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Living it up: the wide range of support for smart growth in Canada promises more livable towns and cities

Deborah Curran and Ray Tomalty

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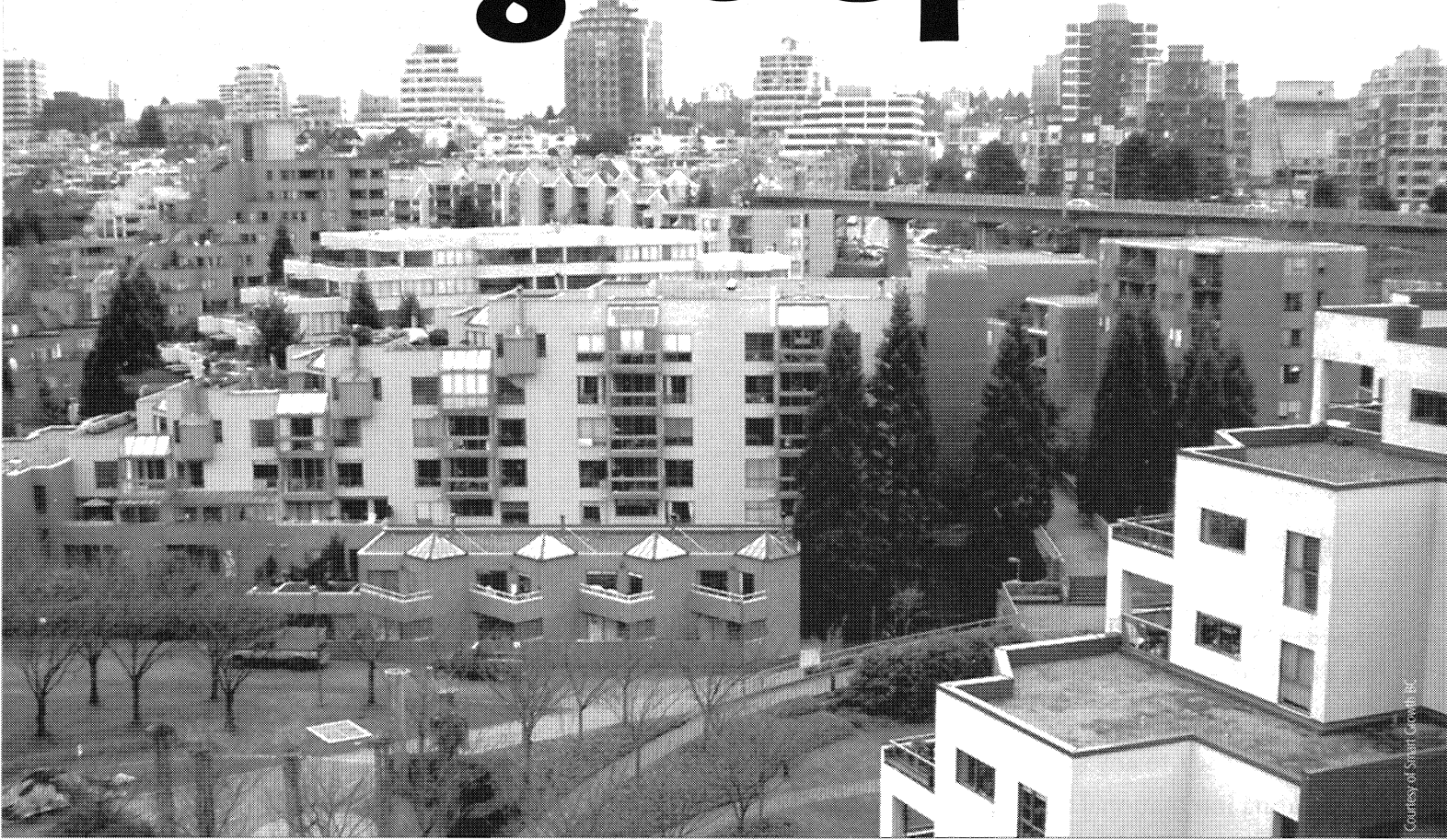
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Living It Up



The wide range of support for smart growth in Canada promises more livable towns and cities.

Deborah Curran and Ray Tomalty

IN CANADA, we have always prided ourselves on the fact that our cities are more livable than their US counterparts. Canadian planners like to say that urban densities are higher here, car ownership is lower, transit use better and our downtowns, although sometimes troubled, never became the burnt-out, no-go areas they often did in the US.¹

But the 1990s saw a gradual shift of this picture. While senior governments in Canada were slashing their budgets for affordable housing and their support for transit

While some of this interest in smart growth is motivated by high planning ideals, much of it is held together by the more mundane glue of self-interest.

services, US federal, state and municipal governments were investing massively in transit, housing, urban infrastructure and the revitalization of central cities. They have even bought up hundreds of thousands of hectares of conservation lands outside major cities to stop sprawl.

Now, for the first time in decades, many US cities have seen their populations grow. The decline in transit use has been stemmed and downtowns are booming. US cities are showing more of that elusive quality that always characterized Canadian communities: livability.

As David Crombie, former mayor of Toronto and current president and CEO of the Canadian Urban Institute, puts it:

We in Canada used to pride ourselves on our livable cities and city regions, and pity the Americans their dying downtowns. Now many American cities are coming back to life and economic health, like heart attack victims who survive to become fitness fanatics. Canadian cities may no longer have the advantage.²

The Americans called the new movement “smart growth”, a phrase that captured the middle ground between the “any growth is good growth” mentality that was presiding over the creation of sprawling cities, and the “no growth is good growth” reflex of residents’ associations and environmental groups trying to stop the growth bulldozer.

The idea behind smart growth is that with the right land-use, development and public finance strategies, we can enhance the quality of life in communities, preserve ecological integrity, and save infrastructure and other costs over the long term.

Many long-time planning professionals and environmental activists question how smart growth differs from good land-use planning. The differences are twofold. First, smart growth is anchored in a coalition of interests working to create more livable communities. For the first time, transportation, affordable housing, environmental preservation, fiscal accountability, economic development and healthy communities advocates are all speaking of a package of livability that has many common themes.

Second, while land use is a large part of smart growth, it is also about addressing regional equity – about who pays for new roads and infrastructure, about the affordability of housing, the property value benefits of healthy ecosystems, and the true costs and benefits of economic development.

Thus while some of this coalition is motivated by high planning ideals, much of it is held together by the more mundane glue of self-interest. Financial institutions, for instance, want to preserve their prior investments in city

centres by preventing further flight to the suburbs. Labour unions see that sprawl is dispersing employers into low-wage and non-unionized shops on the edges of cities. Developers want to save money by forcing municipalities to let them build housing on smaller lots with narrower streets.

Residents’ associations are tired of subsidizing new growth in sprawling areas through their property taxes; they want to see mechanisms put in place to ensure that the cost of growth is borne by those who benefit from it.

Canada catching on

Inspired by the movement in the US, smart growth is catching on in Canada. The first smart growth organization in Canada emerged in 1999 in British Columbia. Called Smart Growth BC, the non-profit group was set up by the West Coast Environmental Law Association and the Eco-Research Chair of Environmental Law and Policy at the University of Victoria. Its goal is to mobilize a growing

Smart Growth Principles

1. Preserve greenspace, environmentally sensitive areas, natural beauty and farmland.
2. Undertake broad-scale planning for cities and town in adjacent regions and counties in a way that integrates land-use and transportation planning into the entire area.
3. Make full use of existing urban land and infrastructure.
4. Mix land uses (combining homes, stores, offices and services in the same neighbourhood).
5. Provide a variety of transportation choices, with a major focus on public transit.
6. Take advantage of innovative and compact building design.
7. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices.
8. Create neighbourhoods that invite walking and bicycling.
9. Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.
10. Direct urban development towards existing communities, and ensure that all such development is compact.
11. Encourage community collaboration in development decisions. ♻️

Excerpt from Linda Pim and Joel Ornoy, A Smart Future For Ontario (Don Mills: Federation of Ontario Naturalists, 2002). Full report available at www.ontarionature.org.

citizen movement to address growth and sprawl issues around the province, and to provide sound alternative policy solutions to local and provincial governments.

A number of Ontario municipalities, including Guelph, Ottawa, Kitchener and Hamilton, have elected smart growth mayors to lead changes in the way towns and cities grow. The Conservation Council of Ontario is exploring the creation of an Ontario Smart Growth Network, while the Federation of Ontario Naturalists is co-ordinating a series of southern Ontario-wide workshops to educate and mobilize residents against urban sprawl.

Smart growth is also on the agenda in Halifax, which was amalgamated in 1996 with Dartmouth and surrounding areas to form an immense regional municipality, now in the midst of a regional planning exercise. Initiated in October 2001, the theme of the plan is "Healthy Growth" and is based on the familiar smart growth principles of

mixed-use development, compact design, a range of housing choices, sense of place, walkable neighbourhoods and alternatives to car-based transportation.³ "For the first time in the region's history," says Austin French, Halifax's manager of community planning, "the key players appear ready to co-operate on a long-range plan."

Moving ahead

Needless to say, smart growth is not a panacea. There are many doubts within the movement itself.

First, given its broad meaning, the term smart growth (not surprisingly) is open to co-optation. In the US, a large number of statewide citizen groups have organized under the smart growth banner to control sprawl, while the National Association of Home Builders trumpets smart growth as a reason to continue building low-density housing on the urban fringe.

Three Ways We Subsidize Sprawl Enid Slack

If municipalities are serious about curbing sprawl, they need to restructure their financial tools. Development charges, user fees and property taxes, the three key methods municipalities use to generate money to pay for public infrastructure and services, tend to favour sprawl by undercharging lower density developments.

They could easily be changed to provide market incentives for smart growth.

Development charges

Municipalities levy development charges to cover the costs of building the infrastructure needed to support new development, i.e., the drinking water and sewage systems, roads and so on.

An efficient development charge should vary by the density and location of development. For instance, if a new housing project in the inner city can make use of existing infrastructure it should pay a lower charge than a project in a farmer's field that requires pipes and roads to be extended in order to service it.

If a development charge is uniform across the city, on the other hand, it will underprice services in low-density neighbourhoods and overprice them in high-density neighbourhoods.

The result will be overdevelopment of low-density housing and underdevelopment of high-density housing. Although municipalities are allowed by provincial legislation to vary the amount of the charge to reflect different costs in different locations, many do not take advantage of this tool.

User fees

Local governments in Canada also impose user fees to cover some of the costs of providing services such as water, sewers, transit, garbage collection, recreation facilities and parking.

User fees can improve the pattern of development if the price charged

equals the cost of providing the service to the user, which, as noted above, often depends on the location and density of development.

Although this approach to pricing can be a useful tool in achieving desired development objectives, it is rarely applied in Canadian municipalities. Instead, most municipalities charge a fee that is averaged out over all users and therefore does not reflect the higher costs of providing services to low-density developments located further away from existing services.

Property taxes

The property tax structure of most Canadian municipalities also results in a reduction in density. This is because any investment that increases the value of the property (such as when a house is converted into apartments, or a parking lot replaced with a building) will make the property subject to a higher tax.

Furthermore, apartment units are often taxed at a higher rate than single-family homes. But since the cost of providing public infrastructure and services is lower in higher density developments, this tax structure amounts to a sprawl subsidy.

In sum, those who enjoy the benefits of low-density, suburban development are not currently paying the higher costs associated with providing public services to this urban form.

Some of the incentives for sprawl would be removed if residents of the outlying suburban areas were charged the higher cost of services provided to them and residents of the central, more densely populated areas were charged the lower cost of their services. ♣

Enid Slack is a consultant in Toronto who specializes in urban economics and public finance.

Smart growth is about regional equity – about who pays for new roads and infrastructure, about the affordability of housing, the property value benefits of healthy ecosystems, and the true costs and benefits of economic development.

This same tension is beginning to emerge in Canada. In January 2001, then premier Mike Harris launched the Ontario Smart Growth Initiative and one of the first announcements made under its auspices was a massive expansion (estimated at \$10 billion) of the province's highway building program.

Second, smart growth seems to apply mostly to rapidly growing urban areas. So far, the movement has little to say to those communities that are growing very slowly or are in decline. In these areas, attracting growth, new businesses or cultural facilities may be more important than controlling the shape of that growth.

Third, there is a lingering debate about whether there should be limits to growth, especially in areas where the population depends on limited local ecological resources, such as groundwater.

Finally, some of the recommendations made by smart growth enthusiasts may simply be unrealistic under prevailing economic conditions and popular attitudes. For instance, Jill Grant at Dalhousie University has questioned whether mixed-use development is as feasible as often assumed.⁴ Having shops and services available within neighbourhoods is a laudable planning goal, but many developers say such strategies are not economically viable

in most suburban settings: adjacent residents don't want the hubbub that retail activity brings, and corner retailers can't make a buck when most people can drive to a Wal-Mart in a few minutes.

Nonetheless, it is clear that there is growing popular, professional and political support for real changes to the way we build cities and for the smart growth agenda.

In the past, efforts to manage growth have largely been seen as the responsibility of urban planners working with tools like zoning regulations and development controls. We have learned from the failure of that approach that shaping urban development requires a much wider array of tools.

Healthy, sustainable cities need strong regional planning authorities, adequate financing and financial incentives, cross-sectoral partnerships, high levels of civic engagement and greater cultural acceptance for mixed, high-density, residential-commercial areas.

Strengthen regional governance

Regional governments have always played an important role in shaping land-use planning in Canada. Regional authorities like the Lower Mainland Regional Planning Board in BC, and regional governments in Ontario cities

Don't Touch My Property Deborah Curran

The US preoccupation with individual rights may seem a little quixotic to many Canadians. But aggressive rights talk is having a subtle influence on smart growth planning here in Canada.

The idea that landowners have a sacred right to do whatever they like with their property is a cornerstone of US culture, and property rights advocates have emerged as the most powerful anti-smart growth lobby.

Smart growth strategies that may prohibit or limit development on privately owned land are frequently met with the claim that the government is unjustifiably taking away owners' rights to do as they wish with their property.

Landowners argue that they should receive compensation for any such "taking" because property rights are protected under the US Constitution. For example, a landowner who is prevented from building at the front of a shorefront lot because of a local planning regulation that the building must be set ten metres back from the shoreline might seek compensation from the government for the loss of that economic opportunity.

In Canada, land-use planning has long been accepted by the courts as a legitimate limit on how property owners may use land. Planning is seen as a way to ensure the orderly development of compatible activities

and to avoid costly mistakes. As a smart growth tool, the ability to enact land-use rules is essential to protecting ecosystem values, channeling growth into existing built areas and addressing problems at a regional scale.

However, property rights arguments are common in the US media and this rhetoric has spilled over into Canada. Provincial and municipal prohibitions on development in riparian zones, shoreline preservation regulations, and cluster development requirements have all been challenged using US "takings" arguments.

To date, none of these challenges has been successful in Canadian courts. But even the threat of lawsuits can make local governments less likely to try new approaches to growth management. 🗣️

Follow up

The Institute for Local Self Government provides resources for local governments on how to design regulations that withstand these "takings" claims: www.ilsg.org

The Defenders of Property Rights is one law and advocacy group dedicated to challenging government decisions that potentially limit what landowners can do with their land: www.yourpropertyrights.org 🗣️

New Urbanism Stalls Without Public Transit

Nicola Ross

You must look down from 35,000 feet and see the big picture, if you want smart growth to work," says Marvin Green, president of River Oaks Group Inc. The aptly named Green cut his smart growth teeth in the mid-1990s on a 340-unit development in Orangeville, a town of 20,000 people located in Ontario's Golden Horseshoe.

Green built Montgomery Village according to the smart growth features heralded by planners and architects as "New Urbanism": compact design, front porches, detached garages on back lanes, and home offices. The vision involves a return to the main streets of the 1950s small town with mixed housing and walkable streets that lead to parks, schools and stores.

Unfortunately, Montgomery Village only made it part way there. The distances separating its front porches from stores and other amenities, along with the limited public transit in the area, left the village a car-centric suburb. When combined with inadequate regional transit linking Orangeville with Toronto, Mississauga and Brampton, where many of its residents work, Green's early attempt at smart growth floundered.

The experience demonstrates how smart growth hinges upon a co-ordinated approach to land-use, transportation policy and community design.

Green contends that Montgomery Village is not big enough. "With a few hundred units you can change densities, put in a corner store and eliminate parking for the store," he declares, "but that's it." You can't build a shopping centre within walking distance, nor can you create a public transit system. These things, says Green, require regional planning.

Montgomery Village's brief history illustrates what happens when a so-called New Urban community isn't backed up by a complementary transportation policy. The moderately priced townhouses and single-detached homes sold well when they hit the market. But Andy Kidd, president of Devonleigh Homes Inc., the company that built later phases of the development, points out that at the time there was almost nothing else for sale in Orangeville. He adds, "as soon as new products with garages in front were available, the market for back lanes dried up." Montgomery Village's first phase is now a lonely island amidst a sea of typical suburban homes.

Kidd attributes the preference for the garage-front design – so hated by New Urbanists – to Orangeville's car-dependency. As long as residents pick up groceries and kids in their cars, they prefer the convenience of a direct, snow-free link between garage and kitchen.

Green additionally complains that Ontario's one-price-fits-all development charges discourage developers from building smaller, higher density homes. "It's easier," says Green, "to amortize a \$20,000 development charge on an expensive home that sits on a 70-foot lot than on a price-sensitive 25-foot home." A graduated price structure would reduce the financial risk and debt assumed by developers pursuing smart growth initiatives.

Green remains committed to smart growth, but the Montgomery Village experience clearly left him frustrated. Without a more comprehensive, 35,000-foot approach to land-use planning, the current system hampers even the most willing developers. 📍

Nicola Ross is the executive director of the Caledon Countryside Alliance (www.woodrising.com/cca/homepage.html). A contributor to The Globe and Mail, Harrowsmith Country Life and others, she received a National Magazine Award in 2002 for an article about the ecological footprint concept.

like Hamilton and Ottawa helped lay critical groundwork for the co-ordination of regional issues like transportation and land use.

Historically, these efforts have been resisted and undermined by municipalities suspicious of placing too much authority in regional bodies. Nonetheless, only strong regional governments have the inclusive geographic scope to stem sprawl and address fiscal imbalances across adjacent municipalities.

An inspiring example of the new muscle and regional foresight that is needed to stop sprawl is provided by the Greater Vancouver Regional District. In a landmark decision, the district recently denied a municipality a sewer extension onto non-urban lands known as the Green Zone, upholding the new focus on sustainability that has been incorporated into the district's strategic plan.⁵

Federal and provincial role

But as municipal and regional officials point out, there is an important role that only provincial and federal governments can play in encouraging smart growth. Cities have been on the losing end of the budget wars that have waged among levels of government over the last ten years: local governments have been forced to shoulder more responsibilities but are seeing fewer financial transfers from senior governments.

The result is cash-strapped municipal governments forced to cut services and scrimp on the housing and infrastructure investments needed to grow smarter.

"We see a major benefit of direct senior government involvement," says planner Kevin Curtis from the Region of Waterloo, Ontario, "not just in giving clear policy direction, but in providing financial assistance for infrastructure, transit facilities, downtown revitalization, the acquisition of green spaces and housing. All of this requires the commitment of real dollars from the province and from Ottawa."

Canadian cities also need new powers to manage growth effectively, which can only be granted by provincial governments. They need the right to apply taxes and fees (like gas taxes) that will encourage conservation and responsible travel patterns, adopt standards and codes that will allow more compact development, and negotiate deals with developers that will help achieve planning goals. A positive sign here is the introduction of a new municipal act in Alberta that provides municipalities with more revenue sources and legislative powers. Other provinces need to follow along.

Getting the price signals right

For smart growth to succeed, we also need to move from a planning framework based on regulatory prohibitions to one that features a range of tools that promote the desired choices, including economic signals.

The assortment of taxes, fees and charges set by municipalities and other levels of government – including property taxes, development charges, building permits, fuel taxes, parking fees and water use fees – are all unconsciously emitting signals to developers, investors, home buyers and commuters, and influence their decisions on where to locate within and how to travel around urban regions (see “Three Ways We Subsidize Sprawl” on page 12).

These signals have to be brought into line with social goals such as the desire to stem sprawl and encourage alternative forms of transportation. Better use of economic tools also provides an opportunity to address equity issues.

The full costs of the public infrastructure needed to support sprawl and car travel should be incorporated into the prices paid for land, housing, fuel and so on.

Citizen engagement

Appropriate government action will undoubtedly move the smart growth agenda forward in Canada, but strong citizen advocacy is still needed to keep governments on track.

The situation in Ontario underscores this need. Chris Winter, executive director of the Conservation Council of Ontario, points to the emphasis the Ontario government is placing on “transportation choices” in its Smart Growth

Quebec Village Designed for Train Commuters Alexandra Jozsa



Courtesy of La ville de la gare

On the site of a former sugar refinery, a new model for development is coming to Mont-St-Hilaire, a municipality on Montreal’s South Shore. Aptly named La village de la gare, the project is centred on a new commuter train station. It puts transit first in order to discourage suburban automobile use and promote a socially diverse and friendly village feel.

This joint effort between the municipality, the land developer and the Agence métropolitaine de transport (the agency responsible for planning public transportation in the Montreal metropolitan area) is both highly innovative and controversial.

The project has been opposed by residents living nearby on the grounds that increased densities will conflict with the rural character of the area, historically a picturesque village situated along the Richelieu River, at the base of the small mountain known as Mont Saint-Hilaire.

According to Michel Morneau, a planner for the municipality, the higher densities of Le village de la gare will relieve development pres-

ures on the mountain. Designated as Canada’s first UNESCO biosphere reserve in 1978, it contains the last remaining virgin forest in the region. More recently, suburban development has begun encroaching on areas surrounding the reserve.

La village de la gare is an effort to reduce this sprawl, create community in the suburbs and aid conservation. Building the project on a former industrial site ensures it will not consume any further green space.

The most interesting aspect of the project, however, is how it is designed to make transit, walking and cycling the preferred options for both local and regional trips.

A commuter train will provide residents with direct access to downtown Montreal in 40 minutes. The station will be within a ten-minute walk for the majority of residents, although a parking lot will cater to motorists as well. The idea is that by making transit accessible and convenient, commuters will do most of their daily trips to and from Montreal by train.

Pedestrian-friendly features – narrow streets to slow automobile traffic, sidewalks, footpaths and green spaces – will encourage walking as a viable option for short trips. A bike lane network promotes cycling for longer local trips. Shopping facilities are within short walking or cycling distances from residential areas. In addition to single-family dwellings, La village de la gare also incorporates condominiums, townhouses, duplexes, triplexes and low-rise apartments. These housing types increase density and accommodate a population with a range of income levels.

Local planners and the developer emphasize the project’s village-like feel, claiming that this atmosphere will provide residents with a sense of place often lacking in suburban settings. Construction began last year and will continue over the next ten years. 🏠

Alexandra Jozsa is a master of urban planning student at McGill University, Montreal.

Follow up

Read more on Mont-Saint-Hilaire and the new development at www.ville.mont-saint-hilaire.qc.ca 🏠

Initiative: "Transportation choice can mean I want to be able to take my car anywhere I want. It's a big loophole you can drive a truck or pave another highway through – and that is exactly what they are doing."

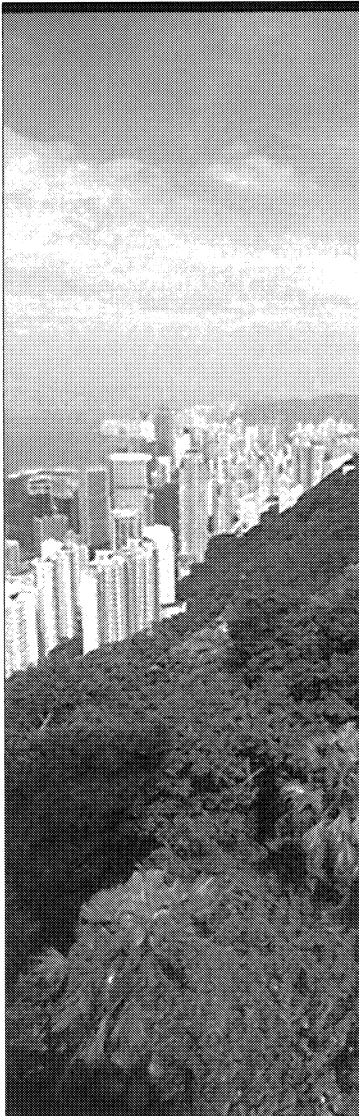
Smart Growth BC has made citizen education and involvement a priority. According to Cheeying Ho, the organization's executive director, "The goal is to share smart growth examples from across BC and to help ensure that urban land-use decisions are made on the basis of smart growth principles."

In the run-up to the 2002 municipal elections, Smart Growth BC carried out a province-wide voter education campaign to raise awareness of smart growth issues. It has also produced a number of research reports on sprawl,

created a smart growth toolkit and held two major conferences on smart growth.

Steven Peck, a Toronto environmental consultant and smart growth advocate, claims that what Canada lacks in moving ahead with a smart growth agenda is a national network of NGOs, municipal representatives and other stakeholders to lobby for the necessary funding and policies. "The problem is that there is nobody on the national scene to fight for real changes."

The first step towards building such an organization was taken when about 40 NGOs met in Vancouver this May to launch the Smart Growth Canada Network. For now, the network will concentrate on information sharing and capacity building among NGOs. Eventually it may mature



Hong Kong Is the Model for High Density Richard Gilbert

What do Canadian cities need to do to become more sustainable? One simple answer is for them to become more like Hong Kong. Hong Kong's seven million residents have a higher GDP per person than Canadian urban residents, but it has the lowest per capita energy use of any affluent urban region.

The secret behind this low energy use is not frugality but the smart growth principle of efficient urban design.

What makes the difference is Hong Kong's high settlement density – it is more than ten times higher than the major urban regions in Canada, and five times most urban regions in Europe.

This density is a result of a strict public policy regime. Hong Kong's territory is surprisingly extensive, totaling about 1100 square kilometres. Development is restricted with extraordinary severity, so that more than 80 percent of the territory is maintained as parks or wilderness. Hong Kong residents have easier access to open space than residents of most other cities.

There is also less reliance on cars in Hong Kong. Private automobile ownership is not directly restrained, but there are only about 50 cars per 1000 residents, one-tenth the ownership rate in Canada. Almost all journeys within Hong Kong are by public transit or cab. Transit is inexpensive, efficient and profitable for its operators.

Even on the food front, Hong Kong is a low energy

user. A large share of its food comes from just a few dozen kilometres away in Guangdong province.

These remarkable land-use and transportation arrangements have both positive and negative aspects.

On the one hand, they result in high levels of mobility and business efficiency. Little time is wasted in moving around. Everybody and everything you need is close at hand

On the other hand, housing is expensive and living conditions are cramped. Local pollution levels can be high even though emission rates are low, because of the concentration of activity.

Notwithstanding these factors – and the recent SARS problem – Hong Kong residents are among the healthiest in the world. If Hong Kong were a country, it would have the second-lowest infant mortality rate (behind Sweden) and the second-highest life expectancy (behind Japan).

Hong Kong has thus managed to maintain a high standard of living and to minimize its environmental impact, making it one of the world's most sustainable cities. ♻️

Richard Gilbert is an independent consultant specializing in transportation and energy issues, with clients in North America, Europe and Asia.

Follow up

The non-profit think tank Civic Exchange has more information on environmental issues and initiatives in Hong Kong: www.civic-exchange.org ♻️

into a broader coalition that will lobby senior governments for the investments and policies needed to allow cities healthier.

Living with density

Important as citizen action is in promoting a smart growth agenda, it can cut both ways. Higher density projects in existing neighbourhoods are often derailed by local groups who do not want to see changes to their living environments.

“Many people want to preserve land on the urban fringe for food production or recreational purposes, but when

you tell them that might entail living with higher density development in their neighbourhoods, they flip out,” says Anna Hercz, a planner with the City of Ottawa, where a new smart growth plan is being finalized.

One reason for this reaction is that people fear they will have no control over the intensification process and that that changes in their neighbourhoods will ultimately compromise the quality of their environment, despite the promises of planners and developers.

In order to pre-empt that type of negative public reaction, Ottawa is putting in place a new initiative that will involve the community in coming up with acceptable

Collaborative Design Yields Green Suburb Patrick Condon and Shana Johnstone

A camel, goes the old joke, is a horse that was designed by a committee. Planners in Surrey, BC, have turned the joke into success, using a multistakeholder committee to design a neighbourhood as well suited to West Coast rain as a camel is to its desert environment.

In most cases, urban development can be described as a “disintegrated” process. It occurs step-by-step, with approval or completion of one step required before the next step can begin. Technical specialists review the plans independently, each adding their own recommendations before passing the drawings on to the next specialist, from the developer to the architects, the engineers, planners, inspectors, contractors, landscape architects, hydrologists and suppliers. A similar sequence is repeated through the stages of construction.

The new homeowners move in at the end of this cycle. They are rarely, if ever, involved in the development process. The residents who will spend years of their lives in the community generally find their input restricted to minor design details of the individual home they have purchased, such as choosing the number and size of bedrooms, or selecting the colour of the carpets. Because most participants in the design process act in isolation, there is little opportunity to design for efficiency.

When Surrey’s planning and development department decided that a new design for its suburban communities was needed in order to manage the area’s rapid growth sustainably, a new model for the development process was part of the package. The goal was to break through the institutional barriers that perpetuate suburban sprawl by achieving design efficiencies that benefited the natural environment, saved money and created a healthy, liveable neighbourhood.

The result is the East Clayton neighbourhood concept plan. Once complete, East Clayton will provide homes and jobs for over 13,000 people. Playgrounds, parks, stores, schools and workplaces will be

located less than a five-minute walk from every home, and regional bus service will be frequent and reliable. Salmon will swim in clean streams that run through the community.

Infrastructure efficiencies, such as narrow, curbless streets and ponds for on-site stormwater retention, will significantly reduce public maintenance expenses. The average cost of a single-family home in East Clayton will be approximately 20 to 30 percent less than in comparable subdivisions, saving money for developers and making the sustainable vision accessible to a wide range of income brackets and family types.

The key to this practical vision of sustainability was the integrated planning process that developed the design. The details were hammered out over a four-day intensive charrette that involved all the relevant private, city and regional institutions, design professionals, and representatives of important constituent groups such as local landowners. To ensure the discussions achieved a solid plan, the individuals at the table were vested with sufficient authority to make decisions on behalf of their constituencies and even to negotiate new standards “on the fly” when necessary.

The green infrastructure plan developed through the charrette will be the first suburban neighbourhood in BC planned for sustainability. Construction in East Clayton began in 2001, with completion forecasted for 2021. 🏡

Patrick Condon is the James Taylor Chair in Landscape and Liveable Environments at the University of British Columbia, a leading partner in the East Clayton project. Shana Johnstone is a research assistant at the James Taylor Chair.

Follow up

The complete East Clayton concept plan is available at www.sustainable-communities.agsci.ubc.ca/projects/Headwaters.html 🏡

designs. "We are going to set the basic parameters for the areas slated for intensification and then work with the residents to come up with design options," says Hercz. "Once those are in place, developers should be able to proceed without objection, as long as they stay within the design guidelines."

Research on community design supports a certain optimism on this point, according to Peter Calthorpe, a well-known new urbanist planner who has helped communities and regions across the US develop comprehensive plans.

When asked to choose between allowing further sprawl that will eat up treasured ecological and recreational amenities just outside the city versus selectively densifying neighbourhoods and commercial centres, Calthorpe finds communities across North America are choosing the second option. Citizens do not envision living in a high-rise jungle, but they do favour low-rise, townhouse neighbourhoods that remain within half an hour drive of agricultural and resource lands and significant natural areas.

Smart growth offers an idea around which these values can be articulated. At its best and most complex, smart growth in Canada can enliven the debate about sustainability, bringing citizens, politicians, developers and planners around a common table. ♻️

Deborah Curran is the sustainable land-use lawyer for West Coast Environmental Law Association and president of Smart Growth BC. Ray Tomalty is a Montreal-based research consultant in urban sustainability.

Notes

- ¹ For an account of some of the differences see Tamim Raad and Jeff Kenworthy, "The US and Us," *Alternatives Journal*, 24:1 (1998), pp. 14-22.
- ² D. Crombie. "Grow Smart or Grow Worse," *The Globe & Mail* (Toronto: April 4, 2001).
- ³ Halifax Regional Municipality, *Smart Growth Principles for HRM-Draft*, (Halifax, NS: HRM, 2002). Available at www.region.halifax.ns.ca/regionalplanning/smartgrowth-principles.pdf.
- ⁴ J. Grant, "Mixed Use in Theory and Practice: Canadian Experience with Implementing a Planning Principle," *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 68:1 (2002), pp. 71-84.
- ⁵ For the report on this issue, see the Greater Vancouver Regional District, *Sewerage and Drainage Committee minutes*, November 29, 2002. Available at www.gvrd.bc.ca.

Follow up

For BC-related resources and initiatives, see Smart Growth BC: www.smartgrowth.bc.ca

The Conservation Council of Ontario is spearheading NGO efforts in Ontario: www.greenontario.org

The US-based Smart Growth Network has an extensive library of reports, Web sites and case studies: www.smartgrowth.org ♻️

Alternatives' posters for single or discounted bulk orders

Water Hot Spots poster

A poster-size map of Canada shows the position of different Canadian cities on privatization of water services. Also features information about:

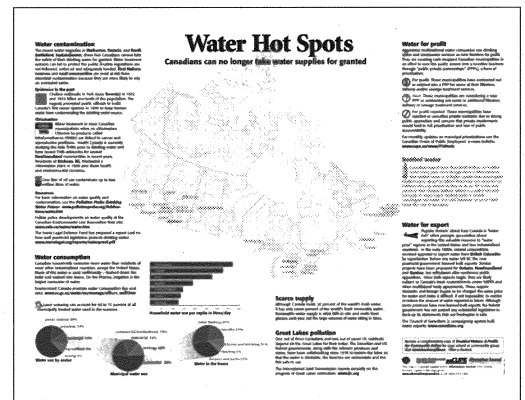
- water contamination in Canadian cities;
- statistics on water use, by country, by sector, and within the home;
- water exports.

English on one side, French on the other, **Water Hot Spots** is ideal for use in classrooms!

The Landfill Starts Here poster

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