

THE NEXT LONDON

A new way of thinking about community

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Sun Media

November 15, 2007

London is at the precipice of a great urban design revolution, and it can only bode well for our future.

There are signs all around us that things are changing. Seeds are being planted now that could reshape this city into a more livable, successful community, perhaps even make it an example for other cities and a showcase for the country.



The culture is changing, the people are speaking and the politicians are listening.

For evidence of this shifting culture, we need look no further than last week's address in council chambers by Larry Beasley, Vancouver's former co-director of planning. Beasley is credited for transforming Vancouver's downtown into a success experts from around the world come to examine.

Beasley talked of the new urbanism and the need to make cities more livable, and, if we are to accomplish that, the need to co-operate with developers so we all get the city we want, the city we deserve.

It's not about spending more money or more bureaucracy; it's about a new way of thinking, and Londoners clearly are ready for it. We know that because council expressly invited Beasley to speak to them, and they listened intently.

But his appearance was only one of many significant happenings.

London has recently hired an urban planner, Sean Galloway, who will work with developers to explore ways to create better communities.

Meanwhile, in the last year, London has raised the profile of the urban design awards and established an urban design steering committee, which will establish terms of reference for a peer design review panel.

We are ahead of the curve on this. Boston and Vancouver have such entities, but Toronto is only now experimenting with one.

Finally, London is in the midst of a "Placemaking" exercise, an attempt to raise our sense of community, increase social interaction, look for alternatives to the automobile, increase our quality of life, make our neighbourhoods and our city more sustainable . . .

In this series of editorials over the coming days and weeks, we'll explore these themes and others, and together come to a better understanding of the next London and what we want to see in it.

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