

# ***"What I Have Learned About Cities"***

***Thursday, September 8, 2011***

***4:30 to 6:00 p.m. (followed by reception)  
Vivian and David Campbell Conference Facility  
Munk School of Global Affairs  
University of Toronto  
1 Devonshire Place, South House***

***Dr. Anne Golden, C.M.  
President and Chief Executive Officer,  
The Conference Board of Canada***

## **Introduction**

I thought I would begin with a quick trip down memory lane because, in preparing for today, I was struck by the continuity of thought underlying what I've learned about cities over the past four and a half decades. So, here goes, 45 years of learning in under 45 minutes! I considered titling this speech "The Ecstasy and the Agony" – the ecstasy of learning and the agony of watching most of it not implemented.

My interest in cities goes back to the late 1960s – a time of considerable ferment over the future of the urban fabric. The iconic Jane Jacobs, whose extraordinary legacy continues to inspire urban progressives, had moved to Toronto after her legendary New York battles against such Robert Moses projects as the building of the cross-town expressway and the so-called renewal of Greenwich Village.

In Toronto, the battle to stop the Spadina Expressway was just getting started. My own political awakening was linked to a much smaller project – a Cadillac-Fairview proposal to put up three 30- plus story apartment buildings on St. Michael's lands just south of where I lived on Millbank Avenue in the lower Village. What bothered me, just as much as the fact that the development would have left our home in perpetual shade, was the attitude of the planners at the public information meetings: it was a "done deal", they explained, our only hope was to

suggest building modifications. The message was: “You can’t fight the developers, you can’t fight City Hall”. It turned out that you can and we did; ratepayer opposition led to the development being scaled back to a most attractive, non-high rise solution with the same coverage (Village Gate).

Then the debate over the Spadina Expressway erupted, led by people like David and Nadine Nowlan and given huge creditability by the support of the celebrated Jane Jacobs. That struggle was a personal turning point. I actually went down to City Hall to make a presentation, quite pregnant at the time, and was heckled by the Councillors throughout my speaking time. The lack of respect shown to citizens by the “old guard” City Hall politicians together with the patently fraudulent arguments in support of building the expressway through the heart of Toronto’s neighbourhoods (i.e., more roads lessen congestion) had a big impact on this up-until-then politically complacent young bride. Through the terrific people that I met and the intense and intelligent debate, I became aware of the new ideas about cities, ideas that challenged the large-scale, auto-oriented, top-down post World War II planning mindset. By the late 1960s, reaction was setting in and I was ripe for the challenge.

When David Crombie threw his hat into the ring in 1972, I picked up the phone spontaneously and offered to help his then embryonic mayoralty campaign. David’s election was largely about saving neighbourhoods from the high-rise developers and their “block-busting” techniques, respect for people’s roots and their values, higher density, mixed use urban development, and reduced dependence on cars. The underlying vision was of a successful, liveable city, encompassing vibrant neighbourhoods.

Through that experience, I came to know a generation of passionate urban activists, many of whom have remained friends and colleagues since. And, what I learned from these early years – apart from the new ideas about cities, scale, mixed use, etc. – is that you can fight City Hall

and win through the power of citizen engagement! I was surprised when the press attributed Crombie's resounding victory to the power of the "Big Blue machine".

Going into the campaign, David was not given an outside chance; the race was between two "old guards" David Rotenberg and Tony O'Donoghue. The key to David's win was that the election, in effect, became a movement – a coalition that crossed the political spectrum and social classes.

Of course, citizen efforts are not always successful. But, for sure, each generation has to be engaged if it wants to preserve the best possible quality of life for its community. I often think back and wonder what would have happened if we'd listened to the cynics.

Throughout my career I have maintained a focus on urban issues, albeit through a variety of lenses. Shortly after Mayor Crombie's election, I was hired as the Research Coordinator of the Bureau of Municipal Research (now defunct but very influential then, she says modestly) where I developed quite an impressive cv by publishing everything I wrote (it was a very tiny organization).

Many of the dozens of studies we produced then contain lessons that are of interest and relevance today. As just one example, the work we did on economies and dis-economies of scale in measuring the efficiency of municipal services deserves to be re-read; bigger is not always better, as we can see with amalgamation<sup>1</sup>.

At Queen's Park, as Advisor on Toronto issues for Dr. Stuart Smith (he needed one as his caucus contained only a single Toronto MPP, Margaret Campbell), my lens was political though still progressive I like to think. My role was to advise on all Toronto policy issues to Stuart's largely rural caucus. And when it was proposed to remove all the homes

---

<sup>1</sup> For recent evidence confirming this, see Conor Dougherty, "When Civic Mergers Don't Save Money", [The Wall Street Journal](#) (August 29, 2011).

from the Toronto Islands to make way for a large Metro park, I was opposed. I remembered Jane Jacobs' warning that without "eyes on the street" people were less safe. Because we were in a minority government situation, our opposition was successful.

At United Way, where I was for two decades, our focus on cities was through the prism of social justice and social policy. We adopted a strategy of doing research on social issues in order to strengthen our fund-raising case and to appeal to corporate and wealthy donors with whom individual stories of pathos did not resonate deeply. For instance, by documenting the increasing concentration of poverty in a large number of Toronto communities (building on the break-through studies by Marvyn Novick at Ryerson and the insights of Larry Bourne at UofT), potential donors understood the negative implications for all Torontonians.

Towards the end of my United Way career, I was asked to take on two major projects: The Task Force on the Future of Greater Toronto and one on Homelessness in Canada's cities. In each case I devoted a year to urban issues.

The terms of reference for the GTA review were hugely ambitious: we were asked to set the Toronto region "on a new course for the new century".

We began by reviewing the emerging literature on city-regions by authors like Neal Peirce (*Citistates*), which built on the insights of the thinking of the 1960s, but with an important new emphasis: the impact of globalization.

And now for the past decade at The Conference Board of Canada, I have been following municipal issues primarily through an economic lens and with a global perspective (research on municipal fiscal imbalance, the urban infrastructure gap, lagging productivity, innovation, and the role of Canada's major or hub cities in driving economic growth, and

our municipal benchmarking reports). This economic lens, as it turns out, is inextricably meshed with all of the other lenses – social, environmental, and political.

Over the course of the more than four decades that I have followed municipal issues, there have been two important insights that have reinforced the paradigm shift of the 1960s:

- The understanding that in a knowledge-based global economy, cities, and specifically city-regions, are the drivers of national and international prosperity; in other words, Canada's prosperity depends on its major cities, not vice versa; (Jane Jacobs had foreshadowed this thinking in her 1969 book, *The Economy of Cities*, by emphasizing the importance of the local milieu to global competitiveness); and,
- The realization of the critical importance of the human capital component thanks to Richard Florida's book on the creative class (2002). Essentially, he tells us that we must reverse the adage "if we build it, they will come" to "if they come, they will build it"; the essential take-away is that we must think of our cities as magnets of talent in order to attract the desired business investment. Creating a welcoming milieu (a high quality and socially tolerant environment with just-in-time amenities) for a top quality labour force is every bit as important as pro-business policies. And especially so in an era of labour shortages, which we are entering.

Through all of the research that I've been engaged in or benefitted from throughout my career, there is a remarkable continuity of ideas. There is a definable "line of descent" (as Nicholas Lemann put it in his recent *New Yorker* article) from Jane Jacobs to Richard Florida. The importance of investing in our major cities and supporting urban quality of life, broadly and inclusively defined, is the cardinal theme.

So I find it ironic that the current attitudes of voters in Toronto, and indeed in Canada, are so out of sync with this accumulated wisdom!

The question for today was how best to summarize all that I have learned from this amazing exposure I have been privileged to have. If I were to approach my task chronologically (a natural instinct for an historian), I expect that – notwithstanding respect, even possible affection for the speaker, the audience’s patience would be taxed unreasonably. I have decided instead to share a template that I have developed that helps me to synthesize, assess, and analyze the plethora of challenges and opportunities facing Canada’s cities.

## **Key Assumptions**

Ten assumptions underlie the template that I would like to propose.

- i. Cities and city-regions are the ascendant players on the world economic stage, the primary platform for the export of goods and services in today’s global economy.
- ii. In today’s economy, knowledge and learning have become predominant in the creation of economic value.
- iii. Proximity matters<sup>2</sup> – cities make frequent interaction affordable in cost and time. It is paradoxical that in a global world, connected by technology, proximity has become more, not less important as predicted by those who argued that telecommuting would empty downtown buildings. Proximity speeds innovation by connecting smart and creative people.
- iv. Most innovation occurs in cities. In high wage economies, like Canada, higher productivity is not possible without innovation.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> This is well understood now, but was an important revelation for me when I read a 1991 report called “Re-inventing New York” (O’Neill and Moss). Meric Gertler has documented the same pattern here in Canada (1994).

<sup>3</sup> A nation’s productivity is determined by the amount of output, measured by GDP, which the average worker creates per hour. Standard of living is influenced by the number of workers times the work effort (hours per worker) times the productivity (value of the output per hour). Of these factors, productivity is by far the most important.

- v. Cities are where a growing number of people live and where most immigrants choose to live. Two thirds of Canadians live in Canada's 27 Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs); more important is that two thirds of the net new jobs created in Canada (1995-2005) were in Canada's ten major cities.<sup>4</sup>
- vi. Cities and their suburbs are economically interdependent, their fates and fortunes are intertwined. This theme of the interdependence of all parts of the city-region underpinned our 1996 Taskforce Report on Greater Toronto. While the values of the residents of cities and suburbs as expressed politically seem very different, the evidence – in the U.S. and Canada – shows that cities and suburbs constitute a single economy and that suburbs tend to be more prosperous when the city they surround is healthier.

The research and analysis supporting this very important insight was done by David Pecaut and The Boston Consulting Group. It had the dual impact of adding to the credibility of our report and converting David into the passionate urban guru we all remember.

- vii. Not all cities are the same when it comes to the need for strategic investment – a rather controversial opinion in Canada, but supported by evidence. The call for concentrating strategic investment in big cities was championed in 2001 by Jane Jacobs who, together with the five big city mayors, launched the C5 agenda. The Conference Board of Canada did a study that showed that when major cities (i.e., hub cities) grow and prosper, their success boosts the economic performance of smaller communities in their region. Specifically, we showed that economic growth (GDP per capita) in Canada's nine hub cities generates an even faster rate of economic growth in other communities within their province or region.

---

<sup>4</sup> Halifax, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Winnipeg, Regina, Saskatoon, Calgary, Edmonton, and Vancouver

- viii. Cities generate extensive and growing environmental activity; addressing pollution and urban ecology issues will be the next frontier of urban reform<sup>5</sup>. It is worth noting that the theme of urban ecology is not brand new; remember that Rachel Carlson's book, *Silent Spring*, came out the year after Jane Jacobs' *Life and Death of American Cities* (1961). David Crombie's 1972 campaign slogan was "Toronto is a living thing – let's treat it with care", reflecting the influence of both of these visionary women.
- ix. The resources at major cities' disposal do not match their importance as engines of national prosperity; the cumulative impact of off-loading<sup>6</sup>, rapid growth, shrinking inter-governmental transfers, reliance on tax sources that do not grow as the economy grows, and rising citizen expectations have put our major cities into a state of structural fiscal imbalance.
- x. Governance is a problem that remains to be solved. Canada is living with architecture built for our 19<sup>th</sup> century rural past – structures and systems that fit poorly with the new urban Canada. Its fiscal arrangement is not responsive to the massive shift in population to Canada's major cities, to patterns of immigrant settlement, nor to the growing challenges and expectations we have of our cities. So what we have are ongoing arguments about redistribution, who should pay for what, while urban infrastructure decays, funding for education declines relative to other countries, and Canada invests less than it needs to in order to prepare for the future. By governance I mean more than governments, I mean the coming together of all of our citizens from all sectors to help solve problems and it is here that we are seeing some positive change.

---

<sup>5</sup> Filion and Bunting (*Canadian Cities in Transition*) believe that cities are on the verge of a new era whose defining characteristic will be a new definition of the relationship between cities and the biophysical environment.

<sup>6</sup> For example, the federal government has passed on part of the maintenance of municipal airports, local ports and harbours, and immigrant settlement. Meanwhile, some provinces have shifted additional responsibilities to municipalities in the areas of transit, child care, social housing, social assistance, ferries, some airports and property tax assessment. (*Mission Possible: Successful Canadian Cities Volume III, The Conference Board of Canada, 2007, page 88*)

The template I will now propose comprises four cornerstones and three enablers.

### **Cornerstones of Competitive Cities** (*Mission Possible*)

Four building blocks are the cornerstones of a strong foundation for success:

- i. a strong knowledge economy;
- ii. connective physical infrastructure linking people, goods and ideas;
- iii. environmentally sound growth; and
- iv. socially cohesive communities.

A few comments about each.

#### **A strong knowledge economy**

Growing attention is being given to the idea that universities with their advanced research capacities have a big role to play in a city's success. They are important magnets of talent and investment. This capacity to attract talent and investment make them central to the development of clusters (dense agglomerations of companies/institutions in a common sector).

The Toronto region is well endowed with its four universities and six community colleges. Sometimes overlooked, our colleges are playing an increasingly important role in accelerating business innovation, documented in a study at the Conference Board last November.<sup>7</sup> The Toronto Region Research Alliance (TRRA), on whose Board I sit, has documented the region's advantages as a place for business to build research capacity; it sees the region as an economic powerhouse with

---

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Haimowitz and Daniel Munro, *Innovation Catalysts and Accelerators: The Impact of Ontario Colleges' Applied Research*, executive summary (Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada, November 2010).

outstanding R&D, a highly skilled and diverse labour force, and the many attractive lifestyle options that people seek. It is well located, of course, part of a well developed air, rail and highway infrastructure, the home of Canada's largest ICT cluster, among other things.

To me, the case for supporting a strategy focused on attracting research-intensive businesses is compelling. From conversations with Canadian heads of global companies operating in Canada, I know that the quality of research being done relevant to them and their ability to leverage both that knowledge and the researchers is an important factor in decisions to invest in research.

## **II. Connective physical infrastructure linking people, goods and ideas**

No modern city can thrive without an efficient urban transportation system that moves people and goods safely, while minimizing environmental consequences. This is an area where Canada is failing. A recent OECD report estimates that traffic congestion costs the GTA some \$2.7 billion<sup>8</sup>.

We just did a study for Metrolinx, soon to be published, showing that urban transportation makes it easier to match workers and jobs, promotes employment density, and enhances productivity and prosperity. Typically, these broader impacts are not explored in investment decisions.

For instance, it is often argued that public transit should pay for itself. I don't know why. Roads don't pay for themselves. Even in highly populated metropolitan areas like Paris, London, and Milan, public transit requires operating subsidies and every major industrialized country in the world subsidizes capital expenditures. All of the evidence

---

<sup>8</sup> OECD report, *Territorial Review of Toronto*, 2010.

on the cost of sprawl – including the very important study that Pamela Blais did for the GTA Taskforce – shows that literally billions of dollars can be saved in direct and indirect costs through urban growth based on higher density communities, less sprawl and greater use of public transit.

Transportation infrastructure has suffered from such a long period of public disinvestment that it is hard to see how we can catch up. Before 1977, new investment in infrastructure kept pace with Canada's growing population and it grew by close to 5% annually. Between 1978 and 2000, however, - and this is a shocking number – new investment in urban infrastructure grew on average by a miniscule 0.1% per year! Little wonder that we are behind the 8-ball.

Unfortunately, this topic attracts only sporadic attention like when a highway overpass in Montreal collapses. Canada's cities face a staggering infrastructure deficit, which FCM estimates at more than \$123 billion (2007). Almost half of this is transportation-related. Decades of infrastructure neglect and poor design of our cities, with suburban expansion exacerbating the gap, have come home to roost.

We used to understand that fare box revenues cannot meet the total cost of transit operations. I recall that when I was at Queen's Park, the Government of Ontario provided transit subsidies in the range of 70%. These subsidies in Ontario disappeared altogether in 1997. Now each province has its own arrangement; however, in the past 40 years, the responsibility for transit funding has shifted to municipalities. Yet, for the most part, government treats roads as public goods to be financed out of property and general tax revenues.

Some positive things have happened. Canada's three largest cities have inter-regional commuter rail services that have been successful in increasing ridership.

To me it seems obvious that as cities develop and grow into knowledge-based economies, improving public transportation is more and more important.

So are links to other cities. Today, the vast majority of inter-city travel occurs in private cars; air travel accounts for over half the remaining inter-city trips. Airports matter, as we know from surveys of CEOs when they are asked about location decisions. The Conference Board has examined the case for high-speed rail – in the east (Quebec City to Windsor corridor) and in the west (Calgary to Edmonton). I find the case persuasive, especially if you add the environmental and quality of life benefits to the economic. The problem is that new high-speed rail projects are expensive and the actual direct returns don't cover the outlays.

We need studies that quantify all the costs and benefits – commercial, socio-economic and environmental. The plain fact is that local governments alone cannot create a sustainable urban transportation system. Ottawa and the provinces must also contribute.

### **III. Environmentally sound growth**

One of the facts that has stayed with me, even five years after we published our Canada Project report on successful cities (2007), is this: cities use only two per cent of the world's land but account for roughly 78 per cent of the carbon emissions from human activities. Per capita, the carbon footprint of city dwellers is actually much lower than that of their country cousins, but urban activities have environmental consequences that can cause damage (e.g., air and water pollution, landfill sites, climate change, etc.).

The solutions are known. First and foremost, we must integrate land use and transportation planning at the local and regional levels, aiming to accommodate growth through intensification rather than low density sprawl.

We can also use the principles of ecology to create what they technically call “closed-looped systems” (where waste products become inputs for new processes). The idea of clustering is usually associated with economic benefits and more efficient land use, but eco-industrial parks are communities of businesses that share all resources, including those that improve the environment.

Canadian cities are starting to get interested in this. Several cities have set goals for becoming eco-communities or sustainable communities. There are inspiring examples to draw on internationally – Sweden and Norway come to mind<sup>9</sup>. But putting industrial ecological principles into practice is a huge task requiring changes on a number of fronts: more research; real collaboration between city governments, industry and NGOs; federal/provincial regulatory changes; fiscal incentives; and new infrastructure.

#### **IV. Socially cohesive communities**

A strong social fabric is, I believe, an essential component of economic prosperity. I need to acknowledge that the link between social cohesion and prosperity has not gone unchallenged. There is no actual proof that cities’ rates of income inequality, trust or crime affect their economic wellbeing. It is true that there are cities with booming economies that have big and growing income disparities. It is also true that no one knows what are the tipping points at which massive social divisions or income inequalities or crime will undermine economic performance. That said, I include it as a cornerstone because I believe intuitively that social cohesion contributes to social sustainability and has to be better for the economy.

The Conference Board recently released data showing that the gap between the rich and the poor in Canada has widened over the past two

---

<sup>9</sup> Some 70 Swedish municipalities have been transforming themselves into “eco-municipalities” (*Mission Possible: Successful Canadian Cities Volume III, The Conference Board of Canada, 2007, page 46*)

decades. The bulk of the new wealth being created in Canada is accruing to the top 20 per cent – much of it to the top one per cent!<sup>10</sup> This is worrisome: it both raises a moral question about fairness and can increase social tensions, making a city less attractive to the talented immigrants we need.

To promote social cohesion, there are two obvious policy directions to pursue: create more affordable housing in Canada's major cities and improve incentives for working-age adults to enter the workforce by reforming income security and our tax system. Moreover, the four cornerstones are mutually reinforcing – better designed and serviced communities should help both with sustainability and social cohesion.

## **Enabling Conditions**

How do these four cornerstones of successful cities fit together to ensure that Canada's cities achieve their potential? Three enabling conditions are essential: effective governance, sufficient money, and good leadership.

## **Effective Governance**

There is no ideal model of metropolitan governance. We have experimented with various approaches across Canada with both more and less success. The so-called urban experts seem to agree on the principles – coordination where needed, cost-effectiveness, accountability, and responsiveness. As you know, I concluded that for Toronto a two-tier federated system works best but because of the development across the GTA, we needed to extend the original two-tier model to encompass the economic city-region. I did not agree with the amalgamation of the six municipalities that comprised metro and knew that the consultants' arguments that money would be saved were false.

---

<sup>10</sup> The richest one per cent of the population (the 246,000 people whose average income was \$405,000) took home almost a third of all growth in incomes from 1998 to 2007, a decade that saw the fastest economic growth in this generation (Armine Yalnizyan).

I believed that a four city model, with York and East York joining Toronto, would have addressed the issue of insufficient tax base for the two smaller cities. And I was afraid that an amalgamated city would be too big to allow for meaningful citizen engagement. Moreover, I was worried that a 416/905 divide would be a barrier to region-wide cooperation. Nothing has altered these views.

I also concluded that mayors of major cities needed to have strengthened powers because the task of creating consensus on every single item was enervating. I supported the notion of a new City of Toronto Act, but I now believe we have gone too far in empowering the mayor – nor do I agree with a four-year term – three years is both more sensible and provides accountability in a system where a government in power cannot be defeated.

Another governance challenge is the complexity of the issues facing Canada's cities (e.g., infrastructure to immigrant settlement and immigration) which demand multi-jurisdictional responses. The traditional vision of “layer cake federalism” – with each level of government having clear and separate responsibilities – is an anachronism. City leaders need to be able to engage formally with both the provinces and the federal government. City mayors are on to this and cities like Calgary, Edmonton, Montreal, and Toronto now have senior staff dedicated to inter-governmental relationships.

The most exciting development in governance is occurring outside of government per se – in some cities, like Toronto and Calgary – business leaders are stepping up and engaging with the voluntary sector on a range of issues. CivicAction (formerly the Toronto City Summit Alliance) has galvanized leaders from all sectors to act on problems like immigrant employment, income security, diversity, etc.

The Toronto Region Immigration Employment Council (TRIEC) has inspired similar partnerships in Ottawa and Halifax. Community-based

networks connecting people of different backgrounds – sometimes around local issues, sometimes on policy matters – can strengthen the urban fabric in important ways.

Mayor Naheed Nenshi of Calgary is generating a great deal of excitement with his high energy, pro-citizen engagement approach. I heard him speak at Couchiching this summer and he attributed his victory to his rejection of “sound-bite politics” in favour of “politics in full sentences” and to his very creative use of social media. He was able to have a mature discussion with the electorate about the future of Calgary. But what keeps Mayor Nenshi up at night is how to keep this positive dialogue going.

### **Sufficient fiscal resources**

Our municipal governments face rising costs and/or dwindling resources. The Conference Board has done a great deal of work on the fiscal situation of Canada’s cities. We started by building a model that included a detailed breakdown of both revenues and expenditures of Quebec’s municipalities over a 20 year horizon and we showed that they suffer from fiscal imbalance. We have done similar studies for Winnipeg, Toronto, London, and even Sudbury. The bottom line? To make our cities financially sustainable over the long term, we need to do three things:

- i. Where appropriate, upload the services to more senior levels of government; (overall, I don’t see up-loading as the solution; I’ve usually been on the empowerment side of the equation, with cities having the capacity to raise the revenue they need).
- ii. Encourage cities to make better use of the fiscal tools available to them, like user fees and debt financing; and
- iii. Give cities access to a growth tax revenue, preferably the right to levy a small addition on existing consumption taxes. This would have to

be agreed to and applied regionally, and small enough to avoid distorting buyer behaviour.

For decades now, the rate of growth of municipal revenues has been much lower than that enjoyed by other levels of government. In 2004, the federal government introduced its New Deal for cities and communities which stemmed years of declining federal transfers. It committed to rebate part of the GST to municipal governments and, in 2005, agreed to share fuel tax revenue – a commitment recently renewed by Prime Minister Harper. However, the fiscal imbalance has not been solved.

## **Good Leadership**

Even if you had an effective system of governance and sufficient fiscal resources, leadership would be the transformative ingredient. Today's city leaders face very complex issues, some even international in scope (like trade and immigration), some that are quite new (like public security and cyber security) and regional issues (transportation, garbage, etc.) that require partnerships with other cities and engagement with other governments. Attracting people to serve who are capable, far-seeing, able to take action when needed, and have the negotiation and communication skills to get the relevant players and the public on side is a daunting challenge.

What have I learned from examples of success? David Crombie's mayoralty still stands out as an illustrious period, hailed in Canada and abroad as a time of urban transformation – Fortune magazine called his term "the greening of Toronto". David came to his task with extraordinary energy, a vision and an urban agenda, a willingness to reach out and include all interested citizens, etc. During my tour of UK cities, I met the Head of Council in Manchester, a very talented administrator with focus and drive who saw himself as a municipal entrepreneur. Because I believe that leadership is situational, there is no handbook for civic leadership, but leadership is crucial.

## **Why are we ignoring the accumulated wisdom?**

In his recently published book, *Triumph of the City*, Edward Glaeser asks “Why do so many smart people enact so many foolish urban policies?” A good question. By “foolish”, Glaeser means urban sprawl. I would add: neglect of infrastructure; the failure to integrate land use and transportation planning; keeping municipalities in fiscal straightjackets; and ignoring environmental consequences. I could go on, as I’m sure we all could.

Many answers have been offered:

- the inherent short-sightedness of democracy;
- the influence of powerful vested interests, especially related to land;
- the complexity of municipal issues which are by definition very local and micro, but have a cumulative impact not apparent in any given decision;
- the under-representation of the urban electorate in Parliament;
- and, the role of the media, where municipal issues just don’t get the attention they deserve.

## **Conclusion: What does the future hold?**

With more and more people moving to cities, will the existing pattern continue to expand or will our modern suburban spread be seen as an historical aberration (Glaeser)? Will density intensify and, if so, in what form? If Paris can have intensification with six-story buildings, why do we need 35-story towers plunked in the middle of neighbourhoods?

Assuming that we can’t totally reinvent the suburbs, can we re-knit the suburban fabric (compact walkable centres, more intensification with amenities and services), and manage sprawl better? Can we slow down suburban sprawl by enticing couples to rear their children downtown?

Since most of the new condos we are building in our urban cores are designed for singles and couples, where would families with children live in our cities if they wanted?

Will we overcome the urban/suburban value split, which so affects our politics?

Will cities reorient themselves around enormous airports as a new book, *Aerotropolis* (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux), predicts?

I'm going to take the advice of Yogi Berra who said, "It's tough to make predictions, especially about the future."<sup>11</sup>

I always say that because I'm short, I like to see the glass half full. The future of our cities depends, I believe, on the efforts and vigilance of citizens. We have to care. And we have to work individually and together to shape the future we want. The challenge is formidable but I go back to my first lesson about cities: you can fight City Hall and win!

---

<sup>11</sup> In a recent book, "Future Babble", Dan Gardner argues that most forecasters are wrong.