

Place

Every good plan starts with a story.



Forward Focused

How Specialized Economies
are Reshaping Planning
pg. 09

Integrating Transit
Infrastructure
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AI and the Future
of Planning
pg. 22



2026 PlanON Awards Winners

Honouring Excellence in Planning

Celebrating Projects

PlanON 2026 Vision Award Project of The Year

- Housing Equity Near Transit Stations: Ottawa's Inclusionary Zoning

PlanON 2026 Vision Award of Excellence (3 Winners)

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- Pam Duesling, MCIP, RPPI

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- Aimee Powell, MCIP, RPP
- Heather Swan, MCIP, RPP

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Cover image: Finch West Entrance and Substation. Photo by Arcadis. See page 18.

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Message from the Chair



“
The future
will demand
innovation,
collaboration,
and a continued
commitment
to building
resilient, thriving
communities.”

As planners, we spend much of our professional lives helping communities navigate change. Today, however, the pace and scale of change can feel unprecedented.

Technological disruption, climate pressures, evolving economic structures, shifting demographics, and changing community expectations are converging in ways that challenge many of our traditional assumptions about how places grow and thrive.

That is why the theme of this issue, **Forward Focused**, is particularly timely.

The articles in this issue explore many of the forces shaping our future and the role our profession plays in responding to them. From artificial intelligence and electric vehicle infrastructure to battery energy storage systems, renewable energy development, climate adaptation, and the emergence of specialized economies, each contribution examines how planning practice must continue to evolve to remain relevant and effective.

What unites these topics is not technology or infrastructure alone. It is the reality that successful planning increasingly requires us to be comfortable with complexity, uncertainty, and continuous learning. The future is not arriving in a neat sequence of predictable events. It is unfolding rapidly across multiple fronts at once, demanding thoughtful leadership and informed decision-making.

Throughout our profession's history, planners have been called upon to balance long-term vision with practical action. That responsibility remains unchanged. What is changing are the tools available to us, the pace of

transformation, and the expectations placed upon the profession to help create resilient, sustainable, and prosperous communities.

Looking forward, our success will depend not only on technical expertise but also on our willingness to embrace innovation while maintaining our commitment to sound planning principles. We must stay curious, remain adaptable, and continue investing in the knowledge and relationships that enable communities to flourish in times of change.

As planners, we are uniquely positioned not only to respond to change but to help shape it. The future will demand innovation, collaboration, and a continued commitment to building resilient, thriving communities.

I encourage you to explore the diverse perspectives presented here, reflect on how they may influence your own practice, and consider the role you can play in helping shape the future of our profession and the communities we serve.

I hope this issue provides inspiration, insight, and practical wisdom as we move our profession and our communities forward.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Andria Leigh".

Andria Leigh, MCIP, RPP, Dipl.M.M.
OPPI COUNCIL CHAIR

CEO's Message



“

I'm looking forward to sustaining all the incredible momentum my predecessor, the formidable Susan Wiggins, was able to build for our profession...

It's my pleasure to be rounding out my first few months as the new CEO at OPPI, and I can already sense that I'm joining a kind and curious community that I'll be proud to be a part of.

It's the start of a new era for me and for OPPI as we embark on our new Strategic Plan, Elevate 2030. So naturally many of you may be wondering: why me; why now?

I am not a planner by trade. My professional background lies in government relations, strategic communications, placemaking, and non-profit management.

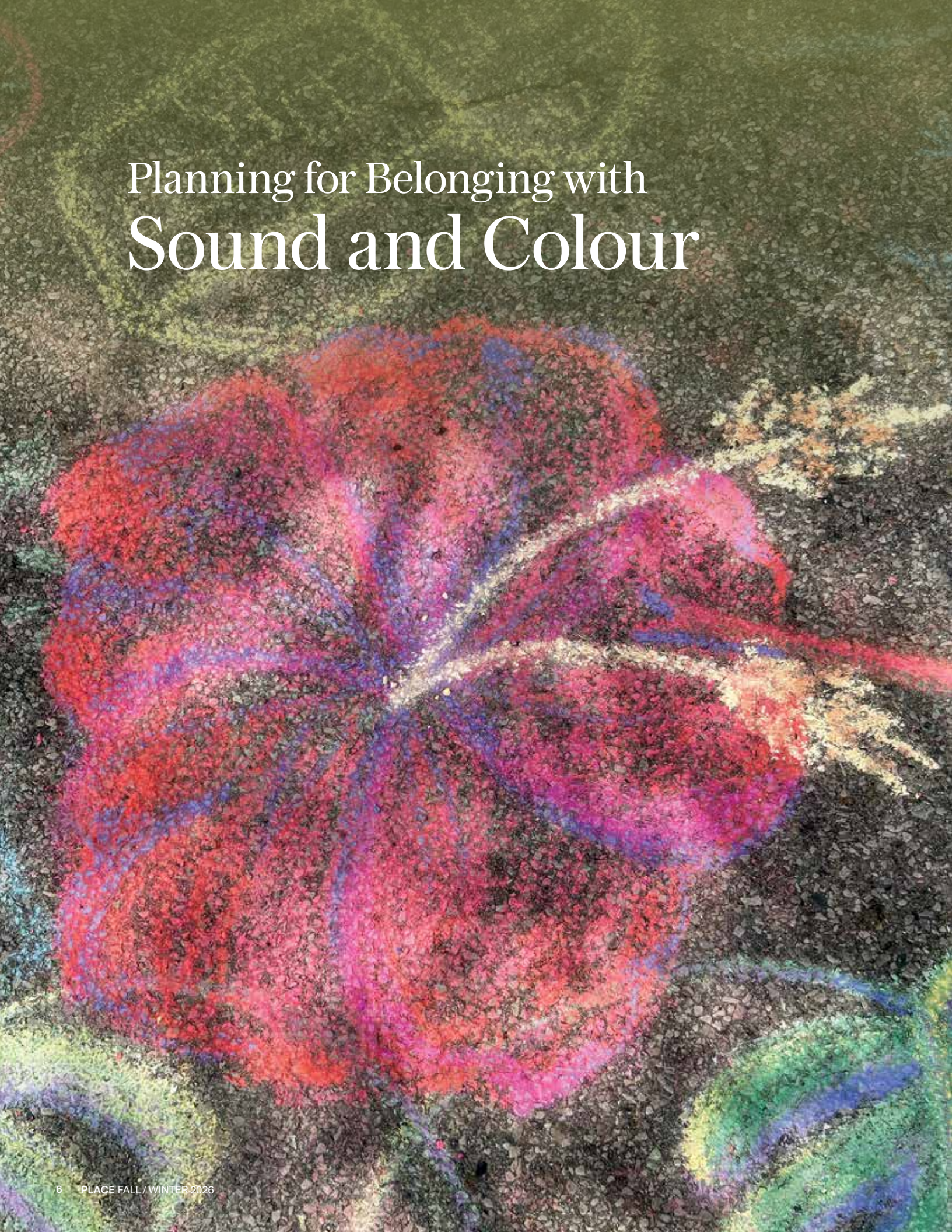
Most recently, I spent the past nine years of my career leading The Bentway — a movement to reclaim a seven-kilometre stretch of forgotten land under Toronto's elevated Gardiner Expressway and transform it into a network of social spaces, destination parks, and connective trails. There, my team worked closely with the City of Toronto's Urban Planning team, an in-house planning and design department, and a range of creative and community partners to bring this vision to life. But as an independent not-for-profit, The Bentway remained agile, entrepreneurial, and scrappy. Inviting Toronto to fall in love with a concrete hulk of highway was a... provocative act. In fact, our stated mission was to *ignite the urban imagination*.

I'm looking forward to sustaining all the incredible momentum my predecessor, the formidable Susan Wiggins, was able to build for our profession in the face of changing political headwinds, a feat that is impossible to overstate. And perhaps what I'm looking to push even harder on is in that same Bentway spirit — to ignite imaginations, to think and act boldly, to set and deliver a provocative agenda, and to do it warmly, together.

Thank you for a great first chapter, and cheers to the journey ahead.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'D. Carey'.

David Carey
CEO, OPPI

An abstract artwork featuring a dark, textured background. A large, vibrant, and somewhat irregular shape in the center is composed of layered strokes of red, purple, and magenta. To the right of this central shape, there are horizontal strokes of yellow and orange. In the bottom right corner, there are strokes of green and blue. The overall texture is grainy and painterly, suggesting the use of oil or acrylic paint.

Planning for Belonging with Sound and Colour



MARKUS MOOS, RPP, AND KATHERINE PERROTT, RPP

Vibrant places that foster social connections are not just nice to have but are essential for society's well-being. And sometimes, all it takes is chalk, music, and freezies.

Recent research shows that Canadians who have a positive attitude about their community and feel a sense of belonging and connection experience less loneliness.¹ For planners, this means that vibrant places that foster social connections are not just nice to have but are essential for society's well-being.

Spaces like libraries, recreation centres, and public squares are clear examples of social infrastructure. These “palaces for the people” and their associated programming deliberately support interaction and the formation of social bonds.^{2,3} Sidewalks can be social places where people briefly greet each other or stop for a chat, but they can also be temporarily transformed from mobility to social infrastructure where people linger and build deeper bonds. Sometimes, all it takes is chalk, music, and freezies.

It was with the goal of community-building that we organized a pop-up placemaking event on the University of Waterloo campus.⁴ The intent was to get people together to co-create a sidewalk chalk mural inspired by the themes of belonging, well-being, and cultivating a sense of place. We chose a walkway between two parts of campus with a high level of foot traffic. We played music loud enough to signal to passersby that there was something happening.

“What is going on here?” was the opening for us to explain that we were creating space for fun and to draw things that make us feel well. From there, visual and verbal conversations emerged about nature, animals, exercise and movement, friendships, and other markers of social belonging like sports team logos, campus mascots, country flags, and 2SLGBTQ+ pride symbols. Those with advanced art skills were in their element, but we assured those more hesitant about their artistic abilities that realist art was not the end goal. Rather it was the process of getting together with other people to achieve a collective output by adding colour, symbols, or words to the chalk mural that we valued.

Engagement in the event took many forms. Some dove right in, embracing the chalk dust on their hands and knees, whereas others smiled and nodded as they passed by on foot, bike, bus, or car. Several visitors stumbled upon us just going about their day, while others had seen our event advertisements and made time to stop by. One community member told us that “we made their day” as she walked by us several times to and from classes. Some participants only stayed briefly, others lingered, and some even returned several times throughout the day to add to the mural and enjoy another freezie on a hot June day.



"the process of getting together with other people to achieve a collective output..."

At times there were only a few or no visitors at all, with just us organizers keeping the mural moving forward. Other times, there were 50 or more people there all at once, many actively drawing and several chatting. We could hear laughter and animated conversation over top the sounds of the music as more colour appeared on the pavement.

Those who participated appeared to have left with a renewed sense of connection to a place they regularly traverse. We left our mark on a place, literally, and by so doing we made it special. Elevating the sidewalk to an artistic canvas allowed us to slow down and pay attention to the space: its maple, oak, and locust trees providing shade, the sound of Laurel creek nearby, the curious squirrels, Canada geese, robins, and house sparrows that visited.

The event facilitated a collective sense of accomplishment as we all stood back to admire and photograph what we had created together. This pride of place transitioned to digital space as people shared highlights on social media.

Later that evening, the rains came. The chalk blurred together and washed away, the mural as temporary as most moments in our lives tend to be. Memories, however, will last. The conversations sparked new connections and deepened existing social bonds. We talked about and drew what made us feel well, which is low stakes, but also slightly vulnerable and personally revealing.

Playing a role in social infrastructure

Temporary and low-cost interventions can change how we act in and perceive a space. Activating a space is a way to construct social infrastructure without requiring a building permit.

The spatial form matters. The relative safety of our chosen location and slow adjacent road speeds, benches, and wide boulevard and lawns allowed people to securely store their things and participate in a low-pressure, comfortable environment, while passersby could still move through. Ultimately though, a deepened sense of place and belonging is created through social connection, and connection is built through activity, not just physical infrastructure.

We are not the first or only ones to animate space this way. We learned from a long list of urban practitioners and theorists before us. We'd like to think that Jane Jacobs who famously wrote about the "sidewalk ballet"⁵ of everyday life would be proud of this event. While we didn't play any Tchaikovsky or Stravinsky, the contemporary music, colourful chalk, and free frozen treats transformed a thoroughfare into a place of conversation and belonging.

Those who participated may view this space differently now. We contributed to a collective memory of place on campus that tells us we belong and that we can contribute positively through social interaction. We planned for belonging with sound and colour.

Planners and planning educators can play a role in planning, designing, and animating social infrastructure, both in its temporary and more durable forms. Play is a deliberate word choice here. Playfulness is an impactful way to bring people together, foster healthy populations,⁶ and subvert power dynamics. In our case, it was professors kneeling beside students, covered in chalk and singing along with our favourite tunes. But this could easily be repurposed as a municipal planning activity that brings government down to earth.

In this AI-hyped, speed-obsessed, screentime-heavy moment, we celebrate the slow, messy, noisy, and joyful work of in-person community building.

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Planning for Highly Skilled Talent: How Specialized Economies are Reshaping Planning Practice

In specialized economies, planning shapes the conditions that determine whether communities can attract, integrate, and retain the highly skilled talent needed to sustain regional development.

NATASHA D'SOUZA, RPP, RYAN GIBSON, WAYNE CALDWELL, RPP

Across Ontario, municipalities are competing not only for investment and population growth, but also for highly skilled talent (HST). Unlike traditional labour-attraction challenges, HST shortages often involve globally mobile workers with specialized credentials that are difficult to replace locally.

Engineers, healthcare professionals, technical specialists, project managers, and internationally recruited knowledge workers are essential to specialized sectors such as energy production, advanced manufacturing, agri-food innovation, and emerging technologies. These workers support specialized economic clusters where industries, supplier networks, training institutions, infrastructure systems, and supporting services concentrate geographically.

Top right: Map of Bruce County.
Bottom right: Bruce Power Nuclear Visitor Centre, Tiverton, Ontario. Photograph by Bailey Cole.

At the same time, HST is highly mobile, and location decisions are often shaped by housing availability, quality of life, career mobility, healthcare access, educational opportunities, and broader community supports. As a result, retention is critical to regional economic resilience.

Recognizing the geographic clustering effect of specialization, the role of planning is adapting. Municipal planning must now look beyond managing land use and physical growth as planners increasingly respond to workforce mobility, housing pressures, infrastructure demands, and broader community conditions to attract and retain HST. In specialized economies, planning decisions are connected to long-term economic resilience, infrastructure coordination, and workforce retention.

These dynamics are increasingly evident across specialized regional economies where municipalities are balancing sector-related growth, workforce pressures, and long-term planning considerations. In many cases, economic specialization reshapes not just local labour markets but also housing demand, infrastructure planning, governance relationships, and community development priorities.

Bruce County, Ontario

The interaction between specialization, workforce attraction, and planning can be observed in Bruce County. Anchored by Bruce Power and its supply-chain network, the area has evolved into a specialized energy cluster supporting engineers, technical specialists, project managers, tradespeople, educational partnerships, and significant investment in infrastructure. This concentration of industry and expertise has strengthened labour attraction, economic growth, and regional identity, while also creating new pressures related to housing, servicing,



transportation, healthcare, and broader community capacity.

The presence of a large energy-sector employer influences local growth patterns and infrastructure demands. In response, planning and governance systems across the region have increasingly incorporated anticipated workforce and population growth into land use, housing, servicing, and infrastructure planning. Bruce County's "Good Growth" official plan amendment, for example, integrated projected energy-sector growth into housing and infrastructure planning.

Regional collaboration has also expanded through initiatives such as the Clean Energy Frontier and partnerships with the Nuclear Innovation Institute focused on workforce development, applied research, and regional coordination.

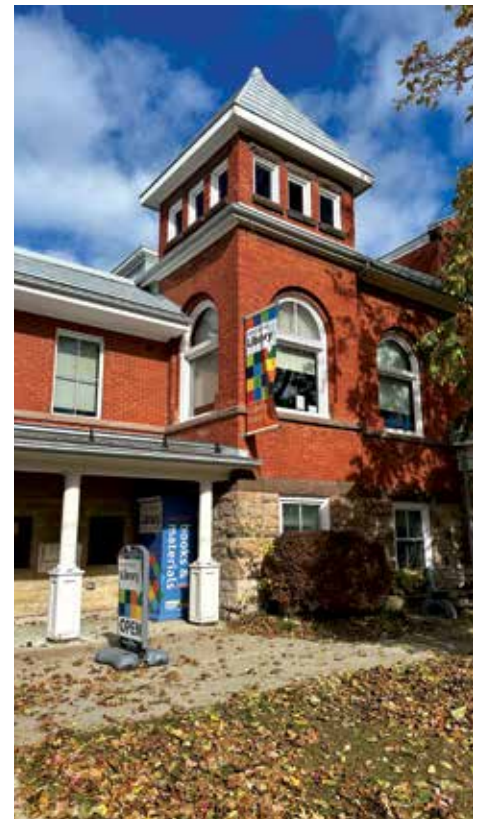
These pressures are illustrated by through Bruce Power's Major Component Replacement (MCR) program, which brought large numbers of temporary and project-based workers into the region over an extended period. The scale and duration of the project increased demand for housing, accommodations, transportation



Top left: Wind Energy, Bruce County.
Photograph by Negin Bamoueifard.

Bottom left: Kincardine Harbour, Kincardine, Ontario.
Photograph by Wayne Caldwell.

Bottom: Kincardine scene, Kincardine, Ontario.
Photograph by Wayne Caldwell.



infrastructure, healthcare services, and community amenities across the tri-county area. These pressures required municipalities and regional organizations to anticipate growth impacts beyond traditional planning timelines.

This highlights that long-term success in specialized regional economies depends on more than employment growth alone. Retention is closely connected to the ability of municipalities and regional partners to coordinate housing, infrastructure, transportation, healthcare, education, workforce development,

and community supports. Migration and retention are therefore not simply economic decisions. They are also shaped by family considerations, social integration, identity, and day-to-day community experiences.

Families consider whether a community can support dual-career households, provide appropriate schools and childcare options, offer recreational and social opportunities, and create a sense of belonging. It is often shaped through everyday interactions within schools, workplaces, recreation spaces,

community organizations, and social networks. These informal experiences can strongly influence whether HST newcomers and their families choose to remain in rural communities.

Examples of these efforts are increasingly visible across Bruce County and the broader tri-county region. Partnerships involving municipalities, employers, educational institutions, and community organizations have supported workforce attraction and settlement initiatives tied to the energy sector. Recreation programming, volunteer organizations,

“

...long-term success in specialized regional economies depends on more than employment growth alone.

schools, community events, and informal social networks have similarly played in helping newcomers and their families establish social connections and navigate life in a smaller, rural community.

Planning practice is becoming more relational

One of the central tenets in this investigation is that planning practice is becoming more relational, collaborative, and systems-oriented. Planners are no longer operating solely as regulators of land use and development applications. Increasingly, planners are acting as intermediaries between municipalities, employers, educational institutions, infrastructure providers, service agencies, and community organizations to align growth with long-term community capacity.

The concept of infrastructure is also expanding. Traditionally, planning discussions focused on roads, servicing, utilities, and transportation systems. However, retention outcomes are also shaped by social infrastructure, including childcare systems, schools, healthcare access, recreation facilities, public spaces, cultural inclusion, and opportunities for civic participation.

This represents a meaningful shift in how planners understand growth. Communities are no longer planning solely for population increases. They are also planning for workforce retention within highly competitive labour systems.

Implications for Planning	Key takeaways for municipalities
Growth coordination is increasingly critical	Municipalities benefit from coordination with major employers, infrastructure providers, and educational institutions to anticipate growth pressures. Proactive coordination can reduce service strain and support long-term growth management.
Retention is a household decision	Retention is influenced by employment opportunities for spouses and partners, access to schools and childcare, and opportunities for social and economic integration.
Housing must match workforce needs	Retention depends not only on housing supply, but whether housing meets workforce needs. Purpose-built rentals, medium-density housing, and flexible housing options are increasingly important for internationally recruited workers, mid-career professionals, and dual-income households.
Social infrastructure matters	Community hubs, healthcare, recreation, public spaces, cultural inclusion, and opportunities for participation support workforce retention and community stability.
Governance capacity is a planning asset	Regional collaboration, shared services, and inter-municipal coordination can strengthen planning capacity and infrastructure delivery.
Planning extends beyond recruitment	Skilled labour retention is a planning systems issue, not solely an economic development objective. Housing, infrastructure, governance, land use, and community well-being are interconnected in specialized economies.

The emerging governance question

The evolving role of the planner also raises important governance questions. The closer municipalities work with dominant employers, the greater the need to ensure that planning decisions continue to reflect the broader public interest rather than the priorities of any single economic actor.

Collaborative governance can strengthen coordination, reduce fragmentation, and improve responsiveness to growth pressures. In Bruce County, municipalities, economic development organizations, educational institutions, healthcare providers, and industry actors have worked together to respond to projected workforce growth associated with the energy sector. This coordination has included aligning infrastructure

investments, housing discussions, workforce development initiatives, and servicing strategies with anticipated labour demands.

The County's "Good Growth" official plan amendment, Clean Energy Frontier initiative, and partnerships involving the Nuclear Innovation Institute illustrate how planning and governance systems have adapted to changing workforce and population pressures. These collaborative approaches have strengthened regional coordination and helped municipalities respond more proactively to rapid growth and infrastructure demands.

At the same time, there are noted challenges associated with rapid specialization and growth. Rising housing prices, limited rental supply, and increased demand for temporary accommodations



Top left: Kincardine scene, Kincardine, Ontario.

Bottom left: Southampton Lighthouse, Southampton, Ontario.

Photograph by Wayne Caldwell.



Planning beyond recruitment

HST retention should be understood as a planning systems issue rather than solely an economic development objective. Labour markets, land use planning, infrastructure investment, housing policy, governance systems, and community well-being are closely connected. As municipalities increasingly compete within global labour systems, planners are becoming more directly involved in shaping the conditions that influence long-term regional resilience and workforce retention. As such, the role of the planner includes governance coordination, social infrastructure planning, and long-term community capacity building.

created affordability pressures for many residents, particularly lower-income households, younger families, seniors, and workers who do not participate in the dominant economic sector.

While HST who are connected to the energy sector benefit from strong employment opportunities and institutional supports, other groups experienced greater barriers related to housing access, transportation, employment mobility, and social inclusion.

Internationally recruited workers and their families could also encounter challenges related to credential recognition, culturally responsive services, and employment opportunities for spouses and partners.

These dynamics illustrate that while specialized economies can generate

significant regional investment and growth, they can also create uneven pressures that municipalities must navigate through housing policy, infrastructure planning, service coordination, and broader community development strategies. This is particularly relevant in smaller and rural municipalities where resources may be limited and where dominant employers may hold significant influence. Planning therefore requires balancing sector-specific growth with broader community priorities and the long-term public interest.

In highly specialized economies, attraction may initiate growth, but planning determines whether communities have the capacity to sustain it. As workforce mobility increasingly shapes regional competitiveness, planners are becoming central actors in creating the conditions that allow both communities and specialized economies to thrive.

Wayne Caldwell is taking part in "Measuring Farmland Conversion in Ontario: An Update and Reflection on Data from 2000 – 2021" at OPPI's 2026 conference at The Blue Mountains. ontarioplanners.ca



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City of Waterloo Credit: hstiver

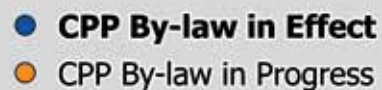
Change Management: Easing the Path Forward in the Transformation Towards a CPPS

The Community Planning Permit System can streamline the development approvals process and help communities meet goals — but you have to adopt a different mindset first.

JUSTINE GIANCOLA, RPP,
ASHLEY NORTH, RPP, AND
CHUN CHU, RPP

How do you get approvals for development applications from 180 days down to 45 days? That is a question that keeps the City of Waterloo staff up late at night. After all, they are about to overhaul their existing development review process with a new one — a Community Planning Permit System (CPPS) — piloting first in the Erb Street Corridor strategic growth area.

A CPPS is a tool enabled under the *Planning Act* that combines the zoning, site plan, and minor variance processes into one application and approval process. Currently, the *Planning Act* decision timelines are 90 days for a zoning bylaw amendment, 60 days for site plan approval, and about 30 days for a minor variance. These separate processes each require the applicant to provide submission materials, have different approval authorities and notice requirements, and require municipal staff to write staff reports, coordinate circulation and review of application materials, and set procedures working with the clerk's office. If the



The diagram compares two planning processes:

- Current Process (approximately 180 days):**
 - Starts with **Pre-Consultation** and **Submit** (indicated by a minus sign icon).
 - Followed by **Zoning Amendments (90 days)** (Council Decision).
 - Then **Site Plan Approval (60 days)** (Director of Planning).
 - Finally **Building Permit (30 days)** (If Required).
 - Includes **Minor Variances (30 days)** (Committee of Adjustment Decision) as a parallel path.
 - Ends with **Build** (indicated by a checkmark icon).
- Community Planning Permit Process (approximately 75 days):**
 - Starts with **Pre-Consultation** and **Submit** (indicated by a minus sign icon).
 - Followed by **Community Planning Permit (65 days)** (Council/Staff Decision).
 - Then **Building Permit (30 days)** (If Required).
 - Ends with **Build** (indicated by a checkmark icon).

A comparison icon (VS) is placed between the two processes. A star icon is placed next to the Community Planning Permit Process, indicating it is the preferred or faster option.

range of uses to be introduced in a municipal area. Similarly, the CPPS can prescribe a range of variations to development standards that may be permitted, so that the approval can address site-specific conditions without going through a separate minor variance process.

The flexibility of the CPPS enables the municipality to better implement their official plans through forward-looking development standards, manage unique site characteristics, and review the full proposal through a single application process. For the development community, this can provide clarity on expectations while providing flexibility to be able to achieve the best outcome efficiently.

Community benefits: The CPPS is akin to zoning with conditions because it can impose conditions on a development prior to or after the issuance of a CPP. The types of conditions are extensive, ranging from obtaining approvals from other agencies such as conservation authorities to monitoring environmental impacts as part of mitigation measures.

One of the most important types of conditions a CPPS can impose is the requirement for community benefits in exchange for additional height or density. This is referred to as “facilities, services and matters,” and many jurisdictions have used it to tackle local priorities, such as natural heritage enhancement, affordable housing, and conservation of heritage properties. This tool allows municipalities to “pre-zone” properties in alignment with their official plan and establish a range of community benefits that are required in exchange for increased height or density.

Today, at least eight municipalities have a CPPS in force, and more than 10 municipalities are in the process of establishing a CPPS. For many who are implementing this new tool, change management is top of mind.

Easing the path forward

Change is not easy. Sometimes it is pushed on us through external forces, such as imposed legislation. Other times, it's self-directed by an internal drive to improve. As CPPSs become more widespread in Ontario, integrating change management as part of the transformation will help ease the path forward and ensure municipal objectives are realized.



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Change Management Framework

The five pillars of the Prosci ADKAR® model for organizational change.¹



Awareness

Help people understand why change is needed now.



Desire

Build personal motivation and commitment to change.



Knowledge

Learn the skills, behaviours, and processes for the new system.



Ability

Coach, practice, and receive feedback to help build confidence.



Reinforcement

Recognize, reward, and sustain the change in the new system over the long-term.

Applying the Five Pillars in Change Management

According to the Prosci ADKAR® model for organizational change, there are five pillars in change management: awareness, desire, knowledge, ability, and reinforcement.¹ Here is how the model applies in the transformation to a CPPS.

Awareness and desire

Awareness and marketing of a CPPS begins during the preparation of the enabling policies and CPP bylaw through extensive public and stakeholder consultation. For instance, Brant County, City of Peterborough, and City of Waterloo have taken every opportunity to speak with the public and development community about the new tool. Engagement included multiple public open houses and meetings with key stakeholders, each providing ample information about CPPS and how it is intended to work, including interactive maps and information guides.

Municipal staff also engage with council through numerous educational and briefing sessions to help decision-makers understand why a CPPS is a good thing for the community. In addition, key internal departments are consulted during the drafting of the CPP bylaw, so that they contribute to and take ownership of the new bylaw. It is vital to get early buy-in from both internal and external partners of the development process.

When communicating about the new CPPS, we help reduce the fear of the “unknown” by reinforcing that the CPPS is not a foreign concept but rather that it builds on existing processes the municipality already has in place.

Dillon Consulting recently hosted several workshops with municipalities who are either updating or establishing a new CPPS. When asked, “What keeps you up at night,” almost all participants rated the following as their top two worries: how to actually administer a 45-day approval process and how to train staff on the new process.

Knowledge

Adopting a different mindset for reviewing development applications is one of the first things we roll out for CPPS training. Municipal staff and commenting agencies need to shift from a traditional back-and-forth, cyclical re-submission of applications to one that is straight-forward and prescriptive. As such, giving clear direction to an applicant during the pre-consultation stage is critical in setting expectations. Applicants must provide all required information and studies to the satisfaction of the municipality. Municipal staff, in turn, are encouraged to reframe their comments on development applications to be explicitly about what is needed to get to “yes.”

A CPP can only be approved if the application meets all the requirements and development standards of the CPP bylaw. In some circumstances, an applicant may not be able to demonstrate or meet certain requirements of the bylaw within

the 45-day period; however, if the municipality is satisfied that the applicant will be able to fulfill these requirements over time, it may issue a provisional approval that outlines conditions required before the CPP is issued or issue a CPP with conditions attached.

This highlights the importance of establishing clear conditions within the 45-day period to ensure the CPP bylaw requirements will be adequately addressed. Hence, numerous municipalities are standardizing the list of conditions that can be included in a CPP and when it would be appropriate to require them as part of provisional approval versus conditions attached to a permit. Likewise, the CPP agreement is another document that can be standardized to help secure conditions and requirements.

Ability

To build staff confidence in shepherding the new CPPS regime, municipal staff typically learn through mock application files and pilot programs. All relevant commenting departments are given clear roles and responsibilities, along with set timeframes for participating in the pre-consultation and review process. Updates to internal standard operating procedures and processes is essential to setting the teams up for success. Additional guidance is often needed during the early transition period, when the first few applications are tested and processed through the new system. Positive reinforcement is important, as is recognizing that there will be hiccups to work through in the early days.

Reinforcement

As the CPPS is implemented over time, monitoring and measurement is vital to determine the effectiveness of the CPP bylaw and its ability to achieve streamlined approvals. Before the five-year anniversary of a CPP bylaw, we recommend a municipality to review and update the bylaw to address any implementation improvements.

For example, the Town of Innisfil was one of the first pioneers of CPPS in 2017 with the establishment of a CPP bylaw for its shorelines. After the successful implementation, Innisfil expanded its CPP area to include the primary settlement area of Alcona in 2025. Innisfil also passed a housekeeping amendment to its CPP bylaw in the spring of 2026 to improve clarity and administration and is now preparing a town-wide bylaw. Innisfil has shown that continuous improvement is an inherent part of successfully managing the change.

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People-Oriented Transit: Challenges & Opportunities in Planning, Design, and Integration of Transit Infrastructure

Designing transit spaces around people and their needs to create accessible, thriving places that serve communities now and in the future.

ANA FRANCISA DE LA MORA,
ELIKA ZAMANI,
LIBBY DROR, AND
HAJI NAKAMURA

Ontario is currently undertaking nearly \$70 billion in transit investments, representing the largest expansion in North America and the most significant subway growth in Canadian history.¹ Across major projects, practitioners are gaining first-hand insight into what it takes to integrate mobility, placemaking, and growth in a people-oriented approach.

Drawing on lessons learned from the Arcadis transit architecture studio and extended multidisciplinary teams, this article calls for the planning, design, and integration of transit spaces around people to create accessible, connected, and thriving places that serve communities now and in the future.

Eglinton - Fairbank Station Plaza.
Credit: Metrolinx 2024



Planning transit facilities

Large transit projects often cross multiple jurisdictions and engage various stakeholders with differing objectives, leading to in-depth conversations about aligning priorities for the public realm. While municipalities lead with their official plans, there is an opportunity to improve coordination on continuity of public realm elements in the jurisdictions involved. Depending on the project scale, a comprehensive, line-wide strategy is necessary to ensure cohesion in the public realm across municipalities. Such strategies must balance continuity with site-specific adaptation.

While transit agencies offer resources through their design standards and guidelines to support transit integration with new development, establishing a project-specific urban design strategy from the outset helps create a cohesive vision.

An example of this approach is the Hazel McCallion LRT project, which traverses three jurisdictions: Brampton, Mississauga, and Peel Region. The municipalities collaborated on the Hurontario Main Street Corridor Master Plan, which established land use and urban design policies for a lively, pedestrian-friendly main street.² Building on this foundation, Arcadis implemented a line-wide streetscape and urban design strategy during the design development phase to ensure the

seamless connection of public spaces, key destinations, communities, and LRT facilities across jurisdictions.

Over the past 20+ years, the Arcadis transit architecture and placemaking studios have witnessed significant policy changes impacting transit infrastructure. The recent introduction of *Reducing Gridlock, Saving You Time Act, 2024* and *Fighting Delays, Building Faster Act, 2025* in Ontario have created uncertainty in station-area planning and streetscape design. The latter legislation enables the province to override municipal decisions on active transportation, potentially impeding implementation of complete streets guidelines in master plans where removal of vehicle lanes is required to accommodate cycling infrastructure. These uncertainties can delay design decisions, increase soft costs, and complicate the timely coordination of utility relocations and other enabling works.

Further complexity arises from ongoing debates about cost allocation for utility relocations and upgrades, especially when excavation is required. In Ontario's rapidly evolving legislative environment, transit projects require agencies and practitioners to be both proactive and well-informed to adapt effectively to emerging challenges. Success depends on creatively addressing policy and jurisdictional requirements.

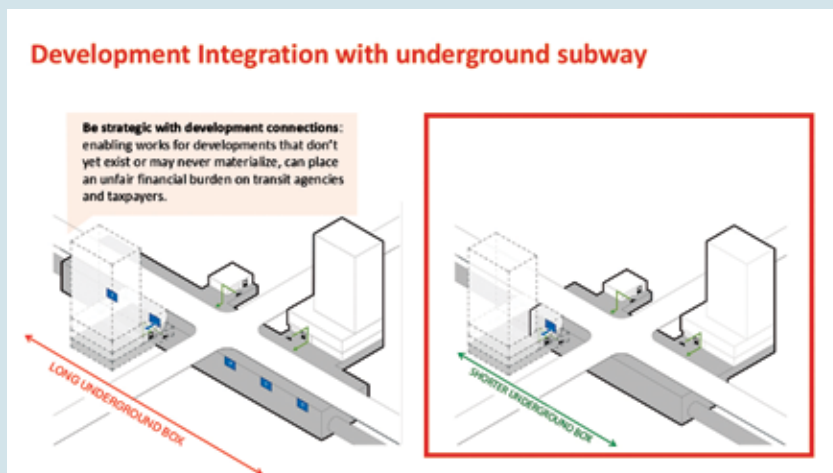
As transit agencies strive to align project objectives with municipal priorities and community interests, it is increasingly important to prioritize and keep record of stakeholder needs to establish a clear shared vision early on. Achieving this requires strategic coordination and negotiation, as well as a sophisticated understanding of the policy, financial, technical, and social dynamics that drive successful transit integration.

An example of this is Fairbank Station on Line 5 Eglinton in Toronto. The station plaza incorporates the space which was once St. Hilda's Parkette. The design team collaborated with the city, stakeholders, councillor, and local business improvement area (BIA) to inform the design and future function of the station plaza, which also serves as a community gathering place. It is important to note that active management of a shared vision throughout delivery is critical for successful collaboration.

Integrating transit with public life

Shifting to a more detailed view, the list below demonstrates how deliberate design of integrated transit facilities can elevate the passenger experience within the public realm.

Optimize entrance quantity: Adding more entrances or connections to a higher-order transit station does not necessarily enhance



Strategic development integration. Credit-Arcadis 2025

“

The latter legislation enables the province to override municipal decisions on active transportation...

its effectiveness and can increase costs due to a larger station footprint. A succinct station layout prioritizing efficient passenger movement, supported by high-quality exterior public spaces, seamless street connections, and effective links to private buildings is often more advantageous. This approach supports accessibility and integration while maintaining cost efficiency and design simplicity.

Prioritize proximity for pick-up/drop-off:

Private vehicle access points, including ride-share and accessible pick-up/drop-off, must be located as close as possible to entrances, with one or two temporary parking spaces in the right-of-way to accommodate quick stops. Locating these facilities a block away discourages transit use, may hinder development, and inadvertently promotes driving instead of offering seamless multimodal connections.

Incorporate bus terminals into city life:

Bus terminals should not be isolated; with thoughtful design, they can be integrated into the base of a building or the city fabric, remaining visible from the street and contributing to an active, vibrant public realm.

Activate main streets with ancillary buildings:

Substations and similar ancillary buildings do not need to hide from the main street; when designed to respect and complement the surrounding context, they can face primary streets and contribute to an animated main street. This can be achieved through the use of high-quality materials, public art, integrated bike parking, landscape architecture with seating or water features, or small-scale retail or community uses.

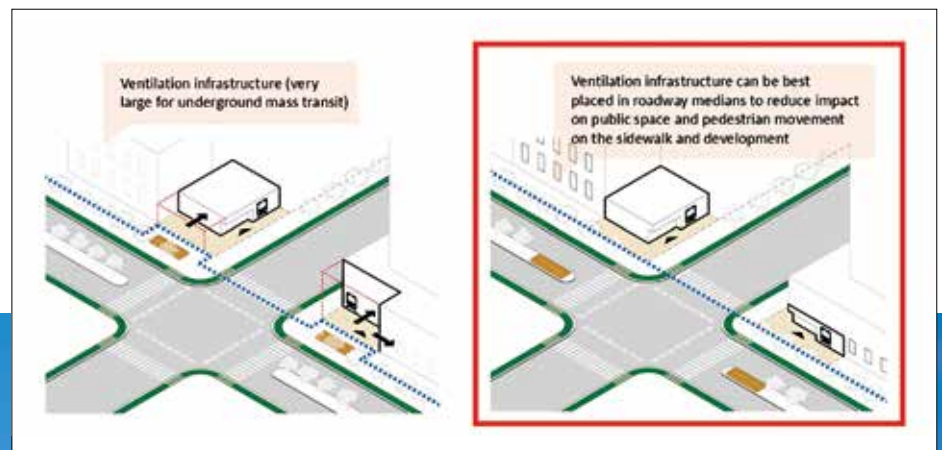
Facilitate flexibility in landscape design:

In transit projects, there is often an opportunity to improve urban design continuity by maintaining plaza design typology and materiality into the municipal right-of-way to the back of curb. Collaboration with municipalities in creating consensus on material continuity

and cross-agency coordination for long-term maintenance can lead to lasting, cohesive interface between station plazas and streetscapes.

Locate vent shafts in medians: Where possible and to reduce impact on public spaces, private development, and pedestrian movement on the sidewalk and into adjacent development, ventilation infrastructure can be placed within the roadway medians and integrated into municipal streetscape visions.

While these ideas have proven useful in our experience, it is important to emphasize the value of a context-specific approach rather than a one-size-fits-all model. As transit architects and designers, we recognize the importance of stakeholder feedback as part of an iterative design process



Right: Finch West Station Entrance and Substation.
Credit: Arcadis 2025

Below: Allow for flexibility on locating vent shafts in medians.
Credit: Arcadis 2025



that responds to both existing and future community needs.

Delivering high-quality public spaces around transit infrastructure remains a persistent challenge, particularly when there is insufficient space within the rights-of-way or on transit parcels to accommodate all municipal requirements. To ensure these spaces genuinely serve community needs, public life studies are invaluable: by observing how people move through and inhabit pre-construction public spaces in the neighbourhood, planners and designers can gain critical insights that inform more responsive, effective design solutions.

However, another significant obstacle is assigning ownership, maintenance, and operational responsibilities for plazas and interstitial spaces. Innovative stewardship models such as incentive programs for BIAs, transit agencies, municipalities, or private owners can encourage active development and ongoing care of these essential public assets. As design evolves, direct integration of transit with new development supports a unified urban experience.

Building connections

Ontario's transit-oriented communities program aims to integrate transit infrastructure with high-density, mixed-use developments, leveraging land-value capture for funding transit, while increasing ridership and local economic growth³ and enhancing the passenger experience. Undertaking such integrations is multi-faceted and complex: designing interfaces requires coordination among interdisciplinary teams, multiple owners and stakeholders, the development of design and delivery agreements, and highly efficient interface and overall project management, among other requirements. Throughout this process, it is essential to keep the focus on quality and continuity of the pedestrian experience.

One of the primary challenges of integration is aligning construction timing between private development and transit delivery. These programs are often not synchronized, as they are

driven by different funding structures, approval processes, risk profiles, and market conditions. As a result, successful integration frequently requires early partnering, clear governance frameworks, and interim or phased solutions that allow each party to progress independently while safeguarding future connections. Proactive coordination on interfaces, temporary conditions, and long-term safeguarding is essential to avoid costly retrofits, service disruptions, or missed placemaking opportunities.

Another integration challenge is aligning applicable code requirements across transit and mixed-use components. Transit facilities are subject to specialized fire and life-safety standards, such as NFPA 130, which do not directly align with the prescriptive requirements of the Ontario Building Code for residential or mixed-use occupancies. In integrated conditions, this can create conflicts related to egress, fire separations, and life-safety systems. Resolution typically requires early code analysis and engagement with authorities and simplifying transit requirements for connections from private development to transit facility for easier developer buy-in.

Despite these and other challenges, integration with development to optimize land use should remain a priority. Cost-sharing approaches such as negotiated joint development partnerships, rail-plus-property and long-term public land leasing models in Hong Kong, tax-increment financing-supported station area regeneration in Denver, and integrated public-private, station-led regeneration frameworks in the U.K. offer relevant lessons for Ontario planners.

Acknowledgements

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Looking ahead

Ontario is uniquely positioned to apply these principles as it advances multiple new transit projects, drawing on lessons learned from other jurisdictions while responding to local priorities and constraints. Establishing a clear, shared vision early and maintaining it throughout delivery is critical to manage complexity, avoid unnecessary delays, and ensure that streetscapes and transit infrastructure remain focused on user needs.

Successful integration of transit and development lies in recognizing transit as a foundational part of urban fabric. By prioritizing people, everyday mobility, and long-term place quality, practitioners can collaborate to deliver transit environments that do more than move people efficiently — they can shape complete communities that support social connection, economic vitality, and sustainable growth over time.



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The Algorithm in the Office: AI and the Future of Planning

Surveys show that AI makes many Canadians nervous.
So how do planners balance public concern over AI risk
with the potential benefits of this new technology?

ROB DOWLER, RPP,
AND GABE D'ULISSE



The *Economist* recently noted that “advances in artificial intelligence have long terrified techies. Lately, voters are feeling the angst too. AI is unpopular in the West and climbing up the political agenda.”¹

Closer to home, the 2026 *Ipsos AI Monitor* suggests that Canada stands as one of the least-trusting and least-enthusiastic populations globally regarding AI with 67 per cent of Canadians reporting that “products and services using artificial intelligence make me nervous,” compared to a 32-country average of 50 per cent. Only 34 per cent of Canadians reported that “products and services using AI have more benefits than drawbacks” compared to a 32-country average of 55 per cent. Further, only 27 per cent of Canadians trusted companies using AI to protect their personal data and only 36 per cent trusted AI not to “discriminate or show bias towards any group of people.”²

This begs a critical question for the planning profession: how to balance public concern over AI risk with the potential benefits of this new technology?

The pressure from the province is clear: build housing and infrastructure faster than ever before. With compressed timelines, constant legislative changes, and mountain-high stacks of development applications, RPPs need solutions. AI is in our offices now and the promises of greater efficiency are tempting. As noted by Othengrafen et al. (2025):

- In early phases of planning work, AI can help with data-based planning analysis, and formal planning workflows can be simplified through functional AI.
- AI can be used to analyze public comments and assist with routine tasks like document summaries and formulation of pre-draft documents.
- AI “can support internal administrative procedures and planning processes, e.g., checking procedural steps or checking whether the documents required for the planning application are complete.”³

“

How do planners reap the benefits of AI while maintaining public trust?

But planners are required to maintain the trust of councils, public and private stakeholders, and delivery partners. How do planners reap the benefits of AI while maintaining public trust?

The AI adoption landscape: efficiency vs. risk

To use AI responsibly, planners need to separate helpful agents from risky over-reliance which operates without a “human in the loop.” As noted by Boyko and Robinson, these tools pose a degree of ethical challenge that requires boundaries to avoid compromising equity and undermining public participation.⁴

Time-consuming tasks that mire planners in paperwork are perfect for AI. Large language models (LLMs) excel at organizing messy information. They can take hundreds of public comments from a town hall and group them by theme in minutes. They can quickly draft report outlines or clean up data in spreadsheets. We are already seeing AI tools piloted across Ontario municipal offices.

City of Hamilton partnered with the Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative to pilot the “First Wave Portal.” This system is intended to automate zoning compliance screenings and preliminary Ontario Building Code checks on applications to reduce review times for formal consultation documents by 60 per cent and conditional site plan applications by 71 per cent.⁵

City of Burlington launched “eCheck,” an online portal powered by Archistar. The platform uses AI to scan building permit applications before formal submission, flagging code non-compliance and formatting errors for applicants to correct early in the process.⁶

City of Ottawa deployed an Archistar-powered system for low-rise residential projects. It automates initial completeness checks and compliance reviews against local zoning bylaws and the Ontario Building Code to reduce submission review cycles.⁷

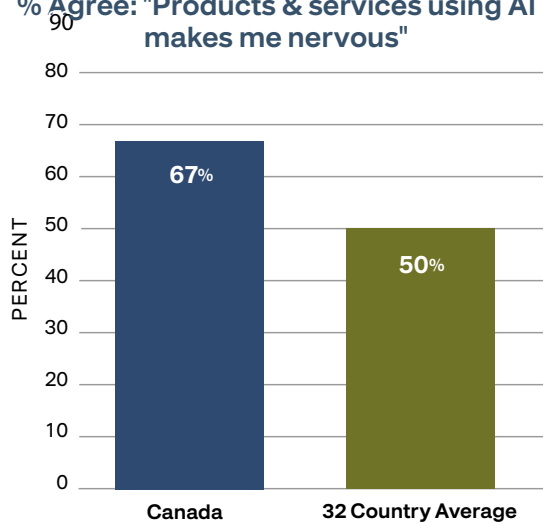
City of Vaughan partnered with GeoMate to pilot an AI mapping system. The tool applies machine learning to high-resolution aerial imagery to generate GIS-ready datasets of sidewalk and transportation infrastructure, reducing the need for manual fieldwork.⁸

City of Toronto has established governance for the responsible use of generative AI,⁹ and the City was also selected to participate in the Bloomberg Philanthropies City Data Alliance to develop resident-centred AI applications.¹⁰ In addition, Toronto has announced an AI-Assisted Building Plan Pre-Assessment Pilot Initiative to improve building permit review efficiency.

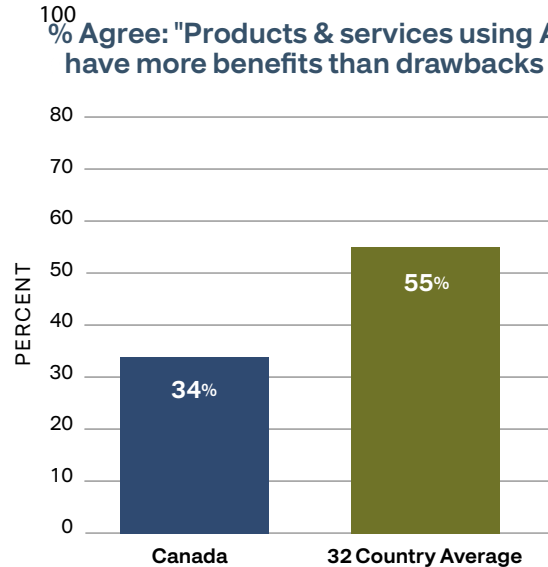
King Township utilizes Snowflake and Microsoft platforms to run multiple AI tools. These include Kingsley, a virtual assistant that answers public inquiries about zoning and bylaws, automated

Canadian Trust in AI - Ipsos AI Monitor

% Agree: "Products & services using AI makes me nervous"



% Agree: "Products & services using AI have more benefits than drawbacks"



Sources: 2026 Ipsos AI Monitor

“ AI is not going to replace planners. But planners who use AI responsibly will replace those who use it irresponsibly or choose not to use it at all.

invoice processing, and CITYROVER, a computer-vision tool that scans roads from municipal vehicles to track potholes and infrastructure maintenance.¹¹

In these scenarios, the risk appears to be low. AI is not replacing human judgment. Rather, it is reducing administrative overhead so planners can spend more time on complex applications, plans, and assisting stakeholders.

While AI can check compliance against objective standards like setbacks, height, parking, side yards, and density, most implementations use a human-in-the-loop approach which relies on planners to comment on criteria that require professional judgment — provisions which use terms like “compatible,” “appropriate,” “sufficient,” “reasonable,” or the oft-discussed “character.” Like most jurisdictions, qualitative provisions like these are common in Ontario’s planning legislation, the Provincial Policy Statement, as well as local plans and bylaws.

Warnings from the witness stand: the OLT rules

Planners are not the first professionals to grapple with AI. We can learn from our peers in law and engineering as well as the Ontario Land Tribunal (OLT).

The legal community has already faced harsh wake-up calls regarding AI. In *Mazaheri v. Law Society of Ontario*, the Law Society Tribunal issued a \$31,150 penalty against a practitioner who submitted a factum containing AI-generated case citations that appeared to be hallucinations.¹²

Engineers Canada and regional regulators have issued similar warnings. In their practice advisories, regulators like Engineers and Geoscientists BC have reminded professionals that if an algorithm is trained on flawed data, it will produce flawed designs yet the regulated professional remains fully liable.¹³

The OLT has taken a firm stand on undisclosed AI use. Under the OLT’s Practice Direction, effective for all hearings after

“Planners are not the first professionals to grapple with AI. We can learn from our peers in law and engineering as well as the Ontario Land Tribunal.

March 30, 2026, parties, participants, and witnesses must identify the paragraphs generated and confirm a human has verified them.¹⁴ If a planner submits inaccurate materials generated by AI, or fails to declare its use, the OLT can strike those documents from the record and award costs.

For RPPs, the message is clear. When you stand before the OLT as an expert witness, your opinion must be entirely your own and completely verified. “The algorithm got it wrong” will not hold up under cross-examination.

Global lessons: what regulators are saying

Planning organizations around the world are drawing lines in the sand and issuing formal policy positions that tie AI use directly to professional ethics.

In the United States: The American Planning Association (APA) has published, *Planning Ethics and Generative AI*, linking AI use to the AICP Code of Ethics.¹⁵ The APA dictates that planners must maintain a human-in-the-loop approach. They warn that over-reliance on automated tools will erode public trust, noting that AI models can absorb and amplify biases sometimes found in planning data.

In the United Kingdom: The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) released an advice note for members as the UK government tests AI to speed up planning decision times to meet ambitious housing targets.¹⁶ They note that it is “crucial for RTPI members to have a high-level understanding of how the technologies powering such tools work, allowing us to harness the opportunities they create whilst navigating their many challenges.”¹⁷

In Ontario: The Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI) has recognized AI as a critical shift for the profession. In its Strategic Plan framework, OPPI identifies AI as part of the “changing planning landscape” and commits to take steps to help emerging planners navigate the field “with confidence and professional judgment.”¹⁸ OPPI has launched new workshops such as *ChatGPT for Planners: Transforming How We Write, Review, and Communicate* to teach planners how to leverage AI to sharpen text and work efficiently without compromising the OPPI’s Professional Code of Practice. Further, OPPI has established “AI literacy and responsible use” as a theme for its 2026 annual conference.¹⁹

A four-pillar framework for Ontario

As Ontario shifts to human-in-the-loop AI, professional planners need clear guidance regarding responsible use. Professional guidance for RPPs should rest on four core pillars:

Disclosure: Mirroring the OLT’s approach, planners should not have to declare use of AI for minor tasks like spellcheck or spreadsheet formatting. However, if AI is used to summarize public consultation data or draft sections of a secondary plan, that should be clearly stated. The public has a right to know how their feedback was processed.

Competence: The OPPI Code of Practice requires planners to be competent. Today, that includes technological literacy. Planners must understand how their tools work. Professional training should focus on AI auditing and digital literacy. RPPs must always maintain the skills to question and override AI’s conclusion.

Confidentiality: Most public AI models save the information you type into them to train future systems. If a planner uploads an unreleased draft of an official plan amendment or sensitive financial data into a public AI tool, they are leaking confidential information. Policies must require the use of secure, private networks that protect client and municipal data in compliance with Ontario’s provincial privacy frameworks.

Bias Mitigation: AI learns from the past. If we feed old reports into AI, it will replicate those exact biases under the guise of “objective data.” Planners must actively audit AI tools to ensure they do not recycle inaccuracies.

The bottom line

AI is not going to replace planners. But planners who use AI responsibly will replace those who use it irresponsibly or choose not to use it at all. As noted by Othengrafen et al. (2025):

“We are convinced that planning processes will not be fully automated by AI. Planning is still dependent on the decisions and valuations of planners, which is confirmed by all of our interviewees. AI-based applications are used here as supplementary tools for the work process.”²⁰



Elvis: A low-risk, high-impact case study in planning education

Ontario's universities are already piloting AI strategies to build future-ready planners. One example comes from Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU).

TMU's undergraduate planning program features a fourth-year core course on Plan Implementation & Administration. In it, students develop impactful implementation plans using a strategy toolset from McKinsey. Course instructor Rob Dowler wanted to see if AI could offer an additional learning aid to help a class of over 100 students improve their grasp of some challenging course concepts.

TMU recently updated its Senate Policy on Academic Integrity to establish clear parameters for the responsible use of AI in teaching and learning. The university provides access to Gemini Pro, which operates under a core agreement with Google to ensure TMU data remains private.²¹ With these guardrails established, "Elvis" was born.

Elvis is an instructor-built AI coach. Students were given the option to submit drafts to Elvis for immediate, conversational feedback. To minimize the risks of bias and hallucination, Elvis was developed using a closed-loop (RAG) environment and trained on a private dataset of course readings and lecture slides. RTRI prompts were developed by the instructor to mirror the tone used in class.

Strict guardrails were built into the agent's prompts. Elvis was forbidden from writing text, providing answers, or giving solutions to assignments, which could run afoul of university plagiarism policies. Instead, it was programmed as a purely Socratic coach — designed to ask guiding questions that help students critically analyze and improve their own work.

To ensure transparency, Elvis was tested using a range of dummy submissions. Prompts were revised to ensure the agent's tone and content was consistent with course readings and lectures. To avoid "context rot" where the AI over-weights recent conversations and forgets its initial prompting (a common problem with neural network LLMs), Elvis's prompts were refreshed for the second assignment.

Since many students are uneasy with AI, using the coach was completely optional. Students who opted in were required to complete readings on responsible AI use and participate in a reflection survey. The rollout demonstrated a shift in student trust:

Assignment 1: Student response to Elvis was initially tentative. Only 42 per cent of the class chose to use Elvis, but among those early adopters, 90 per cent reported that the AI tool was helpful from a learning perspective.

Assignment 2: Take-up increased to 68 per cent of the class, with 100 per cent of users indicating that the tool was helpful.²²

A more rigorous analysis is planned for this fall, laying the foundation for the rollout of Elvis 2.0 in the winter of 2027.

Rob Dowler is taking part in "Who's Afraid of AI? A Fireside Chat" at OPPI's 2026 conference at The Blue Mountains. ontarioplanners.ca

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AI Disclosure: The authors used the TMU instance of Gemini 1.5 Pro to assist with initial research, formatting, and grammar. All arguments, cases, and citations are the authors' who have manually verified the content and maintain full accountability for any errors.



Rob Dowler, MCIP, RPP, ICD.D, served as Corporate Chief Strategist for IT in the Ontario government and Chair of the Ring of Fire Infrastructure Development Corporation. Since retiring, he teaches planning at TMU and UofT.

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Harnessing AI for Sustainable Urban Planning:

Mitigating Over-Paving in Urbanizing Communities

A look at how a subset of AI, machine learning, can help with a key challenge associated with gentle density in low-rise suburban neighbourhoods.

ANDRIA SALLESE, RPP

The rapid urbanization of low-rise communities to accommodate a growing population can present several challenges to municipalities. The expansion of impervious surfaces, such as widened driveways and expanded parking areas, can support gentle density. However, these changes can reduce natural water infiltration, leading to increased runoff that may exacerbate flooding risks and place additional strain on aging stormwater infrastructure, particularly in communities where systems are not designed for higher volumes.¹

AI offers a potential solution to managing these issues by providing real-time data. By leveraging AI-driven geospatial analysis and high-resolution aerial imaging, municipalities can proactively monitor changes in land use and develop sustainable policies, helping to mitigate adverse effects and promote resilient communities.²

"While Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a broad term referring to systems that simulate human intelligence, machine learning is a specific subset of AI focused on systems that learn from data. In this article, the term machine learning is more applicable, as the tools discussed analyze and learn from large datasets to improve over time and make predictions."

Source: Clemson Center for Geospatial Technologies, 2023*



Balancing housing needs with environmental priorities

As cities grow, the demand for housing inevitably increases. Suburban low-rise neighbourhoods can provide opportunities for gentle density. For example, in fully serviced settlement areas, permissions for up to three additional residential units (ARUs) in single-detached, semi-detached, and townhouse dwellings in the form of basement apartments, additions, garage conversions, and garden suites can help provide housing options.³

While integrating ARUs into existing neighbourhoods can help municipalities meet their housing targets, this form of gentle intensification can also generate additional demand for on-site parking, altering soft landscaped space in front yards. In Newmarket, survey findings from the Town's Residential Parking Study (RPS) hot spot areas indicate that 91 per cent of respondents reported parking on their driveways and 31 per cent report insufficient parking space on their lot, highlighting how intensification is directly contributing to increased pressure to expand parking areas on private lots often at the expense of soft landscaping.

It is important to balance housing needs with sustainability. In low-rise communities, stormwater systems are typically designed based on planned densities and populations and the estimated stormwater runoff these communities will generate. Increases in impervious surfaces can exacerbate stormwater issues by reducing permeable surface area.

Newmarket's driveway/walkway AI pilot study, undertaken as part of the RPS, provided a more nuanced understanding of this issue. The analysis found that walkway widening is the more significant contributor to incremental over-paving than driveway widenings. Approximately 95 per cent of properties (out of 176) in the pilot area exceeded the maximum permitted walkway width by +2 metres from the bylaw permissions, often resulting in contiguous hard surfaces that function as an additional parking space. This change can result in increased stormwater draining into municipal systems and sometimes onto neighbouring properties. Careful monitoring of impervious surfaces can help avoid exacerbating stormwater runoff and the loss of green space in these neighbourhoods.

Monitoring over-paving and the role of AI

By using AI tools to monitor and analyze the impact of gentle density on local environments, planners can develop zoning provisions that support sustainability and flooding risks. For example, where homeowners in low-rise communities often expand their driveways or adjacent hard surfaces to accommodate additional vehicles, legally or illegally, this results in gradual but measurable increase in impervious surfaces in these neighbourhoods over time.⁴

Machine learning tools, particularly those using aerial photography and geographic information systems (GIS), can play a role in addressing these environmental challenges. As demonstrated through

Newmarket's driveway/walkway pilot, these tools can measure driveway and walkway widths, assess compliance with zoning bylaws, and map patterns of over-paving across neighbourhoods where they are most prevalent (see Dashboard). This data can then be used to inform location-specific parking management policies and zoning provisions, thereby promoting more sustainable practices.

Implementing AI-driven zoning provisions

Despite its many benefits, using AI-powered tools requires municipalities to adopt a multifaceted approach to building the tool for the local context. The first step is sourcing and investing in machine learning tools capable of processing and analyzing large datasets for a municipal environment.

The next step involves gathering the right information from high-resolution aerial imagery, creating GIS parcel data, and zoning permissions to inform baseline data for the AI model. While AI can provide real-time insights into land use changes, enabling planners to make data-driven decisions, the time and resources needed to implement and integrate these tools may be cost-prohibitive.

Newmarket's experience also highlights the importance of cross-departmental collaboration, including planning, bylaw enforcement, and GIS to make the tool successful. Emerging options being explored through the RPS include regulating the combined width of driveways and walkways, introducing tiered soft landscaping requirements



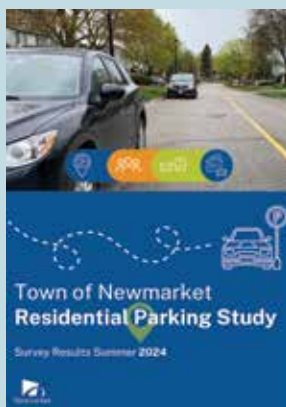
based on lot frontage, and permitting flexibility for parking while maintaining minimum permeable surface areas.

The options for implementation and the net benefit to the environment and municipal assets, however, may outweigh the costs. For example, using the findings from the AI analyses, municipalities could, with local council approval, implement restrictions on driveway widening and other increases in impervious surface in areas identified as high-risk for stormwater runoff, mitigating impacts to nearby parks, trails, and other municipally owned lands. This is particularly important as additional water can flow onto sidewalks and roadways, leading to freezing and slippery conditions when temperatures drop between the seasons.

Municipalities could also require the use of permeable materials for driveway expansions in areas with high numbers of ARUs to balance the decrease in the amount of soft landscaping, which may allow rainwater to infiltrate the ground, helping to reduce runoff, and improve groundwater recharge. Incentives could be provided for homeowners who incorporate green infrastructure, such as rain gardens and green roofs, into their properties. These measures would help mitigate the environmental impact of increased density while providing much-needed housing.

Benefits of AI-driven planning

By providing accurate and timely data, AI and machine learning can help planners develop more effective zoning provisions that balance the needs of



Above: Newmarket Driveway/Walkway AI Pilot Infraction Dashboard

Left: Town of Newmarket Residential Parking Study

residents with environmental sustainability. Newmarket's driveway/walkway AI pilot study demonstrates how these tools can uncover patterns not readily visible through traditional analyses.

This approach may not only help mitigate the cumulative impact of over-paving but also enhance the resilience of urban areas to climate change. Moreover, AI-driven urban planning can lead to more equitable outcomes. By identifying areas most affected by over-paving, planners can prioritize interventions in communities that are disproportionately affected by flooding.⁵

The use of smart tools in planning represents a significant advancement in our ability to manage our planned and natural environment. As municipalities continue to respond to the pressures of urbanization and climate change, leveraging machine learning and real-time data will be an essential asset in a planner's toolkit.

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Walking the Tightrope: How Inclusionary Zoning Passed in Ottawa

Ottawa's Inclusionary Zoning journey took eight years and is now the only functioning IZ program in Ontario. Here is a look at the process, lessons learned, and what comes next.

DAVID WISE, RPP, AND RORY BAKSH, RPP

Inclusionary Zoning. Two words that will rouse hope in the hearts of housing advocates and strike fear in the hearts of many others. The IZ philosophy in Ontario is simple: development that profits by proximity to major public transit investment should provide a social return through affordable housing units. However, when system interdependencies are considered, the complexity of IZ emerges. This complexity is why prior attempts at IZ in Ontario have met with resistance and roadblocks.

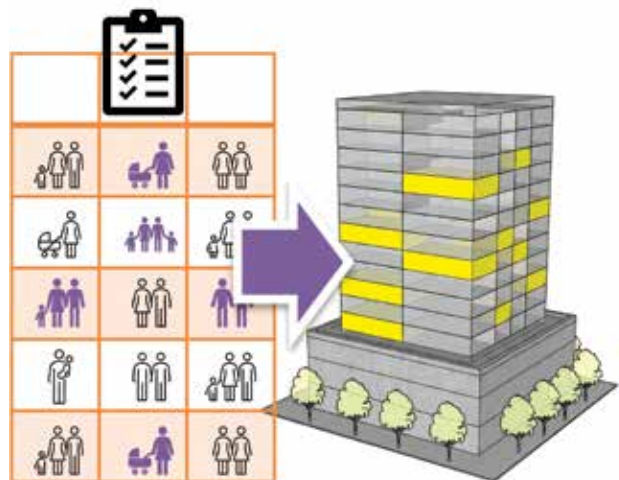
Making IZ come to fruition is not a hammer driving a nail — it's more like walking a tightrope. That's why Ottawa's IZ is explicitly not about setting a mandatory requirement to force affordability — it's about building a system that can support one. That distinction may sound minor, but it reflects market feasibility to inform the policy instead of trying to override market forces.

The starting point was the housing system

Ottawa chose to recognize the market outcome first: more homes. If it wants affordability near transit, then developers have to build, and affordability must work within their business cases. City staff engaged Dillon Consulting Limited and NBLC to provide deep understanding and help pressure test the assumptions. Prototyping and pro forma analysis of various housing demonstrated the push-and-pull factors involved in IZ. Consultation with developers themselves (both market and non-profit) also helped test the numbers.

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Ottawa's IZ is explicitly not about setting a mandatory requirement to force affordability — it's about building a system that can support one.



Idealized conceptualization of Inclusionary Zoning. Source: City of Ottawa.

The economics drive everything

The market assessment illuminated how IZ does not operate in a vacuum. IZ impacts the revenue stream while leaving costs largely unchanged. That affects cash flow and ultimately whether a project moves forward. Under current conditions, many projects are already marginal because construction costs have increased sharply and prices have softened.

In this context, even a modest number of required IZ units (set-aside) has a disproportionate effect. It doesn't just reduce profitability; it can push a project from marginally viable into non-viable territory. Consultation with industry reinforced the market assessment and this stakeholder input helped give Ottawa's IZ policy its shape so it could function effectively.

Housing outcomes, responsive policy

Recognizing that a mandatory set-aside under current market conditions would stall development, Ottawa chose to sequence its strategy differently. Rather than forcing immediate requirements onto a weak market, the policy aims to support long-term growth and housing supply.

Setting the mandatory rate at zero per cent directed focus towards making future projects feasible through partnerships, benefit stacking, and economies of scale. A zero per cent

set-aside is not an absence of policy; rather, it is a structural foundation that creates flexible pathways, uses evidence-based market triggers, and ensures predictability. That shifts IZ from being a static rule to a responsive tool.

A program within a larger set of actions

Market analysis confirms that IZ cannot exist in isolation; it is just one factor alongside development charges, parkland contributions, and financing that determines a project's viability. To reduce friction and improve predictability, Ottawa aligned its IZ framework with Ontario's provincial definitions of affordability. This alignment allows projects to automatically stack various incentives, including development charge exemptions and parkland relief.

IZ now functions as part of a combined approach, using regulation to establish a requirement while leveraging municipal capital, non-profit partnerships, and federal/provincial programs to make that requirement financially viable at scale.

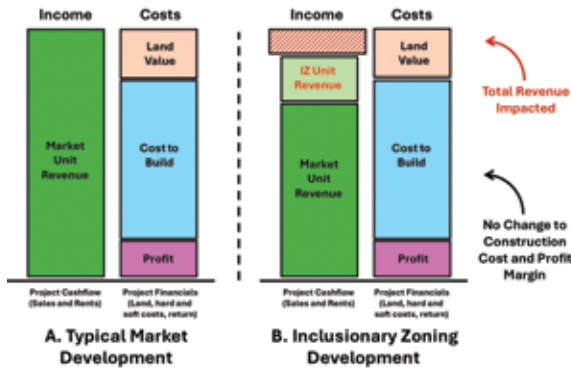
IZ as one tool among many

Ottawa's first attempt to introduce IZ created unrealistic expectations that it could solve the entire affordability crisis. Recognizing the need for clearer communications, city staff regrouped and integrated IZ into a broader discussion alongside



Landing IZ in the Housing Continuum. Source: City of Ottawa.

Economics of Inclusionary Zoning



Demonstration of the shifting revenue impacts associated with IZ. Source: City of Ottawa.

Design choices are not incidental

The decision to set a minimum threshold of 80 units or 6,000 square metres was not arbitrary. It ensures IZ produces meaningful units within a project, rather than scattered units difficult to manage. It also aligns with the provincial cap of five per cent. Below those thresholds, math creates practical and legal complications. In a snapshot of Ottawa's IZ regulations, each parameter has a recommendation.

Geography: Within Protected Major Transit Station Areas (PMTSAs). No sub-markets currently identified.

Development threshold: 80 or more dwelling units or 6,000 square metres or more residential (GFA).

Maximum set-aside rate: Zero per cent, subject to review in the next market assessment via two-part market feasibility and housing equity test.

Transition period: Where an existing set-aside rate is proposed to increase, up to 2-year transition provided.

Affordability term: 25 Years

Affordability depth: Tied to income-based affordability to the sixth decile to ensure alignment with municipal and provincial incentives and exemptions.

Unit mix requirements: Provided units are to be proportional to the unit mix of the overall development, distributed throughout the building, with equivalent build quality as market units.

Off-site provisions: Permitted within any PMTSA located in the same geographic sub-region, subject to development agreement and registration on title for conveying and receiving properties.

To maintain financial feasibility, the policy uses a proportional rather than prescriptive unit mix, ensuring affordable units mirror market mix without disrupting the financial structure. Additionally, off-site delivery is permitted only when it improves outcomes while remaining strictly managed to protect mixed-income communities near transit. Every decision balances feasibility, equity, and administrative practicality.

the 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan. Repositioning IZ as "one of many" tools helped clearly define its capabilities and structural limits:

- What it can do: Deepen affordability within mid- and high-rise market developments.
- What it cannot do: Replace non-market housing, effectively deliver larger family units in high-rises (which the market analysis demonstrated is more feasible for ground-oriented housing), or generate deeply affordable units without outside intervention.

Establishing these boundaries shifted discussion away from demanding immediate affordability mandates and towards guiding market processes without halting development.

The real work is the housing program

A clear lesson from other municipalities was to focus on nimble implementation. Cities that defined every IZ aspect in zoning bylaws ended up with systems more complex than the projects they governed. Ottawa's response was to separate structure from operation.

The official plan and zoning bylaw set out what must be legally established. Our constant question was, "Does this absolutely have to be in the policy and bylaw?" If not, we made it a topic for the forthcoming *IZ Implementation Guidelines*. That keeps the regulatory framework stable while allowing evolution and alignment to how housing projects actually work.

Future outlook

Housing policy should measure success by actual delivery rather than the stringency of its mandates. Ottawa's IZ framework prioritizes this by implementing seemingly conservative choices — such as the zero per cent rate — with full intent to create a system that operates well and can evolve. This approach has established a stable, long-term policy anchor. Ottawa is now better poised to produce affordable units as it looks forward to the future.

Rory Bakshi is taking part in "The Double Life of Place: Planning for visitors, residents and every season" at OPPI's 2026 conference at The Blue Mountains. ontarioplanners.ca



David Wise, MCIP, RPP, was the Program Manager of Housing Acceleration Coordination at the City of Ottawa and City lead for the Inclusionary Zoning file from 2018 to 2026.
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Ontario Needs Rural Land to Power Its Future: Are Municipal Planning Frameworks Ready?



Ontario's electricity demand is growing rapidly, requiring new capacity and energy needs. Rural Ontario is commonly sited for these projects for some very good, practical reasons.

GILLIAN SMITH, RPP

On a warm evening last summer, I was joining some friends at a restaurant on Picton's Main Street when the power cut. Staff quickly set out candles as if they had been through this before. It was an inconvenience for tourists but a familiar frustration for locals.

Prince Edward County has embraced localized solar power, but the grid serving this rural community remains among the most vulnerable to disruption, caused by aging infrastructure and the geographic realities of serving dispersed populations far from load centres.

With my experience siting Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) in rural contexts across Ontario, I found myself thinking that this is exactly the problem utility battery storage was designed to solve. In a twist that highlights the friction of rural

energy planning, Prince Edward County is one of the municipalities that has refused to host them.

The rural case for energy storage

Ontario's electricity grid was designed around centralized generation and urban demand. Rural communities sit at the end of old distribution lines, making them susceptible to outages caused by severe weather, equipment failure, and load imbalances. As climate change intensifies storm frequency and duration, the vulnerability of powering these communities will only grow.

BESS address this directly. A grid-connected BESS facility absorbs excess generation during periods of low demand, typically from wind and solar, which produce power independent of when

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Rural communities sit at the end of old distribution lines, making them susceptible to outages caused by severe weather, equipment failure, and load imbalances.

people need it, and discharges it back to the grid during peak periods and outages. BESS can also provide local capability, keeping critical community infrastructure online when the broader grid fails.

Ontario's Independent Electricity System Operator (IESO) has secured nearly 3,000 MW of BESS capacity across its competitive procurement rounds.¹ The largest BESS in Canada is the Hagersville Energy Storage Project in Haldimand County, providing 300 MW of power, roughly enough to power 240,000 homes for four hours.² So far, IESO has contracted nearly 20 BESS facilities, making it the largest single battery storage procurement effort in Canada. IESO's 2026 outlook projects that Ontario's capacity needs could grow 65 per cent by 2050 and that storage will be essential to managing demand.³

IESO will continue to procure these projects. The question is not whether BESS will be built but rather where BESS will be built — and increasingly, the answer is rural Ontario.

Why rural siting makes planning sense

BESS facilities are relatively undemanding land uses. A utility-scale facility of 100 to 200 MW typically requires less than a dozen hectares, which is a fraction of the footprint of a comparable solar farm. They produce no emissions, generate minimal noise, and have minimal traffic from occasional maintenance. They require a grid connection, a relatively flat site, road access, and adequate separation from sensitive land uses. Rural Ontario offers all of these.

More importantly, BESS facilities are not permanent and are often located on leased lands. IESO contracts are 20 years, after which the BESS can be fully decommissioned and lands returned to prior use. For agricultural operators, this means a reliable lease revenue stream with no long-term encumbrance on the land's farming potential. A BESS facility leaves no lasting mark on the landscape.

This temporary, low-impact profile makes BESS among the most farmland-compatible of all energy infrastructure types. A well-sited BESS on marginal agricultural land protects farmland by taking pressure off higher capability soils and stabilizes the rural grid that farmers depend on to run their equipment.

Planning policy has moved faster than local implementation

Ontario's policy framework recognizes the importance of energy infrastructure. The Provincial Planning Statement, 2024, directs municipalities to plan for infrastructure that supports current and projected needs and promotes the long-term viability of rural areas. Concurrently, Bill 40, the *Protect Ontario by Securing Affordable Energy for Generations Act*, 2025, reinforces the province's commitment to expanding and modernizing Ontario's electricity system. Together, these policy directions acknowledge significant investments in energy infrastructure to meet growing demand.

Despite provincial legislation, a gap remains between provincial objectives and municipal implementation. Most official plans and zoning bylaws were developed before utility-scale battery storage

Key planning considerations for rural BESS siting

- Updated policies and regulations to recognize BESS and establish performance standards
- Fire risk assessment and emergency response plan developed in coordination with local fire services with financial support for training
- Decommissioning bond or security required
- Preference for co-location with existing generation assets (wind, solar) to share grid connection infrastructure
- Agricultural impact assessment where proposed on prime agricultural areas
- Full site restoration obligation ensuring no permanent land use change

emerged and contain limited policy direction regarding appropriate locations, performance standards, or approval requirements. As a result, municipalities are left to evaluate complex proposals without established policy direction.

The challenge facing planners is how to integrate BESS proactively into local planning frameworks in a manner that protects agricultural resources, addresses public concerns, and delivers material benefits to host communities.

This can be addressed through proactive municipal planning policies. Official plans



and zoning bylaws can identify BESS as a form of infrastructure and establish standards related to setbacks, fencing, and landscaping. The development approval processes can require fire safety assessments, emergency response plans, financial assurances, and decommissioning securities. Establishing these expectations provides certainty to municipalities, residents, and proponents while reducing the likelihood of conflict when applications are submitted.

Addressing community concerns

The community opposition facing BESS in rural Ontario is real and reflects a knowledge gap between provincial energy objectives and awareness needed to effectively integrate these facilities.

The Armour Township public meeting that drew over 82 written submissions against a single proposal,⁴ the Town of Espanola's outright refusal, and concerns raised in Prince Edward County, Fergus, and West Carleton are not NIMBYism. They reflect genuine anxiety about a new technology, amplified by high-profile battery fires in other jurisdictions and frustration with a planning process communities feel is without adequate local input.

Major public concerns such as fire risk need to be addressed. Lithium-ion

batteries can undergo thermal runaway, which is a chemical reaction that generates intense heat and can result in fire. This risk is manageable with fire suppression systems, internal monitoring systems, and emergency response planning.

Ottawa's 2025 BESS planning framework, which requires fire protection and emergency response plans, represents a credible model for other municipalities.⁵ The planning profession has a role to play in providing a rigorous, independent, evidence-based assessment that builds confidence in these projects.

While safety debates frequently dominate the discussion, BESS facilities can deliver substantial, long-term economic and social benefits that are transformative for local host communities. When structured properly through formal community benefit agreements and Indigenous equity partnerships, these projects create lasting benefits.

A forward-focused framework

Ontario's energy future will be built significantly on rural land. The forward-focused imperative is to help municipalities develop proactive BESS and renewable energy policies through official plan policies, zoning frameworks,

and site-plan requirements before applications arrive, not in reaction to them. A municipality that enters the process with a clear policy framework and defined expectations is in a fundamentally stronger position than one improvising in response to a contentious proposal.

Back in Picton that evening, the power eventually returned. But with annual energy consumption expected to grow upwards of 60 per cent, eventually is not good enough. The energy transition offers rural Ontario something it has rarely been offered: grid stability. Getting the planning right is how we make sure that happens.

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Teaching First-Year Planning in an Age of ChatGPT



A planning professor proposes a challenge: what can students bring to the world of planning that distinguishes them from AI?

BRIAN DOUCET

I teach PLAN100 at the University of Waterloo, which introduces 250 first-year students to the world of planning. I'm going to let you in on a little secret: ChatGPT could have taken this course and quite possibly done better than some of them!

This is meant to neither discourage students nor to conclude that AI should do the work. Instead, it's a challenge to think about what students can bring to the world of planning that distinguishes them from AI.

Unlike other subjects, we don't solve for X in planning. Some days, we are greeted in our classroom by complex equations left on whiteboards by prior math or computer science profs. I admit I have no idea how to answer these. In PLAN 100, I occasionally use the whiteboard to draw maps, and we talk about how cities grow and what makes

good neighbourhoods. On the surface, this seems much easier.

However, planning is not formulaic — it involves dealing with people, communities, and real-world challenges. This necessitates critical thinking, independent thought, and the ability to work both with others who are fighting for the same cause and across differences.

That is why, since day one, I have been adamant that ChatGPT and other generative-AI programs are not welcome in PLAN100. They may have a purpose elsewhere in planning, but to succeed as a planner, you first need to develop the language, skills, and knowledge that an increasingly complex world requires.

I often use the analogy of a party. Being a planning student is your invitation. Those



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This critical thinking is under threat from the ease with which ChatGPT can provide information, the reliability of which is impossible to assess unless you're familiar with the topic.

of us already here can actively contribute to the party because we understand planning's history, its contributions to society, and its shortcomings. We've read the theory, analyzed the key works, and compared the best examples ourselves. We've grappled with difficult questions that have no easy answers. Importantly, we've made mistakes, learned from them, and have become better at our jobs as a result.

This critical thinking is under threat from the ease with which ChatGPT can provide information, the reliability of which is impossible to assess unless you're familiar with the topic.

This is a challenge for universities. While PLAN 100 has always had final exams, many professors (including me) are incorporating exams into courses that used to assess students' knowledge on the basis of essays and assignments. While the aim is to design ChatGPT out of classes, there's also pedagogical value in the pressures and expectations of exams: you know the topic in advance and you must prepare, but you don't know the specific questions. You need to give clear and succinct answers quickly; if you don't, you won't succeed.

Those same pressures are felt in community meetings that planners lead about issues such as park amenities, new

developments, or where to put bike lanes. There's value in developing analytical, interpersonal, and critical thinking skills right from first year.

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Planning is not formulaic — it involves dealing with people, communities, and real-world challenges.

Consider bike lanes. No topic is more contentious, and planners are at the centre of this fractious debate. Throughout this course, I have repeatedly asked students what seems like a basic question: how do we build a bike lane?

On the one hand, it's easy: we know how to design and maintain them. The economic, health, safety, transportation, and sustainability cases are clear, backed by years of evidence. ChatGPT could give you a summary. But as a society, we struggle to implement cycling infrastructure, as well

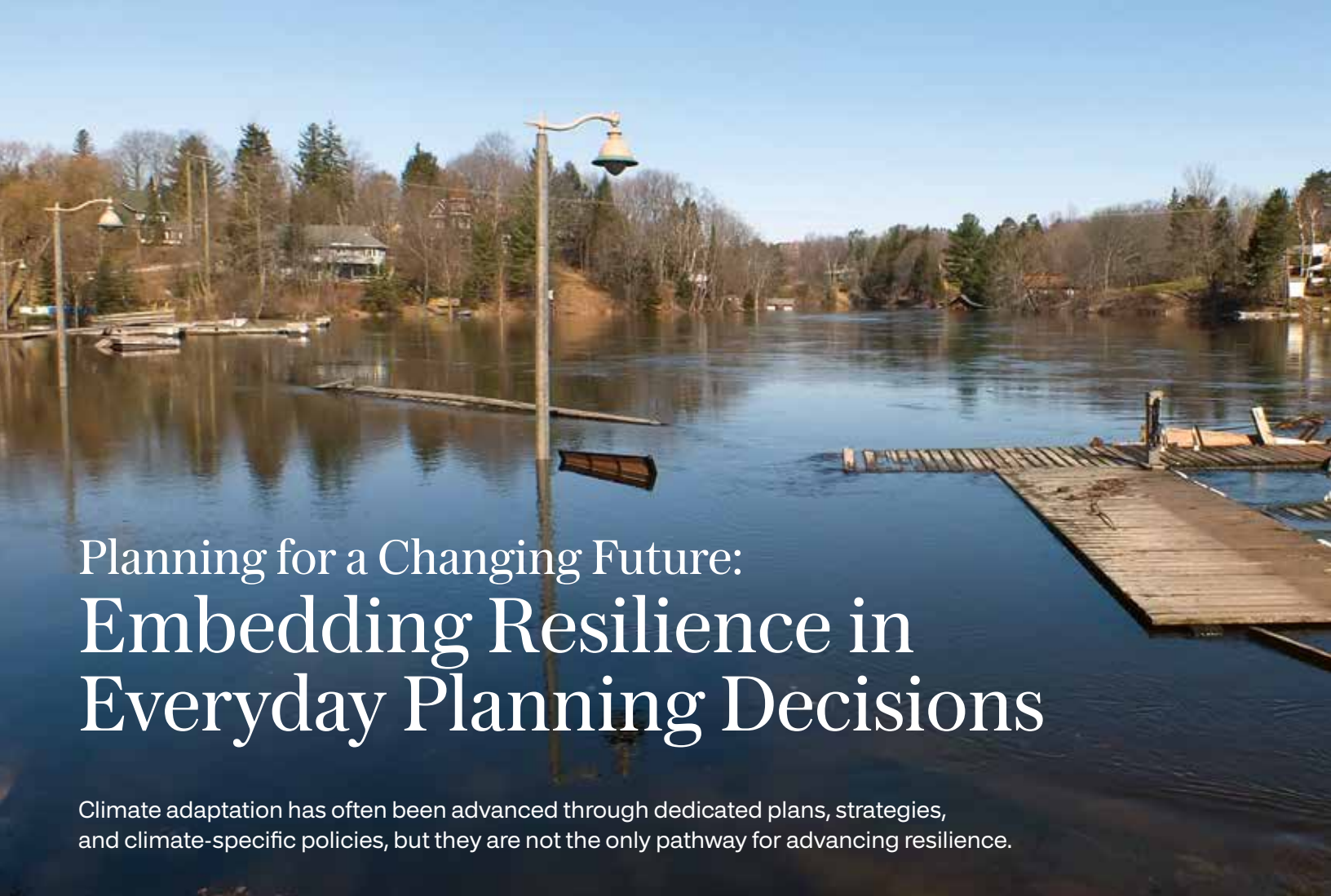
as other aspects of good urban planning such as affordable housing, better transit, and healthy, liveable communities. So, I ask again: how do we build a bike lane?

The answer is not about solving for X, and certainly not about regurgitating computer-generated summaries. It's about working with purpose, conviction, and insights that come from deep knowledge, critical reflection, and listening and by incorporating diverse perspectives and engaging in challenging debates. That's a lot more daunting than solving an equation.

Doing planning well means not only speaking to fellow planners but, more importantly, also speaking to the public and working with communities that are complex and diverse. Our world needs creativity, energy, and critical thinking, not what ChatGPT tells us to think. Because it's only through doing the hard work of learning, listening, and reflecting that we will know what skills, qualities, and perspectives we can bring to the party.



Dr. Brian Doucet is an Associate Professor in the School of Planning at the University of Waterloo.



Planning for a Changing Future: Embedding Resilience in Everyday Planning Decisions

Climate adaptation has often been advanced through dedicated plans, strategies, and climate-specific policies, but they are not the only pathway for advancing resilience.

AYNSLEY KLASSEN

When my children were younger, I often puréed vegetables into pasta sauces, muffins, and smoothies. Not to trick them, but because I wanted to ensure they got the nourishment they needed in a form that fit the realities of the moment.

In many ways, the challenge facing planners today is similar. Climate resilience, health equity, and long-term well-being remain essential ingredients of strong, thriving communities. The question is not whether they matter, but how they can be advanced in a planning environment shaped by housing pressures, infrastructure deficits, growth targets, and other competing priorities.

As planning contexts evolve, so too must the ways planners advance these objectives. The need to reduce future risks and build healthy, resilient communities

has not changed. What is changing are the tools, mechanisms, and language used to move this work forward.

Embedding resilience in planning

For many years, climate adaptation has often been advanced through dedicated plans, strategies, and climate-specific policies. While these tools remain important, they are not the only pathway for advancing resilience.

Looking forward, climate adaptation will increasingly be embedded within the planning decisions that shape how communities grow and function. Official plans, secondary plans, infrastructure investments, parks and open spaces, housing strategies, and development review processes all influence future climate risk. Increasingly, resilience is being viewed not as a standalone objective, but as a consideration that cuts across nearly every aspect of community

planning. After all, resilience is most effective when it is integrated into the systems and decisions that communities are already using to shape their future.

Looking ahead

Planners use projections to anticipate population growth, housing demand, transportation needs, and infrastructure requirements. Future climate hazards and risks must now be considered alongside these other drivers — flood risk, extreme heat, wildfire, and infrastructure vulnerabilities, which are already shaping decisions about where and how communities grow. This shift is an evolution in planning practice. Planning is not simply a response to climate impacts; it is one of the primary ways communities can reduce future risk before it is created.¹ Climate projections, risk information, and social-vulnerability data help planners make decisions informed by present conditions and also by the conditions



Spring Flood in Huntsville, Ontario, Canada, 2013

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Many planning interventions are uniquely positioned to advance multiple objectives simultaneously.

Building resilience through planning? ORCCA can help.

The Ontario Resource Centre for Climate Adaptation (ORCCA) helps Ontario communities reduce climate-related risks and build resilient, healthy, thriving communities. Through the free support desk, planners can access local climate information, practical resources, expert guidance, and relevant examples from across Ontario.

For free support, email orcca.craco@iclei.org or visit orcca-craco.ca.

Multi-solving

Many planning interventions are uniquely positioned to advance multiple objectives simultaneously. For example, efforts to increase housing supply can also support resilience when growth is directed away from flood and wildfire risk, ultimately reducing future risks, limiting infrastructure costs, and improving access to services.

Similarly, investments in natural systems and stormwater management can reduce vulnerability to flooding, extreme rainfall, and extreme heat while protecting municipal assets and reducing long-term costs. In an environment of constrained resources and competing priorities,

solutions that advance multiple objectives at once are more practical, cost-effective, and politically durable than those pursued in isolation.

Building buy-in

Climate adaptation increasingly overlaps with conversations related to risk reduction, service continuity, housing, fiscal responsibility, and community well-being. This does not mean downscaling climate adaptation or health equity as planning objectives. Rather, it means recognizing that the framing used to advance these objectives can influence how they are received and acted upon. In many cases, the most effective conversations begin with the outcomes that decision-makers are already trying to achieve. Planners who demonstrate how resilience supports existing priorities are often better positioned to build support and momentum, helping ensure resilience objectives are reflected in real-world planning decisions.

Forward-focused planning is not about choosing between housing, infrastructure, economic development, public safety, health equity, or climate adaptation. It is about recognizing that these priorities are increasingly interconnected. As planning contexts evolve, so too must the tools, mechanisms, and language used to advance resilient, healthy communities. The ingredients have not changed. The recipe continues to evolve.

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communities are likely to face decades from now. This includes understanding which residents and neighbourhoods face the greatest exposure to climate hazards and which have the least capacity to prepare, respond, and recover. Planning decisions can prioritize protection where it is needed most and ensure resilience investments contribute to healthier, more equitable communities.

Core Objective	Related Municipal Priorities
Climate adaptation	Risk reduction, community safety, protecting critical infrastructure, fiscal responsibility
Climate resilience	Community preparedness, service continuity, long-term reliability
Health equity	Protecting residents most at risk, equitable access to services and opportunities
Sustainability	Healthy ecosystems, water security, resource stewardship, long-term community well-being



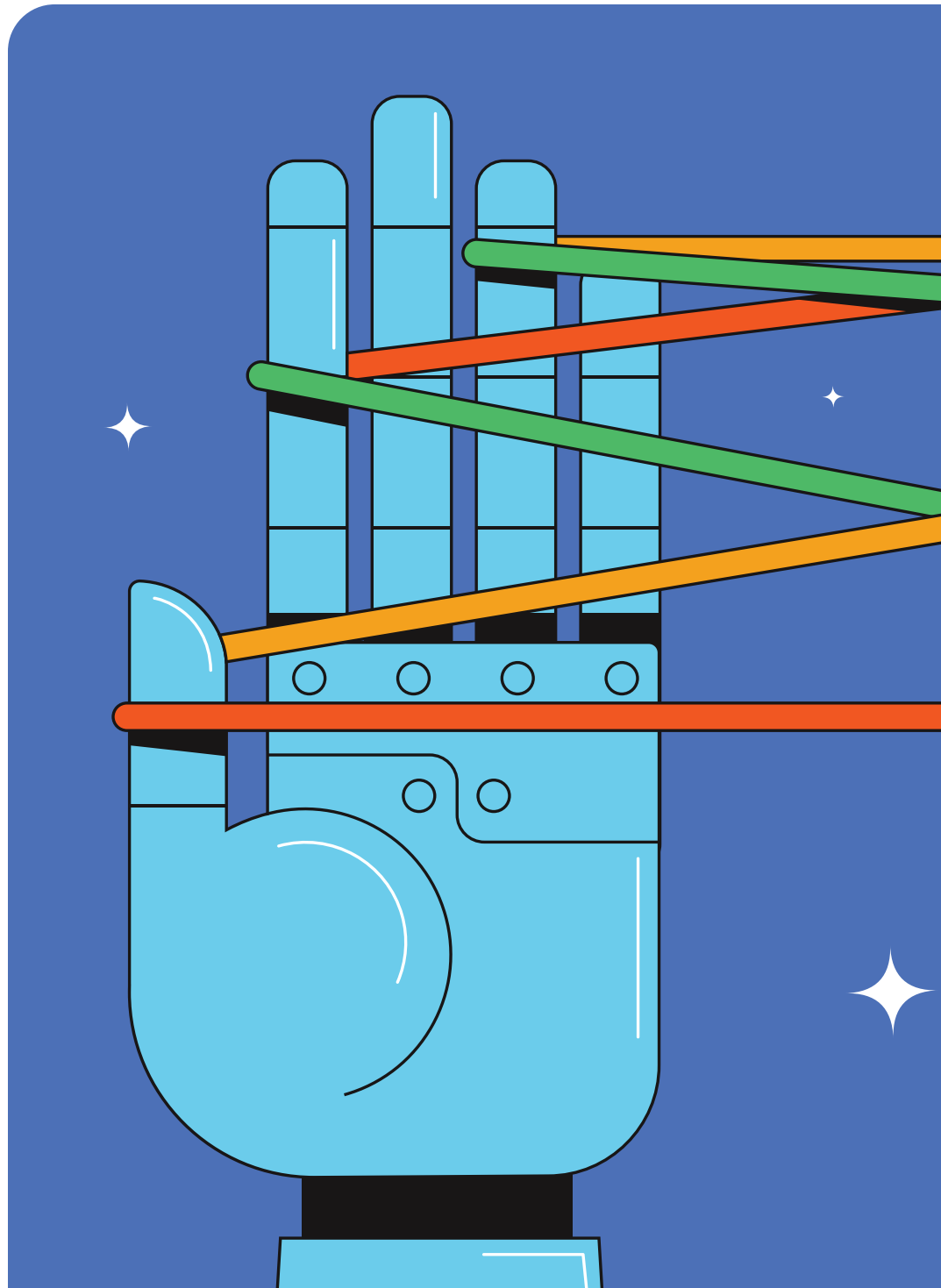
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Streamlined or Sidelined?

What AI in Development Approvals Means for Planners

The development application on your desk was likely shaped by AI before it even reached you.

OLIVIA TSILFIDIS AND
PAMELA ROBINSON, RPP



A growing ecosystem of AI tools, including platforms that interpret zoning bylaws, generate massing scenarios, check regulatory compliance, and route permit files, are being used by residents, developers, and consultants to prepare applications for municipal approval. By the time a planner opens a development application file, AI may have already shaped the project's form by helping the applicant submit a complete application that complies better with the current planning

policies, and it may have helped the applicant rule out other options. The arrival of this technology has been swift and largely without public or professional dialogue.

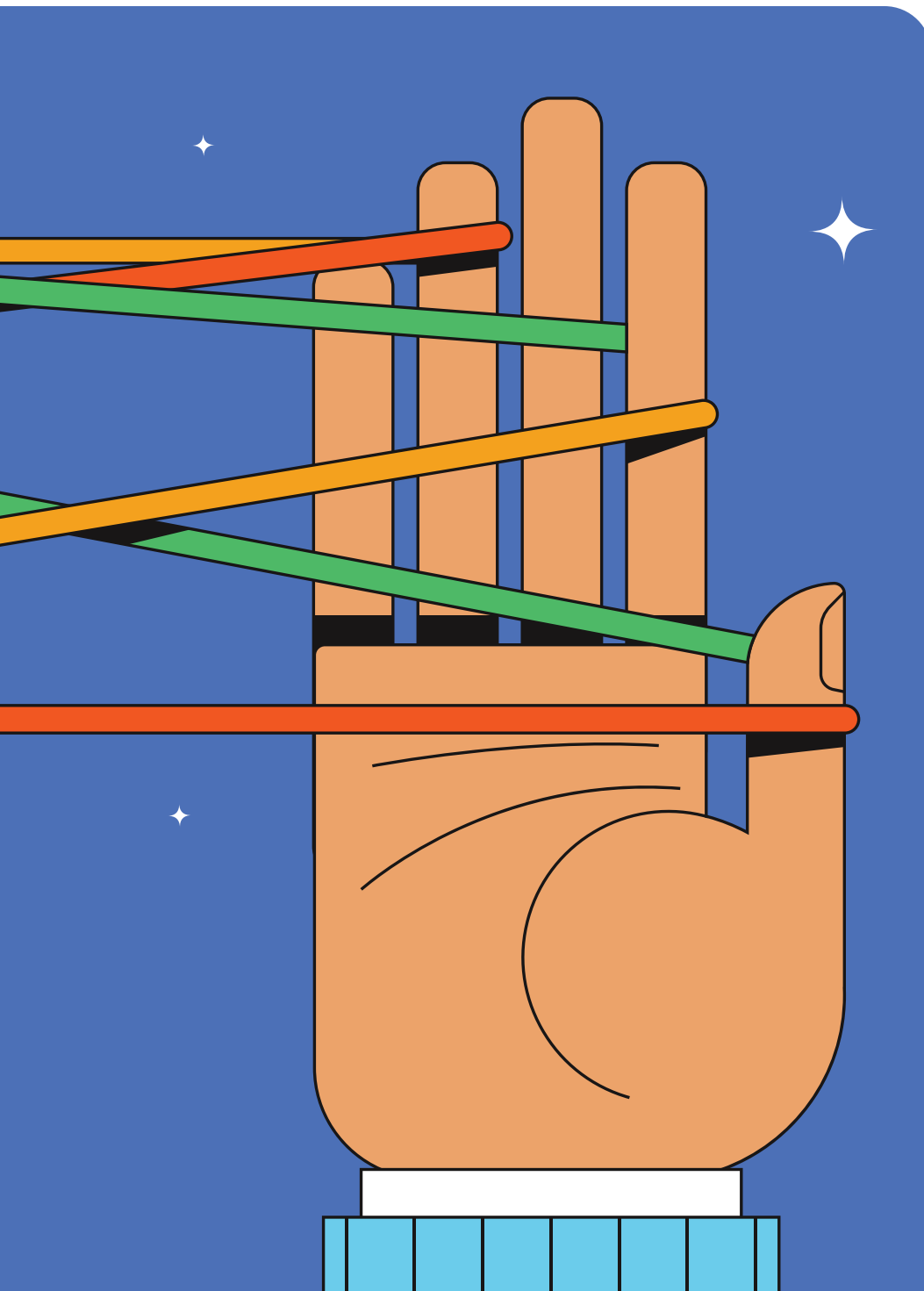
Research from winter 2026 examining 13 AI-enabled tools currently used in development approvals reveals a clear pattern: these tools intervene in the front end of the planning process, supporting pre-application analysis, feasibility modelling, compliance checking, and application development. The latter stages of the development approval process, where we exercise substantive professional judgment, remains largely in our domain. For now, AI-enabled interpretive work is migrating upstream into pre-submission stages where planner oversight is limited and accountability mechanisms vary.¹ At the time we wrote this article, migration was accelerating.

Four roles AI is playing in approvals

Our research identified four generalized ways in which AI tools are interacting with the development approvals process.

Planning intelligence platforms (e.g. Ratio.City, LandLogic) compile zoning bylaws and parcel-level data

“Planners must be careful that these tools do not lead to the quiet redistribution of advantage within the planning process.”





“ If the adoption of these tools becomes more widespread, we foresee a shift in when a planner’s professional judgment is exercised.

into spatial, searchable interfaces. Users, including applicants and their consultants, can bypass direct policy interpretation and engage with system-generated outputs, including pre-organized regulatory information that reflects choices about how rules are read and applied.

Generative feasibility tools (e.g. TestFit, Giraffe, Zenerate, Autodesk Forma) allow applicants to produce and test development scenarios rapidly against zoning parameters, site dimensions, and financial assumptions. These tools filter options before submission, narrowing the range of proposals that reach formal consideration. What planners see is already the product of a computational process.

Regulatory compliance tools (e.g. CivCheck, Symbium, Archistar, Blitzai) translate zoning regulations and building codes into machine-readable rules applied directly to proposals. Compliance is assessed automatically, often before staff review begins, which means interpretations of regulatory language are embedded in the process.

Workflow and permitting platforms (e.g. PermitFlow, SwiftGOV, Surrey’s Development Inquiry Assistant) manage how applications move through departments, including routing files, tracking status, and structuring communication. These systems help organize the approval process itself.

Judgment is moving, not disappearing

Tool vendors sell them as a response to pressures faced by applicants, developers, and planners. This comes at a time when municipalities are under-resourced, approval timelines are considered long, and there is significant political pressure to demonstrate progress in responding to the housing crisis by reducing review times. These AI tools are marketed as a way to reduce delays and offer applicants a better application

experience. However, thus far, research does not provide evidence that these AI tools speed up the approval process uniformly. So far, we observe that it restructures where decisions take shape within it.

When applicants use these tools, their applications should be more complete and align better compliance-wise with planning policy and regulations. These AI-supported applications then shift the role of the planner, moving from more active engagement with a range of possibilities to reviewing the validity of a proposal already shaped through automated analysis.

If the adoption of these tools becomes more widespread, we foresee a shift in when a planner’s professional judgment is exercised. If, increasingly, planners are engaging with development applications shaped by AI, will planners have a narrower opportunity to negotiate and offer alternatives? This process is one of the important ways in which planners can align a proposal with the public interest. The process might move faster but we should be evaluating the quality of the outcomes.

Who has access and who does not

In these early days of implementation, planners should remember that these tools are not necessarily accessible to all development process participants. Well-resourced developers and large consulting firms are better positioned to use AI platforms to pre-align proposals with regulatory expectations, reduce uncertainty, and present applications that move efficiently through review. Smaller developers, community organizations, and individual property owners may lack the access due to financial, technical, or informational barriers.

Uneven access to resources is not a new issue with the arrival of these AI-enabled tools but planners should be vigilant about considering how this differential access impacts equity-focused

“

When using AI or automated tools, planners remain fully responsible for the accuracy, integrity, and ethical use of outputs.

planning outcomes. Planners must be careful that these tools do not lead to the quiet redistribution of advantage within the planning process. The proposed neutrality and efficiency these tools offer are unevenly distributed but the extent to which the planning process can see or understand the outcomes of this distribution is yet to be determined.²

Efficiency vs. public consultation and engagement

The efficiency gains these tools bring, combined with the time pressures emerging from our current housing crisis, run the risk of planning becoming even more technocratic over time. As these tools become normalized in the development process, does development approval focus even more on compliance, reducing time and opportunity for other considerations? Issues around design quality, sustainability, creativity, and public aspirations require more than compliance considerations. Opportunities for community members, elected officials, and planners to ask different questions and to expect different answers may be reduced in a process focused on efficiency and compliance.^{3,4}

New ethical obligations for planners are on the horizon

Now, in 2026, our profession is actively questioning where planners stand in relation to AI? The answer carries real obligations.

In 2026, the Professional Standards Board is working on an update to the national ethical standards. Technology already plays a large role in our work, but artificial intelligence technology raises new questions about our responsibilities. AI bias and misinformation could challenge our obligations to the public interest. If a planner actively uses AI to inform their recommendation, does this pass the test of an independent professional opinion as required in our responsibility to clients and employers? Over the next few years, planners can anticipate updates to our ethical standards and that AI technologies will continue to evolve.

What comes next

Week over week, planners are more widely encountering AI in their practice. The question is not whether AI will be used in development approvals. It is. The question is how do we as planners engage with it? Will we be deliberate or allow our

practice to be shaped by systems we did not design, do not control, and cannot fully interrogate?

More experienced planners need to think carefully about the future of the profession. If we allow AI tools to take on the work of junior planners by having it write our first draft of planning justification reports, doing preliminary zoning interpretation or early feasibility review, how will the next generation of our profession learn?

Our professional judgment and experience were built by making sense of ambiguous or conflicting policies, having our early work critiqued by senior colleagues who shared their tricks of the trade, doing site visits, and navigating the gap between what a bylaw says and what it means in context. The more we allow AI-enabled planning technology to shape our process, the more seriously we need to consider how our junior colleagues will build their foundations of sound professional judgment. Protecting our talent pipeline is not a sentimental plea — it's a professional priority.

The Professional Standards Board's forthcoming update to the profession's ethical standards will give us a foundation. Moving forward, we will continue to be accountable for our professional opinions whether we used an AI tool or not. Planners will need to understand how these tools work, what assumptions they encode, and where their outputs require independent scrutiny. It means asking hard questions about how systems are procured and governed.^{5,6,7} And it means maintaining that efficiency is not the only measure of a good planning process. Professionally protecting the interpretive, deliberative, and equity-oriented dimensions of our work does not mean that we are resistant to change. Keeping planners active in the process of planning is the core of our professional obligations to the public interest

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Olivia Tsilfidis, MPl, is a recent graduate of the Master of Planning in Urban Development program at Toronto Metropolitan University.

Dr. Pamela Robinson, RPP, FCIP, is a professor at the School of Urban and Regional Planning at Toronto Metropolitan University.

Another Electric Mobility Revolution? Rewiring Planning in the Future City

Electricity and mobility are once again front and centre in our communities, and every means of moving people and freight is being electrified.

CLARENCE WOODSMA, RPP

"Since the 1990s, we've been particularly focused on sustainability in our mobility and its role in the climate emergency..."

A century ago, cities across Canada were experiencing the first true electric mobility revolution. Electric railways (streetcars) were not only providing mobility for the masses but were changing the form of the city as streetcar suburbs and linear retail developments sprang up along the emergent infrastructure-defined corridors.

Consider that in 1923, the TTC "electric railway" recorded 277 million total passengers when the city population was roughly 530,000 while 48 Canadian cities had systems of their own.¹ By 1926, electric-powered shared mobility was a defining feature across the Canadian urban landscape.



Left: Modern TTC street cars: electric public transportation in downtown Toronto.

Below: A vintage Peter Witt-designed streetcar is part of Toronto heritage and conserved at Russell Carhouse.





For many, EVs and electrification, while no silver bullet, are “green” and essential to our more decarbonized future.

Fast forward to today, and electricity and mobility are once again front and centre in our communities. EVs (autos) may be top of mind, but whether a traditional or new mode, every means of moving people and freight is being electrified. E-scooters, e-bikes, enclosed mobility scooters, mini-EVs, eVTOL, transit bus fleets, freight vehicles including cargo bikes, light to heavy duty trucks, and the rapid growth of robotics in supply chains from the warehouse to the sidewalk — electrification is everywhere.

It's fair to ask, are we in the midst of a second electric mobility revolution and will the future see the kind of urban transformation we witnessed a century ago?

Avoid – Shift – Improve

The “streetcar suburbs” of that first era soon were absorbed into the urban fabric as the emergent automobiles’ transformative story took hold and ushered in the autocentric city we still have today. The private auto was not just another travel option. Through the work of policy makers, planners, and allied professions, the auto led to a reorganization of mobility spaces, parking, garages, playgrounds, new retail formats, channeling of pedestrians onto sidewalks, and new development economics.

The story of postwar autocentric urban evolution is well known, as is the classic tension between the many mobility benefits of autos and their externalities. It's the auto advertising version of complete freedom to go anywhere, anytime, on the wide-open road in your car versus the GHG emissions, air and noise pollution, accidents, and congestion all our auto activity creates. And since the 1990s, we've been particularly focused on sustainability in our mobility and its role in the climate emergency — reducing GHG from transport has consumed much of planning's bandwidth.

Reflecting on the Avoid – Shift – Improve (ASI) framework,² planners have put decades of effort into shaping our communities to reduce trip lengths or eliminate trips (Avoid), yet the biggest single reductions ever came during the pandemic era in the 2020s. The “Shift” from auto trips to active transportation or public transit has not really made a significant auto-dependency dent in most markets. The “Improve” energy efficiency of the modes via alternative fuels and electrification is certainly where the major players in the current autocentric regime have placed their focus. For many, EVs and electrification, while no silver bullet, are “green” and essential to our more decarbonized future.

Electrification

Electrification is indeed argued by some to be part of a transportation revolution phase that we are currently experiencing. Contrasted with the 20th-century evolution of automobility, the revolution today is driven by three concurring areas of technologic innovations: decarbonization (electrification), autonomous vehicles connected to each other and to infrastructures, and new mobility services.³ Collectively, they're presenting us with unprecedented disruption as the complexities of interconnected urban systems reveal new areas of contention.

The evolution of the “robotaxi” exemplifies this contention — a new mobility service impacting our streetscapes and curbsides, talking to our traffic lights, and as EVs, needing to be charged. But a revolution?



Are we in the midst of a second electric mobility revolution and will the future see the kind of urban transformation we witnessed a century ago?

Canada currently has roughly 15,000 public station locations with some 40,000 charging ports. One estimate for 2040 sets the future need at 679,000 public ports, retrofits of 3.2 million parking spaces at multi-unit residential buildings, and in the medium and heavy duty vehicle market, the need for 275,000 public ports and 1.1 million private ports.⁵

Ontario's Bill 98 narrows the authority of municipalities to set development standards related to the provision of charging infrastructure on private developments. Most current EV adopters live in single family homes and can absorb the charging-related infrastructure costs. But what about the multi-unit residentials and where are our integrated approaches to equitably secure and implement the broader public charging ecosystem described above?

Considering the full spectrum of the electrified mobility future at play today and forecasts for 2040, there are big questions around charging and the land-use, curbside, site-design, and electrical-distribution capacity realms. At the same time, our ongoing efforts to create more liveable places through the implementation of ASI objectives are being compromised as e-bikes, e-scooters, robotaxis, and new mobility services related to people and goods contend for lanes, curb spaces, and sidewalks.

Yes, this may be a second electric mobility revolution, but unlike the first, it is not shaping new mobility patterns around a new fixed infrastructure network. It is rewiring the city we already have — garages, curbs, warehouses, parking lots, loading bays, hydro systems, and planning realms — the everyday spaces where mobility, land use, energy, and public life continue to collide.

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John Zimmer, former CEO of Lyft made a number of predictions for our mobility future, foretelling the arrival autonomous ride-sharing fleets, although his timing was a little off, by 2021. He also predicted the end of private car ownership in major U.S. cities⁴ — oops. Hubris of Silicon Valley for certain, but also indicative of the messy path of system evolution.

In the mid 2010s, major auto manufacturers were throwing billions at autonomous vehicle development which they subsequently backed away from. Most recently, they've approached EVs the same way, with a constantly shifting production emphasis from "all in" to a softer target, responding to consumer and political dynamics.

However, the International Energy Agency reports one in four new cars purchased globally in 2025 was electric with over 50 per cent in China, which also reports nearly 1/3 of new heavy trucks sold being fully electric. While the numbers in Canada, at roughly 11 per cent of new sales in 2025, are more modest, our current (as of writing) federal government policy is 75 per cent of new vehicle sales electric vehicles by 2035 and 90 per cent by 2040.

Physical-form transition

John Zimmer also predicted that the physical form of our cities would change more than ever before, but it was largely because of all that extra infrastructure we wouldn't need because we had given up our private autos! The real physical-form urban challenges are centred on quite the opposite — transitioning all our private autos and commercial truck fleets to electrification. The provision of a whole new "fuel" system — the charging capacity to support the electric mobility future — is a major city building challenge moving forward.



Clarence Woudsma, PhD, MCIP, RPP, is an Associate Professor in the School of Planning and Co-Director at the Future Cities Institute by Caivan at the University of Waterloo.

Play Isn't Just For Children, Says Maxwell Hartt

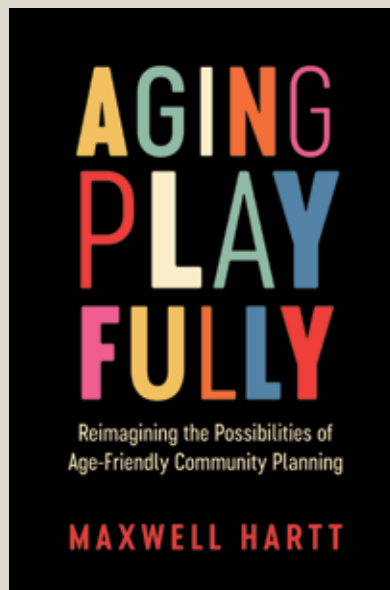
A powerful new book by a Canadian author prompts us to reimagine the possibilities of play and the potential of age-friendly planning.

GLENN MILLER

Hard to believe, but the World Health Organization's Age-Friendly Cities project, launched as a pilot in 2006, celebrates its 20th anniversary this year.¹ The Public Health Agency of Canada played a key role in helping WHO grow its global network of AFCCs ("communities" was added later) to more than 1,700 places around the world. So it is only fitting that a Canadian is issuing a "clarion call to challenge societal assumptions and expectations... about the potential of age-friendly planning."

Queen's associate professor Maxwell Hartt's powerful new book prompts us to reimagine the possibilities of play. Hartt's inspiration to expand his aging-focused research to include play came while touring a Glasgow housing estate with fellow scholars. Spying a children's playground, he couldn't resist trying out the slide. His academic colleagues were "bewildered and mostly amused" but the experience sparked a stunning insight — play is okay for children but unbecoming for adults.

Hartt asks: "Why is play considered so fundamental to children's physical, social, and cognitive development but superfluous for everyone else? Why do we plan our cities and communities only for children's play?" If the UN can declare



Aging Playfully: Reimagining the Possibilities of Age-Friendly Community Planning
By Maxwell Hartt. 184 pp, UBC Press, 2026

"right to play" as a human right for children, why is play for older adults tolerated only if it is "organized, rigid, and competitive" or serves a useful purpose such as building strength for aging muscles? "Play is as vital as the drive to procreate or procure food," says Hartt.

Through a series of imaginative investigations in places as different as Victoria, B.C. (Saanich, a suburb of Greater Victoria, was an early adopter of AFC) and The Villages, a massive retirement community in Florida, combined with probing interviews with international experts in play, Hartt and his colleagues

created S.O.A.P — Sociospatial Environmental Well-being + Play Conceptual Framework — a tool to inspire scholars, planners, and policymakers to add joy and fun to the lexicon of age-friendly planning.

But Hartt's frustration persuading planners to take meaningful action on AFCC remains. Although AFCC committees exist in 80 Ontario communities, don't expect explicit policies advocating age-friendly solutions to appear in official plan guidance any time soon. Is it because the eight domains of AFCC fit poorly with how municipal responsibilities are organized? Or that problems faced by older adults are seen as the purview of social services not planning? Or that policies promoting complete streets and walkability are deemed sufficient? The reality is that changing attitudes to AFCC will be an uphill battle.

"New ideas are needed to complement existing age-friendly efforts," Hartt insists. "New ideas such as aging playfully."

Reference

¹ The WHO subsequently published *Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide* in 2007.



Glenn Miller, FCIP, is the author of *No Place to Grow Old: How Canadian Suburbs Can Become Age-Friendly* and a contributor to Toronto's 2018 Seniors Strategy 2.0. Cities Institute.

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.

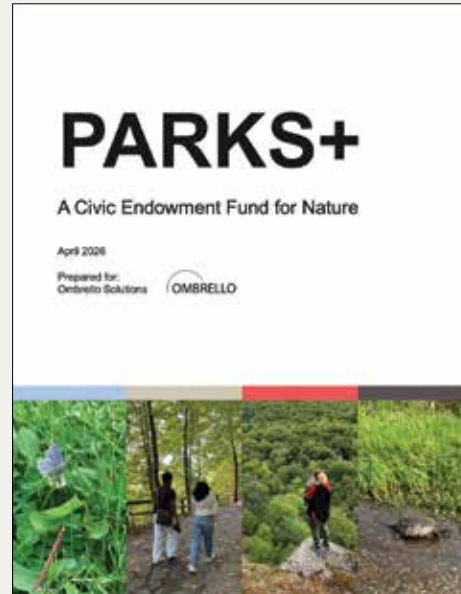


York University
Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change, Critical Planning Workshop

Planning Otherwise: More-than-human futures in the Lower Don Lands

Graduate students worked collaboratively as a planning consultancy, investigating Toronto's Lower Don Lands through embodied walking methodologies, field-based observation, creative multispecies practices, guest lectures and guided site visits, and critical analysis. After two weeks out in the field, they produced an ambitious professional report for Waterfront Toronto that considers how planning might cultivate an inclusive more-than-human city. The report offers recommendations addressing climate adaptation, flood mitigation, ecological restoration, affordable housing, public space, decolonization and reconciliation, and environmental justice while foregrounding relational approaches to urban planning that attend to both human and more-than-human worlds.

Students: Ashleigh Addison, Jasleen Brar, Mila Monica Buenaventura, Ehren Cheung, Juliet Dhanraj, Zainab Gaafar, Chiara Guastelluccia, Yamini Kanwal, Sevda Laghayi, Mirza Maryam Sahi, Isabel Shaw, Harleen Sodhi, Sabrina Spataro, Jahan Ulfath, Kyra Vergara
Advisor: Dr. Loren March



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

PARKS+ A Civic Endowment Fund for Nature

Development priorities, climate change, and biodiversity loss are degrading urban ecosystems, while municipalities lack the capacity to provide adequate park space. Ombrello Solutions' PARKS+ model proposes an integrated governance and financial framework that positions healthy natural spaces as essential urban infrastructure. Grounded in Toronto's planning context, the PARKS+ model shows how a civic endowment fund for nature can be governed multi-sectorally to support the delivery, expansion, and stewardship of biodiverse urban parks in perpetuity.

Client: Ombrello Solutions: Anastasia Mourougova Millin, Founder, and Jeremy Guth, Board Director
Students: Amaan Jabbar, Bruno De Marinis, Calvin Onate, Greg Aneziris, Liam Ryan, Riley Locke
Mentor: Jean-François Obregon Murillo, Head of Research & Financial Analysis
TMU Supervisor: Nina-Marie Lister, MCIP, RPP, Hon ASLA, Hon OALA



University of Guelph
Master of Science in Rural Planning and Development

University of Guelph Planning Class Explores Bruce County

Graduate students in the Rural Planning and Development Advanced Planning Practice course (RPD*6280) visited Bruce County on March 24–25, 2026, to explore planning in practice. The trip included meetings with Bruce County and Kincardine staff, RPD alumni, Belmoral Farms, Seaman and Sons Builders, and Bruce Power. Students learned about municipal planning, agriculture, construction, community engagement, tourism, and energy production. The class thanks the Ontario Agricultural College Learning Trust Fund for supporting this valuable experiential learning opportunity.

Student / author: Marisa Esterbrooks
Professor: Mollie Kuchma



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

East Harbour Revitalization: Bright Point Harbour

This project envisions Toronto's East Harbour as a resilient, mixed-use waterfront district that reconnects the site with its ecological and cultural foundations. Using a Two-Eyed Seeing approach, the design integrates Indigenous knowledge, sensory site analysis, and transit-oriented development principles to enhance public space, support flood resilience, and strengthen community connections. The proposal promotes collaboration with local Indigenous Nations, Waterfront Toronto, and community stakeholders to foster inclusive, sustainable, and culturally grounded redevelopment.

Client: City of Toronto
Students: Amy Liu, Sophia Tsan, Brandon Ng, Cierra Miller
Advisor: Dr. Luna Khirfan



University of Toronto
Master of Science in Planning

Road Work Ahead: The Impact of Construction on Cycling Safety in Toronto

Toronto has over 750 active construction sites at any time, routinely disrupting cycling infrastructure and creating dangerous riding conditions. Using spatial analysis, 10 site observations, and 13 expert interviews, this research reveals how vehicle exposure, contractor negligence, and weak enforcement force cyclists into risky manoeuvres like sidewalk riding and unsafe merging. The study concludes that meaningful progress towards Vision Zero requires redesigning work zones to prioritize vulnerable road users, reducing vehicle access, and establishing proactive enforcement.

Student: Jessie Ye
Instructors: Sergio Montero Munoz (Supervisor) and Kayleigh Swanson (Course Instructor)



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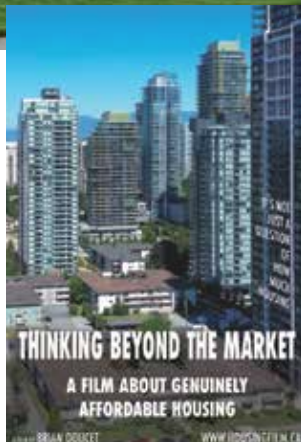
Thinking Beyond the Market: A film about genuinely affordable housing

Everyone's talking about housing. But are we asking the right questions? What if it isn't just a question of how much housing but what kind of housing and for whom?

Join Dr. Brian Doucet, a researcher, author, filmmaker, photographer, award-winning teacher, and Associate Professor in Urban Planning at the University of Waterloo, as he goes coast to coast to learn about policies, programs, and projects that are helping to ensure that housing is a human right.

From using public land to build non-market housing in Kitchener and Whistler and inspiring Indigenous-led projects in Vancouver to strong tenant protections and rent control in British Columbia and Prince Edward Island, the examples featured in this film demonstrate how many important solutions are making a difference in communities big and small.

The film features interviews with more than 30 planners, policymakers, politicians, developers, residents, and housing advocates from across Canada. It both inspires and challenges us to think about the root causes of the housing crisis and the transformative solutions that are hiding in plain sight.



"*Thinking Beyond the Market* is the culmination of years of research into why we are in a housing crisis and what we can do about it," says Doucet in his Director's Statement. "It draws on my own work on displacement gentrification and housing

The film is the culmination of years of research into why we are in a housing crisis and what we can do about it.

precarity in cities across the country, as well as important findings, evidence, and examples that get to the root causes of the housing problem."

Find more information at www.housingfilm.ca

***Thinking Beyond the Market* is being presented at OPPI's 2026 conference at The Blue Mountains, where Brian Doucet will participate in a Q&A with the audience.**

The 2026 Scholarship and Mentorship Award Recipients



CLAIRE BASINSKI CHAIR SCHOLARSHIP:

Lily McDonald

Lily is an incoming MA in planning student with a passion for transportation planning, accessibility, and equitable community development. She currently works with MiWay Transit and the City of Mississauga's Elections Office while contributing to youth poverty-reduction initiatives in the Peel Region. Through her professional and community experiences, she has developed a strong interest in creating transportation systems that improve access to employment, essential services, and social connection. She hopes to build a career in public-sector planning, helping shape more connected, inclusive, and resilient communities. In her free time, she enjoys climbing, running, crafting, reading, and writing.



RONALD M KEEBLE UNDERGRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP:

Eric Tran

Eric Tran is a third-year planning student at the University of Waterloo, specializing in land use, transportation, and infrastructure planning. From a young age, he has been curious about the world, particularly how cities are designed and function. Through leadership roles with the Institute of Transportation Engineers and OPPI's Career Path Programming Committee, Eric has actively contributed to his academic community, including organizing over 15 events (industry talks, technical tours, and software tutorials), leading design team projects, and developing K-12 workshops on transportation planning. Deeply committed to creating people-centric, equitable, and sustainable communities, Eric aims to make a meaningful impact on the planning field.



OPPI ADVANCING EQUITY IN PLANNING SCHOLARSHIP:

Satnam Hehar

Satnam Hehar is pursuing an MA in planning at the University of Waterloo, where her research focuses on first- and last-mile transit access for mobility-impaired individuals in suburban Canadian contexts. Her work examines how people with disabilities and mobility challenges move through everyday spaces and the small but significant barriers they encounter. Drawing on both academic interest and lived experience with chronic pain, Satnam aims to bridge the gap between planning theory and practice to advance more inclusive approaches to mobility and access. Her long-term goal is to contribute to planning policies and systems that make every day travel more accessible, dignified, and practical for all users.



2026 OPPI OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP:

Raniya Sethi

Raniya Sethi is an MA candidate in planning at the University of Waterloo. Combining her planning education with her background, research, and experience in development studies in Pakistan, Raniya is interested in how planning can address systemic inequities through infrastructure, climate resilience, and community-centred decision-making. Entering her final year at the University of Waterloo, Raniya's major research project explores how infrastructure systems shape urban microclimates and how planning can reduce heat exposure while creating healthier, more climate-resilient communities. Her long-term goal is to bridge the gap between sustainable development, planning, and public policy and advance evidence-based solutions that make cities more inclusive, sustainable, and equitable.

Learn more about OPPI's Student Scholarships and Bursaries, including application details and dates, at ontarioplanners.ca.



2026 OPPI OPPORTUNITY
SCHOLARSHIP:

Auditiyo Das Gupta

Auditiyo Das Gupta's interest in advancing equity started as a child growing up in East Africa and the Middle East and was nurtured by his father, mother, and sister. During his undergrad at the University of Waterloo, he volunteered for the Student Refugee Program and helped settle refugee students from harsh political environments into Canadian life. After graduating, he started Community Kitchen Coop — a food business incubator supporting marginalized communities in Kitchener's downtown core. Today, Auditiyo is dedicating his graduate research at the University of Toronto to exploring the impact of community gardening on the food security of new immigrant communities.



BURSARY PROGRAM:

Christina Paola Carballo

Christina (Chris) Paola Carballo is a MPL candidate at Queen's University. Her research interests include spatial equity, health infrastructure, and public policy, with a particular focus on how demographic change and the distribution of care infrastructure shape access to services and quality of life in urban areas. Her current research explores the relationship between population aging and health-care accessibility, examining how planning decisions influence equitable access to care and support systems. Chris also serves on the Youth Advisory Committee for a SSHRC-funded FIFA World Cup research project led by the University of Toronto, where she contributes youth perspectives on the social and community impacts of mega-sporting events.



THOMSON ROGERS LLP
MENTORSHIP AWARD:

Aimee Powell

Aimee Powell, MCIP, RPP, is the Founder and Chief Planning Officer of Powell Planning & Associates, a consulting firm serving public and private sector clients. With more than 18 years of experience, Aimee is a recognized leader and passionate advocate for mentorship, dedicating significant time to developing, sponsoring, and supporting emerging planning professionals. In 2023, Aimee was inducted into ULI's Women's Leadership Initiative in recognition of her commitment to advancing inclusion, leadership, mentorship, and excellence within the planning profession. She is an instructor at Toronto Metropolitan University, serves on OPPI Council, and is a Director with the Black Planners & Urbanists Association and the Ontario Black Contractors Association.



GERALD CARROTHERS MEMORIAL
GRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP:

Georgina Colthurst

Born and raised in Windsor, Ontario, Georgina developed an early interest in how geography, communities, and regional connections shape people's experiences. After completing an undergraduate degree in Women's and Gender Studies, she moved to Northern B.C., where her passion for northern and regional planning emerged. She has worked in nonprofit and public-sector roles focused on community development, youth employment, governance, and public engagement. She is currently pursuing an MA in planning at Queen's University and serves as the Student Director on the Board of Directors of the Canadian Institute of Planners. Her work focuses on northern planning, affordable housing, and equitable community development.



BURSARY PROGRAM:

Jeiden Iskandar

Jeiden Iskandar is a third-year undergraduate student in planning at Toronto Metropolitan University. She is dedicated to advocating for better policies and planning practices to develop a better living community and wants to take part in changing housing policies to allow for fair, equal living in Toronto. During her time in TMU's planning program, she has focused on creating a student-based community-oriented third space as well as relieving food insecurity. Her long-term goal is to fight for affordable housing, advocate for low-income communities, and create a space where community is integrated into the planning process.



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.

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Welcome to our newest RPPs

OPPI is pleased to welcome 131 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.

Aaron Bensmihen
Aaron Ariganello
Ada Maciejewski
Aidan Pereira
Alessandro Mior
Alexander LeFort
Alisha Ma
Alison Torrie Lapaire
Allison Chewter
Allsun Campbell
Alyssa Soldo
Alyssa Woods
Amelia Crichton
Amna Khan
Amna Amir
Anthony Soccia
Arjan Soor
Arno van Dijk
Ashley Graham
Brandon Raco
Brandon Eidner
Brandon Bell
Cameron McDonald
Cameron Hodgins
Celina Hevesi
Chhavi Narula
Chinoye Sunny
Chloe Patten
Christine Huynh
Christine Wilson
Claire de Souza
Clay Janzen
Daniel Borrelli
Darcy Vander Pryt

Davin Metheral
Deepali Dang
Dzmitry Kurylovich
Elizaveta Klets
Emily Williamson
Enya Huang
Erica Rose
Erika Lindsay
Erin Helsby
Evan Kotsopoulos
Francois Hemon-Morneau
Graham Richards
Grihalakshmi Soundarapandian
Han Liu
Hanaa Ali
Homa Jalili Safarian
Hyeonyoung Yang
Ian McIntosh
Ian Search
Isabelle Ilagan
Ivy Liang
James Hunter
Jason Campigotto
Jenna Dawson
Jennifer Vu
Jennifer Combs
Jessica Conroy
Jiajun Zhang
Jocelyn Wainwright
John Albert
Jonathan Mineault
Joseph Lefaive
Joy Tigchelaar
Julia Rojas-Contento

Junyi Fan
Jyutika Rajesh Bhise
Katrina Munshaw
Ken Bulgin
Krishtian-Tyler Rampersaud
Kristin Racine
Laura Ross
Madalena Harreman-Fernandes
Madalene Albano
Mahshid Fadaei
Maire Stea
Margot Linker
Mariana Da Silva
Marion-Frances Cabral
Martina Braunstein
Matthew Taylor
Megan Asbil
Melinda Tasnadi
Melissa Greco
Michael Bennett
Michael Balch
Michael Pizzimenti
Michelle Marcantonio
Mohammad Sameem Raheemi
Mojgan Rasouli
Morgan Clare
Muhammad Zulkarnain Hamzah
Murray White
Natalie Barcellos
Nicholas Burnie
Olga Alchits
Omar Elsharkawy
Pirooz Davoodnia

Prerit Kaji
Rahim Baird
Raisa Chowdhury
Randi Burke
Ray Lister
Rebecca Sciarra
Rebecca McEvoy
Richard Valenzona
Robert McQuillan
Robin Mennie
Sakshi Sakshi
Salvatore Marchese
Samantha Dela Pena
Savonnae Street
Scott Plante
Selam Eyob
Silvia Laban
Siobhan Kelly
Soumaya Ben Miled
Tahereh Granpayehvaghei
Tara Vader
Taya Devlin
Thanh Nguyen
Trisha Sridharan
Victoria McCutcheon
Victoria Kramkowski
Victoria Blake-Stroz
Yingluo Wang
Zahra Jaffer
Ziya Cao

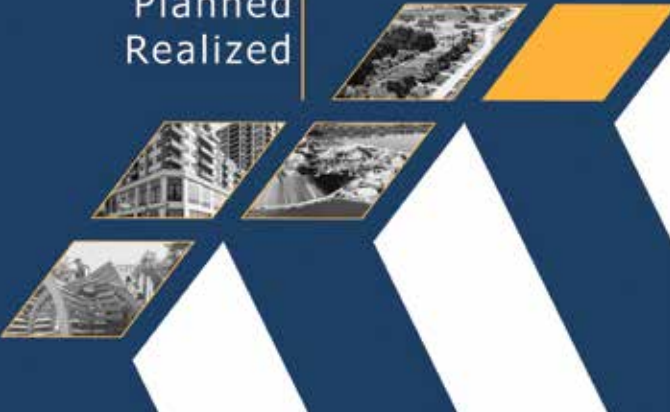


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RPP Profile

THE PEOPLE, PATHS, AND PERSPECTIVES SHAPING PLANNING



RPP Profile



Director, Housing and Land Use Policy, Toronto Region Board of Trade



Member of OPPI's Government and Public Relations Committee

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Years in planning

Alex Beheshti

For Alex Beheshti, planning is about bringing together different strands of thinking. His career path has provided him with opportunities to dig deep into a wide range of perspectives. A Toronto Metropolitan University graduate, Beheshti has held a number of positions over his eight years in planning, including senior researcher at the Missing Middle Initiative and senior consultant at Altus Economic Group. Currently, he is Director of Housing and Land Use Policy for the Toronto Region Board of Trade.

"Planning is about bringing in policy analysis, it's bringing in economic thought, and it's marrying that to how we design urban areas and regions so people can prosper," he says.

What attracted you to the Toronto Region Board of Trade role?

For me, it's about the importance of prosperity. Without it, we would be so much more worse off with the challenges we face as a society. I fundamentally believe it is the key ingredient that makes it possible to transform hopes and dreams into reality.

The Board has a similar take as this, but they refer to it as economic competitiveness. They're looking for a Toronto region that is nationally and globally competitive, one that draws in jobs and opportunity for people to be their best and do their best.

One of the benefits of working at the Board is there are a lot of opportunities to engage within different ecosystems — the policy ecosystem, the business ecosystem — and bring them altogether when it comes to housing and land use policy to ensure we're making the best possible decisions, because those decisions are going to echo for decades.

What are your key priorities in your role?

What I do ultimately comes down to attracting and retaining talent that the Toronto region needs to stay competitive. From a housing perspective, this means enabling individuals and communities to have more agency in deciding what options are best suited for themselves. A one-size-fits-all built-form development pattern doesn't create the kinds of places that people are very attracted to or want to stay in. This is something greater realization has developed around, which is why the conversation about housing options has evolved so much and includes so many more people and actors participating in it.

However, enabling more housing options isn't a simple exercise. As planners, it takes a lot of work on our part from zoning policy to infrastructure decisions to create the complete communities that are the necessary foundation in supporting more homes that attract and retain people.

Talent attraction and retention also isn't just about housing — it's also about land use more broadly, which speaks to the second part of title. While there's been a vocal conversation about needing enough homes, every household also needs employment that generates the income needed to afford those homes, and that often gets left out of the conversation. Despite the changes that have occurred to work post-COVID, most people still have a place of work outside of their homes for at least part of the time, which means we need employment lands to be economically viable and vibrant to support jobs. This is a key remit of both the Board and my role in it.

...to ensure we're making the best possible decisions, because those decisions are going to echo for decades.

When you look ahead to the future, what inspires you?

The future is something that I need to consider as part of my regular work. The Board is a very forward-looking institution in terms of contemplating where technology is going and how it impacts competitiveness and productivity. Currently, I'm exploring that intersection between technology, innovation, data availability, policy, design, and government processes and how it all comes together in delivering the housing and employment lands people need.

What I have seen throughout my career and from the vantage point of my current role is that the planning practice is going to involve more technology adoption and require more technical skills on the part of practitioners. While that seems very daunting for the current generation of planners like me, I'm really inspired by

the technical skills the new generation of planners is bringing to their practice, as well as their outlook on data and evidence-based policymaking. I'm a proponent of more information being made publicly available to support all kinds of analysis.

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

The only constant I have experienced in this profession is the constant of change. It's not just legislative or economic changes. Your career path as a planner can change significantly from job to job, year to year.

I started as an intern at a municipality, then went to a research institute, then into consulting, then back to a research institute, and now I'm at a nonprofit advocacy organization. Yes, I'm taking transferable core skills to each role, but my actual job and the organizations are

also constantly changing. And that's okay. It's an opportunity planners should seize, especially young planners.

Excelling as a planner requires lifelong learning. To maximize your outcome, you have to put in the time with things like reading legislation first-hand and understanding its wider implications — not just the news about it or someone's hot take on social media.

While I have emphasized the evolving nature of technical skill requirements, curiosity, energy, communication skills, and the ability to build relationships are more important than ever in an age of AI. What makes employers choose one applicant over another? Technical skills can be taught over time, but you can't teach curiosity, caring, or ambition, and many employers know that.



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We Asked Our Contributors

Registered Professional Planners are future-forward thinkers by nature and expertise, trained to provide evidence-based guidance for decisions that build sustainable, resilient communities. Here are some thoughts from three contributors to this issue of *Place Magazine* about what they see looking ahead.



Natasha D'Souza PHD, MCIP, RPP

RESEARCHER, SEDRD, UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH, AND
POLICY PLANNER, CITY OF BRAMPTON. PAGE 09

It's an exciting time to be a planner because the profession is evolving alongside the communities we serve. I am most excited by the opportunity to work on emerging challenges, from new infrastructure to technological change, where planners can bring a thoughtful lens to complex issues and connect ideas, people, and places in new ways.

These are the moments that call for curiosity, creativity, and collaboration, giving us the opportunity to help communities navigate change and shape stronger communities for generations to come.



Clarence Woudsma PHD, MCIP, RPP

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, SCHOOL OF PLANNING, AND
CO-DIRECTOR, FUTURE CITIES INSTITUTE BY CAIVAN,
UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO. PAGE 14

Given the privileged role I have as an academic at the University of Waterloo, watching the next generation of professionals tackling their learning provides a constant source of excitement for our future. Students are curious, bright, and caring — and a lot of their energy is directed at non-auto mobility options — transit and active transport writ large.

This is an area I'm also keen to put my energies into — specifically on how to build and maintain a mobility culture that is less "driver first" oriented and making cycling and transit more a cultural norm in more places.



Justine Giancola MCIP, RPP, LEED AP

PLANNER, PARTNER AND BOARD MEMBER, DILLON
CONSULTING. PAGE 44

We're at an incredibly interesting time in the evolution of Canadian cities. While there's no shortage of conflict and issues, I'm most excited about working with communities to be a voice for positive change.

The planning profession has an incredible ability to bring people together to address the wide range of emerging issues, whether its climate change, housing affordability, mobility, access to amenities, local jobs, infrastructure deficits, or the ability to adapt to change. I love working with passionate people to try to build better, smarter, and more purposeful communities. If this is your M.O., let's collaborate!



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