Strategic Priority: City Building

Definition

Enhancing urban development, planning and placemaking processes to expedite the creation of places and spaces that contribute to complete communities for existing residents, future residents and tourists.

Research Shows...

City building is a broad term that can be used to define numerous investments and activities that bolster city development. However, as the definition suggests, the focus here is on infrastructure and enhancing urban planning and placemaking processes. City building is not just about new construction or attracting tourists; it is about building connected, resilient communities where people feel proud to live, work and participate.[1] Cities shape their image either nostalgically, by repurposing historical areas for commercial or leisure use, or technologically by modernizing existing structures. This approach allows a city's development to reflect both its history and its modern aspirations.[2] Cities also need to attend to the state of their natural and critical infrastructure, ensuring the resilience and continuity of systems on which citizens rely.[3] Maintenance of existing infrastructure is crucial, particularly because so much is failing and coming to the end of its useful life—due to a convergence of several related challenges, such as under-investment, the straining of existing assets to meet the needs of growing populations, and the inadequacy of older systems in the face of a changing climate.[4]

Key Facts and Considerations

» Grey County forecasts the need for 1,200 more affordable housing units in the region to meet the needs of current households waiting for supportive housing. Additionally, the 2024 median household income in Owen Sound is $63,000, which equates to a maximum affordable housing cost of $1,575 per month. Residents in Owen Sound would benefit from the development of multiple types of affordable housing, including low-income housing, seniors' housing and supportive housing for marginalized populations.

» Maintaining important cultural heritage sites has proven expensive for municipal governments in Canada, often leading to increases in taxes and the selling off of assets to cover the costs of urgent repairs.

1 Smith, H., & Soledad Garcia-Ferrari, M. (Eds.). (2012). *Waterfront regeneration: Experiences in city-building.* Routledge.
2 Muxi, Z. (2004). *La arquitectura de la ciudad global.* Gustavo Gili.
3 Resilient Cities. (2018, March 12). *Promote safe and resilient infrastructure.* Medium. https://medium.com/safer-and-stronger-cities-strategies-for-advocatin/promote-safe-and-resilient-infrastructure-9eaf9d0f5c95
4 Macklin, A. (2020, July 16). *Addressing the challenges of aging infrastructure.* ReNew Canada. https://www.renewcanada.net/feature/addressing-the-challenges-of-aging-infrastructure/

» Owen Sound's waterfront, at the mouths of the Pottawatomi and Sydenham Rivers, has great potential for boosting the economy. However, the waterfront faces challenges, such as limited amenities (e.g., waterfront restaurants), docking restrictions and boater access. There is also a need to make the waterfront accessible beyond peak seasons.

» Owen Sound currently has more than two dozen active planning applications, which include approved planning files, plans for subdivision and heritage designation plans. Owen Sound has made significant progress in development, and has been recognized as a growth city, with expanding infrastructure and more development on the horizon.

» Small and mid-sized cities, and even rural communities, are looking to public transit infrastructure as a response to many challenges, including climate change, equity of access to services, isolation, particularly for seniors, and out-migration of youth.

Precedents from Other Communities

The following precedents may be aligned with current initiatives in Owen Sound and may be reviewed to assess local approaches and/or serve as inspiration for possible future initiatives.

» With a population of about 20,000, the Town of Cobourg has successfully balanced urban renewal and affordable housing, particularly through the Tannery District redevelopment, which provides both homes and businesses, creating a vibrant community and sustainable city growth.

» The Municipality of Port Hope is a heritage-designated municipality that restores old heritage sites and promotes a mix of housing options, including affordable units within commercial spaces. The city blends history with modern needs, as outlined in its strategic plan.

» The City of Brockville has transformed its waterfront from an industrial zone into a lively area with condominiums, restaurants and recreational spaces, including a historic railway tunnel that attracts tourists and a former coal storage yard that is now an accessible community park.

» The Town of Collingwood recently received a silver designation from the Share the Road Cycling Coalition for its efforts to encourage active transportation among residents and visitors. The town received a bronze designation in 2017, but committed to improving active transportation infrastructure by making safe cycling in the town a priority, launching an active transportation plan, connecting trail corridors and cycle paths, developing in-school cycling education, and creating an engagement strategy that included people with a diversity of backgrounds, ages and abilities.