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Journal

## THE DIGITAL CITY



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## Attend OPPI's AGM

Join our colleagues and fellow members for OPPI's AGM on Thursday, October 11 from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. at Science North in the City of Greater Sudbury. At the AGM, we will recognize outgoing Council members, 25-year OPPI members, Member Service Award winners and new RPPs.

Members do not need to register for the symposium to attend the AGM. You can review the minutes from the 2017 AGM on OPPI's website. All members are welcome and encouraged to attend. After the AGM and awards presentation, explore Science North.

## Achieve your professional goals

OPPI offers educational opportunities to enhance career development and help members maintain and increase their knowledge, skills and professional performance standards. CPL classes are available for all levels of experience. Learn more about each course by visiting OPPI's [Programs & Events webpage](#) or [Events Listings](#) and sign up.



## Write for the Planning Exchange blog!

Since 2015, OPPI has offered its Planning Exchange blog, facilitating the exchange of planning knowledge, best practices and issues important to members. It is a member-sourced blog, meaning it runs on your contributions.

OPPI is always looking for relevant topics to highlight, and members to write about them. Do you have any experience with LPAT that you want to share? Are you conducting interesting research and want to profile it? Do you have informed opinions on issues that impact planners' roles? Is OPPI missing an emerging topic or theme that members need to know about? If you are interested in contributing, please contact OPPI Education Manager Ryan Des Roches at [education@ontarioplanners.ca](mailto:education@ontarioplanners.ca). Submit your post today!



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Digital cities

# On Disruption, Transformation & Dividends

By Rob Horne, RPP

I am very pleased to introduce the feature articles in this edition of the *Journal* that both conceptualize and implement smart community initiatives. They reflect the journey from disruption, through transformation and (hopefully) to dividends. I challenge you to consider the influences technology has on the communities in which we live, work and play, and to build forward on the experiences offered here.

Smart community thinking requires great openness to change. But change needs to be attuned to community values and the public interest. Hence the role of the professional planner is critical to supporting community vitality as technology evolves, hedging against instability or slow decline.

When we talk about smart cities, a bit of context is important. To this end, we have included the following definition of smart (and smarter) communities. I like this definition, as it speaks to using data and technology as infrastructure to support sustainability. It also speaks to the degrees of smartness, and to community uniqueness.

Underpinning what we characterize as good planning, are efforts to help shape opportunities and prepare communities for change. Consider the thoughtful submissions of OPJ's contributors to this issue.

The City of Toronto is using technology to address old problems, like improving a 150-year-old streetcar line on one of the city's first streets. Michael Noble illustrates how new tools for gathering, combining and analyzing data can help answer questions more accurately and more quickly than in the past.

Waterloo Region is the only community of its scale in Ontario to become a finalist in the Government of Canada's Smart Cities Challenge. Matthew Chandy shares the community-driven framework the region developed to guide the use of technological solutions.

Ottawa has developed a strategy with its partners to position the city to take advantage of technology and to cultivate innovation. Geraldine Wildman and

Sheilagh Doherty describe the three priorities supporting Smart City 2.0.

Stratford has been designated the province's only demonstration zone for connected and autonomous vehicles. Joani Gerber describes why the community was chosen and how this initiative relates to the bigger vision of Stratford as a smart city.

Former Ryerson student Steven Coutts writes about engaging in planning for open and inclusive smart cities and the challenges this brings to the profession.

Contributing editor Rob Voigt asks whether the planning profession is responding and adapting quickly enough.

At a national scale, our country is consumed with the proposition of becoming a more vital part of the global knowledge economy. As we watch basic manufacturing shrink or right-size and relocate (witness the auto industry), we are faced with the shift from traditional commodity production to virtual and experiential product and service



A smart city uses technology and data to optimize resources and enhance quality and performance of urban services, increase economic competitiveness, and engage its citizens more effectively. A smarter city develops and implements innovative policies and technologies to ensure these benefits are realized in a manner unique and consistent with its core values of economic, social, cultural and environmental vitality.

~ Michael Noble



industries. The extent of this shift remains uncertain.

There is also much discussion around commoditizing data to the benefit of the public and private sectors, and realizing other dividends. We know that big data can be used and abused as well.

The number of lofty, transformational concepts and strategies seems boundless. The question is how one actually secures the tangible dividends that should accrue to smart (or smarter) communities.

Malcolm Gladwell asserts that “The key to good

decision making is not knowledge. It is understanding. We are swimming in the former. We are desperately lacking in the latter.”

It is an exciting new road, as long as we listen carefully and learn along the way.

*Rob Horne, RPP is a member of OPPI and the CAO of the City of Stratford. In his previous capacity as planning commissioner with the Region of Waterloo, he was also the chair of the Regional Planning Commissioners of Ontario.*

## From Locomotive Repair Shop to Community Hub

TECHNOLOGY AS A DRIVER of community change is not a new concept. Consider Stratford and the transformation of 17 acres in its downtown core from locomotive repair shop to community hub incubating start-up enterprises.

In the late 1800s, the Grand Trunk Railway established a massive locomotive repair facility (almost a half million square feet) on approximately 17 acres in downtown Stratford. At one point, over half of the city was employed by the Grand Trunk. With the eventual decline of rail and rise of the automobile in the early 1900s, the facility closed and was eventually used for a variety of transitional purposes.

The city floundered economically, prompting a bold move in

1952 to establish a Shakespearean Festival. Today, the festival is flourishing, with over a half million tickets sold annually, and a new \$65-million theatre now under construction.

Fast forward to 2012, when the University of Waterloo built a School of Digital Media using part of the former Grand Trunk property, now in city ownership. Today, the school is growing so rapidly that it is actively making expansion plans, and has been recast as an independent School of Interaction, Design and Business. The convergence of redevelopment interests in the area resulted in the creation of the Grand Trunk Master Plan covering 17 acres. Central to the plan is a community hub, which will be located in part of the former locomotive repair shop.



Cooper Block —before ...




... and after

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# New Technologies and Toronto's Transit Pilot

By Michael Noble, RPP

**P**lanners take great pride in their ability to understand how cities work and to make them work better. The promise of smart city technologies is that new tools for gathering, combining and analyzing data will help answer questions more accurately and more quickly than in the past. For example, information previously collected by individuals with clipboards for a few days during the peak travel period can now be gathered electronically 24/7 across a whole neighbourhood.

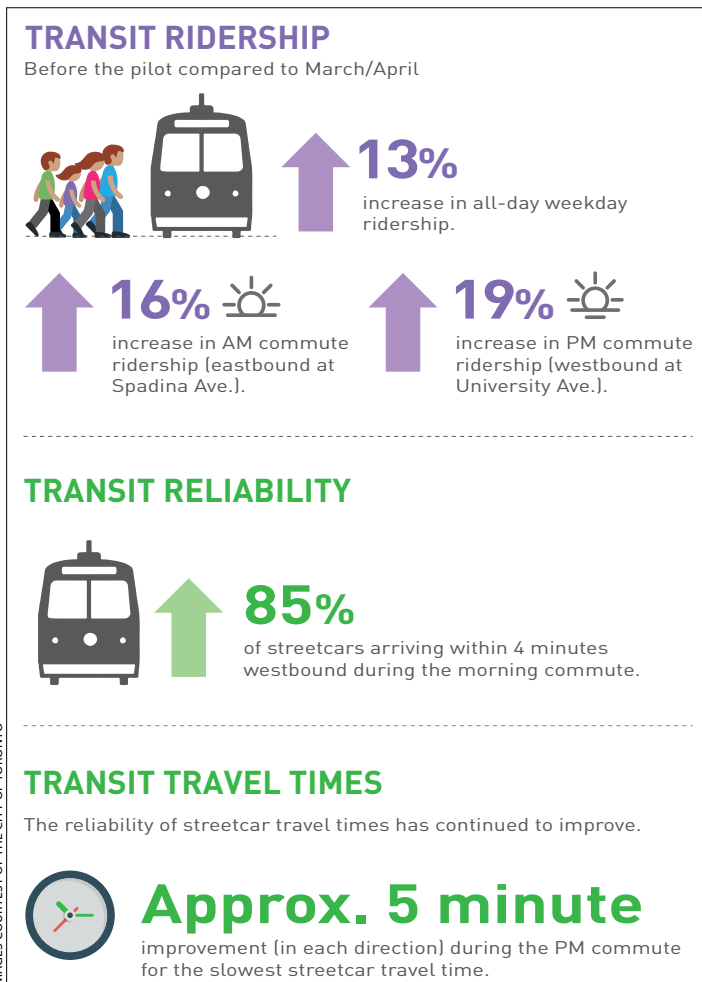
These new tools can often be used to address old problems—like improving a 150-year-old streetcar line on one of Toronto's first streets, King Street.

## The pilot project

When Toronto's first 10-block grid was drawn in 1793 (as the Town of York), it was King Street that cut east-west through the middle. In 1861, a

horse-drawn streetcar line travelled south on Yonge Street from north of Bloor to King and then east to Jarvis.

Today, King Street is part of the most travelled surface transit route in the city, with approximately 72,000 riders on the average work day as of 2017. It serves the Financial District—the largest concentration of jobs in Ontario—as well as neighborhoods with thousands of residential units and commercial destinations. Until recently, the streetcar rolled through mixed traffic. With 20,000 vehicles using the central section of the street each day, there were increasing frustrations with the slow travel speeds, unreliable spacing between streetcars and overcrowding.



IMAGES COURTESY OF THE CITY OF TORONTO



King Street Pilot, King Street & University intersection looking west, May 2018



Photo of King Street looking east from Victoria Street. The installation "Face to Face/Tête à Tête" is by Plant Architect Inc.

Some April highlights from King Street Transit Pilot dashboard



After years of proposed solutions, the King Street Transit Pilot was launched in November 2017. Today, between Bathurst Street and Jarvis Street, streetcars have priority and private cars are not permitted to drive through the majority of intersections. Automobile drivers can enter the street—to access a garage or drop someone off, for example—and then must exit the street. Street parking has been removed and patios and other public realm improvements have been installed for the warmer months. This pilot will continue for one year.

The goals of the project are to move people more efficiently on transit, improve public space, and support economic prosperity. Primary transit metrics are transit reliability, speed, and capacity.

### The evaluation

To evaluate the project's success, a broad set of data sources is being used, larger than any used previously in past studies. Managed by the city's Big Data Innovation team, information is being collected not just on King Street, but on the surrounding grid of streets, including:

- TTC GPS units on streetcars and busses
- Cameras on traffic lights to measure counts of different types of travellers (pedestrians, bikes, drivers, etc.)
- Bluetooth sensors to capture car travel times

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- Moneris point-of-sale purchase data to evaluate changes in business sales
- TTC ridership data
- Toronto Parking Authority data for parking lots and on-street spaces.

As the pilot has progressed, new information sources have been brought online and made available and more still will be added, such as air quality and noise sensors and collision reports.

Qualitative evaluation tools such as field investigations and perception surveys are also being used.

The depth of information available is particularly valuable for supporting and assessing a pilot project, because so much can be learned in a relatively short period of time.

Information is publicly available in a monthly status [report](#) with a dashboard of statistical results and details on evaluation methodology. Raw information for those who want to undertake their own analysis can be accessed on the city's [Open Data catalogue](#).

Privacy is a natural concern. Data collected through projects such as the King Street Transit Pilot are regulated by Ontario's *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (MFIPPA). Personal data may only be collected for a defined time period and purpose, and citizens must be informed that the collection is happening, usually through signage on the street. For example, intersection cameras do not capture faces or license plate numbers. Bluetooth IDs are instantly converted into anonymous numbers at the moment of collection, so that there is no way to trace information back to a specific phone. Moneris data is acquired at the aggregate level, so the city does not receive information on individual purchases.

### Handle with care

Historically, some of the most lauded and persuasive city researchers have been those who came up with new ways to study the realities of daily life. William H. Whyte's classic 1980 book and film, *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, for example, was based on evidence from time-lapse cameras in New York's plazas. The visuals were compelling—who knew how much people liked to move their chairs around?

The information available today dwarfs what Whyte had at his disposal. These new abilities create new responsibilities. One is the responsibility of all levels of government to work with community partners to examine the costs and benefits of the technologies and to develop the next generation of digital governance structures. Another is the responsibility of planners to use the information wisely to create a better city.

*Michael Noble, MScPl, MCIP, RPP, is a member of OPPI and a project manager with the City of Toronto's Waterfront Secretariat. His work includes the Sidewalk Toronto project and the Toronto's digital infrastructure plan. Previously, Michael worked on social housing neighbourhood revitalization and rental housing development.*

# Waterloo's Community-based Smart City Principles

By Matthew Chandy, RPP

**O**n June 1, Waterloo Region became the only big city in Ontario to become a finalist in the Government of Canada's Smart Cities Challenge, one of five across Canada. What launched Waterloo Region into the final stage was not the application of available technology and data, but the development of a community-driven framework for the use of technological solutions.

Given its strong technology sector, Waterloo Region has been able to leverage smart city solutions to enhance its service to citizens and to efficiently manage its infrastructure. These have ranged from LED lights to smart traffic solutions to apps that provide residents with information on municipal services. So when the federal government announced the Smart Cities Challenge we began our process by developing a community-based framework, not by identifying technologies that could be applied to a problem, or even identifying a problem.

This began through a broad-based consultation program with area municipalities, the technology sector, not-for-profits, educational and academic institutions, and the public. Together we worked to build consensus on the foundation of a smart Waterloo Region. The result was a set of six principles. These principles led the community to select healthy children and youth as the focus of its response to the Smart Cities Challenge.

Using technology and data, Waterloo Region will become the benchmark community in Canada for child and youth wellbeing. The following six principles will enable us to achieve that goal.

*Start with people's needs and engage the community*—The evolution of smart cities has moved from being technology-driven to being people-driven. Historically, municipalities have often looked to available technology solutions, such as smart sensors and streetlights, and then identified opportunities to apply them in their municipalities. Today we first look to identifying community challenges and then to finding or developing the right technology solution.

*Build connections and work together*—Communities often work in silos, with technology, not-for-profit, academia, government and the public each chipping away at broad-based community issues with minimal

intersect, often leading to duplication, fragmented solutions and missed opportunities.

Building new relationships and partnerships across all sectors leads to more flexible, effective and efficient responses to community issues. In Waterloo Region, we are proposing to build a community-based data platform that incorporate data on wellbeing from different public, private, and not-for-profit organizations. Using machine learning, this database will feed Canada's first real-time child and youth wellbeing dashboard, which will be available to the public and will allow decision-makers to allocate resources to the challenges that need them the most.

*Respond faster and make it transferrable*—The public and not-for-profit sectors are effective at identifying and responding to community issues, but not always in the quickest and most efficient ways. Partnering with private sector organizations, especially those in the technology sector, can lead to a better integration of technology and solutions. This enables us to identify where we are underperforming and to target efforts and resources.

*Share data but protect privacy and personal information*—Protecting personal information and privacy has never been more at the forefront of our collective conscious, considering the recent news about Cambridge Analytica, Facebook and more. Creating data sharing systems, while protecting the privacy of community members, is a fundamental requirement of any smart city initiative. Without it, no initiative would be supported by its citizens.

*Build on existing technologies but reflect local context*—Waterloo Region has always prided itself in its made-in-Waterloo Region solutions to local issues. This is evident in regional responses to issues such as affordable housing, urban sprawl, and many more.

Waterloo Region was one of the first municipality in Ontario to leverage a private/public partnership to deliver new affordable housing units to target needs most prevalent in our community. In response to the urban sprawl trend of the late 1990s, Waterloo Region established a firm countryside line to limit urban sprawl, protect valuable agricultural lands and maintain the community's rural character.

*Measure outcomes and design for the future*—If you cannot measure it, how can you know your impact? Smart city technologies need to be applied in ways that





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can be measured and evaluated concretely. Further, the correlation between the application and the outcomes must be discernible so that the community can see the impact.

Further, future applications of smart city technologies need to be adaptable and tailored to a comprehensive smart cities strategy so that they can be applied to issues arising in the future.

The application of these community-based principles has laid the groundwork for Waterloo's approach to smart city solutions.

Waterloo Region has identified six priority areas to be addressed through our smart cities initiative: early child development, mental health, bullying, literacy rates, high school graduation rates, and youths' sense of belonging. Working with our community partners we will develop connected community spaces, broader education platforms and technology-based programming that supports equity, mentorship, volunteering, mental health, food security and nutrition and STEAM (science, technology, engineering, the arts and mathematics) learning.

Waterloo Region has partnered with UNICEF Canada and its One Youth Initiative to build Canada's first real-time child and youth wellbeing dashboard. Using a community-based data platform connecting data from multiple organizations, we will create a framework that measures child and youth wellbeing in Waterloo Region against UNICEF's Canada's Child and Youth Wellbeing Index. Together, we will scale this framework to communities of all sizes across the country helping to make Canada the number one country in the world for child and youth wellbeing over the next decade.

Waterloo Region will be working on its smart city proposal over the next eight months, including the integration of technological solutions in each of its six priority areas. If selected as the winning big city community in Canada, the Region will receive a \$50-million grant from the federal government to implement its proposal.

*Matthew Chandy, RPP is a member of OPPI and manages the Office of Regional Economic Development at the Region of Waterloo and is leading Waterloo Region's response to the federal government's Smart Cities Challenge on behalf of the region and its seven partner municipalities.*

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# Ottawa's Blueprint for Smart City Success

Geraldine Wildman, RPP & Sheilagh Doherty

Like many Ontario municipalities, Ottawa is establishing its blueprint for future growth using a technology-centred approach to improving the lives of its residents. Planning for the city of the future is not easy; land use priorities continually evolve, and with disruptive technology added to the mix, one thing is certain—certainty is a fleeting concept.

So how does a city forge ahead in times of uncertainty? The City of Ottawa and its smart city partners—such as Invest Ottawa and Hydro Ottawa—know that building a strong foundation for the future depends on two things: the well-being of its residents and the strength of its economy. Together they help to cultivate innovation and position the city to take advantage of technology, rather than be disrupted by it.

Today, influences of technology are everywhere and users are widespread. Consider the modern farmer for example. Using technology as the primary means to increase outputs, farmers are now able to feed more people than ever before, while reducing inputs such as water and fertilizer. Much like the retail sector's shift from bricks and mortar to online shopping, food production may be drastically different in the future, if trends in vertical farming continue.

In 2017, as part of Ottawa's blueprint, the city adopted its smart city strategy, [Smart City 2.0](#). The strategy focuses on three priorities that will help the city become more innovative and digitally connected.

The first priority concerns connectivity and the need to ensure that everyone has equal access to information communication technology. This priority recognizes that high-speed communications infrastructure has become critical to sustained economic growth, quality of life, and the delivery of efficient and effective government services. One of the initiatives of this

priority is to explore developing a minimum standard of connectivity for the city. The priority also supports Ottawa's long history as a leader in providing next generation networks. With over 80 per cent of its land base rural, Ottawa continues to confront unique challenges around connectivity.

The second priority focuses on Ottawa's economy and its continued growth in the local knowledge-based sector. The success of the future city will rely on Ottawa's ability to attract, develop, and retain a substantial pool of knowledge-based talent. It will also depend on the city's ability to attract knowledge-based businesses to the city and to support their advancement and expansion.

Invest Ottawa, the city's arms-length economic development organization, works closely with investors to catalyze the growth of local entrepreneurs and help Ottawa achieve its potential as a future-ready city. The city is also working with investors through its Innovation Pilot Program, which provides entrepreneurs and start-ups with an opportunity to test and pilot their services or products across the organization. Together, both the city and Invest Ottawa are focusing and supporting the advancement of specific knowledge-based sectors like smart agriculture and autonomous vehicles.

Through the study, *Ottawa Next: Beyond 2036*, the city is assessing its long-term economic outlook within the context of land use planning. By forecasting growth scenarios, the study will help the city create an adaptable and resilient planning framework, improving its capacity to respond to challenges and opportunities. Anticipating how technology disruption might influence the future city is another way that Ottawa is addressing uncertainty.



Geraldine Wildman



Sheilagh Doherty



Ottawa's Innovation Centre at Bayview Yards



Concept Plan for an Agri-food and Smart City Innovation Hub

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The third priority centres on innovative government. This means leveraging opportunities to enhance platforms for city services and prepare its workforce for the digital economy. While the city will continue to improve mobile services, it will also capitalize on its wealth of open data to further inform decision-making and support intelligent infrastructure and assets. The city's Digital Services Strategy, currently underway, will outline opportunities to improve government services.

Ottawa continues to address uncertainty by carefully mapping out its blueprint for smart city success. Its emphasis is on the people that are at the forefront of the smart city initiatives. The city will work with civic tech groups and residents to generate ideas and think outside of the box to solve technological, social, and economic problems in Ottawa. It will also continue to promote innovation by fostering collaborations and engaging with stakeholders. It will continue to measure our success by the well-being of our residents and the strength of our economy.

*Geraldine Wildman, RPP, is a member of OPPI and a rural strategist who oversees Ottawa's rural affairs office. Sheilagh Doherty is a program manager who oversees high economic impact projects including the Smart City Strategy. Both Geraldine and Sheilagh work in economic development and long range planning services within Ottawa's Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Development Department.*

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# Stratford—Real Life. Real Tech. Real Smart.

By Joani Gerber

**M**unicipal government policies and procedures are not conducive to speedy decision-making, and yet that's exactly what is needed to leverage private sector opportunities.

Recognizing the imperative to be nimble and move fast, the City of Stratford was able to capture a multi-million-dollar investment in autonomous vehicle testing. In June 2017, the Renesas Connected Vehicle Test Site was an unoccupied snow storage area. By September, a lease was signed, asphalt was laid and cars were testing on a four-acre fully functioning track.



The basis of its success is threefold: being the perfect size, inter-departmental coordination, and the speed of its decision-making. As a result a community of 32,000 attracted a significant investment and the only designation in Ontario as a Provincial Demonstration Zone for Connected and Autonomous Vehicles.

"The City of Stratford was everything we needed—they are high energy, they like autonomous driving and they really want to help companies like Renesas develop technology, so it was a great match," Renesas Electronics of America senior manager John Buszek said.

## Staff collaboration

All city departments and related economic development, electric and data utility corporations must see the value of the project and be willing to creatively explore opportunities within acceptable boundaries. All must have a bias toward action.

Our experience is that face time matters. While no department intends to stand in the way of innovation, process often can, so by bringing all parties together at the site with clear expectations we were able to move the project forward. Our companies have removed the silos and so must we.

## Manageable size

Stratford's scale actually works in its favour.

"We aren't so big that we're cumbersome to deal with, but not so small that we have little to offer," says Stratford mayor Dan Mathieson. "We've been intentional about seeking and leveraging partnerships, such as Toshiba and Motorola, to build our city's brand as a digital technology centre. As a result, we are now known as a high-quality test bed for technologies because we focus on clear value propositions, with strong emphasis on applied research."

Stratford covers 14 square kilometres. One can drive the perimeter in 20 minutes or less, meaning that no stone is left unturned and any site is reachable quickly. Our deployment of technology for our connected vehicle testing is manageable—it is installed on all 24 traffic lights in the city's system—which means real data can be pulled in and used from an acceptable sample size.

The potentially trillion-dollar autonomous vehicle industry will put pressure on municipal infrastructure to adjust and readjust as the technologies and demands of the driverless future change and unfold.

## Forging partnerships

In November 2017, Stratford was designated by the province as the Demonstration Zone for Connected and Autonomous Vehicles. Born of a partnership with the Automotive Parts Manufacturer's Association (APMA), the Stratford Demo Zone aims to position Ontario as a globally-recognized connected / autonomous vehicles infrastructure jurisdiction. This designation elevates Stratford, and the province as a whole.

Partnerships such as these promote a customer-centred approach to the commercialization of innovation in Ontario and Canada, and will provide Ontario-based companies with a competitive advantage. These activities will also strengthen Canada as destination for foreign investment.

*Joani Gerber is the Chief Executive Officer of investStratford, which represents the economic development interests of the City of Stratford and leads special initiatives including the Stratford Autonomous Vehicle Demonstration Zone.*



"We Stage the Future" #Stratford4Real IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR



# Planning Open and Inclusive Smart Cities

By Steven Coutts

**W**e hear that big data and smart city technology have the potential to bring real improvements to the lives of urban dwellers—improving safety, mobility and service delivery, and allowing better coordination among city functions. But do these proposed benefits outweigh the concerns that come with them?



As urban planners, we need to fully consider what technology means for our practice. The combination of big data and smart city technology—sometimes called urban informatics—has major implications for planners. A few reasons why planners ought to engage:<sup>1</sup>

*The huge amounts of raw, unfiltered data generated in the smart city are useless to most users*—Without specific training in data management and analysis, data simply being made available is a lot like looking for a needle in a giant haystack. It can have a negative impact on grassroots efforts to use data to understand problems or create solutions at the local level.

*Decision-making and service delivery will increasingly be driven by big data and algorithms, yet we can't easily examine them and question how they work*—Municipal governments have been using software to manage service delivery and assist with administration for many years. However, the sophistication of cutting-edge smart city technology based on predictive algorithms means that it won't just support decision-making, it will drive it. But what happens when, for example, an algorithm

that tracks crime incidences causes some neighbourhoods or segments of the population to come under greater policing and surveillance?

*Big data, while less visible than the built environment, will profoundly change the urban experience*—Who owns the data that are collected in the city? Privately-owned smart infrastructure (e.g., sensors, cameras, servers, etc.) and the data they collect could privilege some firms (e.g., those with lots of resources) over smaller, local businesses that can't compete on the same scale. Planners concerned with equity should consider how individuals who don't possess smart technology or whose data isn't considered as valuable (e.g., for advertising purposes) might find themselves excluded, creating a new type of digital divide in our cities.

*Tracking behaviour in public spaces, collecting and storing this data raises serious ethical questions around privacy and consent*—Most of us are used to the idea that when we use smartphone apps we're consenting to our location data being recorded (even if we didn't read the terms of use thoroughly). But how do we give (or withhold) consent as we move through a neighbourhood equipped with cameras and sensors? How do we know who is collecting our data and for what purpose? Can we, as planners, ethically use data in our work that's been obtained through coercion or uninformed consent?

Clearly this is an area of professional practice that needs focussed attention. Consider the following four actions:

*Communicate and curate data in an accessible way for public use*—OPPI's Professional Code of Practice states



Plugging into what people are doing

that planners have a responsibility to “provide full, clear and accurate information on planning matters.” In an era of big data, this means being proactive, readying datasets with public use in mind, and anticipating how grassroots planning efforts might use open data.

*Advocate for code and data used in public decision-making and governance to be made open and transparent*—While access to the inner workings of smart city software and algorithms won’t necessarily solve any problems in itself, it permits the opportunity to credibly challenge and hold governments, service providers, and/or developers accountable and promotes the public interest.

*Be responsible stewards of citizen data in all planning activities*—Planners constantly use data to inform their work. However, the ethical and privacy considerations involved in collecting identifiable personal or behavioural data need to be carefully considered. This means asking “Do we really need this data?” and, if the risks prove too great, potentially deciding not to collect the data.

*Encourage developers to make solid plans for dealing with data*—Private sector planning consultants should encourage their clients who are proposing smart city developments to anticipate and mitigate community concerns related to data transparency and privacy as much as possible in order to gain public support for their projects. Municipal planners can play a role during pre-application consultations, advising

proponents and providing a checklist of best practices on maintaining open data, personal privacy, and an accessible public realm.

It is time to re-imagine the role of professional planners in light of the challenges raised by technology. Instead of allowing the technology to drive us, we need to guide the technology and ask plenty of critical questions:<sup>2</sup> Do we need to implement this technology or collect these data? What kind of engagement opportunities exist? Will this lead to the best outcomes for my community?

Regardless of how smart cities eventually take shape, planners will be needed more than ever. It is up to the profession to decide how we will act.

*Steven Coutts, BA (Hons), M.Pl., is a student member of OPPI and recent graduate of Ryerson University’s Master of Planning in Urban Development program.*

#### Endnotes

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# Process and Effect

By Michael Mizzi, RPP

**T**here is likely no other planning office in the country that processes more minor variance and consent applications than the City of Toronto Committee of Adjustment.

Across Toronto, there are four district committee of adjustment offices, and six adjudicative panels comprising of 30 council-appointed members. In 2017, they dealt with over 4,500 applications at 109 hearings. About one-third of the applications were within the centre of the city. That is almost double the volume it was eight years ago. And, so far, 2018 is shaping up to be another high volume year.



## Window onto the evolving city

Committee of adjustment applications also provide a window onto the evolving city, helping staff identify some of the changes in development occurring in Toronto.

In addition to a monthly overview of the applications received by the city, staff analysed every committee of adjustment application over two time periods: August 2003 to December 2005 and April to June 2015. They assessed and compared patterns to gain a better understanding of the type of minor variances being requested. Staff also examined how many decisions were approved and refused, and which ones were appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board. The results proved insightful.

While the amount of development that occurs as a result of the committee of adjustment process is significant—almost 4,000 applications were approved in 2017—more development occurs through the issuance of as-of-right building permits or through larger area or site-specific rezoning processes.

Perhaps not unexpectedly, the type of minor variances requested has remained relatively constant over the years. Although, the number of minor variances sought per application increased for lots with detached or semi-detached houses. Applications received for lots in low-scale residential neighbourhoods are usually for increases in floor area and height, and often they seek relief from side-yard setback requirements.

Many owners today build houses larger than those originally constructed on their lot or permitted by zoning. The average size of a new house, often requiring minor variances, has steadily increased over the years, as many post-war bungalows are being replaced with two-storey homes. While many of these large new

homes have not resulted in more people being housed, some have been constructed to accommodate more units, such as secondary suites.

Consent-to-sever applications tell a similar story of some neighbourhoods being gradually rebuilt with new housing stock, taller than what previously existed and tighter to the property lines.

Each year, about 10 per cent of all committee of adjustment applications in Toronto are to sever an existing lot, and create two or more smaller building sites. Some neighbourhoods, such as Willowdale in North York Centre or Long Branch in South Etobicoke, have had a higher than average proportion of these applications, usually to split 50-foot frontage lots into two 25-foot wide properties.

The traditional lot pattern of some neighbourhoods is changing through this process. This reflects continual low-scale intensification occurring in residential neighbourhoods across the city. Many people consider this to be an erosion of the physical character of the area, while others view it as an acceptable form of intensification. As a result, these types of applications can be challenging for staff to assess and panel members to adjudicate.

There is a greater emphasis in recent years on resolving overbuilding issues and addressing transitions between new development and the existing context. All parties are increasingly sensitive to maintaining neighbourhood character and preserving trees.

Low-scale neighbourhoods in Toronto, along with the downtown, avenues and centres are undergoing redevelopment and intensification, as land values and population rise, and the ground-related housing stock ages. The City of Toronto Committee of Adjustment, its staff and panel members, play an increasingly important role in managing and shaping gradual change across the city, in particular, in the lower scale neighbourhoods.

## Addressing operational challenges

A sustained high volume of applications continues to challenge the city's operational capacity. As practicing planners in Ontario will know, *Section 45 (4)* of the *Planning Act* states that a committee of adjustment hearing must be held within 30 days of an application being received.

In Toronto, applications normally take months to be heard, in part, because of the back-log associated with high volumes, but complexity and other factors are at play too. Hundreds of applications are deferred annually to enable proponents, the community and staff to have added time to address concerns, which is good for



everyone if better development is the result. However, this requires hearings to be rescheduled, adding to the workload.

We are working to achieve operational improvement constantly, both through e-service modernization and enhancements to the organizational structure.

Many measures to address high volumes have been implemented in the last year. These include accelerated hiring processes to fill vacancies, especially application technicians, and an increase in the number of staff reports providing expert advice, to aid panel decision-making.

The current workload is a challenge for panel members, as well. On average, the agenda for each hearing will include over 40 applications, and can draw hundreds of residents depending on the concerns

raised. Site visits and document review require a substantial time commitment by panel members.

Approximately 10 per cent of all committee of adjustment applications in Toronto are appealed. Mediation, whether by professional mediators, staff or the parties themselves, is encouraged. This serves to increase dialogue and reduce the number of matters appealed to the Toronto Local Appeal Body.

Learn more about the City of Toronto Committee of Adjustment by visiting [www.toronto.ca/cofa](http://www.toronto.ca/cofa).

*Michael Mizzi, MCIP, RPP, is a member of OPPI, and director of zoning and secretary-treasurer of the committee of adjustment for the planning division in the City of Toronto.*

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## Municipal Natural Asset Management

# Private Landowner Collaboration

By Sara Jane O'Neill

Cities have become the engines of change worldwide and nowhere is this more evident than in municipal service delivery. Aging infrastructure is unable to meet increasing capacity demands as cities grow and redevelop. City budgets can't keep pace with costly infrastructure upgrades to address capacity challenges, forcing municipal staff to re-think their options.

One of those options is to use natural assets to help provide municipal services, such as stormwater management, flood mitigation and improved air quality. This can help municipalities deliver these services sustainably over the long term and often at a lower cost than solely relying on engineered solutions. This is why the [Municipal Natural Assets Initiative](#) is working with Canadian municipalities to develop a process for managing natural assets. The process, known as municipal natural asset management, is a way of measuring and managing the services provided by natural assets (such as wetlands, forests, foreshores for example) under the same asset management and financial frameworks as engineered assets, such as roads, bridges and buildings.



One of the main challenges with municipal natural asset management is that, unlike roads or buildings, natural assets do not heed lines on a map or jurisdictional boundaries. A creek, for example, is likely to cut through multiple municipalities and public and private lands. So how can a local government work towards managing an asset that may not be fully under its jurisdiction?

The answer lies in comprehensive collaboration. Natural assets can only be managed effectively when all landowners are at the table. While there are many stakeholders—including other levels of governments, businesses, landowners, and First Nation communities—a recent [report](#) prepared by the MNAI focuses on private landowners in particular. Although managing natural assets on private lands for public goods and services can be challenging, local governments have access to a number of tools and incentives to encourage private landowners to become

partners in the development of an effective natural asset management strategy that balances private costs and public benefits.

Planning tools are critical to natural asset management. The Town of Gibsons, BC, for example, pioneered natural asset management with the release of its [Eco-Asset Strategy](#) in 2014. Since

“The term municipal natural assets refers to the stocks of natural resources or ecosystems that contribute to the provision of one or more services required for the health, well-being, and long-term sustainability of a community and its residents.”

~ Municipal Natural Assets Initiative

then, the town has amended or updated a number of land use planning tools to support its strategy, including an innovative approach to Development Cost Charge by-laws. Acknowledging natural assets, the town amended its Development Cost Charge by-law to include the capital costs of maintaining natural drainage features supporting new development. This change, which was approved by the Province of British Columbia, sets an exciting planning precedent for other communities.

Land acquisition and conservation easements are other tools that have been used across Canada for environmental protection, and may also be used to manage natural assets. Edmonton, AB and Surrey, BC, for example, have made acquisition of significant natural areas a priority and are working on a dedicated funding mechanism to support that priority. For many municipalities, however, the funding required for land acquisition will be a challenge, so conservation easements may be a more cost effective alternative. The Nature Conservancy (US), for example, has found that it is able to protect three times the amount of land through conservation easements than through direct purchase.

Economic incentives for natural asset management are less commonly used in Canada, but have great potential. Incentives such as payments for ecosystem services, tax incentives, and water quality trading

markets all build on a beneficiary pays model where those who benefit from natural asset protection—the public—pay those who protect the natural asset—the private landowner. This contrasts with programs, such as carbon pricing, where the polluter pays. Other funding sources for municipal natural asset management programs include user fees, stormwater utilities, and development charges. Green bonds and provincial/federal grants can also help local governments build capacity or invest in new projects and programs.

Given existing infrastructure deficits and the expected impacts of climate change, natural asset management is a core component of effective asset management planning. To ensure success, local governments must also adopt a collaborative approach among all stakeholders, particularly private landowners.

*Sara Jane O'Neill is a senior research associate at Smart Prosperity Institute, a national research network and policy think tank based at the University of Ottawa, and a convening partner of the Municipal Natural Assets Initiative. The other partners include Brooke and Associates, David Suzuki Foundation and Town of Gibsons. To learn more about the Municipal Natural Assets Initiative visit [mmai.ca](http://mmai.ca).*

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**OBITUARY**

**Lynsie Wilkinson, RPP,  
1982–2017**

Lynsie Wilkinson, RPP MCIP, was always eager to learn, share with her colleagues and contribute to the team. She was a dedicated planner and strong proponent of the planning profession.

Born and raised in the City of Hamilton, Lynsie attended McMaster University where her passion for planning flourished. After graduating she was hired by a consulting firm in St. Catharines, which enabled her to apply her academic knowledge to real-world planning applications. Subsequently she relocated to the Town of Bracebridge to obtain experience as a planner working in the public sector.

In 2007, Lynsie began her career with the City of Hamilton starting in the zoning by-law reform section, and then moving on to community planning, growth planning and the policy planning sections of Hamilton's Planning and Economic Development Department.

Shortly after joining the city, Lynsie began the accreditation process towards becoming an RPP and became an active member of OPPI. She served on the Western Lake Ontario District leadership team, and supported professional



Lynsie Wilkinson with her niece, Laine

continuous learning during its developmental stages. Lynsie was a planner who put the public interest above all else in her planning work.

Throughout her battle with breast cancer, Lynsie continued to work and serve the community she loved. She had an infectious laugh, a positive attitude and never wanted her illness to conquer her spirit.

In 2017, the Hamilton planning community mourned a dedicated colleague and friend, who lost her courageous and hard-fought battle with cancer. She is missed by her many friends and colleagues.

In recognition of the service she provided to the city, a commemorative bench has been donated in Lynsie's memory. It can be found in Hamilton's Gage Park at 1000 Main Street East.



Commemorative bench donated in Lynsie's memory, in Hamilton's Gage Park at 1000 Main Street East

**Be Involved**

ARE YOU PASSIONATE about the planning profession and accountability to the public interest? If you answered yes, consider volunteering for OPPI. [Log in to your Member Profile](#) and click on Volunteer Opportunities to sign up today!

**OPPI Correction Notice** In the July/August issue of *OPJ*, OPPI incorrectly listed Lynsie Wilkinson as a Full Member who was removed from the register for non-compliance in 2016. Lynsie was focused on fighting a courageous battle against breast cancer, and she sadly passed away in November of 2017. OPPI would like to apologize for the error and any stress this may have caused her colleagues at the City of Hamilton, fellow OPPI members and her friends and family.

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OPPI18 Symposium Preview

# Working Toward Conciliation

By Jesse Wentz



Planners have a vital role to play in how the future of Canada is designed and built. You have an opportunity to benefit all communities by seeking out reconciliation and relationships with the communities who have called this place, Turtle Island, home for millennia.

More than any other time in recent memory, many organizations, institutions, governments and individuals are interested in understanding and connecting with First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities across Canada.

The recent sesquicentennial, which arrived in the shadow of the final report from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, released just two years prior, provided a time of reflection on Canada's past, present and future. In turn this has offered an opportunity to engage in a new dialogue between First Nations, Inuit and Métis and those who now share this land with them.

Many of the groups seeking a new relationship have arrived at this point with no experience as to how to proceed in the proper way. Such is the legacy of Canada, a country founded by treaties with Indigenous nations but which has spent the last 150 years trying to ignore that very history.

It's important to recognize and acknowledge the purposefulness that created this ignorance. As planners, it will be easy to recognize the design that went into obscuring history and marginalizing and dehumanizing peoples through assimilationist and relocation policies that attempted to erase Indigenous peoples and remove them from both physical and historical sight. It's a daunting task to ask groups of people, who lack education and knowledge about these issues, to engage in appropriate new relationships. And for those institutions that played a part in the marginalization of Indigenous peoples, years of mistrust must be overcome before a new relationship can even begin.

That is why the work to build relationships with Indigenous people begins before you even pick up the phone, or draft an email to contact an Indigenous person. The first step is an internal one. Groups and individuals must first understand their own place in this relationship—examine their own past to see where barriers may have started, and where their lack of understanding or knowledge may have contributed to those barriers.



Reconciliation as part of a national movement is one that exists largely for non-Indigenous peoples. First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples are all too familiar with having to reconcile from the abuses of the past, to the reality of the present—existing in a country that strived so hard for your extinction—and to the threats on our future freedoms.

Reconciliation starts with you, in your home, and radiates out to your family, your community, your workplace, your city, your country. It requires individual change as much as institutional change, as large groups only move when the individuals that comprise them begin to move.

As seen in the recent decision by the new Ontario government to shelve a writing session to update curriculum with Indigenous' perspectives,

governments, especially colonial ones, struggle to reconcile, as they feel threatened by what acknowledging Indigenous peoples and nations means to their own legitimacy. It's this outlook that means reconciliation can, and might, be fleeting on the governmental level. But it doesn't have to be that way on the institutional, organization, community or individual level. Canadians, not their governments, will drive reconciliation. In doing so they may gain an understanding, which had been withheld from them, of the place they now call home, while others were marginalized on their behalf.

Planners, do your homework, find out what nation's territory you are on, at home and at work. What treaty territory are you on? Then reach out to the band offices of those communities and invite them to participate from the beginning of the project, even if it is only in an advisory or consultative role.

Build a relationship like you would with any other partner, especially one to whom an historic debt is still to be paid. And most of all don't be afraid, afraid of making a mistake, or insulting someone. We are all in the same boat, building new relationships.

What Canada needs is conciliation, the building of a new working relationship, and you are people who can help make that happen.

*Jesse Wentz is a broadcaster, advocate and pop culture philosopher. Jesse will be the keynote speaker at OPPI's 2018 Symposium. To register visit the OPPI website.*

# Navigating the Planning Process

By Anna Pace, RPP

**O**n April 3, I was appointed to chair a new Ontario agency, the [Local Planning Appeal Support Centre](#). This new, independent agency is the first of its kind in Canada. It was established to help people navigate the land use planning and appeals process.

For a process to be fair, people have to know it exists, it has to be understandable and it has to be affordable. That has not always been true for Ontario's land use planning process. The Local Planning Appeal Support Centre was created to help change that. When people want to take an active role in shaping their communities, we are here to help.

The centre helps people who want to participate in the planning process or appeal a decision to the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal. Its small team of planners and lawyers offers information, advice, and sometimes representation, free of charge. The team explains how to fill out appeal forms, compile the appeal record, and prepare for case management conferences, mediations and hearings.

While the centre's primary clients are individual residents, and ratepayer and advocacy groups, we have also responded to requests for information from developers, planning lawyers in private practice, and even municipal planning departments.

The support centre is operating in a new legislative framework. On the same day as the support centre opened its doors, some major changes to Ontario's planning and appeals system became law. Those changes to the *Planning Act* are intended to give communities a stronger voice in planning decisions. In part, this means involving residents earlier in the process. This goal is reflected in the centre's mandate.

Only people who have made written submissions to council or spoken at a public meeting can appeal a decision. And no new evidence can be introduced as part of the appeal. Gone are the days when people can save their best arguments for the tribunal. The research has to be done and the arguments formulated when the municipality is considering the planning application. At this early stage, the support centre helps clients understand the proposal, frame their concerns in land use planning terms, engage with the municipality and the applicant, and make a solid submission to municipal council.

Once all the evidence is disclosed, if the parties decide it might be better to negotiate rather than spend time and money at the tribunal for an uncertain outcome, the centre assists clients through the mediation process.

I've heard a concern that the support centre is encouraging appeals. This is not true. Some appeals have merit and others don't. The centre's team of planners and lawyers makes that assessment and shares its best advice whether it be to appeal, withdraw or mediate. It isn't always what the client wants to hear.



For example, in one recent case a resident was concerned about a proposed mid-rise next to his farmhouse. The building was to go up outside his kitchen window, where he'd been drinking his morning coffee every day for the past 40 years.

With help from one of the centre's planners, the resident learned that because of the height and transition, he might have grounds for appeal. He decided to appeal and the municipality offered mediation to the developer and the resident. The parties agreed and the centre supported the resident during mediation. A solution was found and the resident withdrew his appeal.

Another inquiry resulted in a very different outcome. A residents' group called looking for help in appealing a decision to allow a hotel and restaurant development in its neighbourhood. After one of the centre's planners explained that the area was earmarked for growth and the proposal met the official plan policies related to economic development and tourism, the group changed its mind and decided not to appeal.

Everyone benefits when residents get professional advice. Appeals without merit are less likely to go ahead and residents with valid objections are able to present them more clearly. This makes the whole process more efficient for everyone—municipalities, developers, residents and the tribunal.

Most people don't think about how development decisions are made until they see a notice posted on a building site or find one mixed in with their mail. Even fewer people understand the role they can play. As a professional planner that's something I'd like to see change. And it's the reason I'm proud to be leading an organization whose mandate is to help people shape their own communities.

*Anna Pace, MCIP, RPP, is a member of OPPI and the first chair of Ontario's Local Planning Appeal Support Centre, which opened April 3, 2018. She has led planning initiatives for major rapid transit projects at Metrolinx and the TTC and has served in a range of senior positions with the City of Toronto.*

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# Planning for Drinking Water in First Nation Communities

By Jessica Lukawiecki

When I first took a course in Environmental Planning through York University’s Master of Environmental Studies degree, I had no idea what to expect. What does it mean to plan for the environment and where can such a career take you? I would soon find out.

My professor was the director of Ontario’s David Suzuki Foundation, and he invited me to volunteer with the foundation on a research project looking at First Nation communities’ drinking water. Like most Canadians, I was unaware that more than 126 First Nation communities across Canada are under a drinking water advisory, meaning that they cannot drink the water that comes from their taps.<sup>1</sup>

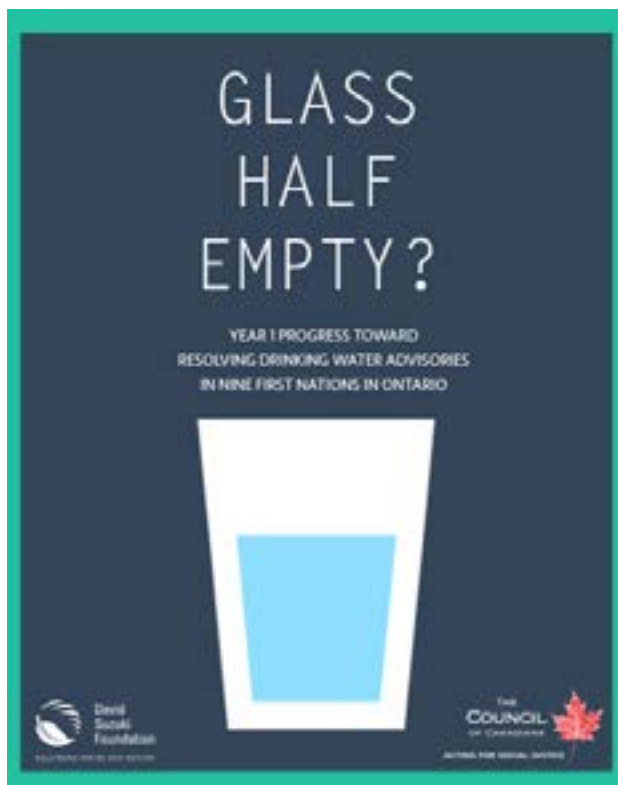
Many First Nation communities experience chronic water issues, even when their neighbouring municipalities enjoy access to clean, safe and reliable drinking water. I had a lot to learn in the early days of this work and some of it was hard to wrap my head around—in a number of First Nation communities children develop rashes because of the poor quality of their water and some have linked their abnormally

high cancer rates to contaminated water. All of this in Canada, a nation that is celebrated for being one of the most developed in the world.

This issue of inequality is deeply tied to Canada’s colonial history. It is an issue that asks us to revise the ways in which we’ve structured our society and the relative ways we’ve prioritized the economy over the social and environmental well-being of all people living within our nation’s borders.

Looking at the issue in depth, it becomes clear what a government should not be doing.

Historically, the focus of First Nation communities’ drinking water investments has been quite narrowly put on capital—pouring millions of dollars into brand new water treatment plants in the prioritized First Nation communities. Very little attention has been paid to the training, staff, capacity-building and funding required to properly operate and maintain these water systems in a way that is sustainable. These and many other challenges represent systemic barriers that cause First Nation communities across Canada to have disproportionately high



Glass half full, half empty



Map of Ontario communities surveyed about drinking



rates of inadequate access to safe, clean drinking water.

With the federal government's commitment to ending all drinking water advisories in First Nation communities by 2021, it seemed there was no better time to monitor the progress that has been made on this issue. The report would be the first of an ongoing series meant to hold the federal government accountable to its commitment to safe, secure drinking water for First Nation communities.

Data were compiled from interviews, meetings, conferences, and reports—I spoke to chiefs, members of council, technical service advisors, engineers, provincial and federal government practitioners, lawyers and media to inform the project. I used this data to assess the likelihood of whether nine First Nation communities across Ontario with long-term drinking water advisories would have their advisory lifted within the committed timeframe.

Three First Nation communities we assessed as being on track to having their drinking water advisories lifted. In another three communities efforts are underway but there is continued uncertainty about whether the advisories will be lifted within the five-year commitment. For the remaining three communities, unless current processes and procedures are reformed, it is unlikely the advisories will be lifted within the committed timeframe.

Based on our research, we developed a number of recommendations for addressing some of the major barriers to progress. These include working with First Nation communities to streamline and simplify the process for capital investments in water infrastructure; supporting First Nation-led approaches to drinking water that recognize the local

leadership; and increasing federal transparency, reporting of spending and progress toward ending long-term drinking water advisories in First Nation communities.


Working on this project has challenged me to learn about new fields, to develop relationships with a diversity of people holding different worldviews, and to recognize the ways in which the environment and social well-being are intimately tied. I am excited to see where these experiences take me as I move forward in my career in the dynamic field of environmental planning.

*Jessica Lukawiecki is a researcher and writer focused on a range of social and environmental issues such as water and food security, Indigenous rights, urban sustainability and climate change mitigation and adaptation. She has a Master of Environmental Studies degree from York University and a Bachelor of Arts degree from McGill University, and has completed projects for the David Suzuki Foundation, the City of Vancouver and the Shareholder Association for Research and Education.*

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# E-Bikes and Bicycle Highways

By George Liu

In September 2016, I jumped on a plane from Toronto to Amsterdam with three suitcases, my trombone, and my bicycle to begin my PhD career researching cycling in the Netherlands. For cycling enthusiasts around the world, the Netherlands represents an idealized landscape where everyone cycles together. The Netherlands is country where the bicycle is used for close to one-third of all trips, so understanding how to achieve this level of carbon-free transport is of vital importance for cities around the world.

Having done cycling research at the University of Toronto, and after working in various roles related to cycling while living in Ontario, I was acutely aware that the best of North American cities struggle to achieve a cycling mode share of 10 per cent. When I heard that more than half of all trips in Amsterdam are done by bike, I knew I needed to learn more.

At first, I posed a practical problem: how can North American cities increase their cycling numbers? Over the past year, I started asking a more interesting question: What will a place like Amsterdam look like with even more cycling? Is it even possible for a city to achieve 75 per cent of trips by bike? History has shown this has been done before, albeit before the widespread ownership of automobiles.

Being a researcher affords me the opportunity to imagine these possible worlds. One technology that may open up cycling to a greater number of people is the e-bike. The elderly can get a boost up hills and fight headwinds while those with longer commutes can pedal for longer and get to their destinations faster.

The growing popularity of e-bikes, when combined with the

construction of cycle superhighways, such as those found in London, UK, can make cycle commuting more practical than ever. Similarly, regions in the Netherlands have envisioned the combination of fast e-bikes (with speeds up to 45 km/h) and cycle highways as the new frontier for intercity travel. By eliminating traffic lights and giving bicycles priority at intersections, e-bike commuting is marketed as the alternative to crowded trains and rush-hour traffic jams for ever greater distances.

The practitioner proposes the best solutions. The academic asks the right questions. For bicycle infrastructure, there is a commonly held belief that “if you build it, they will come.” The theory is that given a network of high-quality bicycle infrastructure, people will choose to cycle. Yet, the transport system is

unimaginably complex.

It may be true that copying and pasting Dutch bicycle infrastructure in other cities around the world will entice more people to cycle. But what do you do if you are already a world leader in cycling? With nobody to copy, how do Dutch planners improve the cycling experience in their cities? In other words, how do the best get better?

I don't know the answer, but the quest for better cities is a dynamic, experimental, and exciting journey towards a PhD.

*George Liu, MES (Pl.), is a PhD candidate researching bicycle infrastructure and urban design at Eindhoven University of Technology and University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands. Follow his blog at [www.everybodyhatestraffic.com](http://www.everybodyhatestraffic.com).*



Cycling infrastructure in Eindhoven, the Netherlands

IMAGE COURTESY OF MATTHEW PINDER



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# Come for the View: Stay for the Liveability

Review by Glenn Miller, RPP

*Building Community: Defining, Designing, Developing UniverCity*  
By Gordon Harris with Richard Littlemore  
Ecotone Publishing  
144 pages  
ISBN 978-0-9972368-4-297  
\$34.90 (CAN)

If you are looking to learn about contemporary community building techniques that embrace sustainable design, innovative development economics and the art of successful collaboration with developers to deliver higher standards of environmental performance, look no further than *Building Community: Defining, Designing, Developing UniverCity*. I might also suggest reading the last chapter first. This is where you will quickly realize that the ambitious vision for constructing a “sustainable community” on top of Burnaby Mountain in British Columbia is qualitatively different from typical development projects.

More than 15 years into the active development phase, and looking ahead to the near future when their development corporation (Simon Fraser Community Trust) is wound up, authors Gordon Harris, president and CEO of the enterprise, and his writing colleague Richard Littlemore, start the final chapter with a discussion about what it will mean to launch this living community into “the outside world.” UniverCity is not just a collection of condominiums ready to be turned over to a condo board (or, in B.C. parlance, a strata council). Nor is it just a successful test bed for alternative design standards that have demonstrated to the host municipality (the City of Burnaby) that these standards are “no more difficult or expensive to maintain than a conventional subdivision.”

At its core, Harris suggests, the test of the impending handover will be that the residents “who have bet their life savings that this new community will be sustainable ... for them” will see that their trust in the process and its outcomes has been justified. “It’s about safety and security ... and liveability,” the authors say. It is also about protecting long-lasting relationships because the Trust’s principal shareholder is Simon Fraser University (SFU)—hardly a conventional landlord.

With a projected population of around 10,000, UniverCity—a brand that urban planner Harris confesses works better on paper than in conversation—is designed to benefit SFU but is also intended to become part of the wider Burnaby community. Perhaps the boldest move took place long before the current management was involved. Instead of laying out a typical subdivision, a decision was made at the outset, some 25 years ago, to condense the density allocated by the City of Burnaby into a fraction of the space, ensuring that the layout of UniverCity is compact and walkable, leaving most of the forested hillside in its natural state. Designed so

that no residents are more than a 10-minute walk from main street, the community comprises a range of attractive high-rise, midrise and townhouse residences, as well as a full range of essential amenities including restaurants, a grocery store, and a school.

Another important differentiator is the governance model. Although SFU is the principal shareholder, the trust reports to an independent expert board (with community representatives as well as an SFU student and faculty member). The mission is twofold: to establish a residential community that complements the university (a large percentage but by no means all residents are connected in some way to SFU) and to “establish an endowment fund and other sources of revenue to support University purposes” such as teaching and research. Harris estimates that by the time the Trust wraps up its responsibilities, it will have established an endowment of about \$90-million to support the university’s mission. This is just the beginning, as all developments are on 99-year leases.



Early on, the trust’s management recognized that subsidizing retailers would be key to normalizing shopping patterns. Similarly, ensuring that the fast-growing neighbourhood had its own school and a state-of-the-art daycare facility helped accelerate a sense of belonging (and a slew of international design and development awards). For the cost-conscious, the regulated neighbourhood utility, designed to operate on renewable sources of energy, will come on stream shortly. And the trust is also building support for a high-speed gondola to connect to the transit hub at the base of the mountain, which will cut travel time from 17 to six minutes and enable the regional transportation authority to redeploy dozens of diesel buses elsewhere.

Moving from “Inception” to “Construction” through to “Reflection,” Harris and Littlemore describe these moves—and many more—in plain language that gives full credit to the many collaborators whose expertise made a difference. They also acknowledge miss-steps and, with the benefit of hindsight, things that would be done differently.

*Building Community* is an authentic, highly readable account of how to translate a bold vision into a practical reality that belongs on the desk of anyone who wants to bring their own practice to the next level.

*Glenn Miller, FCIP, RPP is a senior associate with the Canadian Urban Institute in Toronto. Gordon Harris is a Fellow of CIP and an active participant in the affairs of the Planning Institute of British Columbia.*



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

# Planning for the Digital City

**W**hile technology is an issue all industries and professions are tackling, it is quickly playing a larger role in the planning profession. The pace of technology has increased expectations and complexities concerning information sharing, transparency and communications.

Professional planners routinely gather and analyze information concerning all sides of an issue. Gaining an understanding of emerging technologies and how they may influence decision-making and impact local communities is increasingly an important part of the RPP's skill set.



However, the topic of technology is very broad, so it's helpful to define it in practical terms that enable OPPI to determine what it can do to help our members keep up with technological changes and prepare for the next wave. In this regard OPPI reached out to members with a short survey about individual experiences with technology, and how technology helps inform what you do. The response was overwhelmingly positive and contributed to a fulsome discussion around the Council table, led by director Eldon Theodore.

The survey and subsequent discussion considered several matters, such as member experience with all kinds of technology, what members feel the biggest impact on their roles will be, barriers and adaptability of technology,

examples of technologies RPPs should be using now and whether technology could replace the role of planners. The resulting insights were informative:

- Many members have experience with the day-to-day tools of the job (e.g., email, word processing, and others) but are seeking experience with emerging technologies such as 3D modelling, drone technology, augmented/virtual reality, public consultation tools and web-based spatial mapping applications.
- There is disparity in adopting technology between private and public sector organizations, and small and large organizations, and access varies geographically.

Building on this discussion, on September 20, I will host a Twitter chat concerning how technology is transforming the roles of RPPs. I want to hear from you about the issues you think RPPs are facing as technology begins to transform your role. More information on this Twitter chat can be found on the OPPI website.

OPPI will use all this information to help guide and develop educational opportunities for members.

I hope you will be able to participate in this discussion. It is important that RPPs understand and can prepare for the impact of technology on our profession.

Jason Ferrigan, RPP

*Jason Ferrigan, RPP, is OPPI President and director of planning for the City of Greater Sudbury.*

## SOCIAL MEDIA

# Siren Songs of the Techno-future

By Rob Voigt, RPP, contributing editor

**T**echnology is significantly influencing the evolution of our communities. In response, planners have been adapting to these changes and integrating the use of technology into their work. But are we responding and adapting quickly enough?

Changes resulting from technology are taking place at such a rapid pace and significant scale that planners are only beginning to understand their implications. This compromises our ability to effectively prepare the communities we serve.

One example is Google Sidewalk Lab's Waterfront Toronto

project, which could become a global first for the integration of digital technology in the built form. (See *Technology's City Building Laboratory*, *OPJ* Vol. 33, No. 1, 2018.) This project represents city planning in a social, cultural, and urban design framework with no historic precedent or contextual touchstone.

Autonomous vehicles represent another example of ground-shaking technological change. At the very least the shift to this form of transportation will only increase and entire cities may experience almost perpetual motion as service is decoupled from drivers, and ownership is shared.

The community health impacts of this phenomena, regardless of vehicle energy source, will be stunning as even more car-dependant development will be facilitated. An increase in the conflict between vehicles and active modes of transportation alone is anticipated to have a negative impact on community health.



Additionally, as this form of technology goes through its research and development phase, communities are being used as living test tracks. Regardless of the statistical arguments that might be made about levels of inherent danger in vehicle use, this burden on citizens, of being live subjects in ongoing product testing, is extraordinary.

Planners need to engage in the dialogue about the implications of new technology and the expectation of our communities, not just about the transportation system impacts. With the magnitude of financial influences of the automobile industry at play, and the physical changes this shift in the current transportation paradigm represents, the ability of planners to have a meaningful role will be a very tall hurdle to clear. Unfortunately, planners are already laggards in this discussion behind engineering, technology and economic development agencies that have created a framework that assumes utopian results and has essentially eliminated citizen engagement.

The next example is different, in that it is not the technology itself that results in the change, but the way it acts as a catalyst. The new business models of technology-focused companies allow for potentially staggering concentrations of wealth. Which in turn, has increased their ability to exercise influence on the communities within which they operate. In Amazon's case, this influence is exhibited by the way it has initiated the process to select a location for a new headquarter campus. Through an RFP process, Amazon has changed the dynamics of economic development and planning activities associated with the traditional site selection process.

Through this process, communities have been given the

opportunity to lure Amazon's investment with their unique characteristics and benefit packages. While the overall quality of life community attributes are undoubtedly considered, they are secondary to the financially-oriented ones. Also, the compressed schedule of this process has not allowed sufficient time for the crafting of well-reasoned, fully costed, and contextually and culturally appropriate proposals. Nor have there been the public engagement processes we would expect to be associated with sound urban planning at this scale.

From a corporate perspective, this approach may lead to an acceptable level of success for Amazon. If so, this will undoubtedly be a process that is mirrored by other companies that feel they can exercise similar levels of influence on the competition for economic development. Planners must find a leading role in this framework, or the results could be disastrous with communities sacrificing their future for short-term gain.

Planners do not yet have the skills or expertise to navigate these new technology-induced forms of city building and evolution. The profession is not currently equipped to rapidly adapt its citizen engagement strategies, legal and policy frameworks, and urban design tools to adequately address them.

*Robert Voigt MCIP, RPP is a professional planner, artist and writer, recognized as an innovator in community engagement and healthy community design. He is the Director of Planning for Parkbridge Lifestyle Communities Inc., board member for EcoHealth Ontario, and publishes Civicblogger.com. Contact: @robvoigt, rob@robvoigt.com.*



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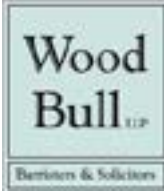
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# Review of Report on Barriers to Building New Housing

By Kevin Eby, RPP, contributing editor

In May 15, the C.D. Howe Institute released “*Through the Roof: The High Cost of Barriers to Building New Housing in Canadian Municipalities*.” Authored by Benjamin Dachis and Vincent Thivierge, the report offers an analysis of the policy, development review and municipal financing processes associated with the development of new single-detached housing in major cities throughout Canada, with a particular focus on the Greater Golden Horseshoe. The report concludes that regulatory barriers “such as zoning regulations, development charges, and limits on housing development on both Greenbelt land and land between urban areas and the Greenbelt [are responsible for increases of] around \$45,000 for the average single-detached home in Ontario, and over \$100,000 in some municipalities.”



To address this issue, the report recommends that various levels of government reduce regulatory barriers, including easing restrictions on the development of agricultural land; moving up-front costs of development currently assessed as development charges onto user rates or the property tax base; and streamlining the development approval system.

While regulatory barriers can increase the cost of housing, the analysis and conclusions in the C.D. Howe report are based on a number of questionable assumptions, incorrect policy interpretations, misrepresentation of the conclusions of a previous study, and a failure to consider one of the fundamental challenges facing municipalities today, namely the maintenance and replacement of existing infrastructure.

## Assumptions used in the study

The C.D. Howe report attempts to address the causes of increased prices associated with single-detached housing through analysis of the gap between the cost of construction and the market price for such homes. A key assumption of the report is that in a well-functioning housing marketplace, the market price of housing remains close to the cost of constructing it. The report argues that where market prices are consistently higher than the construction cost, it is often barriers from excessive regulations that make the housing more expensive.

The C.D. Howe report uses the physical cost of construction, which exclude development charges, land costs, gross profit margins and costs related to the time taken to move through the regulatory process—and then adds percentage mark-ups reflecting the cost of land and gross profit margins to determine the total cost of construction. This is then compared to market prices for such homes, with

the authors assuming that the gap between the two is primarily associated with regulatory barriers imposed by municipalities or provincial planning policies.

One area of concern with the analysis in the report relates to the assumed percentage mark-ups associated with the cost of land and gross profit margins. The assumptions used in the report relating to these factors are drawn from a 2017 study prepared for the U.S.-based National Bureau of Economic Research by Edward Glaeser and Joseph Gyourko—*The Economic Implications of Housing Supply*. These assumptions are key to the analysis in the C.D. Howe report, as any variations in the percentage mark-ups associated with either the cost of land or gross profit margin directly impact the size of the gap that the authors allege is primarily related to regulatory barriers. The C.D. Howe report uses these two assumptions drawn directly from the U.S. study to “make our results comparable.”

The cost of land assumption used in the C.D. Howe report—25 per cent mark-up on the physical cost of construction—is identified in the Glaeser and Gyourko study as being “an industry rule of thumb based on an *ad hoc* survey of home builders” undertaken in the U.S. sometime before 2003. In an appendix to the C.D. Howe report, the authors examine some comparable data for locations across Toronto and conclude that in “using the 25 per cent assumption of land cost, we are perhaps understating those costs.” The use of a higher percentage mark-up for land costs in the analysis would reduce the gap the report associates with regulatory barriers.

The gross profit margin assumption used in the C.D. Howe report—17 per cent mark-up on the physical cost of construction—also comes from the Glaeser and Gyourko study. This study provides no source for this gross profit margin assumption. In the appendix to the C.D. Howe report the authors note that “Industry Canada estimates that gross [profit] margins were 33.5 per cent” in 2015, the most recent year for which data were available. This is almost double the 17 per cent factor used in the Glaeser and Gyourko study.

The authors of the C.D. Howe report use a sensitivity analysis of selected municipalities to assess the impact of utilizing the lower gross profit margin assumption from the Glaeser and Gyourko study as opposed to the Industry Canada estimate. This sensitivity analysis demonstrates that use of the Industry Canada estimate would have reduced the gap the report attributes primarily to regulatory barriers by 13 per cent in the municipalities reviewed.

The authors conclude that a reduction of 13 per cent would “not change results dramatically,” and taken in isolation this is probably correct. However, the cumulative effect of the lower gross profit margin assumptions, combined with the “understating” of land costs, is not assessed. Together these would serve to reduce the magnitude of the regulatory barriers identified in the report.

## Recommendation to ease restrictions on development of agricultural land

The authors of the C.D. Howe report incorrectly reference various policies of the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* by failing to properly identify the quantum, applicable dates and phase-in provisions for various targets. The authors also ignore provisions that allow some



municipalities to apply for specified alternative density and intensification targets.

In speaking to the Ontario specific analysis, the C.D. Howe report states that where a municipality has a large share of land zoned for agricultural use, this land is unavailable for urban development. This is not an unreasonable observation, but the report goes on to conclude that the “resulting shortage of land” in such situations leads to increases in home prices. There does not appear to have been any consideration given to the relative overall size of the municipalities in question, their forecasted populations or whether the municipality had resulted from the amalgamation of other cities, towns and townships. The assumption in the report that a municipality having a large share of land zoned for agriculture automatically has a shortage of urban land, thereby causing home prices to rise, is simply made without justification.

The report also states: “Developers usually build greenfield single-detached residential development on what was previously agricultural land. However, developers in GTA [Greater Toronto Area] municipalities are facing a shortage of land available for new housing development (Clayton 2015). The primary cause is not the Greenbelt, but because suburban municipalities are not enabling development on land between the existing urban boundary and the Greenbelt.”

While there appears to be a bit of a disconnect between various sections of the C.D. Howe report as to whether or not the Greenbelt is a significant factor in the rise of single-detached housing prices, a more significant concern is the use of the 2015 Clayton policy report in drawing these conclusions.

The 2015 Clayton policy report argues “that a shortage of serviced land [contrary to the Provincial Policy Statement which requires three years of serviced land to be available] is

the major contributor to the decline in the production of new ground-related homes in the GTA, thus contributing to the sharp rise in prices.” This issue is not about how much land is designated for development, but rather about how lands already designated for development are brought onto the marketplace.

The Clayton policy report does not speak to development restrictions on lands currently outside the urban areas as implied by the C.D. Howe report. The authors appear to have conflated two entirely different issues, and in doing so have drawn erroneous conclusions.

There is no shortage of land designated for urban development in the Greater Golden Horseshoe based on the policies of the Growth Plan. Not only have Growth Plan conformity reviews insured that every Greater Golden Horseshoe municipality has sufficient land to accommodate its population and employment forecasts to 2031, it has been reported through a number of studies that many municipalities have land designated for urban development well in excess of that timeframe. The next round of conformity reviews will extend the planning horizon to 2041, with any required adjustments in the amount of land designated for urban development being made at that time.

The C.D. Howe report’s recommendation to open up large chunks of agricultural land simply to maximize competition—thereby reducing housing prices—is short-sighted at best. More developable land does not generally increase the amount of development that will occur. It simply results in the same amount of development being spread out over a larger area, thereby:

- Unnecessarily taking agricultural land out of production
- Expanding the up-front expenditures to service additional land



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- Delaying the implementation of cost-effective transit service to such areas.

### Recommendation to reduce development charges

One of the fundamental challenges facing municipalities today is how to finance the maintenance and replacement of existing infrastructure. The C.D. Howe report's recommendation that a significant amount of the cost of new infrastructure required to service developing greenfield areas be moved onto the user rates and property tax base is again short-sighted. At a time when every bit of available property tax room is going to be required to meet municipal obligations to maintain and replace existing infrastructure, a proposal to increase property taxes to pay for costs currently funded through an appropriate alternative funding mechanism is of questionable merit.

This applies equally to user rates for water and wastewater. Water authorities in Ontario are now required by provincial legislation to prepare plans to raise adequate financial resources to provide safe drinking water today and into the future. As a result, many Ontario municipalities are already proposing to dramatically increase user rates to solve deferred maintenance issues and replace aging infrastructure.

If the financing of infrastructure required to open up new greenfield areas for development is left to property taxes and user rates, such decisions will be made annually by municipal councils at budget time, with such infrastructure projects competing directly with all of the other demands made on these revenue sources. It was not that long ago that the development industry was expressing concern about slowdowns in development related to the inability of various municipalities to finance even tiny non-growth related portions of capital projects required to open up new areas. It is hard to imagine the development industry supporting a recommendation that would remove virtually all the leverage the industry currently has relating to when new infrastructure is constructed.

The *Development Charges Act* essentially requires payment of an initiation fee for new development—a proportionate share of the growth-related cost of new infrastructure—after which such development is assessed equally with the rest of the homes and businesses. The proposed elimination of development charges essentially gives new development a discounted entry at the expense of existing taxpayers and current consumers of services paid through user rates.

If the development industry is concerned about NIMBYism today, one can only imagine the impact when residents realize they are being forced to subsidize such new developments as is being recommended in the C.D. Howe report.

### Recommendation to streamline the development approval system

There is one area where I am in full agreement with the authors of the C.D. Howe report. The development approval system needs to be streamlined. Steps in this regard have already been taken by the province through the restructuring of the Ontario Municipal

Board, but clearly more needs to be done at all levels.

The real issue relating to land availability facing the GGH today is not about how much land is designated for urban development, but rather how to address the challenges associated with short-term inventories. These can be resolved most effectively by updating applicable development controls, streamlining development review and environmental assessment processes and/or increasing resources to deal more effectively with the process.

*Kevin Eby, B.Sc, MA, RPP is a member of OPPI, the OPJ provincial news contributing editor and the former director of community planning with the Region of Waterloo. He previously worked on secondment to the province to help with the formulation of the original Places to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe.*

## URBAN DESIGN

# POPS for Towns and Mid-sized Cities

By Nancy Reid, RPP & Harold Madi, RPP, contributing editor

**O**wned and maintained by private developers or building owners, privately owned publicly accessible spaces (POPS) are publicly accessible open spaces that contribute to urban character, enhance the pedestrian experience, and supplement the larger network of publicly owned parks and open spaces.

There is an obvious trade-off between governments and private developers in dense urban areas, where demand for public open space is growing and land availability / affordability is declining. However, the exchange of density for public space may not be possible or appropriate in smaller towns and mid-sized cities. In these situations planning tools can be used to help implement POPS and encourage the animation, revitalization, and well-being of downtown cores and mainstreet areas.

### Benefits of POPS

For municipalities, POPS can be an effective way to provide public spaces without having to dedicate financial or human resources. The community can gain a wide range of social, economic, and environmental benefits through well-designed and maintained POPS—at no cost to the taxpayer—such as, improved quality of life and well-being, increased tourism, increased property values, and cleaner air and water.

For the private sector, POPS provide an opportunity for developers to receive bonusing under the provisions of *Section 37* of the *Planning Act*. In exchange for these public spaces, and under certain conditions, a developer may be permitted to exceed the heights and densities otherwise permitted by applicable official plan policies and zoning by-law provisions.

Clearly, POPS can offer an opportunity for partnerships between municipal governments and private developers. And this



Nancy Reid



Harold Madi

type of partnership is not limited to large cities. For many small towns and mid-sized cities across Ontario, where financial resources are often just as or more constrained, such partnerships can offer a cost-effective way to increase access to public space.

POPS can help revitalize downtown and mainstreet areas. Implementing POPS with new development along a historic mainstreet or downtown core can result in an increased availability of leisure destinations, and can attract residents and visitors to the area.

POPS can help to enhance character and design. Implementing POPS improves aesthetics by conveying openness, creating visual interest, and creating connections to the street, and to nature.

POPS can help to improve walkability and the pedestrian experience. Implementing POPS enhances pedestrian circulation by providing accessible options for ingress and egress. They provide eyes on the street, which in turn can improve pedestrians' perception of safety.

### Planning tools

Policies, by-laws and incentives can all be used to facilitate POPS in Ontario's small and mid-sized municipalities. The following examples illustrate how this is being done in several municipalities today.

#### *Official plan policies and zoning by-laws can encourage/facilitate POPS*

Policy 410 of the City of London's official plan clearly communicates to private developers that the city has a desire to

gain POPS with new developments: "Other open spaces that are privately-owned but accessible to the public, will be established through planning and development approval processes."

Similarly, zoning by-laws can facilitate POPS by defining certain types of public uses, such as public art, community gardens, plazas, and atriums, and so on, which can be permitted as-of-right in certain zones within a municipality.

#### *Policies and by-laws can mandate POPS*

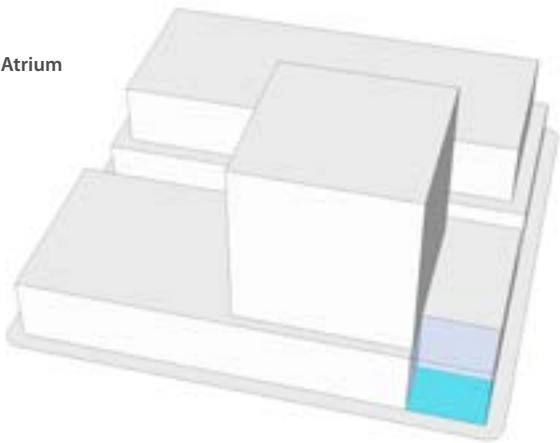
The City of Ottawa Uptown Rideau Street Secondary Plan allows for deviations from maximum building height provisions through its density redistribution policy provided: "The proposed development provides a minimum 200m privately owned publicly accessible space (POPS)."

Parkland dedication strategies and by-laws under *Section 42* of the *Planning Act* can also be used to mandate the provision of POPS in Ontario municipalities. For example, parkland dedication policies and by-laws can explicitly permit various forms of POPS, such as pocket parks and sliver spaces, for parkland dedication.

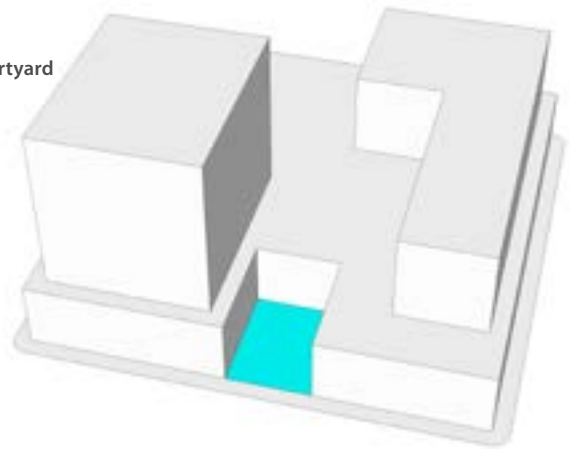
While most municipalities accept cash-in-lieu for high-density developments, parkland policies and by-laws can be updated to ensure that a physical land contribution is made through POPS in urban centres and areas of growth. For example, the Town of Newmarket has updated its cash-in-lieu by-law within areas subject to the Urban Centre Secondary Plan:

### Some POPS typologies

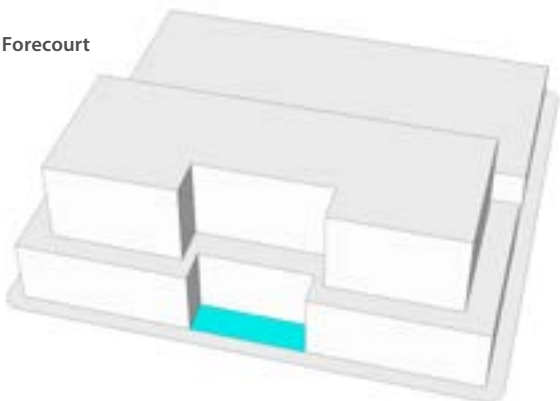
Atrium



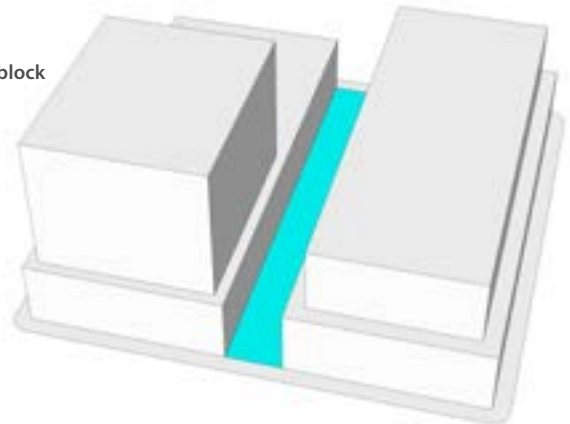
Courtyard



Forecourt



Midblock





“All residential development on sites greater than 1,000 sq. m. in size to provide a physical land contribution of:

- a) An Urban Park System land contribution of not less than 7.5% of the developable site area; and/or
- b) An Urban Square or Plaza, Pocket Park or Sliver Space with a minimum frontage on a public street of 7.5 metres, and a minimum size of 75 square metres; and/or
- c) Pedestrian Mews with a minimum width of 6 metres.

The remainder of the required parkland dedication may be made up of an off-site land dedication, or cash-in-lieu of land, or some combination of land and cash-in-lieu.”

#### *Incentives can pay for POPS*

Through Section 28 of the *Planning Act*, Community Improvement Plans (CIPs) can address certain revitalization and redevelopment needs of a community, often focusing on downtown cores. Once a CIP is in place, the municipality can provide grants and loans for eligible costs included in a redevelopment project.

For example, the Township of Cavan Monaghan Downtown Millbrook CIP is a good example of cost sharing for POPS through incentives because it includes an individual grant program that is specifically targeted at POPS: “The POPS and Public Art Grant may be available to eligible applicants to assist with the permanent installation of Publicly Accessible Private Spaces and outdoor artworks on private property.”

Eligible costs associated with POPS or public art projects in Cavan Monaghan include decorative signage, paving and walkways,

permanent landscaping features, seating, heritage commemoration, decorative lighting, artists’ fees and installation charges.

In Cavan Monaghan, when all eligibility requirements are fulfilled, a POPS and Public Art Grant may be provided for 50 per cent of the eligible costs. The total value of the grant cannot exceed \$5,000 per project and/or property.

In addition to individual grants created for the purpose of encouraging POPS, the township also permits costs associated with POPS to be included in the list of eligible costs for a tax increment equivalent grant. This grant is focussed on encouraging major redevelopment or adaptive reuse projects in existing built-up areas.

*Nancy Reid, RPP is a member of OPPI and a senior policy planner at the Town of Milton. She has more than 12 years’ experience working on community improvement and revitalization plans for municipalities across Ontario. Harold Madi, RPP, is a member of OPPI. He has two decades of planning and urban design experience leading numerous large-scale, multi-faceted and visionary projects across Canada and internationally.*

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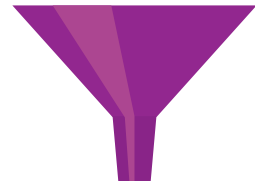
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