

Healthy *Communities*

Sustainable Communities



A Call to Action



Ontario
Professional
Planners
Institute

Institut des
planificateurs
professionnels
de l'Ontario



Healthy Communities, Sustainable Communities

A Call to Action: Ontario Professional Planners Institute

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Overview

Established in 1986, the Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI) is the recognized voice of the Province's planning profession and provides vision and leadership on key planning issues. The Institute's more than 2,700 members are employed by government, private industry, agencies, and academic institutions. They work in a wide variety of fields, including urban and rural community development, urban design, environment, transportation, health and social services, housing, and economic development.

At the Institute's Symposium in 2006, it was clear that OPPI members were committed to creating and fostering healthy communities throughout Ontario, because they recognize how land use planning decisions shape us in ways that we are only just beginning to appreciate – obesity, heart disease, mental health, social isolation, nutrition, and air quality.

In keeping with this commitment, OPPI has prepared a position paper focusing on healthy and sustainable communities that emphasizes the importance of urban design, active transportation, and green infrastructure. The paper also explores the links between public health and land use planning and includes strategies for collaborating on tangible actions that result in healthier communities.

OPPI sees this as critical because where we work, live, and play is vitally important to the quality of our lives. Our built environments are not addressing emerging public health issues well and are resulting in a less than optimum human environment. These issues are not minor and for the first time in many decades, our children's life expectancy may not exceed our own. We need to reconsider our built environment expectations to better address emerging public health issues.

Our Position

As a call to action, OPPI believes the following five issues require immediate priority attention by all those with an interest and involvement in planning our communities and our future. To be successful in creating healthy and sustainable communities, we must collectively:

1. Refine and verify the results of the public health work on the relationship between sprawl and poor health outcomes, including obesity, to better develop land use and transportation design responses to Ontario's unique built environment.

2. Develop design measures and transportation modelling methods to better balance walking, cycling, and public transit with the demands of automobiles.
3. Prepare more sensitive land-use compatibility guidelines to address noise, odour, and air contaminants associated with the mixed land uses and higher densities required by Ontario's growth management policies.
4. Develop planning policies and methods appropriate to different contexts, including in economically declining regions and municipalities, by:
 - Encouraging markets for locally grown agricultural produce;
 - Finding innovative local uses for lands and resources in rural and northern communities; and
 - Scaling services in declining rural and urban communities to match community needs.
5. Ensure that planning analysis and decisions enable local communities to take control and manage change sustainably.

Discussion

In addition, OPPI has identified five areas of research in which Ontario's built environments are not effectively addressing public health needs, and has asked the following questions of those with an interest and involvement in planning our communities:

- 1) How do the built environment and transportation systems contribute to obesity and related health issues?
- 2) How do the built environment and transportation systems affect air quality along heavily travelled corridors and in areas of mixed uses and higher densities?
- 3) How do the built environment and transportation systems affect air quality in general?
- 4) How do the built environment and transportation systems, along with poverty and economic decline within and outside our major urban centres, affect human health?
- 5) How do the built environment and transportation systems affect social cohesion?

In response, OPPI has developed a number of suggestions and solutions to making our communities more healthy and sustainable, including initiatives in the following areas:

Transportation:

- Expanding transportation legislation, policies, and modelling programs to include walking and cycling, access transit and not just automobile use, in establishing transportation master plans and infrastructure requirements. Locally, attention needs to be placed on the physical design of paths and streets; safety (including lighting, street crossings, and passive surveillance); aesthetics and cleanliness; and destinations, for example, linking shopping, entertainment, workplaces, and parks.

- Planning communities with high connectivity, and spreading traffic and transit along main streets, must be combined with appropriate distribution and placement of supportive built form, including:
 - Reducing the number of private vehicle lanes;
 - Adding dedicated transit lanes;
 - Allowing space for intensively planted boulevards and medians;
 - Promoting transit and walkability to help reduce pollution and accidents; and
 - Slowing the posted speed of roads to increase safety and reduce accidents.
- Advocating that work must begin at every level of government and every level of planning and design to address the following key issues, for example:
 - Ensuring every Secondary Plan and Plan of Subdivision satisfactorily accommodates all primary modes of transportation in a way that directly connects and relates to the surroundings;
 - Requiring that arterial roads contain no more than two or four private vehicle lanes; if additional travel demands exist, the additional corridor space should be devoted to transit or bicycle lanes;
 - Developing comprehensive Travel Demand Management strategies that provide incentives and disincentives, recognizing all modes of transportation; and
 - Introducing new standards and approaches to managing transportation resources in concert with land use plans.
- Promoting local actions such as regular road cleaning, closing certain roads to automobile traffic, elimination of idling, smoother driving habits, routing heavy trucks away from residential areas, and increased use of alternative modes of transportation. Promotion of cleaner vehicles at the federal level is also required.
- Paying specific attention to reducing use of petroleum-fuelled vehicles in favour of other transportation technologies and modes, and placing greater attention on “greening” our urban environments with green roofs and trees, especially along heavily travelled thoroughfares.
- Recognizing the implications that the link between land use and transportation also has for social equity. Individuals and families with lower socio-economic means, and those who must drive to work because alternative forms of transportation are not feasible, are forced to spend a disproportionate share of their income on their automobile.
- Advocating that governments contribute funds and resources toward the implementation and operation of connected transit networks that can reduce travel times and provide consistent levels of service with appropriate fare structures.

Land Use Planning:

- Recognizing that good urban form is functional, economically and environmentally sustainable, and liveable, in a way that promotes public health. It is expressed in complete, compact communities that have a clear structure of neighbourhoods and offer a variety of housing options, facilities, and open space systems, including natural and built features.
- Planning and creating neighbourhoods and communities that offer live/work opportunities where residents can either work at home or walk to work; where Internet access strategies are in place to help employees work from home; and where the need to travel outside the community during the daily peak period travel times is reduced.

- Ensuring that land use planning takes into account access to fresh, healthy, and local food, including greater emphasis on urban agriculture and maintenance of farming on the fringe of growing urban centres.

Infrastructure:

- Addressing our infrastructure needs. Old and new infrastructure needs to be reorganized, rebuilt, replaced, or dismantled to support sustainable urban form and transportation networks if our current public health challenges are to be addressed.

Recycling used construction materials to reduce demands for fresh resources. However, this will require additional spaces within urban areas for reprocessing materials for reuse and may generate additional dust and particulate emission sources. Road, infrastructure and building design standards may also need to be revised to enable greater reuse of construction material.

- Promoting greater openness to new ways to design, develop, and implement new infrastructure that support the changes to urban form and transportation systems. Planning for social infrastructure can also support healthier lifestyles, particularly among low-income households.

Urban design:

- Designing complete, mixed-use communities with good access to employment, shopping, education, recreational opportunities, and health care to help reduce car trips and promote a healthier, more active lifestyle.
- Designing comprehensive open space systems that integrate and link natural features to help alleviate respiratory problems, promote physical activities, and support mental health. A hierarchy of good-quality built features, such as urban parks and parkettes, squares, and pathways, linked with well-designed walkable streets, would also contribute to healthier communities.
- Greening our communities and neighbourhoods (existing or new) to make them healthier and to make the urban infrastructure less visible, while reminding us of our connection to the natural environment. Suggested approaches include:
 - Planting trees along streets, particularly the most travelled ones;
 - Reducing the extent of paved areas, particularly surface parking;
 - Installing permeable paving and green roofs;
 - Making creative use of stormwater features; and
 - Employing building techniques such as triple glazing and careful placement of outdoor amenity areas.

Summary

OPPI is committed to a planning process that places greater emphasis on healthy and sustainable communities that focuses on the following key elements:

Good urban form, arising from careful planning and designing of our regions, cities, neighbourhoods, has the potential to positively influence health issues. It is functional, economically and environmentally sustainable, and liveable, in a way that promotes public health.

Communities that adopt these planning principles are walkable, cyclable and transit-supportive, include transit-oriented development, and promote alternatives to the single occupancy vehicle.

These communities are safe and accessible to people of all ages. They have a strong character and distinctive identity and promote a sense of place through high-quality planning and design.

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