



Raising a good city: What are your Peterborough Values?

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A recently installed sign welcomes drivers and visitors to Peterborough on Thursday March 30, 2017 at the intersection of Crawford Dr. and The Parkway in Peterborough, Ont. Clifford Skarstedt/Peterborough Examiner/Postmedia Network

Climate change is a challenge to be reckoned with in the Peterborough Official Plan Review now underway. We will not be spared severe weather events and attendant economic distress.

Hundreds of cities around the world are now committed to understanding and planning

for potential climate shocks--like fires, droughts, hurricanes and floods - that show up in local, everyday life stresses like water shortages, business interruptions, food supply breakdowns, social upheaval, prolonged power outages and huge municipal budget impacts.

Accounting for climate action in how we plan and build the city from here on will shape how we cope. It will assist us in making the shift to a stronger local economy in a city that integrates all citizens' needs across generations, has resilient infrastructure and renewable green energies.

Reimagine Peterborough submits three vital strategies for the Official Plan that will direct us toward building a resilient city.

Firstly, the awareness of the city as a living system made up of people in interdependent networks, in a built environment, that is embedded with Nature and her carrying capacity. Secondly, the use of adaptive planning so that we are equipped and capable of navigating new and rapidly changing pressures. Thirdly, meaningful and informed citizen participation to build trust and collective wisdom.

Seeing the city as a living system helps us to value the interconnectedness of the natural, the human-made, and the social networks that sustain us. Living systems respond and adapt to their environment. They evolve and change. And as we treat life, so too should we treat our living city: first do no harm.

Small changes can have many other effects. For example, as in Ottawa's historic Byward Market, Peterborough's Official Plan could say any buildings demolished in the downtown core must be re-built within the same footprint. This policy change can have many positive effects for the city's downtown economic and living system: it gives incentive to preservation of heritage, retains ideal smaller spaces for small businesses and apartments, it ensures walkability, sustainable lifestyles, eyes-on-the-street safety, and promotes a dynamic and thriving social culture.

Knowing more about Peterborough as a living system will inform our second recommended strategy: adaptive planning. Adaptive planning acknowledges the new realities of more flooding, drought, population shifts (including climate refugees) and economic stress. It understands that designing the city in a more compact footprint, using green housing and building design, increasing public transit, valuing and protecting our ecological "green" infrastructure, and introducing creative zoning, can truly build resilience - the ability to "bounce forward" in adaptation to change.

Even better, adaptive planning keeps us open to new and locally based kinds of economic and job opportunities, live-work situations, safer and less toxic energy generation, and food production. And by planning the city to better withstand disasters like floods and drought, adaptive planning will ideally help us avoid multi-billion dollar disaster clean-up bills.

Finally, meaningful public engagement is essential to enhancing our city's climate

change resilience. Public consultation builds knowledge and consensus that are essential for creating trust between local decision-makers and the citizens who elect them - an important state to be in when a crisis hits.

Let's find ways for councillors and staff to share their information in accessible ways that support respectful and meaningful citizen input when we turn out to consultations, fill in surveys and speak to council. Let's make the council chamber a trusted and people-friendly place. Let's have knowledgeable citizens in advisory groups on key climate adaptation decisions, like protecting the role of natural areas for flood reduction. Let's make sure that participatory budgeting survives as an ongoing way to strengthen community networks, inform decision-makers and unleash people's gifts and ideas when they are most needed - in times of change and challenge.

The climate will continue to change for a long time and require nimbleness and willingness to live with uncertainty and experimentation.

Peterborough's planning for climate change resilience is not an "if" but a "when" as is evident in the official Community Sustainability Plan for the city, county and First Nations of this area. This important Official Plan review should seize the opportunity to plan for a very different future and do so in a way that makes our city flexible yet strong under severe and long-lasting climate impacts.

Will we adapt resiliently together to climate change or stumble into it clinging to old, out-moded ways of thinking? Apply your imagination to the Official Plan Review by talking to your councillor, and by informing yourself about the [Official Plan](#), the [OP Review](#), about climate change, and by participating in public consultation events.

The future shows up locally first.

This is the eighth in a series of columns from Reimagine, a citizen-led movement that sees better urban planning and public engagement as essential to our social, cultural, democratic, and quality of life needs. For updates, follow Reimagine Peterborough on Facebook, Twitter, at reimagineptbo.ca, and join our mailing list.