



Eldon Theodore, RPP, is a Partner with MHBC, specializing in land use planning, urban design, and sustainability. He joined the firm in 2002, holding an Honours BA in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Waterloo and an MA in Urban Design Studies from the University of Toronto.

Registered Professional Planner

## PROFILE

NAME:

**Eldon Theodore, RPP**

LOCATION:

**Woodbridge, Ontario**

POSITION:

**Partner/Planner/Urban Designer at MHBC Planning, Urban Design & Landscape Architecture**

Eldon's land use planning experience spans almost 20 years of obtaining development approvals (subdivisions, condominiums, site plans, official plan, and zoning by-law amendments, consents, and minor variances), project coordination and management, special studies and associated research, expert witness at the local planning appeal tribunal, and presentations to committees, council, and the general public.

He also specializes in providing design and sustainable development services to public and private sector clients across Ontario. His experience includes the application of urban design and sustainable initiatives through policy preparation, site design analysis, community visioning, design briefs, and community design guidelines. He is also trained in conducting intensive design charrettes to help establish places of distinction and create value in a community.

Eldon is a Full Member of CIP and OPPI, and he was on OPPI Council for four years and was co-Chair of the Anti-Black Racism in Planning Task Force. He also serves as a Director on the Design Industry Advisory Committee of Toronto.

**Tell us about the work you are doing now with MHBC. What excites you about the projects?**

The work I do is quite diverse; it spans from small infills promoting incremental change, to expansive master-planned projects that introduce new environments. That work occurs in the most urban areas to the most rural or natural environments, primarily in all parts of Ontario, but also across Canada and sometimes the United States.

Wearing two hats as both planner and urban designer, my work often weaves between leading a project and supporting a project. I enjoy that aspect as well, because it allows me to observe different leadership styles and emulate those traits as part of my practice.

**What aspects of planning do you enjoy the most? Is your answer now different than you thought it would be when you were a planning student?**

What I enjoy the most is that my work involves a high level of problem-solving, creative thinking, and conflict resolution to reach success. There is a certain sense of achievement when you know that you've played a critical role in leading, collaborating, and consensus-building to find common ground on an approval. Walking by a successful project and being able to say that I helped make that happen is part of the reward for the hard work it took to make it a reality.

To be honest, I had no idea where life would take me as a planning student. I knew I wanted to play a role in placemaking, and I imagined it would involve designing spaces and seeing them get approved. As a student, I was more interested in walking through and experiencing the outcome of community building. As a professional, I find myself drawn to and appreciating the hard work and thoughtful process to make that experience a reality.

**“...people need to understand that every Black person that is subject to anti-Black racism experiences and responds to it differently, and that is okay.”**

**Has the impact of the pandemic influenced your perspective on the role of planning in meeting the needs of people?**

The pandemic has brought to bear many inequities that have been masked in our society. It has opened my eyes to what role planning has played in establishing and reinforcing those inequities. It has changed the way I look at regulation, policy, zoning, and guidelines and the intended and unintended consequences on communities, particularly those who have been historically and disproportionately marginalized. We need to recognize that planning's role is not to reward privilege but instead to find balance, promote access, and achieve greater pluralism when it comes to accommodating our diverse population.

**Tell us about OPPI's Anti-Black Racism in Planning Task Force and the work that's underway now.**

I had the pleasure of being a co-Chair of the Anti-Black Racism in Planning Task Force on behalf of OPPI. The task force was made up of members within and outside of the profession and represented a diverse cross-section of people and a grassroots response to putting in place a framework to eradicate anti-Black racism in the profession.

Over the past year, the Task Force volunteered their time to explore and sometimes have uncomfortable conversations about systemic barriers, privilege and entitlement, disproportionate impacts, and the lack of representation in the profession. This work culminated in 14 recommendations for action organized under the following categories:

- The journey to becoming a professional planner
- Cultivating relationships with diverse Black organizations
- Equity-focused data, policy change, and evaluation
- Professional development

I encourage all OPPI members to read the September 24, 2021, *Report to OPPI Council with Final Recommendations of the Anti-Black Racism in Planning (ABRP) Task Force*.<sup>\*</sup> With this report released, the hard work of acting on these recommendations and bringing about incremental change over time must take place, and I look forward to seeing those actions by OPPI in 2022.

**With respect to the work of the Anti-Black Racism in Planning Task Force, do you have a message you want the planning profession to understand and take to heart?**

In my opinion, people need to understand that every Black person that is subject to anti-Black racism experiences and responds to it differently, and that is okay. It can fuel outward advocacy to demand change and justice. It can be absorbed as an anticipated obstacle that requires personal perseverance to overcome. There is no right way to manage this type of incident. The important takeaway is that all planners should be continually promoting working environments, creating built environments, and transforming policy and regulation to eliminate actions that perpetuate anti-Black racism to persist.

I also take heart in the fact that every year our profession gets more and more diverse as young planners are entering the profession, who are educated and acting on the issue, giving hope that over time, we will see a diversity in leadership positions that can help accelerate the change we seek.

**“...it is important to contribute to the advancement and improvement of the profession...”**

**You have been volunteering with OPPI in various capacities for some time — what makes this meaningful for you?**

I started volunteering in the District Committees, then the Community Design Working Group, and finally OPPI Council. I really feel that it is important to contribute to the advancement and improvement of the profession and to help make a difference for those currently practising and those about to enter the profession. And while this was not a motivation initially when I first started volunteering, I recognize that having more diverse voices like mine helps to ensure that OPPI represents and responds to all of our members' needs and helps to inspire our future members to continue to promote diversity within our profession.

**What is your message to new and aspiring planners about the future of planning and the role planning has in making Ontario a better place for everyone?**

I encourage all aspiring planners to be part of the change; don't expect the profession to change simply because you are there, and don't expect planning to transform and respond to a changing society without having the courage to challenge the role you play and the actions you take as a professional. (Y)

*\*Read the report here: <https://ontarioplanners.ca/inspiring-knowledge/anti-black-racism-in-planning-task-force>*