

# Place

Every good plan starts with a story.



Healthy, Liveable  
Communities

Planning for Health  
and Well-Being

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Lessons from Moose  
Cree First Nation

pg. 13

Land Use Planning for  
Agricultural Prosperity

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# PlanON Awards

## Honouring Excellence in Planning

Registered Professional Planners (RPPs) play a critically important role in shaping the quality, liveability, 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 strong commitment to advancing the planning profession in Ontario. The program celebrates projects and individuals within our community, acknowledging significant contributions in areas such as education, research, and volunteerism.

The call for submission opened on April 8, 2026. We look forward to receiving your entries across six awards presented in two categories.

### Celebrating Projects

- PlanON 2026 Vision Award
- PlanON Public Education Award
- PlanON Innovative Research Award

### Celebrating People

- PlanON Emerging Leadership Award
- PlanON RPP Leadership Award
- PlanON Volunteer Service Award

Everything you need to know about PlanON award categories, application submissions, eligibility criteria, and important dates can be found at [ontarioplanners.ca/PlanON](https://ontarioplanners.ca/PlanON).

The ceremony honouring the recipients of the 2026 PlanON Awards will take place on September 17, 2026 at Blue Mountain Resort.

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Want to learn more about planning in Ontario? Digital copies of *Place Magazine* are available for download, free of charge, at [ontarioplanners.ca/place-magazine](http://ontarioplanners.ca/place-magazine).

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# ELEVATE 2030

## Advancing a Stronger, Bolder Planning Profession



### The Ontario Professional Planners Institute's Strategic Plan

A message from our members struck a chord: be BOLDER. Bolder in our advocacy. Bolder in how we show up for our community. Bolder in how we lead and shape the future of the planning profession. You also challenged us to be forward-thinking, meaningful, and truly representative of the vital role planners play in shaping vibrant, sustainable communities, now and for the future. That message has reshaped our outlook and you will see it reflected throughout our new strategic plan.

Thank you to our members for your valuable insight, candour, and continued engagement. We look forward to sharing the comprehensive version of ELEVATE 2030: Advancing a Stronger, Bolder Planning Profession with you on June 18 at our Annual Members Meeting being held virtually from noon-1:30 PM.

**Together, we are elevating the future of planning in Ontario.**

**ELEVATE 2030 signals a stronger commitment to upholding trusted standards, amplifying our advocacy voice, preparing planners for what's next, and building a more connected and inclusive planning community.**



#### Our vision

A strong and connected planning profession advancing inclusive and sustainable communities.



#### Our mission

To advance and advocate for Registered Professional Planners acting in the public interest by fostering professional excellence, strengthening the planning community, and sharing knowledge to support continuous learning and growth.

To bring that mission to life, OPPI's work is grounded in **four strategic pillars.**

01

Strengthen and Uphold Professional Standards in the Public Interest

02

Lead Strategic Advocacy to Advance the Role and Impact of Professional Planners

03

Advance Professional Knowledge and Confidence in an Evolving Planning Landscape

04

Deepen Engagement and Belonging Across a Diverse Membership



# Message from the Chair

This is a moment of transformation for OPPI and for planning in Ontario. With a renewed commitment to the profession, we are stepping into a bold new chapter. One that strengthens our impact, amplifies our voice, and shapes the future of communities across the province.

“

In our rapidly changing landscape, the role of planners has never been more critical.

Good planning is essential for building great communities. It involves informed thinking and strategic planning to create urban, suburban, rural, and remote areas that balance short-term and long-term public needs. Registered Professional Planners (RPPs) are experts in using space effectively, ensuring elements like road networks and transit, greenspace and walkways, and water and sanitary infrastructure work together seamlessly. They plan for essential resources like schools, hospitals, libraries, and services.

To be successful in achieving growth and navigating complex issues, RPPs must evolve their processes, systems, and thinking. As the profession evolves, OPPI is stepping forward with a renewed sense of purpose and direction, and you see that here in the bold new look and feel of the first issue of *Place Magazine*.

Place is more than a new name. It's a statement. A recognition that planning is ultimately about place: the lived experiences, connections, and environments that shape our daily lives. *Place Magazine* reflects a renewed commitment to how we show up for our members and the communities we serve.

The launch of *Place Magazine* marks a defining moment for our organization in alignment with our new strategic plan, ELEVATE 2030: Advancing a Stronger, Bolder Planning Profession. Through this plan, we are embracing a clear call from

our members to be bolder. Bolder in our advocacy. Bolder in how we engage and support our community. And bolder in how we lead and shape the future of planning in Ontario.

In our rapidly changing landscape, the role of planners has never been more critical. Across the province, RPPs are designing neighbourhoods, building sustainable infrastructure, fostering resilient economies, and creating places where people can thrive. This issue of *Place Magazine* brings those contributions to life. Together, the stories you'll read here reflect a profession that is thoughtful, responsive, and ready to lead. They also reflect OPPI's commitment to elevating that work, amplifying its impact, and ensuring the voice of planning is strong, clear, and respected.

Thank you to our members for your continued leadership, insight, and dedication. You are the driving force behind this evolution. As we move forward with purpose and confidence, we will continue to elevate the profession, strengthen our collective voice, and shape communities that are inclusive, sustainable, and built to last.

**Andria Leigh**, MCIP, RPP, DipI.M.M.  
OPPI COUNCIL CHAIR

**The 15-minute neighbourhood:**  
a practical organizing framework  
connecting built environment choices  
to lived experiences.



# Planning for Health and Well-Being

Translating Rhetoric into Practice

**AUTHOR**

INGE ROSENDAAL, RPP

As planners, our ultimate measures of success are communities built to respect, nurture, and enable the well-being of both people and the planet. What does it take to thrive and live life to the fullest? And how do we plan for that?

The world is shifting rapidly, and the challenges we face, like housing affordability, climate impacts, and widening inequities, are increasingly complex and connected. The social and physical infrastructure of our communities can either buffer shocks and disruptors or amplify risk and exclusion. Our communities also shape the everyday conditions that add up over a lifetime, like access to daily needs, safety, comfort, and connection. And this is deeply entangled with people's health and well-being.

In a fast-moving housing and policy environment, planning for health and well-being is not an added lens; it's a practical way to make better trade-offs, reduce system costs, and build communities that work for more people, more of the time.

## The Evolving Landscape

Like much of the country, Ontario planners are under intense pressures to deliver more housing, faster, in more forms and with wider affordability. At the same time, rapidly changing legislative and policy environments are accelerating approvals, reshaping how planning decisions get made. But what we build, where, and what surrounds it will influence health and well-being for generations. Importantly, many of the same planning choices that support health also advance affordability, climate resilience, and long-term economic value.

Two decades of research make it clear that the built environment is a powerful determinant of health. It impacts chronic disease risk, injuries, mental health, and inequities, which, in turn, affects quality of life. These health conditions also put extreme pressure on the health care system. In Ontario, cancers, cardiovascular diseases, chronic lower respiratory diseases and diabetes account for about two-thirds of all deaths.<sup>1</sup> I've worked at the intersection of planning and public health long enough to see "healthy communities" move from emerging ideas to mainstream aspiration. The next challenge is making it routine in the way we plan, approve, design, and measure success.

*"Importantly, many of the same planning choices that support health also advance affordability, climate resilience, and long-term economic value."*

## How the Built Environment Shapes Health

Making health and well-being routine in planning begins with understanding the main pathways through which community design affects health and well-being outcomes. What began as a focus on chronic disease prevention has broadened into a clearer picture of interconnected impacts that accumulate over time and are not experienced equally across neighbourhoods or populations. If they are not considered, planning decisions can



Credit: Inge Roosendaal

inadvertently promote unhealthy and unsustainable lifestyles, expose people to environmental stressors, and deepen inequities in access to protective community resources.<sup>2</sup>

Land use patterns and transportation options influence physical activity, access to healthy food, and chronic disease risk. Street design, such as crossings, intersection geometry, and speed environments, affect injuries and fatalities. Tree canopy, greenspace, and built-form shape heat exposure, air quality, and mental health. Housing location, affordability, and suitability are foundational to physical and mental well-being.

There is no single recipe for what makes a healthy community, but the evidence consistently points to common ingredients: walkable, well-connected, compact neighbourhoods with a mix of uses that are supported by safe mobility options, climate-ready public spaces, and equitable access to daily needs.

**Access to Daily Needs:** land use patterns and transportation options determine whether residents can easily access daily needs like groceries, schools, parks, services and jobs. The more of these destinations accessible by walking, cycling or transit, the better the outcomes.

**Mobility and Safety:** street design, such as sidewalks, protected space for cycling, safe crossing, and traffic calming, as well as network connectivity and speed, shape whether walking, cycling, and transit feel safe and practical. This affects people's physical activity and injury risk.

**Exposure to Environmental Stressors:** built-form and land use decisions can reduce or concentrate exposure to air pollution, noise, and heat. For example, playgrounds beside high-traffic corridors without buffers can raise children's exposure to traffic-related air pollution, shaping who bears risk.

**Comfort and Usability:** access to shade, tree canopy, places to rest, winter comfort, and accessible design influence whether public spaces are usable and feel good for people of all ages and abilities all year round.

**Social Connection and Well-Being:** parks, public spaces, streets, and the presence of welcoming “everyday places” such as local shops and community centres can support opportunities for social interaction and reduce isolation. Casual connections with acquaintances can build community and feelings of well-being.

**Equity:** not everyone experiences the built environment in the same way and has equitable access to resources in the community that protect and promote well-being. The COVID-19 pandemic brought this into stark relief. Identifying these inequities is the first step to investigating potential interventions.

### Practical Inter-Disciplinary Opportunities

Planning has come a long way in recognizing these connections. But decisions can be successful on paper, providing units, and still fall short of creating cumulative decisions that enable people to thrive. Planning for health and well-being is most successful when it is deeply integrated in policy and decision-making frameworks, as well as plans and designs that emerge on the ground. A health and well-being lens can strengthen how planners weigh trade-offs. What does this look like in practice?

Today’s planning challenge is to move from awareness to implementation by consistently translating evidence into existing policies, processes, tools, and decisions. Three areas where the planning structure offers opportunities for integration are policy language, decision-making processes, and measures and accountability.

**Healthy Public Policy:** Integrating health and well-being into policy language. In public health, we often talk about addressing root causes of issues that impact well-being. Health-promoting public policy is often one of the most impactful opportunities. Building health and well-being language, directions, and perspectives into the documents that guide decisions anchors and codifies healthy community commitments. Official plans (OP) are an important first step as a gateway that is implemented through master plans, secondary plans, policies, guidelines, programs, and bylaws that flow from it. Health and well-being can be reflected through both explicitly stated goals and directions, as well as being woven throughout OP policies that shape land use, mobility, parks, public realm and infrastructure. For instance, Ottawa’s new OP embeds health-supportive direction across core policy areas, linking health to intensification and increased housing choice, directing shifts to sustainable transportation, and reducing urban heat islands. It also elevates “healthy and inclusive communities” as a cross-cutting strategic direction, carried through the OP’s land use, mobility, and urban design sections.

**Making Health Routine:** Integrating health and well-being into the decision-making process. Policy sets the directions, but the proverbial rubber hits the road in how trade-offs are weighed and considered and policies are translated and implemented in plans, approvals, and designs. A consistently applied health and well-being lens can help bring policy to life. A well-established approach is the Health Impact Assessment (HIA), which is a structured way to assess how a plan, policy, or development proposal may affect health and well-being before decisions



are locked in. Used well, HIAs make trade-offs explicit, surface distributional impacts, and strengthen rationale for mitigation measures, conditions, or design approaches. It can draw on research evidence and leverage data, epidemiological expertise, and community insights. HIAs can be scaled to the resources and time available. Rapid desktop HIAs can be used as a quick screen to ensure impacts are anticipated and mitigations are considered early, when they are still feasible.

**Measuring What Matters:** Integrating health and well-being into measures and accountability. If good health and well-being are outcomes we value, these factors should be visible in what we track, or the impacts disappear behind metrics that are easiest to count, like units and approvals. Geospatial analytics can be a helpful tool in providing place-based measures to understand and track changes in built-form characteristics that impact well-being. Because the literature and evidence are clear that the built environment shapes behaviours and exposures that affect health, it follows that tracking these conditions is a practical bridge between planning actions and well-being outcomes. Examples include locations of heat islands, neighbourhood walkability, and understanding spatial inequities to see whether protective features and exposures are distributed equitably across neighbourhoods and populations.

## Making Lasting Change

The stakes have never been higher. Ontario's planners are working in a period of rapid change, where housing pressures, climate realities, and widening inequities interact in ways that no single discipline can solve alone. These are systems challenges, and planners' strengths as integrators and collaborators have never been more essential. As we accelerate much-needed housing, we also have an opportunity to accelerate the creation of healthier, more inclusive communities. Lasting change happens when health and well-being are treated not only as aspirations, but as intentional considerations throughout the planning process, with their own methods, evidence sources, and forms of expertise. When applied consistently, a health lens helps planners make clearer trade-offs, strengthen rationale, and align decisions with what communities ultimately value.

The good news is that planners have a growing suite of resources to draw from. Evidence-based checklists, frameworks, and guidance on healthy communities have expanded over the years, supported by professional associations and practitioners. Ontario's local public health units can also be key partners. Specifically, the Ontario Public Health Standards that guide public health professions outline public health requirements to assess and address environmental determinants of health, including the built environment, and to work with partners to support the evolution of healthy, equitable communities.<sup>3</sup> Their epidemiology, data, and population health expertise can complement planners' land use and design knowledge, helping surface issues and identify practical mitigation strategies.

## The Ottawa Experience

Ottawa Public Health (OPH) and the City of Ottawa have been advancing health and well-being integration for a number of years, including through public health staff working alongside planners in the City's Planning, Development and Building Services department. In my role as a Healthy Communities Planner, this embedded approach has made it easier to contribute early, when key directions are still being shaped and to stay involved through implementation.

Ottawa's Official Plan integrates health and well-being in two ways: through explicit policy intent sections and through implementation policies that influence key planning levers such as land use patterns, mobility networks, parks and public space, and infrastructure. The 15-minute neighbourhood serves as a practical organizing framework by connecting built environment choices to lived experiences, helping create places where people can meet daily needs safely, comfortably and affordably.

As the City moves from policy to action, through master plans, secondary plans, guidelines, and the new zoning bylaw just adopted by Council, OPH continues to collaborate with planners to translate evidence into clear, feasible recommendations that support mutual goals: healthy, liveable communities where more people can thrive.

The deeper the health integration, the bigger the impact. These approaches can help translate aspirations for healthier and more equitable communities into lasting change, leveraging interdisciplinary thinking across systems and decision-making frameworks. Let's make sure we are not only building more housing, but also better places to live. ■■

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<sup>3</sup> Government of Ontario. (2026, January 8). "Ontario public health standards: Requirements for programs, services, and accountability." Accessed February 6, 2026. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-public-health-standards-requirements-programs-services-and-accountability>



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# Hazards, Houses, and Settlement Areas

## The Courage to Redraw the Map



### AUTHORS

REBECCA BELANGER, RPP  
MARY LOU TANNER, RPP

In the traditional Ontario planning lexicon, “growth” has almost always been synonymous with “expansion.” For decades, official plans were designed to facilitate the steady outward march of settlement boundaries. The County of Essex recognized it had to change that approach.

As communities confront the pressures of a volatile climate, the demand for housing in a volatile economy, and a shifting provincial policy landscape, the most critical work of the new County of Essex Official Plan was, in part, deciding where we could build – but courageously identifying where we no longer should.

The development of the new County of Essex Official Plan (OP) represented more than a statutory requirement; it has been a fundamental re-positioning of the County’s role in the 21st century, demonstrating that significant growth

could be accommodated within existing settlement areas and that settlement areas that are demonstrating a threat to sustainability needed to be re-drawn.

In September 2025, the Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI) recognized the new County of Essex Official Plan (OP) as the Project of the Year. While the award celebrates our innovative growth management framework, the true story of this plan lies in its willingness to confront a difficult reality: the land use designations of our past can no longer dictate the required trajectory of our future.

## Climate Standards and the 232-Kilometre Reality

As a peninsula at Canada’s southernmost tip, Essex County is defined by its relationship with the Great Lakes. But that same geography makes us the “front line” for climate volatility. Essex County is surrounded on three sides by waterbodies of the Great Lakes system. In addition to the ongoing threat of natural hazards, Essex County contains some of the most productive farmland, with all areas outside of settlement areas identified as prime agricultural lands.

Our natural heritage features are equally vital; situated within the Carolinian Canada Zone, Essex County serves as a critical biodiversity hotspot. Despite the zone representing a fraction of Canada’s landmass, it harbours a disproportionately high concentration of rare and endangered species, necessitating a planning framework that treats conservation not as an elective, but as a core component of regional resilience.

This policy and mapping work was not a subjective exercise – it was anchored in data-driven long-term scientific analysis. Utilizing federal and provincial grants, we updated this 47-year-old natural hazard mapping for the Essex County’s entire 232-kilometre shoreline.



County of Essex



Essex Region Conservation Authority

Partnering with the Essex Region Conservation Authority (ERCA) and Zuzek Inc., the County of Essex applied a climate change standard as mandated by the Provincial Planning Statement, 2024. The results were undeniable: there are areas where settlement is simply no longer sustainable. By removing these flood-prone lands from the settlement area inventory, Essex County is preventing the creation of future stranded homes and municipal assets.

### The Legacy Problem: De-Designating the “Paper” Subdivisions

Perhaps the most significant professional hurdle tackled was the review of historic and legacy settlement areas. Throughout shoreline areas in particular, Essex County is

dotted with registered plans of subdivision with some dating back to the 1920s and 30s. Some of these subdivisions had been recognized as settlement areas, establishing a policy basis for growth and expansion.

*"The results were undeniable: there are areas where settlement is simply no longer sustainable."*

These cottage communities were never intended to support permanent, year-round housing with modern servicing. Yet the desire for waterfront living has created persistent pressure to transition

## Economic Diversification: Beyond the “Just-in-Time” Model

A resilient County of Essex must be independent and pivot away from supply chain models of the past towards a self-reliant industrial base focused on economic diversification.



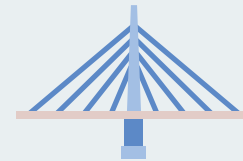
### Agri-Tech & Food Security

Leveraging our status as a green-house capital to support controlled environment agriculture.



### Green Energy Supply Chain

Positioning the county as a hub for the “Circular Battery Economy” and electrified manufacturing.



### Multi-Modal Logistics

Capitalizing on the Gordie Howe International Bridge to build robust, independent trade infrastructure.



these seasonal pockets into year-round dwellings—often via low-lying, single-access roads with inadequate infrastructure.

In a bold policy shift, the new OP requires local municipalities to address these undeveloped historic areas. Where lands are constrained by natural hazards or lack of servicing, the new OP has either removed these designations or requires that municipalities consider this removal as part of their local OP updates.

### Reconciliation and Our Relationships with First Nations

The new County of Essex Official Plan was anchored through genuine, respectful relationship building with our local First Nations communities. Our regular consultations moved beyond checking the box to a shared understanding of land stewardship, ensuring that as we grow, we do so in a way that respects the limited water and soil resources we all share.

### The Ethical Friction of De-Designation and the Responsibility of the RPP

Removing development permissions is perhaps the most politically and ethically fraught task an RPP can undertake. We recognize that for property owners, a designation is often viewed as a right or a

financial asset. However, as planners, our primary duty is to the public interest and the long-term safety of the community. As practitioners charged with the implementation of provincial policy, it is our responsibility to begin having these difficult conversations about policy implementation that guides the wise use of resources.

Permitting new housing in high-risk flood-prone areas—knowing what we now know about climate trajectories—is an abdication of professional responsibility. By ending the permissions in these vulnerable areas, we are preventing the creation of future stranded assets and ensuring the County's growth is built on a foundation of resilience rather than liability.

This is not easy work. It requires navigating difficult conversations with landowners and reconciling historic expectations with future realities. Yet, if we are to truly address climate change and build an economy that can withstand the shocks of the coming decades, we must be willing to correct the decisions of the past.

The new County of Essex Official Plan isn't just a map of where we will live—it is a testament to our commitment to build safely, equitably, and sustainably. In the face of shifting lake levels and increasing natural hazards, subtraction is often the most vital form of progress. ■■

## 2025 PlanON Project of the Year

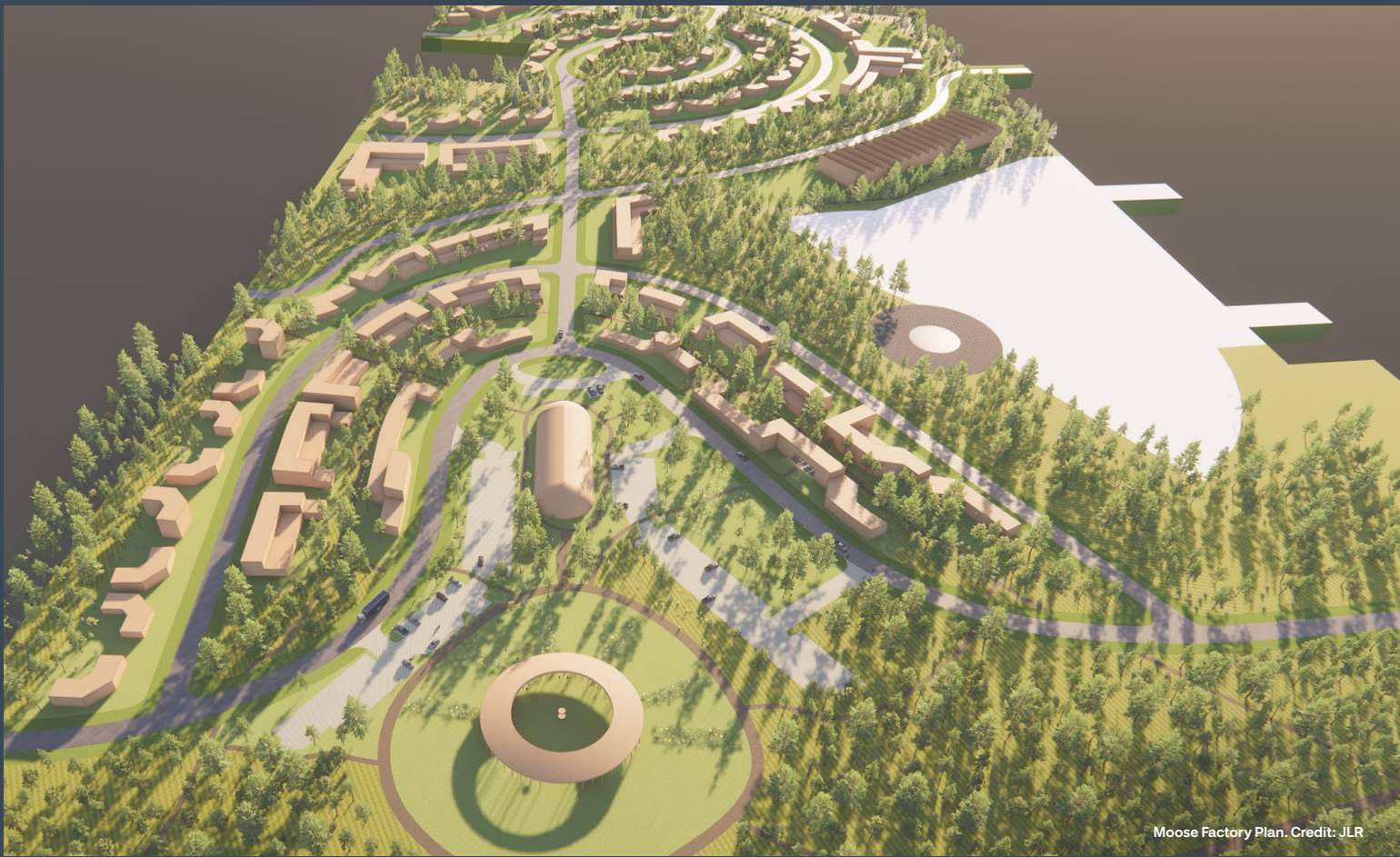
One Land, One Climate, One Future,  
Together – the foundation of the new  
County of Essex Official Plan – was  
awarded the 2025 PlanON Project of  
the Year. The PlanON Awards are the  
highest honours OPPI can bestow.  
Learn more about the awards at  
[ontarioplanners.ca/PlanON](http://ontarioplanners.ca/PlanON).



**Rebecca Belanger**, MCIP, RPP, is the Manager of Planning Services at the County of Essex.  
**Mary Lou Tanner**, RPP, FCIP, is a Senior Partner with NPG Planning Solutions.

# Planning for Healthy, Liveable Communities

## Lessons from Moose Cree First Nation



Moose Factory Plan. Credit: JLR

### AUTHORS

ALISON BUCKING, RPP  
ARIANNA GRASSER

At its core, the Wâhkôhtowin Plan is a plan designed by the people, for the people. For the Moose Cree people, everything is connected: people, land, water, and spirit. Ceremonies and celebrations sustain this balance, reinforcing the deep relationship between the land and its people.

“

The Wâhkôhtowin Plan... demonstrates what planning can become when communities lead and professionals support.



Sunset on Moose Factory Island in the Winter. Credit JLR

What it takes to build a liveable community in remote northern Ontario challenges many standard planning assumptions. Remote northern communities face planning conditions far beyond those encountered elsewhere in Ontario. High living costs, limited access, climate-driven flooding, and a deep cultural relationship with the land shape every aspect of community life.

Working alongside Moose Cree First Nation (MCFN), our team at JLR supported the development of the Wâhkôhtowin Plan, a community-led master plan for a 40-hectare (99-acre) parcel currently being pursued through treaty land entitlement negotiations. Located directly southwest of the existing reserve on Moose Factory Island, the site represents a generational opportunity to expand the community in a way that strengthens cultural connections while addressing urgent challenges such as housing shortages, overcrowding, loss of cultural space, high costs of living, and seasonal access barriers. At its core, the Wâhkôhtowin Plan is a plan designed by the people, for the people.

### Planning Within a Different Framework

Planning on reserve lands differs significantly from municipal planning practice. Provincial legislation and policy do not apply, creating space for a more creative and responsive process rooted in culture, community priorities, and land-based knowledge. While provincial policy may still serve as a reference point, it is not the governing framework — the community is.

A guiding principle throughout the project was the Two-Eyed Seeing approach, which draws on the strengths of both Indigenous and Western knowledge systems. This approach created a more complete understanding of local realities, including seasonal isolation, flood risk, limited access to goods and services, and the challenges of building in remote northern conditions. It ensured planning decisions honoured Cree teachings, lived experience, and long-standing relationships with land and water.

### Integrating the Plan with Island Realities

Rather than focusing on conventional master-plan elements, the Wâhkôhtowin Plan emphasizes how the new 40-hectare parcel strengthens and supports the existing community. Moose Cree First Nation faces long-standing housing shortages, overcrowding, and limited land availability. This plan represents a critical step toward ensuring future growth aligns with the community's values, needs, and long-term vision.

Planning decisions were shaped by lived realities, including:

- High costs of living driven by remote supply chains.
- Limited access and reliance on seasonal transportation. As there is no permanent road access to the island, the community can be reached from Moosonee by train or plane. In summer, autumn and spring, access is by boat. During the breakup and freeze-up seasons, only helicopters can reach

the island. In winter, cars, trucks, and snowmobiles are used, with a six-week period when the Wetum winter road provides additional access outside of Moosonee. Spring breakup flooding affects mobility, safety, and access to essential goods.

- Soil conditions influence building form and construction methods.

These conditions directly informed road placement, land use distribution, and housing choices. For planners, the take-away is clear: on an island, land is limited and each season brings unique constraints. Expansion outward is not always possible or sustainable. Growth must therefore be strategic, often meaning building upward and making the most of available land.

While flooding poses real risks, prohibiting development is not always feasible. Instead, planning must balance the need for new spaces with resilient design and adaptive land use, allowing the community to thrive within its constraints.

### A Storytelling Framework: Shapahtwan

A defining strength of the plan is its storytelling foundation. At its centre is the Shapahtwan, a traditional gathering lodge that embodies the community's spirit and identity. In keeping with Cree tradition, ceremonial structures are entered from the southeast. Accordingly, the Shapahtwan is oriented along a northwest-southeast axis, facing the Moose River. Within the plan, it functions as both a cultural symbol and a spatial organizing element.

Surrounding the Shapahtwan is a system of U-shaped roads and mixed land uses that radiate outward while remaining connected to this central ceremonial space. To the north are the powwow grounds, providing a dedicated area for cultural celebrations and community gatherings. To the south, Elders' housing is strategically located, allowing Elders to welcome visitors as they arrive, honouring their role as knowledge keepers and placing them at the heart of the community.

The southern portion of the site is designated for low- to medium-density residential development. At its centre is a large outdoor gathering space, connected to a network of smaller gathering areas distributed throughout the neighbourhood.

“  
**Ceremonies and celebrations sustain this balance, reinforcing the deep relationship between the land and its people.**



These outdoor spaces are unified by an interconnected pathway system that symbolizes the community's lifeblood. For the Moose Cree people, everything is connected: people, land, water, and spirit. Ceremonies and celebrations sustain this balance, reinforcing the deep relationship between the land and its people.

### Letting the Land Lead

The decision to move away from a colonial grid road pattern is deliberate and culturally significant. Here, the land and river shape movement. Roads follow natural contours, preserving vegetation, respecting water and topography, and improving resilience to flooding.

Institutional and healing spaces are intentionally located near open areas and close to Moose River, recognizing the river's cultural and spiritual significance. Water is understood as a source of healing, and its presence plays a central role in the overall design philosophy. These choices honour Cree relationships with place and reinforce the importance of land-based healing.

### Housing That Reflects Community Needs

Moose Factory Island faces a severe housing shortage, resulting in overcrowding and multi-generational living in inadequate conditions. The plan introduces a broader range of housing options that respond directly to community needs and local constraints, including:

- Apartments for singles and young couples, who currently have limited options
- Homes for multi generational families, reflecting community living patterns
- Elevated structures, adapted to frequent flooding
- Layouts grounded in Cree teachings and community relationships

Together, these approaches support a healthier and more sustainable housing landscape.

### Climate Access and Adaption

Flooding during spring breakup is one of Moose Cree's most significant planning

challenges. Flood-prone areas within the 40-hectare parcel were intentionally designated for open space and temporary recreational uses, protecting future development while maintaining community value. This climate-adaptive approach is woven throughout the plan's road network, infrastructure siting, and land use decisions.

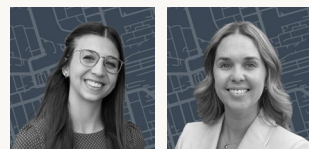
Midway through the planning process, the team learned of plans to locate an ambulatory care centre on the parcel. This new requirement reduced the developable area by roughly a quarter. In response, land uses were reconfigured to ensure that cultural, housing, and community-serving spaces remained cohesive. The plan's flexible structure allowed it to adapt without compromising its cultural or spatial foundations.

### A Plan Rooted in Relationship

The Wâhkôhtowin Plan is a living expression of the relationship between people, land, water, and future generations. It demonstrates what planning can become when communities lead and professionals support.

- Liveability demands attention to local realities, not generic frameworks.
- Planning that respects cultural knowledge is stronger, more resilient, and more meaningful.
- Community leadership guides decisions that are more adaptive, grounded, and lasting.

Ultimately, the strongest plans are those created with and for the people who know their land best. Honouring lived experience, strengthening resilience, and supporting long-term community well-being. ■



**Alison Buckingham**, MCIP, RPP, is a Planner with experience across Ontario in both public and private sectors.

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# Planning Healthy, Liveable Communities in a Changing Ontario

**AUTHOR**

CAROLINE SAMUEL, RPP

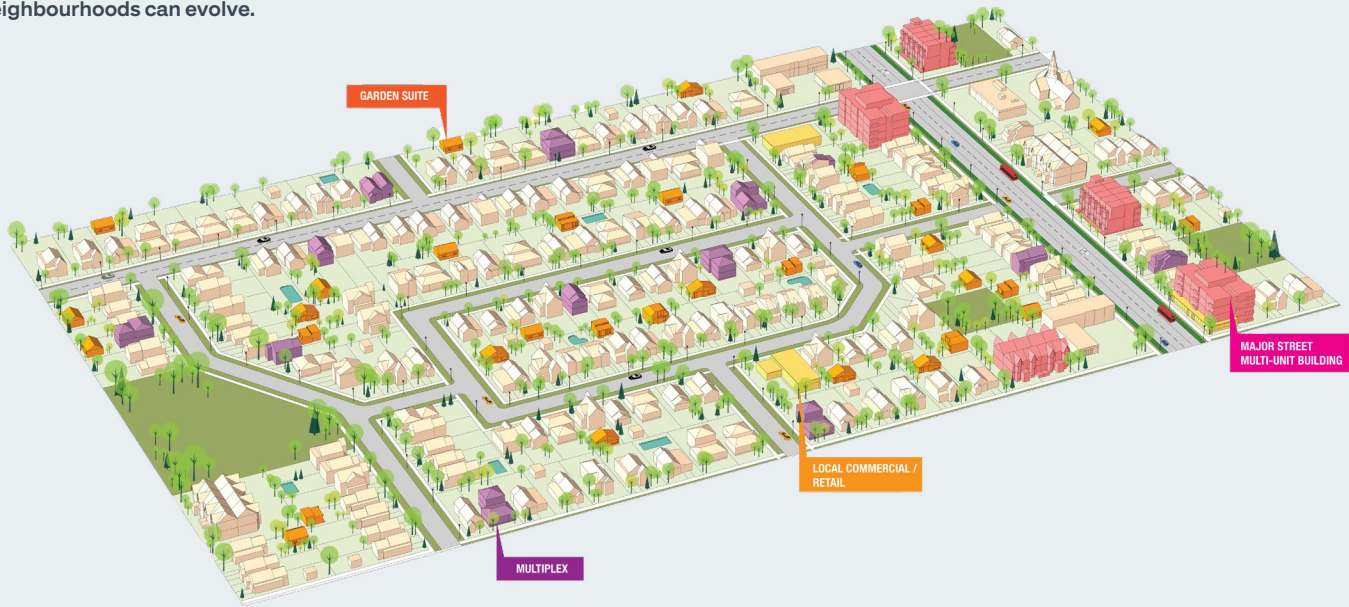
What makes a community healthy and liveable? For decades, planners across Ontario have wrestled with this foundational question. Today, that question is more complex and urgent than ever before. Insights from Toronto's Expanding Housing Options in Neighbourhoods initiative provide insights for planners.

Today, that question is more complex and urgent than ever before. Rapid population growth, rising housing costs, demographic shifts, climate change, economic pressures, and evolving technologies are reshaping how Ontarians live, work, and move through their communities.

The work of Registered Professional Planners has never been more critical. Through policy leadership, research, community engagement, and long-range visioning, planners are guiding decisions that support sustainable futures for people of all ages, incomes, and backgrounds. One of the most comprehensive and forward-looking examples of this work can be found in the City of Toronto's Expanding Housing Options in Neighbourhoods (EHON) initiative – a multi-year planning effort that rethinks how neighbourhoods can evolve to better support healthy, inclusive, and resilient communities across Ontario.



City of Toronto's EHON initiative rethinks how neighbourhoods can evolve.



### What Are the Components of a Healthy, Liveable Community?

A healthy, liveable community is not defined by a single feature, but by the interaction of many systems working together. Planners routinely consider:

- Housing that is affordable, diverse in form, and suitable for different life stages
- Schools and community facilities that support learning, social connection, and well-being
- Local services and retail that meet everyday needs within walking distance
- Parks and open spaces that promote physical activity, mental health, and ecological resilience
- Employment opportunities close to where people live
- Transportation networks that prioritize safety, accessibility, and low-carbon mobility
- Food systems and agriculture, including access to fresh food
- Public safety and inclusive design that foster trust and belonging
- Technology and digital infrastructure that support flexible work, service access, and innovation

When these elements are planned together, communities become places where people can not only live but also thrive.

### How These Components are Changing in Ontario

In today's Ontario, the relationships between these components are shifting. Housing affordability has emerged as one of the most pressing challenges facing communities of all sizes. Demographic changes, including an aging population, smaller household sizes, and increased cultural diversity, are creating demand for housing forms that differ from those built in the past.

At the same time, the climate crisis is forcing planners to rethink land use patterns, transportation choices, and how communities can reduce emissions while remaining resilient to extreme weather. Economic pressures and evolving work patterns, accelerated by digital technology, are changing how people use neighbourhoods throughout the day.

*"... communities are experienced differently depending on age, income, culture, mobility, employment type and family structure."*

These realities are pushing planning practice beyond traditional single-use zoning toward communities that are more complete, providing places where a mix of housing, services, employment, and green space are integrated in ways that support health, sustainability, and equity.

### Learning from the Past: Why Change is Needed

Historically, many Ontario neighbourhoods were planned around separation: housing in one place, shops in another, employment farther away, often accessible primarily by car. In Toronto, this approach led to large areas of low-rise neighbourhoods zoned almost exclusively for single-detached houses, limiting housing choice and concentrating growth along a small number of corridors.

While these neighbourhoods offered stability, the planning frameworks behind them also produced unintended consequences:



City of Toronto

constrained housing supply, housing mismatches with household size, rising costs, longer commutes, and inequitable access to services and opportunities. Today’s planners are drawing lessons from these outcomes, recognizing that supporting neighbourhood character does not require freezing communities in time.

The challenge is not whether neighbourhoods should change, but how they can evolve thoughtfully, equitably, and sustainably.

### Expanding Housing Options in Neighbourhoods

Since 2019, the City of Toronto has been a leader in policy and zoning bylaw changes to enable gentle density in residential neighbourhoods in the form of laneway suites, garden suites, multiplexes, and apartment buildings and townhouses on major streets through the Expanding Housing Options in Neighbourhoods (EHON) initiative.<sup>1</sup> The initiative reflects this evolution in planning thinking. Led by the City Planning Division, EHON is a comprehensive strategy to gently diversify housing and services within established neighbourhoods while maintaining a human-scaled, low-rise form to meet the needs of the growing city.

At its core, EHON focuses on enabling “missing middle” housing — low-rise building types such as duplexes, triplexes, multiplexes, townhouses, small scale apartment buildings, laneway suites, and garden suites. These housing forms bridge the gap between single-family homes and high-rise apartments, providing options for families, seniors, young adults, and multigenerational households to accommodate people at all stages of life and all household sizes and incomes, leading to a more equitable and inclusive community.

By expanding where and how these housing types can be built, planners are enabling more housing options and addressing demographic change while supporting more inclusive neighbourhoods. EHON initiatives could contribute approximately 163,785 units of new housing towards achieving the Province of Ontario’s and the City’s Housing Target of 285,000 units by 2051 as indicated in the June 2025 Neighbourhood Intensification Research Bulletin.<sup>2</sup>

### Beyond Housing: Community Within Reach

Recognizing that healthy communities require more than just homes, EHON also includes new permissions for local retail and services, an essential component of daily life.

The local retail and services study acknowledges a simple truth: communities function best when residents can access essentials such as groceries, childcare, cafés, medical offices, personal services without long car trips. By recommending zoning changes to allow small-scale retail, service, and office uses along major streets and select interior streets while also refining permissions for home-based businesses, planners are helping bring everyday services “within reach.”

*“Through policy leadership, research, community engagement, and long-range visioning, planners are guiding decisions that support sustainable futures for people of all ages, incomes, and backgrounds.”*

This approach supports walkability, strengthens local economies, and aligns with changing work patterns where more people operate businesses from home or seek flexible, neighbourhood-based employment. In addition, these small shops and services can provide size-appropriate spaces for independent businesses to remain in and around neighbourhoods.

### Incorporating Diverse Perspectives

A defining feature of EHON is its emphasis on engagement and inclusion. City planners undertook extensive public consultation, including city-wide meetings, neighbourhood surveys, pop-up events, and digital engagement, ensuring that residents, business owners, and community groups could shape the outcomes.

Incorporating diverse perspectives is not just about consultation; it's about acknowledging that communities are experienced differently depending on age, income, culture, mobility, employment type, and family structure. By listening to these voices, planners can design policies that respond to real-world needs whether that means accessible housing for seniors, rental opportunities for young families, or local services that reflect cultural diversity.

## Health, Sustainability, and the Climate Lens

EHON also demonstrates how land use planning supports public health and climate goals. Gentle density within existing neighbourhoods allows more people to live near transit, schools, parks, and services, reducing reliance on cars and supporting active transportation. This land-efficient approach helps limit urban sprawl, protect agricultural lands beyond city boundaries, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Access to parks, tree canopy, and local open spaces remains central to the planning framework, ensuring that growth does not come at the expense of environmental quality or mental well-being. In this way, housing, transportation, climate resilience, and health are planned as interconnected systems rather than isolated issues.

## The Role of Registered Professional Planners

The EHON initiative highlights the multifaceted role of Registered Professional Planners in Ontario. Planners are not only policy writers; they are researchers, facilitators, systems thinkers, and stewards of the public interest. They navigate competing priorities, interpret complex data, anticipate long-term impacts, and translate community values into actionable policy. In doing so, planners help decision-makers understand the trade-offs and opportunities inherent in building sustainable communities whether those decisions relate to housing affordability, economic development, infrastructure investment, or climate adaptation.

## A Model for Ontario's Future

While EHON is grounded in Toronto's context, its lessons resonate across Ontario. Communities large and small are grappling with similar pressures: how to accommodate growth, support affordability, respond to climate change, and ensure that neighbourhoods remain places of connection and opportunity.

By focusing on complete communities, where housing, services, employment, transportation, and green space are planned together, Ontario's planners are helping shape places that are resilient, inclusive, and adaptable to change.

Healthy, liveable communities are not accidental. They are the result of intentional planning, informed by evidence, shaped by community voices, and guided by a long-term vision of sustainability and equity. The City of Toronto's EHON initiative illustrates how planners can respond to today's complex



challenges while learning from the past and embracing diverse perspectives. Furthermore, EHON stands as an example of how thoughtful planning and leadership can help ensure that communities now and in the future are places where everyone has the opportunity to live and thrive. ■■

*The EHON work has been achieved through many staff across the City of Toronto Planning Division, as well as other partner divisions. Both the EHON multiplexes and EHON Major Streets received an OPPI Vision Award of Merit.*

### References

- <sup>1</sup> Expanding Housing Options in Neighbourhoods (EHON) initiative. <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/planning-development/planning-studies-initiatives/expanding-housing-options/>
- <sup>2</sup> June 2025 Neighbourhood Intensification Research Bulletin. <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2025/ph/bgrd/backgroundfile-255734.pdf>



**Caroline Samuel**, MCIP, RPP, is the Manager of the Zoning Section in the City Planning Division at the City of Toronto.



Greek Summer Night Culture Pop-Up, 2024. Photo by Trinity Design Photography.

# Activating Whitby's Waterfront Through Culture

**AUTHOR**  
SOPHIA SOUSA

When we think about healthy, liveable communities, some things that come to mind are green spaces, affordable housing, and access to transportation. But how are we as planners supporting diversifying communities and celebrating local cultures?

In 2023, the Town of Whitby implemented a community strategic plan (CSP). Informed by feedback from over 3,000 people, the CSP is a four-year plan that provides staff and council with a shared vision and measurable objectives and actions to help make Whitby an even better place to live, work, and explore.

One objective of the plan is to "increase opportunities to acknowledge and celebrate the diversity of the community." The Town of Whitby officially launched the Culture Pop-up Series in 2023 to meet this objective.

## Celebration through Participation and Connection

Culture Pop-Ups are vibrant community events that celebrate the rich diversity of cultures in Whitby through arts, music, and dance. These events are hosted at Whitby's waterfront next to the landmark pier, where participants enjoy interactive dance performances with a scenic view of the harbour.

The inaugural year featured two events, Paint Night and Sunset Tango. In 2024, the series expanded to five events, including the return of Sunset Tango and new events such as Bollywood on the Pier, Greek Summer Night, En Plein Air Paint Night, and Unravel for Change. The series drew widespread community participation, attracting over 1,000 attendees.

The 2025 series highlighted global dance traditions commencing with a National Indigenous Peoples Day Celebration and continuing with Boots and Beats, Rhythms of Africa, and the return of popular events, Bollywood on the Pier and Greek Summer Night. Each year, the series brings back community favourites while also spotlighting new traditional dances that reflect Whitby's diversity.

For the Culture Pop-Up Series, the goal is celebration through participation and connection. Community members are invited to learn about traditional dances from instructors, watch short performances, and then follow along to demonstrations. The interactive approach creates a safe and fun environment to explore Whitby's vibrant cultures through knowledge sharing, collective participation, and cultural understanding.

*"Culture Pop-Ups are vibrant community events that celebrate the rich diversity of cultures in Whitby through arts, music, and dance."*

### A Platform for Unity, Expression, and Community Pride

Setting the series on the Whitby waterfront adds a sense of charm and allure. The event site is a popular destination on the waterfront trail next to the lakefront's Kiwanis-Heydenshore Park, Whitby Marina, and the new Town Brewery Pumphouse gathering place. Whether people are out for an evening stroll, cycle, refreshments, or sightseeing, the waterfront site enables passersby to



**Left:** Rhythms of Africa Culture Pop-Up, 2025

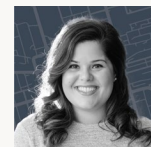
**Bottom:** Bollywood on the Pier Culture Pop-Up, 2025  
Photos by Trinity Design Photography



participate in an unexpected experience. There is truly no better feeling than linking arms with 300 strangers in a traditional Greek dancing circle or trying Bollywood dance moves for the first time during a waterfront sunset.

Culture Pop-Ups are more than just events, they are a platform for unity, expression, and community pride. The series continues to gain popularity and will be returning this summer with five events, starting once again with a National Indigenous People's Day celebration on June 17, 2026.

As planners, we often concentrate on enhancing the places where people live and work, but for healthy and liveable communities to thrive, we must also make room to explore. For more information visit: [whitby.ca/Culture](http://whitby.ca/Culture). ■■




**Sophia Sousa** is a Candidate member of OPPI and the Cultural and Tourism Coordinator at the Town of Whitby.

# Reimagining Neighbourhoods

How Hamilton's New Mid-Rise  
Zones Advance Housing Supply  
through Residential Intensification

AUTHOR

MALLORY SMITH, RPP



In October 2025, the City of Hamilton advanced one of its most significant zoning updates with the introduction of three new mid-rise residential zones in the city-wide zoning bylaw. It's the latest phase of the Reimagining Neighbourhoods residential zones project.

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... promoting higher density along key corridors while ensuring compatibility with surrounding neighbourhoods...



Hamilton skyline from Sam Lawrence Park. Credit: Tessier

Hamilton’s land use policy direction is shaped by Hamilton City Council’s 2022 decision to maintain a firm urban boundary. With a growing population and increasing housing pressure, the Hamilton’s growth strategy focuses on residential intensification within built-up areas.

With the introduction of the mid-rise residential zones, as-of-right mid-rise permissions have been introduced to approximately 3,000 properties across the city, a change that significantly increases housing options and opportunities in areas with urban services.

The intent is to strike a balance: promoting higher density along key corridors while ensuring compatibility with surrounding neighbourhoods, where zoning changes introduced through the first phase of the residential zones project have increased opportunities for gentle intensification. The most permissive of the zones allows up to 12 storeys with commercial permissions. The most widely applied zone permits up to six storeys and is found along many of the Hamilton’s corridors.

### A Robust, Transparent Engagement Process

The public engagement program has been a multi-year initiative, employing a range of engagement tools, recognizing the broad

impact of these city-wide zoning changes. The City of Hamilton, supported by WSP Canada Inc., conducted 22 community pop-ups across the city at farmers’ markets, shopping malls, libraries, arenas, cultural events, and community centres, connecting with a wide cross-section of the community.

The engagement program also utilized virtual open houses, workshops with the development industry, an informational video series, multiple advisory committee meetings, an interactive public survey, and engagement webpage. The goal was to meet people where they were and so the engagement was intentionally accessible, offering opportunities for residents across diverse neighbourhoods to participate in the evolving zone creation.

### Supporting Existing Homeowners Through the Transition to Denser Built Form

Many of the areas where mid-rise residential zones have been introduced are low density in character, with single family homes predominant. To support transition, the mid-rise residential zones allow homeowners to maintain existing uses and even expand or add additional dwelling units beyond what is permitted through legal non-conforming status. This transitional flexibility provides the conditions for intensification to occur organically over time.

### Following this milestone, planning staff are:

- Proceeding with Phase 2 of the mid-rise residential zone project, applying zones within the City of Hamilton’s Secondary Plans;
- Commencing a comprehensive review of official plan policies that will inform high-rise residential permissions in the zoning bylaw;
- Forthcoming city-wide design standards to elevate the quality of mid-rise development.

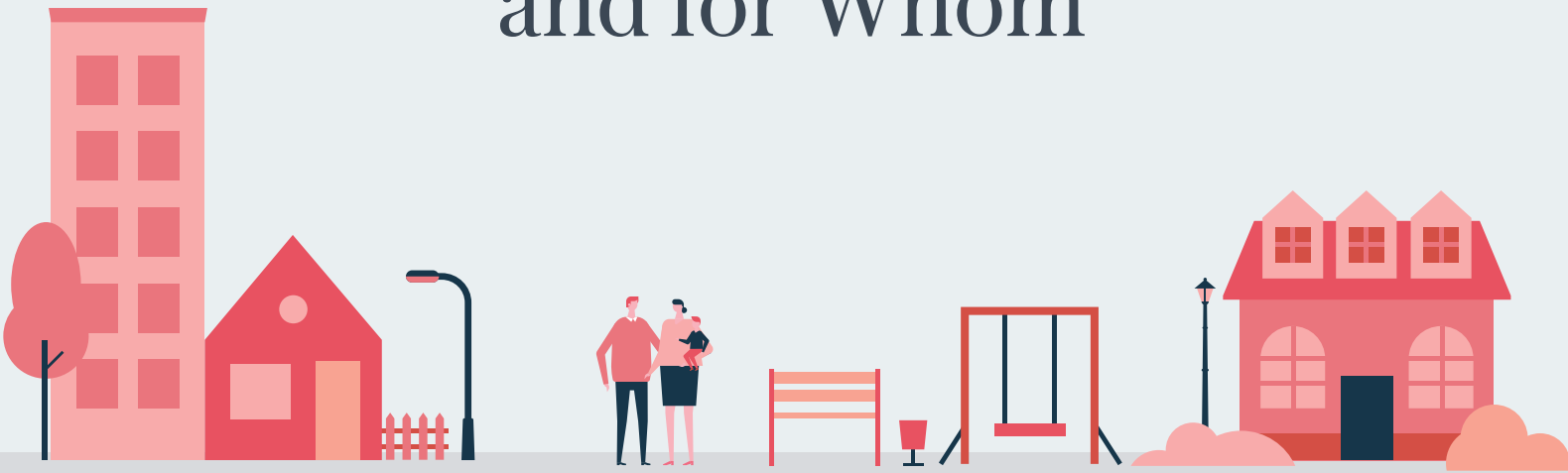
### Looking Forward

By pre-zoning thousands of properties and modernizing its development regulations, Hamilton’s land use policy and zoning is committed to the creation of complete, transit-supportive communities, without expanding its urban boundary. These zoning updates mark a substantive step towards aligning Hamilton’s land use framework with contemporary housing needs and provincial policy direction. ■■



Mallory Smith, MCIP, RPP, is a Senior Planner with the City of Hamilton, working on zoning bylaw reform.

# Revisiting Why We Plan Healthy, Liveable Communities and for Whom



**AUTHOR**  
MADELINE GIBSON, RPP

Are we taking the impact of our urban design on the next generation seriously? Here are some considerations for mitigating risk and creating liveable communities by focusing our planning efforts on developing environments where children thrive.

In 2023, and later in 2025, I was fortunate enough to become a parent of two (under two!) children. The experience opened me up to a new way of viewing the world around me. Like many new parents, I was reading all the latest parenting books. However, unlike many new parents, I couldn't stop connecting my new-found knowledge with urban planning. Through my reading, it became very clear that our urban environment has such a deep and profound impact on our ability to raise resilient, healthy

children, and planning for the healthy development of our children is paramount to combatting some of today's biggest challenges.

## Looking at the Risks

In January 2026, the World Economic Forum released a risk report, citing the top short-term and long-term risks facing society today. In the short-term (two years), the top three risks are geoeconomic confrontations,

misinformation and disinformation, and societal polarization. In the long-term (10 years), the top three risks are extreme weather events, biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse, and critical change to earth systems. With seven in 10 people expected to live in cities by 2050, I believe almost all of these risks can be mitigated by focusing our planning efforts on developing environments where our children, the next generation, thrive."

*"...top environmental threats children face today include traffic danger, air and noise pollution, and poor mental and physical health."*

In *Urban Playground: How Child-Friendly Planning and Design can Save Cities*, author Tim Gill notes that the top environmental threats children face today include traffic danger, air and noise pollution, and poor mental and physical health. He later goes on to quote a 2018 UNICEF report that states that for children, poorly planned urbanization can lead to unhealthy and unsafe environments, limited options for walking and playing, and limited connectivity.

I don't think this information comes as a surprise to planners, yet year after year, our children continue to be faced with these same threats. I can't help but wonder, are we actually taking the impact of our urban design on our children seriously? Do we truly value their well-being when it comes to planning our communities?

### Listening to the Children

Every year, my planning team and I go into our local elementary schools to engage with Grade 3s for World Town Planning Day. We hear a lot of great feedback from the students about what they love and don't love about their communities, but the experiences of two students have stayed with me.

One boy noted that he does not play inside on his technology as a first choice. He says



that he would like to play outside with his friends, but the park is too far away and his parents think that it's too unsafe for him to walk on his own, and his backyard is simply too small for him and his friends to do any real activities, so they relegate themselves to the basement to play video games.

Another student noted that she would like to walk to school but she doesn't feel safe. She noted that there are a lot of cars along the walk to her school, and she felt it was too dangerous, saying she was too small and she thought drivers wouldn't see her and may hit her. These revelations are a sad reality for a growing number of Ontario's children and a very stark difference to our own childhood experiences.

We must ask ourselves, what is the cost of planning where children don't feel safe, empowered, or motivated to go outside? More than we can afford.

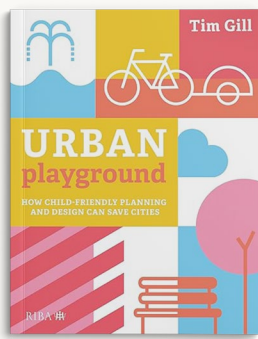
### Children Need Nature

The absence of nature and a decrease in time spent outdoors have an incredibly detrimental impact on our children's lives. In Richard Louv's book, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*, he notes that "Nature-deficit disorder describes the human costs of alienation from nature. Among them: diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, and higher rates of physical and emotional illness. This disorder can be detected in individuals, families, and communities."



A lack of outdoor time impacts the strength of our children's immune systems, their ability to focus and combat depression. It also deprives them of the all-important relationship to our natural world that we require as human beings.

Studies show that our children need frequent and easy access to the natural environment. Children, even at the youngest age, need access to natural light and fresh air. They need to be able to touch dirt, rocks, and water for the healthy development of their biological systems. They even benefit from hearing bird song.



## Reading Recommendations

For planners who want to read more about the impacts of our urban environment on the healthy development of our children, I recommend reading the following:

- *Urban Playground: How Child-Friendly Planning and Design can Save Cities* by Tim Gill
- *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* by Richard Louv
- *There's No Such Thing As Bad Weather: A Scandinavian Mom's Secrets for Raising Healthy, Resilient, and Confident Kids* by Linda Akeson McGurk

By incorporating the natural world into our neighbourhoods, not only can we build our children's (and our) understanding of the natural world, but we also reap the important community benefits of nature-based solutions in our efforts to combat the increasing risks of a changing climate.

In Linda Akeson-McGurk's, *There's No Such Thing As Bad Weather: A Scandinavian Mom's Secrets for Raising Healthy, Resilient, and Confident Kids*, she compares her Scandinavian hometown to her current American mid-west community, noting, "As my children grew older and I stood in many more deserted playgrounds, in summer, as well as winter, I started to realize that playing outdoors is not the norm here."

She goes on to quote the Nature Conservancy, stating that, by the time they reach their teens, only 10 per cent of American children report spending time outside every day. This is despite the clear research for both children and adults alike on the benefits of fresh air, walking, and being in the natural environment in general.

And there is another downside. When children don't feel safe or motivated to play outdoors, venture to the neighbourhood park, or walk to school, they miss out on important developmental opportunities. Louv notes that although a childhood with a lot of indoor (or back seat) time does reduce some dangers, other risks are heightened, including risks to physical and psychological health, risk to children's concept and perception of community, risk to self-confidence and the ability to discern true danger.

This applies to adults, too. When you spend a majority of your time in your house or in your car, your social connections become fewer and fewer. Children become less able to converse with their peers and adults start to only have discussions within their own echo chambers. We lose those informal neighbourhood relationships that keep communities strong. We start to feel uncomfortable with eye contact or even asking for help from others. We start to distrust one another.

### Adopting Child-Friendly Principles

The components of a healthy, liveable community are clear, and they are the same ones that impact the healthy development of our children. Unfortunately, in Ontario, we seem to be stuck in a system that prioritizes the personal vehicle above the pedestrian, a housing supply unsupportive of social connections, the detrimental bulldozing of mature natural spaces, and urban green spaces completely void of biodiversity. This is a trend throughout North America and no doubt beyond. It is also a likely contributing factor to the top risks identified in the World Economic Forum's 2026 Risk Report. As planners know all too well, our urban environments deeply impact and shape society around us.

Child-friendly development is not difficult. Simple principles can guide our communities to be better for everyone. Tim Gill's *Urban Playground: How Child-Friendly Planning and Design can Save Cities* does great job of compiling a toolkit on how we can better achieve child-friendly design in our communities.

**Our children need to be able to move around our neighbourhoods and communities with greater autonomy.** That means safety when walking and biking and options for public transit when our kids are older. This journey to autonomy builds critical thinking and problem-solving skills, it builds trust within our neighbours and neighbourhoods, it strengthens our social networks and communities at large.

**Our children need easy access to the outdoors and greater engagement with our natural environment.** Not only will this support the healthy development of our children, but it will also contribute to a healthier community all round. Increasing biodiversity and naturalized areas enhances our resiliency by way of nature-based solutions in the face of climate change. This is a win-win-win situation for us, the environment, and our wallets.

In the words of Tim Gill, "Healthier children create happier, stronger communities and greener neighbourhoods, delivering more resilient local economies."

Rather than focusing on the components of a healthy and liveable community, let's revisit why we do what we do. Ultimately, we planners strive to improve the liveability and well-being of the people for whom we plan. The healthy development of our children should be our driving force. ■■



**Madeline Gibson** (Naidu), MCIP, RPP, is a Senior Planner with the Town of New Tecumseth.

# Rebuilding Health Where We Live

## A Smarter Path to Complete Communities



Across Canada, most communities were built in an era when convenience meant a car. Post-war planning favoured single-family zoning, wide arterials, and distant destinations, inadvertently creating pedestrian-hostile environments. These neighbourhoods have been silently shaping our health ever since.

**AUTHORS**

ROSALINE HILL, RPP  
ALISON DRAINIE

Neighbourhood design has a quiet but profound impact on public health. The neighbourhoods designed in the post-war era resulted in landscapes that discourage physical activity, limit social connection, and contribute to rising rates of chronic disease and social isolation.

Yet many of these same neighbourhoods hold enormous potential for healthy, sustainable renewal. By reimagining low-rise areas with mid-density infill, communities can evolve naturally into places where people prefer a short walk over a car ride, bike to pick up groceries, chat with neighbours on the way to school, or grab a coffee before catching the bus.



Credit: BuildingIN.ca

Planners often call this creating “complete communities,” though other terms — New Urbanism, transit-oriented development, 20-minute cities — share the same goal: more density, better walkability, and less car dependence.

### Why Density Matters for Health

Research continues to confirm what many planners have long understood: our physical environments shape our physical health. A University of Toronto review of more than 170 studies found consistent evidence that where walking and cycling are impractical, there’s less physical activity and increased risk of diabetes and obesity.<sup>1</sup> In other words, walkable design is a foundation for public health.

But creating walkable neighbourhoods doesn’t happen by chance — it requires the right urban structure. An influential U.S. study across Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco revealed that the denser the neighbourhood, the less people drive. In all three cities, higher residential density

correlated with fewer cars per household and far lower vehicle miles travelled.<sup>2</sup> With homes, shops, schools, and daily needs closer together, active transportation naturally replaces short car trips and turns health into a built-in feature of everyday life.

### Can We Retrofit Health into Our Existing Neighbourhoods?

Today, about two-thirds of Canadians live in low-density neighbourhoods.<sup>3</sup> If density is key to creating complete, walkable communities, the real question is: how can we add density to low-rise neighbourhoods without eroding what residents love about them?

Rather than allowing mid- and high-rise buildings that clash with neighbourhood character, we can add thoughtful, low-rise infill that’s up to three-storeys in height. Done well, it can double or even triple the local population without erasing a community’s sense of place. This approach delivers a cascade of benefits:

- More foot traffic to support small businesses
- Higher and more reliable transit ridership
- A stronger municipal tax base to fund parks, trees, and active transportation

Many municipalities are on the right track, already embedding complete community principles in their official plans and treating healthy neighbourhoods as tangible policy goals. But policies cannot succeed without the density that supports corner stores, cafés, and frequent transit. As Jan Gehl reminds us, urban form dictates behaviour: more room for cars draws traffic; more for people sparks public life. The same holds true for our low-rise streets: plan for modest density and walkable, healthy communities will follow.

### How to Get Neighbourhood Density Right

Most older neighbourhoods across Canada are ripe for renewal through targeted mid-density infill, but success



Low-rise infill can be designed to fit with the neighbourhood character. Credit: BuildingIN.ca

“  
... higher residential density correlated with fewer cars per household and far lower vehicle miles travelled.



Credit: BuildingIN.ca



Credit: BuildingIN.ca

“

Plan for modest density and walkable, healthy communities will follow.

depends on precision and design sensitivity. When infill is allowed everywhere, it can fuel NIMBY tension, add strain to existing infrastructure, and produce boxy, out-of-scale projects. The municipalities that succeed will treat infill planning as an economic and urban design exercise grounded in market realities and guided by evidence. Here’s how to make it work.

**Start with market forecasting, not trial and error:** Simplifying regulations or streamlining approvals means little if done in the dark. By forecasting development outcomes — using real data to understand the economics of what’s actually likely to get built — planners can reverse-engineer reforms that hit housing targets, then refine them through an iterative process. Most planning departments lack the capacity for this kind of market analysis, and the economics of missing middle housing often fall outside a planner’s core training. Yet understanding these realities is essential for informed decision-making and ensuring upzoning policies succeed. Municipalities can partner with low-rise infill experts or add staff with development industry experience who understand the nuances of how regulation shapes a project’s financial feasibility.

**Target where intensification makes sense:** Infill cannot and should not happen everywhere. It needs to align with servicing, transit, and infrastructure capacity. Adding this layer of intelligence to growth management allows planners to connect land use, infrastructure, and investment in a coherent way.

Concentrating upzoning reforms where conditions are ideal for low-rise infill ensures resources are used effectively, while preserving stability in areas not yet ready for renewal.

**Zone the street façade, not just the structure:** Façade zoning should never be an afterthought. Strategic zoning for entrances, glazing, landscaping, and architectural articulation helps new buildings blend into their surroundings and strengthen the street’s identity. What’s more, they’re interesting to walk past, making streets more inviting to walk along and drawing more people out on foot.

**Plan for transitional parking:** Parking is one of the toughest challenges in neighbourhood intensification, with space demands often clashing with the goals of green, walkable communities. In car-dependent areas, new residential projects that overlook parking often stall. As streets evolve to support walking and transit, parking needs decline. Transitional measures like short driveways, street permits, or temporary surface lots can bridge the gap and keep projects moving.

## Laying the Groundwork for Healthy, Happy Communities

Canada stands at a turning point for housing, where the long-imagined idea of complete, healthy communities is finally within reach. The opportunity before us is to move beyond the status quo of low-rise single family homes and narrow

definitions of typologies, embracing low-rise infill that fits the character of the street while welcoming more homes, more neighbours, and more daily life within walking distance.

This transformation will not happen by chance. It requires deliberate, evidence-based planning that aligns growth with market demand, infrastructure capacity, and façade zoning. Intensification must be strategic and sensitive, supported by clear standards and innovative housing approaches like modular and factory-built construction.

Behind every tree-lined street and lively corner café is the steady work of planners aligning bylaws, budgets, and political will to make healthier neighbourhoods possible. ■

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# Diversifying Farms in North Durham



Forsythe Family Farms - Pumpkins in Front of Green Barn

## AUTHORS

STACEY JIBB  
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CODY MORRISON

Rural municipalities often face criticism from the agricultural community for a lack of enabling permissions to diversify farms. Planners often find themselves providing concierge-style business services in addition to processing the farmer's development application and managing expectations.



Pefferlaw Creek Farms Maple Syrup - Production Area Interior

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... an opportunity to better support farm economic viability and succession planning while also streamlining the approval process.

Many municipal approaches to approving On-Farm Diversified Uses (OFDUs) and/or Agriculture-Related Uses (ARUs) require a costly zoning bylaw (ZBL) amendment and/or site plan approval before receiving a building permit. The Townships of Brock, Scugog, and Uxbridge, together with the Region of Durham, recognized an opportunity to better support farm economic viability and succession planning while also streamlining the approval process.

### North Durham Agriculture-Related and On-Farm Diversified Uses Study

In April 2024, WSP Canada Inc. (WSP) was retained to undertake a North Durham ARU and OFDU study with the aim of permitting ARUs and OFDUs as of right, and in doing so, support a thriving agricultural system. The project team consisted of WSP staff, Brock, Scugog, and Uxbridge staff, and Region of Durham economic development staff.

ARUs are defined as those farm-related commercial and farm-related industrial uses that are directly related to farm operations in the area, support agriculture, benefit from being in close proximity to farm operations, and provide direct products and/or services to farm operations as a primary activity. Examples of ARUs may include apple storage serving apple farms in the area; processing of products grown in the area; grain dryer for farm operations in the area; and flour mill for grain grown in the area.

OFDUs are defined as uses that are secondary to the principal agricultural use of the property and are limited in area. Examples of OFDUs may include value-added uses such as winery, cidery, cheese factory, bakery; agritourism uses such as a petting zoo, corn maze, limited on-farm accommodations; retail uses such as farm market, antique business, tack shop, café, small-scale event venue.

The Provincial Policy Statement (2020) and Provincial Planning Statement (2024) provide permissions for ARUs and OFDUs in prime agricultural areas and rural lands across Ontario. In most municipalities, a ZBL amendment is required at minimum to establish these uses. The goal of the study was to establish as-of-right permissions into the Townships' official plans (OPs) and ZBLs as well as develop new processes that make it easier for farmers to navigate the approvals process. Along with being consistent with the PPS, the proposed policies also have to conform to the Greenbelt Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and align with the Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas.

WSP's final recommendations were presented to and endorsed by the three Township Councils in 2025. At a high level, the recommendations included policy wording for OPs, ZBLs, and site plan control area bylaws to include definitions, permitted uses, and criteria that must be met to qualify as an ARU or OFDU.

The recommendations also included a tiered approach to site plan approval, including options for staff to exempt the proposal from site plan approval or require a minor or standard site plan approval.

The consultation summary and final recommendations from WSP can be found on Durham Region's website, [InvestDurham.ca/OnFarmDiversification](https://www.investdurham.ca/OnFarmDiversification).



Applewood Farm Winery Seagrave

## Official Plan Amendment and Zoning Bylaw Amendment

Each Township prepared amendments to their OP and ZBL to align with the WSP recommendations. A goal of the study was for the three Townships to have consistent regulations to permit ARUs and OFDUs, including permissions for small-scale event venues and limited on-farm accommodations.

Having consistent regulations has decreased the planner's time evaluating a proposal to ensure it meets provincial and OP policy and the provincial guidelines. Further, one of the key policy requirements to establish an OFDU is for the applicant to have a valid farm business registration number (FBRN) or equivalent to confirm an active agricultural operation on the property. The FBRN also ensures the applicant is the agricultural operator. The OP and ZBL amendments have removed barriers by providing as-of-right permissions for ARUs and OFDUs for active farm operations to assist farmers in benefitting from the intent of the PPS policies. The policies enable on-farm diversification opportunities which are critical to farm economic viability and succession planning while supporting rural economic development.

### Site Plan Control

The study also recommended updates to the Townships' site plan control areas bylaws to include a tiered approach for site plan approval for ARU and OFDU uses.

**Exempt:** To be considered exempt from site plan control, the proposal must result in negligible impacts and satisfy the as-of-right criteria in the OP and ZBL. Negligible impacts may include consideration for parking, expected traffic, available on-site servicing capacity, available municipal infrastructure such as roads, emergency services and utilities, site context, location of the use on the site, operating hours, surrounding uses, and seasonality.

**Minor Site Plan Approval:** A minor site plan process would apply in instances where the proposed use is compatible with the agricultural area, and the modifications to the property are limited in size, location, and scale to limit the impact to the stormwater management, geotechnical engineering, grading, or traffic circulation and would not create nuisance that would impact surrounding properties. The applicant would be responsible for demonstrating to the Township's satisfaction that such impacts from the proposal and potential for nuisance are minimal or non-existent. If a minor site plan process is deemed appropriate for the use, the required reports, studies, and drawings are intended to be scoped. A letter of undertaking in lieu of a site plan agreement may be considered based on the complexity of the potential impacts of the proposed use.

**Standard Site Plan Approval:** A standard site plan process would apply for a more complex OFDU or ARU. It would require technical review of documents by the



Township and commenting agencies to ensure the proposal satisfies the OP, ZBL, and other applicable requirements. Site plan approval and a site plan agreement with conditions would be required.

### Implementation

Township and regional economic development staff recognized that there is benefit in having an early hands-on approach with farmers to help them understand what is required to establish an OFDU or ARU business. Since the OP and ZBL amendments provide as-of-right permissions, planning approvals may only play a small part in the creation of the business. As such, the Townships, together with regional agriculture and rural economic development staff, have tailored their business support services to help guide farmers from the outset of starting their business planning. The project team developed key tools and processes to streamline the review and approval process.

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The Townships scaled back their planning application fees for ARUs and OFDUs to enhance agricultural viability through farm diversification.



Buzzing Bees Adventure Farm - Corn Maze



## Application Toolkit

A key outcome of the study was to develop an application toolkit to assist applicants at the outset with preparing their business plan as well as better understand the process and requirements to establish their business. The toolkit includes a list of questions for the applicant to complete with the aim of assisting them with understanding as-of-right policies and criteria and recognizing what is considered an appropriate size and scale for the business. The toolkit also assists staff and agencies with reviewing the proposal, determining requirements early, and tailoring support services and resources. The application toolkit is available at [InvestDurham.ca/OnFarmDiversification](http://InvestDurham.ca/OnFarmDiversification).

### Process for Pre-Application Meeting

One of the ways staff improved the evaluation process for a proposed ARU or OFDU and lessened the heavy lifting done previously by the planner is to have a pre-application meeting with applicants. These “Get Ready” style meetings allow the applicants to meet with key technical staff (planner, economic development, CBO, health department, public works, MTO, conservation authority) to discuss their business idea, determine if the proposed use would be classified as an ARU or OFDU, and provide business support and resources. An applicant is asked to complete a checklist before meeting with staff who then outline the applicable process and any fees, including development charges, for the applicant.

In instances where the planner deems the proposal to be exempt from site plan approval, the applicant would proceed with obtaining a building permit and other permits and/or business licenses. When a proposal requires approval under the *Planning Act* (e.g. OP amendment, ZBL

amendment, or standard or minor site plan approval), the applicant would be encouraged to request a typical pre-consultation meeting.

### Further Enhancements

The Township and the region economic development staff also recognized other barriers for farmers wanting to create OFDUs and ARUs, including costly application fees, road widening requirements, and payment of development charges and implemented further changes to processes.

**Planning Fees Bylaw:** The Township scaled back their planning application fees for ARUs and OFDUs to enhance agricultural viability through farm diversification. The pre-application meeting and concierge-style services are free as a commitment to supporting rural economic development.

**Road Widening (Township and Regional):** Section 41 of the *Planning Act* allows a municipality to acquire land as a condition of site plan approval to ensure future growth can be accommodated, improve public safety, and support transportation needs. Road improvements, including widening of a road, in rural areas can occur but are infrequent. The Township of Scugog waived road widening requirements for OFDUs and ARUs requiring minor or standard site plan approval when a road widening is deemed to be impractical or unnecessary.

**Development Charges (Township and Regional):** Although the development charge bylaw update was beyond the scope of the study, it is recognized that fairness in the property tax system is important and should support the agricultural nature of ARUs and OFDUs. Scugog, Brock, and the Region of Durham have committed to reviewing the development charges applicable for OFDUs and ARUs through the next development charge background studies.

In summary, the Townships of Brock, Scugog, and Uxbridge and Region of Durham are excited to continue to work with new and existing agricultural operators on diversifying their farm



businesses. As-of-right, consistent policy regulations have streamlined the approval process for planners and applicants. Agriculture is the key economic driver for the three Townships in North Durham; ensuring family farms remain viable through permissive ARU and OFDU policies can help to support the broader rural economy.

*The Townships Brock, Scugog, and Uxbridge and the Region of Durham would like to thank WSP Canada Inc. for their support with the study, application toolkit, and recommendations for consistent policies across the three Townships. Thank you to Allison De Vos, Lori Talling, and Michael Scott for their input on this project. ■*



**Stacey Jibb** is the Manager of Agriculture and Rural Economic Development for the Region of Durham. **Robin Prentice**, MCIP, RPP, is the Director of Development Services for the Township of Brock. **Valerie Hendry**, MCIP, RPP, is the Manager of Planning for the Township of Scugog. **Vanessa Reusser**, MCIP, RPP, is the Principal Planner for the Township of Scugog. **Cody Morrison** is the Chief Planner for the Township of Uxbridge.

# Community Design Lab

## How Residents Helped Reshape Guelph's St. George's Square

Downtown Guelph is undergoing a once-in-a-generation transformation to replace and upgrade underground infrastructure, while above ground, roads, sidewalks, and public spaces will be upgraded. Right in the middle of the first part of the project is St. George's Square, the heart of Downtown Guelph.

### AUTHORS

SONJA MACDONALD  
PAUL SHAKER, RPP

St. George's Square (the Square) is the centre of the community, where people meet, shop, and celebrate. As the Square is located at the centre of the first phase of the Downtown Infrastructure Renewal Project, the City of Guelph has included its redevelopment as part of the overall project. This has given residents a unique opportunity to reimagine how people can experience this important space. The project team used an innovative participatory process to help residents shape the redesign of their town square.

### History of St. George's Square

Located at the mid-point of Wyndham Street North, St. George's Square has a long history of change. It was originally designed by John Galt in 1827 as the home of the first St. George's Church, erected in 1833-4 and later moved to Woolwich Street in 1872. With the removal of the church, the Square, which is a perfect 80 metre by 80 metre square, was redeveloped through the later part of the 19th century into the early 20th century. Changes included installing the Blacksmith Fountain, concrete sidewalks, streetcar tracks, underground sewers, and paving blocks.



By the mid-20th century, the current Modernist buildings design was introduced, replacing the mid-late Victorian architectural fabric. This was followed in the 1980s with the reconstruction of the Square and enclosure of part of Quebec Street to become a mall. The iconic Family Fountain was also installed.

The St. George's Square study area for the redevelopment project includes the three areas on all sides of the roads: the plaza in front of the Old Quebec Street mall, the area in front of the post office, and the southwest plaza where concerts and activities happen throughout the year.

### Design Context

Six core principles, developed as part of the Downtown Streetscape Manual, were used to guide the redesign of the Square: support local business and daily activities, unify the square, less is more, make it beautiful, make it comfortable, and improve connections to other downtown anchors.

To help frame discussion, a series of design opportunities were identified, including better connecting separated areas and giving more priority to pedestrians moving through the space. In addition, there was an opportunity to better improve safety and open up sightlines as some views are currently blocked. Further, a redesign could provide more open and flexible space for



Left: Historic St. George's Square. Credit: Guelph Museums

Bottom: Final Concept St. George's Square. Credit: GSP Group

events and programming, and it could make the space comfortable by providing more shade, seating, and accessible elements.

Design constraints were also identified, including the slope and elevation throughout the area, as well as the need to include the Family Fountain. Additionally, the current roads and major intersection separate sections of the Square, breaking the space up and making it less cohesive.

### Interactive Community Engagement

Throughout 2024 and 2025, the City of Guelph undertook engagement activities around the proposed redesign of the Square. This included attending community

events, conducting a community survey, hosting onsite tours with stakeholders, construction cafés, and a number of in-person open houses.

In addition, innovative virtual engagement was undertaken, including a Community Design Lab, which was launched to gather ideas from residents, as well as virtual open houses, which provided opportunities for the public to evaluate and refine design concepts.

Participants could also share ideas from elsewhere, including photos and links to resources that could explain design ideas. After all the pinpointed ideas were shared for redesigning the Square, the results were then organized by theme and a



## Design Context

Six core principles, developed as part of the Downtown Streetscape Manual, were used to guide the redesign of the Square:

- 01 Support local business and daily activities
- 02 Unify the Square
- 03 Less is more
- 04 Make it beautiful
- 05 Make it comfortable
- 06 Improve connections to other downtown anchors

# Community Design Lab

A Community Design Lab is a spatial engagement tool that allows participants to identify locations in and around the study area and to share ideas or concerns about the space as it currently exists as well as identify opportunities for a redesign.

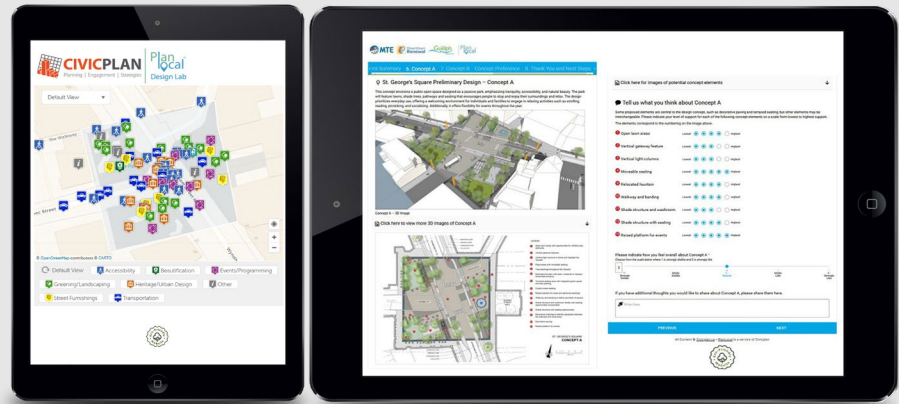


Photo by Civicplan

Design Lab results summary was provided to the designers to help inform concept development.

Following the Community Design Lab, preliminary designs were presented in a virtual open house and at an in-person open house, providing participants the opportunity to view preliminary concepts and provide feedback. Participants were able to evaluate specific design factors such as gateway features, seating and patios, lighting, shade structures, paving, event spaces, greening, and a proposed play area.

*"What resulted was a final concept that directly addressed and/or incorporated ideas from residents."*

The engagement measured support between preliminary concepts as well as the specific design features within concepts. The results were fed back into the design process which led to a final concept that was improved based on the Design Lab and open house evaluation feedback.

## How Public Engagement Shaped the Final Design

When presenting the final concept, designers identified the specific elements that had been improved based on public input. This included:

- Developing shade structures to reflect the theme of community, building from the agricultural roots of the city through potential patterns and colour overhead. Additional temporary shade features, like large-scale umbrellas (canopies), are proposed for the space. These can be moved throughout the Square to enhance pedestrian comfort during day-to-day use or for special events.
- Changes to the planter layouts to provide seating for pedestrians and adequate soil volumes for trees, while opening up more space for moveable furnishings and programming for pedestrians.
- Finalizing the relocation of the fountain. The sculpture and water display of the fountain will remain the same, but the size and look of the lower basin may change to better incorporate the fountain into the space in front of the Old Quebec Street Mall.
- The provision of moveable bollards between the sidewalk and street that can be moved to close off Quebec Street for larger special events in the Square.
- The proposed introduction of reclaimed heritage materials, including limestone, into the terraced seat-walls and stairways, while still maintaining an accessible space for all.
- Changes to the proposed footprint of the play area to provide a climbable placemaking structure while balancing the need for patios or special events space in the southwest part of the Square.
- Improvements to the lighting for the space including a mix of light standards, inset wall lighting, and lighting for shade

structures and the fountain to increase visibility and highlight features during evening hours.

- Gateway elements which contribute to the branding of the space, while providing opportunity for signage and wayfinding.

Overall, the engagement process allowed residents to actively participate in the redesign of this important civic space. Residents were able to help shape the context through the Community Design Lab, identifying opportunities and ideas for design, then through the evaluation of elements in preliminary concepts. What resulted was a final concept that directly addressed and/or incorporated ideas from residents.

Resident feedback was again expanded in the final approvals at Council, when a proposal to commemorate Robert Munch's contribution to this community was adopted through the addition of a placemaking feature in the play area that reflects his children's literature.

Beyond making St. George's Square an area that is vibrant, clean, and safe for all, residents helped design a legacy space that will be a vital part of Guelph for decades to come. ■■■

Sonja Macdonald and Paul Shaker, MCIP, RPP, are Principals with Civicplan, a Hamilton-based planning consultancy.

# Reintroducing MIPOC

## The Mentorship Initiative for Indigenous and Planners of Colour



Healthy, liveable communities show up in the everyday. Can you walk to a store without feeling unsafe? Can your kids get to a park without a car? Does a public space feel welcoming? The way we design communities can support or limit daily movement and well-being.

### AUTHORS

ELIJAH BAWUAH, NESOCHI CHINWUBA, NATALIA ÁLVAREZ QUINTERO, IMAN YOUSUF

The Public Health Agency of Canada summarizes that people are more physically active in communities with mixed land use, well-connected street networks, and higher residential density than in places designed for automobile dependence.<sup>1</sup> And a healthy cities approach highlighted by the World Health Organization ties healthier urban living to choices that improve air quality and promote physical activity, like shifting from car trips to walking and cycling where possible.<sup>2</sup>

So where does Mentorship Initiative for Indigenous and Planners of Colour (MIPOC) fit into that? Here's the honest answer: it's not about representation "for the sake of representation." It's about planning competence and being able to read a place with more than one lens and to run engagement in ways that work.

The same street can feel different depending on your gender, disability, age, religion, language, migration story, or whether you've ever been targeted in a public space. Those experiences can change what you notice, what you ask, and how you interpret feedback. MIPOC is explicit that equity work includes empowering those with intersecting and diverse identities not flattening people into a single label.

Canadian planning data helps explain why this still matters right now. In the Canadian Institute of Planners 2024 EDI Insight Survey,<sup>3</sup> the largest group of respondents identified as white (67.9 per cent), while 17.4 per cent identified as people of colour. The same report found an overall inclusion score of 73.3 per cent, with "Voice" scoring lowest. It also notes that groups reporting

lower inclusion include people of colour, Indigenous respondents, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ respondents, and immigrants. These gaps are exactly where mentorship and community infrastructure can make a practical difference.

*"MIPOC is explicit that equity work includes empowering those with intersecting and diverse identities not flattening people into a single label."*

## How MIPOC Makes a Difference

MIPOC was established in 2019 because planning has a significant impact on people's lives and well-being, yet communities facing the most harm have been under-represented in a profession that must act on behalf of the public. MIPOC's own story is straightforward: it provides a social and professional networking infrastructure, connecting Indigenous, Black, and other planners of colour to skills development and peer mentorship.

The model is structured and specific. MIPOC runs a six-month cohort (January to June) that focuses on relationship-building, community-building events, and professional development. It's also clear about outcomes: employment can happen, but the program is not meant to lead mentees directly to employment. Instead, it's meant to expand insight and networks.

Mentees commit to six months with skills and professional development workshops led by experienced and respected city-building professionals. Overall, it's majorly volunteer-run with passionate planners operating the organization and working hard to continue its growth, because MIPOC understands most workers with a mentor say it's helpful for career advancement, skill-building, managing difficult situations, and job satisfaction.<sup>4</sup>

MIPOC also does community professional development in a real, grounded way. In December 2025, MIPOC hosted a meet and network event at the University of Toronto, designed to bring together students, early-career professionals, and established planners to share experiences through speed networking, a networking bingo icebreaker, and a "Community Vision Wall."

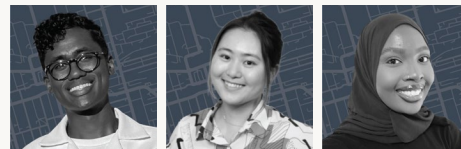
In 2023, the City of Markham and MIPOC launched a partnership creating two four-month internships, supported by mentorship and exposure to real planning work.<sup>5</sup> By late 2025, concrete outcomes included two interns transitioning into full-time roles (one with Markham and one with a neighbouring township) and two participants pursuing further education.<sup>6</sup> In February 2026, the City of Markham entered its third cohort into the internship program, which included two MIPOC volunteers, reflecting how the initiative is driven by people who share the lived experiences and intersectional identities of the community they support.

Support is growing. Ontario Professional Planners Institute announced financial support to recruit a MIPOC mentorship coordinator, with the Black Planning Project hosting the role focused on program administration, recruitment coordination, events, and outreach.<sup>7</sup>

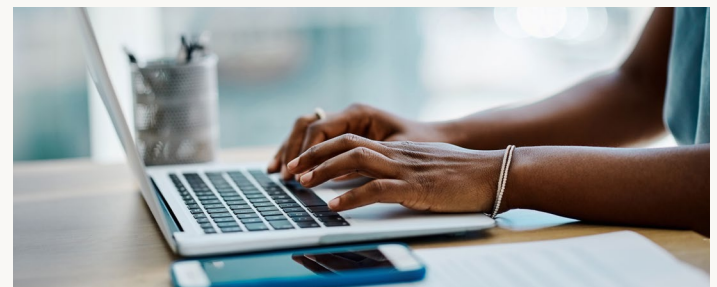
If you're skeptical of organizations like this, that's fair. We ask that you remember that MIPOC's case is simple: better planning comes from strong skills and deeper context. When the profession builds pathways for Indigenous, Black, and other planners of colour, recognizing the full, intersectional lives people carry, it strengthens how we listen, how we design, and how we deliver communities that are genuinely healthy and liveable. ■■

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Elijah Bawuah, Nesochi Chinwuba (not pictured), Natalia Álvarez Quintero, and Iman Yousuf are all members of the MIPOC team.



## Meet MIPOC Team Members

Learn more about MIPOC by reading stories from the team that recount their experiences with the organization and their passion for being involved. Planning Exchange blog: [ontarioplanners.ca/blog/planning-exchange/posts/meet-some-of-the-people-behind-the-mentorship-initiative-of-indigenous-and-planners-of-colour-miipoc/](https://ontarioplanners.ca/blog/planning-exchange/posts/meet-some-of-the-people-behind-the-mentorship-initiative-of-indigenous-and-planners-of-colour-miipoc/)

# Land Use Planning for Agricultural Prosperity

## Building Resilience in a Time of Uncertainty



**AUTHOR**

WAYNE CALDWELL, RPP

Planning decisions, often made thoughtfully and with the best of intentions, can profoundly influence whether farm families are able to adapt, invest, and thrive. When planning frameworks evolve, they allow for diversification and renewal, supporting economic prosperity and resilience.

Early in my career, I received a phone call from a farmer who wanted to store boats in his barn — not just one, but several, as a small commercial venture. At the time, there was no policy framework to allow such a use. I can still recall thinking, “Please don’t ask the question.” But of course, the question came: “Can I do that?”

The answer, regrettably, was that it wasn’t permitted under the official plan or zoning bylaw as they were written at the time.

Today, however, we would look to the agricultural guidelines provided by OMAFA and see that there is now a clear framework for such activity. With support

from the province, local official plans and zoning bylaws can now be more flexible, recognizing these ventures as legitimate on-farm diversified uses. Such flexibility allows municipalities to accommodate innovative business ideas while still upholding the principle of keeping agricultural land in agricultural use.

Beyond this short story lies a larger truth: when planning frameworks evolve, they allow for diversification and renewal — supporting economic prosperity and resilience. This flexibility is especially important for smaller farms, which often need creative ways to supplement income and remain viable.

## Why Planning Matters

This anecdote may seem simple, but it captures the central role of planning in shaping the future of agriculture. Planning decisions—often made thoughtfully and with the best of intentions—can profoundly influence whether farm families are able to adapt, invest, and thrive.

For agriculture, good planning means keeping agricultural areas agricultural—maintaining a clear focus on the land's primary purpose while allowing appropriate flexibility for on-farm innovation. It means ensuring that policies are grounded in evidence, guided by local realities, and informed by those who work the land. Good planning promotes fairness and consistency in decision-making so that similar farms are treated in similar ways, regardless of size or location.

It also means recognizing that the long-term viability of farming depends as much on local planning frameworks as it does on markets, weather, or technology. When plans are clear, fair, and forward-looking, they give farmers the confidence to invest, diversify, and adapt. When they are too rigid or uncertain, they can limit opportunity and discourage innovation. The best planning balances protection with possibility—safeguarding farmland while enabling the people who farm it to prosper.

Over the years, I have come to recognize several reasons why planning is vital to Ontario's agricultural prosperity.

**It shapes the future of agriculture by protecting farmland and defining how rural lands evolve.** Through official plans, zoning, and community dialogue, planning establishes where farming will continue

and where growth will occur. This clarity not only preserves the land base but also provides the confidence farmers need to invest in the long term.

**It gives priority to agriculture in provincial and local policy, ensuring that farming of all sizes and forms remains viable.**

From family farms to larger operations, a strong policy framework recognizes agriculture as an economic engine and a cultural cornerstone. It also ensures that other land uses are planned in ways that complement, rather than conflict with, agricultural activity.

**It offers stability and fairness, treating similar operations consistently and reducing uncertainty in the approvals process.** Predictable planning decisions help farmers plan for the future, make investments, and transfer operations between generations. Fairness also builds trust between the agricultural community and local government—a trust that is essential when new challenges arise.

**It sustains the environment, recognizing that healthy soil, water, and ecosystems are the foundation of long-term agricultural success.** Good planning integrates environmental protection with agricultural production, ensuring that conservation and cultivation move hand in hand. Thoughtful land use policies support climate resilience, biodiversity, and the stewardship practices that keep the land productive for generations to come.

**It provides a framework for collaboration, helping rural and urban interests find common ground.** Planning creates a forum where farmers, residents, and decision-makers can share perspectives and negotiate solutions. It encourages

understanding between those who produce our food and those who rely on it, linking community well-being to the success of local agriculture.

**Ultimately, it creates opportunity, giving farm families the ability to diversify, innovate, and pass operations on to future generations.** When planning is forward-looking and flexible, it supports new activities, agri-food businesses, and on-farm enterprises. It ensures that the next generation of farmers can build a livelihood on the same land—adapted to new markets, technologies, and community needs.

## Planning in Practice: Responding to Uncertainty

Recently, I was invited to speak in Dufferin County about the impacts of tariffs on agriculture and how they connect to economic development, growth, and prosperity on farms—and, ultimately, to land use planning (that presentation can be viewed at: [dufferincounty.ca/economic-development/tariff-response-and-business-resources/](http://dufferincounty.ca/economic-development/tariff-response-and-business-resources/)). That discussion reinforced how external pressures such as global trade, shifting markets, and climate-related disruptions intersect with local planning frameworks.

The global context for agriculture has become increasingly unpredictable. Tariffs, supply chain disruptions, and extreme weather events expose vulnerabilities that are often invisible until they surface. In this environment, planning provides a measure of stability and resilience. Thoughtful land use policies can help farmers adapt by supporting diversification, improving access to local markets, and encouraging investment in agricultural infrastructure.

Drawing from recent work with municipalities and farm organizations, several key directions stand out.

**Support On-Farm Diversified Uses:** Allow and encourage small-scale processing, retail, and agritourism activities that add value while keeping the land in production. On-farm diversification—whether through bakeries, farm markets, or small processing ventures—creates local jobs,

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... the long-term viability of farming depends as much on local planning frameworks as it does on markets, weather, or technology.

strengthens rural economies, and provides farmers with secondary income streams that improve business stability. Municipal zoning frameworks that clearly define and support these uses can turn underused buildings or heritage barns into productive community assets.

**Facilitate Farm Worker and Family Housing:** Simplify approvals for housing that supports farm labour needs, while maintaining the primacy of agriculture on the parcel. Reliable and accessible housing for seasonal or year-round workers is critical to the success of many farms yet remains a challenge in rural Ontario. Policies that streamline approvals, clarify definitions, and provide flexibility for multi-generational housing help sustain farm operations while reinforcing the human side of agriculture.

**Encourage Local and Domestic Markets:** Strengthen connections between local producers and nearby consumers, reducing reliance on distant processors and global supply chains. Local food hubs, year-round farmers' markets, and cooperative storage or distribution facilities can improve market access and help producers capture a greater share of the food dollar. Supporting short supply chains also builds resilience against global disruptions while reinforcing community self-reliance.

**Promote Adaptive Agricultural Infrastructure:** Ensure that zoning and building policies accommodate investment in essential farm infrastructure such as storage, processing, and climate-controlled facilities. Infrastructure like cold storage, grain drying systems, greenhouses, and controlled-environment buildings helps farms manage costs, extend the growing season, and reduce environmental risk. When planning frameworks enable these improvements — through flexible setbacks, modern design standards, and clear permitting processes — they create long-term benefits for both the farm and the surrounding community.

**Protect Prime Farmland While Enabling Flexibility:** Maintain strong protection under the PPS and Greenbelt Plan but allow complementary uses that sustain farming over time. This balance ensures



that farmland remains the foundation of the agricultural system while allowing adaptive re-use, innovation, and small-scale economic activity that strengthens viability. The goal is to protect the land base without isolating it from the evolving realities of modern agriculture.

These directions reflect a philosophy that is both protective and pragmatic. Agriculture is an economic driver, but it is also a way of life — one that requires adaptability to endure.

Many examples from across Ontario demonstrate how thoughtful land use policy strengthens agricultural resilience, from local processing and on-farm diversification to Agricultural Impact Assessments to guide development. Together, these tools show how well-designed policy translates into on-the-ground prosperity.

From those experiences, a number of lessons emerge for planners, policymakers, and communities striving to support agriculture.

## Lessons for Planners and Policymakers

Through experience and collaboration, several lessons have become clear.

**Listen and Learn:** The foundation of good agricultural planning lies in genuine engagement with farmers and rural residents. Listening carefully to those who work the land ensures that policies are rooted in lived experience rather than assumptions. Farmers bring practical knowledge about soil, drainage, markets, and regulations — insights that are essential to sound decision-making. When municipalities make time to consult meaningfully, the result is policy that feels fair, realistic, and supported by the community it serves.

**Plan with Purpose:** Planning for agriculture means applying an agricultural lens to every policy decision — from infrastructure and housing to natural heritage and economic development. It requires asking, how will this affect farming? And does it help keep agricultural areas agricultural? Integrating agriculture into the broader policy

framework helps avoid unintended conflicts and creates a more coherent approach to rural growth and conservation. Clear, consistent policies give farmers the confidence to invest and innovate.

**Protect and Connect:** Protecting farmland remains essential, but protection alone is not enough. Farmland must also be connected — to infrastructure, to processors, to local food systems, and to the communities that depend on it. Safeguarding contiguous blocks of prime agricultural land helps sustain viability, while linkages to markets and transportation networks ensure that farming continues as a living industry, not a preserved landscape. Strength in agriculture comes from both stability and connectivity.

**Collaborate and Adapt:** Rural communities thrive when they embrace collaboration and flexibility. Managing land-use conflict through dialogue allows neighbours and land users to find practical solutions rather than rigid positions. As markets, technology, and environmental pressures evolve, planning frameworks must also adapt. Flexible policies can support innovation in on-farm diversification, emerging activities, and new business models, ensuring that agriculture remains resilient and responsive to change.

**Evaluate and Invest:** Strong planning includes evaluating how non-farm development affects agriculture through tools such as Agricultural Impact

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## Tariffs, supply chain disruptions, and extreme weather events expose vulnerabilities that are often invisible until they surface.

**Assessments.** These assessments promote balanced decisions and protect the long-term viability of farming operations. At the same time, municipalities and the province must invest in the infrastructure that supports agriculture — roads that move goods to market, broadband that connects businesses, and drainage and water systems that sustain productivity. Thoughtful investment reinforces the economic backbone of rural Ontario.

**Sustain Rural Communities:** Finally, successful agricultural planning depends on strong rural communities. Villages and small towns provide the services, housing, and social fabric that make rural living viable. Supporting main-street revitalization, encouraging modest housing growth, and maintaining essential services like schools, healthcare, and recreation ensures that farming families have places to live, work, and belong. A thriving countryside is inseparable from a thriving agricultural sector.

### Planning as Partnership

Agriculture, at its heart, is about partnership — between farmers and the land, between rural and urban communities, and between all levels of government that shape the framework within which agriculture thrives. Earlier this year in Dufferin County, when the discussion turned to tariffs and their effect on farm viability, the underlying theme was not only about trade. It was about how local planning can respond to global pressures. When markets shift, when supply chains falter, or when the climate itself becomes unpredictable, planning can provide the steadiness that allows agriculture to adapt.

That partnership depends on mutual understanding and shared purpose. Planners bring a capacity for long-term vision, coordination, and balance; farmers bring deep knowledge of the land and the realities of production. When those perspectives meet — around council tables, at community meetings, or through ongoing dialogue — the result is stronger policy and more resilient communities.

Planning cannot solve every challenge facing agriculture, but it can create the conditions for success. It can protect the land base, enable innovation, and give farm families the confidence to invest in their future. In doing so, it supports not just the prosperity of farmers, but the health, sustainability, and vitality of Ontario's rural communities. ■



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# Planning Student Projects

Students in Ontario's six accredited planning programs 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.



University of Guelph  
School of Environmental Design and Rural Development

## Linking Community Gardens with Schools in Northern Ontario First Nations Communities

This applied planning research project fosters partnerships between community gardens and local schools, strengthening planning activities for food sovereignty, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and youth engagement through hands-on growing, harvesting, and curriculum-linked activities. Linking school partnerships with community gardens supports local food systems, land use planning, and social infrastructure in remote Indigenous regions.

Students: Yue Yen, Camilo Jimenez, Tristan Cook  
Faculty Advisor: Silvia Sarapura

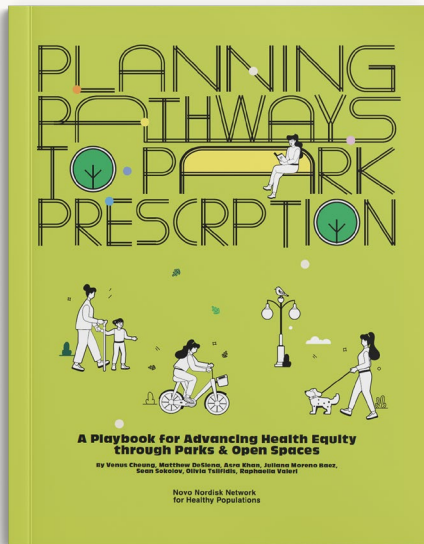


University of Toronto  
Planning Program, Department of Geography and Planning

## A Vision for Flemingdon Park

Flemingdon Park's transformation reimagines the "tower in the park" neighbourhood as a connected, transit-oriented urban community. Four bold moves shape the vision: a safe, multimodal mobility network that fosters porous connectivity for all; vibrant community anchors and third places; an inviting, interconnected open space network rich with amenities; and a thoughtful height strategy delivering density supportive of transit while preserving the existing community character. The project retains neighbourhood identity while embracing meaningful change, repositioning Flemingdon Park within Toronto's evolving urban fabric.

Students: Isaac Sider-Echenberg, Charlotte Reed, Anna Stephenson, Ashwini Gadotoula  
Instructor: Sirous Ghanbarzadeh



Toronto Metropolitan University  
School of Urban and Regional Planning, Graduate Planning Studio

## Planning Pathways to a Park Prescription

Planning Pathways to a Park Prescription is a graduate planning studio project that reimagines parks and open spaces as vital social infrastructure for health, equity, and everyday well-being. Students developed an Equity-Informed Park Planning Framework that translates placemaking principles into practical tools for municipalities, spanning planning, design, engagement, and finance. Grounded in community knowledge, public health evidence, and climate resilience, the studio demonstrates how inclusive, community-scaled placemaking can be operationalized within real planning systems.

**Client:** Dr. Gillian Booth, Scientist, Map Centre for Urban Health Solutions, St. Michael's Hospital (Unity Health), Canada Research Chair in Policy Solutions for Diabetes Prevention and Management; Natalie McGlynn, Researcher, Map Centre for Urban Health Solutions, St. Michael's Hospital (Unity Health)  
**Students:** Raphaela Valeri, Asra Khan, Juliana Moreno Baez, Matthew DeSiena, Olivia Tsilfidis, Sean Sokolov, Venus Cheung  
**Supervisor:** Dr. Pamela Robinson, RPP, FCIP, Professor

Toronto Metropolitan University  
School of Urban and Regional Planning, Graduate Planning Studio

## Unlocking Public Land Value: Redevelopment of the McCleary District

In fall 2025, Lakefront Synergy, a studio group comprised of 13 TMU planning students, produced a development concept to maximize the potential of a vacant two-block site in Toronto's Port Lands. Their proposal advanced a complete-community framework emphasizing family-oriented rental housing, integrated production/interactive/creative cluster, and an Indigenous-centred public realm. Along with detailed design and mapping, the team delivered due diligence, massing study, market analysis, and feasibility testing in their presentation at CreateTO's downtown office.

**Client:** CreateTO's P. Arkilander, K. Barkman, T. Kanagathan  
**Students:** Alex Di-Carlo, Azhar Moolla, Brayden Zawalykut, Daniel Tagasa, Eisham Ghuman, Evelyn Romano, Gianluca Spagnolo, Leanne Crowe, Michelle Jacob, Psyche Li, Rebecca Jeon, Victor Kniat, Xiu Lin Amy Tan  
**Studio advisor:** Christine Wen





University of Waterloo  
School of Planning, PLAN 409 Urban Design Studio

## Victoria Hills Commercial Plaza: Reimagining Community Connectivity

This project reimagines the Victoria Hills Commercial Plaza in Kitchener as a vibrant, inclusive hub that prioritizes equitable growth, affordability, and community connectivity. The design integrates mixed-use development, green infrastructure, and active transportation networks to foster social interaction and environmental resilience. Through rigorous research and innovative design strategies, the team’s proposal demonstrates how underutilized commercial sites can transform into sustainable, people-centred spaces that strengthen neighbourhood identity and liveability.

Client: City of Kitchener  
Students: Christian Zollner, Ryan Yu, Haris Wilkinson, Suzanne Su  
Advisor: Dr. Luna Khirfan

York University  
Master of Environmental Studies, Planning

## Connections at The Village at Black Creek: A Future Reimagining

The Connections Project reconceptualizes The Village at Black Creek from a heritage site into a public community-led space, connecting four distinct urban landscapes: Jane-Finch, Downsview, York University, and Vaughan. Through a comparative analysis of public spaces across Toronto and inquiries into adjoined neighbourhood challenges, the team reimagined a new cultural and ecological trail-and-garden strategy. Alongside interwoven recommendations, the team’s vision reconnects northwestern Toronto’s fragmented histories and memories for more equitable and sustainable space.

Students: Em Kolodko, Aaron Joseph, Nikoo Aleyasin, Cristina Cacciola, Xinyu Cathy Lu, Sapthasvanaa Killewalavan, Natalie Koper, Anson Ho, Jaime Genest, Ian Weir  
Advisors: Ute Lehrer and Luisa Sotomayor, CITY Institute at York University; Wendy Rowney, Site Manager, TRCA; The Village at Black Creek



# Challenges and Barriers to Shared Electric Micromobility Use in Suburban Municipalities

**AUTHORS**

SAMUEL EVANS AND RAKTIM MITRA

Communities across Ontario face growing transportation challenges associated with automobile dependence and limited public transit service. Shared electric micromobility to support short trips and first/last-mile connections to transit is an increasingly popular consideration as part of a multi-modal solution.



Micromobility refers to lightweight vehicles designed for short trips and can be human-powered (such as bicycles) or electric (such as e-bikes and pedal-assisted e-scooters). The availability and use of shared electric micromobility — rentable dockless e-bikes and e-scooters typically operated by for-profit companies and accessed via phone applications — has grown rapidly across the U.S. and Canada, with 76 million trips in 2023.<sup>1</sup>

Dockless e-bike and pedal-assisted e-scooter systems, introduced in 2018, allow users to park devices anywhere within guidelines, improving convenience for short trips and first/last-mile travel. In Ontario, e-bikes speeds are limited to 32 km/h and e-scooters to 24 km/h with both restricted to motors under 500 watts.<sup>2,3,4</sup> By enabling short trips that might otherwise be taken using a car, e-micromobility may contribute to lower greenhouse gas emissions and reduced traffic congestion, which are closely linked to healthier communities.<sup>5,6</sup>

Ontario's provincial e-scooter pilot program, launched in 2019 and extended in 2024, has enabled municipalities to experiment with shared e-micromobility.<sup>7</sup>

*“Shared e-micromobility may offer significant opportunities for suburban communities to reduce automobile dependency, particularly where public transit service is limited and infrequent.”*

### Purpose of the Study

In Ontario, many suburban municipalities were the early adopters of shared e-micromobility systems. However, current international research on shared e-micromobility has largely focused on dense and mixed-use urban areas, while suburban contexts remain understudied. Shared e-micromobility may offer significant opportunities for suburban communities to reduce automobile dependency, particularly where public transit service is limited and infrequent. At the same time, suburban built environments may pose distinct barriers, limiting successful implementation and widespread use of these shared services.

In this context, we undertook an exploratory study to understand perceived challenges and barriers to using shared e-micromobility systems in suburban municipalities. Using a qualitative approach, our study foregrounds the perspectives of residents (both users and non-users of shared e-micromobility) in three suburban municipalities in the Greater Toronto Area: Town of Ajax, City of Brampton, and City of Mississauga.

This study is part of a broader research program titled “Shared Electric Micromobility as Transportation Solution in Canada’s

Suburban Communities (SEM-Can).” Our research website ([sharedmicromobility.ca](https://sharedmicromobility.ca)) shares more data and insight. The findings are intended to inform provincial and municipal-level planning and policy-making related to shared programs.

### Shared E-Micromobility in Study Area

In 2023, the Town of Ajax in Durham Region introduced a micromobility pilot program that included both e-bikes and e-scooters, as part of the provincial pilot. The pilot was recently extended until 2029 with Lime Mobility as the sole operator. The City of Brampton in Peel Region introduced their shared micromobility pilot program in 2022 with three operators: Bird Canada, Neuron Mobility, and Scooty Mobility. Mississauga is also part of Peel Region and introduced their shared micromobility pilot in 2024 in partnership with Bird Canada and Lime Mobility. All three municipalities have introduced only dockless systems with electric vehicles. Among the three municipalities included in our study, Brampton only allowed e-scooters as part of their micromobility pilot, while Ajax and Mississauga introduced both e-scooters and e-bikes.

### Methods

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with residents of Ajax, Brampton, and Mississauga using Zoom with approval from Toronto Metropolitan University’s Research Ethics Board. Municipal partners supported recruitment through websites, social media, libraries, and newsletters. A total of 17 interviews were conducted with both users (defined as those who used a shared e-micromobility vehicle in their municipality at least once in the past year) and potential users (defined as those who did not use shared micromobility in the past year but considered using it). Interviews were conducted in the fall of 2024.

### Challenges and Barriers to E-Micromobility

Participants identified three inter-connected themes shaping their willingness to use shared micromobility: safety, cost, and program design.

Safety emerged as the most significant concern. Participants frequently described concern with competing for space with motor vehicles on suburban arterial roads, which are often designed for automobiles travelling at high speeds and high volumes. This concern was particularly pronounced for e-scooter users, who felt especially vulnerable in mixed traffic. Several participants reported near-misses or collisions with vehicles, reinforcing perceptions of risk and deterring future use.

Given these concerns, participants strongly preferred infrastructure that separates e-micromobility users from motor vehicle traffic. They noted that existing infrastructure where they can safely ride an e-micromobility vehicle (such as trails, multi-use paths, and low-traffic local streets) is often fragmented with gaps that force users back onto busy roads.



Parked shared e-scooters at Chinguacousy Park, Brampton. Credit: City of Brampton

Sidewalks were frequently mentioned as a perceived safer alternative when road conditions felt unsafe, even though sidewalk riding is prohibited in all three municipalities and restrictions are enforced through geofencing technology. While participants generally recognized the risks sidewalk riding poses to pedestrians, they argued that limited flexibility is necessary in areas where no safe on-street alternative exists.

All participants identified cost as a barrier to regular use of shared e-micromobility. Shared micromobility was commonly compared to public transit, ride-hailing services, and walking. While e-scooters and e-bikes were viewed as cheaper and more convenient than ride-hailing, they were consistently seen as more expensive than public transit. This cost differential was especially salient when micromobility was used as a connection to transit, requiring users to pay two separate fares.

Participants evaluated travel cost broadly, considering not only fare but also time, convenience, and reliability. In some cases, the time saved by using a shared e-micromobility device was offset by the time required to locate and walk to one. As a result, micromobility was often treated as an occasional convenience rather than a regular or default travel option.

A common suggestion for addressing cost barriers was to integrate shared micromobility with the region's public transit fare system (PRESTO). Participants believed that fare integration or bundled transfers would make shared e-micromobility a more attractive first/last-mile option and encourage more frequent use.

Two program design issues were highlighted: communication and vehicle distribution. Potential users frequently reported limited understanding of how shared e-micromobility programs work, including costs, sign-up requirements, and rules of use. Current users echoed this concern, arguing that municipalities and operators do not adequately promote the benefits of shared micromobility or provide clear safety messaging. Participants emphasized the need for consistent education around helmet use, road sharing, and vehicle operation.

Vehicle availability was another recurring concern among users. While e-scooters and e-bikes were sometimes

conveniently located for return trips to home, they were often less accessible in residential areas for trips that start from home. If locating a vehicle required a lengthy walk, participants were likely to choose another mode. Some suggested designated parking areas to improve reliability, though others recognized that fixed stations could reduce the flexibility that makes dockless systems attractive.

## Takeaways for Policy

Our study highlights several potential considerations for suburban municipalities seeking to support shared e-micromobility. First, safety concerns underscore the need for clearer guidance on where micromobility belongs within the transportation network. In the short term, municipalities may need to consider pragmatic solutions, such as limited sidewalk access in constrained locations, while prioritizing long-term investments in connected active transportation networks.

Second, cost remains a critical barrier, particularly for users seeking to combine shared e-micromobility with public transit. Integrating payment systems or offering discounted transfers could strengthen shared micromobility's role as a first/last-mile solution.

Finally, program success depends on effective communication and reliable access to vehicles. Improved outreach, education, and more strategic distribution of devices could reduce uncertainty and make shared micromobility a more dependable option for everyday travel.

Overall, shared e-micromobility has the potential to address important mobility gaps in suburban municipalities, but realizing this potential will require coordinated attention to safety, affordability, and program design. ■■

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# Resident Experiences of Transit-Oriented Communities

## Lessons from Brampton's Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood

### AUTHORS

SHANPREET SHERGILL AND BRIAN DOUCET

Transit-Oriented Communities have quickly become one of Ontario's most widely adopted planning tools. This approach embraces ideas of density, mixed-use, and walkable neighbourhoods anchored by transit stations. It is also a stark contrast to the suburban developments dominating Canadian metropolitan growth since the 1950s.



Transit-Oriented Communities (TOCs) are part of the broader approach of New Urbanism, and while much has been written about their planning goals and design aspects, comparatively little research has investigated the ways in which these spaces are used and experienced by residents. This raises three important questions: how do residents experience life in a TOC? To what extent are these experiences different from conventional suburbs? How do TOC residents engage with the automobile-centric suburbia outside their neighbourhood? To answer these questions, we conducted 20 interviews in spring 2025 with residents of the Mount Pleasant neighbourhood in Brampton.

Mount Pleasant is a master-planned TOC centred around a GO Station, where trains depart at least every hour to downtown Toronto. Developed in the early 2010s through a partnership between the City of Brampton, Metrolinx, and Mattamy Homes, the neighbourhood was designed to accommodate Brampton's rapid growth while promoting walkability, density, and commuter transit living. At its heart are the train station, civic square, community and education centre, public library, and live-work units with small retail units at grade.

Our interviews focused on three themes: mobility, build environment, and amenities. Within each topic, we discussed what residents liked and disliked about Mount Pleasant, how they used different aspects of the neighbourhood, and how Mount Pleasant differs from other parts of Brampton.

### Everyday mobility and transportation choices

Residents consistently emphasized the central role of the Mount Pleasant GO Station in shaping their mobility patterns. Nearly all respondents commute to destinations outside Brampton,

primarily downtown Toronto, Guelph, and Waterloo, making the GO Station indispensable to daily life. Its reliable service was often described as the “gateway to opportunity” in allowing residents to access education and employment without relocating. The station's accessibility has also enabled many young adults and students to live at home while studying or working downtown, avoiding higher rents and long commutes by car.

But while the GO train creates very strong transit connections, Mount Pleasant still sits within the vast automobile-oriented suburbs around Canada's largest city.<sup>1</sup> Thus, private vehicles remain essential for needs outside the neighbourhood. Residents regularly discussed how they drove to grocery stores, recreational facilities, and family visits. As one resident noted: “Having a car allows me to experience more things and go farther to amenities that Mount Pleasant doesn't offer.”

### Place identity and built environment

Mount Pleasant's urban design has generated a distinct sense of place rarely associated with suburban developments. Residents described the neighbourhood as a “mini downtown” or “village,” with a unique identity defined by its clock tower, public square, and walkable streets surrounding the GO Station. A resident said, “I think Mount Pleasant is isolated but like its own community... It reminds me of a downtown area where you don't need a car...” The area's contemporary architecture, mix of uses, and public realm were frequently cited as key attractors, especially for those moving from more conventional suburban settings.

A strong emotional attachment and community identity emerged through shared public spaces such as the farmers market, skating rink, and library square. These features were

seen as vital for fostering social interaction, family-friendly events, and year-round activities.<sup>2</sup> Residents valued how Mount Pleasant remained lively even during winter months with amenities that strengthen belonging and pride of place.

Despite these positives, respondents expressed mixed views on density. While many appreciated the vibrancy and convenience associated with compact urban form, concerns were raised about parking shortages, crowded facilities, and smaller lot sizes compared to traditional suburban areas. As one homeowner with a family explained, "I feel like houses are closer together here, and the backyard is not as big as the older homes in Brampton. I don't like the lot sizes as they are smaller."

With more development under construction and planned around the GO station, many respondents expressed their concerns over potential developments "burdening" Mount Pleasant's overall space. "I know there is a big focus on building more complexes to house people, but what happens is if you push one thing ahead of the other then the library, for example, becomes super packed." However, most respondents accepted these trade-offs as part of a broader goal of living in a complete, accessible TOC.

### Mixed-use functionality and amenity use

Related to its design, Mount Pleasant's mixed-use zoning supports a degree of local living. Residents frequently visited and appreciated small-scale local amenities: restaurants, barber shops, and convenience stores located near Mount Pleasant Square and the GO station. One interviewee typified responses: "I go [to local shops] twice a week, sometimes three... Most of the time, when I am using transit, I am trying to pick up everything I need... if I want to pick up some snacks, I'd run by the convenience store rather than going all the way to the grocery store [outside the neighbourhood]." Thus, these amenities supported everyday convenience rather than major retail needs and were often used during walks or commutes.<sup>3</sup>

A small but notable group of residents operate home-based or live-work businesses directly within the community. For these individuals, living and working in Mount Pleasant offered exceptional convenience and work-life balance, reducing commuting pressures and reinforcing the value of local economic opportunities.

One Mount Pleasant business owner said: "Location is very important to live and work in the same area... We started the business and lived in our old location but because of the long hours at the store, it was getting difficult to live in one area and work in another... So, we decided to take the upstairs portion off rent and live there ourselves."

However, residents widely identified gaps in higher-order amenities. The absence of a full-scale community centre with facilities such as gyms, pools, and indoor ice rinks was viewed as a main shortcoming, forcing them to travel to other parts of Brampton. Many also expressed a desire for more diverse retail, dining, and recreational options to align with the growing population density.

While Mount Pleasant succeeds in creating a compact and vibrant core, it remains incomplete in delivering the variety of amenities expected in a mature urban node. However, it is an optimistic sign that the residents of a suburban TOC like Mount Pleasant are demanding services that would be found in more urbanized communities, reinforcing the need for urban living in a suburban location.

*"Mount Pleasant illustrates that new TOCs can successfully foster a strong sense of place, create new opportunities, and enhance mobility..."*

### Three lessons from Mount Pleasant

Mount Pleasant illustrates that new TOCs can successfully foster a strong sense of place, create new opportunities, and enhance mobility. Residents take advantage of walkable streets, public space, local amenities, and proximity to a GO station, creating a hybrid lifestyle that blends urban convenience with suburban car orientation. That residents still drive places should not be seen as a failure. Instead, it reflects the reality of the vast Canadian suburbs while offering tangibly different lifestyles, even if this is just confined to the local neighbourhood.



Local live-work shops on Sidford Road. Credit: Shanpreet Shergill



Mount Pleasant Square's central pond and elementary school. Credit: Shanpreet Shergill



Credit: Ontario Growth Secretariat, Ministry of Municipal Affairs



New (MPV2) developments along Bovaird Drive. Credit: Shanpreet Shergill

With that in mind, we end with three key messages for planners.

**Listen to lived experiences.** Too often planning decisions are based on what looks good in a rendering or what makes sense according to the dominant theories and paradigms. But equally important is a meaningful understanding of how places are used by people.

**Good public realm, land use, and density all matter.** Building on the first point, it became clear that many key planning ideas central to a TOC help shape the overall neighbourhood experience and, therefore, matter greatly for quality of life and place satisfaction. Several key areas stand out in this regard:

**Economic anchoring around the GO station is a powerful lever.** TOCs can be successful when the station area functions as the neighbourhood's economic and social anchor. Mount Pleasant illustrates that even modest employment opportunities and retail or commercial spaces can diversify local activities, reducing reliance on outward travel.

**Mixed-use development means more than a land use colour!** Most respondents mentioned how they frequently visit local amenities for everyday use. Housing density and a central place enable the embedding of services, workplaces, and social infrastructure.

**Good urban design matters.** Many respondents talked about the high-quality design of the public realm and public amenities. These should not be afterthoughts as they are key to informing how residents perceive and experience the neighbourhood, enhancing daily life for residents and helping TOCs achieve broader social, economic, and transit-related goals.<sup>4</sup>

**Focus on internal completeness of the neighbourhood, not the entire suburb.** Despite density and good transit connections, residents of Mount Pleasant frequently use their cars to access

opportunities outside the neighbourhood. We don't see this as a problem. Rather than trying to create car-free neighbourhoods, the goal should be to enable as many services and amenities to exist within TOCs as possible, while acknowledging that neighbourhoods do not house everything and cars will be required for many journeys outside them.<sup>5</sup> Costco and hockey practice are likely to remain trips done by car. But having more amenities within the neighbourhood matters and, as our research shows, shapes a hybrid lifestyle that offers choice and that residents value and appreciate.

Planners should focus on designing new suburban development and the redevelopment of existing suburbs with good density, proximity to reliable transit, good design, and ample spaces for amenities and entrepreneurship within walking distance. Mount Pleasant demonstrates how this can lead to tangible differences in suburban living and provide genuine choices at the neighbourhood, city, and metropolitan scale. ■

**References**

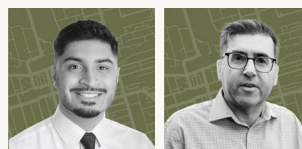
<sup>1</sup> Filion, P. (2018). Enduring Features of the North American Suburb: Built Form, Automobile Orientation, Suburban Culture and Political Mobilization. *Urban Planning*, 3(4), 4-14.

<sup>2</sup> Jacobs, Jane. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: Random House, 1961, Chapter 3. [55-73].

<sup>3</sup> Ewing, Reid, and Robert Cervero. Travel and the Built Environment: A synthesis. *Transportation Research Record 1780* (2001): [87-114].

<sup>4</sup> Ellen Greenberg. Chapter 4: Regulations Shape Reality: Zoning for Transit-Oriented Development, in *The New Transit Town: Best Practices in Transit-Oriented Development*, ed. Hank Dittmar and Gloria Ohland (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2004), [pg. 67].

<sup>5</sup> Peter Calthorpe. *The Next American metropolis: Ecology, Community, and the American Dream* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993). [Pg.17].



**Shanpreet Shergill** is an accredited student member of OPPI and a recent graduate of the University of Waterloo's Master of Arts program in the School of Planning. **Brian Doucet** is an award-winning Associate Professor in the School of Planning at the University of Waterloo.



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# OPPI News

Highlights, news, and reminders from OPPI you won't want to miss



## Susan Wiggins, OPPI's ED, is retiring in 2026

After six impactful years as Executive Director of OPPI, Susan Wiggins has announced her plans to retire, closing a distinguished chapter of more than 30 years in association management.

From the moment she joined OPPI, Susan understood the responsibility ahead of her – to support members whose work shapes the places where Ontarians live, work, and play and to elevate OPPI's voice and the RPP brand. Over the past

six years, she has translated that vision into action by leading the delivery of the Strategic Plan 2025 and strengthening the organization's foundation for the future.

"It has been my privilege and honour to serve Ontario's planning community," says Susan. "The work achieved during my time at OPPI was made possible by a dedicated Council, passionate volunteers, and an incredibly talented staff team. I am deeply grateful for the trust placed in me and confident that OPPI's work to advocate, educate, and build community will continue to thrive."

Susan will remain in her role until a successor has been hired. Watch for more updates over the coming weeks.

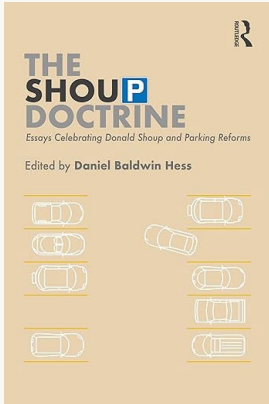
## OPPI 2026-2027 Scholarships and Bursaries

OPPI's Student Scholarships and Bursaries are more than financial awards; they're an opportunity to be recognized for your achievements, connect with professional leaders, and advance your career. Applications for the 2026-2027 awards are open until May 22, 2026, and include new scholarships and bursaries designed to celebrate students who are making a difference and showing leadership in planning across Ontario. Find more information, including application forms and eligibility requirements, at [ontarioplanners.ca/student-scholarships](https://ontarioplanners.ca/student-scholarships).



# Reading List

A SELECTION OF READS AND RESOURCES TO SUPPORT YOUR PLANNING PRACTICE

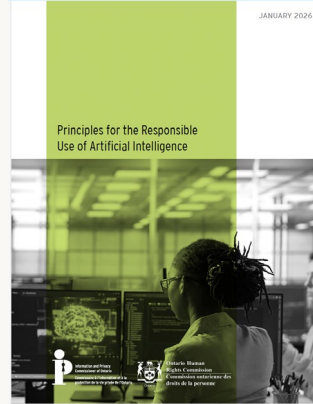


01

## The Shoup Doctrine: Essays Celebrating Donald Shoup and Parking Reform

*The Shoup Doctrine: Essays Celebrating Donald Shoup and Parking Reforms* features 37 city planners, economists, journalists, and parking professionals who analyze three major parking reforms

proposed by Donald Shoup, a UCLA Distinguished Professor of Urban Planning. First, remove off-street parking requirements; second, use market prices to manage on-street parking; third, spend the parking meter revenue on added public services on metered blocks. These parking reforms can align individual incentives with collective objectives and produce enormous benefits at low or no cost. Edited by Daniel Baldwin Hess, PhD, this book celebrates Shoup's contributions to research, practice, and education and demonstrates how parking reform can support affordable housing development, lessen air pollution, and reduce automobile dependency.



02

## Principles for the Responsible Use of Artificial Intelligence

In January 2026, the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario (IPC) and the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) released *Principles for the Responsible Use of Artificial Intelligence* to guide the responsible

adoption of AI systems. These principles are designed to help organizations develop, deploy, or use AI in ways that maintain public trust by respecting privacy and human rights. To align with these principle, the Ontario Land Tribunal (OLT) published a new Practice Direction that provides guidance on the use of generative AI in OLT proceedings.

Download the IPC-OHRC Principles:

[ohrc.on.ca/en/principles-responsible-use-artificial-intelligence](https://ohrc.on.ca/en/principles-responsible-use-artificial-intelligence)

Download the OLT AI Practice Direction:

[olt.gov.on.ca/legislation-and-rules/](https://olt.gov.on.ca/legislation-and-rules/)

## Volunteer with our PKE Committee

We strive for a diverse committee that represents the full breadth of OPPI members. The PKE Committee serves a single, non-renewable three-year term. Members represent a range of practice areas, including urban land use, rural land use, housing, transportation, academia, DEI/racial and social justice, and environment/climate resilience. In addition, three programming members from the conference's host city or district serve one-year terms.

The committee is led by a chair who facilitates meetings, approves agendas and minutes, and works closely with the Director of Education & Events. Members often come from District Leadership Teams, and some have gone on to serve on OPPI Council.

Volunteering with PKE offers a unique opportunity to shape professional learning, contribute meaningfully to the planning profession, and grow alongside peers from across the province. We are currently looking for several new practice area members for 2027, as well as three programming members from the Southwest District. If you are interested in joining the committee or learning more, please contact [education@ontarioplanners.ca](mailto:education@ontarioplanners.ca).



# In Conversation

OPPI MEMBERS SHARE THEIR INSIGHTS, EXPERIENCES, AND PERSPECTIVES ON PLANNING



## Blair Allen


Blair Allen’s impressive career accomplishments advanced public transit in the Waterloo Region and influenced transit systems all across Canada.

In 2025, after 37 years in the transportation planning field, Blair Allen retired from his career with Grand River Transit (GRT) and Kitchener Transit. Over the years, Allen held a number of positions, finishing his career as the Manager of Transit Development for GRT. He participated in numerous committees, policy processes, official plans, and conferences and was involved with a long list of projects, from on-street infrastructure and new transit facilities to community buses, rural services, and transit network restructuring.

Especially notable, Allen spearheaded an Intelligent Transportation System as part of a new express service and also led the development of a green-energy, zero-emission bus strategy and pilot project. He currently sits on the Canadian Urban Transit Zero Emission Bus Joint Procurement Initiative board.

### Retired RPP

**37** Years in transit planning

 Mentored more than 70 co-op students

 2024 Canadian Urban Transit Association’s William G. Ross Lifetime Achievement Award

“A prime interest has always been the relationship between land use and transportation, wanting to ensure our city form could not only accommodate effective transit choices but also, conversely, allow people to make choices in housing and work locations that gave them more transportation choices.”

He further adds that if we fail to provide communities with active transportation, they will not be healthy or sustainable. “A large portion of society cannot independently drive a car – too old, too young, disability of some form, economic limits – and if we want a community suitable for all, then we must design our land use in a way that a car isn’t a necessity for all our trips.”

*“Technological improvements have added so much to improve the transit experience...”*

Allen has seen significant changes in public transit over his career, particularly with technology.

“Technological improvements have added so much to improve the transit experience and planning, from accessibility advancements like low-floor buses to using GPS to track vehicles, allowing better information for customers, operations, and planners to improved fare technology,” says Allen.

In 2024, he received the Canadian Urban Transit Association’s William G. Ross Lifetime Achievement award, recognizing his long-time contribution to transit in Canada. The nomination emphasized Allen’s role in mentoring students and others early in their careers, something that has always been important to him. At one point, he and his staff compiled a list of students hired over the years – there were more than 70 from co-op programs alone.

“While many ended up with transit in their future career, it was just as important to see some realize that other areas of planning were their passion, and it was always exciting to see them flourish wherever they ended up,” he says, adding that it is always important for students and young planners to remain positive and realize they have a lot to contribute.

Looking ahead, Allen says the ability to further reduce environmental impact through electrification is something to watch over the next few years.

“I also think it is exciting to see more understanding of how different areas of planning can be integrated and work together with a realization that land use development can be more effective when other aspects of planning are considered – transit, mobility, social, public health, and so on,” he says. “Understanding and building upon the interplay between different aspects of planning is something that needs to be encouraged.”

\*Interview edited for brevity. Read the full interview on the Planning Exchange blog: [ontarioplanners.ca/blog/planning-exchange/posts/retired-rpp-spotlight-blair-allen-mcip-rpp/](https://ontarioplanners.ca/blog/planning-exchange/posts/retired-rpp-spotlight-blair-allen-mcip-rpp/).



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## Will Nixon

Considering a career in the planning profession? Planning changes the way you see the world – and opens you up to a world of opportunities.

Will Nixon's decision to pursue a planning career seemingly came out of nowhere but was an obvious fit once discovered. In fact, before he even knew what planning was, he got peek into the profession working with Earthroots, an environmental non-profit, communicating the benefits of Ontario's Greenbelt.

"I've always known that I wanted a career centred around climate action and helping move society towards a more sustainable and resilient future," he says. "The intersection of planning and climate action provides me with a space to make a meaningful contribution in an important field."

After graduation in 2021, Nixon was hired by The Planning Partnership in Toronto, where he wrote and designed planning rationale reports for development applications and learned about review processes. Then, in March 2023, he joined the City of Toronto in the Environment and Climate Division (now Environment, Climate and Forestry Division) on the New Development and Renewable Energy team. Asked what he enjoys most about his role, he points to two aspects in particular.

## New RPP



City of Toronto, Environment, Climate and Forestry Division



Personal and professional interest in climate change



Achieved his RPP designation in 2025

"The first is the impact that I'm able to have within my city," says Nixon. "It's nice to know that I can align the success of my career with the mission of making Toronto more sustainable and resilient."

The second aspect is the opportunity to be at the forefront of a global challenge.

*"The intersection of planning and climate action provides me with a space to make a meaningful contribution in an important field."*

"The City of Toronto leads by example which allows us to work on innovative projects that move us closer to a low carbon future," he says. "There is a great sense of community between people working on similar work for other cities across the world. I've been able to speak with people across Canada and in other countries and

everyone is engaged and willing to share their lessons learned about their own climate action projects."

When Nixon embarked on his RPP certification process, he wanted to work with someone specializing in climate planning.

"Shout out to my mentor Megan Gereghty for her guidance," he says. "The integration of climate action into city-building initiatives is a growing sub-field, so not many professionals already have that type of hands-on experience. With her experience from the Climate Risk Institute, Megan helped me explore what it means to plan cities in the time of climate change."

While the RPP designation was always part of Nixon's plan, there is another reason – he wanted his opinions on planning matters to carry the legitimacy that comes with the RPP designation.

"My team is outside of the city-planning or development-focused divisions, so the RPP designation helps me communicate my professional background and experience to others while working on collaborative projects," says Nixon.

Are you considering a planning career? Nixon has a message for you.

"I strongly believe planning is a great career for those who are morally ambitious, because it has a clear intersection with many important topics, including human rights, transportation, local economic growth, and environmental stewardship, to name a few."

\*Interview edited for brevity. Read the full interview on the Planning Exchange blog: [ontarioplanners.ca/blog/planning-exchange/posts/rpp-spotlight-will-nixon-mcip-rpp](https://ontarioplanners.ca/blog/planning-exchange/posts/rpp-spotlight-will-nixon-mcip-rpp).





## 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 in-demand profession that helps shape a better future.

Learn more at [ontarioplanners.ca](http://ontarioplanners.ca)

## Welcome to our newest RPPs

OPPI is pleased to welcome 110 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.

Alex Ho Shing Chik  
 Alexander Burnett  
 Alicia Monteith  
 Anthony Caruso  
 Arjun Singh  
 Avinash Soni  
 Beckett Frisch  
 Bo Peng  
 Brent Kuefler  
 Brooke Burlock  
 Caitlin Carmichael  
 Cameron Smith  
 Caroline Bucksbaum  
 Cassandra Dillman  
 Catherine Belgin  
 Chantal Lee  
 Chloe Simpson  
 Christian Tsimenidis  
 Chun Fu Liu  
 Connor Joy  
 Daniel Olding  
 Danielle Foley

Dannika Van Vugt  
 David Pau  
 Dmitriy Kharena  
 Dorotea Pripon  
 Ellory Vincent  
 Emily Overholt  
 Evan Garfinkel  
 Floyd Heath  
 Greg Hayes  
 Hanna Holman  
 Hannia Nawaz  
 Harsh Padhya  
 Helen Elizabeth Spang  
 Hendrikus Rolleman  
 James Schofield  
 Jeff Nadeau  
 Joanna Ilunga-Kapinga  
 Joseph Liberatore  
 John Graham  
 Junyan He  
 Kaitlyn Whitehead  
 Keirsten Morris

Kelsey Martin  
 Kerstin Afante  
 Khatereh Baharikhooob  
 Kristen Regier  
 Kyle Peel  
 Lauren Jeffrey  
 Lawrence Yip  
 Lindsay Sthamann  
 Lucy Huang  
 Mackenzie Farrant  
 Madelen Fellows  
 Madison Vernooy  
 Magnus Wessels  
 Matt Pipe  
 Melanie Schneider-Mak  
 Michael Campos  
 Michael Donolo  
 Michaela Bray  
 Mikaela Coon  
 Mishaal Rizwan  
 Nadejda Mrochkovskaia  
 Nazanin Aghahasan Nooshabadi  
 Nidhi Subramanyam  
 Nikolas Kohek  
 Nitika Jagtiani  
 Oriana Nanao  
 Pak Yin Cheung  
 Parvesh Kumar  
 Patricia Cho  
 Paul Cech  
 Paul Hess  
 Piraveina Raveendiran  
 Pourya Nazemi

Qian Zhang  
 Rachel Haggith  
 Roberto Vertolli  
 Rodger Miller  
 Ryan Lightfoot  
 Ryan Lloyd  
 Samantha Hannah  
 Samantha Leger  
 Sarah Bale  
 Sarah Burrell  
 Sarah De Carlo  
 Sarah MacKinnon  
 Seyedehhanieh Alyassin  
 Sheila McKinley  
 Shuvangkor Shusmoy Roy  
 Sophie Hautot  
 Spencer Phillips  
 Stefanie Kaminski  
 Stephanie Hong  
 Sue Sanku  
 Terina Tam  
 Thomas Sentowski  
 Tina Fang  
 Tony Lieu  
 Tyler Kwall  
 Vanessa Simpson  
 Vithulan Vivekanandan  
 William Nixon  
 Yathartha Singh  
 Yvonne Ye  
 Zaid Kashef AIGhetaa  
 Zaid Zwayyed  
 Ziqi Ding

# RPP Profile


THE PEOPLE, PATHS, AND PERSPECTIVES SHAPING PLANNING



## RPP Profile

 Director of Planning and Development, Town of Grimsby

**20+** Years in planning at various levels of government

 Secondary planning has always been her favourite

## Kirsten McCauley

Kirsten McCauley has always been fascinated by how communities grow and evolve, how people interact with their environment, and how thoughtful planning can support social well-being as much as physical development.

She has worked in the planning profession for more than 20 years at various levels of government, including with the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Region of Niagara, City of Hamilton, and Township of West Lincoln.

McCauley's interest in planning has its roots in a family home-addition project when she 15. That introduction to zoning, land use, and the broader planning system combined with encouragement from her high school geography teacher led her to the University of Waterloo and the launch of a very rewarding career, working in a wide variety of planning areas, including development review, policy and long-range planning, recreation planning, and interdepartmental initiatives. Those early

experiences, learning about the planning process as a teenager, being encouraged by a teacher, and later working across different municipal contexts, have influenced how she approaches the profession today.

"Each role has been valuable in shaping my love of the profession, but secondary planning has always been a favourite," she says. "Secondary plans allow you to dive deeply into the specifics of an area and prepare policy and land use plans to guide its growth or evolution in a meaningful and intentional way. There's something very rewarding about shaping a vision that balances growth, community needs and identity, and long-term sustainability."

In November 2025, she joined the Town of Grimsby as Director of Planning and Development.

### What are your key goals at the Town of Grimsby?

I feel very privileged to be working for the Town of Grimsby. It's an exciting time for the community. Like many municipalities, we are finalizing our official plan to set the vision for future growth. Grimsby's

growth will largely be accommodated through infill and intensification, which requires thoughtful policy direction and strong implementation tools.

The Town is also anticipating a new GO Station – something long planned for and now increasingly important with our growing community and the direction for Destination Niagara. Ensuring people can access Niagara, and Grimsby specifically, will continue to be a major priority. As a Greenbelt community with the Niagara Escarpment, we are also preparing for the anticipated upcoming coordinated plan review, which will align provincial plans and policies with the 2024 Provincial Planning Statement.

Internally, my goal is to encourage clear, consistent application processes which will build trust in how decisions are made. Predictability and transparency are essential for supporting positive outcomes, reducing delays, and ensuring that everyone understands what is required at each stage of the process.

Being new to the role, another major focus for me is building and strengthening collaboration across departments and with external agencies. Planning touches almost every part of municipal operations and aligning our work early will also help to improve the process. When communication is proactive and consistent, we are better positioned to support high-quality development that reflects the Town's goals.

### What are the factors in building a healthier, more sustainable Grimsby?

Healthier, more sustainable communities are shaped by land use decisions. Planning for compact mixed-use development, sustainable mobility systems with transit supportive density, and integrating climate resilience will support more sustainable outcomes.

The majority of Grimsby's growth will be primarily directed to three main centres: our Protected Major Transit Station Area, the downtown, and the health centre around our new hospital. Beyond that, nodes and corridors have been identified for additional, appropriate intensification. Each of these areas is intended to support density and compact mixed-use, with more intense transit-oriented development around the PMTSA.

Sustainable mobility systems are another key factor for a healthy community. In anticipation of the GO Train stop, the Town is advancing discussions on the local transit system. Prioritizing public transit, safe pedestrian routes, and suitable cycling networks will be essential for connectivity within and into our community.

*"A healthy, sustainable community is one where people can live safely, access housing options and essential services, and remain within the community as their neighbourhoods and needs evolve."*

Climate resilience must be integrated into planning decisions. Embedding mitigation and adaptation into land

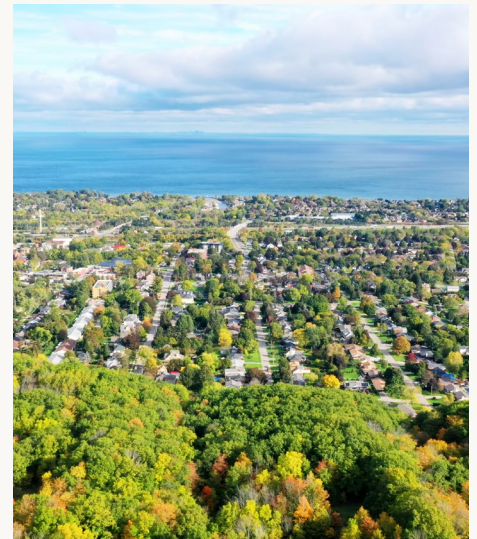
use and infrastructure planning creates more durable and environmentally responsible communities. A connected parks system, urban tree canopy, green corridors, and stormwater solutions are also important. Access to green space has clear mental and physical health benefits.

Finally, aligning growth with infrastructure capacity is so critical. Strong asset management, proactive maintenance, and timely upgrades ensure long-term success and resilience.

**Are there any areas of planning you would like to see get more attention in Ontario?**

I've always had a strong interest in social planning and understanding how people use or interact with their community. We have started the discussions, but I think there could be more emphasis on the social dimensions of planning such as health equity-informed decision-making and the relationship between the built environment and social interaction. In my experience in smaller municipalities, we often focus solely on land use and infrastructure, but how people connect, feel included, and experience community can be just as important.

We also need to strengthen collaboration across disciplines, sectors, and departments. Planners are uniquely positioned to bring people together, bridge perspectives, and champion approaches that support social well-being alongside physical development.



Planning is about building communities that are healthy, inclusive, and resilient. Seeing the profession move further in that direction makes me proud to be part of it.

**Do you have a message for other RPPs and up-and-coming planners?**

Planning is a profession that touches so many facets of community building and requires a broad understanding of many different topics. Even at this point in my career, I am always learning. I encourage all planners to seek opportunities to get involved in a wide variety of projects, even those where the link to planning isn't immediately obvious. Those experiences often help define your path forward and can grow your passion for the profession.

\*Interview edited for brevity. Read the full interview on the Planning Exchange blog: [ontarioplanners.ca/blog/planning-exchange/posts/rpp-profile-kirsten-mccauley-rpp-director-of-planning-and-development-town-of-grimsby/](https://ontarioplanners.ca/blog/planning-exchange/posts/rpp-profile-kirsten-mccauley-rpp-director-of-planning-and-development-town-of-grimsby/).

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# We Asked Our Contributors

Registered Professional Planners are experts at incorporating a diversity of perspectives and guiding decisions that build and support healthy, liveable communities. For this issue of *Place Magazine*, three contributors share where they see the most progress in Ontario and what they believe deserves more attention.



## Inge Roosendaal MCIP, RPP

HEALTHY COMMUNITIES SENIOR PLANNER WITH OTTAWA PUBLIC HEALTH, EMBEDDED WITH CITY OF OTTAWA, PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT AND BUILDING SERVICES

I am heartened to see progress at the municipal level, where planners are advancing complete communities through zoning reform, active transportation, housing, and climate-responsive design.

What needs more attention is using health and well-being as a shared frame for decision-making. Health outcomes are produced, not incidental, and planners influence conditions that accumulate over time. Connecting complex problems to new ways of thinking and drawing on health evidence can help planning drive deeper systemic change and mitigate long-term pressures across systems, including the health system.

## Mary Lou Tanner RPP, FCIP

SENIOR PARTNER WITH NPG PLANNING SOLUTIONS

Significant progress has occurred in advancing the planning for jobs and planning for housing. With major investments in many communities, the focus on the need for and timing of building housing to align with major investments for new jobs is necessary for healthy and complete communities. This connectivity between planning for the implementation of jobs and housing as key for communities is impressive and important work.

Food security will continue to be an essential issue for communities. As communities grow and develop, we must be careful to ensure the economic viability of farming and farmers.

## Wayne Caldwell PHD, RPP, FCIP

PROFESSOR EMERITUS (OAC), RURAL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT, SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT, UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH

We've made progress recognizing the connections between environmental health, economic vitality, and community well-being. We've seen success with environmental programs in communities where agriculture is central. There's also growing attention to healthy communities in small towns, including walkability and active transportation.

That said, implementation is uneven, and at times, it feels like political focus — locally, provincially, and nationally — has drifted from environmental priorities. I'd like to see renewed commitment to education, climate resilience, and biodiversity, alongside planning for an aging population and the services and housing that rural communities need to thrive.

# Position Your Brand Where Ontario's Planning Future Takes Shape

## OPPI Conference 2026

September 16-18, 2026 | Blue Mountain Resort



200+

Visionary Speakers



100+

Concurrent Sessions



1000+

Attendance

## More Than Visibility, Create an Experience

Put your organization at the centre of Ontario's planning conversation. Connect with top professionals and lead the way in rural and urban planning, climate resilience, sustainable communities, and AI-powered innovation – while shaping inclusive, equitable communities.

Go beyond logo placement and become part of the moments that define the conference. Weave your brand into the delegate experience from arrival to departure. Options include:

- Opening Reception at the Summit
- PlanON Awards Ceremony
- Blue Mountain Scavenger Challenge
- Custom Guestroom Keycards
- Yoga on top of the Mountain

## Partnership Opportunities

Customizable packages designed to align with your goals and maximize your exposure.

### Bronze

Entry-level visibility, one ticket, practical branding opportunities available

### Silver

Consistent exposure, two tickets, engaging branding and sponsorship options

### Gold

Strong visibility, three tickets, standout experiential sponsorship opportunities

### Platinum

High-impact exposure, six tickets, premium branding opportunities throughout

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Premier partnership with maximum visibility, eight tickets, top recognition



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# OPPI 2026 CONFERENCE

Learning from Our Past. Planning for the Future.

**September 16 –18**  
**Blue Mountain Resort**

**Unforgettable moments. Real connections.**

Join your planning colleagues from across Ontario for two action-packed days of expert-led panels and sessions, keynote speakers, and networking events. At a time of rapid change, the opportunity to come together, face to face, to learn, share experiences, and find solutions is not one you want to miss. Watch for more details in OPPI communications and on our website.

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