Making Wise Planning Decisions, Careful Management

This paper is the final in a series of eight discussion papers.

ReThink London is about talking to Londoners about our City, and asking questions about the City’s future. What do we want London to be in 2035? What do we want it to look like? How are we going to live in London in 2035? What will London have to offer that will make this the place where I want to live?

A way to answer some of these questions will be in London’s new Official Plan. This last Discussion Paper talks about Making Wise Planning Decisions and Careful Management. This is about how we will Plan to grow over time, and how we will make those decisions about how we grow.

Making the Plan work will rely on making good planning decisions, and carefully managing the outcomes of those decisions. In order to be consistent, and to make sure that we get to where we set out to go, we will need to meet the expectations that we have set out in the Plan. To do this, we will need to make our decisions based on a set of defined principles.

For Planners, this is pretty simple—in theory! We make decisions and recommendations about land use and planning based upon the policies of the City’s Official Plan, and those decisions must be in the public interest and common good. This might sound easy, but planning is often a balance between many interests; the neighbours, the developer and City policies, but the “test” is the broader public interest. The question is “what is the public interest”? The public interest includes the interests of all of Londoners, and sometimes this might not fully align with the people most involved, or even possibly affected by a planning decision.

To help us through this decision-making process so that we can make wise planning decisions, there are some over-arching planning principles that we use.
Planning Principles

A good place to start when talking about Planning Principles is the Provincial Policy Statement. This document sets out the provincial interest in land use planning matters, in other words, it lays out in policies what the Province expects municipalities to review when they consider planning applications. The Province also makes this consideration mandatory; Section 3 of the Planning Act requires that decisions affecting planning matters “shall be consistent with” policy statements that are issued under the Planning Act.

It’s important to note that in the guide to how we use the Provincial Policy Statement, the policies are not set out in a hierarchical manner, meaning that one policy is not more or less important than another. The guide says that we are to apply those policies that are applicable to the matter that we are considering, and that we should recognize the inter-relationships and connections between many of these policies.

- The protection of ecological systems, including natural areas, features and functions.
- The protection of the agricultural resources.
- The conservation and management of natural and mineral resources.
- The conservation of features of significant architectural, cultural, historical, archaeological or scientific interest.
The supply, efficient use, and conservation of energy and water.

The adequate provision and efficient use of communication, transportation, sewage and water services and waste management systems.

The minimization of waste.

The orderly development of safe and healthy communities.

The accessibility for persons with disabilities to all facilities and services.

The adequate provision and distribution of educational, health, social, cultural and recreational facilities.

The adequate provision of a full range of housing, including affordable housing.

The adequate provision of employment opportunities.

The promotion of efficient development and land use patterns that sustain the financial and economic well-being of the City over the long term.

The co-ordination of planning activities of public bodies.

The resolution of planning conflicts involving public and private interests.

The protection of public health and safety.

The appropriate location of growth and development.

The promotion of development that is designed to be sustainable, to support public transit and to be oriented to pedestrians.

All of these principles could be summarized into four statements:

1. Avoid land use conflicts
2. Protect the environment
3. Preserve what you can’t replace
4. Grow in fiscally prudent and sustainable ways

The Decision-making Process

So far, we have talked about what we need to consider to make wise planning decisions, but what about the decision-making process? How can we make sure that the process will help us make wise decisions? The Planning Act lays out a process for public participation in the planning application process, but this tells us what we need to do and when we need to do it, not necessarily how we do it.

In 2012, Municipal Council adopted the City of London Community Engagement Policy. This policy, developed in consultation with a resident-
led community engagement task force, defines Community Engagement as the process of meaningful two-way dialogue and participation in forming decisions that affect the community. The community engagement process is transparent, responsive, inclusive and empowering, and is based on realistic expectations, mutual respect and trust.

The following definitions are from the Engagement Policy:

**Mutual Respect and Inclusion:** All participants will listen and respect different opinions, be flexible in how we interact and be open to considering alternatives.

**Responsiveness:** All participants will listen and respond to concerns in a timely manner, ensuring that outcomes and next steps are communicated.

**Accessibility:** Information and communications are easy to find, access and understand.

**Transparency:** All processes will be open, understandable, transparent and inclusive. All participants will make the best effort to reach, involve and hear from all those who are directly and indirectly affected.

**Realistic Expectations:** At each level of engagement, all participants will understand their roles, responsibilities and authority and will understand that the interest of the community may be greater than the interest of individuals.
This policy describes how we should be engaging the public through Plan practices. One really important thing to note is that the “decision-maker” when it comes to planning matters is Municipal Council. Planners, the applicant, residents and neighbours, outside agencies like Provincial Ministries or the Conservation Authority, and interest groups all have a role in the decision-making process, but we all must remember that it is Municipal Council who is the decision-maker.

Engagement vs. NIMBY

What is NIMBY? Its an acronym standing for the words “Not In My Backyard”. It represents a concept whereby community members are very supportive of important city-building concepts, but they take a very opposing view of these same concepts when it relates to a property close to their own home. For example, we’ve spoken extensively about infill intensification in these discussion papers and we understand that we need to look inwards and upwards rather than just outwards for our future growth. This can’t happen if NIMBY kicks in every time a planning application comes forward that proposes an increase in a neighbourhood’s intensity or the infill of a vacant or underutilized site. This is not to say that infill and intensification is appropriate everywhere. However, we need to make wise decisions, that will be difficult decisions for some communities, when quality projects come forward in those locations where we’re aiming for intensification. We should not jump to the conclusion that a project isn’t a good one, just because the immediate neighbours don’t agree with it.

Accountability to OUR Plan

We’ve heard it over and over in our conversations with the community. They tell us that they like the concepts that are coming forward through ReThink, but they aren’t confident that Staff and Council will “walk the talk” as projects come forward. They point to past plans that they believe haven’t been well respected over the course of time.

They’re right. A plan is only as good as its implementation. A plan cannot sit on a shelf as a reflection of a community’s wants and needs, but not be implemented a piece at a time as development applications come forward, investment decisions are made, and municipal projects are initiated. The plan that is produced through ReThink London must lead the way in our decision-making. It needs to be clear so that all stakeholders can understand what the plan is asking for and act accordingly. And, if one or another stakeholder “slips” and does not honour the plan with the actions they take, it will be incumbent upon the others to “call them on it”.

Evaluation Principles

The last piece of the Wise Planning Decisions and Careful Management discussion is “how do we know that we are making wise planning decisions?”

The best way to do this will be to evaluate our decisions based on the process that we have described above.

To do this, we would ask questions like:

- Is our decision consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement?
- Is our decision consistent with our Planning Principles?
- Was our decision-making process open, fair, transparent and inclusive?
- Is our decision sustainable over time? Have we considered the social, environmental and fiscal impacts of our decision?

Where we’re going...

The following summarizes the direction that we’re headed, based on what we’ve heard from you, and the research we’ve completed to date.
More of this...

- Ensure the London Plan is current by on-going monitoring through 5-year updates; thinking long term by building on short-term opportunities; planning for a competitive city; and identifying and promoting opportunities for alternative implementation tools.

- Our decisions should reflect planning principles by avoiding land use conflicts; preserving and conserving what we can’t replace, such as Natural Heritage, Cultural Heritage, agricultural lands, aggregate lands, tree canopy and coverage; protecting the environment, including air quality, ground water, and water resources; adapting to climate change and avoid contributing to climate change; supporting prosperity and growing in fiscally prudent ways; and plan for beauty.

- Planning for changes by engaging citizens early in the process for their input on planning applications that may affect communities and neighbourhoods; and creating expectations through form, use and intensity.

Less of this...

- Achieve only the minimum standards to implement on-going monitoring and regular updates to the Official Plan.

- Less focus on applying planning principles equally to each situation.

- Planning focused review that does not require public input in the early stages of the process.
More of this...

Ensure efficient and collaborative processing of applications by collaborating with regional partners and the Province; implementing the London Plan in an integrated way that involves all City departments; providing for flexibility, but in an integrated manner; and linking land use and transportation planning.

Promote opportunities to foster public-private relationships by collaborating with local partners to examine how education, business and community linkages can be leveraged for economic opportunity; making more efficient use of public resources by targeting and meeting the needs of specific populations; fostering an exchange of ideas, talent, and innovation; and using public funds more effectively.

Less of this...

Continue to apply the required standards and specifications in all planning applications.

Less collaboration with partners on public-private opportunities.