

Building Up.

Making Canada's cities
magnets for talent
and engines
of development

December 2002



Executive Summary

Canada25 is a non-partisan organization dedicated to engaging the perspectives of young Canadians living around the world in Canada's public policy debates.

Over the course of 2002, we turned our attention to the problem faced by Canada's cities. Some 80% of Canadians live in them, and they are the places where innovation happens in this country. However, as the poor cousins of the constitution, they are forced to fight for fiscal table scraps while dealing with a massive increase in downloaded responsibilities. It's no surprise that citizens are calling for change.

We believe in this change. We believe that with some work, some money, and a lot of goodwill, Canada's cities can become magnets for the best global talent and engines of development and innovation.

OUR VISION FOR A GREAT CANADIAN CITY

A great city is one that buzzes with energy, one that is full of innovative people doing big things. The city is diverse – in class, income, and colour – and fights to maintain that diversity. It has rich, living culture – in all meanings of that word – not only because of government support, but also because the citizens recognize the importance of their relationships with one another.

This recognition also manifests itself in engagement and involvement in the community – social capital is strong, though not necessarily in traditional ways; while service club membership and bowling league enrolment may be declining, citizens are still active in civil society.

There are also elements of urban design that are common across great cities – people live where they work and play. Density is high. Public transit is a preferred choice. Young people can afford to live downtown. Classes and socio-economic

backgrounds are mixed in neighbourhoods, not least through the innovative provision of social housing. Environmental sustainability is a major factor in the design of built space and infrastructure. Public spaces are vibrant and attractive. People want to be there.

There are three elements to a great city:

Density. We reject urban sprawl. Smart cities will build up rather than out, reclaiming space to create safe, environmentally friendly neighbourhoods that minimize the cost of transport and infrastructure.

Diversity. We are unanimous in our advocacy of diverse neighbourhoods. We want to live in cities that are intersections of the world. Immigrant and ethnic presence in city neighbourhoods does not threaten our identity; rather, it encourages us to engage in new experiences and creates a healthy tension that challenges us, forces us to re-examine ourselves and helps foster innovation. We also care deeply and passionately about social inclusion and the alleviation of poverty – great cities have great disparities in wealth almost by definition, but we are committed to help those at the bottom of the ladder to become self-reliant and participate in the community.

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Discovery. This term has two meanings here: first, the discovery that comes from innovation, both in education and in industry. This kind of discovery fuels economic development and ensures a flow of young talent to the city. Second, great cities have an element of human discovery – that celebration of the human spirit that comes from the arts, culture, inspiring public spaces, and infrastructure that facilitates human interaction. In practical terms, the city nurtures and supports all forms of culture and encourages people to build their own civic engagement.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

There are eight areas in which action must be taken:

Fighting urban sprawl. Cities should use financial and regulatory tools to become more dense, resulting in shorter commute times, more vibrant neighbourhoods, and a higher quality of life.

Creating a new national transportation strategy. It is time for a massive investment in public transit in our major centres and a thoughtful examination of inter-city transport, in order to reduce congestion and air pollution as well as to better integrate those who cannot or choose not to drive into the community.

Building great city universities. Universities serve as an essential cog in the innovation engine and bring diversity and

vibrancy to city streets. They must take an active role in economic development, and strengthen both internationalization and their relationship with their communities. For this to happen, governments must end systemic underfunding.

Tuning up the city economic development engine. Cities are where innovation happens, and we must work hard to create the environment and infrastructure that helps powerful economic clusters grow.

Maximizing the benefits of immigration. Immigration is unambiguously good for our cities, and we must find ways to better spread the benefits of immigration across the country as well as to help immigrants reach their potential and contribute to the community quickly.

Fighting the effects of urban poverty. While cities will have inequalities in wealth, we must work together to help those less fortunate. This means a new focus on homelessness, ensuring the stock of affordable housing, new solutions to urban poverty, and a focus on maintaining an excellent public education system.

Fostering creativity and supporting the arts. The availability of culture – both high and popular – is a major determinant of the location decision. We must help our cities become centres of creativity through innovative funding and support to the arts.

Marketing what we have. Cities need to get their message out to the best young talent globally. One tool to do this involves the creation of a national Quality of Life Index to help communities measure what is and is not working for their citizens.

All of these action areas lie on a base of improving and enhancing civic engagement in our cities, through programs designed to build community involvement at the high school, post-secondary, and recent graduate levels.

Making our cities what they need to be will not be easy. It will require concerted effort from federal, provincial and municipal governments, as well as from business, universities and the not-for-profit sector. We believe, however, that great things are possible if we start building up our cities: building up more than out, building up civic engagement and building up the capacity of our communities to lead change.

Canada25 is pleased to lay the foundation with this report, and we will continue the job of building. We encourage you to join us.

For more information on *Canada25*,
please visit our website at
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