

CANADA25 AND THE OFFICIAL PLAN: Great Leaders build Great Cities



Submitted to the City of Toronto as our commitment to work together to help
keep Toronto a great place to live, work and play

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Introduction

Canada25 would like to thank the City of Toronto for the opportunity to participate in the review of the Official Plan. As the Official Plan aptly states, leaders and stewards are fundamental to the city's success. This is Canada25's commitment to work with the City of Toronto and other community organizations to make the vision laid out in the Official Plan a reality.

This past summer, Canada25 examined the role of Canadian cities – how they can be better economic development engines and more vibrant places to live. Canada25 accomplished this with a three-stage process. First, we conducted an attitude and opinion survey, aimed at Canadians between the ages of 20 and 35, to better understand their perspectives on Canada, its cities and these cities' potential. Second, we held a series of Regional Roundtables involving young Canadians living across Canada and the US, focused on the role of our cities in attracting talent and promoting development. Finally, we held a National Forum in Victoria, BC in late July, at which we summarized the Roundtable work, drew conclusions on our collective vision for Canada's cities and laid out actionable initiatives we plan to pursue to help achieve our vision.

Specifically, our Forum and Roundtables focused on addressing the following question: “How can Canadian cities attract talent and promote development?” To answer this, we took a holistic view of cities and the elements that make them great. Not only did we discuss the importance of urban design, but we also considered the areas of industry, culture, social infrastructure and external city linkages and how they work together to enhance the ‘liveability’ of a city. None of these elements, including urban design, exist in a vacuum. We believe that only when these elements are tackled together can a city be truly great. This view formed the basis for all recommendation and initiative development undertaken at our Regional Roundtables and National Forum.

In this submission, we would like to share an early draft of our vision for a great city, expand on some of the areas for action and key initiatives that were discussed by young Canadians across the country and discuss how they relate specifically to the City of Toronto. Canada25's final report on Canadian cities will be released in late October.

Our Vision for a Great City

Surprisingly, no matter where in the country our discussions took place, or on what topic we were focused, we continually identified the same factors that make a city great. A terrific city is one that buzzes with energy, one that is full of innovative people doing great things. This city is diverse – in class, income, and colour – and fights to maintain that diversity. It mixes classes and socio-economic backgrounds through innovative provision of social housing. This city has rich, living culture – in all meanings of that word – not only because cultural activities are supported by government, but also because the citizens recognize the importance that culture plays in their lives. In this city there are also certain common elements of urban design – people live where they work and play. Density is high. Public transit is a preferred choice. Young people can afford to live downtown. Environmental sustainability is a major factor in design of built space and infrastructure.

This “buzz factor” is elusive; there are as many different models for success as there are successful cities. Nonetheless, we believe that there are certain elements that all Canadian cities need to build upon:

- **Diversity.** While our membership belongs to a certain age group and tends to reflect more education than the average, we are unanimous in our advocacy of diverse neighbourhoods. We want to live in cities that are intersections of the world. Immigrant and ethnic neighbourhoods do not threaten our identity; rather, they encourage us to

engage in new experiences and create a healthy tension that challenges us, forces us to re-examine ourselves and helps foster innovation. This desire for diversity also means that we care about social inclusion and the alleviation of poverty – great cities have great disparities in wealth almost by definition, but we understand the vital need to help those at the bottom of the ladder.

- **Density.** We reject urban sprawl. Smart cities will build up rather than out, creating safe, environmentally friendly neighbourhoods that minimize the cost of transport.
- **Discovery.** There are two meanings here: first, that discovery that comes from innovation, both in education and in industry. Second, that 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.

Areas for Action

In all our consultations across the country, two major areas for action were seen as critical for achieving this vision for our cities nationwide. These areas are particularly applicable to Toronto.

1. We need to develop Toronto’s civic capacity. The City of Toronto belongs to the residents who live, work and play within it. Community leadership is not only the concern of elected officials; individual residents, local businesses, cultural organizations and the voluntary sector must all take on leadership roles in ensuring that Toronto remains a great city. Toronto needs a culture in which people are empowered to be leaders in their sphere, are proactive and are committed to building their communities.

2. We need to ensure that Toronto has a liveable downtown core. Quality of urban life is limited by sprawling, low-density urban centers. Transportation costs for citizens increase as the city expands. Infrastructure costs also grow as the city’s developed area expands. With heightened costs of infrastructure, civic governments have limited ability to provide social services and amenities for the population. A sprawling city consumes more resources and causes more environmental harm than a high-density city of the same population. Additionally, low-density development reduces the ‘buzz’ factor of a city. Young people seek out cities that are culturally diverse and interesting places to live. Only by keeping Toronto’s downtown core ‘liveable’, by promoting high-density development, can the city offer a diverse and interesting lifestyle to Canada’s young people.

Canada25’s Commitment to Moving Forward

Canada25 is committed to working with The City of Toronto, and private and voluntary sector leaders, to help achieve this vision and move forward on these areas for action. We are eager to work with other community organizations, in taking a leadership role in the implementation of the Official Plan, to develop creative solutions and to actively participate in the decision-making process in our communities.

Flowing from these areas for action there were a number of specific initiatives proposed by our members to help us achieve these goals. These initiatives focus on increasing the civic capacity of Toronto and the ‘liveability’ of the downtown core. Our national report, to be released in late October, will outline our complete set of recommendations and initiatives related to the question “How can Canadian cities attract talent and promote development?”

A. Create the Urban Living Competition: This competition, judged by industry and city professionals, will challenge young, visionary Canadians to create models for sustainable urban development. These models can range from low cost community improvements to the redesign

of an entire downtown city block. Projects will be promoted as inter-disciplinary; encouraging architects, urban planners, environmental engineers, artists, business people and students to come together to create workable solutions that account for the technical, social and economic issues that exist today in Canadian cities. As a partnership initiative, we propose that The City of Toronto consider commitment of financial support and implementation expertise to the winning submission. The intellectual investments young Canadians make through this competition will not only produce creative, implementable solutions to some of Toronto's urban challenges, but will also strengthen their commitment to the city and raise the profile of Toronto's innovative culture.

B. Promote strategies for reducing urban sprawl and promoting the downtown core:

The City of Toronto has a number of planning, regulatory and financial mechanisms at its disposal to reduce urban sprawl and promote the vibrancy of the downtown core that delegates believe we should consider to ensure a clean, liveable city for the future. We recommend that these measures be taken into account when secondary plans, area studies and urban design parameters are developed to support the Official Plan. Some examples include:

1. Utilizing a Community Energy Planning (CEP) approach for urban development. CEP uses energy as the basic resource on which to base planning and development decisions. Using energy consumption as a yardstick to measure projects and outcomes, CEP entails applying integrated planning principles that influence transportation planning, site and building technology, service infrastructure efficiencies, and energy supply and distribution at a regional and site level. Encouraging high-density development, utilizing CEP principles in urban planning, will result in an increase in the quality of life through shorter commute times, decreased energy bills and more efficiently planned neighbourhoods.
2. Utilizing financial mechanisms such as, full-cost pricing, deferred re-assessment periods and location-efficient mortgages to provide incentives for consumers and developers to act in a manner that is consistent with the vision of the City of Toronto.
3. Implementing regulatory measures, such as, density bonuses for developers and mixed-used and performance-based zoning, to allow municipal governments to shape the nature and quality of urban development

C. Continue our work on city policy recommendations and initiative development:

The national leadership of Canada25 will work with our local chapter leadership (in cities nationwide) to determine which actionable initiatives, suggested during our Roundtables and National Forum will be pursued. We will also continue to build on and communicate our ideas on improving Canada's cities both within our membership, and in larger public forums (such as the upcoming TD Forum on Canada's Standard of Living).

Working Together – Canada25 and The City of Toronto

Our vision for Toronto is very much aligned with that laid out in the Official Plan. We believe in ensuring the 'liveability' of Toronto's downtown core and encouraging the residents of our great city to take on leadership roles in the development of its future.

We are optimistic and enthusiastic about working with the City of Toronto to reach our collective goals. We, as Canada25, are dedicated to moving ahead on our recommendations, and continuing to build our organization so that young Canadians can remain involved in the development and implementation of important policy decisions, and in the shaping of their communities and their country. We welcome feedback, comments and questions at any time, and look forward to working with The City of Toronto and local community organizations on this important effort.

Footnote: What is Canada25?

Canada25 is a non-partisan organization with the vision of promoting a new definition of citizenship and the role of young Canadians in the development of Canada. We work to engage young Canadians living around the world in Canada's public policy debates. We hope to become an even stronger voice that encourages young people to share their concerns and propose solutions, and one that sparks new ideas and debate among Canada's leaders, business people, academics and citizens.

Canada25 was incorporated in 2001, and is supported by the generous donations of a number of organizations, including McKinsey & Company, the RBC Financial Group, the Government of Canada, CN, Aventis Pasteur, Aliant Inc., Petro-Canada, Enbridge, the Canada Lands Company, the Province of Manitoba and the City of Winnipeg and APEX Public Relations. For more information on Canada25, please visit our website at www.canada25.com, or contact our office at 416.313.3722 or at info@canada25.com.