

THE NEXT LONDON

Designer is central to the new urbanism

Paul Berton
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There may be no better indication that London's built landscape is about to start changing for the better than the recent arrival of a man named Sean Galloway.

Galloway was hired last month as London's urban designer. He grew up in London's Westmount community, but he studied in Waterloo and in Sydney, Australia, and has worked in Oakville and beyond.



He has seen what cities around the world can become; he has seen welcoming, integrated, livable communities; and he sees lots of potential in London.

In his native Westmount, for example, he sees a successful community that could be much more successful. Are the streets pedestrian-friendly? Do gathering places have a sense of themselves, a sense of uniqueness? Is the neighbourhood connected to others? Is there a strong sense of community?

It's high time we all ask ourselves these questions -- and others -- about every corner of our city?

Urban designers (they are multiplying across the continent because of the recognized need to make cities more livable)

can be instrumental in effecting change by helping planners, developers, builders, financiers, retailers, politicians and ordinary folk come together, change their way of thinking and build efficient, friendly, responsible, sustainable cities for the future.

"The fundamental thing is to create great places within the city and connect them," says Galloway.

Masonville, Richmond and Oxford, Westmount -- all these could be bigger and better destinations by creating within them better public spaces, better pedestrian routes and heavier densities (among other things) -- and then making it easy for Londoners to travel between them.

It's all part of a larger initiative endorsed by city council called "placemaking" -- an initiative Galloway is helping to lead.

But it's a big job, and it requires a co-ordinated effort and a willingness to try new things by those at city hall, those in the private sector and those who uses these places -- in other words, all of us.

Other cities, both nearby and far away, are quickly learning that new urbanist concepts and placemaking ideas are the only way communities and cities will thrive in the future.

Galloway has the support of city council, which hired him; now he needs buy-in from the rest of us.

Paul Berton is Sun Media National Comment Editor.

E-MAIL: paul.berton@sunmedia.ca