



Raising a good city: What are your Peterborough Values?

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Wednesday, August 23, 2017 4:04:20 EDT AM



Residents shared their comments in markers and sticky notes at the Reimagine Peterborough booth at Peterborough Pulse on July 16. SPECIAL TO THE EXAMINER

What does it take to raise a good city? As a similar saying goes, it takes a village.

A good city is built on a strong foundation of the community's values and priorities, the type that will guide the city through the next few decades and leave it at its best for the next generation.

The values that are important to teach our children - like kindness, integrity, gratitude, and responsibility - are equally valuable for us to both practice and expect in our community, and this begins with the policies that direct our city government.

For the first time in a generation, the City of Peterborough is undertaking a review of the Official Plan. The [Official Plan](#) will guide decisions ranging from neighbourhood design, to how many trees we have and where, to how much we will need to pay in property taxes to sustain our infrastructure and social services.

Right now, with an [online survey](#), the City is asking the public to voice what we want the long-term vision, principles (values), and strategies for Peterborough to be. These will become the guiding vision and principles of the new Official Plan.

We at [Reimagine Peterborough](#) urge every citizen to respond to the survey and this rare chance to influence the next few decades of planning and spending decisions by city staff and council. In your response to the survey, we encourage you to provide the following three specific responses:

Firstly, environmental stewardship must be the first principle of the new Official Plan.

Planning our city to function efficiently within its local environmental footprint will ensure responsible spending of our property taxes. It is now widely understood that the [costs of sprawling infrastructure](#) are becoming economically and environmentally unaffordable for [Canadian cities](#).

Citizens of Peterborough have consistently said high quality greenspace, trails, community gardens, trees, open space for activities and leisure, clean and protected water, and environmentally-sustainable planning are most important to them ([Vision 2025](#), [PlanIt](#), etc). Peterborough is blessed with a rich local environment that must be nurtured in order to build our city's resilience to changes, like more frequent and disruptive weather events.

Contaminated and smog-filled cities around the world are scrambling to restore their natural environment and living systems like wetlands, rivers, and wildlife habitats so that people can be healthy, secure, and productive. Besides being very expensive, this is difficult.

Secondly, Reimagine recommends adding a sixth principle of genuine public engagement. In the 2011 PlanIt Peterborough engagement and other city decision-making processes, citizens have emphasized the significant need for plans, policies and decisions to be developed and decided in a more transparent, open and accessible manner.

Thirdly, of the strategies listed in the survey, the highest priority should be put on "multi-modal systems and compact form/land use mix" (as worded in the city's survey under the Connective and Mobility, and Complete Communities principles). This means using our land in more efficient and responsible ways, and supporting more walking,

bicycling, ride-sharing, and investment in a better public transit system.

Peterborough will soon feel the pressures of an expanding Greater Toronto Area and must [plan for growth](#) in a way that is affordable. With the city budget increasingly stretched to pay for existing infrastructure, we need to plan our neighbourhoods to be connected, modern, and affordable for residents and City Hall.

The way a city is designed and built limits or expands its sense of community, quality of life, how it copes with natural and other disasters, whether there are good jobs, and the property tax rates. Poor planning can deplete the local environment, weaken the community, hurt the economy and even risk bankrupting a city with unsupportable patterns of development.

This 21st century is and will be vastly different than the 20th century. Successful cities will do the hard work to plan for these big changes and, as the City of Brampton says, to become "future ready" by transforming communities for maximum livability, sustainability and resiliency.

Let's get our Official Plan vision, values, and priorities right - and raise the best Peterborough we can.

Be sure to fill out the City of Peterborough's first [Official Plan survey](#) before it closes on Sept. 20.

This is the seventh 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.