive, equitable places address specific needs, and as needs vary based on demographic, neighbourhood, geography, site, culture – so should our approach and design response.

FINDING BETTER APPROACHES

Approaches to planning and engaging with communities are changing to rectify inequities, providing safe, welcoming spaces targeted to reach those who will most benefit. It is important to recognize that equity-deserving communities often face barriers that extend beyond physical barriers to include social, economic, and cognitive challenges.

“...our own personal values influence us in our professional lives.”

Inequity can stem from not feeling safe and welcome based on gender, race, physical ability, or other intersecting identities. Social factors and community expectations can also impact how people experience public spaces, including interaction with other users and being subject to suspicion and hostility when using a public space. Common programmatic barriers to use related to public spaces and trails include access to amenities such as washrooms, potable water, rest areas, and seating options, as well as signage and/or information not provided in a language understood by the user.

As professionals, we often run into real-world complexities and barriers to achieving equity. We're working within existing infrastructure, budgets are limited, and we may face planning and policy constraints. It can be difficult to advocate for actions that will elevate equity-deserving communities when faced with opposition from those with influential privilege. It is important that we champion establishing priorities based on outcomes that have the greatest impact for unique needs prioritized by the community we're working with.

REMOVING BARRIERS

Our goal through planning and design is to remove barriers to accessing parks, open spaces, and natural areas and invite community members into the process of developing and reimagining our public open space – then using and enjoying those spaces freely.

Provision of open space is a common barrier to equity. At a policy level, designation of open space is often characterized by geographic area and standardized



programming per population – rather than amenity-based considerations. Two parks could, for example, have parity in terms of size, location, and designation but be inequitable in how well they serve the needs of the local community in terms of programming, layout, and facilities. Provision disparity became a stark reality during the COVID-19 pandemic for those who didn't have personal outdoor open space at home.

Having convenient, accessible open spaces is critical – there is limited benefit of open space 10 blocks away if there are barriers that prevent or deter some users from reaching that space. We see that it is time to rethink the open space paradigm and start to think of open space holistically. What if we designed those 10 blocks to be open space?

PUBLIC SPACE AS A NETWORK

We believe public space provision should be planned as an interconnected network. This means encompassing all the spaces that connect our parks and plazas – our streets and public realm, trails, and really any space that has the potential for people to use freely to spend time outside. The emphasis on the connective spaces and all those gems of underutilized space in our towns and cities is vital to the conversation around equity.

“...equity-deserving communities often face barriers that extend beyond physical barriers...”

Overcoming the barrier of provision equity means rethinking how we classify, consult, design, and consider our public realm and open spaces. Provision equity requires deeper understanding of community needs and challenges and an “on the ground” assessment of opportunities.

When we take on consultation for design of public open space with an equity mindset, we start by challenging traditional approaches and explore how

“Overcoming the barrier of provision equity means re-thinking how we classify, consult, design, and consider our public realm and open spaces.”

employing equitable engagement, planning, and design tactics can build better public spaces. Wide audience engagement is, or at least is becoming, synonymous with the equitable planning and design process for public spaces.

With each unique community we work in, our role as planning and design professionals is to acknowledge, discuss, and uncover the needs of the community by working directly with those with lived experiences in that community to ensure their needs are given weight in decision-making.

There can be challenges in seeking meaningful input from a full cross-section of potential users. Managing the “loudest voice in the room” – literally or figuratively – is often a principal issue where certain demographics are either under or overrepresented.

“Provision disparity became a stark reality during the COVID-19 pandemic...”

ENGAGEMENT

What can we do to help build equity into the consultation process? We can advocate for expanding or rethinking engagement approaches. In public space projects, we should enable a consultation process that is enjoyable and something for people to get excited about. We want our communities to feel heard and empowered and to have a sense of ownership in the places we create. We want to enjoy working with them, and we want our clients to enjoy and be proud of the work we do together. This means meeting the community where they are and getting to know who they are.

Most of us will be familiar with a wide variety of engagement techniques – everything from “high tech” digital platforms to “high touch” tangible solutions

where we are in person in the community (think post-it notes on the wall). Most projects benefit from a tailored combination of techniques.

During the pandemic, we saw the exponential rise of online engagement and a wide variety of tools and platforms. We certainly had projects see unprecedented levels of survey participation, and we’ve also had plenty of participants encounter issues with the technology and express a desire to get back to in-person engagement.

We’ve hosted events where imaginative play games with groups of school children – running through imagery forests, conquering mountains – were translated into an adventure playground. We have also worked with community groups and First Nations for guidance regarding the use and stewardship of lands and resources; pertinent cultural traditions, for instance, medicinal and permaculture planting strategies; educational components; and representation of different cultures, such as inclusion of Indigenous languages on signage. These priorities were identified by asking questions about how and to what extent they wish to be engaged. What key processes or outcomes did they want to collaborate in? What specific aspects of the project they would like to be kept informed of? This will vary by project and by community.

In any scenario, the basic principle we like to follow is go to the people – don’t expect them to come to you. As consultants, we are generally working to support our clients as the relationship manager and always thinking beyond the immediate project scope to how the relationship will continue to inform public spaces through future projects. We need to be mindful that often we are asking for time out of people’s busy lives to engage in the process. For many, we are also working to overcome hesitancy to participate, because they have never felt listened to or had their hopes and fears given real consideration in the past.

“What if we designed those 10 blocks to be open space?”

Starting the question of how they would like to be engaged requires flexibility in project schedules and adaptability to different methods to engage with diverse groups – there is a conversation we should all be having with our clients around what it takes to achieve meaningful engagement and the implications on project scope, timelines, and fees.

THE HEART OF WHAT MATTERS

The way in which we engage is also of great importance. We start by acknowledging our own experiences and perspectives. We acknowledge divergent views and recognize that individual perspective has value in the planning and design process. Then, tailored to the audience and forum, we ask questions and actively listen to get to the heart of what matters most to participants.

In human nature, we often find it hard to express what

“In any scenario, the basic principle we like to follow is go to the people – don’t expect them to come to you.”

it is we want. We also cannot expect participants to know what is possible – that is our job. Starting the conversation around lived experiences and the barriers they face can help to get dialogue flowing. We have found that asking, “What are you afraid may happen in this space?” is a powerful and conversation-evoking balance to “What do you hope for?”

Diversify engagement and be receptive to new perspectives and opportunities. By bringing all the perspectives gained through the consultation process, together with our knowledge and expertise and that of our clients and stakeholders, we are better enabled to realize equitable design of our public open spaces. 



Alison Lumby, OALA, CSLA, CMLI, is design lead manager, landscape architecture and urban design at WSP. **Allison Good**, OALA, CSLA, PMP, RHFAC PROFESSIONAL, is senior manager, Ontario and Atlantic Canada, landscape architecture and urban design at WSP. **Amanda Gebhardt**, BLA, OALA, CLSA, is manager, landscape architecture at WSP.

“...diversity not only in terms of demographic characteristics but also of viewpoint.”



INTERVIEW

Moving the planning profession forward on diversity, equity, and inclusion principles

When OPPI developed its current strategic plan, *INSPIRE: OPPI Strategic Plan 2025*, an important change was made to the profession’s values – “Progressive” was replaced with “Equitable: Embodying diversity of all kinds within the profession and the communities we serve.”

With that came a strong determination to actively incorporate “equitable” into everything OPPI does, including thoughtful commitments to “diversity of all kinds,” which means diversity not only in terms of the various intersecting identities we each carry but also of viewpoint.

“OPPI has responded to a number of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) principles, Indigenous truth and reconciliation, and systemic racism issues organizationally and within the planning profession,” says Andria Leigh, RPP, Director of Planning and Growth

for the Town of Innisfil, an OPPI Council member, and former co-chair of the Anti-Black Racism in Planning Task Force. “*INSPIRE: OPPI Strategic Plan 2025* intentionally focused on DEI through the inclusion of a new equitable value and the incorporation of DEI principles into each of the five strategic directions.”

“Meeting that commitment includes hiring Miranda Jimmy to be OPPI’s first-ever Director of Reconciliation and Social Justice,” says Susan Wiggins, OPPI’s Executive Director. “Her role is to embody OPPI’s commitment to DEI within the planning profession and broader planning community.”

Jimmy will lead the implementation of the approved recommendations from two OPPI task force reports: the *Indigenous Planning Perspectives Task Force Report* and the *Anti-Black Racism in Planning Task Force Report*. In both reports, recommendations were organized into timelines of short, medium, and ongoing actions.

“There’s a lot of overlap in the ideas that were brought forward in both of the task force reports,” says Jimmy, listing representation in the profession,

supporting students to consider planning as a learning path, and the need for education amongst non-racialized planners. “But how those things will be approached might be different.”

“...recommendations for moving forward respectfully and in collaboration...”

INDIGENOUS PLANNING PERSPECTIVES

The *Indigenous Planning Perspectives Task Force Report* was published in June 2019, the result of a process that began in 2018 to establish context and outline recommendations for moving forward respectfully and in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples, communities, and planners.¹

A key point of progress was the 2021 creation of the Indigenous Perspectives and Planning Committee (IPPC), a working group established to guide implementation of the recommendations.

“The work of IPPC has focused primarily on building institutional capacity within the organization through the following initiatives: providing cultural training for OPPI staff and Council; providing continuing education cultural training opportunities for membership; aligning OPPI’s management practices with the Progressive Aboriginal Relations certification program of the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business; and hiring a Director of Reconciliation and Social Justice,” says Calvin Brook, Principal of Brook McIlroy, OPPI Council member, and IPPC co-chair with Stephanie Burnham, a planner with Dillon Consulting.

“Now that Miranda has joined OPPI, we are focused on advocacy and implementation of the task force recommendations to build strong working relationships with Indigenous organizations and communities,” says Brook. “This is an exciting time for OPPI and provides IPPC with the means to carry through on the action items identified through the task force and the subsequent priorities identified by IPPC.”

ANTI-BLACK RACISM IN PLANNING

In October 2021, the *Anti-Black Racism in Planning Task Force Report* was released and included a number of recommendations to develop a strategy and action plan to remove systemic barriers in planning practice that perpetuate anti-Black racism against Black communities and disproportionately limit employment opportunities for, and representation of, Black planners in the planning profession.²

“The final recommendations of the *Anti-Black Racism in Planning Task Force Report* were approved by the

task force at their September 2021 meeting and aligned with OPPI’s overall strategic directions and organized into priority areas with timeframes,” says Andria Leigh. “At their October 2021 meeting, Council endorsed the final report and recommendations and requested that an implementation plan be brought back to Council for further consideration. In order for the necessary resources to be dedicated to the implementation plan, Council at their November 2021 meeting endorsed the hiring of a Director of Reconciliation and Social Justice.”

NEXT STEPS

One of Jimmy’s goals is to establish a benchmark – data collection and research into where OPPI is starting from.

“In both task forces, they talk about increasing representation,” she says. “But what is the current representation? How many students are applying to planning schools? How many are graduating? We don’t know that information.”

Research projects to provide that benchmark data may be started in the next year.

“...advocacy and implementation of the task force recommendations...”

“The establishment of the Director of Reconciliation and Social Justice position and the hiring of Miranda Jimmy recognizes the work that OPPI needs to continue to do into the future, including developing and delivering content that responds to the IPPC and Anti-Black Racism in Planning Task Force recommendations and OPPI’s overall DEI framework,” says Andria Leigh. (Y)

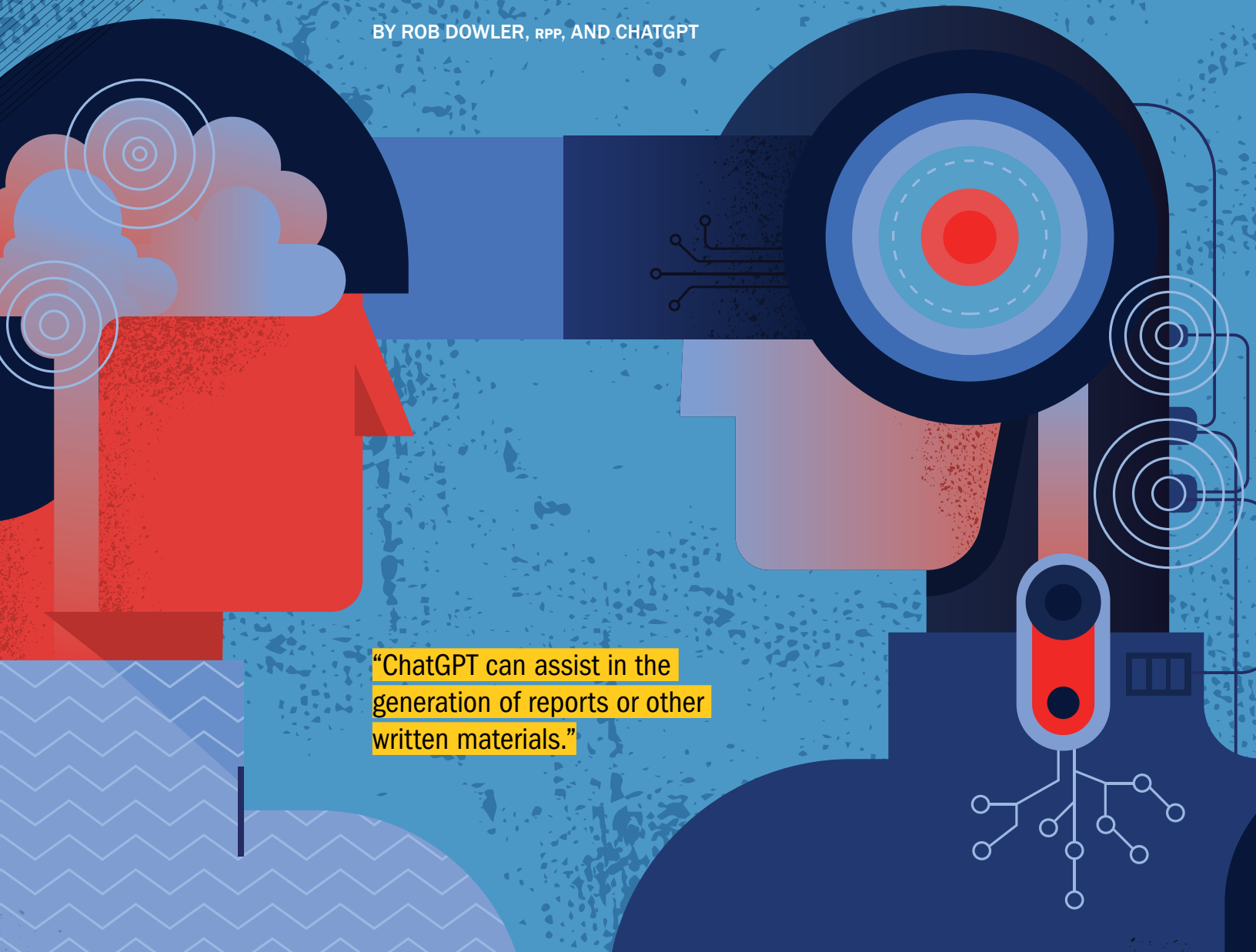
¹ 2019 *Indigenous Perspectives in Planning Task Force (IPPTF) Report*: <https://ontarioplanners.ca/inspiring-knowledge/indigenous-planning-perspectives>

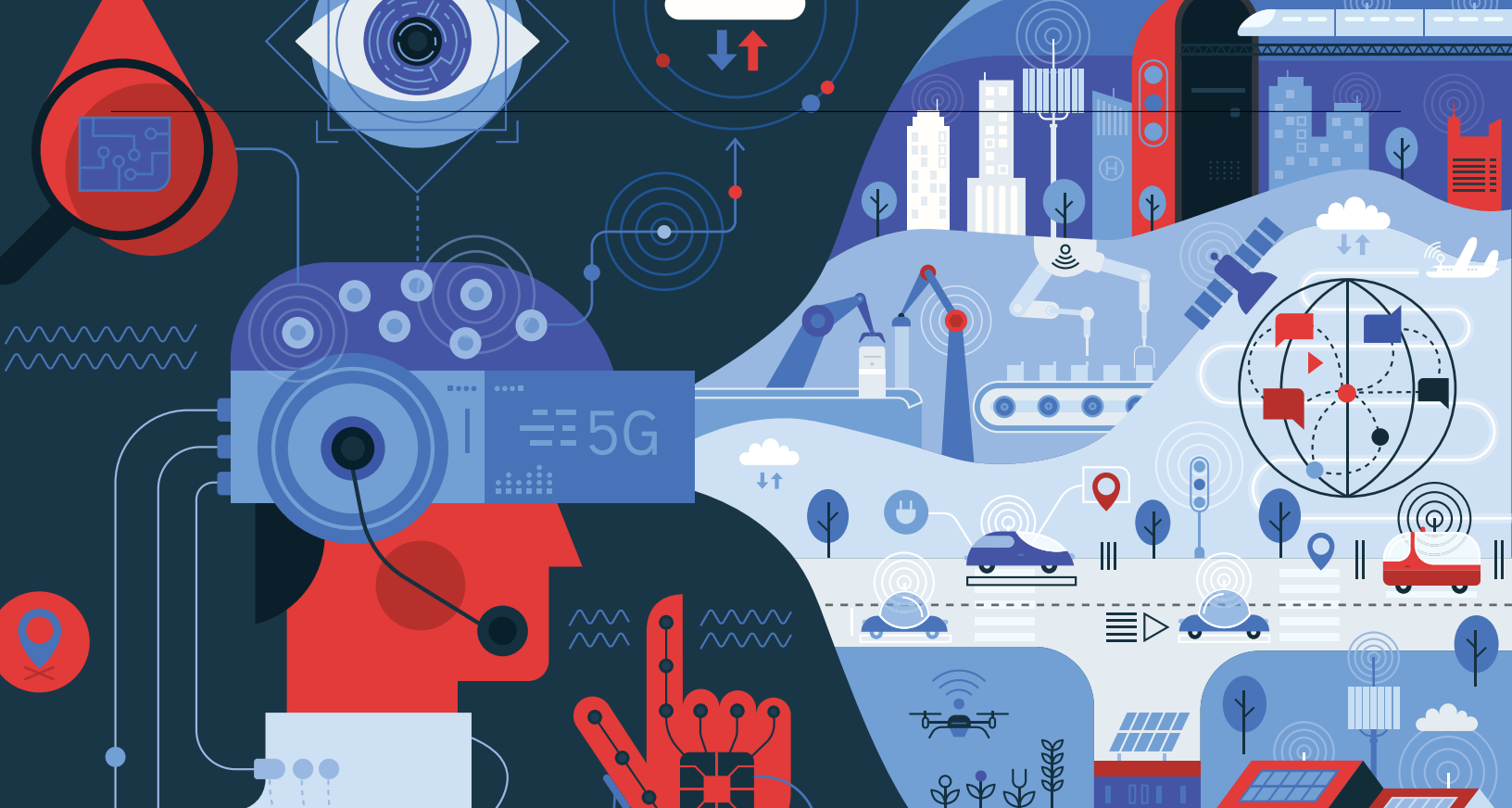
² 2021 *Anti-Black Racism in Planning Task Force (ABRP TF) Report*: <https://ontarioplanners.ca/inspiring-knowledge/anti-black-racism-in-planning-task-force>

Artificial intelligence and urban and regional planning: Opportunity, threat, or both?

BY ROB DOWLER, RPP, AND CHATGPT

“ChatGPT can assist in the generation of reports or other written materials.”





Unless you were living under a rock in December 2022, you probably saw a headline related to the launch of ChatGPT. An article in *Fortune* called it “the most important news event of 2022”¹ and a writer in *The Atlantic* suggested ChatGPT will, “kill the student essay” and “transform academia.”² Various podcast pundits have suggested that it could spell the end of gainful employment for “creative class” employees in professions like journalism, legal services, real estate, finance, and, yes, even urban and regional planning.

ChatGPT, like Bard, its Google competitor, relies on a subsection of machine learning called large language models (LLMs). LLMs are very large networks, which are trained by going through billions of pages of text, while looking for relationships between words.

In January 2023, Microsoft announced it was in talks to potentially increase its investment in ChatGPT by USD \$11 billion and planned to integrate it into its Bing search engine as well as its cloud and supercomputing platforms.

WHAT IS CHATGPT AND HOW MIGHT IT BE USED IN PLANNING?

ChatGPT is a variant of the GPT (Generative Pretrained Transformer) language model developed by OpenAI. It is specifically designed to generate text in a conversational style, which means it is able to produce responses that are more natural and coherent when used in a chat or messaging setting.

In the field of urban and regional planning, ChatGPT can assist in the generation of reports or other written materials. For example, ChatGPT could be used to generate drafts of planning documents or reports, which could then be reviewed and edited by human planners. This could save time and resources by automating the initial drafting process, while still allowing for human review and input.

Another potential use of ChatGPT could be to improve communication and collaboration within the planning process. For example, it could be used to generate routine responses to questions or comments from the public during public meetings or online forums. This could help planners to engage with community members and stakeholders more efficiently, allowing them to gather input and feedback on planning proposals more quickly and easily.

ChatGPT could also be used to generate responses to questions or comments from planners or other professionals, helping to facilitate more productive and efficient discussions within planning teams. By using ChatGPT, planners could save time and effort that would otherwise be spent typing out responses to circulated applications, allowing them to focus on other important tasks related to the planning process.

“It is important to note that ChatGPT is not a replacement for human planners, but rather a tool that can assist them in their work.”

It is important to note that ChatGPT is not a replacement for human planners, but rather a tool that can assist them in their work. While ChatGPT can generate responses that are coherent and natural, it is still a machine learning model and may not always produce responses that are completely accurate or appropriate. Therefore, it is important for planners to use ChatGPT in conjunction with their own expertise and judgment, rather than relying on it entirely.

THE RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH AI TOOLS IN PLANNING

Several risks are associated with the use of ChatGPT and other similar AI tools like the image-generating Dall-E2, Midjourney, Chinchilla, or Bard/LaMDA in professions like planning. Some of the main risks include:

- **Bias:** AI tools, including ChatGPT, can be biased if they are trained on biased data. This could lead to skewed outputs or decisions, which could have negative consequences for communities and individuals.
- **Lack of accountability:** AI tools can make decisions or take actions without human intervention, which means there may be no clear accountability for their actions. This could be a problem if an AI tool makes a decision that has negative consequences.
- **Lack of transparency:** AI tools can be difficult to understand and explain, which means it may be difficult for humans to understand how they are making decisions or taking actions. This lack of traceability could be problematic if an AI tool is making decisions that have significant impacts on communities or individuals.
- **Security risks:** AI tools, including ChatGPT, can be vulnerable to security risks such as hacking or data breaches. This could have serious consequences if sensitive or confidential information is compromised.
- **Job displacement:** The use of AI tools in planning and other professions could potentially lead to job displacement if certain tasks are automated. This could have negative consequences for workers who may lose their jobs as a result.

Overall, it is important for planners and other professionals to carefully consider the risks associated with the use of ChatGPT and other AI tools and to take steps to mitigate these risks as much as possible. This might include measures such as ensuring AI tools are trained on diverse and unbiased data, developing clear accountability mechanisms, and taking steps to ensure the security and transparency of AI systems.

“AI tools, including ChatGPT, can be biased if they are trained on biased data.”


HOW CAN PLANNERS KEEP UP WITH AI TOOLS?

The best way to understand the capabilities and limitations of AI tools is to take them for a test drive.³ In fact, that’s what I did when preparing this article.

The second and third sections of this article were written by ChatGPT based on prompts which I supplied and refined. To mitigate the risks identified by my electronic co-author, I reviewed its content carefully. While the writing is fairly anodyne, I found that, with a few edits, it was sufficiently balanced and accurate, so that I was prepared to share my byline with a bot.

I’m hopeful that AI tools can be useful in taking the drudgery out of routine tasks (like preparing draft responses to routine information requests, compiling policy inventories, writing up jurisdictional

scans, or summarizing literature).⁴ But for higher-order work (like options generation, risk assessment, quality assurance, professional attestation), I will prefer to rely on living, breathing colleagues.

And I’ll continue to encourage students and new planners to always be honing their bias-detectors and to be on the lookout for the tells that separate “sponsor content,” “free-search,” or “bot-o-pinions” from the genuine articles of planning evidence that can form the basis for effective decision-making in the public realm. 

Postscript: This article was penned mostly in December 2022 using chatGPT3. To illustrate how fast AI is moving, while the article being made ready for publication, chatGPT4 was launched, Microsoft integrated it into its Bing search engine and the co-pilot feature of Office. Most recently, the UK released a white paper titled “AI regulation: a pro-innovation approach” while 1,100 signatories in the US wrote an open letter calling for a six-month pause in AI development while governance issues are sorted out.

Read more: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ai-regulation-a-pro-innovation-approach/white-paper>
<https://futureoflife.org/open-letter/pause-giant-ai-experiments>

¹ Alan Murray and David Meyer (2022). *Fortune*. https://fortune.com/2022/12/12/openai-chatgpt-biggest-news-event-of-2022/?utm_source=email&utm_medium=newsletter&utm_campaign=ceo-daily&utm_content=2022121612pm

² Stephen Marche (2022). The College Essay is Dead. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2022/12/chatgpt-ai-writing-college-student-essays/672371>

³ Research versions of ChatGPT are available at: <https://chat.openai.com/auth/login>

⁴ In a recent Working Paper for the National Bureau of Economic Research, Korinek (2023) identifies 25 cases where LLMs are becoming useful in economics and other disciplines (eg. ideation, writing, background research, data analysis, coding, and mathematical derivations). See: https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w30957/w30957.pdf



Rob Dowler, ICD.D., RPP, MCIP, is a Member of OPPI Council and served for 13 years as a policy ADM in the cabinet office and as corporate chief strategist for enterprise IT in the Ontario government. Since retiring from the OPS, Rob has been teaching in the planning programs at Toronto Metropolitan University and University of Toronto and is a consultant to and keen supporter of various Indigenous and local charities.

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The signage and results of one Daily School Route (DSR), an enhanced approach to active school travel that creates active transportation systems for kids. © Civicplan

“...the percentage of children walking and cycling fell from 62 per cent to less than half.”

Safer streets for students create healthier neighbourhoods for everyone

BY PAUL SHAKER, RPP

Neighbourhood schools are typically centrepieces of their respective communities, and they are focal points for travel twice a day for children and parents. This movement between home and school also links community planning with public health in the context of active transportation and physical activity. However, while some kids walk or wheel to school, many others make the trip by car.

In fact, fewer and fewer students are walking or cycling to school. From 1986–2011, the rate at which Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) students 11 to 13 years of age were driven to school

doubled, according to a Metrolinx study. At the same time, the percentage of children walking and cycling fell from 62 per cent to less than half.

Why is this important? We know exercise is a critical part of the school day because it helps optimize brain health, including cognitive, mental, social, and physical health. A child with a healthy brain is ready to learn, interact with others, and deal with stress. As walking and cycling can help achieve this, the school day really begins as soon as a child starts their journey to school and ends when they arrive home.


“...the school day really begins as soon as a child starts their journey to school and ends when they arrive home.”

While there have been many programs and initiatives aimed at increasing active school travel, success has been mixed. This is because there are many different but connected issues affecting the decision to walk/wheel to school. For example, traffic safety, street design, cycling networks, family schedules, public awareness, and distance to school all factor into a successful walk/wheel to school program. What is needed is an approach that reflects this reality.

“The goal is to see 100 per cent of students who live close enough walking or wheeling to/from school daily...”

The Daily School Route (DSR) is an enhanced approach to active school travel that creates active transportation systems for kids. The DSR sees kids as “transportation users” within their own system and creates a network of routes, called Student Streets, to help facilitate safe, effective active school travel. The goal is to see 100 per cent of students who live close enough walking or wheeling to/from school daily, regardless of age, ability, or personal circumstance, so they can experience the benefits of active transportation. Since 2020, the DSR has been introduced at 25 schools across Hamilton and more signed routes are being implemented in 2023. But this isn’t the only benefit.

Through a data-intensive engagement process, including safety hotspot mapping and an innovative draw-your-route tool, the DSR is able to look at entire city wards to capture information about the active transportation environment among several schools that are geographically co-located. With routes identified for several schools at once, necessary safety improvements are flagged to make the Student Streets safe, convenient, and attractive. When combined with ward-wide improvements, such as speed limit reductions, what results is a ward strategy to create safer streets for all residents.

The goal of the DSR is to get more kids walking and wheeling to school on a daily basis. A fundamental part of this is making streets safer and more pedestrian friendly. After all, if the current design of neighbourhood streets isn’t working for students, then it’s not working, period. 



Paul Shaker, MCIP, RPP, is a Member of OPPI and a principal with Civicplan, a program partner with the Daily School Route (DSR). For more information about the DSR, visit <https://dailyschoolroute.org>.



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INTERVIEW

Transforming youth engagement: The Cities for Youth toolkit

In summer 2022, under the supervision of Urban Minds co-founder Ryan Lo and Toronto Metropolitan University professor Dr. Pamela Robinson, RPP, Urban Minds research analyst Federico Palacios prepared the Cities for Youth toolkit, a best practices and strategies resource for youth engagement in planning.

“At Urban Minds, we want to transform youth engagement for city-building projects from being a tiresome chore into an inspiring journey,” says Patricia Menko, project coordinator and part of the strategy and design team at Urban Minds. “We are committed to changing the perception of youth as lesser, passive participants to that of youth as capable, active co-creators and encourage them to participate in planning processes.”

Drawing from the experiences of Urban Minds’ previous projects and in collaboration with 11 professionals (including planners, policy experts, students, and educators), the toolkit includes:

- Guiding principles in workshop design
- Best practices for youth engagement that are actionable
- Case studies of innovative programs and events

“We also have several toolkit guides that act as secondary resources,” says Menko. “These guides are simplified flowcharts that help explore our toolkit and locate solutions and ideas to your needs.”

The toolkit was created as a result of formal and informal conversations with Ontario planners and allied professionals working in public, private, and non-profit sectors who found youth engagement a complex, nuanced process.

“Both municipalities and private sector firms in particular have a hard time engaging youth,” says Menko. “These groups don’t know how to reach them, how to appeal to them, and how to effectively involve them. They have limited time and resources to design effective engagement initiatives or find it awkward to cultivate relationships with youth, particularly through social media.”

At the same time, youth experience barriers to participating in planning processes, such as awareness, accessibility (i.e., language, time, place), relevance, and

trust, as well as limitations such as their dependency (i.e., financial standing) and transitional life stages (i.e., education, employment, activism). Moreover, youth remain in adult-dominated and adult-designed spaces, which can make them feel intimidated and uncomfortable during traditional consultation events.

“The toolkit was created to help anyone who believes in our mission and is looking to better connect with the new generation and deliver more youth-friendly outcomes – creating cities for youth,” says Menko. “We believe that youth in any community, urban or rural, deserve just opportunities to participate in planning processes.”

“...youth in any community, urban or rural, deserve just opportunities to participate in planning processes.”

While many of the case studies are from larger Ontario municipalities, the toolkit can be used with any sized municipality and sector. In fact, Urban Minds is making conscious efforts to connect with smaller municipalities to see how they can uniquely support them with youth engagement.

“In particular, the guiding principles can support them in countering or minimizing any number of challenges that may be specific to their project and/or the youth population being engaged,” says Menko. “Essentially, we created a framework that inspires and leaves the operationalization of the work up to the planners involved.”

Urban Minds has also used the toolkit towards developing events and workshops with/for GTA high schools, Scarborough Centre for Healthy Communities, Black Architects and Interior Designers Association Canada (BAIDA), DesignTO, Park(ing) Day, City of Markham’s Markville Secondary Plan, and City of Toronto’s Jane Finch Initiative.

“...created a framework that inspires and leaves the operationalization of the work up to the planners involved...”

“Over the last year, we’ve made countless connections with planners across the country and given out physical copies of our toolkit at many events, such as the OPPI-OALA 2GETHER conference in London, ON and the Canadian Institute of Planners Elevate conference in Whistler, BC.”

Future plans include encouraging planners to indicate where and when they use the toolkit so a visual public map of impact and youth-engaged communities can be created.

Urban Minds has another program of interest to the planning profession.

“Our IUP Youth City Builders Program is a youth-led high school program equipping Toronto’s next generation of city builders and changemakers,” says Menko.

IUP Youth City Builders has three main components. Leaders Lab is a leadership training program featuring talks and workshops on urban planning, design thinking, project management, and public speaking, as well as a conference. In School Chapters, students work in teams to design and build practical, real-life projects to improve public spaces in their neighbourhoods.

“The conference is an action-packed day filled with keynote speakers, a case competition where teams brainstorm, design, and prototype solutions for real development projects in Toronto and youth networking,” says Menko. “The pandemic gave us the opportunity to craft the art of hosting events both in person and online.”


Additionally, Urban Minds’ work with BAIDA led to a two-day workshop called Stepping Stones, specifically for Black students within the Toronto District School Board.

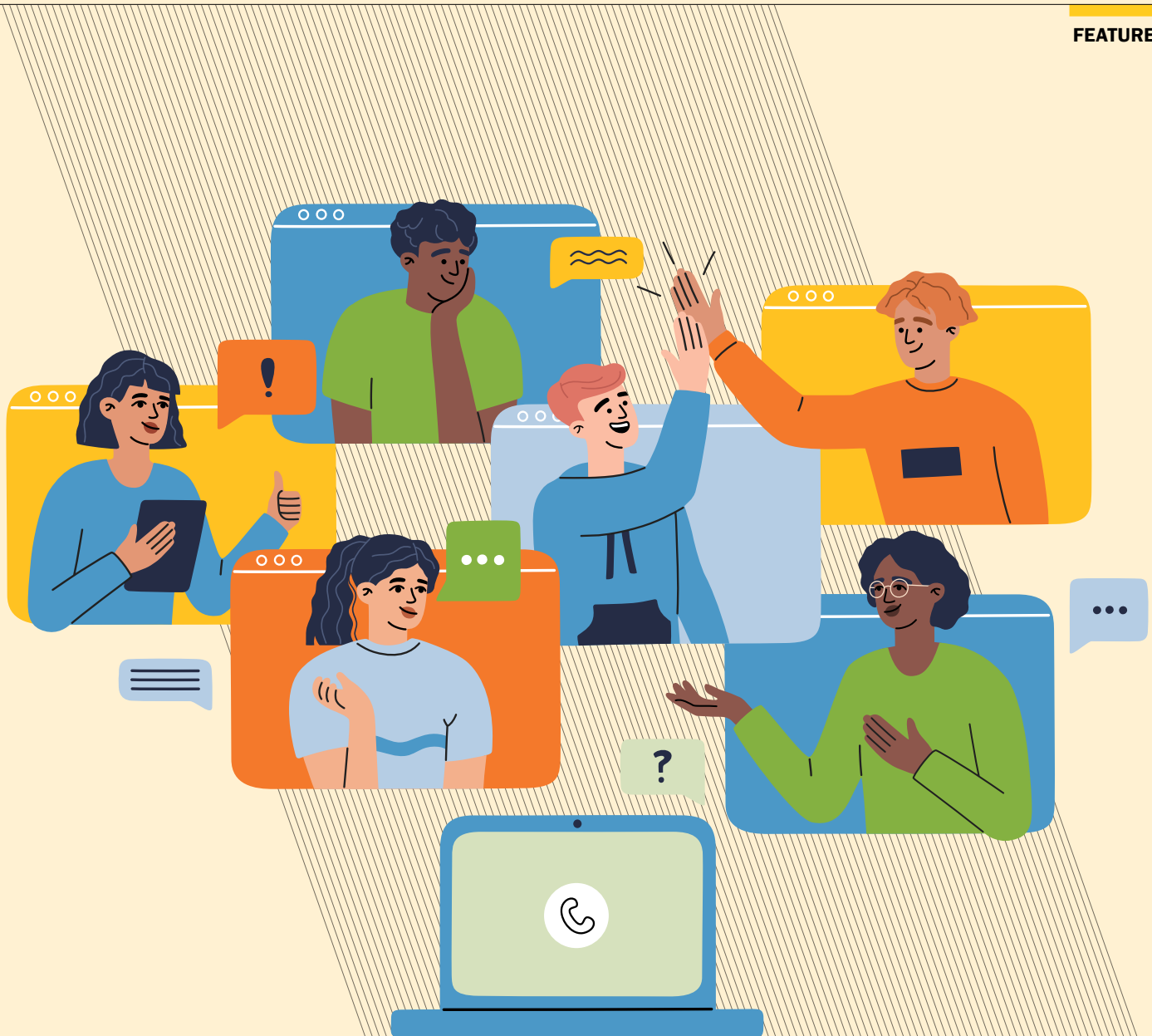
“Our goal was to spotlight Black designers, architects, interior designers, and planners and connect them with students in the Black community, so they can share their professional and personal experiences as current practitioners in the industries.”

“We also hope the toolkit assists with policy and process changes...”

What it comes down to is that Urban Minds wants to inspire change.

“We also hope the toolkit assists with policy and process changes,” says Menko. “Engaging youth is not currently a requirement in planning processes, nor is it the norm for most planning projects. However, public consultation is, and we want youth to always have a seat at the table. Perhaps our toolkit will one day help mandate youth engagement, and we’ll have broad support for this change across sectors.”

The Cities for Youth toolkit is both a physical and online resource, available online when you subscribe to the Urban Minds mailing list at <https://www.urbanminds.co>. 



Digital public participation: The complicated ways that technology platforms both help and challenge planners

BY PAMELA ROBINSON, RPP, MORGAN BOYCO, RPP, AND PETER JOHNSON

The planning profession has long used public-participation technology platforms as a way to connect with the broader public. These tools range from purpose-specific planning tools like MetroQuest to interactive mapping software like ESRI 123 and Social Pinpoint, to social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. Before the COVID-19 pandemic started, these tools were used for information sharing and dialogue but more commonly as supplemental to in-person public meetings.

But the March 2020 go-home-and-stay-home public health orders made what seemed impossible, necessary: planning public consultation and engagement meetings went exclusively online.

THE SHIFT TO VIRTUAL

Social media and digital participation platforms are often lauded for their ability to reach community members in the convenience of their own homes, workplaces, or back pockets. These digital tools promise wider reach and easier access for both the public process convenors and the participants themselves.

During the lockdown phases of the pandemic, local governments had to pivot rapidly from in-person events to virtual ones to ensure the democratic process of council continued. From committee of adjustment to site-specific development meetings, planners, elected officials, consultants, developers, and community members all fumbled through “you’re still on mute” to meet mandatory public meeting requirements.

Now as our lives and work increasingly include returning to some in-person activities, what balance will we strike between our public meetings being in-person, online, or a hybrid combination? And how will this accelerated shift to the virtual public sphere impact planning and community participation?

“..what balance will we strike between our public meetings being in-person, online, or a hybrid combination?”



THE RISE OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS

In early fall 2022 (September 22 to October 1, 2022), we conducted an environmental scan of 32 Canadian municipal governments that included the largest municipalities in each of the provinces and territories with a simple goal: to gain a big-picture overview of how municipal council meetings were being delivered across in-person, virtual, and hybrid venues. We found that 63 per cent of these municipalities were using a hybrid meeting model via a broadcast technology platform such as eScribe meetings, Zoom, or Webex.

Whether full or partially virtual, online meetings and consultation appear to be part of our toolkit moving forward. Beyond the broadcast technology that enables public meetings to be shared online, we’re seeing a rise of digital platforms that focus on more interactive public participation and engagement activities. These purpose-built tools bundle a variety of functions into one portal, offering planners a series of options for seeking public opinion and input, including functions such as polls, surveys, interactive maps, virtual post-it notes for commenting, petitions, discussion boards, participatory budgeting, and communication channels, including email newsletters. Such “Have Your Say” web pages provide

63%

“...63 per cent of these municipalities were using a hybrid meeting model via a broadcast technology platform...”

planners and other conversation convenors with an entire suite of digital tools to augment and extend more traditional in-person engagement and conduct online dialogues.

“...we’re seeing a rise of digital platforms that focus on more interactive public participation and engagement activities...”

Although some free and open-source examples do exist, many of these platforms are developed by companies marketing their subscription-based services to local and other levels of government as well as private sector proponents to solicit feedback directly from residents.

According to their own promotional literature, these platforms are built specifically to advance more deliberative decision-making and strengthen democracy. And they are growing in popularity. An ongoing review of municipalities across Canada indicates that adoption of these types of platforms is growing substantially, taken up especially by local governments. Initial research indicates that one tool – Granicus software’s EngagementHQ – is being used by more than 200 municipal governments across Canada, in addition to its use by other levels of government, local school boards, health services agencies, and Indigenous communities.¹ EngagementHQ and other platforms like it have now been taken up by hundreds of local governments

across the country to manage thousands of engagement processes.

UNDERSTANDING THE TOOLS

As the opportunities to use these tools grow, it is important for us as planners to evaluate their impacts on participation rates and how these tools change the very nature of participation itself.

The digital divide still exists, leading to barriers to participation for some of our residents. How much do we know about how these tools might make it easier for some people to participate (e.g., young people) yet harder for others, including people facing accessibility challenges, the elderly, and people with varying degrees of comfort using online tools in English? What role do these platforms play in helping planners identify who participated and, more importantly, who is missing from these civic conversations? And how do these participation platforms impact the *quality* of participation?

When done right, public engagement efforts can lead to rich in-person discussions and consensus building. Does the use of technology lead to a more transactional approach to participation? How can a tap on a smartphone application be compared to in-person presence at a town hall or even a direct email to a council member? One significant challenge ahead for planners is to determine how the method or tool used to request or facilitate participation shapes the impact and contribution of that participation as an input to decision-making.

“...planners need to be aware of and correct for the unintended consequences of digital deliberative processes.”

These platforms make it “easy” for planners to gather feedback because the technology channels public input and assembles it. What happens to community member feedback that doesn’t “fit” the channels offered? That resident could resort to other ways of providing input (e.g., 311, email, a phone call). But when the majority of the public process feedback is housed inside a public participation portal, then the outside-the-portal feedback runs the risk of being lost/ignored/not considered.

“...adoption of these types of platforms is growing substantially...”

Platform design matters. Just as we critically examine how the design of an in-person meeting, and even a purportedly deliberative process, might inadvertently exclude or marginalize certain voices, planners need to be aware of and correct for the unintended consequences of digital deliberative processes. Inadvertently or by design, might digital participation become yet another (potentially more powerful) way to simultaneously claim to empower residents through “participation” while also stifling dissent and bringing restrictive order to a process?

Some of these engagement tools make use of automation to help planners manage the volume of participation, with some platforms advertising AI-driven moderation and feedback analysis. If resident feedback is processed using AI, do we as planners have an obligation to disclose the use of this technology? *Dear resident: thank you for your feedback on the rezoning of 123 Main Street. Please note it is being reviewed first by robot.* More seriously, there are plenty of real-world examples of when government automation has led to exclusion and bias in decision-making having particularly negative impacts on equity-deserving and marginalized communities.

If we, as planners, use software platforms to help us analyze feedback from our residents, we argue that we should first ensure we understand the programming of that technology to better understand what assumptions and biases are embedded in its coding.

Building trust and sustaining meaningful, inclusive working relationships with our community members is a persistent challenge for planners. The growing suite of digital tools for engagement offers great promise. And with this opportunity, as planners ethically charged with working in the public interest, we need to build our capacity to critically evaluate these tools. 🙄

¹ Boyco, M. (2022, November 3-5). *Digital Participatory Governance: Resolving or Hard-coding Communicative Planning's Democratic Deficits* [Paper Presentation]. Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning Annual Conference, Toronto, Ontario.



Pamela Robinson, MCIP, RPP, is a Member of OPPI and a professor at the School of Urban and Regional Planning, Toronto Metropolitan University. **Morgan Boyco, MCIP, RPP**, is a Member of OPPI and a Ph.D. candidate at the School of Planning, University of Waterloo. **Peter Johnson** is an associate professor in Geography and Environmental Management, University of Waterloo.

Growth and municipal finances

BY RAY TOMALTY



“Without reforms like these, the government’s current flurry of legislative changes will only contribute to sprawl and, therefore, the long-term cost of housing...”

The phrase “growth pays for growth” is an oft heard although seriously misleading refrain, one that seems almost designed to put our minds to rest about growth. If growth pays for itself, after all, why worry about it? Despite the mesmerizing mantra, the financing of growth is becoming an increasingly “hot” topic in Ontario as the provincial government pushes through major legislative reforms that will load more of the cost of growth on municipalities who are already suffering from the long-term debt associated with previous waves of growth and the fiscal ravages of the global pandemic.

While the government is furiously pressing every button it can find on the cost of housing console, including forcing municipalities to reduce planning approval times, transferring the development charge burden on municipal shoulders, reducing opportunities for public consultation, and releasing land from the Greenbelt for housing growth, it’s missing one of the less obvious contributors to the long-term cost of growth: urban sprawl.

Growth patterns determine infrastructure needs, and those investments are essentially eternal – once the infrastructure is in the ground, municipalities are forever responsible for operating, maintaining, and replacing it. Growing in more compact ways, relying more on intensifying existing urban areas, and creating dense, mixed-use new communities can reduce long-term financial commitments and ensure better fiscal health now and for generations to come. Unfortunately, municipalities in Ontario don’t always take into account the long-term financial impacts of their growth decisions, and this critical disconnect is contributing to both higher infrastructure costs and urban sprawl in the region.

There are two main ways to achieve better linkages between growth planning and financial management: 1. strategic opportunities to integrate fiscal sustainability issues into growth management processes; 2. fine-grained restructuring of revenue instruments – including development charges,

property taxes, and user fees – to avoid inefficient subsidization of low-density development and to promote smart growth practices.

Strategic opportunities:

- Encourage municipalities to integrate life-cycle infrastructure costs into the growth planning process to achieve more efficient growth outcomes.
- Create a “fiscal impact of growth” tool that could be adapted by municipalities to model fiscal impacts of growth scenarios and other major growth planning processes.
- Require municipalities to conduct a “fiscal alignment audit” whereby municipal staff work through the potential land-use impacts of their revenue tools and compare those impacts to their growth management objectives.

“...two main ways to achieve better linkages between growth planning and financial management...”

Development charges:

- Amend the provisions of the *Development Charge Act (DCA)* to encourage municipalities to use area-specific charges for location-sensitive services such as water, wastewater, stormwater, and roads in the calculation of development charges.
- Amend the DCA to ensure all municipal services with a capital component and all costs related to those services are recoverable through development charges. The amendments should allow municipalities to formulate their development charges based on planned levels of service rather than historic service levels.
- Amend the DCA to allow municipalities to recover lost revenues associated with provincially mandated

“...the financing of growth is becoming an increasingly ‘hot’ topic in Ontario...”


development charge discounts to affordable housing by applying higher charges to other properties (rather than being transferred to property taxes).

Property Taxes:

- Amend the *Municipal Act* to require that municipalities apply the same tax rate on multi-residential properties as applied to other residential properties, end incentives given to vacant commercial and industrial units, eliminate the vacant and excess lands property tax subclasses, and require municipalities to phase out discounts to farmland awaiting development.
- Introduce a provincial tax-increment grant program to match municipal programs designed to incentivize property owners to redevelop and intensify in target areas.
- Adopt a regulation under the *Tax Increment Financing Act* to activate the Act and make tax incremental financing available to municipalities as an infrastructure funding source.

User Fees:

- Amend the *Municipal Act* to require municipalities with stormwater management services in settlement areas to introduce user charges and specify that the user fee must include a lot area or a pervious surface area (i.e., roofs, paved areas, etc.) parameter in the calculation of the charge.
- Encourage municipalities to move towards charging for parking on an hourly, progressive, or demand-responsive basis in municipal facilities, municipally operated parking lots, and on-street parking in high-demand areas, such as on main streets and commercial areas.
- Study the various options for structuring a road pricing system in high congestion areas (such as the Greater Toronto Area) and introduce such a system when the political conditions permit.

Without reforms like these, the government’s current flurry of legislative changes will only contribute to sprawl and, therefore, the long-term cost of housing, whether that be reflected in the purchase price, the extra personal transportation costs associated with low-density growth, or the long-term burden placed on residents to pay for the life-cycle costs of the infrastructure needed to support low-density growth. It was never true that “growth pays for growth.” In fact, people pay for growth, and how that’s done is of vital importance to solving the housing conundrum. 



Ray Tomalty, PhD, is a consultant in urban sustainability and an adjunct professor at McGill’s School of Urban Planning. The Greenbelt Foundation published his report on municipal finances and growth planning in October 2022. The report can be downloaded at www.greenbelt.ca/research

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**Applying
environmental
criminology
to optimize
safe, functional
utilization of
public alley
spaces**

BY BARRY HORROBIN



The whole issue of achieving safety within urban alley environments has long been an intriguing challenge for me throughout my career, most notably as it relates to my work within the law enforcement profession. Alleys exist in many Ontario and Canadian communities, particularly within older neighbourhoods, but they suffer an identity crisis of seemingly always being perceived as less than safe. Just like our community roadways, alleys represent key connecting elements of the municipal infrastructure; however, they are often relegated to being the “poor cousin” when it comes to usage opportunities, maintenance, and perceived public value when compared to our streets and avenues.

A big reason for this is that alleys are “back-of-house” spaces that are outside prominent public view, with most possessing no real identity via names or physical features that would conceivably draw people regularly to them for lawful usage. The end result in many cases is some degree of overt physical neglect (graffiti, broken glass, overgrown vegetation, lack of lighting, etc.) that makes them vulnerable to unlawful behaviour at the expense of beneficial, lawful public activity within them.

“[Alleys] are often relegated to being the ‘poor cousin’ when it comes to usage opportunities, maintenance, and perceived public value...”

It begs the question: what can we do then to reverse this trend and, instead, make these public spaces more attractive for functional use that will drive lawful usage and drive away unlawful usage? One possible avenue to pursue involves looking at these spaces with a lens of “Environmental Criminology” to get at the root cause of their

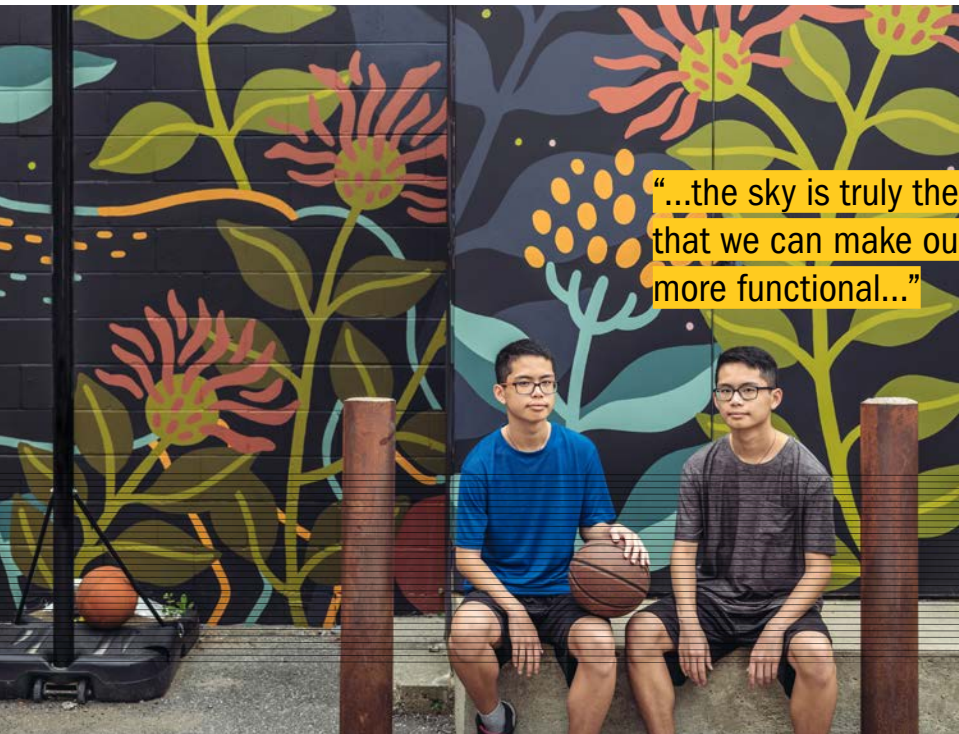
misuse in order to elevate them to more functional prominence for everyone’s benefit.

Environmental criminology involves the study of crime, criminality, and victimization as they relate, first, to particular places/spaces, and subsequently, to the manner in which individuals and groups shape their activities spatially. This results in users being influenced by place-based or spatial factors – or so-called “ingredients” that combine to dictate how people can and/or will use both natural and built environments.

“A well-maintained public alley is a strong, visible sign to any criminal that lawful users are in constant care and control...”

KEY FACTS ABOUT ALLEYS THAT ARE CORRELATED TO PUBLIC SAFETY

1. While alleys do support vehicular activity, volumes are typically much lower than traditional roadways, making them more ideally suited to accommodating active transportation activity (walking, bicycling, etc.). The physical design and upkeep of alleys needs to recognize this, as increased positive usage will help deter unlawful behaviour from establishing and remaining.
2. Arguably, the four greatest physical improvements that can be applied to an alley, in no particular order, to noticeably improve its safety are the following:
 - Installation of adequate, high-quality lighting that produces a balanced output of illumination with



“...the sky is truly the limit when it comes to ways that we can make our urban alley spaces safer and more functional...”

widespread coverage to encourage a broadened timeframe for lawful users to be present;

- Thorough cleaning up of alley spaces, inclusive of debris removal and trimming/elimination of any extraneous vegetative growth;
- Re-paving of the laneway, complete with proper drainage and appropriate pavement markings and signs to direct users accordingly; and
- Injecting positive activity generation in the form of events, such as public markets, cafés, etc., along with promoting them as viable spaces for regular active transportation usage (walking, cycling, etc.).

3. Many urban alleys possess considerable texturing which poses a safety challenge, most notably at night. Such texturing results in pockets of discreet, unobservable space that attracts loitering and trespassing, reducing a user’s perception of safety. Physical improvements, such as lighting, art murals, signage that gives the alley a name, and better ongoing maintenance are most effective at addressing this problem. A well-maintained public alley is a strong, visible sign to any criminal that lawful users are in constant care and control, making for increased resistance against crime and, therefore, less attractive to criminals as an enticing target.

4. It is of great assistance to emergency service responders (police, fire, EMS) if a property’s address number is visible from the alley, since incident response in these areas can often occur from the alley rather than the street. The numbers need to be large and easily recognizable, not obstructed by shrubs/tree branches,

featuring numbering with strong contrast that stands out against the background onto which the address number is mounted.

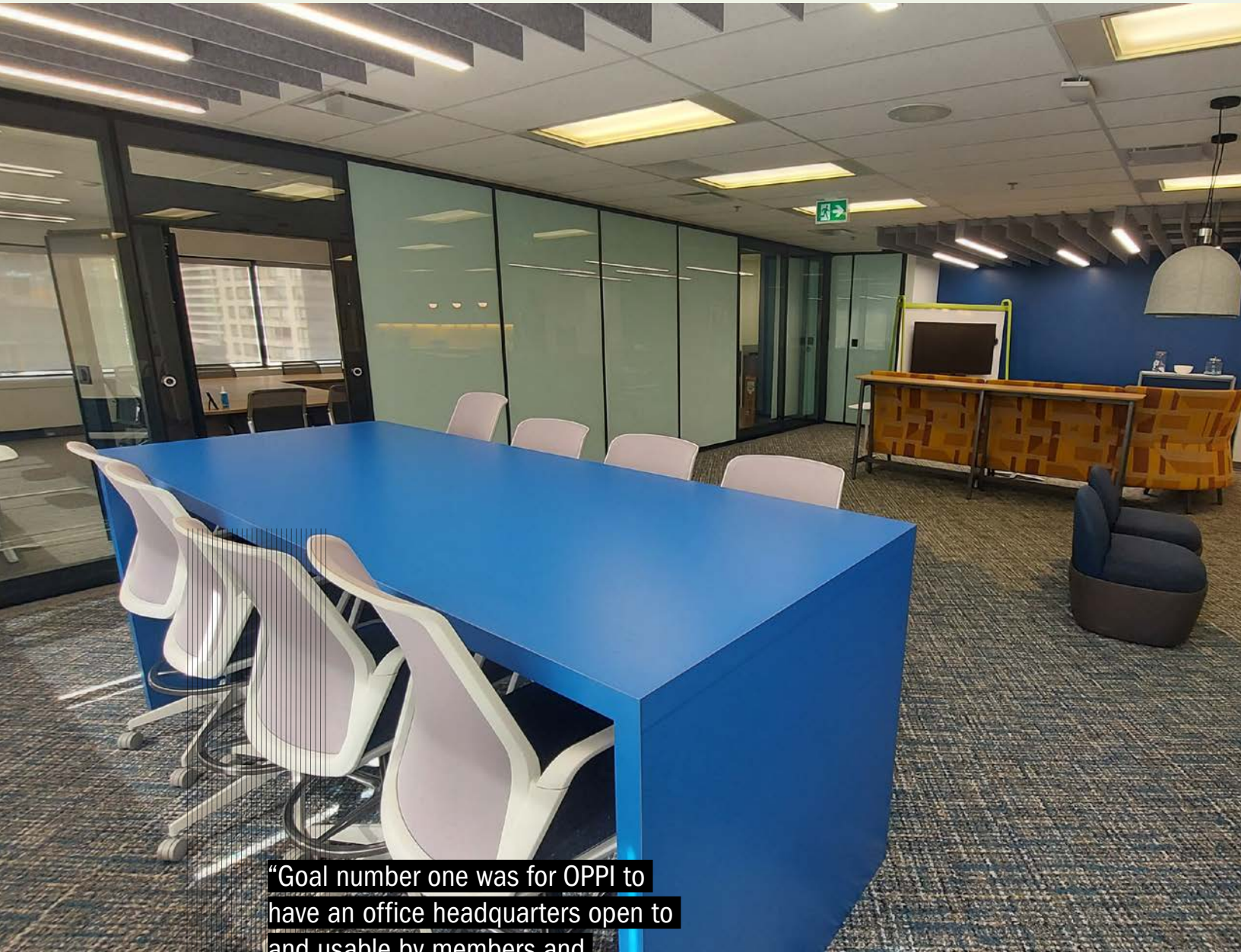
This greatly aids first responders in quickly identifying an incident location, particularly at night.

5. Abutting property owners to alleys should be encouraged to install motion-activated floodlights to supplement existing static alley lights and install CCTV cameras that record activity as well. When abutting property owners do this, the neighbourhood gains a discernible and beneficial “collective impact” that improves safety for the broader area and not simply on a lot-by-lot basis. Combined, such measures strengthen the criminal resistance of the space.

In conclusion, the sky is truly the limit when it comes to ways that we can make our urban alley spaces safer and more functional. If we allow ourselves to be uninhibited in our creativity for how this can happen, the end result will be improvements that elevate alleys from merely being our roadway’s “poor cousins” to a more distinguished status of “equal sibling” within all our communities. 



Barry Horrobin, BA, MA, CLEP, CMM-III is a practicing environmental criminologist and planner who works in the law enforcement profession and as an independent consultant.



“Goal number one was for OPPI to have an office headquarters open to and usable by members and for members.”

INTERVIEW

OPPI headquarters: Where innovation meets opportunity



On May 1, after about six months of construction, design, and finishing work, OPPI opened the doors of its brand-new headquarters – a modern space custom designed and built for OPPI members and staff at Yonge and Sheppard in Toronto.

While the construction phase went fairly quickly once underway, the steps leading up to it involved an exhaustive due diligence process with real estate and interior design consultants to explore different options and a vision for a new headquarters. It had to be right, and every detail had to be considered to ensure it would be a place members would benefit from and be proud of.

It is a process Susan Wiggins, Executive Director of OPPI, has considerable experience with.

“...a hybrid workspace with four ‘hotelling’ offices available for anyone who needs them, when they need them.”

“This is my third corporate headquarters that I’ve worked with an interior designer on and renovated for a profession,” she says.

Wiggins’ two previous projects were the headquarters of Association of Registered Interior Designers of Ontario in Toronto and the American Society of Interior Designers in Washington, DC.

Fully prepared with real estate analysis, detailed plans, pricing structures, operating costs – and the interior designer – Wiggins presented to OPPI Council, and the project was approved.



L to R: Stephania Panini-Gautreau, OPPI’s Coordinator, Strategy & Communications; Susan Wiggins, OPPI’s Executive Director; Lucia De Biasio, Registered Interior Designer and owner of LDB Design Inc.; and Rupendra Pant, OPPI’s former Finance Manager.



Goal number one was for OPPI to have an office headquarters open to and usable by members and for members. After 20 years, the previous offices were unable to meet that need.

“We were spending significant amounts of money on hotel rentals for all the council meetings, committee meetings, and workshops,” says Wiggins. “Additionally, the old meeting space could only accommodate eight people at a push, which was smaller than the OPPI staff team”.

At the new headquarters, OPPI can host gatherings of members in a variety of formats easily.

“If we’re going to convene, it makes sense to convene in our branded space and really let members appreciate the value of their institute,” she says.

The other functional goal relates to the way we all work now, after the pandemic sent many of us home. The new headquarters is a hybrid workspace with four “hotelling” offices available for anyone who needs them, when they need them.

“Coming to a space for collaboration is what’s critical – coming to work is no longer necessary,” says Wiggins. “When you come to work, it’s about talking to people and being with people and collaborating. It’s the water cooler conversation. During the pandemic, we missed that. We missed the social element of working”

That hybrid flexibility has proven beneficial in many ways, from allowing staff to care for their families as needed to providing them with a wider range of housing options outside the GTA because commutes were no longer daily.

Then there’s the technology – it has to fulfil the function of a professional-level meeting space. There is even a digital sign for welcome messages to guests and printable QR-code name tags as people enter the office.

“We invested heavily to ensure full functionality,” she says. “We are mimicking the hotel meeting space. The biggest cost of holding meetings at a hotel is the AV”

The location at Yonge and Sheppard in Toronto is another feature that took considerable thought. It is a very accessible address that meets LEED and WELL standards, which Wiggins very much supports and believes in.

“We didn’t go for LEED and WELL certification because there’s a significant cost to that, but we certainly built to the standards,” she says. “Having a space that’s walkable, commutable, has a low carbon footprint, reduces our own carbon footprint, and has access to amenities and outdoor space – that was all part of the consideration.”

Another special feature is that everything in the space is Canadian – a sustainability requirement aligning with LEED and WELL standards.

“This is a pure Canadian story,” says Wiggins. “All of the furniture is made in the GTA by two of the top Canadian manufacturers in the commercial industry – Keilhauer and Teknion – and the carpet is from Interface and made of recycled materials.”

Best of all, members are happy to be attending meetings and workshops at OPPI HQ – truly a place OPPI members can be proud to call their own. ☺

RECONCILIATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Considering “the public” in the public interest

BY MIRANDA JIMMY



“My ancestors had cultures, languages, and traditions that existed for thousands of years before confederation...”

In my relatively new role with OPPI, I have had to prioritize my learning about how one becomes a Registered Professional Planner and maintains their designation. One of the important concepts in the Professional Code of Practice for RPPs is “in the public interest.” This concept is described by the Professional Standards Board for the planning profession in Canada as: Public Opinion + Public Concerns = Public Interest.

But who are “the public”?

As a racialized person, I am often othered and excluded from being representative of this homogeneous group known as “the public.” Even though I was born and raised in the place known to many as Canada, my nationality is not Canadian. My ancestors had cultures, languages, and traditions that existed for thousands of years before confederation and the current nation-state. I am the descendent of governance, education, justice, and other societal systems that have endured 500+ years of genocide.

“As Canadians, we often do not consider how our own actions – and inactions – help to uphold and perpetuate colonization.”

My peoples’ ways of knowing and being have been dismissed, altered, and ignored since the newcomers came to this place and asserted their ways over ours. This has meant that my ancestors and I have had to find ways to maintain our knowledge systems while being told they are wrong and being forced to conform to western ways. This is the process of othering and is the basis for settler colonialism which, in turn, has created the foundation of this place known as Canada.

The concept of colonization is often relegated to the times of Christopher Columbus and Jacques Cartier and is not considered in the present-day context. As Canadians, we often do not consider how our own actions – and inactions – help to uphold and perpetuate colonization. Systems of othering and allowing one

group’s ideas to dominate over all others happens because the people who make up those systems allow it to happen.

Returning to this idea of “the public,” I would like you to think about who they are when imagining them in your mind. Are they the people who live and work in the neighbourhood you are planning? Are they the people whose traditional territory the project will take place on? Are they businesspeople who are funding the development? Are they the elected officials who created the rules within which your decisions must align? Are they people who look like you?

“...overcoming your own biases of who you believe the public to be.”

As RPPs, you “must practice in an ethical and responsible manner” and uphold your “responsibilities to the public interest.” To fully adhere to these ethical standards, you must also know and represent the public in your planning decisions. This means overcoming your own biases of who you believe the public to be. It means being open to less dominant ways of knowing. It means actively including those who are not directly being considered.

I am a *nēhiyaw-iskwēw* (Cree woman). I walk in two worlds. I am trying to relearn my culture, language, and traditions as an act of decolonization while working in and being surrounded by western ways of knowing and being. You can support me and others like me by seeking out our input and guidance in your work. You hold the power to benefit from the gifts of our knowledge systems and connections to the Land. Please include us in your public interest. ♻️

Miranda Jimmy is the Director of Reconciliation and Social Justice with OPPI. She is a proud member of Thunderchild First Nation, community connector, and fierce defender of the truth. Read more about Miranda on page 54.

POLICY

It's all about building more homes

BY SAAD BAIG



“...the political climate continues to be ripe for the government to push ahead...”

It's no secret that we are in the middle of the most significant transformation of land-use planning policy in over a generation. The objective is clear: “More Homes.”

From the Ford Government's initial package, Bill 108, the *More Homes, More Choice Act*, 2019, to Bill 109, the *More Homes for Everyone Act*, 2020, to the most recent and hotly debated Bill 23, the *More Homes Built Faster Act*, 2022, the objective could not be clearer. It is all about building more homes – 1.5 million over the next 10 years to be exact.

“This presents an opportunity for planners to shape how we can best achieve those outcomes...”

Specific policy decisions have garnered a lot of discussion, and controversy, to be frank. But the governing PCs are not alone among Ontario's political parties in what they desire. All major political parties made significant efforts to be seen as having credible housing plans during the last provincial election. The Liberals, the New Democrats, and the Greens all put forward policy proposals to achieve the same fundamental outcome as the current government: to build more homes in Ontario.

Following the election, the PCs came right out of the gate with Bill 3 to provide the Mayors of Toronto and Ottawa with strong mayor powers to advance their housing agenda. The controversial Bill 23 followed and then Bill 39 shortly after. More change is promised with a review of A Place to Grow and the Provincial Policy Statement and another widely anticipated housing legislative package this spring.

The PC government may have been the boldest voice through the recent legislative amendments but there is pressure from within the Legislative Assembly to be even bolder in some regards. Mike Schreiner, the leader of the Green Party of Ontario, recently tabled Bill 44 and Bill 45 seeking to push beyond recent changes in Bill 23 to permit at least three units on all residential lots. He is calling to increase the minimum permission to four units and four stories on all residential lots and even further with six to 11 stories on major

streets, including all transit corridors. And guess what? Titles of both bills include the “More Homes” moniker. A side note, but interesting nonetheless, 39 prominent Liberals recently wrote a public letter to Schreiner asking him to join the race to lead the Ontario Liberal Party.

All this to say the political climate continues to be ripe for the government to push ahead with their “More Homes” agenda. Specific policies may run into political hurdles, but they appear to retain public permission to the outcome. This presents an opportunity for planners to shape how we can best achieve those outcomes, to build “More Homes.” The bolder, the better. The more easily communicated, the even better! Remember unlocking the Yellow Belt only picked up steam in the general political discourse once a catchy brand was attached to it. 🗣️

OPPI has just finalized a list of recommendations that, if implemented, could provide some bold solutions on behalf of the profession. Stay tuned to OPPI Legislative Updates to learn more. All OPPI members are encouraged to follow this conversation and have their voices heard through ERO postings and OPPI requests for input or action.

You can read OPPI's letters on the subject here:
<https://ontarioplanners.ca/policy-corner>.

Saad Baig is a Director in StrategyCorp's Public Affairs Group. He provides strategic advice to clients navigating complex government relations challenges across a variety of sectors. Saad previously served as senior advisor to several cabinet ministers, including the Ministers of Finance, Transportation, and Infrastructure in the Ontario Government.



ACADEMIC

Transitional housing: A sustainable planning approach

BY SHAHIDA HOQUE, WARREN MABEE, AND
CAROLYN DELOYDE, RPP

Ontario is in the midst of a major housing crisis driven by a lack of affordability and inadequate supply to meet demand. A growing homeless population in urban centres poses a significant challenge to city governments and planners. Those tasked with providing innovative solutions to address this critical municipal issue are not alone; they join others around the world who struggle to create quality communities for populations displaced from their homes due to famine, conflict, climate change, and other circumstances.

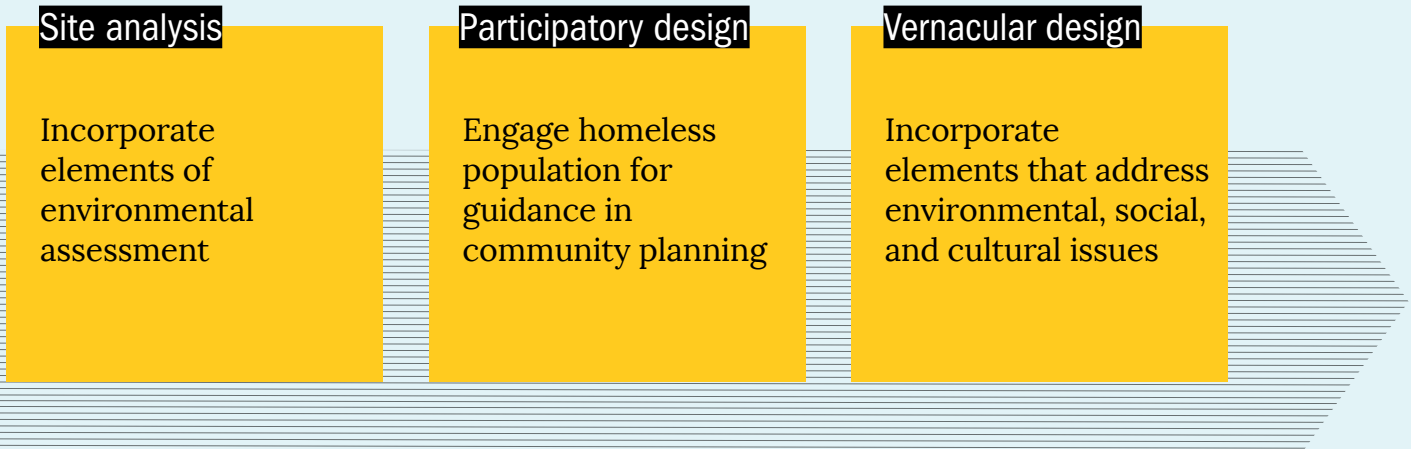


Figure 1: The three-step approach to sustainable transitional housing design © Authors' creation

Researchers at Queen's University in Kingston recently looked at ways in which displaced persons are housed in the Middle East and uncovered insights which may be applicable to addressing the twin crises of housing and homelessness here in Ontario. The study's aim was to introduce sustainable planning and design practices for transitional living conditions that could better address the needs and concerns of displaced populations while reducing environmental impacts and successfully create vibrant, dynamic communities that can thrive independently.

“...sustainable planning and design practices for transitional living conditions...”

The findings of this study offer new solutions that may be considered here in Ontario. Cities across the province have seen rapid growth of tent encampments and makeshift shelters in public parks, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. These camps are characteristic of a homeless population which views traditional shelters – usually communal spaces with little privacy and strongly enforced rules – as undesirable. Inhabitants of these camps increasingly look to each other to create community and find support.

Encampments in Toronto and elsewhere, however, have been plagued by concerns over safety, both for the inhabitants of these camps and for members of the broader public. The flimsy tents and shelters do not have the ability to provide sufficient protection from harsh weather conditions. As seen across Ontario, encampments have become a flashpoint for conflict, with supporters of homeless

rights clashing with members of the public who resent the loss of open public space or who are concerned over the chaotic environment that often characterizes these places.

CHANGING NEEDS FOR DISPLACED POPULATIONS

The study found that a substantive change is underway regarding the design of settlements for displaced populations internationally. This can be seen in the Middle East, where hastily implemented encampments using tents or temporary housing are increasingly being replaced by semi-permanent communities with more substantive shelters and facilities, including schools and clinics. This shift recognizes the fundamental rights of displaced persons and attempts to address the social and cultural voids so often prevalent in a transitional environment.

In Ontario and around the world, experiences in developing transitional housing have shown that neither spontaneous nor standardized approaches to providing basic needs are sufficient or satisfactory. These approaches do not recognize the diverse needs of individuals, nor the additional requirements for psychological and physical well-being. Importantly, it is increasingly recognized that temporary shelters are only truly effective in responding to immediate humanitarian concerns. The persistence of homeless or displaced populations suggests that design principles focused on temporary, time-limited solutions will not be successful. There is, unfortunately, little guidance for planners who are seeking more robust solutions.

The study proposes a new phase in transitional shelter housing, which recognizes the changing problem – away from temporary housing for transient groups and towards solutions designed to

support more persistent displaced populations. The design of this housing is strongly informed by principles of sustainable design to better address social and cultural needs, while also addressing environmental concerns to alleviate the impact of these settlements on both natural and social systems in the vicinity of these communities.

“...a substantive change is underway regarding the design of settlements for displaced populations internationally.”

MOVING FORWARD

While the Queen's study was focused on displaced populations in the Middle East, the findings of this work can easily be applied to the challenges of homelessness in Ontario. Indeed, small steps are being made in communities across the province that indicate acceptance that homeless populations are persistent and housing solutions need to be innovative.

The City of Kingston, for example, has introduced sleeping cabins, similar to transitional shelters provided for humanitarian aid internationally. These structures provide far more protection than the rough shelters seen in encampments, although they still lack adequate living space, bathrooms, running water, or electricity. The scale of this experiment has also been very small, with only 10 cabins built – a far cry from a transitional community.

“...away from temporary housing for transient groups and towards solutions designed to support more persistent displaced populations.”


Cities and neighbourhoods wrestling with homelessness might consider the pros and cons of establishing more permanent communities – either as a collection of buildings or within the context of a single building – to take the place of encampments and provide better housing for those experiencing homelessness. A three-step process of design is proposed (see Figure 1).

First, a site analysis can help balance various issues to identify the best places for communities. The site analysis should include elements of environmental assessment, including identification of valued ecosystem components.

Second, a participatory design process needs to be implemented. Homeless populations are rejecting “traditional” shelter or housing options. There needs to be recognition that their solutions might look different than past ideas.

Third, elements of vernacular design can be incorporated, which means the settlements can be designed to “fit in” to established areas and the communities can be optimized to deal with environmental, social, and cultural issues.

The solutions proposed here will not be cheap. However, the costs of continuing to address homelessness in the current fashion are high; significant savings may be achieved with a more holistic approach.

It should also be noted that opportunities for skill sharing and vocational training provided by the local community could also support the rehabilitation of those experiencing homelessness or unemployment in order to support the development and transition to new livelihoods, which ultimately would provide benefits to all of society. Providing opportunities to contribute and collaborate on planning and sustaining a thriving community stimulate social connectivity, acceptance, and reconstruction of a “home,” where people feel safe and comfortable to re-establish their lives. 



Shahida Hoque, MPL, is a Student Member of OPPI and an urban planning associate at Colliers in Toronto. **Warren Mabee** is associate dean and director of the School of Policy Studies and a professor in the Department of Geography and Planning at Queen's University. **Carolyn DeLoyde PhD, RPP, MCIP**, is a Member of OPPI and an assistant professor (adjunct) and postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Geography and Planning at Queen's University.

ACADEMIC

Planning student projects

Students at Ontario’s six accredited planning schools are the future of the profession and the Registered Professional Planners of tomorrow. Here is a look at some of the exciting and progressive projects from future RPPs.



**SCHOOL OF URBAN AND REGIONAL PLANNING,
TORONTO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY**

Indigenous long-term care in the City of Toronto

Master of Planning students at Toronto Metropolitan University engaged in a four-month consulting project for the City of Toronto’s Seniors Services and Long-Term Care division to determine opportunities for developing the first City of Toronto-supported, Indigenous-focused long-term care setting in Toronto. Through independent research and guidance from Indigenous advisors, they developed recommendations, including where to locate a new home, which elements should be incorporated into its design, and how culturally sensitive care can be provided to residents.

Advisor: Randy Hodge, School of Urban and Regional Planning, Toronto Metropolitan University

Client: City of Toronto, Seniors Services and Long-Term Care; Liane MacGregor, Management Consultant

Students: Robbie McQuillan, Alex Walton, Sabrina Testaguzza, Kimberly Lam, Bailey Classen-Schneider

**SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT,
UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH**

Protecting the future of the agri-food sector: Exploring farmland preservation and loss in Southern Ontario

A vibrant agri-food sector requires a reliable land base, but population growth and urban development are putting pressure on the availability of farmland in southern Ontario. Data on the conversion of farmland to non-farm uses is conflicting, but the best available data is official plan amendments, which must be approved before development begins. This study builds on previous research to track changes in the availability of prime agricultural land in southern Ontario from 2000-2022.

Advisor: Dr. Sara Epp, Assistant Professor, School of Environmental Design and Rural Development, University of Guelph

Students: Erin Helsby and Shanley Weston



SURP Students present the results of their project at the Urbanism Lab, National Capital Commission in Ottawa (December 2022).
© Graydon Simpson

**SCHOOL OF URBAN AND REGIONAL PLANNING
AT QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY**

Second year graduate planning students completed four projects for four different community clients. Professor Collins led students in the completion of a project for the City of Vaughan entitled, "Developing Key Performance Indicators for Evaluating Vaughan's MoveSmart Mobility Strategy Initiatives." Professor Gordon led students in the completion of a project for the National Capital Commission entitled, "Animating the Ottawa Riverfront in the Core of Canada's Capital." Professors Meligrana and Whitelaw led a student team in a project entitled, "Ecological Offsetting in the Cataraqui Region." And Professor Agarwal's team of students examined the greening of internal pathways within Queen's University's main campus.

Reports: All reports are available to download at: <https://www.queensu.ca/geographyandplanning/surp/program-study/project-courses>



**FACULTY OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND URBAN CHANGE,
YORK UNIVERSITY**

How are people experiencing Tommy Thompson Park?

This project analyzed digital data collected in the summer of 2022 about human uses of the Leslie Street Spit (also known as Tommy Thompson Park). The 420 online interviews rendered valuable information about demographics, frequency of use, areas of visitation, attitudes and preferences, types of activities, and knowledge of regulations and ethical wildlife viewing policies. This was part of the Rubble to Refuge project (www.rubbletorefuge.com), a partnership between York University and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority.

Advisor: Jennifer J. Foster, Associate Professor, Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change

Students: Monika Sadler, Peri Dworatzek, Dasha Litviniuc, Jessica Ramsay, Homa Hedayat



As Director, Planning and Growth at the Town of Innisfil, Andria Leigh, RPP, leads an innovative and dynamic team in responsibly and deliberately planning for a rapidly growing community. With over 30 years of experience primarily in the public sector, she leads and serves community stakeholders in growing a vibrant, active, sustainable, and multi-cultural community.

Registered Professional Planner

PROFILE

NAME:

Andria Leigh, RPP

LOCATION:

Town of Innisfil

POSITION:

Director of Planning and Growth

She is also an active volunteer with OPPI and has held a variety of roles: sponsor and mentor to new planners, member of the Professional Standards and Registration Committee, co-chair of the Anti-Black Racism in Planning Task Force, and on OPPI Council, where she is currently serving as secretary-treasurer.

What led to your decision to choose planning as a career?

I actually did not start out in planning either academically or professionally. I received an undergraduate degree in geography from Wilfrid Laurier University. When I completed university, I started an internship program at the Township of Oro, learning about municipal government. I was very fortunate early in my professional career to be mentored by Kris Menzies, who educated me on the planning profession and helped me on my career path to becoming a Registered Professional Planner.

Along my professional journey, I have been supported by so many wonderful, dedicated professionals. I can think of many strong women role models I have admired throughout my career and who have shaped me into the leader and mentor I am today. It is because of these individuals that I feel so strongly about the importance of mentoring others early in their journey to become Registered Professional Planners.

Tell us about your career path and your current role at the Town of Innisfil?

I have spent most of my career working as a municipal planner in a rural municipality. Starting at the Township of Oro, which became the Township of Oro-Medonte

after amalgamation in the 90s, I have spent almost 29 years in progressive planning and leadership roles. I also took the opportunity to join the private sector for three years at MHBC Planning in their Barrie office. Ultimately, however, I have realized that my passion in planning is to serve the public interest from the municipal sector.

I wasn't really looking for a career change when the Town of Innisfil opportunity arose. But with all the provincial legislative changes and the significant growth expected in the Town of Innisfil, I wanted the opportunity to be part of the team that will plan, lead, and shape the community for the future. There will be some great opportunities to be creative and forward thinking in the design of the public realm and to focus on more sustainable development.

“...working as a planner in a rural community definitely has its advantages in regard to the experience you can get and the opportunities to develop your skills.”

What do you find most rewarding about volunteering with OPPI, including on Council?

I ran for OPPI Council in 2019 because I felt I could contribute to the broader profession and could also bring a municipal and rural planning perspective to Council. I have had a lengthy planning career to date through various legislative regimes in addition to a focus on mentorship for young planners obtaining their RPP designation. I felt I could share my learned experiences through Council.

It has been a privilege to work alongside some amazing RPPs who all have a passion for building better communities and for striving to make our profession and our members the best planners we can be in serving the public interest.

I have learned so much more about the OPPI organization during my time on Council. I am also appreciative of the opportunities to contribute beyond my role on Council – first serving as co-chair of the Anti-Black Racism in Planning Task Force and now as secretary-treasurer and a member of the executive committee.

During my time on Council, there have certainly been many challenges to navigate, including the COVID-19 pandemic, updating the Strategic Plan in uncertain times, and more recently, the most significant provincial legislative changes I can recall in my career. However, I found each member of Council to be an active participant and leader who collaborates and focuses on ensuring that, as an organization, we continue to contribute to the advancement of the profession and the five strategic directions contained in INSPIRE: OPPI Strategic Plan 2025.

I have also had the opportunity to meet so many great professionals who work in our industry – people I wouldn't have met solely through my municipal planning role.

You are notable for the valuable rural perspective you bring to your role on Council. Tell us more about that perspective.

I grew up in Toronto so I didn't really have any appreciation of the rural community, other than visiting “cottage country” in the summer or skiing in the winter. It wasn't until I took on my first job at the Township of Oro and moved to the area that I started to learn more about living in and planning for a rural community and what it has to offer.

I believe working as a planner in a rural community definitely has its advantages in regard to the experience you can get and the varied opportunities it provides to develop your skills. Typically, there are fewer planners working in a rural municipality, so the planner is required to work on a broad range of application types. As a new planner, it means you gain skills in a variety of areas early in your career. The disadvantage is that the types of residential and employment developments you may see in your municipality are limited if you don't have servicing or have servicing constraints/capacity.

Being a rural planner has allowed me to bring that voice to the Council table in all our discussions, such as the updating of OPPI's Strategic Plan and especially the past year through the various legislative changes. Whether you are talking about demographics, housing attainability and accessibility, servicing and infrastructure, climate change or barriers in the planning profession, each of these issues has a different impact and means something different when you are planning in the GTA or in rural Ontario.

Given where I have worked, I also bring the perspective of working with the PPS and A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, including the Simcoe area policies and the implications of these on a rural community as well as to the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan and Source Water Protection policies.

“Whether you are talking about demographics, housing attainability and accessibility, servicing and infrastructure, climate change or barriers in the planning profession, each of these issues has a different impact and means something different when you are planning in the GTA or in rural Ontario.”

What are some challenges being faced by the Town of Innisfil and other municipalities like it?

There are a number of challenges that Innisfil and many other municipalities are facing whether they are urban or rural. As planners, it is important that we create affordable and safe places for our residents to call home. The limitations on the housing options that are attainable, affordable, and available to our communities are significant; in rural areas, this is compounded and often results in individuals leaving their rural community to

obtain housing. Building differently by creating unique housing typologies, such as additional residential units or utilizing inclusionary zoning, are possibilities not only for urban areas but also for rural communities and need to be considered.

Servicing and infrastructure capacity and costs are another significant challenge for municipalities as they look to develop sustainable infrastructure and communities. In rural communities or communities with more limited population growth, there is a concern for their future, changing their economy to provide employment, housing, and the services that will be required for people in those communities in the decades ahead, given changing demographics and aging population.

“...each municipality needs to focus on the future and determine their individual or unique opportunities...”

Although there are challenges, each municipality needs to focus on the future and determine their individual or unique opportunities, whether it is in the form of housing they can provide or ways to diversify their economy. Municipalities need to leverage the assets that their community has to offer in order for them to grow and thrive in the future.

The theme for this issue of Y Magazine is “planners in the public realm” — tell us about your public.

The population and demographics in Innisfil are changing, and this is expected to continue as the population increases from 43,326 to 84,450 by 2051. This rapid growth is a concern for those already living in Innisfil who want to maintain the sense of community, rural character, and small town feel that they value now. The current Town of Innisfil Official Plan acts as a guide to enhance placemaking, community character, and social connections, intending to strengthen the sense of place and belonging people feel in Innisfil.

“Innisfil’s current population is 43,326 and is expected to grow to 84,450 by 2051.”

Innisfil’s growth is to be planned in a responsible and deliberate way that focuses on the importance of creating and maintaining a great community, prioritizes the design and programming of public spaces, and plans for the community elements that enhance residents’ and visitors’ love for Innisfil. Our vision is to grow into a vibrant, active, sustainable, and multi-cultural community, offering intriguing and unique places, engaging activities, and essential social connections that make Innisfil thrive.

What would you like to see happen in the Town of Innisfil over next 30 years?

From 2016 to 2021, the Town of Innisfil achieved a population growth of 18.5 per cent, placing it among the top 50 fastest growing communities in Canada. Innisfil is facing significant growth pressure and is at a crossroads in terms of evolving from a modest-sized town into a significant transit-oriented sustainable community.

Over the next 30 years, the majority of Innisfil’s growth will be focused in its primary settlement area, Alcona, and concentrated around Orbit and the proposed Innisfil GO Station. Orbit is designated as a Protected Major Transit Station Area (PMTSA) intended for higher density development. The compact urban form will help the Town of Innisfil avoid the costs and inefficiencies associated with low-density development and allow Innisfil to grow as a balanced, compact, and complete community, while providing local employment opportunities for residents.

If well executed, the planned growth in Innisfil should enhance the quality of life for its residents and also attract local employment opportunities that will contribute to overall community prosperity.

Protecting valued farmland, natural heritage, open spaces, and Lake Simcoe are all essential ingredients within Innisfil’s comprehensive growth strategy.

“Mentoring and supporting a new generation of Registered Professional Planners in Ontario is a priority.”

Do you have a message for other RPPs and up-and-coming planners?

Mentoring and supporting a new generation of Registered Professional Planners in Ontario is a priority. This involves making the field of planning a preferred career choice and presenting leadership in the field as being aspirational to young professionals.

To really succeed as an RPP, you have to be skilled at many things – and this is especially true as a rural planner. But we need to see this not as a challenge but rather as an opportunity to grow and broaden our skills. As professionals and as mentors, we need to foster new planners and set them up to be successful. We need to support them through the tough projects to help them advance in their careers. We need to remember that they are the future of the planning profession and the next generation of mentors. (Y)



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: ALISHA CULL, RPP

Alisha Cull, MCIP, RPP, graduated from the University of Waterloo in 2013 with a BES in Planning, Co-op. Currently, she is the Supervisor of Planning and Development at the Corporation of Haldimand County and has previous planning experience with Grey County and Norfolk County.

She is also a volunteer with the OPPI Outreach Committee, which she joined in 2016.

“The Outreach Committee coordinates with the Student Liaison Committee to organize visits to each of the accredited planning schools in Ontario – Waterloo, Queen’s, York, TMU, Guelph, and U of T,” says Cull.

The visits take place twice a year, once in the fall to discuss OPPI and the benefits of membership, then again in the spring, with a visit more tailored to job seekers.

“Before I was the committee chair, I visited Guelph and Waterloo,” she says. “Now, I am responsible for chairing our meetings, assisting wherever I’m needed, and helping to organize the annual in-person meeting between the Outreach Committee and Student Liaison Committee in Toronto.”

She also attends the Student Liaison Committee meetings, and together with the committee, reviews scholarship applications and chooses recipients.

“The main purpose of the Outreach Committee is to build relationships with students and promote the value of OPPI and the RPP designation,” says Cull.

That’s not her only volunteer role with OPPI. In 2022, she joined the Planners Connect Champions Committee that supports engagement and adoption of OPPI’s online, members-only community forum.

“The role of this committee is to promote the Planners Connect platform by starting and engaging with conversations on the forum,” she says. “There are always interesting discussions going on that any OPPI member can join in on.”

For Cull, the reward for volunteering is the relationship-building aspect with planning students.

“When I was a student at Waterloo, I met some really inspiring planners during my co-op terms who helped shape my career,” she says. “I like passing along whatever experience and knowledge I can to students, but I find it is reciprocal in that I also learn a lot from them. I always leave any event with students feeling very positive about the future of land-use planning in Ontario.”

While Cull enjoys volunteering with OPPI, whether it is in-person, on Zoom, or on the phone, she also feels it is important to give back to the planning community.

“I think it’s our obligation as RPPs to support the planning profession in Ontario in whatever small way we can.” ☺

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**STAFF SPOTLIGHT: MIRANDA JIMMY,
DIRECTOR RECONCILIATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

Last November, OPPI took a big step in its commitment to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion within the planning profession and broader community and hired Miranda Jimmy as Director of Reconciliation and Social Justice.

Jimmy is a member of Thunderchild First Nation and lives in Edmonton, working remotely with OPPI and commuting regularly for in-person meetings. With her background in arts and cultural management, conflict resolution and negotiation, and communications, Jimmy has made a career working with many different non-profit organizations, Nations, governments, and private businesses. She has also worked directly with many Registered Professional Planners on a variety of projects related to diversity and inclusion.

Most significantly, Jimmy is a fierce defender of truth committed to the spirit and intent of the treaty relationship – and she wants to show others what that looks like.

“I hope to build allyship that will create a movement of active inclusion and strengthen relationships across difference,” she says. “With my ancestors behind me, I know my actions will lead to positive change for generations to come.”

Those actions include the December 15, 2022, Planning Exchange Blog post, *Time to (Re)Commit to Truth and Reconciliation*, in which Jimmy reminds us that we have been shown a path to reconciliation. That post marked seven years since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada presented its 10-volume final report – a culmination of nearly 7,000 witness statements, 1,355 hours of recordings from seven national events, and dozens of community events over its seven-year mandate.

Jimmy’s primary focus with OPPI is implementing the approved recommendations from two OPPI task force reports. The 2019

Indigenous Planning Perspectives Task Force (IPPTF) Report establishes context and outlines recommendations for moving forward respectfully and in collaboration with Indigenous People, communities, and planners. The *2021 Anti-Black Racism in Planning Task Force (ABRPTF) Report* removes systemic barriers to inclusion and increases representation of Black community members in the planning profession. Both reports are available for download at www.ontarioplanners.ca

She is also tasked with guiding OPPI on diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, policies, and initiatives to align with INSPIRE: OPPI Strategic Plan 2025.

“Ultimately, I want to move past this idea of a list of recommendations as a checklist on how we transform the planning profession into an anti-racist, anti-oppressive community, so that all groups who have been historically excluded find a place here and that we’re actively seeking to include them,” she says.

Jimmy aims to inspire champions and a collective voice that finds ways in every avenue of the profession to further diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Her goal is to work herself out of a job – literally.

“Everyone should be doing diversity work – that work shouldn’t rely on the shoulders of one person,” she adds. 🙏

➔ **LEARN MORE**

Miranda Jimmy’s activism continues in her off-work time, researching, documenting, and telling the story of Canada’s so-called “Indian hospitals,” particularly the Charles Camsell Indian Hospital, which operated in Edmonton from 1946 to 1996. There were 30 such hospitals across the country. Jimmy was interviewer and co-producer of the documentary *Camsell* (2016), which you can watch at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXQ07F7r9YQ>.

She also contributed to the podcast series, *The Story of a National Crime*, which you can listen to at <https://nationalcrimepod.ca>.

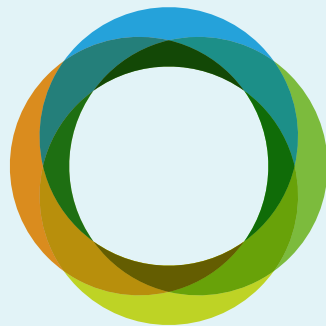


RECAP: 2GETHER, THE 2022 CONFERENCE, WAS A SOLD-OUT SUCCESS!

After two years of online-only conferences due to the COVID-19 pandemic, OPPI was thrilled with the attendance for 2GETHER, the 2022 OALA-OPPI joint conference. On September 21 and 22, 2022, over 750 people attended in person in London, Ontario, in addition to over 500 online participants.

Attendees enjoyed two days of insightful keynote speakers, thoughtful panel discussions, and meaningful breakout sessions, plus the 2GETHER Marketplace, 1NIGHT2UNITE awards and social soiree, mobile workshops, morning yoga sessions, exhibitor hall, and so much more! ☺





PlanON AWARDS

Honouring Excellence in Planning

OPPI AWARDS AND RECOGNITION: THE PLANON AWARDS

Every year, OPPI honours the outstanding contributions and significant milestones of members across Ontario. This year, OPPI is introducing the PlanON Awards, a brand-new awards program to honour the exceptional achievements of OPPI members who demonstrate professional excellence and a commitment to advancing the planning profession in Ontario.

The PlanON Awards recognize the important role the planning profession plays in shaping the quality, livability, and sustainability of communities for future generations. Several categories have been created.

- **The PlanON Public Education Award** honours RPPs who have made meaningful contributions to advance public education within or outside the planning profession in Ontario.
- **The PlanON Innovative Research Award** recognizes innovative academic researchers within the planning profession who, through scholarly activities, including academic papers, research, or publications, have the ability to positively impact the future of the planning profession in Ontario.
- **The PlanON Vision Award** celebrates RPPs and their teams who have exemplified excellence in upholding the public interest through their approach to solving the most important issues facing the planning profession in Ontario, such as climate change,

affordable housing, technology, inclusivity, and more. **Planning Documentation** and **Planning Process** are the two streams within this award category to encompass a variety of ways in which planners work to inform choices and inspire communities.

- **The PlanON Emerging Leadership Award** spotlights future leaders within the planning profession by recognizing RPPs in the first seven years of their careers who exemplify the qualities of leadership, collaboration, professionalism, and empowerment of others.
- **The PlanON RPP Leadership Award** celebrates the trailblazers within the planning profession by recognizing RPPs who exemplify the qualities of leadership, collaboration, professionalism, and empowerment of others.
- **The PlanON Volunteer Service Award** recognizes the extraordinary service and significant contribution of OPPI volunteers who have raised awareness of the profession, mentored students or nurtured relationships, taken part in a special project or program, and more.


The call for submissions is open from March 1 to May 1, 2023. The awards will be a highlight at the OPPI conference in September 2023.

Find detailed information on categories, eligibility, and submissions at www.ontarioplanners.ca/PlanON. 

STUDENT SCHOLARSHIPS

Today's planning students are the RPPs of tomorrow. To encourage and support future planners, OPPI provides student members with scholarship opportunities that award excellence and community contributions.

- **The Ronald M. Keeble Undergraduate Scholarship** (up to \$3,500) assists in furthering planning education and recognizing undergraduate student members who are making contributions to their communities.
- **The Gerald Carrothers Graduate Scholarship** (up to \$3,500) assists in furthering planning education and recognizing graduate student members who are making contributions to their communities.
- **OPPI Opportunity Scholarship** (up to \$5,000) acknowledges the financial barriers to education that disproportionately affect Black, Indigenous, and other racialized people. This one-time scholarship may be awarded to an Indigenous, Black, or other racially marginalized person currently enrolled in an accredited undergraduate or graduate planning program in Ontario.


The applications period for scholarships is March 1 until May 1, 2023. Recipients will be announced in August 2023 and an award ceremony will be held at the OPPI conference in September. Find more information, including application forms and eligibility requirements, at www.ontarioplanners.ca/student-scholarships. 

SAVE THE DATES: OPPI ADAPTATION/TRANSFORMATION CONFERENCE

The Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI) is hosting their annual conference in Ottawa this fall.

From September 20 to 22, the OPPI conference will explore how Registered Professional Planners (RPPs) navigate the profession's rapidly changing landscape to emerge as qualified leaders who bring communities together in the public interest.

The OPPI conference will highlight relevant topics impacting the profession, including housing affordability and supply, changing demographics, representation of equity-deserving groups, advancements in technology, and more.

Find more information at www.ontarioplanners.ca/conference-2023. 



**Dive deeper, learn more
and keep reading by
accessing the online
version of Y Magazine**

ontarioplanners.ca/y-magazine

Contributors

Serving the public interest is at the heart of everything a planner does. Here is how three RPPs keep that all-important concept at the forefront of their work.



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Andria Sallese, MCIP, RPP
PRACTICE LEAD WITH WSP IN THE URBAN
AND COMMUNITY PLANNING GROUP



Page 21

Rob Dowler, MCIP, RPP
MEMBER OF OPPI COUNCIL, CONSULTANT, AND
PROFESSOR IN THE PLANNING PROGRAMS AT
TORONTO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY AND
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



Page 25

Paul Shaker, MCIP, RPP
PRINCIPAL
WITH CIVICPLAN

As a senior planning practitioner with nearly two decades of experience working in the public sector or with public sector clients, serving the public interest is foundational to my practice. An important component of respecting the public interest means being aware of various perspectives and values, while enabling discussion in a transparent, open, equitable manner.

With these perspectives and values in mind, I am passionate about leveraging different, often unique, points of view and seeking opportunities for thought leadership to support the public interest, thereby providing opportunities for learning and fostering a climate of excellence.

Planning issues typically involve competing interests. As a result, planners need to ensure their recommendations strike a balance between provincial interests (PPS, provincial plans), local interests (OP, community input), and “voiceless” interests (future generations, environment, vulnerable populations).

Finding this balance requires us to work closely with a diversity of groups to uncover underlying interests (versus rhetorical positions) and assist voiceless stakeholders in being heard. I try to ensure my advice strikes a balance between vocal and voiceless interests, while being mindful of the government-of-the-day’s vision and what can be realistically implemented.

As a planner, the public interest is the extent to which the plans and policies we develop and implement increase the quality of life for the greatest number of people.

In my work, this involves a participatory approach throughout the entire planning process, where we design multiple opportunities for the public to get involved. It begins with defining the priorities for planning, i.e., the places and issues of focus, and includes a robust role for the public in shaping the outcomes and implementation of plans themselves.

What's your vision for a better Ontario?

Neighbourhoods where everyone belongs. Rural development that protects natural habitats and increases food security. Healthy communities with equitable access to health care, housing, and education. Transportation systems that get people where they are going cleanly, safely, and actively. Cities where the goals of economic development are balanced with the needs of the people who live and work there.

Students aspiring to achieve their visions for the future get their start at Ontario's accredited planning schools. Six universities across Ontario offer accredited programs, where students gain the knowledge and skills they need to become leaders in the planning field.

- Queen's University's School of Urban and Regional Planning
- York University's Faculty of Environmental & Urban Change
- University of Waterloo's School of Planning
- University of Toronto's Department of Geography and Planning
- Toronto Metropolitan University's School of Urban and Regional Planning
- University of Guelph's Rural Planning Program in the School of Environmental Design and Rural Development

These programs provide students with opportunities to engage in well-focused education across a broad spectrum of planning issues, including urban design, rural studies, community sustainability, transportation, housing, heritage, health care, and more. Students engage in teamwork, active learning, innovative research, and real-world projects led by exceptional professors with years of planning experience.

Ontario's accredited planning programs are also the first step to achieving the Registered Professional Planner (RPP) designation. RPPs are innovative thinkers who use their skills and knowledge to bring diverse opinions to the table to find equitable solutions. They are game changers who work in a variety of fields within the public, private, academic, and not-for-profit sectors to inform choices and inspire communities. RPPs know change is constant and challenges are opportunities to do better.

Be part of the change you want to see in Ontario.



Learn more: ontarioplanners.ca/become-an-rpp





ADAPTATION TRANSFORMATION



Preparing planners to navigate
the profession's rapidly changing landscape.

The OPPI conference will highlight relevant topics impacting the profession, including housing affordability and supply, changing demographics, representation of equity-deserving groups, advancements in technology, and more.

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