

KYOTO AND SPRAWL: BUILDING CITIES THAT WORK **Summary of Conference Workshop Recommendations**

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Introduction

Policy proposals by the charrette/workshops at the Kyoto and Sprawl conference came out of an intensive process whereby approximately 100 people in six different groups met six times Friday night through Saturday night. Each of these charrette/workshops addressed a different dimension of sprawl: its costs, its impacts on health and the environment, design alternatives to conventional suburbs, the implications of urban form on economic development, and transportation alternatives to the car. Furthermore, there were plenary sessions on each of these dimensions, interspersed between the individual workshop meetings.

On Sunday morning, each charrette/workshop presented its proposals to a final plenary session. It was very exciting, not only because there were so many imaginative ideas, but also because the proposals overlapped so much. Every presentation stressed the need for education of municipal officials as well as children, and for changes in political processes. Recommendations by the environment workshop, for instance, included suggestions for sustainable communities, which had been the focus of the urban design workshop. The individual sets of proposals are on Kyoto and Sprawl's Website (www.kyotoandsprawl.ca). This document is an attempt to integrate them into a single document for use by policy analysts, political candidates, and anti-sprawl activists.

The idea of the conference had been to produce practical, doable proposals to help municipalities curb sprawl. The stress was to be on what local governments could really do, in spite of restrictive legislation and oversight from the province. What actually emerged was a broad array of actions that applied not only to municipalities but also to other levels of government, as well as to individuals.

It is important to note that there was widespread agreement about the costs of sprawl, costs that lay at the very heart of the logic for the proposals. These costs may be summarized as follows:

1. Sprawl is extravagant in terms of human finances. It costs us substantially more in terms of transportation and other infrastructure; it is a burdensome environment in which to conduct commerce and to produce goods and services; it is energy intensive; it prevents the growth of vibrant local economies, because profits are exported and there is little import substitution; and it makes people sick, thereby adding to the cost of health care. (These costs are difficult to see because they are part of a complex system of direct and indirect subsidies financed by our taxes.)
2. Sprawl has extremely harmful effects on the quality of air, water, and soil – and therefore on the health of the biosphere.
3. Since our own health depends on the health of the environment, sprawl therefore makes us all sicker than we would otherwise be, especially as a result of air pollution. We are less healthy in particular because sprawl forces us to use the car, a major source of air, water, and soil pollution.

4. Our social and psychological wellbeing, in terms of loss of community and mental stress, are put at risk by sprawl.
5. Paving farmland increases our dependence on unhealthy industrial food imported from far away and makes it more difficult to grow healthy, organic food locally, on small farms.
6. Sprawl development is for the most part non-participatory, and therefore comes at considerable political cost. It is built for us, even when there is local opposition to it. Citizens are in general not welcome to be part of the planning process.
7. Suburban housing tends to be unaffordable for many people and therefore perpetuates social inequality.

Therefore, new urban development should be evaluated in terms of minimizing these costs.

Here are the proposals (the order and numbering do not reflect any priority in importance):

A. Political Proposals

1. Campaign Contributions. Contributions from corporations and unions to campaigns at the provincial and municipal levels should be banned. Contributions should be limited to those from individuals who reside in the municipality.
2. Democratize the Electoral Process. Provide public funding to municipal candidates, free air time to candidates, and rebates to people making donations to municipal campaigns.
3. Enforcement. Legislation protecting the environment and public health has to be diligently enforced. Many laws on the books make it look as if governmental action is being taken, but enforcement is totally absent. For instance, anti-idling legislation needs to be properly enforced.
4. Participation in Boards and Agencies. Citizens should be made to feel welcome to volunteer to serve on Planning, Public Health, Environmental, and other advisory bodies to municipal governments. The number of such bodies and citizens serving on them has diminished rapidly in the last 10 years, with a resulting decrease in the quality of public policy.
5. Other Participation. Along with our rights as citizens, we all have an obligation to understand the public impact of our individual decisions about where we live and work and how we live our lives. Political participation also means taking part in community planning groups, cleaning up streams, car pooling, and reducing our energy use. All such actions are examples of taking responsibility for our built and natural environments and they help to counter the nonparticipatory politics of urban sprawl.

B. The Development Process

1. Encourage Smaller Developers. Streamline the application and approval procedure for small developments (which are easier to plan as infill) and for projects that do not depend on the car.

2. Opportunities for Citizen Participation in the Development Process. Establish intervenor funding for communities and citizens to challenge developments according to anti-sprawl criteria. In infill and intensification projects, require participation by present users of the neighbourhood (residents, business owners, and employees) in design charrettes.

C. Provincial Planning Policies and Legislation

1. Strengthen the Provincial Policy Statement on Municipal Planning and the Planning Act Itself. Specifically, the PPS and the Act should provide a province-wide framework for transit-friendly land use, compact development, affordable housing, mixed-use development, agricultural land preservation, and natural habitat preservation – all within the context of regional coordination. A framework should also be provided for municipalities to adopt Urban Growth Boundaries. As was the case in 1994, The Act should contain policy principles in addition to rules relating to the planning process, including adherence to MTO/MOH Transit Supportive Guidelines.
2. Restore the “Consistent With” Principle. Municipal planning decisions should be required to be consistent with provincial policy statements and Planning Act principles, as was the case before the revisions to Ontario’s Planning Act in 1996.
3. Strengthen the Environmental Assessment Act. Severely weakened by the current Ontario government, this act should be amended to secure protection of crucial environmentally sensitive areas under threat from new developments and highways. Municipal governments can be administrators of this act.
4. Strengthen the Nutrient Management Act. One of the purposes of this act is to protect the headwaters of streams and rivers, keeping them clean for the use of all living beings. Provisions of this act could act as a barrier to urban sprawl that threatens these headwaters.

D. Land Use to Promote Intelligent Growth

1. Establish Urban Growth Boundaries. Although there are many provincial constraints surrounding the process, municipalities should consider adopting an UGB – a firm line in the sand beyond which growth will not be allowed and service pipes not extended. Official plan amendments to move the boundary should not be permitted outside 10-year reviews of the current boundary. The 10-year review process should ensure that the boundary is only extended if it can be shown that the anticipated growth cannot be accommodated within the existing boundary through infill and intensification. The province should not provide any subsidies for infrastructure outside this boundary. In municipalities with resource constraints on their growth (such as water supply or carrying capacity limitations), a growth boundary should be established and oversizing of pipes near the boundary should not be permitted.
2. Environmental and Public Health Criteria for Development Approval. Every land development application should be assessed according to its impact on greenhouse gas emissions, air, water, and soil quality and on public health.
3. Environmental and Public Health Components to Land Use Plans. All community plans should include policies on the need to protect the biosphere and public health.

4. Encourage Downtown Development. In addition to discouraging large malls on the urban fringe, this means promotion of close-grained mixed land use and higher density main streets. It also means a strong push for infill development, and local community centres within larger urban areas.
5. Promote Complete Communities. These communities would be pedestrian-friendly and have a diversity of densities, of rental and ownership housing, and of jobs and services. They will also include accessible educational, recreational, and cultural facilities.
6. Encourage Jobs in Housing-Rich Areas and Vice Versa. This would involve small scale commercial and “clean” industrial uses, advisory services for small businesses, and zoning for home/work units. Put in place infrastructure (such as small business centres) and workplace policies that support telecommuting.
7. Match Jobs with Housing Affordable to Jobholders. Financial incentives for home ownership near place of work should be provided.
8. Create Alternative Development Standards. The standards could include features such as narrower road widths, and reduced parking requirements, lot sizes, setbacks and frontages. The standards should be approved by Council and placed in the municipal engineering and urban design manuals so that they can be applied on a project-by-project basis. This would allow developers who want to build sensibly to do so without bureaucratic opposition or delays to the approval process.
9. Discourage Car-Dependent Land Uses. For instance, implement bans on drive-through establishments. Design of commercial areas should make it easy to walk from business to business.
10. Transit-centred Planning. This relates directly to MTO/MOH Transit Supportive Land Use Guidelines, which will be contained in provincial legislation. Higher density, mixed use development would be encouraged around rapid transit stations and along major arterial roads with transit services. Pedestrian and bicycle facilities would be enhanced, and parking requirements reduced in these areas.

E. Investments and Incentives

1. Development Charges. Development charges should not be levied where urban infrastructure is already available (i.e., downtown or other infill situations). Other incentives should be formulated to encourage infill development. Development charges should reflect total costs, including transit.
2. Environmental and Health Protection. Developments should be rewarded through financial incentives for environmentally intelligent designs, land use that minimizes harm to the environment and to public health, and health enhancing designs.
3. Protect Farmland. Compensate farmers, beyond the Farm Tax Credit, for keeping their lands in production, as in the Tender Fruit Land Program of 1994. This is done by the province’s purchasing a restrictive covenant from the farmer, who, in exchange, can not obtain a severance on the land.
4. Make farming profitable. This means encouragement of local, labour-intensive, organic farming, and Community Supported Agriculture. Encourage urban farming in order to reduce the need for long-distance trucking of food. Property tax reductions subsidized by the province would be one tool for this initiative.

5. Encouragement of Land Banking. Land taxes could be structured to promote preservation of environmentally sensitive land on the urban fringe by putting it into land trusts. The capital gains tax on transfers to land banks should be eliminated.
6. Public Transit. Long-term sustainable funding for public transit should be provided by provincial and federal governments. Tax incentives are required to encourage employers to provide transit passes as a fringe benefit in lieu of free parking, and individuals should be able to deduct transit expenditures from their income tax returns.
7. Move towards a full internalization of automotive costs. This means that vehicle owners should pay society for all the costs of pollution, health, and infrastructure incurred by cars and trucks. Assign five cents per litre of the provincial excise tax on motor fuels collected in areas with transit systems to transit investment.
8. Implement Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Programs. Require or provide incentives to municipalities to establish TDM programs including limitations on parking allowances for private developments and fees for on-street parking.
9. Provide Support for Rehabilitation and Retrofitting of Existing Buildings. For example, lower property taxes on upgraded properties, an incentive that could be funded in whole or in part by the province. Eliminate subsidies now in place that encourage the building of new structures (including Land Transfer Tax Rebate Program and #9, below).
10. Reduce or Eliminate Tax Deductions for Depreciation on Certain Kinds of Property. This would be applied to buildings not being used by the owner – i.e., properties rented out for profit, especially those being held for future development. This would have to be a federal tax policy decision.

Government Structure

1. Abolish or Radically Reform the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB). This body should be made up of members appointed through an open and transparent process for a maximum of five years. It should hear appeals about procedures followed, not make judgements on planning principles. If the process is found to be faulty, decisions should be returned to municipality.
2. Establish an Ontario Public Health Commissioner's Office. This commissioner would report to the Legislature, among other things, on the public health impact of urban development. It would set up a public registry of impact statements on the Web.
3. Institute Regional Coordination. In urban areas made up of several municipalities, there needs to be a regional coordinating body made up representatives of local governments, where ultimate authority should reside. Decisions would, however, be made within a regional or provincial policy framework.
4. Introduce Horizontal Coordination to Land Use Decision Making. At the provincial and municipal levels, including environmental and public health criteria in all policy and planning decisions means that staff from the ministries or departments of the Environment and Health would be present on bodies making decisions about land use.

Education

1. Inform Municipal Officials. More and more information about the health and environmental impacts of sprawl is being produced. Municipal officials need continuing training sessions on this research.
2. Change the School Curriculum. The principles of environmental and public health education, as well as connections between land use and transportation, should be taught from the beginning in public schools.
3. Anti-Sprawl Marketing. The costs of sprawl should be presented everywhere, on billboards, in periodicals, and on TV: pollution and congestion are greater in the suburbs, crime rate is higher, and physical and mental stresses are worse.

Research Agenda: Develop a Solid, Accessible Body of Information about

1. Health Impacts of Urban Sprawl
2. Financial Costs of Sprawl. This would include costs to the environment and to agriculture.
3. Environmental Indicators.
4. Best Practices. Examples: Okotoks, Alberta, and Davis, California.
5. Cleaning Up Brownfield Sites. Natural, inexpensive methods have been developed by John Todd.