



After 32 years working for small and large municipalities as both a development and policy planner, Lesley Pavan, RPP, retired this past spring from the position of Director of Development and Design with the City of Mississauga.

Registered Professional Planner

PROFILE

NAME:
Lesley Pavan, RPP

LOCATION:
Mississauga

POSITION:
Director of Development and Design with City of Mississauga (retired spring 2020)

In addition to development application processing, Pavan worked on a wide range of projects over the course of her career: community master plans, housing, heritage, brownfield policies, environmental planning, movement plans, and process improvements, including Mississauga’s e-plans implementation. In the role of Director, she led a team of over 50 professionals, overseeing all aspects of development approvals, zoning bylaws, and urban design. A true leader within the profession, Pavan has also been a mentor to a number of planners seeking their RPP designation.

Looking back on your career, what aspects of being a planner brought you the greatest satisfaction?

I really enjoyed problem solving. Planning projects offer lots of challenges. If an idea or proposal is sound and in the public interest, I never gave up because the direct path was blocked. I found it exciting researching an issue, unpacking it, looking at it from various viewpoints, working through the problem with others, then selling the idea. Nothing equals the joy of resolving an issue or promoting an idea; seeing it implemented and celebrating with the people who made it happen.

Do you have any favourite moments you consider “wins” for yourself as an RPP?

I could cite milestones, like delivering the City of Mississauga’s first Natural Areas Survey, convincing city leaders to acquire and preserve a provincially significant wetland that was being threatened by a landowner or approving the first site plan through e-plans. But honestly, my favourite moments would come after a difficult community consultation process, whether it be on a development application or a new policy, and residents who were initially opposed then approach you in a store, call or stop by the planning counter just to chat. It is a nice feeling that, once a project is done, people from the community feel they have a friend at city hall. To me, making those connections are the wins.

I have heard that you once referred to yourself as part of a “missing generation” in planning? What does that mean? Have things changed?

When I graduated in 1988, I found a job relatively easily with the help of one of my professors. A year later, the housing market crashed and took seven years to recover. Planning jobs in both the public and private sectors dried up. Years later, when looking at the age cohorts of RPPs, there was a significant dip reflecting the recession of the early 1990s. In the first half of my career, I knew or recognized most planners when I went to large meetings or the OPPI conference. As the market picked up, the profession started to grow. It is astounding that we now fill huge ballrooms for the OPPI conference.

You were a planner during some significant times in Ontario (“Rae Days,” the 2008 recession, various downturns): what stands out for you with some of these “phases”? How do these past upheavals compare to what is happening now with COVID-19?

When I started my career, affordable housing was a critical issue until the housing crash. Then, with the crash, came the need for fiscal austerity. At that time, the protection of the Oak Ridges Moraine and wetlands were also planning priorities. The handover of Hong Kong to the Chinese government resulted in new investment opportunities in our major urban centres and shaped many of our communities. Social, economic, political change are constants.

COVID-19 has the potential to impact our communities more than anything I have seen. Fiscal austerity will be top of mind for all municipal governments due to the loss of revenues. There will be pressure to cut “red tape” and provide financial relief to the business and development community. Similar to putting an oxygen mask on yourself before children, governments at all levels will need to ensure they are saving themselves first so they can help others. Decisions will need to be measured, not knee-jerk. I think back to the Walkerton tragedy of 20 years ago, when there was a rush to reduce regulations.

However, I am optimistic. Through this pandemic, we have witnessed the power of all three levels of government working together on the same goal. If rebuilding our communities is done with the same cooperation, we will be successful.

What do you see as priorities for planners in recovering from COVID-19 and building resiliency in Ontario communities?


COVID-19 is bringing our social inequities to the forefront. The need to address the needs of people living in vulnerable circumstances should be our number one priority as planners.


The difficulty will be setting priorities within this overarching theme. Housing, health care, food security, domestic violence, communication with diverse communities, ensuring inclusivity are all equally valid issues.

Resiliency and rebuilding communities will look different for every community. In rural farming areas, it might be safe housing for the migrant workforce or providing better broadband connectivity. In cities, it might be the need to address active transportation options if people do not feel comfortable riding public transit.

Finally, planners will need to work with our business partners to help them recover, whether it be streamlining our processes, or utilizing the tools at our disposal to bring in enabling regulations so business can do what it needs to do.


Do you have a message for your fellow RPPs and future RPPs?

My message is always to try something new and take the difficult path. If a project looks difficult, ask to take it on. The challenge will energize you, your network will expand, your learning will increase, and the satisfaction will be greater. 



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