

The Mid-Sized City Program in Peterborough

Collective Opportunity to Improve Prosperity



Prepared by Evergreen

Evergreen is a national charity that has been working since 1991 to make sustainable and flourishing urban environments in communities across Canada.



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Executive Summary

What is a Mid-Sized City?

In the Canadian context, mid-sized cities are defined as having a population within the range of 50,000 to 500,000 residents. Peterborough is considered a mid-sized 'centre city'. Centre cities are regional hubs with historic centres that function as autonomous economies and self-standing communities and provide key amenities and services such as health, employment and education. The role and impact of centre cities extend far beyond their borders, placing a strong emphasis on the opportunity for regional alignment and collaboration.

Evergreen's Mid-Sized City Program

The Mid-Sized City (MSC) Program is an initiative of Evergreen that seeks to understand the unique needs and opportunities of Ontario's MSCs in order to raise their profile in the province and develop strategies to increase local prosperity. The program is funded by Ontario's Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The program is being delivered in the following three phases.

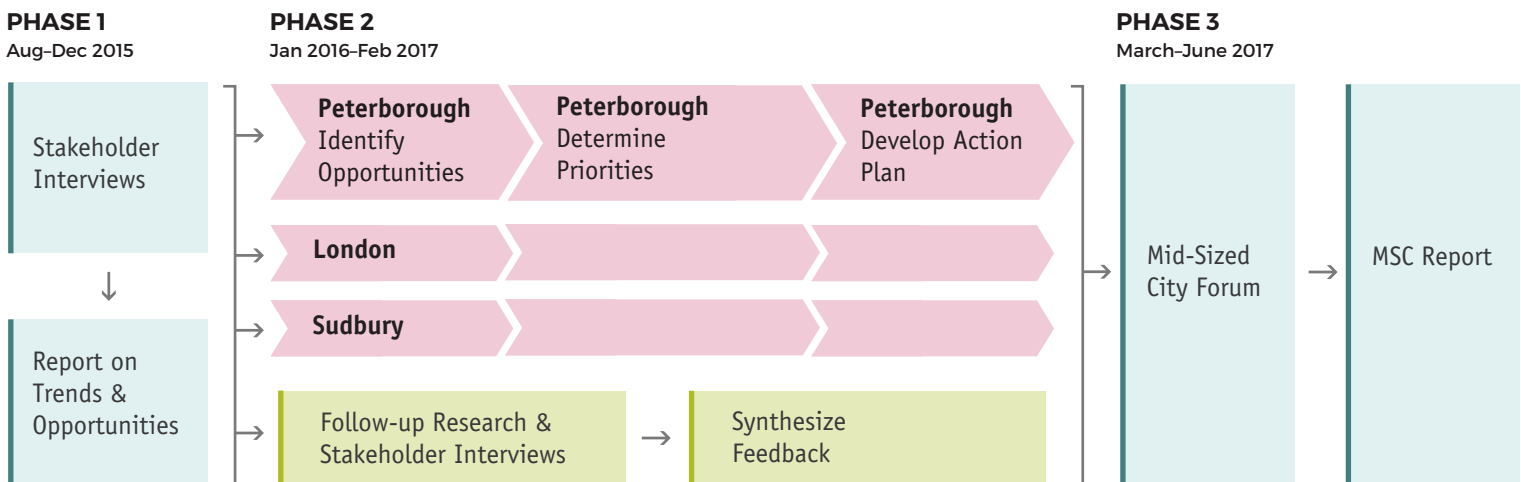
Phase 1: The Mid-Sized City (MSC) Program began in Hamilton, and in 2015, expanded to other cities across the province including Peterborough, London, and Sudbury. In order to build relationships in each of these new cities, we conducted numerous stakeholder interviews and prepared a report on the key trends and opportunities in MSCs. The report identified 12 Opportunities for Action that MSCs can undertake to improve local prosperity. (See Appendix A)

Phase 2a: We used the findings of the report as the basis for follow-up conversations with partner cities – including Peterborough – to determine local priorities, develop on-the-ground capacity, and build Action Plans to move forward on implementation. We are currently in the middle of Phase 2.

Phase 2b: At the same time, we are also initiating another round of research to identify the need, opportunity and design of a broad strategic framework to support Ontario's mid-sized cities.

Phase 3: During Phase 3, select participants of the MSC program will come together at a Forum to share outcomes, best practices and discuss opportunities for collaboration. The outcomes of the Forum and the research from Phase 1 & 2 will be synthesized into a final summary report with recommendations to be submitted to the Province.

Figure 1: Mid-Sized City Program Activities



The Peterborough Process to Date

As part of the Mid-Sized City Program in Peterborough, Evergreen, the City of Peterborough, the Greater Peterborough Chamber of Commerce and the Community Foundation of Greater Peterborough, co-hosted three meetings with key community members. The initial 2 meetings gathered information on Peterborough's wealth of local assets and notable initiatives, and identified opportunities to increase local prosperity.

We then convened a third meeting, where participants collectively assessed the proposed opportunities in order to determine which had the greatest potential to increase prosperity in Peterborough. Ultimately, participants came together around a single opportunity as the most viable and impactful action:

Strategically position Peterborough as a green/sustainable community & economy.

Next Steps

Over the coming months, we will continue to refine this opportunity and develop an Action Plan that makes the case for the idea and articulates a vision and strategy for implementation.

Moving forward, Peterborough Economic Development will be part of our Steering Committee alongside the Greater Peterborough Chamber of Commerce, City of Peterborough and Community Foundation of Greater Peterborough.

Our immediate next steps are to lay the groundwork for the Action Plan and build the case for moving forward. This will include the following:

- 1. Identify and map the green/sustainable assets in Peterborough.**
- 2. Research what it means to be a green/sustainable community and economy and prepare case studies on cities that have successfully undertaken differentiation strategies.**
- 3. Engage the County of Peterborough and update them on our process and outcomes.**

At this stage, we ask that Council support our interest in advancing this work. We plan to present the outcomes of this process and the Action Plan to Council once it is complete.

The Importance of Mid-Sized Cities

In the Canadian context, mid-sized cities are defined as having a population within the range of 50,000 to 500,000 residents. Twenty-five cities in Ontario fall within this category, representing 44.3% of Ontario's urban population. Mid-sized cities can be further categorized by their function and relationships within a region.

Peterborough is considered a mid-sized 'centre city'. Centre cities are regional hubs with historic centres that function as autonomous economies and self-standing communities and provide key amenities and services such as health, employment and education. The role and impact of centre cities extend far beyond their borders, placing a strong emphasis on the opportunity for regional alignment and collaboration.

Despite their prevalence, there is a consensus that mid-sized cities are largely overlooked in urban research and policy development. In particular, their unique challenges and opportunities in meeting infrastructure needs, creating quality of place, or promoting sustainability goals, are often unaccounted for. MSCs, however, are important components of the provincial equation and are critical to managing growth and ensuring overall health and success. Mid-sized cities provide alternative lifestyle options, alleviate pressure on big-city housing markets, and present opportunities to leverage the urban-rural connection to improve regional food systems, natural resource management, and climate change mitigation. Our research has shown that across Ontario, MSCs are at a critical point with a unique opportunity to re-imagine themselves and the potential to become economic drivers in Ontario.

Details of the Mid-Sized City Program

Phase 1: Mid-Sized City Research

Research Setup

In the summer and fall of 2015, Evergreen CityWorks conducted a series of interviews with local leaders across the public, private and non-profit sectors in London, Peterborough, Greater Sudbury and St. Catharines. These four cities were selected because they are thought to represent the geographical diversity of MSCs in the province.

Stakeholder
Interviews



Results

Overall, the research highlighted that Ontario's MSCs are undergoing important transitions that pose new challenges and opportunities for the future. We learned that in the context of a rapidly changing global economy, these cities have lost jobs in traditionally strong sectors, and are seeing their populations aging and/or decreasing. Many MSCs are now confronted with slow to moderate growth and rising social inequality.

Report on
Trends &
Opportunities

Simultaneously, the urban planning frameworks under which MSCs have based their development have become less responsive to the needs of local residents. As a result, many of the existing economic activities, land-use patterns, housing markets, physical infrastructure, and lifestyles are out of sync with mid-sized cities aspirations for change. MSCs also endure greater obstacles in adjusting to new circumstances because their ability to tackle problems is more limited than larger cities. We heard that MSCs tend to lack confidence when envisioning bold and creative futures, taking risks and making big asks from the provincial government. In some instances, they also fall short on the infrastructure, human capacity or resources required to respond to their complicated predicaments.

Despite the many challenges, we also heard that Ontario's MSCs are great places to live. When comparing their quality of life to larger cities, MSCs stand out for offering higher affordability, reduced traffic congestion, lower crime rates, natural amenities, mixed urban/rural lifestyles, a more human scale, and a warm sense of community. MSCs are also demonstrating significant signs of change. Renewed political leadership, rising voter turnouts, higher levels of civic engagement and younger political faces are revitalizing politics and opening new windows of opportunity to do things differently. Over time, MSCs have also developed more balanced economies, and a myriad of strengths and assets that have proven useful to overcoming barriers and creating new areas of growth.

Insights from conversations also identified 12 opportunities for action that mid-sized cities can take to increase local prosperity. The full list of 12 is elaborated in the report *"Making Mid-Sized the Right Size: Re-envisioning Success in Ontario's Mid-Sized Cities"* (Appendix A).

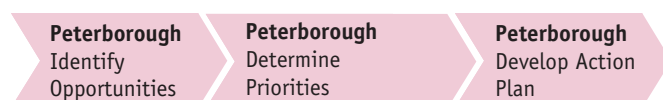
Critical Areas in Ontario's Mid-Sized Cities

Based on our conversations with key city leaders, we identified the following four issues as critical areas in Ontario's mid-sized cities.

1. **Economic outlook:** Capturing opportunities in a slow growth context
2. **The changing ethos for growth management:** Density and complete communities
3. **Social development and housing affordability:** Sustaining a high quality of life for all
4. **Municipal Financial Picture:** Ensuring effective service delivery under tight fiscal realities

Phase 2a: Exploring Specific MSC Opportunities

Note: This is the current phase of the project.



The MSC research findings, specifically the 12 opportunities for action, were used to facilitate and further conversations in 4 MSCs, Hamilton, London, Sudbury, and Peterborough. In each city, the process started by forming a small steering committee and working with partners to identify the local opportunity for action. The following chart summarizes the opportunity chosen in each MSC.

Mid-sized City	Opportunity Selected by the Community
Hamilton	Unlocking underused physical assets for community benefit
London	Developing community engagement strategies to implement the Official Plan
Sudbury	Leveraging anchor institutions for new types of economic and social development
Peterborough	Strategically position Peterborough as a green/sustainable community & economy*

**The origin of this opportunity will be elaborated upon in the coming section*

Process in Peterborough

Peterborough: Meetings 1&2

We started our process in Peterborough by forming a small working group with leadership from the City of Peterborough, the Greater Peterborough Chamber of Commerce and the Community Foundation of Greater Peterborough. We co-hosted two meetings with key stakeholders from public, private and civic sectors on March 2nd and April 13th to better understand the assets of Greater Peterborough and identify actions that can be taken to increase local prosperity.

Participants of Meeting 1 & Meeting 2 agreed on the following broad insights.

1. Peterborough is brimming with environmental, social, physical, economic and cultural assets that contribute to a strong and prosperous city, but it is not leveraging these assets to their greatest potential.
2. There is a perception that Peterborough, as both a city and community, lacks a united vision and strategic focus that sets a clear direction for the future.
3. There is a sense of duplicated conversations and efforts in Peterborough and more needs to be done to align and coordinate the existing initiatives to prevent redundancies and ensure effective outcomes.
4. MSCs require greater flexibility on key provincially mandated regulatory issues. As cities, they need to be recognized for their unique traits and needs, with room to experiment and try new approaches.

Additionally, participants focused on 3 opportunities for moving forward.

1. Develop Programs and Strategies To Better Leverage Underutilized Human Capital
2. Develop A Regional & Economic Roadmap Around An Area Of Focus
3. Build On Existing Municipal And Community Leadership To Drive Action

Peterborough: Meeting #3

Meeting #3 brought together participants from the two earlier meetings to discuss the outcomes of the initial conversations. Participants collectively assessed the 3 opportunities in order to determine which had the greatest potential to increase the prosperity of Peterborough.

The following chart summarizes the discussion and conclusions for each opportunity.

Opportunity for Action	Group Response
1. Develop Programs And Strategies To Better Leverage Underutilized Human Capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The Province recently launched the Local Employment Councils (LEPC) initiative, for which Peterborough is a pilot site, which aims to address issues of labour market and labour force alignment. <p>Next Steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The group agreed that focussing on this issue would duplicate efforts, but noted that there is value in monitoring the results of the LEPC and demonstrating support for the Province's decision to launch the pilot.
2. Build On Existing Municipal And Community Leadership To Drive Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The group was hesitant to create any more committees or advisory groups as "Peterborough is flush with committees." <p>Next Steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ No further exploration proposed.
3. Develop a Regional & Economic Roadmap around an Area of Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ There is strong interest to strategically position Peterborough as a Green/Sustainable economy and community. ➤ Strategies should leverage the numerous existing programs, businesses and initiatives in the region. <p>Next Steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The group was interested in pursuing/building on this idea.

Refining the Selected Opportunity

Participants split into two break out groups to discuss how to strategically position Peterborough around an area of focus. The two groups had similar interpretations of what this could look like in Peterborough.

What would a regional focus for Peterborough be?

Alignment between both groups

- Agreement that Peterborough is well positioned to advance a green focus
- Both groups highlighted the importance of integrating social sustainability and equity considerations with economic sustainability

Group 1

- Interest in using the language of “green economy and green communities”

Group 2

- Debate regarding using “sustainable” or “green” terminology
- Emphasis on sustainable/green land use development
- Need for the language to be authentic and a true reflection of Peterborough

What would Peterborough look like if it achieved this focus?

Alignment between both groups

- Peterborough would be recognized both locally and externally as a green leader

Group 1

- Achieving a green focus could lead to improved quality of life
- This focus may require upfront investment, but will enable future savings

Group 2

- Desire to be recognized at the provincial level as a green/sustainable region
- Differentiation strategies have long term implications, making it critical to choose the right focus

What's already underway that is related to this area of focus?**Alignment between both groups**

- There's a lot currently underway in the Peterborough region related to green and sustainable communities
- The current branding of the city and county presents a focus on natural amenities (e.g. County of Peterborough motif: birds, city slogan: "it's a natural")
- Numerous local organizations: e.g. Sustainable Peterborough, GreenUp, the YWCA, Transition Town, Kawartha Land Trust, Otonabee Conservation

Group 1

- Sustainable Peterborough profiled the 10 largest public and private sector employers that are undertaking initiatives related to climate change or the green environment (ie. SGS Lakefield, Lansdowne Place)
- Local business - Swish Maintenance's FDA certified green products and solar wall
- Other initiatives mentioned: Green industrial park; Wild Rock; Elmhurst Resort; Shimano Partnership; elimination of motorized events in Morrow Park; Trent and Fleming green programs
- Provincial opportunities: 16 provincially funded electric car charging stations in PTBO; Provincial Cap and Trade program; Waste free Ontario Act

Group 2

- Rural history and agricultural society
- Ministry of Natural Resources
- Proposed investment from Peterborough Utilities Group in low head hydro generation in the Otonabee River in collaboration with Curve Lake First Nations
- Peterborough is taking steps to address existing brownfields
- Strong local media industry considering the size of the city – local newspapers, TV station that could support communications

- Warsaw Caves
- Sustainable Peterborough
- Jackson Park/Creek
- Green Spaces
- Del Crary Park
- Little Lake
- Drumlins
- Conservation Areas
- Ecosystem of Water Companies
- Otonabee River
- Kawartha Lakes/ Rivers
- Trail System
- Fresh Air
- Trent Severn Waterway
- Harold Town Conservation Area
- Shimano Partnership
- Trent University Programs
- Fleming College Programs
- Electric Car Charging Stations
- Canoe Museum
- Wild Rock

- Petroglyphs Provincial Park
- Kawartha Region Environment
- Strong Agricultural Community
- Rural Connection
- Local Food /Farmers Market
- Rich Agricultural Land
- Development & Agri-Forestry Plan
- Indigenous Knowledge
- Farm Land
- Multiple Tourism Locations
- Hydro Generation on Waterways
- River System
- Close to Nature
- Urban Forest Strategic Plan
- Ministry of Natural Resources
- GreenUp
- Swish Maintenance
- Green Industrial Park
- Elmhurst Resort

- Just some of Peterborough's green assets!

What activities, programs, & initiatives would make it possible to develop this focus?

Alignment between both groups

- It's critical to know what is being done in the region so that individual organizations can align and collaborate with one another, and to craft a cohesive narrative of Peterborough as a green/sustainable community
- Sustainable Peterborough is a strong initiative already working in this space – how can we connect and leverage their work?

Group 1

- Need to complete an inventory of existing businesses, programs and initiatives, which could help us understand how these initiatives/organizations align and overlap on the green agenda
- Need an overarching commitment that is embraced by all sectors (government, business, not-for profit)
- Opportunity to create a legacy project of City Council building on successful collaborations, esp. in the green sector
- Celebrate what has already been achieved across the region
- Create a charter and have local organizations/businesses sign on
- Change the way the City evaluates its expenditure on green investments to leverage the savings into more green initiatives
- Work with Trent and Fleming (and other anchor institutions), and build on what they currently have in place

Group 2

- Need to emphasize storytelling and communications – put together storytelling pieces for audiences within and outside of Peterborough (PTBO Canada as a strong current social media brand)
- The Official Plan review is currently underway and offers the opportunity to provide input through a green/sustainable lens

What obstacles might impact this idea? Describe potential risks and challenges

Alignment between both groups

- Need to identify the alignment between green/sustainable and individual sectors within the region – don't want to create an exclusionary focus
- A sustainability lens can't just focus on the environment or economy – must also incorporate social dimensions

Group 1

- The City of Kawartha Lakes initiated a water agenda 3-5 years ago that was not as successful as it could have been, so it's important to learn from this to ensure success
- Need funding and resources to push this forward
- Critical that programs are authentic – that "talk the talk and walk the walk"
- Still need to shift mentality, not everyone is ready to embrace the green/sustainable agenda

Group 2

- Must avoid risk of tokenism or green-washing to prevent backlash
- Developers may use "green" to sell projects that are not in fact environmentally sustainable, need to identify corresponding land use regulation
- Challenge of how to execute this without excluding certain people and organizations
- How does one apply a lens that's broad enough to include everyone, while also specific enough to resonate and be memorable?
- Need to "marry" economic and social sustainability to make this holistic

How can we bring this idea to the next level?

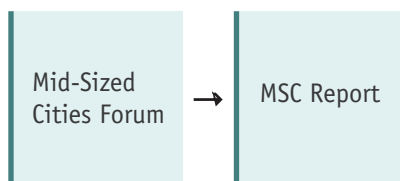
Alignment between both groups	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Need to identify the alignment between green/sustainable and individual sectors within the region – don't want to create an exclusionary focus ➤ A sustainability lens can't just focus on the environment or economy – must also incorporate social dimensions 	
Group 1	Group 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Update City Council on the idea of green economy & green community – followed by presentations to the County and First Nations ➤ Consider how to resource and undertake a mapping exercise to better understand existing green assets and build the case for strategically positioning PTBO as a green economy and community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Important to declare this focus area, and put a "stake in the ground" ➤ Strong opportunity to build on the work of Sustainable Peterborough as an organization with an established reputation, and that is housed within Peterborough Economic Development ➤ How does one apply a lens that's broad enough to include everyone, while also specific enough to resonate and be memorable? ➤ Need to "marry" economic and social sustainability to make this holistic

Phase 2b: Building a Mid-Sized City Strategy



We heard that there is a need for greater flexibility and recognition of the unique role of MSCs in Ontario. This piece of research will explore the need, opportunity and design of a strategy for the Province's mid-sized cities and be shared as part of a final report to the Province in June 2017. We will be conducting interviews and experts and practitioners on the design of a strategy and forming a Mid-Sized City Working Group comprised of staff from within the provincial government to inform our research and discuss strategies to support prosperity in Ontario's mid-sized cities. The work we undertake in Peterborough will also be included as a case study in our final report.

Phase 3: Making Connections & Final Report



The Forum will provide an opportunity for mid-sized city stakeholders to share best practices, connect on important issues and provide feedback on the final mid-sized city report and recommendations, which will be submitted to the Province in June 2017.

Moving Forward

Our immediate next steps are to lay the groundwork for the Action Plan and build the case for moving forward. This will include the following:

- 1.** Identify and map the green/sustainable assets in Peterborough.
 - a.** Through our work to date, we have already begun collecting an initial list of the green/sustainable businesses, organizations and activities underway in Peterborough. We will continue to refine this list and build a full picture of what is happening in the region.
- 2.** Research what it means to be a green/sustainable community and economy, and prepare case studies on cities that have successfully undertaken differentiation strategies.
 - a.** Examine other jurisdictions that have successfully implemented green/sustainable areas of focus and those that have adopted other areas.
 - b.** Connect and learn from the leaders in these jurisdictions.
- 3.** Engage the County of Peterborough and update them on our process and outcomes.

At this stage, we ask that Council support our interest in advancing this work. We plan to present the outcomes of this process and the Action Plan to Council once it is complete.

The time is right in Peterborough. There are a number of projects, organizations and initiatives already underway that demonstrate a strong sense of momentum for positioning Peterborough as a green/sustainable economy and community. We welcome your feedback and hope to engage you as we continue this process.

Participants

Steering Committee

John Good, Community Foundation of Greater Peterborough
Sandra Dueck, Greater Peterborough Chamber of Commerce
Ken Doherty, City of Peterborough
Rhonda Keenan, Peterborough Economic Development

Meeting 3 - April 27, 2016

Dawn Berry-Merriam, Sustainable Peterborough Steering Committee
Dorothy Boddy, Our Space
Ian Bromley, Evergreen/Independent
Evan Campbell, City Youth Council
Danielle DeMarsh, Evergreen
Ken Doherty, City of Peterborough
Sandra Dueck, Greater Peterborough Chamber of Commerce
Joëlle Favreau, YWCA
Jo Flatt, Evergreen
John Good, Community Foundation of Greater Peterborough
Stuart Harrison, Greater Peterborough Chamber of Commerce
Rhonda Keenan, Peterborough Economic Development
Chris Salmans, C of C Young Professionals Group, Sunlife Financial
Dr. Rosana Salvaterra, Peterborough County City Health Unit
Brianna Salmon, GreenUp

Meeting 2 – April 13, 2016

Danielle DeMarsh, Evergreen
Ken Doherty, City of Peterborough
Sandra Dueck, Greater Peterborough Chamber of Commerce
Joëlle Favreau, YWCA
Jo Flatt, Evergreen
John Good, Community Foundation of Greater Peterborough
Dr. Leo Groarke, Trent University
Rhonda Keenan, Peterborough Economic Development
Gary King, County of Peterborough

Dr. Tom Phillips, Innovation Cluster, Trent University
Brianna Salmon, GreenUp
Dr. Rosana Salvaterra, Peterborough County City Health Unit
Allan Seabrooke, City of Peterborough
Frances Wilbur, Community Opportunity and Innovation Network (COIN)

Meeting 1 – March 2, 2016

Joeann Argue, Electric City Culture Council
Rhonda Barnet, Steelworks Design Inc. & Canadian Manufacturing and Exports
Brian Bates, Fleming College
Paul Bennett, Ashburnham Realty
Dawn Berry-Merriam, Sustainable Peterborough
Dorothy Boddy, Our Space
Ian Bromley, Independent / Evergreen
Evan Campbell, City Youth Council
Ken Doherty, City of Peterborough
Sandra Dueck, Greater Peterborough Chamber of Commerce
Jo Flatt, Evergreen
John Good, Community Foundation of Greater Peterborough
Stuart Harrison, Greater Peterborough Chamber of Commerce
Santessa Henriques, Evergreen
Ken Hetherington, City of Peterborough
Karen Jopling, County of Peterborough
Natalie Napier, COIN
Chris Salmans, Young Professionals Group, Sunlife Financial
Michael Skinner, Greater Peterborough Innovation Cluster
Luisa Sotomayor, Independent / Evergreen
Liz Stone, Nijkiwendidaa Anishnaabekwewag Services Circle
Michael VanDerHerberg, New Canadians Centre

Appendix

DISCUSSION PAPER

Making Mid-Sized the Right Size: Re-envisioning Success in Ontario's Mid-Sized Cities



Acknowledgements

This paper was prepared by Evergreen CityWorks and Luisa Sotomayor.

We would like to thank all of the interview participants for their time and effort in contributing to the development of this report, as well as Ian Bromley for reviewing the paper.

This report is funded by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing within the Province of Ontario.

Interview Participants:

Michelle Baldwin, Executive Director, Pillar Non-Profit Network, London

Mayor Brian Bigger, Greater Sudbury

Ken Doherty, Director, Community Services, City of Peterborough, Peterborough

Sandra Dueck, Policy Analyst, Greater Peterborough Chamber of Commerce, Peterborough

Don Duval, CEO, NORCAT, Greater Sudbury

Joëlle Favreau, Community Development and Training Supervisor, YWCA Peterborough Haliburton, Peterborough

John Fleming, Managing Director, Planning and City Planner, City of London, London

Sean Galloway, Manager of Urban Design & GIS, City of London, London

John Good, Executive Director, Community Foundation of Peterborough, Peterborough

Phil Lambert, Associate Director, Infrastructure Planning & Development Engineering, Region of Niagara

Kris Longston, Acting Manager of Community & Strategic Planning, City of Greater Sudbury, Greater Sudbury

Deb McIntosh, Councilor, Ward 9, Greater Sudbury

Sarah Meritt, Manager, Old East Village Business Association (OEVBA), London

Debbi Nicholson, CEO, Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce, Greater Sudbury

Liz Palmieri, Executive Director, Niagara Community Foundation, St. Catharines

Judy Pihach, Manager, Planning and Development Services, City of St. Catharines, St. Catharines

David Robinson, Director of the Institute for Northern Ontario Research and Development, Laurentian University, Greater Sudbury

Brianna Salmon, Manager, Transportation and Urban Design Programmes, Peterborough

Mayor Walter Sendzik, St. Catharines

Carmen Simmons, CEO, Sudbury Community Foundation, Greater Sudbury

Steve Solski, Executive Director, FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre, St. Catharines

Tyler Sutton, Senior Research Analyst, Public Sector Digest & President Emerging Leaders, London

Mary Wiley, Executive Director, Niagara Connects, St. Catharines

Executive Summary

 ntario's mid-sized cities represent 44.3% of the province's urban population. Despite their prevalence, there is a consensus that Mid-Sized Cities (or MSCs) are largely overlooked in urban research and policy development; in particular, their unique challenges and opportunities in meeting infrastructure needs, creating quality of place, or promoting sustainability goals, are often unaccounted for. In light of this context, Evergreen CityWorks has initiated a discussion about urban liveability, infrastructure, equity, resilience and planning in Ontario's MSCs.

In the summer and fall of 2015, Evergreen CityWorks conducted a series of interviews with local leaders across the public, private and non-for-profit sectors in London, Peterborough, Greater Sudbury and St. Catharines. These four cities were selected because they are thought to represent the geographical diversity of MSCs in the province. The findings of these interviews are compiled in this discussion paper, with the aim of facilitating conversations around some of the most pressing issues facing mid-sized cities in Ontario. Between February and April 2016 Evergreen CityWorks will be co-hosting meetings with key city partners in each of the four cities studied to review the paper, identify priority recommendations and begin to devise opportunities for action.

Overall, the research highlighted that Ontario's MSCs are undergoing important transitions that pose new challenges and opportunities for the future. We learned that in the context of a rapidly changing global economy, these cities have lost jobs in traditionally strong sectors, and are seeing their populations aging and/or decreasing. Many MSCs are now confronted with slow to moderate growth and rising social inequality. Simultaneously, the urban planning frameworks under which MSCs have based

their development have become less responsive to the needs of local residents. As a result, many of the existing economic activities, land-use patterns, housing markets, physical infrastructure, and lifestyles are out of sync with MSCs' aspirations for change. MSCs also endure greater obstacles in adjusting to new circumstances because their ability to tackle problems is more limited than larger cities. We heard that MSCs tend to lack confidence when envisioning bold and creative futures, taking risks and making big asks from provincial government. In some instances, they also fall short on the infrastructure, human capacity or resources required to respond to their complicated predicaments.

Despite the many challenges, we also heard that Ontario's MSCs are great places to live. When comparing their quality of life to larger cities, MSCs stand out for offering higher affordability, reduced traffic congestion, lower crime rates, natural amenities, mixed urban/rural lifestyles, a more human scale, and a warm sense of community. MSCs are also demonstrating significant signs of change. Renewed political leadership, rising voter turnouts, higher levels of civic engagement and younger political faces are revitalizing politics and opening new windows of opportunity to do things differently.

Over time, MSCs have also developed more balanced economies, and a myriad of strengths and assets that have proven useful to overcoming barriers and creating new areas of growth.

This document emphasizes that MSCs are at a critical point, with a unique opportunity to re-imagine themselves. Our conversations pointed to several broad insights and specific areas of opportunity that MSCs should consider as they build towards greater economic, social and environmental prosperity:

- MSCs provide a critical alternative to Ontario's big cities;
- MSCs have the potential to bring together the best of big and small sized urban environments;
- MSCs have a unique opportunity to plan for the future of sustainable growth;
- MSCs have the potential to become economic drivers in Ontario.

Research also revealed a series of recommendations for action that should be considered by Ontario's MSCs to leverage their unique potential:

- 1. Develop policy frameworks to build and preserve local assets**
- 2. Reduce governance fragmentation and improve planning coordination**
- 3. Continue to emphasize balanced economies to increase economic resilience**
- 4. Invest in strategies to support regional economies**
- 5. Leverage the role and influence of anchor institutions**
- 6. Invest in human capital**
- 7. Build support for urban intensification, encourage investment in the community and promote sustainable mobility**
- 8. Encourage meaningful and diverse civic participation**
- 9. Take action to preserve affordable housing**
- 10. Provide more flexibility for cities to raise revenues**
- 11. Collaborate, learn, and share to foster innovation across mid-sized cities**
- 12. Take advantage of outside funding and unique strategies to finance climate change adaptation programs and other capital projects**

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INTRODUCTION

Making the Case for Mid-Sized Cities

Ontario's mid-sized cities are great places to live. When comparing their quality of life to larger cities, MSCs stand out because they offer higher affordability, reduced traffic congestion, lower crime rates, natural amenities, mixed urban/rural lifestyles, better air quality, a more human scale, and a warmer sense of community.

Mid-sized cities also play a major role as drivers of regional economies. Despite their prevalence, there is a consensus that mid-sized cities are largely overlooked in urban research and policy development. There is a disproportionate interest in Canada's largest cities—Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver—where most urban research and policy development takes place. In contrast, the specificities of smaller localities, particularly their unique challenges and opportunities in meeting infrastructure needs, creating quality of place, or promoting sustainability goals, are often unaccounted for.¹ Experts point out that mid-size cities suffer from a scarcity of planning models suited to their particular needs and circumstances, because they have yet to be recognized as having a distinctive status compared to other city types.²

Defining Mid-Sized Cities

In the Canadian context, mid-sized cities are defined as having a population within the range of 50 to 500 thousand residents. Twenty-five cities in Ontario fall within this category, representing 44.3% of Ontario's urban population. Within this population range, mid-sized cities can be further categorized by their function and relationships within a region. There are three types of mid-sized cities in Ontario: centre-cities, partner cities, and satellite cities.

- **Centre cities** are regional hubs with historic centres that function as autonomous economies and self-standing communities. They provide employment, higher education, health services, and amenities.
- **Partner Cities** are two or more cities of similar size located in close proximity to each other. Partner cities share the provision of employment, services and amenities across cities.
- **Satellite Cities** are typically bedroom communities or suburbs within a large metropolitan area. In contrast to center and partner cities, satellite cities depend on the main urban core of the extended urbanized region for the provision of employment and services for its residents.

For the purposes of this paper, our discussion of mid-sized cities focuses exclusively on centre and partner cities because their local economies are self-standing and their challenges and opportunities are distinct from those that characterize first-rank cities.³ In contrast, satellite cities rely entirely on the growth dynamics, housing and employment markets of larger urbanized regions, making their challenges a response to the growth of neighbouring first-rank economies.



Sustainable Urban Futures

Mid-sized cities (centre and partner cities) have unique features that position them well to contribute to sustainability goals and more balanced regional development in Ontario.

- Thriving mid-sized cities can help to alleviate some of the pressures and problems of high-speed agglomeration patterns in large cities while improving the balance in regional development. These problems include sprawling land consumption, increased commuting times and distances, unaffordable cost of living—particularly due to high-priced housing markets—and rising socio-spatial inequality.
- Mid-sized cities share a unique urban-rural connection, which can be leveraged to improve regional food systems, natural resource management, and climate change mitigation.
- While large cities benefit from economies of scale in innovation and wealth creation, research in U.S. cities shows that large cities do not necessarily achieve economies of scale in the reduction of CO₂ emissions given their elevated energy consumption patterns.⁴ Mid-sized cities, in turn, have an untapped opportunity to reinvent themselves into more ideal forms of sustainable urbanisms.
- Because of their infrastructures, anchor institutions, human capital, and availability of public and private services, mid-sized cities have the capacity to speed up their economic specialization processes to expand job creation and increase their prosperity.

Overall, a more robust consideration for mid-sized cities is necessary to balance Ontario's urban system and to reshape the future of cities according to pressing sustainability imperatives. For instance, the province's growth management strategy has focused on trying to control development through key legislation such as the Places to Grow Act.



St. Catharines
Photo: 'Cityofstcatharines' via Wikimedia Commons



London, Ontario Skyline
Photo: 'Bolognium' via Wikimedia Commons

We argue, however, that to achieve a truly polycentric and sustainable urban system, these policy frameworks should be coupled with additional efforts to stimulate local economic development and build a strong quality of place in mid-sized cities. By reasserting the economic strengths, diversification and local assets available in Ontario's mid-sized cities, they will be able to attract and retain the talent they need to succeed. Mid-sized cities can play a central role in achieving higher social equity, environmental sustainability, regional balance and liveability outcomes for Ontarians. Nonetheless, their present and future potential contributions need to be reimagined to fit these goals.

In light of this context, Evergreen CityWorks has initiated a discussion about urban liveability, infrastructure, equity, resilience and planning in Ontario's mid-sized cities by exploring the shared histories, opportunities, and roadblocks associated with the specificities of a medium-sized urban scale.

In the summer and fall of 2015, Evergreen CityWorks conducted a series of interviews with local leaders across the public, private and non-for-profit sectors in **London, Peterborough, Greater Sudbury and St. Catharines**. These four cities, with populations ranging between 78,698 in the case of Peterborough and 366,151 in London (see Table 1) were selected because they represent the geographical diversity of mid-sized cities in the province. We purposely chose cities that lie outside of the GTHA, focusing on cities that constitute key regional hubs in the North (Sudbury), South (St. Catharines), East-Central (Peterborough) and South-West (London) regions. While each of the cities demonstrate a unique set of characteristics, all of the cities do offer health and social services, tourism, financial services, commerce, higher education, arts and culture, and diverse economic activities. In terms of infrastructure and urban form, low densities and suburban-oriented development are prevalent across them. To different degrees, these four cities have experienced cycles of

slow growth or no growth and are currently working towards strengthening their urban vibrancy and economic dynamism.

This discussion paper gathers the highlights of rich conversations with mayors, activists, community leaders, business representatives, municipal planners, and directors of private philanthropic foundations. In these exchanges, we talked about current trends, present challenges, and areas of growth and opportunity emerging from their local contexts. The overall goal of this paper is to bring attention to common insights and specific opportunities at the local, regional and cross-city levels. Between February and April 2016 we will be co-hosting meetings with key city partners in each of the four cities studied to review the paper, identify priority recommendations and begin to devise opportunities for action.

In Mid-Sized Cities, Change is the New Normal

In the last three decades, Ontario's mid-sized cities have experienced significant economic, socio-demographic, environmental, and fiscal changes that are prompting them to reinvent themselves. As elsewhere in Canada, local economies rooted in resource-based or manufacturing sectors have lost jobs and are no longer a leading source of economic expansion. Socio-demographic changes across the country, such as ageing populations, low birth rates, and in some cases, youth outmigration, are strongly affecting municipalities located outside the rings of influence in Ontario's large metropolitan areas. Unlike the large urban regions of Greater Toronto and Hamilton or Ottawa-Gatineau that have become magnets for newcomers, medium and small cities are experiencing slow growth, no growth or shrinking populations.⁵

Mid-sized cities also share a myriad of land-use, environmental, fiscal and social challenges. In Ontario, they share urban forms shaped by car-centred lifestyles, low densities in downtown areas, and dispersed urban development patterns. Today, curbing sprawl and promoting active mobility alternatives have become policy imperatives for mid-sized cities seeking to achieve more equitable, efficient, environmentally sustainable, and economically vibrant urban environments. Like every other city, mid-sized cities are also finding themselves increasingly pressed by the need to implement more resilient infrastructure to lessen the impact of extreme weather events and to adapt to a globally changing climate.

Underlying socio-demographic, economic, land-use and environmental challenges are fiscal uncertainties. Amidst higher expenditure demands and shrinking or slow-growth tax bases, there is scepticism over access to the capital funding that will enable mid-sized cities to maintain or upgrade infrastructure, and embark on wide-scope strategic initiatives. More crucially, there are questions regarding the levels of service that mid-sized cities will be able to afford in the future. As social trends continue to change, MSCs are also struggling to preserve the key livability dimensions for which they are commonly recognized.

Are Mid-Sized Cities Reaching a Turning Point?

Amidst transitions and roadblocks, however, there are signs that Ontario's mid-sized cities are approaching a turning point. Economic restructuring across MSCs has led to increased knowledge innovation, advanced manufacturing, and a more balanced workforce. As Sandra Dueck, Policy Analyst at the Greater Peterborough Chamber of Commerce stated, "It feels like we are on the cusp of change on the inside!"

Renewed political and civic leadership, supported by a demand from local residents for change provides hopeful prospects. Mid-sized cities are not only increasingly electing younger candidates and new political figures, but there is also the perception that residents are participating more, and demonstrating a higher degree of engagement in matters that affect them directly.

Rather than importing or adopting big-city visions and solutions that are not appropriately scaled or contextualized, the time is right to take a step back and devise a model that enables mid-sized cities to regain their confidence. Building on local strengths and assets, Ontario's mid-sized cities can redefine what it means to plan and thrive in a slow or moderate-growth scenario.

Mid-sized cities are at a crucial moment. They are well positioned for new types of conversations to share ideas, good practices, and resources that could help redefine success and secure their economic, social and environmental prosperity.

Based on our conversations with key city leaders, we've identified the following four areas as critical trends at play in Ontario's mid-sized cities.

1. **Economic outlook: Capturing opportunities in a slow growth context**
2. **The changing ethos for growth management: Density and complete communities**
3. **Social development and housing affordability: Sustaining a high quality of life for all**
4. **Municipal Financial Picture: Ensuring effective service delivery under tight fiscal realities**

The next sections explore these trends in more detail.

01

Economic Outlook: Capturing Opportunities in a Slow Growth Context

In our conversations with leaders, we learned that all the cities under examination are experiencing moderate to slow growth in their populations, compounded by economic restructuring that is changing the job availability and skill requirements of the local labour market. While the Province is planning for large amounts of growth in the GTHA, managing the slower economic trends in MSCs requires a unique set of solutions and strategies. How can MSCs continue to build their economies in the context of slow to moderate growth?

Growth Context

Table 1 shows that in the last two decades, London and Peterborough had moderate net population gains while St. Catharines and Greater Sudbury have faced cycles of shrinkage and modest growth. Between 2006 and 2011, population change rates were 3.9% in London, 4.4% in Peterborough, -0.4 in St. Catharines, and 1.5 in Greater Sudbury, lagging behind the

provincial average of 5.7%. Demographic changes in the four cities studied show rapidly aging populations and a decline of residents under 25. In 2011, Peterborough had the highest ratio of people aged 65 or older (one out of every five residents), followed closely by St. Catharines, which ranked fourth. Greater Sudbury came eleventh and London fifteenth.⁶

Economy & Jobs

Mid-sized cities experienced job loss in basic industries and manufacturing, demonstrated by the downsizing or closure of companies that were seen as community strongholds, including: the St. Thomas Ford Assembly and the Kellogg's Plant in London; Outboard Marine Inc, and the reduction of Quaker's and General Electric's plants in Peterborough; General Motors and steel plants in St. Catharines; and Froid-Stobie, Lockerby and McCreedy west mines in Greater Sudbury.⁹ These changes signalled a substantial change in the economic orientation and population composition of mid-sized cities. As the primary and secondary industries downsize, employment growth is predominantly taking place in hospitality, retail, tourism, education, healthcare and government services.

TABLE 1
Population change in four mid-sized cities (1996-2011) ⁷

CITY	LAND AREA (KM ²) 2011	POPULATION DENSITY (PER KM ²) 2011	POPULATION 2011	POPULATION 2006	POPULATION 2001	POPULATION 1996
LONDON	420.57	870.6	366,151	352,395	336,539	325,669
GREATERSUDBURY	3,227.38	49.76 ⁸	160,274	157,857	155,219	165,336
ST. CATHARINES	96.11	1,367.2	131,400	131,989	129,170	130,926
PETERBOROUGH	63.80	1,233.6	78,698	74,898	71,446	69,742

New sectors, specific to the strengths of each city, are also emerging. Creative, advanced manufacturing, and technology-producing industries, although still small, are on the rise across the mid-sized cities examined. All cities host strong universities and research hospitals. These anchor institutions play a major role in innovation and economic development. The growth of the service sector has helped MSCs balance their economies, as they shift from an overreliance on single sectors and catch-up with the province's economic trends and goals.¹⁰ As MSCs diversify their economic activities, they are also reasserting their role as drivers of regional economies serving neighbouring municipalities.

Although new economic opportunities are emerging out of the current economic shift, it should be noted that mid-sized cities face barriers of scale when competing for mobile capitals and talent in regional and global markets. Service-oriented and knowledge-based economic activities are primarily concentrating in Canada's largest cities, the so-called "global cities".¹¹ In the words of John Fleming, Managing Director, Planning and City Planning for the City of London, "growth attracts growth."¹² The perception is that the high levels of concentrated growth in specific city-regions, such as the GTA, prevents smaller-scale regional economies from accessing new business and recruiting talent.

Simultaneously, many of Ontario's MSCs benefit from the proximity to the GTA, which produces spillover effects to MSCs by the way of networks and businesses. In fact, such proximity has helped MSCs build economic resilience at times of economic downturn. Although all MSCs in the North American rustbelt were hit hard by deindustrialization and by the 2008 recession, Ontario's industrial MSCs never faced the degree of depopulation, land abandonment, or decline faced by their U.S. counterparts: Some American MSCs,

such as Buffalo, lost between 30 and 60 percent of their residents in just a few decades. Despite similarities in the causes of industrial decay, Ontario's cities have always demonstrated a better ability to adjust to changing circumstances.¹³

Attracting & Retaining Talent

According to our interviewees, youth outmigration and an ongoing brain drain to the GTHA regions have reinforced slow-growth patterns, posing one of the biggest barriers to the expansion of tech industries in St. Catharines, London and Peterborough,¹⁴ which suffer from a shortage of highly skilled workers. As we heard from Sean Galloway, Manager of Urban Design and GIS for the City of London, industries require talent to keep expanding:

“Local Economic Development told us we have approximately 600 tech jobs that we can't fill. We know that we need to strengthen our city's offering of culture, arts, entertainment, urban environments and great places to attract the best and the brightest to fill these positions.”¹⁵

Interviewees also recognized the importance of training and education programs, and policies to help meet the demand for highly qualified workers and better enable the current workforce to take advantage of these new opportunities.

Forming Regional Networks to Access Global Markets

Interviewees from St. Catharines and Greater Sudbury recognized the importance of forming regional and international economic networks in order to develop more specialized services and rebuild the local economy.

St. Catharines' Mayor, Walter Sendzik, noted the rising importance of strengthening cooperation of economic regions to participate in global markets:

“ At one time, cities were economies within the context of their region. Regions are now the leading economies. The Niagara economy is now the driver of where we are going, not St. Catharines. A key question from an economic standpoint, is how are we adjusting to these changes (...) and how are we positioning our community so that we have an ability to plug into the larger global context?” ¹⁶

Regional economic development, however, remains a key challenge for mid-sized cities. Some participants perceive that local governments and stakeholders “tend to work in silos” and have difficulties seeing beyond the administrative municipal borders. As Judy Pihach, Manager of Development and Planning Policy in St. Catharines, expressed; “We need to continue to put our efforts into a unified regional economic development strategy and not just the limits of the local municipal boundaries. Continued cooperation and collaboration are needed region wide..”

SUCCESS STORY:

Diversification and higher-order specialization in Greater Sudbury

Greater Sudbury is an example of a mid-sized city economy that is increasingly specializing to develop new and higher order economic functions associated with its traditional economic base. In Sudbury, growth has been historically characterized by uneven economic cycles associated to fluctuating commodity prices.

Despite ups and downs, Sudbury's mining sector is reinventing itself, while retaining and attracting new talent. The development of a collection of secondary industry business in manufacturing and other mining services has accompanied and supported the development of the consulting sector. In the last decade, Sudbury has increasingly become a leading centre for research, development, and engineering consulting services for mining industries worldwide. Companies such as Hatch, Stantec, Century Systems Technologies Inc., Wardrop and AMEC have grown substantially in the city and also expanded their operations throughout Northern Ontario.

In this process, Sudbury has engaged in innovation processes, acquired and developed a highly specialized new industry, and built multiple cooperation networks with other cities in Northern Ontario and mining companies and markets all over the world. The NORCAT Innovation Mill's Underground Centre is a concrete example of an innovation incubator emerging from Sudbury's research and development sectors. Mining companies worldwide and tech start-up ventures are able to use NORCAT's operating mine as an “active laboratory” to design and test technology prototypes and ultimately showcase innovative products that exemplify the future of the mining industry. This asset is unique in the world and further demonstrates Sudbury's transition to the knowledge economy by tapping into its long-time expertise, investing in research and development already available in local professionals and by connecting to markets at a global scale.

02

The Changing Ethos for Growth Management: Density & Complete Communities

Despite planning typologies that prioritize suburban living and car dependency, mid-sized cities are demonstrating a rising interest in dense, walkable and complete communities. While Ontario's growth framework helps to promote density, each city requires its own unique set of policies and strategies to ensure implementation. How can mid-sized cities change commonly held thinking, practices and policies to meet ambitions for intensified cities?

Development Context

Ontario's mid-sized cities share dispersed, low-density, and car-centred urbanization patterns, a typical outcome of North American cities that introduced master plans in the post-World War II decades of industrial growth. In the 1980s and 1990s, cities experienced a slowdown in growth rates and increases in land consumption as households and businesses relocated to suburban areas. The suburban exodus was driven by the accommodation for auto mobility, and the appeals of cheap land and large distances between neighbours. The mid-sized cities studied were also built under planning paradigms that promoted segregated zoning, creating far distances between daily activities—and separating residents according to incomes, age groups and activities. In other words, this paradigm promoted incomplete communities.

The preference for car-centred development became even stronger in mid-sized cities, which provide

shorter commutes when compared to their suburban counterparts in large metropolitan areas. Although downtown densities have never been high in mid-sized cities, population loss compounded with ongoing suburban expansion and big box retail led to a depletion of downtowns across the province. In our conversations, the general perception is that the urban core communities in mid-sized cities have been seriously neglected in favour of suburban sprawl. Michelle Baldwin, Executive Director at Pillar Non-Profit Network, summed up the persistence of these challenges in London by noting that,

“We have so much development with the big box on the corners, it is starving out the heart of the city”.¹⁷

Sprawl and segregated development pose challenges to the success of compact living and sustainable mobility initiatives as developers continue to feed automobile-centered preferences.¹⁸ MSCs have yet to see a strong demand for downtown occupancy, as many residents still prefer the space of suburban life and the proximity to highway corridors for long-distance commuting. Ongoing green field development raises many concerns among mid-sized city leaders, particularly for the protection of adjacent farmland and green spaces, rising carbon dependency, and the cost of infrastructure investment and maintenance to service new swaths of land. We heard from interviewees that green field and suburban expansion was premised on the philosophy of “growth pays for growth”. This philosophy, however, is now coming under question as city leaders recognize that not all growth is a good investment.

Our informants also identified “mentality” as a significant barrier to the adoption of more ambitious goals for intensification, walkability and placemaking to improve the quality of downtown environments. As one of our interviewees told us,

“there is a mentality that certain urban features are more adequate for cities like Ottawa or Toronto, but not for London. And then, you notice that even Hamilton and Mississauga are working on placemaking, but not us!”

We heard that “small-town politics” or a “lack of ambition” prevents mid-sized cities from embarking on more innovative design. There is also a perception that “things can’t be done differently,” which is supported by a deeply held ideology regarding what cities should look like. For example, the addition of active transportation amenities are not always perceived as appropriate for the mid-sized city context, where densities are low to moderate. “In the absence of visible cues of cyclists that we see in larger, denser cities it can be difficult to inspire and sustain political support for the development of bicyclist facilities.”¹⁹

Signs of Change: Densification & Complete Communities

Despite the barriers, there is a perception that millennials are starting to “flex their muscles”, by influencing the shape and design of cities. Youth are starting to demand quality urban environments, pushing cities to improve amenities, housing options, placemaking in central locations, and investment in effective transportation. This trend demonstrates the appetite for discussion on the types of placemaking models that could best work for mid-sized cities.

With the realization of new fiscal realities and creation of the Ontario Growth Plan, interviews highlighted that the sprawl-favoured ethos of the 20th century is starting to change. Across mid-sized cities there is a growing interest in the concept of complete

communities and the integration of commercial and residential activities alongside a range of transportation options to promote walkable cities. There seems to be “a real desire to live in more urban environments.”²⁰ With changing demographics, as baby boomers age and downsize, planners in Greater Sudbury and London are looking to shift away from single detached housing to townhouses, multi-family housing and apartments.

- London’s research participants agreed that Ontario’s growth framework is stimulating downtown redevelopment. Tyler Sutton, Editor at the Public Sector Digest, notes that in London, there is currently an intensification boom with more plans underway for high-rise and mixed-use developments. Increasing density will help support the ambitious transit initiatives under discussion, creating opportunities for people to live downtown, while maintaining access to other parts of the city.²¹ This vision is demonstrated in the London Plan’s designation of “Transit Villages” for neighbourhoods outside the downtown, which will provide highly urban, transit-oriented environments and are expected to accommodate intense development.
- Greater Sudbury must service residents across an area of 3,227.38 km². Providing access to transit, arenas, libraries, water management and wastewater treatment across such a large land area creates high costs that the municipality struggles to sustain. Kris Longston, Acting Manager of Community and Strategic Planning pointed out “Sudbury’s vastness is its major challenge, we are spread thin.”²² Greater Sudbury’s densification plans for downtown areas seek to promote the opportunity to repurpose dormant assets by bringing businesses back to the downtown. Currently, the city has an excess capacity of over 100,000 square feet of commercial and office space. The opportunity to rejuvenate existing vacant buildings and decrease vacancy rates is seen by interviewees as critical to

create urban vibrancy in core areas. In the words of Don Duval, CEO of NORCAT, one of Canada's premier innovation centres, "If you can fill both the commercial and residential urban spaces with tenants that embody entrepreneurial spirit and creativity, you will create a vibrant community that will absolutely rock!"²³

- St. Catharines would like to add 10,000 residents to the urban centre to make it more of a vibrant and complete community, but as Phil Lambert, Associate Director, Planning and Development of Niagara Region,²⁴ told us, demand for housing in central locations is still low in the Niagara Region because people tend to prefer single detached housing near the highway. The need to curb sprawl and implement densification tools is high in St. Catharines because of its geographic location. The city is bound by Lake Ontario, the World Biosphere Reserve Niagara Escarpment southwards, the Welland Canal system, and Fifteen Mile Creek-making it effectively landlocked. Urban lands comprise approximately 70% of the municipal planning jurisdiction in St. Catharines. Despite the unique environmental richness of the setting, the municipal jurisdiction is, paradoxically, at a deficit of green fields. In terms of development, St. Catharines now has few opportunities for expansion, highlighting the need for densification.
- Peterborough is characterized by car-dependent lifestyles and sprawling development. Dispersion has been further exacerbated by the unintended consequences of the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (ORMCP) (2001). With Peterborough's proximity to the GTA, the greenbelt has created significant "leap frogging" development pressures on the city. At the same time, Peterborough has been identified for densification under the Places to Grow Act.

- Reducing the impact of development pressures caused by the ORMCP to comply with the growth plan is currently a significant challenge that is stimulating important conversations about the future of the city.

No 'One Size Fits All' Policy

A resounding message from interviews is that despite having a progressive growth framework for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, the mid-sized cities examined either don't fit into the geographical scope of the plan or face their own implementation challenges. Interviews suggested that more flexibility and support is needed to achieve the desired outcomes in each local context.

To reduce implementation barriers and build on the uniqueness of local contexts, each of the four cities studied has put in place programs and initiatives to support gradual change.

- In Peterborough, sustainability advocates pointed out that initiatives to integrate land-use, walkability, bike plans and transit provision are expected to create more accessible and equitable spaces for all urban residents, raising the appeal of downtown neighbourhoods.
- In London, the municipal authorities adopted an intensification policy that promotes remediation and redevelopment of brownfield sites and the adoption of the Brownfield Community Improvement Plan. Despite the complexities and risks involved in remediation processes, London currently offers a variety of economic incentives for the private sector to increase their participation in brownfield redevelopment projects.²⁵

- In St. Catharines, we heard that there are many new initiatives to help attract new business and residents to central areas of the city, including: the opening of a Performing Arts Centre; Brock University's new Marilyn I Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts; the 5,000 seat Meridian Centre; a plan to build two-story affordable housing units in the downtown core; and a plan to bring a GO station to downtown St. Catharines. As part of the city's Community Improvement Plan, the city has also adopted financial incentives to stimulate private investments in neighbourhood revitalization. The incentives seek to offset a portion of costs incurred by the developer when undertaking redevelopment projects, brownfield remediation, façade improvements and residential or office conversions.²⁶
- In Greater Sudbury, the Official Plan promotes intensification, however, its targets remain low at 10%. Sudbury's downtown redevelopment plan puts significant attention on two main goals, first, connectivity into other neighbourhoods and into the Greater Sudbury network, and the recuperation of main streets to boost private investments. Actions to promote the downtown include city beautification projects, biking infrastructure, new street furniture and the relocation of Sudbury's Art Gallery to a downtown location. Sudbury's plan is characterized by efforts to bring private sector partners to the table in order to participate and commit to downtown redevelopment strategies.²⁷

Towards Place-Based Policies & Strategies

MSCs have realized that creating a high quality of place can have a profound impact on a range of public policy goals at different orders of government. Building on this idea, mid-sized cities are demonstrating a growing interest in adopting "place-based" approaches to urban development. The rationale behind a place-based framework is that policy interventions that are grounded on the distinctive needs and assets of a community can achieve better results across a variety of areas (ie. public health, education, economic development, environmental conservation). Place-based approaches aim to replace sectoral and fragmented policy interventions with comprehensive plans that coordinate the interests of various orders of government into strategic interventions. Instead of transposing policies created for big or small cities to the MSC context, place-based policies rely on civic engagement and the leadership of local government to assess local needs. Based on contextual assessments, place-based urban strategies and programs are devised to amplify public policy outcomes from a multi-sectoral perspective.

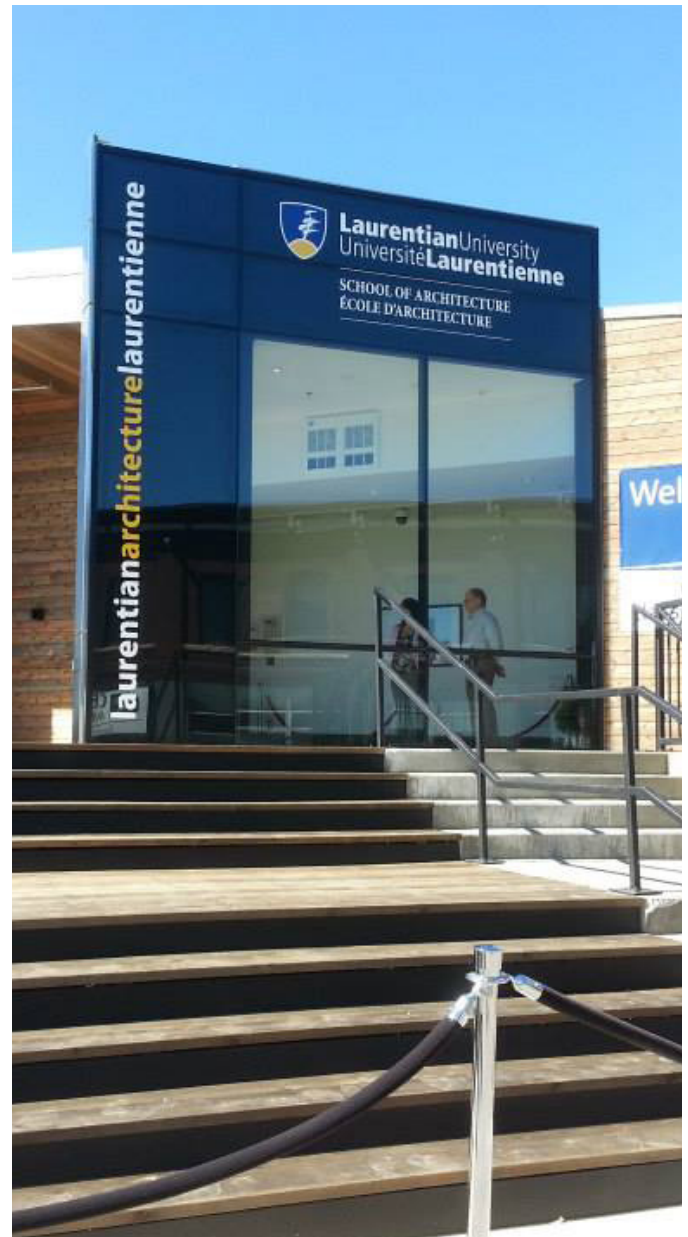
SUCCESS STORY:

Laurentian University's New School of Architecture, Greater Sudbury

In 2006, a local economist rallied the community to open a school of architecture in downtown Sudbury with the hopes it would attract professionals and students, and add vitality to the city's downtown core. Although the idea did not receive immediate support by the University's leadership, the economist brought together a Steering Committee that worked on making this project a reality. Chaired by a local architect, the steering committee managed all aspects of the project and oversaw it to completion. The Committee asked for support from the city, which committed to providing \$10 million over a decade if the rest of the financing could be found. With a new President at Laurentian University and a significant portion of the necessary funding secured, the university became a crucial and effective proponent of the project.

Currently in its third year of operation with the main building under construction, Laurentian's new School of Architecture will bring over 400 students into the downtown, promoting the city's intensification policies.²⁸

This was a remarkable example of Sudbury's collaborative spirit, as Carmen Simmons, Executive Director at Sudbury's Community Foundation explains, "people came together and made it happen. We face many challenges implementing our downtown development plan, but there is a collaborative spirit from having been a small town that makes things happen.... Success? Sometimes the leadership makes the difference."



Laurentian School of Architecture, Greater Sudbury
Photo: <http://www.northernontariobusiness.com/Industry-News/engineering/2013/11/Design-institute-will-lessen-brain-drain-and-enhance-downtown-Sudbury.aspx>

SUCCESS STORY:**Arts based revitalization
in St. Catharines ²⁹**

In 2008, St. Catharines adopted the Downtown Creative Cluster Master Plan, which underscores the city's arts and cultural activities as a means to redefine the character of its downtown. Key components of this plan include relocating Brock University's School of Fine and Performing Arts to the downtown and construction of a new Performing Arts Centre.

This development involved a partnership between the City of St. Catharines and Brock University, and as such, represents an important initiative to bring the university to the downtown core. Provincial and Federal orders of government were also involved in the Performing Arts Centre's financing. According to Steve Solski, Executive Director of the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre,³⁰ these investments are transforming the face of downtown and redefining its purpose. With 95,000 square-feet of space, an 780 seat concert hall, a Recital Hall, a Flexible Theatre a Film House, a music lab for students, and practice studios for rehearsals, the centre is expected to bring together the arts and culture community. Moreover, the Performing Arts Centre is expected to catalyze revitalization and support intensification policies.



The FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre
Photo: <http://www.niagarabuzz.ca/2015/11/15/local-buzz/firstontario-performing-arts-centre-officially-opens/>

SUCCESS STORY:**The London Plan – City visioning
through civic participation**

In 2014, London initiated Canada's largest civic engagement exercise called ReThink London to produce a new official plan. The London Plan will provide direction and accommodate growth over the next twenty years.

Leveraging the opportunity to redefine the city's vision and current growth ethos, London embarked in a two-year extensive consultation process to gather residents' hopes for change. Tyler Sutton recalls that "consultation was kicked off with Peter Mansbridge and he challenged everyone to get involved." Local planners devised a comprehensive and multi-media outreach strategy to make participation truly meaningful and diverse. In order to make it more accessible to ordinary residents, planners changed the technical language typically used in official plans. "The plan has less talk of zones and land-uses, and talks more about places. The emphasis is on places around the city and how to create a community base".³¹ It is expected that The London Plan will be adopted fall 2016, bringing forth a vision for "preserving and strengthening our neighbourhoods by providing new opportunities for redevelopment and growth".

The London Plan will also improve connectivity between streets and the uses along those streets, and enhance mobility options. The London Plan also emphasizes preserving and improving agricultural lands, the natural environment, and the local cultural heritage.³²

03

Social Development and Housing Affordability: Sustaining a High Quality of Life for All

Affordability and high quality of life have been touted as the key strengths that make mid-sized cities desirable places to live and work. Conversations with city leaders revealed concerns that this critical asset is at risk of being lost. What actions must mid-sized cities take to maintain a high quality of life and address issues of poverty and the loss of affordable housing?

Affordability Context

In contrast to housing markets in Vancouver, Toronto or Calgary, Ontario's mid-sized cities have historically prided themselves in offering high quality and affordable lifestyles. For many, the mid-sized city environment provides access to important urban amenities, services, infrastructure and activities that are characteristic of larger cities, but with lower levels of traffic congestion and air pollution. Housing affordability has traditionally been a key driver for young families moving to mid-sized cities looking for larger residential spaces and reduced living costs. Affordability is also an important decision-making factor in the settlement choice of Ontario immigrants, making it one of the mid-sized cities' fundamental assets. Cities like Greater Sudbury, St. Catharines and London, have traditionally rated at the top in Canada's affordability rankings.³³

The location of Ontario's mid-size cities also provide residents with immediate access to rural environments and natural scenery, enabling a myriad of outdoor activities. Mid-sized cities also tend to demonstrate

high levels of social cohesion often seen in small cities and characterized by high levels of trust and solidarity between neighbours. This type of lifestyle combined with affordable housing opportunities, has helped sustain community dynamism and a good quality of life for most mid-sized city residents. Interviewees indicated, however, that the state of housing availability and affordability is changing. Over the last decade, while housing prices have slightly increased, a growing number of residents, particularly the urban poor, have lost access to affordable and adequate shelter.

Affordability is not only about prices, but also depends on household incomes and the cost of living. Data suggests that incomes in mid-sized cities have not gone up for many households, jeopardizing their access to affordable housing. This challenge has been further exacerbated by a smaller rental supply.³⁴ Interviews revealed an overall perception that fewer rental units are being developed, and that those available are mostly tailored to college and university students or single professionals. As a result, available rental units do not provide the variety of options needed to meet the diverse needs of low-income families and other residents. Flat incomes, housing inadequacies, and rising house prices have a direct impact on other dimensions of social welfare, and are related to poverty, food security, and mental health.

Housing Stock In Need of Repair

Most of the downtown rental housing stock across the four cities studied were built over four decades ago. Many of these units have seen little maintenance and are quickly falling into disrepair. In St. Catharines, London and Peterborough, informants expressed concerns for the condition of downtown affordable housing units and the need for retrofits. In Sudbury,

rooming houses seem overcrowded and lack air quality, raising health and fire hazards concerns.³⁵ Participants expressed that if intensification plans are to be successful, new public and private investment initiatives are needed to bring buildings up to standard. For complete communities to work, downtown housing needs to create a wider range of accommodation that reflects the needs of diverse users including all household configurations and incomes.³⁶

Impacts of Housing Unaffordability on Vulnerable Populations

Peterborough demonstrates the greatest gap between rental rates and actual incomes. Local housing advocates have brought attention to the issue as working families and retirees face growing challenges to manage the cost of rent and living expenses.³⁷ Indeed, the demand for affordable housing is significant, with a vacancy rate of 3.5% and 1,485 people eligible for rent-geared-to-income housing on the Peterborough Housing Corporation waiting list.³⁸

Like Peterborough, St. Catharines has seen reduced affordability and growing homelessness in recent years. As Mayor of St. Catharines explained, this is related to the changing employment base in the city:

“We have far too many people waiting on affordable housing lists, because we don’t have jobs where people can pay their mortgage. These families are facing a huge economic impact”.³⁹

Senior populations and retirees in Peterborough and St. Catharines are struggling to afford their living quarters and access services. In 2014, Sudbury was ranked second in housing affordability in the country. Despite this rank, the city’s rates of homelessness, food insecurity, and poverty continue to grow among the First Nations population. Participants indicated that big efforts are needed to better integrate First Nations communities into the job market in order to increase incomes, while also securing adequate and affordable housing options.

Research participants expressed that new Canadians often experience barriers when trying to access the rental market in mid-sized cities. The lack of a credit history, employment records and social networks upon arrival place them at a disadvantage with landlords who demand requirements new Canadians can’t fulfill. According to Michelle Baldwin, there is a clear need to leverage new Canadians’ skills, and connect them to the community to better accommodate their settlement needs and help them gain a real sense of belonging.⁴⁰

SUCCESS STORY:**The London & Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership (LMLIP)**

LMLIP is a collaborative initiative that started in 2009 in London and Middlesex that brings together the public, private and non-profit sectors to improve the settlement and integration of newcomers in all aspects of London's social, economic and cultural life. LMLIP works with volunteers and councils in five strategic areas: Supports and Services for Immigrants, Communication and Access to Information, Host Community, Supports for Service Providers and Advocacy/Systemic Change. LMLIP is co-led by the City of London, and funded by the Federal government and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. This multi-sectorial partnership is unique because it improves local immigrant settlement programs; involves the private sector in addressing the economic marginalization of newcomers; and it uses government funding to support ongoing innovation of immigrant settlement services. This multi-sectorial partnership has managed to mobilize policies and practices to better attract and retain immigrants, creating over 20 programs and products for immigrant integration through creative partnerships and collaborations.



Photo: <http://immigration.london.ca/LMLIP/Publications/Documents/Strategic2013-2016.pdf>

SUCCESS STORY:**The Mount Community Centre, Peterborough**

In 2014, in response to rising poverty in Peterborough, local activists working together via the Poverty Reduction Network (PRN) identified the need for more low-rent housing units. Along with Peterborough's PRN, the project was supported by representatives of the United Way of Peterborough, Trent University, Kairos Non-Profit Housing, Casa Maria, Peterborough Housing Foundation, the Rotary Club, and the Peterborough Chamber of Commerce, among other local leaders. The City also pledged \$3 million in direct and indirect funding to support the project.⁴¹ In response to the need for affordable housing, the PRN learned that a former convent was up for sale, and managed to fundraise and sell special social bonds that pay 3-percent interest annually for three years. They also used a social finance pool to pay for renovations. This financing model enabled the network to acquire the \$5-million property and get started with the renovations. Renovating the 132,000-square-foot building is expected to create 100 apartments and other public amenities. The Mount Community Centre will also include community spaces, art spaces and rental venues suitable for weddings, concerts and events, which will generate revenue for the Centre. With 10 acres of grounds, The Mount will also contribute new gardens to the community. The Centre will be partially open in 2016.



Jim Russell addresses the audience during Coming Together: A Day of Reflection on Poverty
Photo: <http://www.thepeterboroughexaminer.com/2015/10/16/spiritual-response-to-poverty-marks-international-day-for-the-eradication-of-poverty>

04

Municipal Financial Picture: Ensuring Effective Servicing Under Tight Fiscal Realities

Ontario's mid-sized cities are in a fiscal crunch as they manage the rising demands of infrastructure investment, maintenance, repair and service delivery over a shrinking revenue base. How can mid-sized cities continue to meet the needs of residents and plan for large capital projects without a growing budget? What creative solutions or partnerships can cities leverage to address this challenge?

Municipal Fiscal Context

Ontario's mid-sized cities are fiscally healthy. They typically portray balanced operating budgets, low levels of debt, cautious borrowing practices, and strong credit ratings. In Ontario, balanced books reflect the fact that municipalities are precluded from running deficits. But the truth may not be as it appears. A report by the Institute of Municipal Finance and Governance notes, if Ontario's municipalities appear to be fiscally healthy, this has often been achieved at the rate of underinvestment in relevant services and infrastructure, such as, public transit, road maintenance, water and sewerage networks, and recreation services.⁴²

Interviewees expressed the concern that mid-sized cities will increasingly confront both unanticipated and unforeseen investment needs, and growing operating costs. Many of these needs will relate to four areas of growing attention:

1. **the maintenance, repair and adaptation of now aging infrastructure;**

2. **a shrinking revenue base—preventing investment in new infrastructure;**
3. **a rising need for the expansion of regional and local transit infrastructure; and**
4. **the growing costs of workforce compensation, specifically, in essential services such as fire and policing.**

St. Catharines' and Greater Sudbury's Mayors agreed, that even if the above areas do not represent an immediate financial threat, they create pressures that mid-sized cities need to handle carefully. Without growing sources of revenue, mid-sized cities' ability to deliver critical investments can be compromised; particularly, those necessary to achieve higher levels of social, economic and environmental prosperity and overcome pressing challenges.⁴³

Rising Costs and Higher Expenditure per Capita

While cities across the province face similar fiscal predicaments, what we heard from mid-sized cities' leaders suggest a distinctive set of challenges resulting from the intertwined effects of slow to moderate economic and population growth, dispersed patterns of urban development, and social vulnerabilities. These factors create additional challenges for mid-size cities while diminishing their revenue base.

In Greater Sudbury, dispersed development patterns, reinforced by suburban relocation trends, have implied expanding services and infrastructure into greater land areas while reducing the actual number of users. In London, Peterborough, and St. Catharines, urban dispersion has created new costs, as these cities have to invest in marketing and generating financial

incentives to attract or retain immigrants, developers, new businesses, and even city residents to central areas.

On the revenue side, downtown vacancies have meant lower property values, impacting mid-sized cities' fiscal base. Private divestment and property abandonment in London and Peterborough, have given room to land speculators to sit on unused properties. While landowners wait for gentrification or public investments to bring up real estate values, properties are locked from the market reducing the housing supply and affecting downtown communities as neighbourhoods fall into blight, which in turn, forces municipalities, as in the case of London, to invest in revitalization plans.

Because Ontario's mid-sized cities lack flexibility to raise revenues outside the property tax, service fees, and development charges, they often find themselves cutting on spending, a process that Greater Sudbury's Mayor and Council are currently undergoing. Sudbury and St. Catharines' staff and politicians are currently looking for creative ways to find new efficiencies.

“We believe the solution will require new types of innovative strategies by looking at different ways of replacing assets, unique kinds of partnerships and reconsidering the levels of service we deliver and the types of roads and infrastructure we provide.”⁴⁴

Climate Change & Aging Infrastructure

Mid-sized cities in Ontario are falling behind in infrastructure maintenance and climate change adaptation. Often, these public works investments are politically costly because they are not visible to the tax payer. As Greater Sudbury's Councillor Deb McIntosh told us, “the greatest infrastructure

challenges are the maintenance, repair and replacement of water and waste water infrastructure. The stuff you don't see”.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, from roads and bridges, to sewage, energy and water infrastructure, there is a consensus that infrastructure across Ontario is ageing and cities need to fix it in a smart way. The capacity of Ontario's urban aging infrastructure has further decreased due to the impacts of extreme weather events and unforeseen climatic fluctuations.

In recent years, as a result of heavy precipitations, mid-sized and small cities like Burlington, Orangeville, Peterborough, and Stratford, have suffered from power outages, strain on water management systems, and record-high insurance claims. Heavy precipitations are indeed overwhelming the capacity of aging water management systems (supply, treatment, storage and distribution) that were designed under milder climatic scenarios. Other key infrastructures, which mid-sized cities should analyze in terms of their technical resilience, are: solid waste management systems, energy generation, supply and distribution, and transport infrastructure.

Although all Canadian cities were hit hard by the 2008 recession, with smaller budgets, mid-sized cities' ability to pay for infrastructure maintenance, service delivery, and new public works projects was more severely compromised. Greater Sudbury is a special case in point. Because of its vast geographical area, Sudbury's per capita infrastructure is one of the highest in the province, and so are its maintenance costs. Because of this, Sudbury faces challenges to meet an equal level of service across local communities. The exercise of prioritizing what needs to be fixed and when, not only poses technical challenges but has unpopular political costs, as these types of investments are costly and less visible to the taxpayer. Sudbury is also falling behind in the adoption of a resilience plan. The private sector, however, has stepped up as a key partner and has a strong record of responsiveness, particularly with disaster management preparedness. Two of Sudbury's largest mining companies Glencore and Vale have demonstrated leadership in these regards.

SUCCESS STORY:

Improving climate change resilience and reducing carbon in Peterborough

The need to respond to climate change has prompted short-term and long-term action in Peterborough, a city that experienced a significant flooding event in 2004. Since the majority of the city's capital funding goes to "pipes and pavement", the City is keen to secure any potential funding available to address climatic vulnerabilities and reduce the city's carbon footprint.

Recently, Peterborough secured funding from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Ontario Trillium Foundation to create a Climate Change Action Plan. Although still in its preliminary phase, The Climate Change Action Plan will help all of the municipalities and First Nation communities in the Peterborough region to set relevant targets, identify strategic actions, and act collectively to reduce CO₂ emissions.

SUCCESS STORY:

Greater Sudbury's Regreening Program

Over time, Sudbury's primary economic activities drastically transformed its natural landscape. As the large-scale mining industry grew generating economic development, it also removed significant vegetation. Because of aggressive mining technologies, clouds of sulphur dioxide produced significant environmental devastation. This degradation included the acidification of 7,000 lakes within a 17,000 square kilometers radio; 20,000 hectares of barren land with significant erosion; and 80,000 hectares of semi-barren land. In the 1970s, the city adopted a regreening and reforestation program. Between 1978 and 2011, 3,435 hectares were recovered. More recently, the program has focused on fostering biodiversity. While Sudbury's regreening program has improved air quality and improved other environmental outcomes, it has also created many socio-economic benefits for the city. For instance, it has fostered a greater sense of collective pride and self-esteem; increased tourism, and direct and indirect job creation. It has also put Sudbury in the international scene as a best practice for regreening.⁴⁶



Ramsey Lake was one of Sudbury's first major environmental reclamation projects.
Photo: Flöbirig via Wikimedia Commons

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

Building on Local Assets to Create Great Places

ntario's MSCs are undergoing important transitions that pose new types of challenges and opportunities for the future.

In our conversations, we learned that these cities have lost jobs and are seeing their populations aging and/or decreasing. Many MSCs are now confronted with slow to moderate growth and rising social inequality. The urban paradigms under which MSCs have based their development have become less responsive to the needs of local residents. As a result, many of the existing economic activities, land-use patterns, housing markets, physical infrastructures, and lifestyles are out of sync with MSCs' aspirations for the future.

While global economic and environmental trends, and national and regional pressures can explain many of the current difficulties, other issues are the result of unresolved local problems that MSCs have accumulated over time. Although all cities are dynamic places with the capacity to reinvent themselves, mid-sized cities endure greater obstacles in adjusting to new circumstances than their larger counterparts because their ability to tackle problems is more limited. We heard that mid-sized cities tend to have a lack of confidence when envisioning bold futures, taking risks and making big asks from provincial government. In some instances, they also lack the infrastructure, human capacity and resources required to respond to their complicated predicaments.

Despite the many challenges, we also heard that Ontario's MSCs are already identifying and undertaking new areas of opportunity. Over the past several decades, MSCs have developed more balanced economies, and a myriad of strengths and assets

that have proved useful to overcoming barriers and creating new areas of growth. Presently, MSCs have a unique opportunity to re-imagine themselves. A hopeful trend for MSCs is the current wave of renewed political leadership across the cities examined. Rising voter turnouts, higher levels of civic engagement and younger political faces are revitalizing politics. City councils are opening windows of opportunity to test new ideas and do things differently.

Overall, city leaders were clear that attaining heightened social equity, environmental sustainability, and economic prosperity will require a collective and long-ranging effort to revise new models of city-building for mid-sized cities. These models will need to involve strong participation in developing a vision for the city's future that expresses the goals, needs and aspirations of local communities. Inter-city and inter-governmental collaborations are also crucial to consolidate new paths. By working together across governments and sectors, MSCs can advance new perspectives to local growth.

Building on Local Assets to Enhance Quality of Place

All MSCs have particular strengths and assets that they should identify and build on to create great places. Each of the cities studied depends on varied resources and a unique character that can be built

upon to mobilize the economy and improve the social wellbeing of their residents. Assets can be tangible or intangible, and may include historic downtowns, anchor institutions, labour force expertise, balanced economies, social connectivity, housing affordability, unique landscapes, outdoor recreation, among many others. Table 2 summarizes some of the local assets identified by our interviewees in the cities studied. These assets should be considered part of the main building blocks for defining strategic place-based solutions to enhancing each city's quality of place.

Based on conversations about quality of place and the unique strategies for mid-sized cities, our participants pointed to several broad insights and specific areas of opportunity that MSCs should consider as they move towards greater economic, social and environmental prosperity.

➤ **MSCs provide a critical alternative to Ontario's big cities.**

Although Ontario's urban growth is currently "GTA-centric," expensive real estate markets, long commutes, deteriorated air quality, and increased traffic congestion may soon increase the rates of international and regional migrants to MSCs. We heard from interviewees that young families are returning to MSCs because of what these cities offer. It is therefore critical that mid-sized cities leverage their unique position and continue to build on the elements that make their cities great by investing in environmental conservation, social development and physical infrastructures, and maintaining the livability and world.

TABLE 2
Identified Assets across Four Mid-Sized Cities in Ontario

ASSETS	LONDON	GREATER SUDBURY	ST. CATHARINES	PETERBOROUGH
ENVIRONMENTAL	The river; local food system; Back to the River Program.	330 lakes; freshwater epicentre; model of environmental recovery; stewardship; large land base area.	Welland Canal	Beautiful setting on the edge of cottage country; forest city; green city; parks and trees; lakes; water; Trent Canal; sustainability plan.
ECONOMIC	Strategic location between Toronto and Detroit; Western University; low cost of living; hospitals and health research.	Laurentian University; Mining research services; major regional shopping area; hospitals; underground natural resources; great lifestyle; growing innovation sector; mining supply; tourism.	Proximity to the GTA, Buffalo and upstate New York; located in 4th largest trade zone in North America; Brock university; skilled labour force; growth in digital technologies.	Regional centre model; Trent University and Fleming Community College; community colleges; balanced economy; very educated workforce; entrepreneurship; innovation.
HISTORIC, HERITAGE & LOCAL IDENTITY	Historic downtown; River.	Environmental reclamation; science centre; company towns; "Sudbury is unique".	Cultural hubs; Shaw Festival; wine industry; culinary industry.	Strong cultural activity; First city in Canada that had street lights. Called the "Electric City", GE plant in 1893.
SOCIAL	Sense of connectedness; strong sense of community; openness; community diversity; strong non-for-profit sector; high quality of life.	High quality of life; collaborative community; cohesive.	Affordable housing stock; service agencies and social organizations; high quality of life.	"Passionate community"; active citizenry; collaborative environment; humane scale; progressive urban policies in place.
PHYSICAL INFRA-STRUCTURE	Budweiser gardens	Research facilities: Neutrino Observatory; AMREK; NORCAT.	Good municipal transit system; Performing Arts Centre; no traffic congestion; rail access; QEW; great recreational facilities.	Airport

Source: By authors with interview data

➤ **MSCs have the potential to bring together the best of big and small sized urban environments.**

Because of their medium scale, MSCs already have access to most of the amenities and services available in larger cities. The four cities studied have consolidated themselves as regional economic and cultural hubs within larger geographic regions. Residents and industries can easily access highly specialized services locally. MSCs are also home to regional hospitals, renowned universities and colleges. Most cities, particularly in Eastern, Central and Southern Ontario, are well connected to Toronto and in close proximity to key cities in the U.S. At the same time, Ontario's mid-sized cities are distinct from larger cities and have a unique character that resembles the quaint and connected feel of small cities. MSCs boast historic avenues or districts, diverse natural resources, immense agricultural lands, a cohesive sense of community and higher housing affordability. These attributes can help to enhance the brand, value and distinctiveness of mid-sized cities and set them apart as distinctly attractive places.

➤ **MSCs have a unique opportunity to plan for the future of sustainable growth.**

As the reduction of CO₂ emissions and climate change adaptation goals gain increasing relevance to the future of cities, MSCs can learn from the mistakes of big city development and create more sustainable alternative visions. While large cities undergo constant processes of destruction and reconstruction of the built environment, MSCs can shape their desired growth gradually and incrementally because their transformations are less radical, and arguably, less wasteful. Similarly, a medium scale allows for a more cost-efficient implementation of resilient infrastructures because systems are less complex than in larger cities.

MSCs also have an immediate relationship with agriculture lands and rich environmental resources, which positions them well to redefine what growth should look like in a more sustainable world.

➤ **MSCs have the potential to become economic drivers in Ontario.**

Despite long-held assumptions about the exclusive benefits of large city-regions to achieve economic growth through agglomeration economies, a growing body of research points that secondary cities in OECD countries, and particularly in Western Europe, have started to increase their share of per capita contributions to national economies, sometimes outperforming first-rank cities. Research also shows that public investments in MSCs often display a higher social rate of return than larger cities because their infrastructures and services are less capital intensive and pose lower social overheads than their global city counterparts. Generating higher rates of social returns, presents a compelling argument for increasing federal and provincial public investment in these cities. Based on these international trends, their current connectivity to Toronto, and the argument of a more "optimal urban scale," Ontario's MSCs have room to raise their profile and leverage this unique position.⁴⁷

What actions can mid-sized cities take now to leverage their unique points of transition?

1. Develop policy frameworks to build and preserve local assets.

The cities studied are known for providing residents with a quality of life, supported by environmental amenities such as water and agricultural lands; housing affordability; universities; and a welcoming environment. They offer great lifestyles for those seeking high quality urban services but a slower pace of living. Policies oriented to build on MSC's quality of place should focus on preserving and enhancing their core assets. Some examples include the protection of environmental resources, historic districts, waterfronts, buildings or public spaces of emblematic importance to the history and the local identity.

2. Reduce governance fragmentation and improve planning coordination.

We heard that a common issue in MSCs is the lack of coordination in service delivery and public works projects. Administrative fragmentation and disconnections between core areas and the surrounding territories create inefficiencies and suboptimal use of resources. For example, in some cities, library services and community centres are not integrated systems, increasing administrative burden and the complexity of service navigation.

Fragmentation also produces inequalities for populations in the inner city who end up subsidizing expensive service delivery to suburban areas. Uncoordinated municipal development is

problematic because it fails to identify efficiencies that can be created when projects are evaluated in a connected manner. In response, integrated planning tools and integrated systems should be adopted to find operating efficiencies and reduce costs. Some interviewees mentioned prioritizing the levels of service delivery to find new efficiencies or data-based tools to help inform decision-making around investments.

3. Continue to emphasize balanced economies to increase economic resilience.

Our interviews point out that achieving balanced economies has helped MSCs to reduce overreliance in declining manufacturing sectors and cope with economic transitions and recessions. Cities that have achieved such balance have done so by positioning themselves as regional centres, offering a range of services and retail trade to local and neighbouring cities, increasing participation in the business service and advanced manufacturing sectors, and attracting new businesses and investors. As the drivers of regional economies, MSCs should continue to reassert their role by building ongoing relationships and market opportunities with their neighbouring city-regions in the U.S. and GTHA.

4. Invest in strategies to support regional economies.

Successful MSCs have been able to find new niches related to the strengths and networks available in the region. These cities have achieved economic specialization either by drawing or developing new higher-order functions. Specialization requires locally available resources, research and development opportunities, and the ability to reach economies of scale through markets and networks in other cities. Success depends

on the types of supporting economic activities taking place in the city, the quality of production factors, the extent and density of collaboration networks with other cities, and the state of urban infrastructure, including local and regional transportation, education and public services.⁴⁸ Regional economic planning is necessary to create the right enabling conditions for specialization. From a policy perspective, specialization can be encouraged in MSC-regions by improving services, such as education, and infrastructure; through policies aimed at attracting and retaining talent, and through strategic economic planning exercises with neighbouring municipalities sharing similar interests.

A key aspect of building regional economies in the MSC context is the need to protect and preserve agriculture lands and activities, and integrate them more fully into the urban and regional dynamics. Consolidating regional food systems can help build rural vibrancy in the city through farmers markets, and wider availability of fresh food in local neighbourhoods.

5. Leverage the role and influence of anchor institutions.

Anchor institutions, such as hospitals, colleges, universities, large government agencies, and cultural institutions are great sources of local pride for mid-size city residents. The mission of anchor organizations is often tied to the provision of services in a specific city region, and unlike private businesses, anchor institutions do not threaten to leave town for more desirable locations. Instead, they fulfill a strong regional role and cater primarily to the local clientele. Anchors also provide job security and well-remunerated employment. There are three main reasons why anchors are key players in local economies: first, they tend to be among

the largest employers and have an important impact in the earning capacity of residents. Second, anchors usually own substantial fixed assets, receive large endowments, and are major owners of real estate property. And third, anchors spend millions in procurement that if invested locally can contribute to generate new jobs.⁴⁹ Resourceful MSCs can take advantage of anchors by developing diverse partnerships and generating commitments to procurement. Anchors can benefit cities by attracting top talent and by committing to provide opportunities to local qualified employment pools. Similarly, anchors can be great partners in urban revitalization, social development initiatives, and fostering technological innovation.

6. Invest in human capital.

Over the past few decades, the mid-sized cities studied developed a large and seasoned labour force with extensive expertise in several economic sectors, particularly, to meet the needs of base economies and complex industrial processes. The knowledge and skills associated to these economic activities, particularly in skilled trades, are local strengths that mid-sized cities should continue to build upon. As MSCs transition to new economic sectors and more specialized products, however, retooling and retraining the local workforce becomes critical to meet the needs of new economic sectors and to guarantee the inclusion of local workers. Along with training opportunities and employment programs, policies are needed to encourage and support young people to pursue post-secondary education and find jobs locally after completion. Investments in human capital should particularly benefit populations facing the greatest barriers to employment, such as First Nations, racialized minorities, youth and new immigrants.

7. Build support for urban intensification, encourage investment in the community and promote sustainable mobility.

Achieving a more efficient and sustainable use of resources, urban land, and infrastructure in MSCs requires a higher demand for compact development and downtown uses that can effectively curb sprawl. Shifting preferences away from car-centred suburban lifestyles will require a change in mentalities. Public education campaigns, civic engagement exercises, provision of amenities for pedestrians and cyclists and participatory planning tools can be useful strategies to initiate dialogue with residents and encourage new preferences and behaviours.

On the development side, strong commitments to public and private investments in the clean-up and redevelopment of brown fields can support a healthier environment. MSCs have already experienced some success integrating planning tools and offering incentives to developers and private investors. Some of the tools include policies to support walkable environments, façade grants, tax exemptions and fee waivers for redevelopment. Non-monetary incentives such as streamlining the development application process and reducing red tape for conversion projects and other types of infill development can also have an important impact on brown field transformation.

8. Encourage meaningful and diverse civic participation and support partnerships and collaborations.

Civic participation is critical in periods of transition where cities aim to redefine their vision and plans. Participatory planning exercises, whether initiated by municipalities or led from the “bottom-up” through grassroots activism, can help to ensure that the needs, aspirations and goals of local residents,

business owners, organizations, and stakeholders have all been heard and are represented in the city’s vision and plans.

Bringing the community along creates and sustains momentum for change. Participation also stimulates accountability, which can be particularly useful for long-term city visioning or planning exercises that exceed the political terms of councillors and mayors.

Similarly, Most of the successful initiatives described in the report were driven by new partnerships and collaborations to address critical local issues or pool needed resources. These types of networks can catalyze innovative or higher-risk undertakings and build confidence in the capacity and potential of great placemaking in MSCs.

9. Take action on affordable housing.

Housing has a huge impact in the health and overall quality of life of residents. Although MSCs are typically characterized by a good provision of affordable rental units, in some cities this is no longer the case. Currently, the lack of access to adequate and affordable housing is creating deep social disparities. MSCs need to start the dialogue to determine exactly what the needs are and how these needs can be addressed. Questions should be asked about the responsiveness of housing stocks to youth, seniors, students, first nations, immigrants, households of various sizes and persons with mental health issues. Since downtown housing stocks are rapidly aging and falling into disrepair, cities can promote initiatives to retrofit and renew units in need of maintenance and investment. To lower entry barriers into the rental market, cities can also exert more control over landlords’ requirements and informal renting practices.

It is critical that MSCs assess the efficacy of their shelter systems and their subsidy programs to make sure these are meeting the needs of homeless and low-income residents.

10. Provide more flexibility for cities to raise revenues.

Interviewees suggested changes to the municipal act to better reflect the challenges faced by small cities. They also argued that a higher fiscal capacity would empower cities to better manage their particular circumstances. One participant suggested changing a portion of the tax rate for service fees, while others suggested exploring a differential rate form of property taxes based on the cost of services and externalities of dispersed development. Experimenting with new financial management tools, such as a four year municipal budgeting process, also presents a strategic opportunity for MSCs. This action will need further research and discussion among MSCs leaders to determine the specific advocacy approach.

11. Collaborate, learn, and share to foster innovation across mid-sized cities.

MSCs share barriers of scale and resources to solve many of their problems. By creating inter-city collaborations, however, MSC can benefit from sharing perspectives, resources, and best practices. Despite these similarities, participants expressed concern over constant competition for the same resources among neighbouring municipalities, which they see as divisive and undermining of the region's economic success.

To be effective at a regional and provincial scale, MSCs need to advocate as a collective of mid-sized cities to raise their profile. Interviews reiterated the need for a stronger and unified voice to express their interests to higher orders of government. In turn, the provincial and federal governments need to talk to MSCs more directly to better understand their challenges. An idea for consideration is the formation of a network of mid-sized cities to host regular and consistent dialogue across MSCs and across governments. Such instances of collaboration could also be useful to facilitate the sharing of successful experiences, innovations and best practices. Participants pointed to the need for collaboration in diverse areas such as sharing of IT services, human resources, procurement, research, adaptation strategies, and integrated transportation networks.

12. Take advantage of outside funding and unique strategies to finance climate change adaptation programs and other capital projects.

Federal, provincial and philanthropic grants, even if small, can make a huge difference to MSCs because their resources are very limited. The strategic use of outside money for a climate adaptation project, for example, is not only necessary to improve local resilience, but can also spur new development, help secure new partnerships, and create high social return rates. To make the most of external opportunities, cities need to be proactive and investigate new kinds of strategies to fund special initiatives and plan for them accordingly.

Mid-sized cities are indeed at a turning point. Despite many of the challenges they are facing, MSCs are well positioned to leverage their assets and strengths to enhance social, environmental and economic prosperity.

This discussion paper aims to bring some of the critical issues and opportunities to light in order to catalyze new conversations and strategic interventions, within and across Ontario's MSCs. From February to April 2016, we will be hosting meetings in each of the cities studied to identify which recommendations outlined in the discussion paper are in the greatest need of attention.

Following these initial meetings, Evergreen will support further conversation, research and action, to test new policies, models and initiatives that are identified as key areas of opportunity. We anticipate a wealth of learning and great ideas as we move forward.

Footnotes

1. For a detailed discussion see Bunting, T., Filion, P., Hoernig, H., Seasons, M., & Lederer, J. (2007). Density, Size, Dispersion: Towards Understanding the Structural Dynamics of Mid-Size Cities, *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*, 16(2), 27–52; Bell, D., and M. Jayne. (2009)
2. Small Cities? Towards a Research Agenda. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 33.3 (September): 83–99; Kline, S., and S.
3. First ranked-cities are large city regions with expanded urbanized areas that compete in the global economy, with a high level of economic specialization, service provision and connections to global markets.
4. Fragkias, M., Lobo, J., Strumsky, D., & Seto, K. C. (2013). Does Size Matter? Scaling of CO₂ Emissions and U.S. Urban Areas. *PLoS ONE*, 8(6), e64727. <http://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0064727>
5. See Statistics Canada, The Canadian Population in 2011: Population counts and growth. Catalogue no. 98-310-X2011001 Retrieved from: <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-310-x/98-310-2011001-eng.pdf> Accessed: October 18th, 2015
6. Stats Canada, Census 2011. Proportion (in percentage) of the population aged 65 and over, Canada CMs 2011. Retrieved from <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-311-x/2011001/fig/fig9-eng.cfm>
7. Author's elaboration with data from Statistics Canada (2012) "Population and dwelling counts for Canada and Census Subdivisions, municipalities (2011-2006)".
8. Note that Greater Sudbury's low density is a consequence of its vast land extension and significant undeveloped area within the city limits.
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20. John Fleming, Managing Director, Planning and City Planning for the City of London, (pers. comm. 09/16/15).
21. Tyler Sutton, Editor and Research Lead, Public Sector Digest (pers. comm., 08/25/15)
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