

THIS ISSUE:

Addressing On-Farm Housing Challenges 25



Honouring Excellence in Planning

Registered Professional Planners (RPPs) play a critically important role in shaping the quality, livability, and sustainability of Ontario communities, now and for future generations.

The PlanON Awards recognize the exceptional achievements of OPPI members who demonstrate professional excellence and a commitment to advancing the planning profession in Ontario. It is a program that celebrates projects and individuals within our community, acknowledging exceptional contributions in education, research, and volunteerism.

OPPI is very pleased to announce the recipients of the 2025 PlanON Awards.

# **Celebrating Projects**

# PlanON VISION AWARD PROJECT OF THE YEAR

One Land, One Climate, One Future,
 Together — New County of Essex Official Plan

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- Creating a Neighbourhood Active Transportation System:
   A Student Routes Strategy for Ward 9, City of Hamilton
- One Land, One Climate, One Future, Together — New County of Essex Official Plan
- Regent Park Phases 4 & 5 Vision
- Update Downsview: Downsview Secondary Plan

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- Mississauga Official Plan 2051
- Region of Durham The Ritson School Project:
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• Claire Dodds, MCIP, RPP

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- Jennifer Passy, MCIP, RPP
- Rajbir Sian, MCIP, RPP

Everything you need to know about PlanON award categories, application submissions, eligibility criteria, and important dates can be found at **www.ontarioplanners.ca/PlanON**.

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What a time it is to be a Canadian and a planner in Ontario. When I first started my term as OPPI Chair, we were met with significant changes to housing targets and timelines as well as an ever-evolving legislative landscape in Ontario. As I wrap up my term as Chair of this wonderful organization, we continue to experience considerable economic, social, and political pressures as a profession, a province, and a country.

# "...considerable economic, social, and political pressures as a profession, a province, and a country."

The legislative landscape and expectations around the roles and responsibilities of planners can be, at times, overwhelming. Our unique local challenges are further compounded by pressures, fears, and uncertainty across the border and beyond. As a profession, we have a commitment to our code of ethics and our standards of practice, along with our core mandate to serve in the public interest. I could not be more convinced that as a profession, each and every one of us does this with perseverance, compassion, and the utmost respect and responsibility.

As the voice of the planning profession, OPPI understands the immense responsibility that we have to support you through this time and through your careers. We acknowledge how we have succeeded in the past as well as how we have fallen short. Over the past two years, in partnership with OPPI Council, staff, and dedicated volunteers, we have worked to reflect upon and adapt / change the way in which we communicate, engage,

support, and educate our members, our stakeholders, our partners, politicians, and members of the public.

I am so very proud of what we have achieved as well as the ongoing work that we must continue to do. As a member-based organization, OPPI must do what we can to look inward and outward acknowledging the diverse profession we serve and the diversity of needs and opportunities that comes with it.

We acknowledge our role as an advocate. An advocate for the importance of thoughtful, methodical, and informed planning based on a foundation of technical excellence, unique competencies and skills as well as short- and long-term impacts. We are at the table. We are advocating for well-thought-out and executed policies and legislation in working with the provincial government and have worked quickly with our Government and Public Relations Committee as issues and topics emerge as we work towards solutions to the housing and growth crisis.

We acknowledge our role as a partner. We have been focusing on building and strengthening partnerships with a range of organizations. In July, OPPI partnered with the Shared Path Consultation Initiative to advance reconciliation through the engagement and advancement of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit perspectives in planning processes. The Collaborative Hub Pilot Project will facilitate ongoing engagement through regular meetings between First Nations, municipal staff, and leadership in service of shared well-being and collective impact.

Furthermore, in May, the Black Planners and Urbanists Association and OPPI announced a new collaborative



partnership, demonstrating a shared commitment to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion within the planning profession and providing mutual support for both organizations. These are two new and impactful partnerships of many that we continue to explore and build.

We acknowledge our role as an educator. We are committed to expanding and diversifying our educational offerings and topics to meet the changing skill needs for planners at all stages of their career. This year, OPPI published two new practice guides that have been very favourably received by our membership and adjacent professions.

Furthermore, we were successful in securing Skills Development Funding from the Province of Ontario to support six new free training programs to be launched in early 2026. We are also nearing the completion of a Grade 9 introduction to planning course, and we continue to support expanded educational offerings and space at the post-secondary level.

# We acknowledge our role as a connector.

ACTION 2025, the CIP-OPPI conference in Toronto in July, was a resounding success. More than 1,400 planners attended in person along with an estimated 500 online to share knowledge, tools, and research to tackle big challenges such as housing, climate change, and the economy.

At the district level, our volunteers continue to engage with membership locally, providing social and educational opportunities. As an organization, we are also exploring more diverse opportunities to connect with members including The Connective (hosted for our third year) as well as future opportunities for smaller scale symposia based on planning topics and / or professional journey.

# We acknowledge our role to support change.

Earlier this year, as part of our Path Forward, OPPI issued a statement of action on diversity, equity, inclusion, reconciliation, and social justice to demonstrate its commitment to creating a more just and inclusive society within the profession and the communities we help shape.

We continue to chart a new Path Forward and expand our work to set the foundation for new approaches, practices, and principles as an organization. For the first time in many years, we undertook a statistically valid member survey to help us better understand who we are as a profession to help inform strategic planning and priority setting for the future. I am confident that our work is informed by our members and developed for our members.

The work must and will continue. It has been my absolute honour to be part of laying the groundwork for the next chapter of this wonderful organization. I am confident and excited to pass the torch to Andria Leigh, MCIP, RPP, the incoming OPPI Chair. Andria's extensive planning experience and her many valuable contributions to OPPI over the years perfectly position her to lead our profession into the future.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for the commitment and support each and every one of the over 5,000 members of OPPI continues to provide — in ways both big and small — to progress the critically important and impactful profession that is planning. As opposed to a "goodbye," this is an encouraging push forward and call to action — be part of the change, be part of the progress, and be proud to be a planner.



Claire Basinski, MCIP, RPP, CP3

Chair

Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI)

# Once in a Generation: The Story Behind Ontario's Largest Co-op Development

BY JAMES WATTIE



# THE INTERVIEWEES



**Jason Chen,** VP, Development, CreateTO



**Tom Clement,**Executive Director, Co-operative Housing Federation of Toronto



**Gregory Henriquez,**Managing Principal,
Henriquez Partners Architects



**Peter Venetas,** Partner, Civic Developments

hat do you get when you mix cityowned land, co-operative housing, co-operation and a shared purpose? A poster child for development in Toronto, one of the largest co-op housing projects in Ontario in the past 25 years and the province's largest co-operative development.

The City of Toronto is investing in public lands for the development of affordable housing within mixed-income, mixed-use, transit-oriented communities and this site at 2444 Eglinton Avenue East is one of almost 100 city-owned sites that are either housing ready or may be unlocked for new housing. Currently, the site contains a vacant autobody shop and a former commuter parking lot for the Kennedy TTC and GO stations.

In January 2024, the City of Toronto and CreateTO announced Civic Developments, Windmill Developments, and Co-operative Housing Federation of Toronto (CHFT) as the development partners for this project. A world-class architecture team of Henriquez Partners Architects, with landscape work by CCxA, designed the unique honeycomb look of the building and public realm. When complete, 2444 Eglinton





The tower windows with their different coloured portals are inspired by Ontario flint corn. The metaphor extends to some of the garden renderings where corn fields are shown.

Avenue East will deliver approximately 919 homes, including 612 rent-geared-to-income (RGI), affordable and market rent-controlled co-operative homes.

In June 2024, following the approval of zoning by the City's Planning and Housing Committee, Chair Gord Perks described the moment as "a really important turning point in the history of the City of Toronto. This is a victory for the City of Toronto." City Council granted final zoning approval shortly thereafter. Construction is expected to begin later in 2025.

# "...one of almost 100 cityowned sites that are either housing ready or may be unlocked for new housing."

We gathered members of the project team from CreateTO, Civic Developments, CHFT, and Henriquez Partners Architects to talk about what is making the development of this project successful, the unique and award-winning design and how this project can provide lessons to planners across Canada.\*

# WORLD-CLASS DESIGN

Gregory Henriquez, Managing Principal, Henriquez Partners Architects: The project is three residential buildings: two towers with one larger slab street wall extension sitting on a retail and parking podium with large, landscaped gardens on the top of the podium that the towers sit upon. It's divided with a street going down the middle of it with two co-op buildings on one side and the market residential building on the other.

Tom Clement, Executive Director, Co-operative Housing Federation of Toronto (CHFT): We felt that Scarborough was a good

site. The way I'm looking at it is that it's right at the subway. There's a GO train. Those things are important. Just for fun, I checked how long it took to get to Bloor and Yonge from Kennedy on the subway. It's about 22 minutes. Now we're going to be able to build a stronger community there.

Henriquez: In our practice, we always search for poetic metaphors and try and find some poetry to balance the functional realities of what we need to accomplish. We were inspired by Ontario flint corn, which has a whole bunch of different bright colours within it. The goal is to make the project "of this place in the world."

We thought if we could create windows which were metaphorical kernels of the corn cob that got extended up for the towers with different coloured portals, that could be extended also into the podium as well. It could even become a way of taking over the nearby hydro corridor one day with community gardens, and you can see some of our renderings have corn fields planted.

We've also elevated the first levels of housing way up above the streets and the trains and the noise. It also gave us the chance to create a wonderful garden platform above the podium which the residents can all spill out onto with their amenities.

# Jason Chen, VP, Development, CreateTO:

Our evaluation process for selecting a partner for 2444 Eglinton, like on many of our CreateTO projects, included an emphasis on high-quality design. We were confident Civic Developments would put together a world-class team because of their reputation for design excellence. What's unique about 2444 Eglinton is that historically, it is rare to see such a strong design team venture this far outside of a city's downtown core. There's

no rule that says only downtown buildings should be beautiful.

Henriquez: The goal is to find a way to build beautiful architecture in a way that's costeffective. The biggest challenge was figuring out how to build the parking because it's a contaminated site. We needed to build the parking above grade because we couldn't afford to dig it all up and then dig parking down below. We'd spend half our budget just in the soils. It also made it easier for us to do the geo-exchange as we don't have to dig as far down in order to get the geo-exchange working.

The above-grade parking actually reduces the amount of concrete needed compared to below-grade parking. Less concrete means less embodied carbon, pushing the sustainability effort in a way that's more environmentally responsible. A lot of the negatives ended up being helpful in us balancing the budget and creating a better building.

**Chen:** When the concept of above-grade parking was proposed, we knew that from an urban design aspect this would be challenging, but we knew if anyone could pull this off, this would be the team to do it.

The design review panel and the city's planning and urban design team really supported the above-grade parking due to how well integrated it will be and how it's designed to suit the context of its surroundings.

Clement: One Friday night I saw an email come in and it said, "You're a winner!" and I thought, oh that's probably some sort of scam. But I opened it up anyway. I don't know why and sure enough it was a notification that we won a design award. [Henriquez and CCxA's design was awarded the 2025 Green Good Design Award for Green Architecture, noting it "sets a precedent for future urban developments..."]

# Peter Venetas, Partner, Civic

**Developments:** This is a class A design team. Again, kudos to CreateTO and the City of Toronto. They want great design. We want great design. Communities want great design. So much imagination goes into that

design. When I show photos of it, everyone is like wow! You've got a great location, great public transit connections, and you've got great design.

# **CO-OP HOUSING**

Clement: A co-op is where the residents have input into how the building is managed and the decisions that have to be made around work and improvements to the building. It's not just that you get something under your door saying we're going to do X, Y, Z to the building. There's discussion.

Henriquez: We find working with co-ops makes it easy. Co-ops are really good folks. They want to do the right thing and create community and do something meaningful for their members. They have a long-term vision. The buildings are an asset they're going to hold for a long time. It makes doing co-op projects a really enjoyable process.

**Chen:** Plus, the affordability levels beat everything that you can ever want. Especially with the security of it being a non-profit where rents will remain affordable for the long-term, there's no better outcome really.

Venetas: You start thinking how rare co-op housing has been over the last 30 years. It just sort of reinforces that we are doing something incredibly unique and that we should deliver the best possible building. I'm not interested in working on projects that don't move the needle. I want to work on those things that really matter, that make change, and that become the prototypes and the precedents for more and more of these kinds of projects.

**Clement:** It's going to be a community for people of all ages. We know it's a good place for people to age in place because of the transportation connections. I've been dealing with co-ops for over 40 years, and I know that they are amazing communities.

**Henriquez:** I think my last co-op was finished in 2004. It's been over 20 years since co-ops have really flourished in this country. It's the type of meaningful work that we historically have done a lot of, and we want to do more of.



Chen: I think [the co-op] actually really helped gain support for the project. Having 612 units of co-op rental housing brought a lot of attention and support to the site. Not just from the city but the federal government, too. The Federal Co-op Housing Development Program they have, it was perfect for this.

Clement: Across the country, we've needed a federal co-op housing program for a long time. I worked with the old programs so I'm familiar with them. These programs are part of the recipe. Good support from government at all levels and a program specifically designed for co-ops and that's what's going to make this project a go.

# **CO-OPERATION**

Venetas: What's been really nice about this project is that everybody was on the same page from the very beginning. Everybody was very open about collaborating with each other and what some of the sensitivities, opportunities, and constraints were. Then there was this continued ability to work with staff as we were developing the applications to ensure they met the requirements of the city and could be processed in a timely way.

**Henriquez:** Once the application was in, every effort was made to make sure it was accelerated through the city, and CreateTO obviously played a big part in that.

Chen: On this project in particular, there was a bit more of this feeling of trust between our partners and city staff. They got the picture. There were some issues that would come up but there was always the feeling of "Don't worry, we'll get there. Trust us, we'll get there." I think that was a big thing.

**Venetas:** There's a level of flexibility, collaboration, and problem solving, which is often something that doesn't happen. There was an ability to discuss application comments and what they meant and how to then address them. Often, that doesn't happen.

Typically, you get your comments, you go away, you mark up the drawings and you resend them. Here we've been able to have dialogues around some of the different opportunities and constraints that we have to balance.

It's good to have differences of opinion. It's good to have conflict. Conflict breeds resolution, but it has to be within the context of working towards the same goals, which in this case is an incredible project that will create much needed housing.

**Henriquez:** It's been a delight to work in this realm because the people on our team are really committed and that makes a big impact on the outcomes.

<sup>\*</sup> Author's note: Some responses have been edited for length and clarity.





Currently, the site contains a vacant autobody shop and a former commuter parking lot for the Kennedy TTC and GO stations.

Venetas: I think this project is potentially the poster child in terms of how we can work better to solve not only issues that arise with respect to the housing crisis that we're in, but also how we can just better city-build between the private sector, the non-profit sector and the public sector. We need that. It takes all entities working together to solve all these problems. It can't just be the city on its own or the private industry on its own or a non-profit.

We're stronger together than we are as separate entities. This project really exemplifies that kind of collaborative and team spirit. I'm not saying that the project was easy. By no means should anyone take away that it was easy.

# RAPID APPROVAL

**Venetas:** Sometimes approvals can take two years, sometimes they can take longer. I think one of the things that we really need to focus on is that this was the first time that CreateTO had worked with a private developer to do the entitlements, to do the zoning.

**Chen:** Typically, CreateTO leads the entire entitlements process for our sites and then we take it out to market. In this instance, we decided to pilot a site where we would let the developer lead the re-zoning.

We did do a significant amount of due diligence on the site first. We came up with a development concept plan which was vetted by city staff and the local councillor's office. We also held community meetings and workshops with residents where we socialized a proposed development concept for the site.

When we went out to market for a partner, we provided all these due diligence materials and community feedback and advised the team that if they stay within the general development concept provided, the planning approvals should be fairly smooth. There would essentially be nothing

much further for staff to comment on. Any comments that needed to be addressed were already addressed.

Henriquez: One of the nice things we experienced was the collaboration between the City of Toronto, CreateTO, and the developers Windmill and Civic. We were all really determined to make this thing happen as soon as possible. There was a real attempt to accelerate the approval processes. I think we got a rezoning in record time: 69 days.

Venetas: [69 days] has got to be some kind of record in the city in terms of getting a comprehensive re-zoning approved. But a lot of that credit has got to go to CreateTO in terms of teeing the project up the right way, having explored various development scenarios on the site before our involvement. I think what we were able to do is really calibrate it. So, it ended up becoming a site that could move forward, but there was a lot of work that CreateTO and the City of Toronto had done to set that stage.

Chen: I must give a lot of credit to the City of Toronto's Priority Development Review Stream team who helped drive the approvals process forward. They did an excellent job coordinating all the different commenting agencies and helping us resolve issues as they came up. The Civic and Windmill teams were also key in a smooth process. Not only by having a strong knowledge of the approvals process, but also by working with staff and being flexible to resolve issues. It truly was a collaborative effort with everyone working together to get us there.

**Venetas:** I remember being at the Planning and Housing Committee and seeing how happy the planners were, that they were achieving these timelines as well and how that's a great precedent for them. So, it's this

idea that it's a big win for everybody and it took all of us to kind of make it happen.

### WHAT'S NEXT?

Henriquez: There's a lot of heavy lifting to be done between the poetry and the ideas and translating into reality. That's where the real grit and rigour is required to make sure that the intentions are really followed through – time to make a building.

For every young architect or young planner, the lesson here is that just because you've planted the seed doesn't mean that it's going to become a tree. You have to nurture it. You have to add water. You have to make sure it gets a stake in the winds. It's a long haul. We're all in for the next four years to try and translate this intent, our good intentions of everyone — of the co-op, the developers, the city, and the community to build this housing together.

**Clement:** I am absolutely optimistic about affordable housing with the City of Toronto. We're going to be able to do a lot more and I've been waiting a long time for this so I'm absolutely excited.

**Chen:** We at CreateTO are very excited to see this project break ground later this year. I am so proud to be a part of this transformative project. Personally, I have learned a lot about co-op rental housing and how important it is in the housing spectrum. 2444 Eglinton will be a huge contribution to the City of Toronto's affordable housing pool.

**Venetas:** This is a once-in-a-lifetime project. Will it become a twice-in-a-lifetime project or three-times-in-a-lifetime project? That should be the goal. But right now, it's that once-in-a-lifetime project that we have in front of us that I hope becomes the precedent for doing more and more like this. (\(\text{Y}\))



James Wattie Wattie is the Manager of Communications for CreateTO, the City of Toronto real estate asset management agency, and a former producer CBC News in Toronto.

# Pathways to Community Safety:

What Planners can Learn from Transformative Justice Movements

BY RACHEL FATYER, ADITI MEHTA, AND SHERYL-ANN SIMPSON

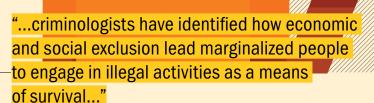
uring the COVID-19 pandemic, Ontario cities experienced significant increases in encampments as unhoused people pursued alternatives to closed or crowded shelters. In addition to other actions, supporter and carpenter Khaleel Seivright built 109 tiny shelters in public parks across Toronto as a stopgap effort in the ongoing crisis.

Homelessness is a failure of a variety of policies including planning, an inability to maintain enough affordable, acceptable, safe housing. Instead of addressing the root causes of this failure, the municipality criminalized unhoused people and supporters, using law enforcement to remove makeshift homes and forcibly evict and arrest those who lived in them for trespassing. City officials described encampments as a threat to safety, an example of a longer, dark history of urban policy and planning practices that criminalize one group, in this case the unhoused, to protect others, in this case property owners, wealthier residents, the city itself.

Future planning practice can learn from transformative justice movements to, instead, produce pathways to community safety defined as caring communities where everyone's safety is prioritized and people have access to needed resources.

# **ABOLITION AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO CRIMINALIZATION**

Toronto's response to encampments illustrates how pathways to criminalization are built. Critical criminologists describe criminalization as the process through which individuals come into conflict with the law. Rather than labelling someone as a "criminal," the process of becoming criminalized recognizes that laws are socially constructed (i.e., they change over time and place). Also, equity-deserving groups are more likely to be targeted by police while having less access to legal representation and due process. Working through the lens of criminalization, criminologists have identified how economic and social exclusion lead marginalized people to engage in illegal activities as a means of survival, particularly within



**FEATURE** 

the context of neoliberal policies whose outcomes include privatized public services, inequitable growth, greater surveillance, and fewer opportunities for democratic decision-making.

Carceral abolition refers to a political vision that strives to eliminate all forms of surveillance, policing, and imprisonment. The term abolition connects to the abolition of slavery, whereby abolitionists recognized that the system of chattel slavery could not be reformed and had to be abolished because it was inherently unjust. Likewise, contemporary abolitionists assert that policing and prisons cannot be reformed, they must be abolished. This assertion is based on the observation that reforms have been unsuccessful in altering the status quo or making prison conditions more rehabilitative.

Hearing that surveillance, policing, and prisons should be abolished, some people might ask, "What about my safety?" We all want to live in safe communities. The question is, how do we get there?

Correctional rhetoric claims that prisons are necessary to "make communities safer." However, there is little evidence to support this claim, and criminological studies have found that carceral responses to social problems do little to deter crime or "rehabilitate" lawbreakers. Increased police budgets and prisons do not reduce lawbreaking, with many studies demonstrating that imprisonment either has no effect on future lawbreaking or can even increase recidivism (repeated law breaking), when compared to using community alternatives such as probation and halfway houses, that are more effective than imprisonment in reducing law breaking.

Despite almost a century of indicting government reports and inquiries into harmful conditions, dating back to the Archambault public inquiry on prison reforms and report in 1938, prison reforms are still superficial. According to reports from the Office of the Correctional Investigator (Canada's federal prison watchdog), Indigenous peoples are grossly overrepresented at 35 per cent of the federal prison population and five per cent of the national population. Incarcerated people must pay room and board while payments and allowances amount to less than a dollar an hour.

"We all want to live in safe communities.
The question is, how dowe get there?"

"Indigenous peoples are grossly overrepresented at 35 per cent of the federal prison population and five per cent of the national population."

They are also required to purchase soaps and shampoos, need to purchase additional food to meet nutritional needs, and can be punished for sharing. A lawsuit asserting Charter rights violations led to the renaming of administrative segregation (solitary confinement) into structured intervention units in 2019. Charter rights violations are, however, still happening, and these units draw resources and scrutiny away from other parts of prisons, which are seeing worsening conditions, including continued segregation. How can planning be accountable to people who are criminalized and imprisoned, how do we plan for safety for all?

Abolitionists look at the failures of policing and prisons to keep us safe and conclude that continuing to reform such an unjust system is futile, arguing instead that we need to alter unjust social structures and facilitate systemic change by addressing the root causes of violence and social harms. While abolition means tearing down prisons, detention centres, and police departments, it also means working to reduce the need for these harmful institutions by creating lasting alternatives to punishment and building a world in which everyone's basic needs are met. Needs include access to safe affordable housing and public transit, food security, removing barriers to employment for equity-deserving groups, income equality, and addressing poverty, gentrification, and displacement for lowincome people. According to well-known organizer Mariame Kaba, an abolitionist vision is about restructuring society so that everyone has everything they need to thrive and developing approaches to address harm without relying on structural forms of oppression or violent punitive systems.

# TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE

Transformative justice (TJ) is one abolitionist practice to build pathways towards community safety. TJ is instructive for planning as a community-based approach that aims to facilitate the involvement of people who are most affected by social harms (i.e., victims, lawbreakers, their families, and communities) to find creative and healing solutions grounded in the traditions and culture of the community where it is implemented. It also recognizes our common human struggle in that we all make mistakes and at some point, we all experience harm and cause harm.

"[Transformative justice]
emerged from Indigenous
and traditional communities,
along with other communities
of colour, feminist, and queer
community organizers."

TJ emerged from Indigenous and traditional communities, along with other communities of colour, feminist, and queer community organizers. Practices can include deescalating violence, intervening to resolve conflicts, respectful processes to hold people accountable without punishment and shame, facilitating healing processes, and efforts to transform individuals and society to build safer, caring, healthy, inclusive communities. Essentially, a TJ approach conceives that working with people in conflict with the law from a place of compassion, love, and inclusivity is a better pathway to facilitating positive changes in individuals and society than perpetual punishment, surveillance, and social control. TJ asks: what are the root

causes of harm and how can we transform the conditions that create injustice?

In the research project Planning for Abolition, we are asking how planning can respond to TJ's questions. We started by analyzing a collection of independent podcasts made about criminalization, abolition, and transformative justice that included over 1,000 interviews. We analyzed the podcasts with methods including natural language processing and thematic coding. We are using translational research to move from our findings to policy and practice recommendations. We'll end this article by sharing some of those recommendations.

# WHAT PLANNERS CAN DO

Planning can support the production of pathways to community safety by keeping the idea of criminalization and root causes front of mind and by prioritizing what is needed for everyone to thrive. As an example, Patty Krawec, host of the Medicine for the Resistance podcast, observed that switching from tokens to Presto cards added barriers to accessing transit for people living in poverty who received tokens from social service and anti-poverty organizers. Access to transit supports access to work, education, food and community, all supports for community safety. People living in poverty in Ontario are also disproportionately members of equity-deserving groups more likely to be criminalized for fare evasion.

Fare-free transit policies can increase transit access. Municipalities, like Ottawa, are starting with fare-free travel for children, Milton has a summer program for youth up to 16, and Orangeville is fare-free for all riders. Evaluations from U.S. systems, including Richmond VA and Worcester MA, show that removing fares increased ridership, disproportionately supported low-income riders, and improved conditions for transit workers by removing conflicts over fare enforcement. Fare-free transit also eliminates fare evasion as a pathway to criminalization, reducing associated costs that can be redirected to service improvements. Municipalities are also funding programs through cost savings from fare collection alongside funding from other levels of government. Increased surcharges

# "Non-profit land trusts are another strategy to maintain affordability by purchasing, building, and managing affordable housing."

on rideshare apps and parking fees are other potential revenue sources. There are also opportunities for business and institutional support, for example, universities could shift student bus pass funds directly to transit systems.

As we see in the encampment example, homelessness has become a pathway to criminalization, so maintaining existing affordable housing is a pathway towards community safety. At the municipal level, Montreal's right of first refusal policy has been used to purchase rooming houses in designated zones, turning them over to non-profit management and keeping them out of the speculative market.

Non-profit land trusts are another strategy to maintain affordability by purchasing, building, and managing affordable housing. The democratic governance model of community land trusts can lead to greater control for equity-deserving groups, as in the case of

the Indigenous-women-led Temiskaming District Community Land Trust and Black-led Hogan's Alley Land Trust in Vancouver. Democratic governance can also nurture solidarities between communities as in the Toronto Chinatown Land Trust's Hak Hei 客氣 program to develop an organizational anti-colonial framework. Community control can extend to fiscal questions as with the Ottawa Community Land Trust's

"Planners also
need to ensure that
criminalized groups are
heard and represented
in urban decisionmaking processes..."

successful community bond program, raising \$3 million in capital through limited-equity investments from Ottawa residents. In addition to starting or working for land trusts, planners can support by developing municipal land transfer policies or providing technical support for approval and design processes.

Planners can also work to implement plans developed in communities. For example, in Ottawa, over 100 small business owners have come together and identified critical needs that include commercial rent-control and small grants, alongside naloxone and conflict de-escalation training. Small business staff can be a consistent, trusted presence in a neighbourhood, and their safety is connected to the safety of all community members. These are the people that multiple contributors to the podcasts Abolition X and We the Unhoused describe as essential for community safety, not the police.

Planners also need to ensure that criminalized groups are heard and represented in urban decision-making processes that affect their personal well-being, safety, and ability to thrive. Organizations such as Communitas in Montreal lead a participatory budgeting process inviting incarcerated individuals to propose re-entry programs and

collectively decide how to spend the non-profit's reintegration funds. In this way, spending decisions better reflect the needs of those re-entering society. Examples of funded programs include a scholarship for children of incarcerated parents, a post-release mentorship program, and a community garden project. Planners should learn from these methods of collaborative decision-making and could extend their impact by integrating the outcomes into community benefits agreements or supporting and acquisition and design for community gardens.

These are just a handful of ways planning's future can embrace shared interests with transformative justice practices to understand and shape spaces and environments to reduce social harms and lawbreaking while promoting well-being, social inclusion and pathways to community safety for all residents.

This article is part of a larger research project, Planning for Abolition, a collaboration between researchers at Carleton University, University of Toronto, the Pratt Institute, and the non-profit Black Planning Project that amplifies the voice of Black planners while addressing systemic barriers and challenges facing Black planners and communities.

To hear more about what planning can learn from transformative justice, join our online learning series Pathways to Community Safety. Find out more at <a href="http://www.wheretohere.com/planning-for-abolition">http://www.wheretohere.com/planning-for-abolition</a>







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# Forecasting the Future: Data-Driven Insights on Neighbourhood Intensification in Toronto

BY KARA NAKLICKI, MCIP, RPP, KARLENE STUBBS, AND FIONA MCGILL

ities across North America are rethinking how they grow and turning their attention to opportunities for gentle intensification in low-density neighbourhoods. Housing occupancy trends in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area show that population growth has outpaced housing supply between 2001 and 2021, resulting in increased pressure on the housing market.<sup>1</sup>

From boosting the missing middle, upzoning, and infill housing strategies to Toronto's own Expanding Housing Options in Neighbourhoods (EHON) Program, these efforts share a common goal: increasing housing options available to residents while making better use of existing infrastructure.

In Toronto, the contrast in urban forms surrounding transit can be striking.2 Spending time near major transit hubs such as Sheppard-Yonge or Bloor-Yonge reveals a sharp distinction between the towering high-rise developments and the adjacent low-density residential neighbourhoods. Part of the reason for the stark contrast between high- and low-rise developments has been the success of the city's urban growth centre policies in directing growth to specific parts of Toronto. On the other hand, the low-density neighbourhood areas that abut these urban growth centres have historically been intended as "stable but not static."3 EHON initiatives represent a shift in how neighbourhoods can grow, requiring careful analysis and monitoring.

As Toronto grapples with how to add housing in neighbourhoods that have experienced little intensification in generations, a pressing question emerges: how much new housing can EHON policies actually deliver? And more importantly, can it meaningfully help to address the housing crisis and contribute to housing goals and targets? While the future is never certain, it's crucial to ensure that land use planning changes lead to real, measurable outcomes.

"EHON initiatives could potentially add up to

163,785 new units to

neighbourhoods by 2051."

In response to these questions, the City of Toronto has undertaken research to better understand the potential impact of EHON initiatives. This article summarizes the findings of Toronto City Planning's Neighbourhood Intensification Bulletin.<sup>4</sup> This research was conducted to estimate the new housing that could result from EHON initiatives and to quantify potential contributions to Toronto's housing goals and targets.<sup>5</sup> Results indicate that EHON initiatives could potentially add up to 163,785 new units to neighbourhoods by 2051 and help address demand for a diverse range of housing options.

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# TORONTO'S NEIGHBOURHOODS

Over half of Torontonians live in neighbourhoods, a land-use designation under Toronto's official plan. These low-density residential areas make up one-third of the City of Toronto's total land area and nearly 80 per cent of residential land. Neighbourhoods have a critical role to play in housing current, future, and more residents.<sup>6</sup>

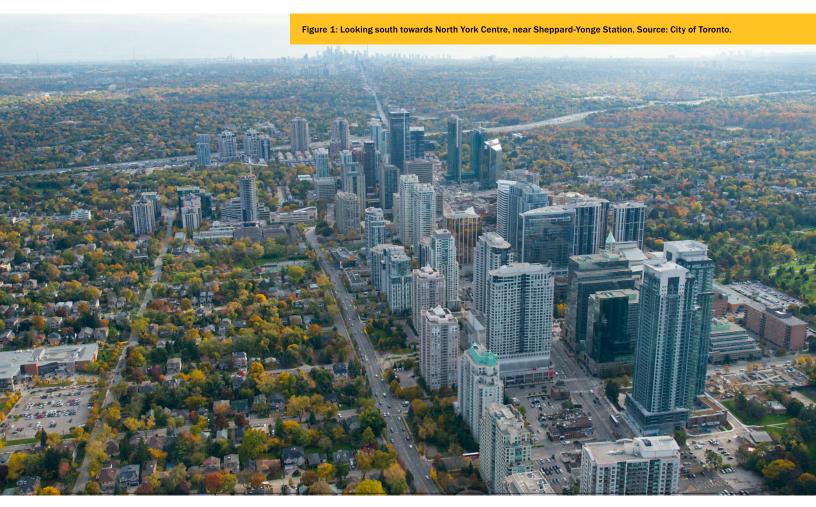
City Planning began researching change in neighbourhoods by residential zone type in 2018, comparing more and less permissive zones. The analysis found that less permissive residential zone types had capacity for hundreds of thousands more Torontonians if population densities were increased to levels found in more permissive zone types. Research before and since demonstrated a "persistent unmet demand for ground-related housing and larger rental units" and "a mismatch between potential housing preferences and attainability for younger generations. This suggests an opportunity to address the demand for ground-related housing via the capacity of neighbourhoods to house more Torontonians.

# **EXPANDING HOUSING OPTIONS IN NEIGHBOURHOODS (EHON)**

EHON is a program adopted by Toronto City Council in 2020 to support diverse housing needs and households, including multigenerational households, growing families, friends seeking co-living arrangements, and those seeking to age in place.

The first phase of EHON initiatives included broadened zoning permissions in neighbourhoods for the following housing types:

 Laneway suites: Self-contained dwellings located in the rear of a property abutting a laneway. Adopted citywide in 2019;



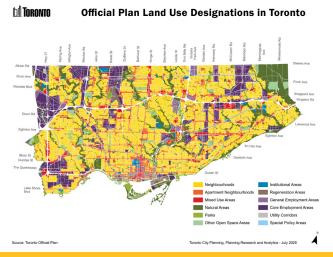


Figure 2: Map of Official Plan Land Use Designations in Toronto

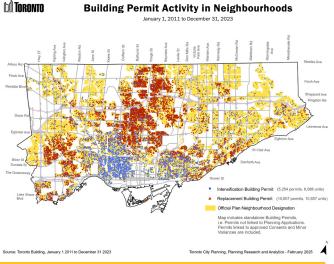


Figure 3: Map of Building Permit Activity in Neighbourhoods

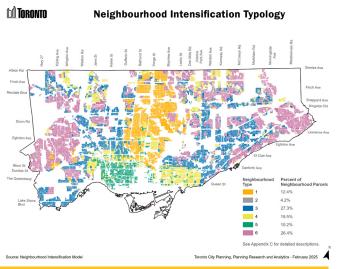


Figure 4: Map of Neighbourhood Intensification Typology

- Garden suites: Self-contained dwellings located in the rear of a property that do not abut a laneway. Adopted citywide in 2022;
- Multiplexes: Low-rise residential dwellings containing two to six units (i.e. duplex, triplex, etc.). Permissions for fourplexes were adopted citywide in 2023, with expanded permissions for sixplexes in Toronto-East York, plus Scarborough North adopted in 2025; and
- Major street projects: Townhouses and small-scale apartment buildings up to six storeys and 60 units along a major street, as identified on Map 3 of the official plan. Adopted citywide in 2024, currently under appeal.

Now that these four EHON initiatives have been adopted citywide, there is a need to assess their potential to enable more housing of more types in more places for more people. The City's Planning Research and Analytics team used spatial analysis, multi-criteria decision analysis, and machine learning algorithms to create a neighbourhood typology model, which in turn was used to estimate the potential for new housing over the next 30 years. As difficult as it is to predict the future, these estimates help to quantify EHON's potential contributions to Toronto's housing goals and targets.

# **NEIGHBOURHOOD INTENSIFICATION SINCE EHON**

Toronto neighbourhoods have been experiencing change since before EHON, although that change has been shifting in recent years. Building permit activity shows significant growth in applications to add net new units in neighbourhoods through gentle intensification.

From 2011 to 2023, there were almost 16,000 building permits applied for to build housing in neighbourhoods. Two-thirds were classified as replacement permits, rebuilding or renovating existing units, and the remaining third was identified as intensification permits, whereby net new units are to be added. The number of new units created has nearly tripled over the past five years as EHON initiatives have been adopted, from 460 units a year in 2018 to 1,282 units in 2023. These findings show that changes to housing permissions have contributed to a shift in neighbourhood intensification.

# THE FUTURE OF NEIGHBOURHOODS: CALCULATING EHON'S POTENTIAL

While Toronto's neighbourhoods hold significant potential for housing Torontonians, predicting the future of the EHON initiatives is challenging due to their recent implementation. However, understanding theoretical potential and uptake is critical for forecasting housing supply and the City of Toronto's ability to accommodate population growth. We contemplated the potential for neighbourhood intensification through two scenarios: the theoretical maximum potential, or an upper ceiling of what could be built, and the estimated uptake, what is likely to be built by 2051.

To calculate the theoretical maximum potential, we conducted geospatial analysis integrating parcel-level data on lot dimensions, building footprints, zoning permissions, and project viability in consultation with colleagues in City Planning and external planners and architects. This analysis identified the potential for approximately 1.2 million additional units. While this full build-out scenario is unlikely, the analysis provides an upper-bound reference for understanding the scale of EHON's potential impact on Toronto's housing capacity.

"The findings suggest that the EHON initiatives could deliver approximately 5,500 new housing units annually, totalling up to 55,000 units by 2031."

**TABLE 1: EHON MAXIMUM POTENTIAL BY INITIATIVE**\*

EHON Initiative	Potential Parcels	Estimated Net New Units per Parcel	Maximum Potential Units	% of Total
Laneway Suites	47,535	1	47,535	3.9%
Garden Suites	165,051	1	165,051	13.5%
Multiplexes	242,891	2.57	624,230	51.2%
Major Streets	9,662	39.57	1,382,325	31.4%
Combined Total			1,219,141	100.0%

In contrast, the estimated uptake of EHON initiatives provides a more realistic estimate of 163,785 new units in neighbourhoods by 2051. We created estimates by incorporating census data and academic research on the impacts of upzoning in cities in New Zealand and California, developing a neighbourhood typology spatial model, and scoring the resulting neighbourhood types by uptake criteria. The findings suggest that the EHON initiatives could deliver approximately 5,500 new housing units annually, totaling up to 55,000 units by 2031. While this figure represents nearly 20 per cent of the city's 285,000-unit municipal housing target, it likely reflects an optimistic scenario. The estimates assume a steady, linear growth rate whereas take-up of the EHON initiatives will take time. Nonetheless, the analysis underscores EHON's significant potential to contribute to some of Toronto's long-term housing goals.

**TABLE 2: ESTIMATED UPTAKE BY EHON INITIATIVE** 

EHON Initiative	Estimated Unit Uptake by 2051	Annualized Unit Uptake	Estimated Unit Uptake by 2031	% of Total Unit Uptake
Laneway Suites	9,180	306	3,060	5.6%
Garden Suites	26,388	880	8,796	16.1%
Multiplexes	87,134	2,904	29,045	53.2%
Major Streets	41,083	1,369	13,694	25.1%
Combined Total	163,785	5,460	54,595	100.0%

# THE FUTURE OF NEIGHBOURHOODS: MODELLING NEIGHBOURHOOD TYPES

A neighbourhood in Toronto's downtown is very different from a neighbourhood in the outer suburbs. To account for these differences, a spatial model was created to classify different types of neighbourhoods based on a variety of characteristics. This analysis resulted in the six neighbourhood types shown in Figure 4.

Areas within a neighbourhood type generally share common characteristics and can be expected to develop in similar ways. The model used a machine learning algorithm called K-means clustering to analyze and group demographic, built form, land use, and economic variables at the census dissemination-area level. Variables included housing age, housing types, tenure, housing prices, EHON development potential, building permit activity, transit and amenity access, household characteristics, and population change. The model was tested and simplified by reviewing variables for redundancy and only retaining those that were most relevant.

Once neighbourhood types were identified, uptake scores for each EHON initiative were created using criteria supported by academic research, such as proximity to transit,

<sup>\*</sup>Note: Some parcels have potential under more than one EHON Initiative and are not summed to avoid double-counting. Units are summed as more than one EHON initiative can be built on the same parcel (e.g., Garden Suite and Multiplex), and the highest potential yield is assumed.

# "While intensification is not new, the scale and scope of housing growth in residential areas is accelerating."

development activity, and parcel suitability, producing a set of base intensification rates. Each neighbourhood type received a score based on how many criteria it met, which was used to adjust the base intensification rates and to add nuance to the estimates of housing uptake across the city. For example, Neighbourhood Type 5 had favourable conditions for laneway suites, so this neighbourhood type received a higher uptake score than Neighbourhood Type 2, which is characterized by small lots and rowhouses and had less favourable conditions for further intensification.

For more information, see the Neighbourhood Intensification Summary<sup>9</sup> for highlights and the full Neighbourhood Intensification Bulletin<sup>10</sup> for detailed research findings and appendices.

# **FUTURE STEPS FOR TORONTO'S NEIGHBOURHOODS**

While intensification is not new, the scale and scope of housing growth in residential areas is accelerating. EHON has broadened the types of housing permitted and unlocked new types of development potential for hundreds of thousands of parcels citywide. These initiatives are not just about numbers of units and targets; they serve to address a critical mismatch between current housing supply and the needs of Toronto's diverse households, particularly for ground-related and rental units.

# "Efforts to address barriers are growing, including through the creation of new mortgage products by financial institutions..."

As Toronto continues to evolve its approach to neighbourhood intensification, several key areas of future work have emerged to support the success of the EHON initiatives. There are barriers to individual property owners building EHON projects in Toronto, including high land costs, limited financing options, and navigating approval processes. Efforts to address barriers are growing, including through the creation of new mortgage products by financial institutions, mortgage insurance reform by the federal government, and the creation of design templates and catalogues by federal agencies, academic institutions and design professionals. The City of Toronto's Building Division has recently released a series of preapproved building plans for garden and laneway suites to simplify the process of adding these units to existing properties.

City staff continue to monitor and propose changes to improve the implementation of garden suites and multiplexes. However, as seen in other cities like Minneapolis, zoning reform alone may not guarantee immediate results. This underscores the importance of continuous monitoring and policy adaptation to ensure that EHON's full potential can be realized in shaping a more inclusive and resilient Toronto for future generations.

The new homes resulting from EHON initiatives have a vital role to play in expanding housing supply and offering more diverse, ground-related living options for Torontonians. Laneway suites, garden suites, and multiplexes can enable a wider range of living arrangements, such as multi-generational housing and co-living, and provide homeowners with opportunities to add rental units to the housing market and supplement housing costs. Major streets developments can offer apartment-style living within beloved neighbourhoods, allowing residents to stay rooted in their communities as their housing needs evolve. Ultimately, Toronto is a city of neighbourhoods, and a diversity of options for housing and the people living in neighbourhoods will support their vitality now and in the decades to come. (Y)

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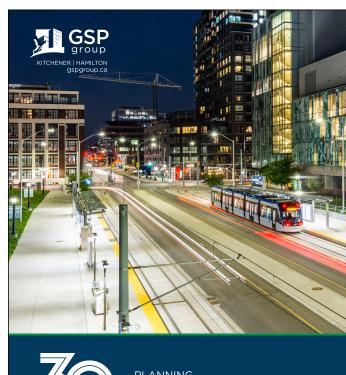
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# Special Events or OFDUs? Clarifying the Distinction in Agricultural Planning

BY PAM DUESLING, RPP



hroughout my research, professional practice, and teachings on balancing on-farm diversified uses (OFDUs) with agricultural preservation, the one question RPPs continue to ask is: What is the difference between OFDUs and Special Events?

As per the Provincial Planning Statement and the *Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas*, an OFDU means "uses that are secondary to the principal agricultural use of the property and are limited in area. OFDUs include, but are not limited to, home occupations, home industries, agri-tourism uses, and uses that produce value-added agricultural products."

Furthermore, "agri-tourism uses are defined as those farm-related tourism uses, including limited accommodation such as bed and breakfasts, that promote the enjoyment, education or activities related to the farm operation."

However, to be an OFDU, the agri-tourism use must meet all of the five OFDU criteria set out in the OMAFRA Guidelines:

- 1. Located on a farm
- 2. Secondary to the principle agricultural use of the property

# 3. Limited in area

- Includes, but is not limited to, home occupations, home industries, agritourism uses and uses that produce value-added agricultural products
- Shall be compatible with, and shall not hinder, surrounding agricultural operations

Simply stated, if an agri-tourism use does not meet all five criteria, including being limited in area (two per cent of the farm to a maximum of one hectare, which includes parking) and is not compatible with and shall not hinder surrounding agricultural operations, then it should not be considered an OFDU.

In Ontario, it is not uncommon for farms to host special events where thousands of people attend a farm for a specific function. Maybe it is to purchase a pumpkin and enjoy About 40,000 people come to see the tulips every spring at JP Niagara Tulip Experience and another 10,000 people to see sunflowers in the summer.



a fall festival, including corn mazes, a play park, a petting zoo, and apple pie eating. Maybe it is an Easter egg hunt on a farm and photos with the Easter bunny, or maybe it is strawberry picking and partaking in a strawberry social with games, activities, food and craft vendors.

Whatever the special event is, they are usually advertised for a specific timeframe and related to a season or special holiday. These events are usually not limited in size and may not be permanently compatible with the surrounding property owners. Therefore, special events are most likely above and beyond an OFDU.

In the Town of Pelham in Niagara Region, special events are regulated with a Special Event Permit Bylaw. If a special event is an organized, time-limited event or function on private property and meets the following criteria, then a special event permit is required:

- maximum duration of five (5) continuous calendar days or in the case of a special event that is directly related to the planting or harvest season for an agricultural operation, the duration approved by the clerk when issuing a special event permit;
- augments the ordinary business or operations at the property where it is held;
- is open to the public and/or to invitees; and
- is reasonably expected to have more than two hundred (200) attendees and/or participants over its duration.

Functions that may constitute a special event include but are not limited to a fair, exhibition, carnival, bazaar, craft show, auction, concert, film screening, festival, sporting event, temporary agritourism offering, parade, neighbourhood block party, assembly for political, religious or cultural purposes, or other similar event. It should also be noted that the Special Event Bylaw does not apply to independent pick-your-own activities.

The special event application is required at least 45 days before the event and includes supporting documents, such as venue plans, proof of insurance, and parking and traffic management plans. There is no fee for the application for a permit, but additional permits may be associated with fees.

The Town of Pelham has two large tulip festivals each year, which attract thousands of visitors who pick flowers, take photos in the tulip fields, eat at food vendors, listen to music, and purchase crafts.

# SARAH GREY PICK FARM

Sarah Grey Pick Farm is located at 1415 Balfour Street off of Hwy 20 in Fenwick and is host to 13,000 visitors each spring. The special event runs for approximately three weeks around Mother's Day and includes ample parking, vendors and music. Sarah and her husband Brian believe in creating peace and joy amidst chaos and offer a serene escape in her tulip-filled small-town getaway, where nature meets tranquillity. Sarah, Brian, and their three children (Hunter, Chase and Grey) have farmed their 23-acre farm in the Town of Pelham since 2023.

# JP NIAGARA TULIP EXPERIENCE

Joseph and Paula host two special events a year in North Pelham at 230A Tice Road in Ridgeville. For Paula, the tulip picking experience



Nature meets tranquillity at Sarah Grey Pick Farm, a family operation that hosts about 13,000 people over three weeks each spring.

is a dream come true as she was born and raised in the Netherlands and has spent most of her life in the tulip industry, travelling the world for shows and events. Joseph has extensive experience in the agricultural industry and a passion for growing flowers and sharing his creativity with visitors. Joseph and Paula are host to 40,000 visitors in the spring for their tulip festival and an additional 10,000 visitors in the summer for their sunflower festival.

# "...the main focus continues to be preserving agricultural lands while creating sustainable opportunities for family farmers in Ontario."

When planning for OFDUs and special events, the main focus continues to be preserving agricultural lands while creating sustainable opportunities for family farmers in Ontario.

The Town of Pelham Community Planning and Development staff had an opportunity to visit the tulip fields in Pelham this 2025 spring and continue to build a relationship with these farmers who host special events. The special events permit process is always a work in progress and experiencing firsthand how the farmers operate tulip festivals improves future opportunities for special events in the Town of Pelham.

For more information on the Town of Pelham special event permits, please visit: https://www.pelham.ca/pelham-government/permits-applications-licenses/special-events-permits/ (\varphi)



Pam Duesling, PhD, MCIP, RPP, ECD, CMMIII, is the Director of Community Planning and Development at the Town of Pelham, Niagara Region, and a seventh generation family farmer in Norfolk County. She is an expert in the balance of on-farm diversification and preservation of agricultural lands and a sessional lecturer at the School of Planning at the University of Waterloo and the Rural Planning and Development Program at the University of Guelph. Pam is also Secretary-Treasurer on OPPI's Executive Committee.

# **New Homes in Old Yards:**

# Planning for Efficiency and Livability with Garden Suites in the Greater Toronto Area

BY HAN LIU

arden suites have become a key response to Ontario's housing challenges across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Supported by provincial policies and evolving municipal bylaws, they enable gentle densification, multigenerational living, and rental income in established neighbourhoods. This article explores recent trends in garden suite implementation, focusing on 1) efforts to streamline approvals through digital tools and 2) community concerns about privacy and neighbourhood compatibility — reflecting broader themes of efficiency and livability.

While zoning covers many technical aspects, finer design details affecting livability would need further guidance. Emerging AI-driven design and visualization tools have the potential to improve both approval efficiency and sensitivity. Balancing speedy delivery with thoughtful design will be essential for garden suites to enhance the livability and character of GTA communities.

"Balancing speedy delivery with thoughtful design will be essential for garden suites to enhance the livability and character of GTA communities."

Backyards across Ontario are being reimagined as part of a broader response to the housing crisis. In 2011, Ontario's Strong Communities Through Affordable Housing Act amended the Planning Act to require municipalities to support secondary suites, including detached units like garden suites. Since then, garden suites, also known as backyard homes or detached Additional Residential Units (ARUs),

have become an increasingly familiar feature of the province's housing landscape. Designed to introduce gentle density within existing neighbourhoods, these small, self-contained dwellings offer a practical way to expand housing options without significantly changing the built form of a neighbourhood. They can also support multigenerational living and offer opportunities for rental income.

Guided by provincial policies, efforts to formally enable garden suites have progressed across GTA municipalities over the past decade. For instance, in 2018, the City of Toronto amended its zoning bylaw to permit laneway suites — a type of ARU — within Toronto and East York area, with the exception of specific residential zones in the Ramsden Park, Asquith–Collier, and Yorkville neighbourhoods. This was followed in 2022 by city-wide official plan and zoning bylaw amendments that legalized garden suites across Toronto.

At the same time, the City of Brampton revised its zoning bylaws to allow detached backyard units on most residential lots. Since then, Brampton has received 92 garden suite applications, with 65 proceeding to building

permit applications, 51 building permits issued, and 15 registered (as of July 21, 2025).

Most recently, in November 2024, the province introduced Regulation 462/24: Additional Residential Units under the *Planning* Act, which further encourages the development of ARUs and influences how municipalities regulate them.

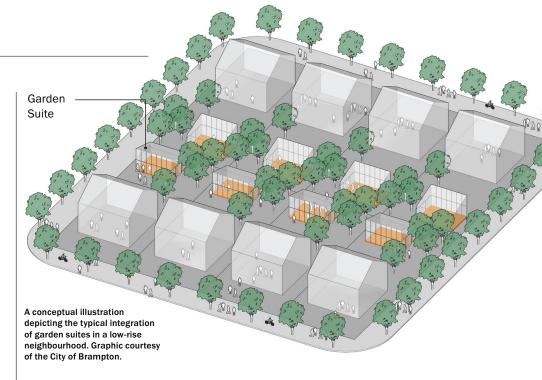
Based on my work on garden suite applications in Brampton and exploration of related policies across the GTA, I've observed two emerging trends. On one hand, many municipalities are making efforts to streamline approvals and reduce barriers for homeowners. A key trend is the growing use of digital tools to accelerate approvals, making the process generally faster, more transparent, and easier for applicants to navigate. On the other hand, there is an increasing attention to privacy and neighbourhood compatibility among residents as garden suites become more widespread. These trends reflect two broader planning considerations: efficiency and livability. Moreover, they suggest a growing challenge: how do we deliver these units quickly while maintaining livability?

# FASTER APPROVALS THROUGH DIGITAL TOOLS

A typical garden suite approval process starts with an application submission. Municipal staff review the proposal, provide feedback, and the applicant revises their design before final approval.

"Mississauga provides a library of pre-approved garden suite designs, which shortens review times and reduces design costs."

To improve this process, along with other application reviews such as rezoning and site plan approval, many municipalities have adopted online systems like ProjectDox or Accela. Some have gone further by offering tools that help residents navigate garden suite regulations more easily. For example, Mississauga provides a library of pre-approved garden suite designs, which



shortens review times and reduces design costs. In Brampton, an interactive ARU search tool lets residents find their address and see if their property may be suited to build an ARU under existing regulations.

These tools reflect a broader shift toward user-friendly, tech-enabled planning systems intended to reduce the burden on both residents and city staff. They facilitate increased information sharing between municipalities and potential applicants to support faster decision-making around developing an ARU. However, faster approvals don't necessarily mean the process is free from concern. As more garden suites are added to established neighbourhoods, some residents have expressed concerns.

# **COMMUNITY CONCERNS**

Concerns about garden suites have been raised, particularly in long-established residential areas. Commonly mentioned issues include:

- A loss of privacy, especially when windows overlook neighbouring yards.
- Increased pressure on infrastructure, including water, sewer, and stormwater capacity.
- Parking stress, particularly on narrow or older residentials streets.
- Removal of mature trees, which often reduces green space and the urban canopy.
- Perceived incompatibility with the surrounding neighbourhood, such as fears of overbuilding or visual disruption.

Looking more closely at these concerns can highlight underlying values. They often relate to how people experience their surroundings and how changes in the built form may affect their sense of comfort and belonging. Among them, privacy and neighbourhood compatibility stand out as the most visible and emotionally resonant issues.

# PRIVACY AND COMPATIBILITY: CHALLENGES BEYOND ZONING

Privacy emerges as a concern due to the proximity of garden suites to neighbouring properties. For neighbours who don't have a garden suite, the presence of a new structure nearby can change their sense of space and seclusion. If two adjoining properties both have garden suites, the combined effect can feel more imposing, further reducing backyard privacy. The suites themselves may face a similar challenge if not designed carefully.

Neighbourhood compatibility is another key issue: how well do garden suites fit into the character of the existing residential areas? Concerns often relate to scale, massing, and architectural design. The new units can alter established patterns of open space or introduce architectural styles that are inconsistent with surrounding homes. Even if each unit appears modest on its own, the cumulative impact of several suites on the same block can be significant.

Together, these two issues point to a broader question: what makes a place livable? While the introduction of garden suites inevitably brings changes and

impacts, thoughtful design can help maintain and even enhance livability. Livability is about more than technical compliance. It's about how well people coexist, how secure and comfortable they feel in their space, and how well the built environment supports everyday life.

Zoning regulations such as minimum setbacks, maximum heights, and rooftop patio restrictions play a key role in addressing many concerns. However, zoning itself is not enough, as it typically excludes finer grain design elements like building materials, colour palettes, or window placement, which are often too restrictive or subjective to codify. Even when a garden suite complies fully with zoning rules, it can still feel intrusive or raise privacy issues. For example, a red-roofed suite may stand out sharply among a block of black-roofed homes, or two neighbouring garden suites may have windows that directly face each other. This also points to a limitation of commonly used tools for reviewing garden suite applications today, which focus primarily on zoning compliance. This is where design guidelines become critical in the process.

# **DESIGN CONSIDERATION**

Currently, municipalities across the GTA tend to incorporate design considerations for garden suites in various ways. In many cases, specific garden suite design guidelines are not readily available online. Zoning bylaw standards seem to end up serving as a form of design control, which may contribute to the concerns mentioned earlier. Some municipalities have adopted alternative approaches. Mississauga, for example, offers pre-approved designs that allow for finish customization while limiting modifications to key elements such as size, layout, walls, and windows. Toronto has also recently released a set of pre-approved, standardized designs for both laneway and garden suites. Brampton, meanwhile, has developed standalone draft Garden Suites Design Guidelines to guide and evaluate proposals.

These measures are meant to support livability. These approaches may be suitable in the current context. However, with the provincial and municipal efforts to expedite approvals, rising housing costs, growing demand for multigenerational living, and the rise of quick prefabricated options, garden suite construction is likely to increase. Their cumulative impacts may become more noticeable over time. This suggests a need to explore more scalable, responsive, and adaptive approaches for the future.

# **SMARTER TOOLS FOR SMARTER GROWTH**

Recently, some municipalities have begun introducing AI tools into their review processes. For example, Burlington is using a online e-check tool that allows users to upload building plans and receive feedback on compliance before formally submitting their application.

This innovation also helps to improve the efficiency of the garden suite review process. However, design quality and neighbourhood compatibility cannot be assessed through the e-check alone.

Archistar, the company behind e-check, offers a more advanced generative AI platform that integrates zoning data with 3D visualization. Designers can adjust building massing, shape, and layout in real time and test how a proposal fits into the surrounding context.

From a municipal standpoint, these tools offer valuable benefits. They enable city staff to visualize proposed developments within their real-world context, taking into account topography, neighbouring structures, and solar orientation. This facilitates a more informed assessment of shadow impacts, privacy, and overall compatibility — factors that significantly affect livability.

Looking ahead, tools like Archistar may become more widely adopted, offering potential benefits such as streamlined processes, greater transparency, and improved visualization during review. At the same time, adoption comes with challenges, such as data privacy, platform accuracy, workflow integration, and staff training, which will all require careful attention. As the pressure for more housing grows alongside the need to manage community character, using AI design tools in planning practices could be crucial for balancing speed with sensitivity in the delivery of backyard homes.

# **PLANNING AHEAD FOR LIVABLE COMMUNITIES**

Garden suites offer an incremental way to expand housing supply without dramatically altering neighbourhoods. With the aid of digital tools, municipalities are making approvals faster and more accessible. At the same time, design quality, community fit, and livability are also important.

Planning for the future means creating places where people can flourish — spaces that are functional, attractive, and inviting. With the right balance of smart technology, effective policies, and careful design, garden suites can increase housing options while fostering vibrant and connected communities. (\(\text{Y}\))



Han Liu is a Candidate Member of OPPI, a full member of the Ontario Association of Landscape Architects (OALA) and the Canadian Society of Landscape Architects (CSLA), and an ISA-certified Arborist. Han is currently the Supervisor and Principal Urban Designer at the City of Brampton, where she oversees the Garden Suites and Custom Home review processes, as well as city-wide initiatives such as the Urban Design Guidelines and the Streetscape and Public Realm Design Manual.

# Addressing On-Farm Housing Challenges: Greenbelt Foundation's New Report Offers Practical Solutions

BY THE GREENBELT FOUNDATION

urban centres. Rural and agricultural communities now face similar if not more acute and unique challenges. These housing challenges pose a real risk to the long-term viability of agricultural and agrifood — one of the province's most essential economic sectors.

Agriculture is a cornerstone of Ontario's economy, contributing nearly \$50 billion to provincial GDP and employing 10 per cent of the workforce. Ontarians also benefit from a safe and secure source of local food with 60 per cent of food produced and consumed locally. Ontario's Greenbelt contains some of the most productive agricultural land in Ontario while being located next to the country's largest food processing sector and consumer market. It is also situated in the Greater Golden Horseshoe, a region which is experiencing tremendous growth pressures. We need to find housing solutions that effectively balance where residential growth should and should not occur while protecting and supporting a viable agricultural sector and economy.

"Agriculture is a cornerstone of Ontario's economy, contributing nearly \$50 billion to provincial GDP and employing 10 per cent of the workforce."

The Greenbelt Foundation's recent report, Housing Needs and Actions for the Agricultural Sector in Rural Greenbelt Communities, brings this issue into focus. The report explores how current housing policies and shortages are affecting farm families, agricultural workers, and the rural economy. An advisory committee of

# "...supporting the essential connection between housing and agricultural viability..."

subject matter experts was established to provide guidance throughout the research process, ensuring that the recommendations addressed the needs of various stakeholders. The findings provide recommendations for rural communities in the Greenbelt and across Ontario with significant agricultural operations and economies to meet housing demands by supporting the essential connection between housing and agricultural viability, the future growth of the industry, and carry important implications for planners, policymakers, and municipalities.

In Ontario's largest urban region experiencing high-growth pressures, the Greenbelt report uniquely addresses the need to protect farmland, support food production and a viable agricultural economy, as well as help shape urban growth. The areas is home to the province's only two specialty



This Barndominium/house is an example of an Additional Residential Unit (ARU) which would provide an innovative solution. The two-story, 1000-sq-ft building is attached to an existing barn/shed and supports transition and succession planning for farm families.

crop areas — the Holland Marsh and the Niagara Tender Fruit and Grape Area — whose fertile soils and unique climate conditions allow Greenbelt farmers to grow crops that can't be found commercially anywhere else.

# "...the Greenbelt's \$4.1 billion annual agriculture economy..."

Ensuring the Greenbelt's \$4.1 billion annual agriculture economy continues to thrive also requires addressing the increasing and emerging housing needs of farm families and workers of agriculture and agri-businesses. Housing shortages are intensifying in rural communities, threatening the viability of farm operations and growth opportunities within the broader agri-food and rural economy. The sustainability of this sector depends on something often overlooked: access to affordable, appropriate housing.

In case studies across Durham Region, Niagara Region, and Huron County, a consistent message emerged. When housing options are limited or unsuitable, farm operations struggle to attract and retain workers, farm succession becomes more difficult, and rural

communities lose economic stability. These case studies also demonstrate that policies must respond to the needs of the local area, and one type of housing solution does not work in all areas of the province. The housing needs for agricultural workers in the speciality crop area in Niagara Region are very different than those in Durham and policy must reflect this.

For planners seeking regional solutions to the housing crisis, this issue offers both a challenge and an opportunity. The report outlines several priority areas for action:

- Preserve and strengthen policies that allow Additional Residential Units (ARUs) on farms to meet the housing needs of both farm families and agri-business workers.
- Promote flexible housing types that can be delivered quickly and cost effectively. These include modular homes, tiny homes, and accommodations for seasonal or temporary workers.
- Create a rural infrastructure strategy that identifies where investment is most needed, clarifies options for servicing (including private systems where appropriate), and aligns with planning objectives.





- Ensure agricultural housing needs are integrated into municipal housing and agriculture plans. Local planning decisions should reflect the realities of farm life and the demands of rural economies.
- Encourage gentle intensification within existing rural settlement areas through thoughtful housing development and infrastructure investment.

This is not only a rural housing issue — it is also a question of economic development, land-use planning, and food security. Supporting housing for agricultural workers and rural residents helps ensure the long-term resilience of Ontario's agricultural system, while contributing to broader goals of sustainable regional growth.

Planners have a critical role to play in bridging the gap between rural and urban policy. By expanding the focus of housing strategies to include rural communities, planning professionals can help create a more balanced, connected, and productive future for all of Ontario. To learn more, visit www.greenbelt.ca/rural\_housing. (\*\*)



The Greenbelt Foundation is committed to promoting awareness and education about Ontario's Greenbelt. To this end we occasionally publish research and general interest papers that explore our three program areas: viable agriculture and viticulture; vibrant rural communities; and a restored and protected natural environment. The report was prepared by Caldwell Consulting with contributing authors Wayne Caldwell, PHD, FCIP, RPP, Denise Van Amersfoort, MSC, MCIP, RPP, Shanley Weston, MSC, and Regan Zink, PHD, (Candidate), as well as Shelley Petrie, Director, Programs, Research & Policy for the Greenbelt Foundation.

# 10 Myths of an On-Farm Diversified Use (OFDU)

BY PAM DUESLING, RPP, EMILY SOUSA, RPP, AND WAYNE CALDWELL, RPP



cross Ontario, farmers are reinventing the family farm. On-Farm Diversified Uses (OFDUs) offer a practical way to sustain agricultural livelihoods while supporting the rural economy. Yet as municipalities implement provincial policy, confusion and misinterpretation persist. Drawing from extensive research involving farmers, planners, and policymakers — including the full report Best Practices for On-Farm Diversified Uses — this article highlights 10 common myths about OFDUs and offers evidence-based clarification to guide planning practice.

OFDUs are now a fixture of Ontario's policy framework. They allow farms to host limited secondary uses — like small-scale food processing, agri-tourism, or craft studios — without undermining agricultural land protection. But successful implementation requires clarity, consistency, and common sense. The following myths reveal where challenges lie and how planning can support both farmland preservation and the entrepreneurial spirit of the next generation of farmers.

# **MYTH 1: SIZE AND SCALE DON'T MATTER**

Size and scale do matter for OFDUs. To preserve prime agricultural areas in Ontario and support long-term farm viability, we must, as a profession, limit OFDU size and scale and ensure they remain secondary to the primary agricultural use.

As outlined in the OMAFRA's *Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas*, OFDUs should occupy no more than two per cent of the farm lot, to a maximum of one hectare. Without these limits, OFDUs risk further farmland loss, fragmentation, and other compatibility issues. While entrepreneurs and farmers may push the boundaries in terms of OFDU sizes, responsible OFDUs should complement — not replace — farmland.

# MYTH 2: THE FARMER MUST OWN AND OPERATE THE OFDU

Another misconception is that the same person must both own the farm and operate the OFDU. However, land use planning focuses on the "use," rather than the identity of the user. The PPS requires OFDUs to be located "on a farm," but this definition is determined by each municipality.

Some municipalities consider agricultural zoning or active agricultural use sufficient, while others require a Farm Business Registration (FBR) — a provincially recognized number used for agricultural tax purposes. Some go further, requiring both the FBR and the land title be held by the same entity to prevent landowners from renting to a farmer solely to qualify for OFDUs.

While these measures aim to uphold policy intent, overly rigid requirements may exclude legitimate farm operations with diverse ownership models. Requiring an FBR strikes a practical balance: it aligns with tax frameworks and provides a standardized, accessible way for municipalities to verify farm status.

# MYTH 3: PARKING IS NOT INCLUDED IN OFDUS

Contrary to common belief, parking, loading, and access areas must be included in the "two per cent to a maximum of one hectare"

size calculation for OFDUs. The only slight exception is for laneways also serving farm purposes, which may be excluded or partially discounted. For larger, public-facing uses such as agri-tourism or event barns, parking needs can significantly constrain the size and layout of the OFDU and must be carefully planned.

# MYTH 4: TEMPORARY OR SEASONAL USES SHOULDN'T QUALIFY AS OFDUS

Some assume that temporary or low-intensity activities such as seasonal workshops, glamping, or farm-based experiences do not qualify as OFDUs because they lack permanent structures or operate part-time.

In reality, planning policies apply to land use, regardless of its duration or permanence. Even short-term activities can generate impacts such as traffic, servicing, or disruption to farm operations that warrant consideration under the OFDU criteria.

Zoning bylaws set clear parameters to accommodate temporary uses while protecting ongoing agricultural activity.

Pick-your-own operations are generally considered agricultural uses. However, when combined with non-agricultural elements like food service, retail, or recreational elements, they may shift into OFDU territory and should be evaluated accordingly.

# MYTH 5: SITE PLAN CONTROL IS ALL-ENCOMPASSING FOR ADDRESSING IMPACTS

Municipalities often apply site plan control to OFDUs in ways that are comprehensive or urban-oriented. However, this approach is not always appropriate in agricultural contexts, and municipalities have discretion to scale requirements based on the nature of the OFDU. Best practices show that municipalities can reduce application costs, scale back formal agreements, and limit urban-style requirements such as paving especially where not warranted. For example, paving farmland for parking is typically unnecessary, except where needed to meet fire safety or accessibility standards.

Site plan control should be scoped appropriately for the nature of the OFDU and the rural setting, ensuring that regulatory oversight supports not hinders farm viability. These requirements and associated costs are within the purview of each municipality and can be adjusted accordingly.

# MYTH 6: EXISTING FARM BUILDINGS CAN BE USED FOR OFDUS WITHOUT BUILDING CODE OR FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

It's a common misconception that existing farm buildings can be used for OFDUs without structural upgrades or a change-of-use permit. This often leads to unexpected challenges during the permitting stage. Farm structures are subject to more lenient standards under the Ontario Building Code (OBC) when used for agriculture. However, once used for OFDUs such as retail, commercial kitchens, or agri-tourism, they must comply with full occupancy requirements under the OBC. This may involve substantial upgrades, including fire separation, suppression systems, structural reinforcements, and accessibility features. Early consultation with building officials, engineers, or architects is essential to understand these requirements and avoid costly surprises.

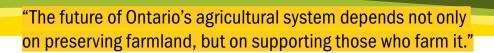
Also, many assume farm tax classification continues for OFDUs. In reality, once a portion of a property is used for commercial or industrial purposes, that area is typically reclassified and often results in higher property taxes.

OFDUs are not automatically exempt from municipal development charges (DCs). While agricultural buildings may qualify for exemptions under certain conditions, new OFDU structures such as tasting rooms or processing facilities are usually subject to full DC rates. Only existing farm buildings changing use may qualify for exemptions under specific conditions. Many farmers only become aware of these charges at the building permit stage.

# **MYTH 7: EVENT VENUES ARE NOT OFDUS**

Event barns can qualify as OFDUs, though it can be difficult to meet the size and scale requirement of two





per cent to a maximum of one hectare. The research identified that most entrepreneurs/farmers will choose not to pursue them due to the significant costs of bringing older barns up to assembly occupancy standards under the OBC and Fire Code. Usually, the cost of OBC and Fire Code requirements outweighs the benefits and projected income of event venues, especially when considering the impacts to the farm business. Not to mention, as referenced above, the change of use eventually triggers a property tax re-assessment. However, there are successful examples of small, seasonal event venues that use tents or pavilions to avoid costly code upgrades and maintain good relationships with their neighbours by mitigating noise and lighting impacts.

There are also numerous examples of non-compliant event barns in Ontario. Owners and users should be cautious of the risks related to insurance, fire safety and liability.

The Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance has published an event barn white paper that includes appropriate examples of event barns and highlights the time and cost involved. This paper can be accessed at: https://foodandfarming.ca/research/.

# MYTH 8: INCOME FROM OFDUS CANNOT EXCEED FARM REVENUE

Some believe OFDUs must generate less income than the farm to qualify as secondary uses. This is incorrect. Under provincial policy, "secondary" refers to the land area, size, and scale not income. In fact, many farmers earn more from their OFDUs than from primary agricultural operations. Our research shows this income is often reinvested into the farm, for example, to tile drain land, purchase more acreage, or purchase new capital.

# MYTH 9: ONLY ONE OFDU IS ALLOWED PER FARM

There is no limit to the number of OFDUs a farm may have, provided the combined footprint remains within the two per cent of lot area, up to one hectare, as outlined in OMAFRA's guidelines.

For example, a farm may include both a tearoom and agritourism activities or operate a mechanical repair shop alongside a craft store. The combined impact of all OFDUs must remain secondary to the principal agricultural use. See pages 53-57 of the guidelines for great examples illustrating cumulative OFDUs on a lot.

# MYTH 10: OFDUS ARE A POOR USE OF PRIME AGRICULTURAL LAND

Some view OFDUs as an inappropriate use of farmland. However, when designed thoughtfully, OFDUs support Ontario's agricultural system by improving viability, encouraging farm succession, and mitigating risk by diversifying income.

OFDUs are now a permanent part of the policy landscape. Our responsibility is to ensure they are implemented in ways that benefit not harm prime agricultural areas and those who rely on them.

# CONCLUSION

The future of Ontario's agricultural system depends not only on preserving farmland, but on supporting those who farm it. OFDUs are an important tool for ensuring that family farms remain viable, resilient, and adaptable in a changing economy. But good policy requires good implementation. Misunderstandings about OFDUs — whether about ownership, income limits, or planning approvals — can add unnecessary hurdles and risk undermining the intent of provincial policy.

As land use professionals, we have a responsibility to ensure that OFDUs are appropriately scaled, thoughtfully integrated, and reflective of local context. More than that, we have an opportunity to help shape a planning system that supports thriving agricultural communities while upholding our shared commitment to farmland protection.

For additional tools, examples, and best practices, planners are encouraged to review the full report Best Practices for On-Farm Diversified Uses available at https://www.waynecaldwell.ca/projects/omafra-permitted-uses-2/ (③)

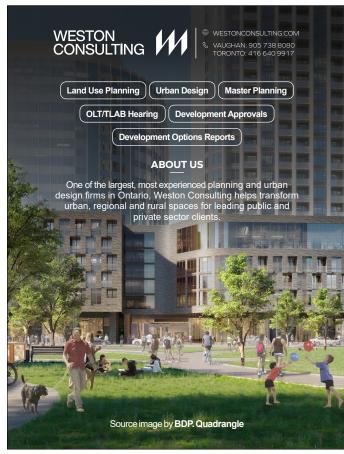


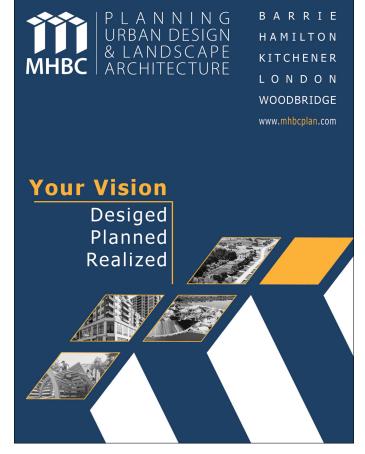




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# Planning for the Future:

# Central Elgin Sets Vision for Transformative Hospital Lands Redevelopment

BY GEOFF BROOKS, ANDREW SLOAN, MARY LOU TANNER, RPP, FCIP



Aerial of the former psychiatric hospital lands in the Municipality of Central Elgin

Figure 1: Aerial Context Map

entral Elgin has taken a major step toward shaping its future with Council's recent approval of a vision and guiding principles for the redevelopment of the former Psychiatric Hospital Lands. Strategically located and well-positioned for redevelopment, the site will serve as the foundation for a new, complete community, distinctive in design, inclusive in character, and sustainable in form.

The adoption of a vision and guiding principles marks the first milestone in one of Central Elgin's most ambitious planning initiatives to date. This project comes at a pivotal time, as the municipality prepares for unprecedented economic and population growth. In the nearby city of St. Thomas, Volkswagen is set to open its first overseas electric vehicle battery manufacturing facility in 2027, following a landmark investment by the federal and provincial governments. The plant is expected to generate 3,000 direct jobs and up to 30,000 indirect jobs across the region, creating substantial demand for housing, services, and infrastructure throughout Central Elgin and beyond.

The former Psychiatric Hospital Lands represent a prime opportunity to accommodate this future growth. Located in close proximity to the new battery plant and largely undeveloped, the site is ideally suited to support a new, complete community. Fully developed, these lands could accommodate a community of up to 10,000 residents.

This transformative economic development underscores the urgency of forward-looking planning. With a significant influx of new residents anticipated, Central Elgin is proactively establishing a framework for a mixed-use neighbourhood that will address diverse housing needs, support local employment, and enhance overall quality of life.

# "Fully developed, these lands could accommodate a community of up to 10,000 residents."

Central Elgin Mayor Andrew Sloan emphasized the significance of the project, noting, "This is an important moment for Central Elgin. We are laying the groundwork for a new, forward-looking community to meet the needs of a growing population and to create a vibrant and inclusive place for generations to come."

# A VISION FOR A COMPLETE COMMUNITY

The redeveloped Hospital Lands are envisioned as a thriving and inclusive neighbourhood, one that is welcoming, people-focused, and designed for all ages and stages of life. The plan emphasizes a broad range of affordable and accessible housing options to accommodate a growing and diverse population.

Rooted in principles of healthy living and environmental responsibility, the community will feature parks, trails, and public spaces that encourage active lifestyles and social connection. At its heart will be a traditional, walkable main street lined with vibrant local businesses, creating a strong sense of place and opportunity for economic growth.

Public services and amenities will be thoughtfully integrated to support residents' daily needs, while green design practices and respect for the natural landscape will help ensure long-term sustainability. This community will not only provide new homes, but it will also generate employment, support local services, and contribute to the financial resilience of Central Elgin.

# **GUIDING PRINCIPLES: A FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPMENT**

To translate this vision into a planning framework, the initiative is guided by four foundational principles:

- **Distinctive Community:** The new neighbourhood will be designed to reflect the area's cultural and agricultural heritage, offering a complete range of housing types, a vibrant commercial main street, and high-quality public realm features that create a strong sense of place.
- Connected Community: With a compact, transit-ready form, the community will integrate active transportation networks including cycling and pedestrian routes — with vehicular access and parking, ensuring safe, seamless mobility throughout.
- Liveable and Affordable Community: A diversity of housing forms and densities will support affordability for households at various life stages and income levels. Public spaces and amenities, including parks and community services, will contribute to a vibrant, inclusive neighbourhood fabric.



• Sustainable Community: The development will be guided by sustainable planning principles, including efficient land use, protection of the natural landscape, a robust urban tree canopy, and adoption of green development standards to promote climate resilience.

# WHAT'S NEXT

The next phase of the project will focus on robust community engagement and the development of a directions report, which will help shape the secondary planning process. Central Elgin staff are working in close collaboration with the Province of Ontario and other key stakeholders to ensure the framework reflects both shared priorities and local aspirations.

The redevelopment of the former Psychiatric Hospital Lands represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to define what growth means for Central Elgin. More than just a response to growth, this project is a commitment to ensuring a healthy, inclusive, and sustainable future, one that residents will be proud to call home.

# SITE CONTEXT

The Hospital Lands total approximately 416 acres (168 ha), with 279 acres (113 ha) being vacant and used for both agriculture and/or open space (soccer fields). The remaining land area of approximately 79 acres (32 ha) is comprised of the vacant former hospital buildings, the Southwest Centre for Forensic Mental Health Care, and the Elgin County detachment of the Ontario Provincial Police.







**Geoff Brooks** is the Director of Planning and Engineering Services for the Municipality of Central Elgin. He leads initiatives that guide growth and development across the municipality, focusing on creating complete, connected, and sustainable communities. Geoff works closely with Council, staff, and community partners to plan for the future and ensure Central Elgin remains a vibrant and inclusive place to live, work, and invest. **Andrew Sloan** is currently serving his first term as the Mayor of Central Elgin. **Mary Lou Tanner**, FCIP, is a Partner and Past President at NPG Solutions, where she oversees the company's project portfolio, leads projects, and actively supports and mentors staff. Mary Lou brings a wealth of knowledge from decades of public sector experience to deliver expert insights to clients and stakeholders. She and the NPG team are the planning consultants to Central Elgin.



# To Prepare for the Future We Need to Understand the Past

BY GLENN MILLER, FCIP

and other professions concerned with managing natural resource assets, looking ahead 75 years is standard practice. But while most planners will claim to be forward looking, thinking ahead three or more generations isn't something we do every day. Perhaps that is why a project launched by CIP's College of Fellows – "Imagining Canada in 2100" – stimulated so many fascinating conversations at the CIP/OPPI national planning conference in July.

Over the course of three sessions — and backed up with two reports (https://www.cip-icu.ca/college-of-fellows/) — we challenged our colleagues to think long-term; to think about what kind of place Canada will be by the end of the century; and to anticipate what role the planning profession might have in shaping a collective future that is economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable for everyone.

Yet context is everything: if we are going to succeed in imagining Canada's future, we have to start with understanding our past. As one of our presenters, Somia Sadiq, a Winnipeg-based consultant who works extensively with Indigenous clients, suggested in a recent column for *Plan Canada*, "Before we look forward, we must be honest about where we've been. And in the case of our profession, that honesty demands an uncomfortable truth: planning, as it was established in Canada, was a tool of colonization. We built with exclusion in mind. We designed with dominance in mind. We planned with permanence, forgetting that the land was never ours to hold."

Somia expanded on these observations at the conference, pointing out that "Acknowledgment is not an act of inducing guilt — it is an act of courage. And it is a necessary foundation if we are to co-create a future where planning heals rather than harms."

Another reality discussed at length in both Canada in 2100 papers is that immigration has played — and will always play — a critically important role in helping Canada achieve what until relatively recently was seen by most as an enviable quality of life.

# "...our ability to attract and retain the immigrants we need to grow is not guaranteed."

But, with fertility rates at an all-time low, growing concerns about housing affordability, an under-performing economy — recently rocked as we all know by unprecedented geopolitical uncertainty — pessimism over the impact of climate change and more, our ability to attract and retain the immigrants we need to grow is not guaranteed. That is why the Canada in 2100 project argues that planners have a role to play in supporting the quality of life that everyone has come to expect.

Planners should also be prepared to speak up on difficult issues to remind us that Canadian values – such as a commitment to genuine reconciliation – are worth defending. After all, what other country

# If Growth to 100 Million Population Occurred for the Next 75 Years in the Same Pattern as the Past 30 years



An urban future not many would consider attractive: New approaches to settling newcomers will be required! Credit: Russel Mathew and Jaclyn Hall, Hemson Consulting Ltd, for the CIP/OPPI National Conference, July 2025, based on calculations for "Imagining Canada in 2100."

in the world can claim to have a prime minister whose book on "Value(\$)" has topped the charts for months on end?

Canada in 2100 is advocating for our profession to get engaged as never before with government, the business community, and our key institutions; to provide advice that will effectively translate high-level government policies on immigration, infrastructure investment, responses to climate change and economic reconciliation, to promote action on the ground in ways that meet nationally relevant targets while reflecting regional needs and priorities.

Although work on the Canada in 2100 project began some 18 months ago, and while we are thrilled with the positive response to our bold ideas at the CIP/OPPI conference, we are adamant that we have only brought these ideas to the starting line. Unlike most planning-oriented initiatives, there is no end in sight! This is a project that we hope will be embraced by planning colleagues across Canada, by our planning schools, and reflected not just in national conferences but future education events hosted by OPPI and other forward-looking PTIAs.

Canada's competitiveness on the world stage begins with our ability to protect and improve our quality of life — a future to which planners must be committed to understanding our past while also willing to think longer term so that we can contribute meaningfully and with purpose.  $(\S)$ 



**Glenn Miller, FCIP,** is a senior associate with the Canadian Urban Institute, a member of the Canada 2100 team and the *Plan Canada* editorial committee. From 1986 to 2011, he was the editor of the *Ontario Planning Journal*, predecessor to *Y Magazine*.

# **FEATURE**

OPPI
statement
of action on
Diversity,
Equity,
Inclusion,
Reconciliation,
and Social
Justice

s the recognized voice of the planning profession in Ontario, OPPI is committed to creating a more just and inclusive society, both within the profession and in the communities we help shape. We're proud to share an important update on a key milestone of this work in strategic priority areas as determined by member input and OPPI council direction.

# **OUR PATH FORWARD**

OPPI has a few large projects underway, which we are calling our Path Forward initiatives, that will set the foundation, or path, for OPPI to move forward in priority areas.

One of our Path Forward initiatives is called Leadership in Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Reconciliation, and Social Justice (DEI-RSJ). The goal of this initiative is to reflect on OPPI's continuing work in this area, as well as lessons learned. Since September 2024, OPPI Council and the staff leadership team have been working with Decanthropy, an equity-driven consulting firm, to better understand organizational opportunities, challenges, and responsibilities when it comes to DEI-RSJ.

OPPI Council recently approved a statement of action and supporting strategy, which was a culmination of eight months of work that included facilitated workshops with Council and staff, as well as conversations with a number of OPPI members. Staff will be working to weave the strategy into a multi-year operational and implementation plan. We're pleased to share our statement of action with the membership.

# **OUR STATEMENT OF ACTION**

Indigenous Peoples, rights-holding communities, and individuals who identify as members of one or more equity-deserving groups have long experienced systemic barriers within the planning profession and the environments it influences. As Ontario's professional planning regulator, OPPI recognizes its responsibility to drive meaningful change.

OPPI has developed a strategic framework grounded in diversity, equity, inclusion, reconciliation, and social justice (DEI-RSJ). This framework will guide our work across all operations and relationships, recognizing that equity and reconciliation are to be addressed distinctly and intentionally.

To foster meaningful engagement, OPPI seeks to collaborate with all our members and those impacted by planning through reciprocal relationships rooted in respect and knowledge-sharing. OPPI will prioritize sustained relationship-building with staff contacts and culturally informed approaches that reflect community needs. Engagement efforts will emphasize partnership, not just outreach.

OPPI is committed to supporting future planners through educational partnerships and programs with K-12 schools, colleges, and universities. We will offer scholarships, bursaries, and mentorships to support Candidate members on their journey to becoming RPPs. Our approach will focus on creating diverse, accessible pathways into the profession.

In alignment with calls for self-determination for rights-holding communities, OPPI, as an ally, supports the development of an Indigenous-led, independent oversight body to improve and evaluate consultation processes. As an organization, we cannot lead this effort. However, we recognize that our role as a regulator involves supporting advocacy. We will seek to work collaboratively with Indigenous Nations, government, and other partners to support equity at appropriate jurisdictional levels.

Transparency and accountability will be essential for maintaining these commitments. OPPI will establish culturally relevant mechanisms to track progress, promote learning, and enable adaptation. Additionally, we will explore alternatives to traditional advisory council models by committing to a collaborative peer-to-peer model to foster safe spaces for knowledge sharing based on inclusive principles.

By acknowledging the truth of past harms, committing to learning, and centring the needs of our members and those impacted by planning, OPPI aims to contribute to a more inclusive, accountable, and equitable professional planning practice. (Y)



#### Welcoming New Talent to Help Us Design a Better Quality of Life

Arcadis is proud to expand its placemaking practice with the addition of two new principals.



Craig D. Sklena

Craig brings extensive leadership experience in urban design, strengthening our integration of transportation and placemaking strategies across the country.



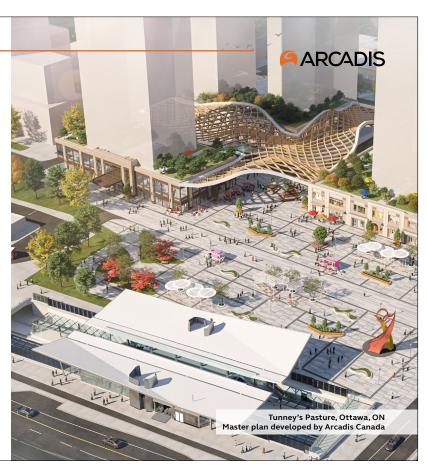
**Alfredo Landaeta** MAUD, CIV, CAV, LEED AP

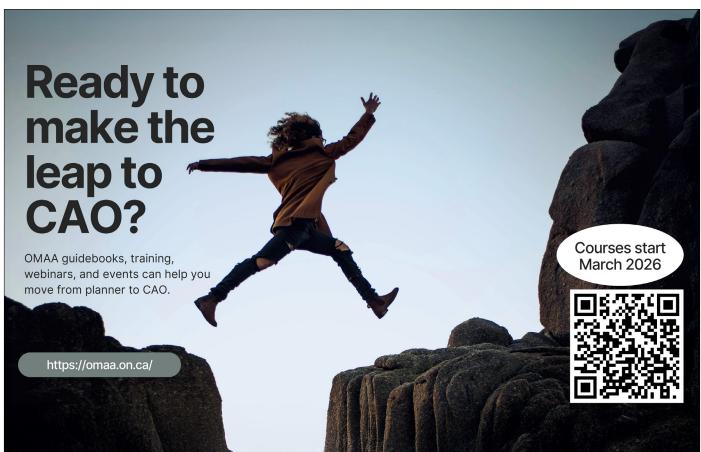
With over 30 years of design leadership across Canada and internationally, Alfredo adds depth to our urban systems thinking and community-focused design.

Together, they join a dynamic team of experts dedicated to inclusive, connected, and transit-oriented places across Canada.



LEARN ABOUT OUR PLACEMAKING EXPERTISE





# **Planning for Possibility:**Reimagining the Allen East District

ANIKA MUNIR, EDGAR SANTOS, DANA BAKKER, MADDY LAWRENCE, CHLOE KLOPP, EMILY LIM AND KOHBOD KHANDAN-BARANI

he 2025 Allen East District Plan (AEDP) was created as part of a studio project in the Master of Planning program at Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU). With guidance from our studio supervisor Blair Scorgie, project client Mark Richardson from HousingNowTO, and mentor Lanrick Bennett, this project aims to transform an underused area into a vibrant, connected mixed-use district.

The Allen East District (AED) sits on a centrally located site within the borough of North York, surrounded by quaint low-rise neighbourhoods and the occasional mid-rise building. Directly adjacent is the now outof-commission Downsview Airport, once an air force base and eventually a facility operated by Bombardier. With the runways now empty, the area invites a surge of residential development that will completely transform the built form of North York. Its closure created a rare opportunity to reimagine what Allen East could become, unlocking new potential for housing, density, and mixed-use development across the 29.5-hectare site.

Why reimagine Allen East? Toronto's and Canada's housing affordability challenges have reached crisis levels, with Canada Mortgage Housing Corporation (CMHC) estimating that 3.5 million new dwelling units would need to be built by 2030 to restore affordability. Toronto in particular has been hard hit, with the average home price reaching a staggering \$1.12 million as of May 2025. This crisis has had

knock-on effects on equity, with minority groups bearing the brunt of the negative consequences. In addition, continued urban sprawl has intensified, leading to a growing need to integrate climate resilience and sustainability as core pillars of the AED.

"...average home price [in Toronto] reaching a staggering \$1.12 million as of May 2025."

## A VISION ROOTED IN AFFORDABILITY, LIVABILITY, AND RESILIENCE

In response, our team produced a new vision for the AED that responds to today's opportunities and tomorrow's challenges. Building on a previous vision developed by CreateTO, the 2025 AEDP outlines a 10-year timeline to deliver the first phase of

# "When fully built out, the plan will deliver roughly 7,000 new residential units across all phases."

development, which includes approximately 4,200 new units. When fully built out, the plan will deliver roughly 7,000 new residential units across all phases. The first phase begins with a mixed-use area featuring residential, retail, institutional, and community amenities to serve both new and existing residents.

To ensure our planning and development concept met community needs and was as





This conceptual rendering illustrates a proposed redevelopment by our group of the Allen East District into a complete community, featuring a mix of high-rise and mid-rise residential buildings, amenities, commercial use, public parks, and community facilities.

viable as possible, the team held a design workshop with participation from urban planners, designers, and other professionals to gather critiques, recommendations, and feedback. The workshop was highly insightful and directly informed our final development concepts. We integrated feedback from both the design workshop and HousingNowTO into our land use, mobility, and housing policies. Based on this input, the team developed two scenarios: a base concept and an intensified concept. The intensified concept proposes a higher number of residential units concentrated around the Sheppard

West subway station, while the base concept may be more easily accepted by the surrounding community.

### DESIGNING WITH COMMUNITY AND SUSTAINABILITY IN MIND

To assess the viability of our development plan, our team utilized tools such as proformas, mapping, and scenario testing. High-level proformas were developed for both the base and intensified concepts. Our team conducted a detailed market analysis to ensure our financial assumptions were aligned with current market



conditions. Mapping and scenario testing was done to identify potential issues with placement of buildings, services, and amenities. The team also used mapping to identify areas that may receive community backlash and used scenario testing to identify potential solutions that met our goals and vision while also creating less backlash in the community.

With the effects of climate change being felt increasingly as our planet temperatures rise, it is important to build climate resilient buildings and communities. Our team's development concept includes two of the three major parks required across the Allen District, the greenway extension from the Downsview development, and additional park spaces totalling 6.92 hectares, exceeding the requirements of 5.7 hectares across the entire Allen District.<sup>3</sup> All residents will be able to access parks and open spaces within 250-500 metres or a five to 10-minute walk from their residences

The 2025 AEDP was designed for a diverse range of income levels by providing a mix of unit types, tenure options, and housing typologies. In accordance with City of Toronto's Housing Now program's affordability requirements, one-third of all residential units in the 2025 AEDP are to be delivered as affordable rental

housing.<sup>4</sup> Across the entire 2025 AEDP area, there are an estimated 2,323 affordable rental units, which will remain affordable for a period of 99 years. Our team's design was informed by reviewing Toronto's Growing Up Guidelines and scenario testing.

"...a diverse range of income levels by providing a mix of unit types, tenure options, and housing typologies."

#### LESSONS IN PLANNING AND POSSIBILITY

The AED provided a plethora of opportunities to learn and reshape the way we approach urban and suburban redevelopment efforts, especially those of such a large scale that provide a blank canvas for growth.

The first of these insights is attached to the old adage "do not let perfect be the enemy of good," a lesson that translates not only to large-scale redevelopments but also to any planning exercise undertaken. The AED was the result of advice from more stakeholders and consultants than one can count on two hands, and not one single party sees the final product as perfect; however, it produces an undeniable net positive impact for all stakeholders involved.

The AED also demonstrated to our team that public infrastructure and amenities are the drivers of growth, and that they must precede any development if the intention is to build out a complete community. People are creatures of habit, and if they live in an environment where, for example, commuting by private vehicle is their best choice, they will often not stray from that lifestyle. Public transit enables development potential, but it must precede the first flurries of development activity, otherwise it could be potentially foregone.

# "Moving forward, planning is a discipline that must become far more integrated with the principles of economic development."

Moving forward, planning is a discipline that must become far more integrated with the principles of economic development. Planning has its hands in the cookie jar of liveability and affordability, which are two of the most important aspects that attract talent to cities around the globe. Planners need to consider how best to improve these aspects of the urban human experience, so that Canada remains an attractive place for those around the globe to settle. The AED is a primary example of this, being a blank slate for a new community that can aim to be the most affordable and most liveable version of itself. But to do so, it must first become a reality, more than a concept on paper but a tangible, living urban space that received the necessary investment from all levels of government to become something great.

- $^1$  CMHC (2023). Estimating how much housing we'll need by 2030. https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/blog/2023/estimating-how-much-housing-we-need-by-2030
- $^2$  Toronto Regional Real Estate Board. (2025). Market Watch. https://trreb.ca/wp-content/files/market-stats/market-watch/mw2505.pdf
- <sup>3</sup> City of Toronto. (2024). Downsview Secondary Plan. https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/8f70-city-planning-update-downsview-secondary-plan-with-note.pdf
- <sup>4</sup> City of Toronto. (2019). Housing TO 2020-2030 Action Plan. https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/community-partners/affordable-housing-partners/housingto-2020-2030-action-plan



Anika Munir is a Student member of OPPI and holds a MPI in Urban Development from Toronto Metropolitan University and an BA (Honours) in Public Policy and Urban Studies from the University of Toronto. She is currently working as a Senior Analyst at CMHC. Emily Lim is a Student member of OPPI and a recent MPI graduate from Toronto Metropolitan University. She also holds a BA in Urban Studies from York University. Her professional experience has primarily been in the public sector. Dana Bakker is a Student member of OPPI and holds an BA (Honours) in Geography with a certificate in Geographic Information Science, followed by a MPI in Urban Development from Toronto Metropolitan University, Dana's many interests include heritage planning, transportation planning, and developing climate resilient communities. Kohbod Khandan-Barani holds an MPI in Urban Development from Toronto Metropolitan University and a BA in Economics from Simon Fraser University. He is passionate about the development of equitable and sustainable urban systems. Edgar Santos is a Student member of OPPI and has a B Com (finance) and an MPI and is interested in low- and midrise development, asset/investment management, municipal finance, economic development, and industrial development. Chloe Klopp is a recent graduate from Toronto Metropolitan University's School of Urban and Regional Planning. Chloe is passionate about advancing innovative approaches to residential development, particularly in response to the growing housing affordability crisis. Maddy Lawrence is a Student member of OPPI and is inspired by her background in psychology, the connection between humans and nature, and the complex but fascinating systems within which we live. She holds an MPI from Toronto Metropolitan University, a post-graduate certificate in Interdisciplinary Design Strategy, and an BA (Honours) in psychology.

#### **ACADEMIC**

# Social Marginalization and Health-care Access:

# A Geographical Analysis of Suburban Hospital Networks

#### BY JANICE WONG AND RAKTIM MITRA

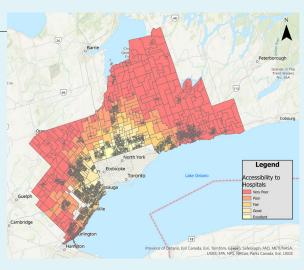


Figure 1: Accessibility to Hospitals in the Suburban GTA

o create resilient and inclusive health-care systems, an equity-based planning approach that is responsive to the needs of all communities is critically important. In this context, we explored how social marginalization in the suburban Greater Toronto Area (GTA) intersects with health-care access in the suburban communities within the GTA. This study was done as part of a master's major research project.

More specifically, we investigated spatial disparities in hospital accessibility across the suburban GTA, with a particular focus on the 30-minute drive time threshold considered critical for timely emergency care. The study area included the regional municipalities of Peel, York, Durham, and Halton.

Social marginalization in this study is measured using the Ontario Marginalization Index (OMI), which captures four key dimensions: household dwellings (residential instability), material resources (economic deprivation), age and labour force (dependency), and racialized and newcomer populations (ethnic concentration).¹ These dimensions were developed using 16 socio-demographic characteristics drawn from census data. Each dimension reflects a form of social disadvantage that can influence access to health care. Higher scores indicate greater marginalization relative to other neighbourhoods.

#### **KEY FINDINGS**

Our findings show that hospital accessibility in the suburban GTA is not equal for everyone. Some areas, especially parts of the Durham and Peel region, have fewer hospitals within a 30-minute drive, making it harder to get emergency care quickly (Figure 1).

Interestingly, according to our statistical analysis (XGBoost regression model), higher levels of material resources and greater newcomer population correlated with closer proximity to hospitals, likely because these communities are located in more urbanized suburbs like Mississauga and Markham. However, areas with unstable housing, like high rental turnover or overcrowding, tended to have worse accessibility.

These findings challenge assumptions of uniform disadvantage for marginalized communities and show that not all marginalized communities face the same health-care challenges.<sup>2</sup> These patterns underscore the importance of spatial nuance and suggest targeted investments in suburban health-care infrastructure, improved emergency coordination, and culturally responsive care.

#### "...health-care delivery must be inclusive...

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategic planning and coordinated policy efforts are essential to addressing the growing disparities in hospital accessibility across suburban areas of the GTA. Expanding hospital infrastructure in underserved regions, particularly Durham, York, and the Peel region, can help bridge critical service gaps. Strengthening coordination between hospitals and emergency medical services is also key to meeting the 30-minute-care standard, often referred to as the "golden response time" for improving patient outcomes. In addition, health-care delivery must be inclusive, with culturally and linguistically appropriate services that reflect the diverse populations these communities serve. (\(\text{Y}\))

- <sup>1</sup> Ontario Marginalization Index (ON-Marg) | Public Health Ontario. (2021). Public Health Ontario.https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/Data-and-Analysis/ Health-Equity/Ontario-Marginalization-Index
- <sup>2</sup> Walker, B. B., Schuurman, N., Wen, C. K., Shakeel, S., Schneider, L., & Finley, C. (2020a). Cancer resection rates, socioeconomic deprivation, and geographical access to surgery among urban, suburban, and rural populations across Canada. PLOS ONE, 15(10). https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0240444





Janice Wong is a Student member of OPPI and currently works as an Assistant Planner in the Strategic Initiatives, Policy & Analysis (SIPA) unit of the City Planning Division at the City of Toronto. She recently completed her MPI at Toronto Metropolitan University, where she served as the OPPI Graduate Student Liaison. Janice also holds a BA (Honours) in Human Geography Specialist and a GIS Minor from the University of Toronto. Raktim Mitra, Burp, Murp, MPI, PHD, is a Candidate member of OPPI and Director and Professor in the School of Urban and Regional Planning at Toronto Metropolitan University.

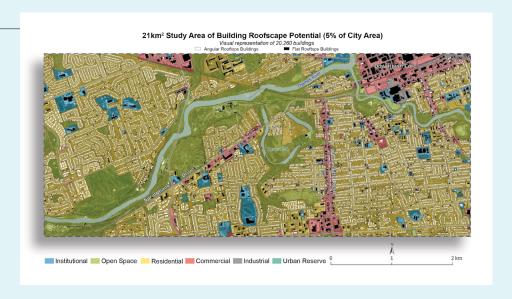
#### **ACADEMIC**

# London, Ontario Roofscape Case Study:

# Aligning Human Built Environments to Synergize with Natural Environmental Systems

#### BY MICHAEL GAGE

Figure 1: Lidar Study Area representing angular vs flat buildings within 21 km² of London, Ontario.



ould you believe that a city has the potential to generate 40 per cent of its residential electrical needs by using angular residential rooftops more effectively? Or that 2.7 km² of commercial flat rooftop spaces could grow 5.4 million pounds of strawberries a year? Would it surprise you to discover that the collection of annual rainwater from a city of 488,000 people would be the equivalent to capturing 63 minutes' worth of Niagara Falls water output? Could you imagine cities across Canada becoming significant production centres, with the potential hiding in plain sight?

# "...2.7 km² of commercial flat rooftop spaces could grow 5.4 million pounds of strawberries a year."

By aligning our built environment to better synergize with how the earth functions, professional planners can be pivotal agents in our future growth towards a sustainable and inclusive relationship with the environment.



Figure 2: Economic, environmental & societal benefits of the application of this model for 257-416 Springbank Drive, London, Ontario.

# "London's commercial buildings have the capacity to grow roughly 5,342,467lbs of strawberries..."

#### ALIGN

In many cities across Canada, including London, Ontario, urban roofscapes are one of the single largest un-tapped resources. Attempts to align our buildings with the earth's elements have started to gain popularity in some places, but their implementation has remained limited and often has fragmented access. Professional planners must go a step further and begin to question and examine how our built forms impact the environment from functioning as intended in a natural setting.

We also need to attempt to align development goals and practices to better synergize with the local functions of the environment surrounding it. For example, integrating green roofs on residential flat buildings within London could add 2.67 km2 of naturalized area for residents to access. Many of these buildings can be found clustered around commercial and transportation nodes

or along commercial corridors and are ideally suited for this purpose.

#### **SYNERGIZE**

With Canada's current population growth, communities across the country will be constructing many new buildings over the next decade and beyond. Currently, most rooftops produce nothing and are static features within urban landscapes. Aligning them to how the earth functions will provide synergies to reinvigorate our communities and in turn create more sustainable cities.

Synergizing our rooftops to capture the energy and resources provided by nature could be the missing link for how planners can build not just a sustainable community but possibly a more sustainable country. Mapping and modelling rooftop spaces have shown that roofscapes are the single largest feature within urban centres, even greater than that of roadscapes. Nature

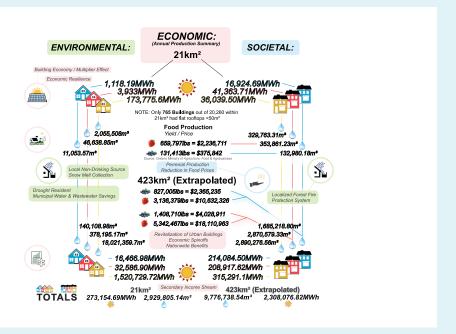


Figure 3: Economic, environmental & societal benefits of the application of this model for 257-416 Springbank Drive, London, Ontario.

already provides us with a bounty of resource potential, one that we can't keep overlooking.

#### BENEFITS

With an integrated vertical land use plan (created through the construction of dynamic buildings that utilize their rooftop areas to capture the natural resources), the potential production value of rooftop areas becomes profound. This is especially true in large, urbanized cities. Although this model is not necessarily suitable for high-rise buildings in the downtown areas of our largest cities, the production potential outside of these regions would still be considerable.

As London, Ontario is the only community analyzed, those statistics can be used to forecast the results of an analysis on a much larger Canadian city. For example, London's total building area is 28.36 km² with 10.4 km² (37 per cent) of that area being predominantly flat. Both architectural types could easily be modified during the construction phase to activate their long-term capturing potential.

In this case study, all angular rooftop areas were modelled to simulate an installed

solar-panel system with a secondary water collection system. The remaining flat rooftop area was then modelled to simulate the collection capacity of stormwater and the amount of food production potential for most common food crops.

When looking at the implementation of such a model, it appears that a single building may not produce much independently; however, the cumulative result is effectual. If solar panels were installed on only angular residential buildings (16.69 km²) the system would have the capability to power 40 per cent of the residential needs of the city. Furthermore, if all buildings in London had solar panels, it would generate enough electricity to sustain an astounding 73.8 per cent (9,974.17 TJ) of the residential needs of the city.

In terms of water needs, institutional flat buildings can capture roughly 674,087 Olympic swimming pools worth of water annually (1,685,218 m³), which is only 5.6 per cent of the entire city's capture potential. When looking at food production, London's commercial buildings have the capacity to grow roughly 5,342,467 lbs. of strawberries and in turn-provide an additional \$18,110,963

in annual revenue. The monetary potential is evident in these numbers let alone the impact it has for Canada's food security. At the very least, the potential is significant enough to warrant further investigation and a life cycle cost analysis to be conducted. (\(\psi\))



Michael Gage is currently enrolled in Fanshawe College's GIS & Urban Planning Program. He previously completed a post-graduate certificate in GIS at Algonquin College and a BA (Honours) in Physical Geography and History from Nipissing University. Previous work experience has included teaching, environmental conservation, and working closely with First Nations communities. Michael has a passion for representing intricate data concepts in clear and concise maps. He is interested in the intersection of urban living and natural spaces and how we can create more efficient cities. He recently won BeSpatial's 2025 People's Choice Award for Best Map, featuring a heat map of Ottawa that highlighted preferred living areas for families.

#### **ACADEMIC**

# Planning student projects

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



### 1. YORK UNIVERSITY, MES PLANNING PROGRAM WHAT A BLAST WE HAD AT THE ANNUAL MYPAC CASE COMPETITION!

Four dynamic teams of MES Planning students went head-to-head in an epic day-long showdown this past March. Their mission? To unleash their creativity and policy prowess on a shoreline site in the charming Town of Coburg. Our stellar judging panel, featuring Farah Ibrahim (MES '11) from Developer Zen, Selam Eyob (MES '21) from Brook McIlroy, and Chinoye Sunny (MES '21) from the City of Brampton, had the tough job of picking the best plan. A huge shoutout to CITY and Arcadis for making this incredible event possible!



### 2. UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH, RURAL PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT 2SLGBTQ+ DISCRIMINATION AND COMMUNITY INTEGRATION IN PERTH AND HURON COUNTIES

Rural-specific experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ individuals remain an underexplored area of research. This study aims to address this gap by examining the lived experiences and needs of 2SLGBTQ+ people in Perth and Huron Counties, with particular attention to experiences of discrimination and opportunities for community integration. Results show a need for 2SLGBTQ+ social events, service provider training, and education. The results can inform planning policy decision and resource allocation for local, rural 2SLGBTQ+ needs.

Advisor: Leith Deacon

Students: Daniel Layden and Ashley Cole

### 3. TORONTO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY, SCHOOL OF URBAN & REGIONAL PLANNING, FACULTY OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

#### REWILD TO: INFORMING AND INSPIRING URBAN LANDSCAPE CONNECTIVITY

REWILD TO aimed to enhance biodiversity by improving ecological connectivity in the urban landscape of the Greater Toronto Area. The project focused on developing planning approaches for integrating habitats that span across public and private lands, towards more complete and connected green networks that can support





wildlife movement and increase the resilience of urban environments to climate change. Informed by a review of literature, policies, and spatial data, the project's outcomes identify opportunities to bridge geospatial and social gaps between ecological restoration efforts on public and private property and suggest tangible steps to achieve neighbourhood-level and city-wide ecological connectivity goals.

Read REWILD TO: Informing and inspiring urban landscape connectivity here: https://ecologicaldesignlab.ca/site/uploads/2025/05/Final-ReWildTO-Connecvity-Catalogue.pdf

Advisor: Nina-Marie Lister, MCIP, RPP, Hon. ALSA

Client: ARC Solutions

Students: Charlotte Scott, Victor Copetti, Max Warren, Shawn R. Williams, and Lillian Thomson

## 4. TORONTO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY, SCHOOL OF URBAN & REGIONAL PLANNING SUPPORTING GROWTH IN TINY TOWNSHIP: A STRATEGY ON ADDITIONAL DWELLING UNITS (ADUS)

The Tiny Team, a mock client-based consulting group, investigated policy context around additional dwelling units (ADUs) to increase housing options in Tiny's rural context. We conducted analysis of policy frameworks and case research from around North America. We produced recommendations, an action plan, draft policy, and a community engagement strategy. For our final presentation, we developed and ran a simulated interactive public information centre on the subject matter. Tiny Township, big plans for the future.

Advisor: Kevin Nunn, RPP, MCIP, PMP

**Client:** Maryann Hunt, Director of Planning and Development, Township of Tiny **Students:** Leanne Crowe, Shawn Heerema, Armin Lashgari, Dylan Lawrie, Adem Rizvic, Evelyn Romano, Bilal Shafiq, Xiu Lin Amy Tan, Brayden Zawalykut, Andrew Zheng

### 5. TORONTO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY, MASTER OF PLANNING (MPL) IN URBAN DEVELOPMENT REIMAGINING SCADDING COURT

Since 1975, Scadding Court has been a hub of care and connection at Bathurst and Dundas. As Toronto grows, our team reimagined the site as a phased, community-led, transit-oriented model for inclusive development. Our proposed vision for the new Scadding Court delivers an expanded community space and library and a revitalized Market 707 and pool with retail and residential components featuring affordable housing. Rooted in equity and resilience, the new Scadding Court reflects the future of a dynamic, growing city.

Advisor: Randy Hodge

Project team: Grant Buchanan, Sam Evans, Isabella Suppa, Athena Tsilifidis,

Janice Wong, Robert Yuen

#### **READING LIST**



#### PRACTICE GUIDE: CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION

Communities across Ontario are already experiencing the impacts of climate change. Rising temperatures, shifting precipitation patterns, and more frequent extreme weather events are affecting built, ecological, cultural, and socio-economic systems. Land use and community planning play a critical role in advancing climate adaptation and building resilience in ways that reflect local needs and priorities. Climate change has been recognized as a key consideration in land-use planning and policy development at both the provincial and regional levels.

Designed for planners and those working in adjacent professions, the *Climate Change Adaptation Practice Guide* acknowledges that planning is a diverse field with practitioners across the public, private, not-for-profit, and academic sectors all working to shape safe, healthy, and resilient communities. It also recognizes the important role professional planners play in helping Ontario adapt to climate change and support individual communities in building resilience against the unique climate threats they may face.

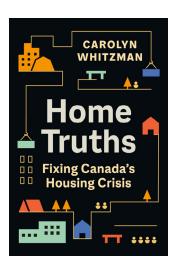
The Climate Change Adaptation Practice Guide represents the first in a series of practice guides to be published by OPPI in 2025 and beyond, on topics of importance to the planning profession. Read and download the guide <a href="https://ontarioplanners.ca/inspiring-knowledge/planning-in-practice">https://ontarioplanners.ca/inspiring-knowledge/planning-in-practice</a>



#### PRACTICE GUIDE: PLANNING LEGISLATION FRAMEWORK IN ONTARIO

In Ontario, land use planning responsibility is led by the province and implemented by municipalities. As such, to properly understand land use planning in the province, Planning Legislative Framework in Ontario Practice Guide starts with an Introduction to Municipal Government. The guide then takes us through the Planning Act, the PPS 2024 and provincial plans, official plans, and so on, providing an in-depth examination of how the planning profession works with legislative policy in the public interest.

The Planning Legislative Framework in Ontario Practice Guide represents the second in a series of practice guides published by OPPI in 2025 and on topics of importance to the planning profession. Read and download the guide at <a href="https://ontarioplanners.ca/inspiring-knowledge/planning-in-practice">https://ontarioplanners.ca/inspiring-knowledge/planning-in-practice</a>



#### HOME TRUTHS: FIXING CANADA'S HOUSING CRISIS

Hundreds of thousands of Canadians exist on the edge. Renters fear eviction, homeowners feel trapped, and both are vulnerable to becoming homeless with a single stroke of misfortune. Unaffordable housing in Canada is tearing communities apart as long-time residents seek affordable housing elsewhere and businesses shutter because they cannot find staff who can afford to live nearby. For two generations, Canadians have watched affordable housing vanish while other nations have been tackling the problem.

In *Home Truths*, housing expert Carolyn Whitzman reviews the decades of policies that have gotten us into this mess and shows how all levels of government can work together to provide affordable housing where it is needed. Her compelling arguments for policy solutions are backed by ideas from researchers, planners, politicians, developers, and housing advocates at home and abroad.

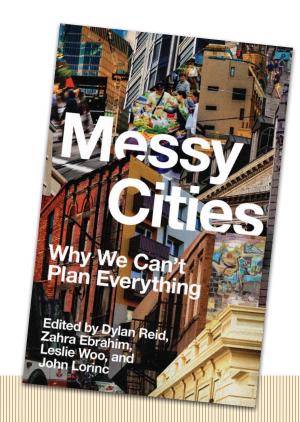
Learn more at https://www.ubcpress.ca/home-truths.

#### MESSY CITIES: WHY WE CAN'T PLAN EVERYTHING

Can messiness make our cities more liveable, lively, and inclusive? Crowded streets, sidewalk vendors, jumbled architecture, constant clamour, graffitied walls, parks gone wild: are these signs of a poorly managed city or indicators of urban vitality? Messy Cities: Why We Can't Plan Everything argues that spontaneity and urban workarounds are not liabilities but essential elements in all thriving cities.

Forty-three essays by a range of writers from around the world, including Jason Thorne, RPP, chief planner for the City of Toronto, illuminate the role of messy urbanism in enabling creativity, enterprise, and grassroots initiatives to flourish within dense modern cities. With pieces on guerrilla beaches, desire lines, urban interruptions, and the inner lives of unlovely buildings written by experts from all walks of life, Messy Cities makes the case for embracing disorder while not shying away from confronting its challenges.

Learn more at https://chbooks.com/Books/M/Messy-Cities.



# Planning for an Unplanned City

#### BY JASON THORNE

Excerpted from Messy Cities: Why We Can't Plan Everything, Coach House Books, 2025.

Interest in a more organic and less top-down approach to city-building is growing. This is a good thing. We should always be questioning and challenging our rules and regulations to ensure that they are serving a clear purpose and not getting in the way of fostering the kinds of vibrant cities we all want to see. But how do you plan and design a city that is safe and functional while also leaving room for spontaneity and serendipity? Or an even more challenging question for planners: Can you even do so?

The planning profession was born out of a movement to improve public health and safety and remove risks and dangers from nineteenth-century urban environments that suffered from overcrowding, air and water pollution, and a lack of green space. Examples of the profession's early successes are many: better access to potable drinking water, improved sanitation, cleaner air, safer housing construction. Unfortunately, so too are examples of its failures: racial segregation, class segregation, automobile dependency, environmental degradation, and urban sprawl, to name just a few of the more notable ones. Another victim of modern planning that is gaining attention is the kind of flexibility

that has historically allowed cities to rapidly change and evolve to respond to new challenges, such as the current housing crisis.

How can a profession born out of a mission to root out hazard and disorder now reorient itself to welcome back risk, spontaneity, and serendipity as positive forces that can once again help shape our cities and neighbourhoods?

An important starting point is to recognize the limits of planning. The term planning has come to represent all the forces that shape our cities. But any planner will acknowledge the limitations of the impact that planning, on its own, actually has. Equally important are the host of other rules and regulations: building codes, engineering standards, alcohol regulations, fire codes, accessibility standards, traffic regulations, public health regulations, and so on. Each of these, on its own, serves a valuable public purpose. In the aggregate, however, they can also preclude some of the dynamic urbanism that many cities are trying to recapture.

Jason Thorne, RPP, is the chief planner for the City of Toronto and a Messy Cities contributor.

# OPPI's Government & Public Relations Committee

BY SUSAN WIGGINS

In February 2024, OPPI launched a new Government & Public Relations Committee (GPR) to advise OPPI staff on government legislation, policy, and regulation, as well as on OPPI public and media relations strategies.

As OPPI's Executive Director, with support from consulting firm Counsel Public Affairs (counselpa.com), I chair the committee and the GPR portfolio of work.

The government relations component takes up the majority of the committee's time as we focus on both proactive and reactive advocacy initiatives related to planning matters.

Meeting on a monthly basis, the committee's current focus areas include:

- Strategies to influence Ontario government legislation, policy, or regulation on planning-related matters, planning as a profession, and the Duty to Consult requirement outlined in the Planning Act
- Drafting OPPI submissions in response to proposed legislative or regulatory changes introduced by the Ontario government; and
- Strategies related to securing increased responsibilities for RPPs through legislation, policy or regulation, clarity in legislative policies and regulations, and/ or better legislation (practice rights) for OPPI and the profession.

On the public/media relations side, when the committee first launched in 2024, our first priority was to ensure that OPPI's key messages and core narrative were on point, consistent, and used by all OPPI spokespersons when speaking with government and the media, in presentations, and on our website and social media posts. Now approved by Council, these essential "speaking notes" are reviewed and updated annually by the GPR Committee.

Our long-term goal is to become known as the trusted source for media interviews on planning-related matters and to find meaningful opportunities for paid media placements to educate the public about planning in Ontario. We now have protocols in place to respond to media interviews, and all OPPI spokespersons have received media training. Additionally, we proactively pitch stories to the media when an opportunity or strategic priority lends itself to this approach.

We are grateful to the OPPI members who serve on our Government & Public Relations Committee. If you might be interested in joining the committee or want to learn more about our work, please reach out to me, Susan Wiggins, at executivedirector@ontarioplanners.ca.



Susan Wiggins, CAE, HON. IDC, is Executive Director of the Ontario Professional Planners Institute

#### **OUR COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**

Geoff Singer, City of Brampton, Chair David Fleischer, City of Markham Charlie Toman, City of Hamilton Melissa Halford, Town of Gravenhurst

**Andria Leigh**, Town of Innisfil (Chair-Elect, OPPI)

**Erika Ivanic**, City of Toronto, (OPPI Council)

Gillian Smith, MHBC Plan Michelle Diplock, Nethery Planning Natalie Madja, TMHC Inc. Ron Shishido, Dillon Consulting

**Alex Beheshti,** Missing Middle Initiative (MMI)

Bruce Curtis, Retired Member

To view OPPI's submissions to government and GPR committee recommendations, visit OPPI's Policy Corner at **ontarioplanners.ca/policy-corner.** To date in 2025, five submissions have been posted.

#### **SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS FOR 2025**

OPPI is very pleased to announce the recipients of the 2025 Student Scholarships.

### RONALD M. KEEBLE UNDERGRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP: SAM GONCALVES-HORTON

Sam Goncalves-Horton is a third-year undergraduate planning student at the University of Waterloo. During his time in the planning program, he has made a concerted effort to contribute to and lead activism efforts within Kitchener-Waterloo. As a student and aspiring planner, he strongly believes that students have a responsibility to contribute positively to the communities they call home during the course of their studies.



Through his interests in transportation planning, grassroots activism, and municipal politics, he has sought to improve outcomes around public transportation throughout Waterloo Region, working with various groups both on and off campus. Some of his achievements include heading campaigns to stop cuts to the ION LRT, stopping cuts to GRT bus service, advocating for the GRT Business Plan, and co-writing a motion to council that led to the creation of the Route 91 Night Bus.

In the future, Sam wishes to continue to explore as many subdisciplines of planning as possible and eventually hopes to zero in on a research question and earn a PhD.

## OPPI OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP: YAN LING VENUS CHEUNG



Venus Cheung is a master's candidate in planning and urban development at Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU). Combining her planning education and architectural background, Venus is interested in how participatory design approaches enhance multicultural planning policies and practices, ultimately contributing to the well-being of diverse urban communities.

She has assisted in research about the social and built care networks of immigrants

living with dementia, their care partners and care workers, informal immigrant entrepreneurship and its role in strengthening equitable food system infrastructure, and the dynamics of transnationalism

and mobility justice. She also focuses on overlooked narratives of the Filipino community and their network of care, agency, and resilience, both in Hong Kong and Canada. Building on her community activism work in Hong Kong, she researched the Filipino diaspora in Canada and co-led 2025 Jane's Walk Little Manila.

Entering her final year at TMU, her Major Research Project aims to integrate community-based knowledge into food-system planning, explore alternative narratives of resilience, and spark spatial-oriented conversations about an integrative resilience approach for immigrant food insecurity. Her long-term goal is to work at the intersection of theory, research, and applied community work, enabling care, creativity, and collaboration in the city-making process.

## GERALD CARROTHERS GRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP: DEAN ORR

Dean Orr is a full time farmer from King City, Ontario, producing organic and conventional grains, pasture-raised poultry, and maple syrup. Dean is an advocate for responsible land use planning and farmland protection — Ontario is shockingly losing one per cent of its farmland, the best in Canada, every year to urban growth!



Dean has published articles in the Ontario Farmer, delegated to

numerous GTA municipal councils, and contributed as expert witness to the recent soil health report prepared by the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry. He is currently working towards his MSc in rural planning and development at University of Guelph. Dean's thesis will work towards calculating minimum farmland requirements to support a population, while examining ways for communities to establish this minimum amount of farmland through protections such as agriculture preserves, etc. Dean's work will examine the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve, Ontario's first and only agricultural preserve, as a model.

#### **OPPI 2026 STUDENT SCHOLARSHIPS**

Today's planning students are tomorrow's RPPs. To encourage and support future planners, OPPI provides student members with scholarship opportunities that award excellence and community contributions. Here are the scholarships for 2026.

The Ronald M. Keeble Undergraduate Scholarship (up to \$3,500) assists in furthering planning education and recognizing undergraduate student members who are making contributions to their communities.

### RPP PROFILE: EMILY ELLIOTT, MCIP, RPP

Vice-President and Partner at MHBC, Kitchener office

"As a profession, we are leaders in shaping the future of the communities we live and work in, and this is an opportunity we should be proud of — I think it's one of the reasons so many of us got into planning in the first place."

For fall issue of Y Magazine, we interviewed Emily Elliott, MCIP, RPP, in Kitchner, to learn about her pathway to planning, work with MHBC, and thoughts on the future of the planning profession and the challenges communities are facing today. Read the full interview on the Planning Exchange blog: www.ontarioplanners.ca/blog/planning-exchange.



The Gerald Carrothers Graduate Scholarship (up to \$3,500) assists in furthering planning education and recognizing graduate student members who are making contributions to their communities.

The OPPI Opportunity Scholarship (up to \$5,000) acknowledges the financial barriers to education that disproportionately affect Black, Indigenous, and other racialized people. This scholarship may be awarded to an Indigenous, Black, or other racially marginalized person currently enrolled in an accredited undergraduate or graduate planning program in Ontario.

The application period for scholarships is March 1 to May 1, 2026; please check the website to confirm. Find more information, including application forms and eligibility requirements, at www.ontarioplanners.ca/scholarships.

#### **2026 PLANON AWARDS**

The PlanON Awards are the highest honours OPPI can bestow and represent the peak of professional planning excellence in Ontario. Award submissions are accepted in the following categories:

- · Project of the Year
- RPP Leadership Award
- Emerging Leadership Award
- · Volunteer Service Award
- · Innovative Research Award
- · Public Education Award
- Vision Award: Awards of Excellence
- Vision Award: Awards of Merit

PlanON Award submissions will be accepted in April/May 2026. Please check the website for confirmed dates. The 2026 PlanON Awards ceremony and celebrations will take place at OPPI's 2026 Annual Conference, September 16 to 18 in Blue Mountain. Details on the categories and submission deadlines,

as well as eligibility and submission requirements, are available at **www. ontarioplanners.ca/PlanON**.

Check out the 2025 PlanON Award recipients on the inside front cover of this issue of Y Magazine.

#### **ACTION 2025 RECAP**

From July 8 to 10, 2025, professional planners from across the country gathered in Toronto for ACTION 2025, the national planning conference jointly hosted by OPPI and CIP. Fresh ideas, innovative tools, and cutting-edge research were shared in sessions, on panels, at networking events, in displays, and on interactive learning tours, reinvigorating our profession and inspiring planners with a renewed sense of compassion and determination. More than 1,400 planners attended in person and an estimated 500 more attended online. Thank you to everyone for participating!



OPPI is pleased to announce that OPPI's 2026 Annual Conference will be held at Blue Mountain from September 16 to 18, 2026.

WATCH FOR MORE DETAILS IN OPPI COMMUNICATIONS AND AT WWW.ONTARIOPLANNERS.CA.

#### **RETIRED RPP SPOTLIGHT**

Two recently retired RPPs, Brian Bridgeman and Carlo Bonanni, reflect on their planning careers and share some words of wisdom for newer planners

#### **BRIAN BRIDGEMAN, MCIP, RPP**



When Brian Bridgeman graduated from the University of Waterloo's School of Urban and Regional Planning in 1983, the job market was tough. It wasn't a time to be choosey.

"I applied anywhere and everywhere and was willing to take whatever I could get, wherever I could get it," he says. "I took the first job I could get out of university and from there, I pursued career opportunities and job openings that I thought looked interesting and that I felt would provide an upward career progression."

His was the path of being a generalist — private sector, public sector, land development planning, policy planning — starting with an entry-level contract position with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food. Then, in mid-1985, he landed a contract position with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH), Plans Administration Branch.

"It was a such great opportunity given that MMAH is the home ministry of land use planning in Ontario," says Brian. "At that time, planning approval responsibilities had not yet been delegated to the regions so MMAH planners were immersed in a lot of day-to-day planning work — review and

approval of official plans, OPAs, subdivisions and condos, and reviews of zoning by-laws for conformity with policy documents."

Brian's next career step was as a planner at a law firm where he assisted with all manner of development approvals and preparations for Ontario Municipal Board hearings. From there, he moved to a land development and construction company, then on to Walker Nott Dragicevic (WND), a leading land use planning and urban design consulting firm, first as a Senior Planner, later becoming a Senior Associate.

"Working with Peter Walker, Wendy Nott, and Bob Dragicevic provided even more tremendous work experience, and I had so many excellent colleagues as well," he says.

By 1999, Brian had worked on several projects in Durham Region and the Town of Ajax and understood the planning and political environments, which led to his position as the Manager of Planning/Chief Planner for the Town of Ajax.

A few years later, in 2005, Brian was Director of Current Planning (aka development planning) for the Regional Municipality of Durham, becoming the Commissioner of Planning and Economic Development in 2016.

"I had no idea when I joined the Region in 2005 that I would be ending my career there, but the work there was always challenging and rewarding and again, working with great colleagues and an exceptional team made it fun and worth staying for nearly 20 years," says Brian, adding that the vision he shared with his staff can be captured by these words: innovative, creative, forward-thinking, future-focused, and solution-oriented.

While much has changed in planning over the course of Brian's career, a key turning point was the 2006 introduction of the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

"It received international recognition and enshrined what many feel are good planning principles and practices, like orderly sequential growth, efficient use of infrastructure, importance of intensification (50 per cent intensification target within built boundaries), urban growth centres, municipal comprehensive reviews (coordination at regional level), elimination of site-specific urban boundary expansions outside an MCR, protection of employment lands, and minimum densities in greenfield areas to curb sprawl."

"Sadly, its foundational elements have been dismantled," says Brian.

Another key shift he points to led to Bill 23 and other legislation aimed at getting more housing built faster.

"Throughout my career, there has always been an emphasis on housing — the need for an adequate supply of land for housing, a range and mix of housing types, and the need for affordable housing — and starting around 2019/2020 the term 'housing crisis' started to be used," says Brian. "During the COVID-19 pandemic, the housing crisis was becoming more severe, and it felt like some elected officials and some in the development industry believed municipal planning and planners were to blame."

He says that suggesting the planning system is the cause of the housing crisis is far too simplistic and ignores other realities such as interest rates, labour shortages in the trades, shortages of materials, and rising cost of materials especially during COVID.

Suffice it to say, the onslaught of new legislation that followed is the subject of much ongoing discussion, whether related to land availability, the Greenbelt, Conservation Authorities and environmental protections, housing targets, Minister's Zoning Orders, among other legislative changes.

"Even the development community said it was having trouble keeping up with all the legislative changes. It was too much too fast," he says. "Regional official plans have basically been eliminated, which is most unfortunate since it was the upper-tier official plans that provided the coordination necessary for the

#### **OPPI NEWS**

efficient delivery of regional infrastructure and services."

Looking ahead, Brian has concerns about the influence that strong mayor powers are having on municipal planners, in particular, the potential for some planners to lose their independence, consciously or otherwise. On the other hand, he has great hope for the planning profession.

"I see a lot of good talent coming into the profession, smart young people who are eager and interested in creating liveable, healthy communities."

His advice for people coming into the profession is to remember planning is about serving the public interest and to do so with integrity and courage. He also encourages new planners to take opportunities to learn and grow by getting involved.

"By getting involved, you learn new things and meet others," he says. "I often tell planners we are really in the 'relationship business."

Brian has certainly led by example in that respect. He has been a member of the Pragma Council at the University of Waterloo, Lambda Alpha International, Association of Ontario Land Economists, University Waterloo Annual Planning Alumni Dinner Comittees, and Toastmasters International. He served as a member of CIP's Honours Jury and has volunteered with OPPI in various capacities, including Exam A Examiner, jury member for Excellence in Planning Awards, a member and later Chair of the Discipline Committee, and a speaker at conferences. He was the inaugural Chair of the Complaints Committee when the Discipline Committee was reorganized and a speaker for OPPI education and training sessions. His many years of volunteer service to OPPI earned him a well-deserved Member Service Award in 2020.

"I like that OPPI is the voice of the planning profession in Ontario and works to foster good working relations not only with the province, but with other organizations such as AMO, BILD, OHBA, and Regional and Single Tier Planning Leaders of Ontario," he says. "I am glad to be a Registered Professional Planner and part of an association that holds its members accountable for their conduct. It is important that the public has trust and confidence in the planning profession, and OPPI plays a key role in that messaging."

Over the years, Brian has found it rewarding to engage with and share his knowledge with future planners by speaking on ethics and professionalism in planning classes at Queens University, University of Toronto, and University of Waterloo.

"I am very happy with the career choice I made, and I often encourage young people to consider pursuing a planning education," he says. "A planning career provides opportunities to pursue different interests — environment, urban design, transportation, land development. It also provides an opportunity to work with other professionals from other disciplines. Planning is very multi-disciplinary."

It also provides the opportunity to be part of the growth and change happening in your community.

"And that's pretty cool," says Brian.

#### **CARLO BONANNI, MCIP, RPP**



After a career spanning 35 years, Carlo Bonanni, MCIP, RPP, retired earlier this year from his position as Senior Vice President, Planning and Design, at CreateTO. He is very proud of the planning profession and his part in it, but how he started is a story — amusing now, but not so much at the time.

"I really didn't even know what planning was, but in high school, it was all about preparing myself for architecture. I applied for architecture at the University of Waterloo, and it was a disaster. It was a really, really bad interview. I did not get in. And so, of course, my life was over at the ripe old age of 18 because I didn't get into my chosen profession of architecture."

But his high marks got the attention of the University of Waterloo and he was nudged towards planning because it had elements of architecture. He signed up and hated all the theory in his first semester.

"But in my second semester, we did a course that was looking at doing a master plan for downtown Cambridge, and I thought, 'This is what I want to do!' I was hooked, and from then on, I didn't look back."

When he graduated, he got a contract position with a planning consultant. From there, he went to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and learned about planning from a provincial standpoint. Wanting to experience the impact of provincial policy, he pursued a municipal-level position with the City of Etobicoke.

"I was there for about eight years, and I really, really enjoyed that because I was able to see the immediate effects of the work that we did — to truly see what is in the public interest, what is in the public good," he says. "My love for municipal planning, my love for working with cities, it really grew there."

While he was working at the City of Etobicoke, he completed a master's degree in environmental studies at York University as a part-time student. Meanwhile, the provincial government was in the process of amalgamating the municipalities around Toronto. Carlo was opposed to what was happening at a provincial

level and in planning at that time, and he left the profession to work at Rogers Communication. But planning drew him back, and five years later, he joined the City of Toronto as a Senior Planner.

"I worked on some unbelievable projects, really catalytic projects, places like the East Bayfront," he says. "I have the utmost respect for municipal planners because I know how hard they work. I know how challenging that job is."

When Toronto was bidding for Expo 2015, Carlo took a position with the Toronto Economic Development Corporation (TEDCO), an arms-length corporation of the city of Toronto. Unfortunately, the bid to host Expo 2015 was withdrawn.

"We were so despondent at that time, but that was a magnificent experience."

He continued working with TEDCO as Manager of Planning Services.

"I loved the model of TEDCO because it was a public sector organization, but we had very much of a private sector entrepreneurial spirit."

More changes at the City of Toronto saw TEDCO split into Invest Toronto, an international economic development agency, and Build Toronto, which focused on monetizing surplus city lands. When Mayor John Tory was elected, he changed the mandate of Build Toronto and it became CreateTO.

"Basically, CreateTO was about the utilization of city lands for city-building purposes and no longer so much about making a profit for the city — it was about delivering city-building benefits for the people of Toronto, and our number one mandate was affordable housing."

Looking back over the years, Carlo identifies amalgamation as a pivotal time.

"It was a seismic shift because you had a situation where you had seven different municipalities and a metropolitan level of government. All of them had their own official plans. All of them had their own zoning. Then suddenly you had to consolidate and make it work as one voice throughout this new gigantic city," he says. "It was incredibly challenging. It wasn't specifically focused on planning per se, but planning was unbelievably affected by amalgamation. You had to pivot so quickly."

More recently, challenges have come with provincial legislation.

"It's been really challenging for the planning profession to keep up with the pace of provincial legislation," he says. "Without the appropriate consultation to the planning profession, I don't even think we know yet what some of those implications are of this provincial legislation."

OPPI has always had important place in Carlo's career. He is currently part of OPPI's Professional Knowledge Exchange Committee and involved with judging PlanON Awards.

"It's critical to belong to a professional organization where you have backup, where you have policies, where you have guidance," he says, describing OPPI as a place professionals can get together, speak about issues, and understand how other people are doing things. "I just came from this great [OPPI-CIP] conference, and I met people from all over Canada, and it's so interesting that regardless of who you speak to, the issues are the same — just the scale is different."

He believes professionals should leave their professions in a better way than they found it.

"Having the backup of OPPI and CIP, I'm not doing this on my own," he says. "There's a very strong mandate to make sure that the public interest is protected."

One change he would like to see is more focus on financial literacy in planning education.

"You do really need to understand the financial realities of what you are planning

for," he says. "A lot of what I did at CreateTO was the utilization of city lands for the delivery of affordable housing. Affordable housing is unbelievably expensive to deliver. What does that mean? Why is it expensive? What's land value? What's land capture? What's residual land value? Those are all things that I learned on the job. I think there needs to be a much stronger focus on that for planners who are graduating."

For the past 19 years, Carlo has been teaching a course at Toronto Metropolitan University.

"I always strongly encourage my students to get involved with OPPI as soon as they can, to become student members and to go through the RPP process to get those letters — it means a lot."

He also tells students that planning is the best professional generalist degree you can ever pursue.

"It's like the world truly is your oyster," he says. "There are so many avenues you can go with a planning degree. You will never be siloed unless you put yourself in a silo. You can branch off and do so many things with a planning degree it's unbelievable."

Then he laughs and says maybe you only really understand that once you've been in the profession for so long.

"All the issues that we're facing right now — climate change, DEI issues from the United States, affordability, transportation — all of that has roots in planning," he says. "Not to say that it is the most important profession, but it is a really relevant and timely profession, because when you watch the news, it all has its roots in planning somehow."

Looking ahead, Carlo is very enthusiastic about the planning profession.

"I do not fear for the future of planning because there are some brilliant minds out there who I've had the privilege of teaching over these years."

#### NEW RPP SPOTLIGHT JUSTIN SHARP, CPT, MCIP, RPP

Justin Sharp's career path is inspiring on several levels. As one of OPPI's newest RPPs, he successfully completed the certification process and passed his examination earlier this year — an admirable accomplishment in itself.



But Justin didn't leave school with the dream of becoming a planner. His first degree was a double major in film and English from Wilfrid Laurier University. His first job was at a landfill where his uncle worked. He also worked as a server, farm labourer, and a volunteer at several heritage and arts centres. He was hired by a major bank to check loan and insurance forms and spent several years working in retail.

So how did all that lead to planning? An ice-breaker activity at an OPPI event asked attendees: was your career path to planning a straight one or were there twists and turns?

Justin's reply: "Mine was the curviest of roads you could have travelled."

Along the way, he decided to return to school and considered training as an electrician or a carpenter. His father suggested electrical engineer, and while he was looking at University of Waterloo programs, he came across planning.

"I had no idea planning was a job," says Justin. But he recognized himself — his skills and interests — in the course descriptions. With just two weeks to go before classes started, he applied for the planning program at University of Waterloo. He graduated in 2010 with an honour's degree.

Even then, it was a few years before he started working in planning. He was comfortable in his retail job and carried on. Then everything changed, when all staff who had been there more than four years were laid off.

"I really didn't like it, but I was kind of just waiting for something to happen," he says. "It ended up being one of the best experiences of my life."

He signed up for a diploma in urban and regional planning at Mohawk College. He wanted to learn CAD and refine his skills in technical drawing and 2D and 3D drafting. He finished first in his class, and while he was celebrating that same day, he got a job offer. Two weeks later, at age 35, Justin was officially working in the planning profession.

In the years since, he has held planning positions with the Biglieri Group, IBI Group, and Arcadis, where he continues to work as a planning technician.

"I'm one of the weird hybrids," he says. "I'm a CPT — a certified planning technician — and also RPP and MCIP. The whole umbrella is there. The thing I love about that is being able to work on concept design — over time, I taught myself Photoshop and Illustrator — so I can work on posters. I can work on 3D renderings. I can work on concepts. I can work on stuff like parking counts. Then I can flip over to do an adjustment case report and I can write it and I can review it. I can do due diligence zoning and by-law amendments — that whole other aspect of it. I love being able to be useful."

He also loves being able to incorporate creativity into his work, especially as a means to address constraints.

"The ability to mold a parcel of land and figure out what can go there, the problem-solving that goes on, the creative thinking that has to happen, dealing with the constraints we have, trying to work around those, and trying to find ways to mitigate them is definitely one of the best parts about the job."

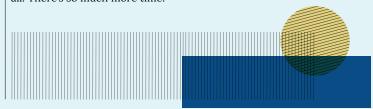
Justin has been volunteering with OPPI's Toronto District since his first planning position and is currently Toronto District Chair. He says he has always considered volunteering a good way to meet people.

"I was a late bloomer to the field," he says. "As a volunteer, I got to meet people and understand this profession a lot more."

As for the RPP process, Justin says, the accreditation is invaluable, but that's only a part of it. "Going through the process is incredibly useful to analyze how you have advanced as a planner."

His advice to anyone putting off the RPP process — just do it, and don't let age stop you.

"You're never too old to get into this profession," he says. "It doesn't have to be that once you hit 30, you're done. That is not the truth at all. There's so much more time."



#### **OPPI'S NEWEST RPPS**

OPPI is pleased to welcome 82 new Registered Professional Planners (RPPs) as Full members. These individuals have passed their examinations and received their RPP designation. Welcome and congratulations to you all! We applaud your achievement, dedication, and commitment.

Zainab Abbasi, City of Mississauga
Gabrielle Amos, Fotenn Planning + Design
Jessica Atuahene-Amankwa, Metrolinx
Sophie Belzil, Access Planning
Nicole Beuglet, Dillon Consulting Limited
Fatima Bhabha, Toronto District
School Board

Marienka Bishop-Kovac, City of London
Ethan Bohnert, Glen Schnarr & Associates
Jeremy Bonham, Town of New Tecumseth
Tyler Boswell, City of Barrie
Chelsea Brooks, MHBC Planning
Kadence Bunke, Dillon Consulting Ltd
Sarah Burjaw, Weston Consulting
Sarah Campbell, District Municipality
of Muskoka

**Emily Clarkson**, Lakeshore Group **Céleste Cordonnier**, Real Estate Development Corporation

**Benjamin Craig**, Simcoe County District School Board

Holly Crawford, Arcadis

**Kathry Curry**, Jp2g Consultants Inc.

Alexander Davies, City of Mississauga

Nicole Dilisi, SvN Architects + Planners

**Edward Donato**, Toronto Transit Commission

Allison Donnelly, Parks Canada

Lauren Dynes, KLM Planning Partners Inc.

Shaival Gajjar, City of Hamilton

Melissa Gasic, City of Burlington

Porter Greatrex, Toronto and Region

Conservation Authority

Britt Gregg-Wallace, Bruce County

**Daniel Hall**, City of London **Christopher Harris**, TVDSB **Megan Herod**, City for All Women Initiative

Matthew Ippersiel, City of Ottawa

Miranda Ivany, City of Brantford

Aisha Jallow, Infrastructure Ontario

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#### A CAREER WITH A FUTURE

Informed, inspired decisions don't just happen — they are the result of careful analysis and information gathering that bring a diversity of perspectives to the table. Good decisions come with actionable, realistic paths forward and lead to a sustainable future. Providing this supported guidance is what RPPs are educated to do.

RPPs work in government, private practice, universities, and not-for-profit agencies in the fields of urban and rural development, community design, environmental planning, transportation, health, social services, heritage conservation, housing, and economic development. It's an indemand profession with a future — and for a better future.

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### **Contributors**

Planners are forward thinkers, always considering the effect decisions made today will have on the future of our communities. We asked three contributors to this issue of Y *Magazine* for their thoughts on key areas of change and innovation for the planning profession. Here are their responses.



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Land development and planning policy is continuously changing at the local municipal level. At the Town of Pelham in the Niagara Region, our team is focused on climate change and adaptation, as well as tree preservation and environmental stewardship within community planning. As the majority of our land base is within the Greenbelt and the Niagara Escarpment, it is essential that we as planners are thoughtful and forward-thinking in the decisions of today to maintain and create the environment of tomorrow.

Of particular interest, I am excited about agricultural policy creation and working directly with farm entrepreneurs in Pelham to develop and create new, responsible on-farm diversified uses. Much like the planning profession, the natural rural landscape in Ontario continues to evolve and prosper!

For the past year and a half, I have been working with colleagues across the country on a project that challenges planners to think longer-term — three generations ahead to the year 2100 — and to find ways to expand planning's role in contributing to policy decisions that affect Canada's communities. This "stretch goal" has shown me that planners — myself included — are increasingly committed to learning new things and are willing to engage with both reconciliation and combatting climate change.

I have also discovered that younger colleagues, ranging from students to early career planners, are just as excited as I am about helping to shape their new profession's role as well as their country's future.

One key change we're seeing today — both in everyday life and planning — is the rise of technology, especially artificial intelligence (AI). It's beginning to change how we work. In the GTA, most cities now use online platforms to review drawings, which makes communication more efficient. AI is also starting to assist with zoning checks, helping staff and applicants spot issues early.

With my background in urban design and landscape architecture, I'm especially interested in how AI can quickly generate and visualize designs in their actual contexts. This helps assess the design options and makes it easier for everyone to understand their impacts. These tools are exciting, but we also need to be thoughtful about ethics and responsible implementation moving forward.



# Be ready for the future: Get a Registered Professional Planner on your team

Major issues such as climate change, aging populations, and the implementation of artificial intelligence show no signs of stopping — and they affect every sector. The only way to be ready for inevitable change is with sound planning. Hiring a Registered Professional Planner (RPP) is a pivotal step in building actionable plans in preparation for the future.

Ontario's RPPs gather and analyze information from every side of an issue and provide the critical unbiased perspective and expertise necessary to help guide the crucial decision making that will shape the future of our communities. The more than 4,000 members of OPPI work in government, private practice, universities, and notfor-profit agencies in the fields of urban and rural development, community design, environmental

planning, transportation, health, social services, heritage conservation, housing, and economic development.

RPPs are the only professionals with the experience and specialized skill set required to fill the very specific role and title of Planner.
RPPs who are certified by OPPI have met rigorous entry-to-practice standards and follow the Professional Code of Practice.

Find the RPP who meets your exact needs in OPPI's Consultant Directory at **ontarioplanners.ca/hire-an-rpp.** 





OPPI is pleased to announce that OPPI's 2026 conference will be held at

BLUE MOUNTAIN / SEPTEMBER 16 TO 18, 2026.

Watch for more details in OPPI communications and at

www.ontarioplanners.ca.

