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Royal Roads University

Ottawa: A Capital City of the Future or a Capital Backwater?

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Moderated by Ann Dale

Participants

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Dialogue

Ann Dale

Welcome to a discussion that hopefully will influence the direction of our national capital into becoming a world leader in sustainability planning and one of the most beautiful capital cities in the world. Walkability, climate change adaptation and mitigation, transportation strategies and transition strategies to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels are all part of the plan. We have a wonderful diversity of expertise on this panel, many residents of Ottawa, and others who know a lot about Ottawa and bring their city expertise to bear.

For those of you who are wondering why I am so interested, my family are old time Ottawa residents--my grandfather was one of the first lock-masters at Hog's Back, in fact, when we first moved here when I was five, we lived in the beautiful old white frame house to the right of the Locks that has since been torn down, along with my grandmother's beautiful lilac bushes. I live in Ottawa and work at Royal Roads in Victoria, so each has a piece of my heart.

Before we begin our discussion today, could each of the panellists introduce themselves and what brings you to the table today to discuss Ottawa: A Capital City of the Future or a Capital Backwater?

Heather Hamilton

Hi, I'm Heather Hamilton, the Executive Coordinator of the Canadian Biodiversity Institute, an environmental NGO formed in 1995 and based in Ottawa. Over the years, CBI has been a Canadian leader in Schoolgrounds Transformation, and introduced the biodiversity Bio-Blitz concept to Canada through our Great Canadian Bio-Blitz programme.

For the last 2 years, CBI has been working on a project called Redesigning Ottawa: Transitioning to a Resilient Future. As part of that initiative we are developing a citizen's action plan to deal with peak oil and climate change with special attention to food, energy and water security issues. We have held three public workshops, and participated in many other events about these issues, such as the city's Choosing Our Future initiative, which has a similar focus, but different goals. This e-Dialogue is another venue for generating public input into the Redesigning Ottawa process and citizen's action plan.

CBI is also a founding member of the new official Transition (Town) Ottawa initiative and the Redesigning Ottawa project is currently being merged with Transition Ottawa.

I would like to acknowledge the following funding sources which have supported Redesigning Ottawa: Ontario Trillium Foundation, Community Foundation of Ottawa, City of Ottawa Environment Fund, Ken and Debbie Rubin Public Advocacy Fund.

Many thanks to Ann Dale and Chris Ling for organizing and facilitating this e-Dialogue.

Chris Wilson

Hi. I'm Chris Wilson. I'm an Ottawa area management consultant that specializes in issues of governance, collaboration & partnership. I teach part time at the Telfer management school at the University of Ottawa and I'm a founding member of Transition Ottawa.

If we want to talk history, my family arrived from the village of Hull outside of Boston in 1802 to found Ottawa. They were the Wrights. For 150 years they farmed and logged the area watching and building it into the nation's capital and a centre of industry and learning.

Chris Ling

Hi I am Chris Ling

I am a post doctoral scholar at Royal Roads University working with Ann on sustainable

community development research. My particular interest is in planning and landscapes - particularly cultural landscape and the way ecology, culture and human endeavour interact in our cities.

I have no real knowledge of Ottawa having only briefly visited on one occasion, but I hope to bring perhaps the insight of the outsider to the discussion.

Rebecca Aird

Hello from Rebecca Aird.

I've been involved professionally and through volunteer work in environment and sustainability issues for over 25 years. (Yikes -- Inside every middle aged person is a teenager wondering what happened!)

Professionally I've mostly been an environmental consultant working mostly with governments and mostly federal. But also with aboriginal communities, internationally, and with other levels of government. I'm a generalist really, so have worked on a lot of issues from sustainable housing to life cycle management for business to government regulations and programs.

My main volunteer gig at for the last few years has been with an organization I helped found called Sustainable Living Ottawa East (www.sustainablelivingottawaeast.ca). We serve as a sort of incubator for practical (concrete) projects in the community I live in. Like a farmers market, a children's garden, a healthy shoreline, and energy efficiency. We have achieved a fair bit in the almost three years since the organization started; but of course very small steps in relation to where communities need to be for the challenges ahead.

Diane Beckett

I am Diane Beckett. I work on sustainability issues at the local and international levels. I have lived in a number rural and urban municipalities in several Canadian provinces as well as internationally

I moved to suburban Ottawa when I was 18 months old - the former Nepean. I spent lots of time on friends and relatives farms around Ottawa. I now live in downtown Ottawa.

My ancestors came to Ottawa from Ireland in the early 1800's and first settled Beckett's Creek in the east end of Ottawa and then some of the children moved and settled Beckett's Landing near Kemptville.

Jim Hamilton

Hi I am Jim Hamilton. I am an Ottawa based consultant specializing in the governance of government programs, and the financing of energy investments. My experiences involve several years at the Treasury Board of Canada analyzing energy and other federal/provincial investments.

Ann Dale

We are just waiting now for Dominica Babicki from Vancouver and Chris Stoney from Carleton University. We have some real Ottawa natives in our group, I wonder about the importance of cultural heritage in any sustainability planning, let's wait a few more minutes for our two other colleagues.

Rebecca Aird

Wow Chris W. I didn't know you had such impressive early capitalist credentials in your family history. There is something very "grounding" about roots that go back like that. Something not many of us have anymore. Which raises the issue for me of "biophilia" (love of the nature of place); something I hope we can touch on.

Ann Dale

Rebecca, you have touched on a topic near and dear to our hearts, the importance of place and I attach an article we wrote on that topic. Let's move to our first question, shall we?

1. What are the basic elements you think should be in Ottawa's sustainability plan to ensure our capital will be able to respond to the challenges posed by peak oil and climate change?

I encourage you to cite other plans and references of what others are doing in this area?

File attachment [PlaceFINAL.pdf](#) (1.43 MB)

Heather Hamilton

Three top things that I think are necessary for a sustainability plan are:

1) The ability of the public and the political structure to really vision with conviction what the future needs to be in relation to the enormous peak oil and climate change challenges and have a willingness to do what it takes to get there. I sometimes despair that that's possible in Ottawa in the foreseeable future. I read Vancouver's 'A bright Green Future' plan and see a part saying, "Can you imagine the City of Vancouver without fossil fuels? We can." And then it goes on for that section to say how they envision this. They have a strong and positive outlook and are facing this head-on with the modest goal of becoming the greenest city on Earth!

In Ottawa, the city's Choosing Our Future initiative is attempting to address these issues, but I am not sure how successful it will be. I don't see political buy-in on it, and the public is still not involved enough or attracted to the project. However, there are some exciting things happening at the grassroots level with vibrant and very positive community-level activity (Transition Towns and others) and these will probably lead the way.

2) A comprehensive transportation plan is a must for so many reasons.

3) A food security plan, which if done properly, will require that the city move beyond its traditional and legal mandates. The city will have to work with the provincial and federal levels to make this happen.

Diane Beckett

We need to ensure it considers equity, community, resilience, diversity (bio, cultural etc), is based on ecological principals, and considers the impact on future generations.

Chris Ling

Peak Oil is going to likely mean the need for greater local self sufficiency. This means enabling people to access services without cars and reducing the length that essential goods need to travel to arrive at those delivery points.

Climate Change adaptation likely will mean dealing with more extreme weather - most of which will mean more green space less concrete - which actually deals with quite a few problems. It increases infiltration of water into the soil, decreases temperature locally and improve health.

A bright green future (attached) as referenced by Heather is a good template as it is ambitious but is backed up with practical steps to get to the goals set - not just random targets.

Trouble with all things Vancouver though is the mismatch between the City and the Metro area

Last edited by Chris Ling on Fri Nov 06, 2009 4:21 pm; edited 1 time in total

File attachment [Bright Green Future.pdf](#) (708.42 KB)

Jim Hamilton

What are the basic elements. The most important is process. Who defines the objectives, who approves them, who monitors them and who adjusts them over time. The actual goals are, more or less, straight forward science and engineering. There are financial issues, but they are, more than likely, resolvable.

I am making these points because, if I were a Martian observing the City of Ottawa and its debate concerning light rail and Lansdowne, I would have to define the governance structure within the city as dysfunctional. And think about it. We are talking a \$4B to \$5B investment for light rail; the investment for climate change would be magnitudes above that.

Rebecca Aird

That's a really big question of course. Many cities have already begun to answer it. Vancouver's Bright Green Future report has a lot of the elements. I also like Guelph's Community Energy Plan. One of the things that I have begun to feel is really key is the idea of more disaggregated municipal infrastructure. Lots has been written about inherently greater resiliency in decentralized systems. They can also be more environmentally sustainable. Especially in rare cases within urban environments where major new developments are taking place (like Lansdowne in Ottawa) I think we need to look at establishing infrastructure that can begin by servicing that site, but be expanded out at the same time that we are excavating for maintenance or repair of existing infrastructure. For example, I think there is value in considering options for district heating infrastructure at Lansdowne that could be extended offsite as existing infrastructure upgrades are made. The Lonsdale Energy Corp in North Vancouver involves a system of mini-plants that service multi-unit residential, commercial and civic

buildings. Another aspect of such nodal development could include on-site composters that could be sized to allow for collection from the surrounding community. UofO has just significantly ramped up its composting capacity.

Ann Dale

Would part of this be integrated long-term planning? In our research, the communities that appear to more along the path of sustainable development have 100-year plans in place?

Chris Ling

It is more than just having a 100 year plan - it's about having a goal that is multi-generational, and having a series of initial steps planned followed by regular review to allow for adaptation within the planning, economic and electoral cycles. That review process being monitored by the community at large. The political lives of officials should be based on progress.

Chris Wilson

The thing about plans is that they sit on the shelf and collaborative plans are even more subject to this kind of sedentary lifestyle. What's important about strategic planning, and again it's all the more important with collaborative initiatives, is not the plan but the implementation. The implementation is based on a variety of commitments and a view among collaborators that they will not be taken advantage of. Trust becomes imperative and the vision of possibility that holds people together.

Rebecca Aird

The issues Jim raises around ownership and process are of course very critical and I agree that at the moment we are hamstrung with the Council we have. That means that informed and committed citizens within the City have to help lay the groundwork (networking like this is really important) so that when we get more progressive political representatives we are ready to move on things. That's a bit naive perhaps, but well-placed naivety is has it value.

Ann Dale

Okay, I have heard about the criticality of due process, how vitally important a long-term vision is, transportation strategies, including modal transportation choices, with an emphasis on walkability, adaptation and mitigation strategies, food security, what about waste, sustainable infrastructure, what else, folks?

Chris Ling

Although a city can only really deal with waste up to a point - Even Nova Scotia with all their great waste management at the provincial scale are struggling to do much more - as they see it without Federal packaging legislation or equivalent they are stuck. That saying a city can of course increase some waste diversion - especially organics etc.

Sustainable infrastructure will only come from a commitment to densification in planning, and planning around ecological systems, transit systems, walking and the bike rather than from the road network.

Chris Wilson

Some of the things I've been thinking about relate to visioning a possibility base on \$4 per litre gas, using Chris Steiners' approach in his book \$20/gallon

More neighbourhood focused development

- *Intensified development around neighbourhoods & communities with public and rail transport access
- *Obvious emphasis on mixed development: commercial development around residential or residential development around commercial
- *Bylaws restricting new construction to 'zero energy consumption' & water recycling
- *Green roof / roof garden incentives in construction bylaws
- *Moratorium on all new big box stores
- *Set asides for community gardens on land from local parks
- *Use of NCC Greenbelt property for garden crop farming, orchards, grains and other consumable crops as needed

More public transportation

- *Target of 60% of motorized person-trips in the morning peak hour by 2030 (double current goal). Jim is right 4-5 Billion isn't going to come close to the requirement for public transit.
- *Most of the new transit plan is mainly building roads - more than 1,000 km in first 6 yrs. Total rail construction - 14 km in 10 yrs, but 40 km by 2031. This should become more heavily weighted in favour of rail. Moratorium on roads and rail construction

should be at least 500 kms by 2030.

- *Lt rail should be developed to centres beyond the Greenbelt to Arnprior, Carleton Place, North Grenville, North Dundas, Casselman & Rockland with lateral connections between these that include Kanata, Barhaven, Nepean Manotick, Orleans

Changing private transportation

- *Moratorium on new road and highway construction
- *Tax on all privately owned vehicles (10%) with significantly more tax on non electric vehicles (40%)
- *Increase the use of tolls on major thoroughfares
- *Make space on roads and highways for light rail
- *Electric car recharging network
- *More teleworking with federal government
- *Significant expansion and prominence of bike paths

More localized neighbourhood services

- *Decentralized municipal and provincial services on bus and light rail routes
- *Decentralized university and college locations
- *Elimination of school busing except for rural students
- *Elimination of green bin service & encouragement of home composting (they're just instituting this & very shortly the collection costs will far outweigh the value)
- *Fewer garbage pick up days (maybe once per month)
- *Decentralized hospital system with niche specialties in each area
- *More neighbourhood foot / bike patrols by police

The financial bite of \$4 per litre will be incentive enough. Last year when gas spiked in price there was a 7% increase in bus ridership. The city cannot sustain that level now and so must radically invest to prepare for the future.

Ann Dale

Jim, referring to the lessons we learned from our sustainable infrastructure project, what would you advise the City of Ottawa to do in their plan?

Jim Hamilton

What I would advise them is to, once they have defined their goals, seek a bill in the Ontario Legislature to define the limits to which they can make changes to the plan and the degree to which subsequent councils must adhere to them. Second, I would advise them to append to the plan changes in municipals by-laws sufficient to control activities (by developers, homeowners, business) within the municipality to accord with the plan. Third, I would secure cooperation with the provincial and federal governments, that

when they are undertaking their investments, they are in accord with the plan. That would be a start. Other aspects would involve changing the municipal structure to include a Board of Control so that counsellors are not put in the position of protecting their constituents against those of other counsellors.

If you are not this methodical at the beginning, then what will be achieved will only be piecemeal, and not goal directed.

Diane Beckett

The current decision-making process divides the budget process into artificial categories that constrains the analysis and contributes to old style decisions - like building lots of roads and not having any money for culture or bike paths.

Ann Dale

Political accountability is of course key, and in our research we have recommended that any integrated community sustainability plan should be tied into the electoral cycle, that is, before every election officials be held accountable for how much of the plan has been accomplished. And folks, the rules of the game have to change, the biggest barriers are municipal bylaws, zoning regulations, so we need policy alignment within a municipality and policy congruence, between levels of government.

Chris Wilson

I'm sorry but policy alignment within a municipality as fragmented as Ottawa and policy congruence, between levels of government is just not going to happen - at least not until there is already congruence among a citizenry that is personally willing to invest in this.

The starting point in my mind is that at a political level there are so many barriers to coherent behaviour targeting any kind of issue, that you should count the politicians out until all the hard work is done and the solutions are unequivocal. Doing otherwise wastes investments of time and energy and sets one up for disappointment.

Chris Ling

Our research really has highlighted the need for policy congruence - too often

sustainability measures fail because the by-laws do not support the planning goals often in fundamental ways. How do you densify your city for example and make it more walkable/bikable - if you have by-laws that state minimum parking requirements. Parking is an enormous waste of space - and the more of it that exists the cheaper it is to park and the more people are encouraged to drive. What a city should be doing is not matching new development with new parking, but building new development on old parking.

Diane Beckett

But before politicians can be held accountable for implementing a sustainability plan, the citizens and civil society have understand the importance of one so that they can ask the right questions.

Jim Hamilton

Not a hundred per cent certain what you are referring to. I agree there must be debate, but once that happens how do you implement? I am talking implementation, which I think is the real big bear here.

Diane Beckett

In Ottawa, the citizens elected a mayor whose vision for the city was based solely on no tax increases. That is not a vision. We won't develop or implement a sustainable plan until the politicians change and that won't happen until the citizens understand the issues aren't addressed by focusing only on narrow economic criteria using old paradigms.

Chris Wilson

This is true, Dianne but don't look to politicians to lead this type of engagement. They will come along when the citizens that will elect them / re-elect them have changed the direction of their conversation.

Jim Hamilton

Very begrudgingly, I agree with this. The Politicians will not lead; too many of them are lifers who spoke whatever their donors ask. It is not their fault; that is how our municipal structure is designed.

Ann Dale

The plan can only be developed by citizens in concert with city staff, using due process and wide community engagement processes, or it will sit on a shelf and gather dust, it is up to all of us to implement it, and commitment does not happen through consultation with done deals. The issues are just too complex, they are beyond any one sector, any one discipline, any one level of government to solve.

Diane Beckett

I have been involved in civil society processes to influence who is elected (identify candidates in key ridings/wards) and work to elect them or build broad coalitions to ensure a holistic vision is put forward (letters to the editor, questions at debates, questionnaires to candidates which are made public). We have to have buy-in at the top of the city structure and we don't know.

Jim Hamilton

If you look at the Okotoks example, they put their goals into the Town charter and then adjusted all of their by-laws.

Rebecca Aird

While I don't necessarily agree with Jim that we have all the technological elements we need, I do believe that the broad-brush needs and elements -- related to energy, food, water, waste, transportation, greenspaces, access to services, etc. -- have been well articulated and personally I don't feel that the most important thing is to reinvent the ideas at this level. Yes we need a foundation of serious commitment by political and civic leaders and then we need a fleshed out long-term vision that builds on that commitment. But what we really need are immediate actions that reflect that vision and direction. I am worn down, and I think many others are, by all the blah-blah planning stuff that is seldom sufficiently anchored in concrete actions. Most of us would agree that if Ottawa 2020 was the plan that was really driving development in the City, we'd be a lot farther ahead.

And so yes, also agree with the stuff that is being said around accountability. We need councillors who don't depend on developers to fund their election.

Heather Hamilton

Diane makes a good point about the budget. A huge problem with making sustainable decisions at the city (and probably every level of government) is that budgets are compartmentalized. The right hand is not aware of what the left is doing or how they are connected. The new report from the University of Ottawa, 'Making it Happen: The Transition to a Sustainable Society', makes this point well for the federal level, but it would apply to the municipal as well.

Ann Dale

Chris W. great concrete steps, in reply to Rebecca, what about how to get there from here, a plan to be real has to include transition strategies.

What about food security, what about the wonderful year-round markets, St. Lawrence in Toronto, Atwater and Jean-Talon in Montreal and Granville Island in Vancouver? What about the connection to local products and food security?

Rebecca Aird

What will it take to galvanize the public and politicians? I think it can be a small number of high profile on-the-ground projects that really demonstrate what it is we are talking about. I understand that in BC municipalities can designate an area (a piece of land) as a "comprehensive development zone" and that this provides the opportunity to rethink the zoning and other by-laws that apply. If we could get the City to do that for Lansdowne, or (I'm being parochial here), the 12 ha Oblate property in Old Ottawa East we could look at creating the kind of "sustainability node" I mentioned earlier on.

Yes, Okotoks is a great example. What is also interesting is that they began with an ecological carrying capacity concept -- the watershed.

Heather Hamilton

I heard a good programme on CBC radio a few weeks ago about 'Slow Money'. This basically is the idea of investing local dollars, from both private individuals and institutions, in local food-based enterprises to support the food system. Farmers have problems getting bank loans for improvements and expansion (for example, a dairy

farmer wants to build a cheese factory to use his/her own milk and the milk from other near-by farms). This way the money would become available to support that farmer. The investment return is lower and over a longer term than the stock market, but there is other important value for the community. I can see the Community Foundation perhaps becoming involved with a project like this. They lost lots of money in the recent economic downturn and maybe looking to literally invest their funds in the community would be a good alternative. It would go far to helping with out local food security issues.

Rebecca Aird

Heather, I think that idea of the community investing in the community is so key. We wait around too much to have things delivered to us. The Ontario government's Green energy Act creates opportunities to do things like create community energy cooperatives. But there is a bit of a chicken-egg situation here. People have to self-identify with a community before they are willing to really "invest" in it. Creating sense of identity is something we are trying to do with the projects we've established in Old Ottawa East. The farmers market, the community garden and the Children's garden, for example, are civic spaces that create opportunities for informal engagement and network-building. I think slowly, we're beginning to see the fruits of that.

Ann Dale

Jim has brought up the example of Okotoks, and Whistler, both of whom have put limits on their development and have 100-year plans in place. It seems to me that integrated plans have to identify the characteristics of place they wish to sustain, limits and scale is also another important consideration and of course, diversity. What do you think are the top three priorities (short, medium and long-term) for such a plan and how do we get from here to there?

Forgive me, as an educator, I thought you might be interested in the attached document, talking about how cities learn?

Last edited by Ann Dale on Fri Nov 06, 2009 4:46 pm; edited 1 time in total

File attachment [City to City Learning.pdf](#) (1.76 MB)

Jim Hamilton

I have a question for you Ann. Are we talking of limitation to the use of fossil fuels and climate change or of sustainability. The former has limits and to that extent may be achievable; the latter is rather open ended and not really susceptible to simpler solutions or even cooperative agreement.

Ann Dale

Limits to sustainability. It seems to me that people are initially attracted to a place because of its special characteristics, and then as more and more people move there, the very characteristics that first attracted people are lost, without strong integrated planning in place. As my grandfather would say, you can't have your cake and eat it too.

Chris Ling

I am convinced there is an optimum size to a community for sustainability, too small and it is dependent on nearby larger communities, too big and the sense of place becomes lost amidst the noise of people trying to survive in the urban jungle. Not sure what that size is however.

However, the bigger a place is the more those special characteristics are at risk. Vancouver identified this and strove to protect the mountainscape and ocean access. Calgary for example clearly hasn't - and is now one of the largest cities per capita in the world with all that entails - loss of farm land, car dependence and unsustainable infrastructure.

Ann Dale

I agree, Chris, each city should carefully protect its unique amenities and precious spaces. In Ottawa I see three great attractors or physical amenities--the Experimental Farm, the Canal, and a highly controversial issue now, Lansdowne Park. Imagine if we also had a year-round vibrant local farmer's market, how many young professionals, novel entrepreneurs, artists, we would attract.

Chris Ling

Short term - start to phase out car access to the city (by congestion charging/increasing parking charge)

Medium term - start to plan around walking and transit - start infilling and relaxing zoning restrictions to encourage mixed use development. Expand transit networks and focus development on the nodes.

Protect farm land within the city and work to improve the access to retail for those locally farmed products.

Start to retrofit ecological functionality back into the city through stream day lighting, creating new wild spaces in existing green spaces, encourage green roofs.

Long term - start to retreat from some of the suburbs perhaps - as life in car focused suburbs becomes more untenable buy back the land and add it to the stock of green space and agricultural space - as people move closer to the centre.

Diane Beckett

Ann asked what the three short medium and long term priorities should be:

Short: re-jigging the spending envelopes so that more coherent decisions can be made which can lead to better by-laws, zoning, plans etc.

Medium: elect the right councillors and mayor so that we will have more coherent decisions

Long: rebuild the infrastructure to support the sustainable vision.

Chris Wilson

Here's my list of priorities:

1. Begin extensive, non-political dialogue and ongoing community level conversations with citizens around the future they want to create
2. Raise public awareness of innovative pilots and innovators in the region
3. Make it easy for any resident or business to get the help suppliers they need to undertake the construction / retrofit they want to do
 - - tax bad behaviour. Don't subsidize good behaviour as with the provincial legislation to subsidize electric vehicles when they arrive from GM.

Jim Hamilton

I am finding the three top priorities a difficult question so I am going to build on Mr. Wilson's comments. What is concerning me is that a fast read of the Stern report suggests we do not have much time to do something. that came out again in the TD Bank Report that come out last week. So I think the number one priority is somehow (?????) securing engagement of the populace. After that it is all regulation like it is inmost parts of Europe.

Heather Hamilton

I think that instead of moving out of the suburbs we should complete them as their own small towns with industry, business, retail, etc. so that we don't end up with ghost towns, but make good use of the resources already expended in that community and the people already living there. They should become more self-sufficient and not reliant on the city nearby to sustain them. The ultimate recycling perhaps.

Chris Ling

The suggestion comes from Richard Registers Ecocities (<http://www.ecocitybuilders.org/>) - he saw both taking effect - existing suburbs densifying to new centres as you suggest - but that still leaves bits in the middle which could be abandoned and allowed to create ecological habitat between the human settlement to increase connectivity and ecological functionality.

Heather Hamilton

I agree. A greenbelt around every townsite would be superb and allow corridors for wildlife and biodiversity generally to move around and be ecologically healthy.

Chris Wilson

But don't forget we still need to find a way to locally feed ourselves. Much of that middle earth is productive farmland or was.

Heather Hamilton

Accepted, Chris, but a lot of class A farmland in the Ottawa area is now being planted in corn and soy for ethanol and meat production. If we changed that over to more crops that actually directly feed people we would not have to drain wetlands and cut forests for farmland. We could have a good natural system as well as farmland that actually feeds people.

Chris Ling

But then well managed farmland can be hugely bio-diverse and ecologically functional. Also a patchwork of small organic farms is more agriculturally productive and sustainable than industrial farm - and more resilient in the event the worst impacts of peak oil and climate change are manifest.

Chris Wilson

But to make the burbs sustainable you'll need to build the public transit and encourage intensification around those residential homes. The least valuable homes in the next decade are likely to be the 3-5000 sq ft homes on the fringe of the city. But along bus /rail routes or around suburban commercial development homes will likely retain their value.

Moratoriums on road building and big box stores will help slow the suburban tide until gas prices become just too crazy. But getting council onside for that is just hard to imagine.

Ann Dale

Chris Wilson has brought this up before, it seems to me the issue of scale keeps raising its head. I don't think we are asking ourselves the right questions--what is the scale of development we want, how many big box stores, versus more diverse small retailers? What is more sustainable? Rebecca just raised the issue scale through centralization versus decentralization, it is not a question of either/or to me, but rather a reconciliation, Jim, as you argue, there are economics involved, which is an argument for integrated decision-making?

Jim Hamilton

There are economics here, but look at Europe. They simply regulated and let the economics follow. The question is what sort of life do you want. If you want pure economics, move to Dallas. I am not being flippant here; normally I would point to economic arguments, but climate change is not about economics, not really. It is about survival. Put it a different way; if you read Stern (or any other multitude of reports) the closest thing to climate change in our work is WWII. The damage and potential deaths are more or less equivalent. Just think about malaria. It stays south only because of the ambient temperatures.

Chris Wilson

Jim my research suggests that climate change will effect us in a more positive way than most areas. We'll likely experience a climate more like Virginia (just checked its 15-20 degrees there this week). That means longer growing season, more rain less snow, & dry summers. The biggest impact on Ottawa will come from the dependencies we have with other regions from whom we get our food.

Rebecca Aird

I have to agree about the tendency of plans to sit on shelves. Chris, your suggestions re short, medium, long are great. And Diane's complement them on the governance side. I just don't know, though, how you get the political stuff sorted out. I understand there are some recent initiatives to try to build more solidarity between the urban, peri-urban and rural areas; and that is critical because right now the electorates within those parts of the City are at loggerheads. And we stand to lose vibrancy in the urban core with the kind of demands for roads etc that come from outside the core. That will be bad for everyone. A small example . . . lots of money was spend to build pedestrian bridges over the Queensway that don't appear to be very heavily used. Corkstown bridge over the canal was much cheaper and user rates have far exceeded what was projected. But another pedestrian bridge over the canal between Pretoria and Bank Steet -- a 2.5 km stretch that does not have any bridge crossing right now, is seen as frivolous. It would make a huge difference to the pedestrian-ability and cyclability of this part of the City.

Dominica Babicki

Hello all - sorry to come in late on the conversation - I am Dominica Babicki currently the Energy Manager but previously a planner at the District of North Vancouver . One of my roles at the District was to help put together a framework for a Sustainability Plan that would also act as the Official Community Plan for our municipality. We then put together a large funding request from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities . We were successful in receiving \$350,000 from FCM to support our Sustainability Plan (which is also our OCP) and are currently in the visioning process of this plan. While we haven't finished the process yet and therefore don't have too many lessons about the process to report on yet - the main issue I see is that if we are truly dedicated to making our community sustainable - the only way it is going to happen is through leadership.

In the District, our community is mostly dominated by single family home and is very car dependent - the only way change will really happen is if change comes from gusty leadership either from our Council or from the Province!

Ann Dale

Dominica, welcome. Rebecca has raised a crucial point, the need for civic space, where people can meet and talk, that is what builds a community, makes a city vital, a network of diverse meeting places and spaces, imagine some innovative zoning in place, like Vancouver, where new buildings now must incorporate some piece of art outside it. I have even seen strangers stopping at a particular building and beginning to talk about the art, it is about the ecological and social capital of a place--this is what attracts what Florida refers to as the creative class.

Chris Ling

The question is whether civic space can be created or does it need to evolve. A lot of spaces created for civic meeting have failed - the key is creating places people want to be - then they will engage - this goes back to walkable neighbourhoods with greenspace and cultural attractors as Ann suggests.

Rebecca Aird

Dominica. great to have you in on this. We need a planner!! How did Lonsdale Energy Corp come about? (I think I'm right that this is in North Van??)

Dominica Babicki

To answer the question on how the Lonsdale Energy Corp was created and to support a comment earlier - it was completely a politically led decision - it was not an idea that came from the public but one where the Council implemented it without much public consultation.

Rebecca Aird

Thank you very much Dominica. Hate to sound like a demagogue here, but I really don't think most people want to be involved in decision making. However, they can rally around good leadership and a vision that has real legs underneath it.

Diane Beckett

Dominica, where did the leadership come for this process?

Dominica Babicki

I have to chuckle because thanks to the continued confusion with the City of North Vancouver having District Energy and not the District of North Van - our mayor (and me quite often now because of my role as Energy manager) is now more motivated than ever to "do something" - so in fact this in itself may be one of the reason for leadership!

With regards to leadership around developing a sustainability plan as our OCP - I would give significant credit to FCM - because their funding was only for Sustainability Plans and you have to have a sustainability plan before you can get any of their other funding (like that for feasibility plans and capital funds) - it pushed me and the other planners to develop a sustainable OCP.

Diane Beckett

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities has an incredible sustainable communities conference every two years. Attending it is such an incredible learning experience as so much is happening across this country. I think it would be wonderful if all Ottawa city councillors attended and had their own personal "guide" to ensure that they went to

sessions and were introduced to people that meet their needs.

At one of the conferences, I ran across a computer simulation system that lets people experience in real time the consequences of their decisions (e.g high taxes is what happens if you want good air quality, big lots, and a short commute. I would like to bring that system to Ottawa - and have community and neighbourhood level sessions to let people explore the options.

Chris Wilson

Dianne, this was probably done by a Vancouver based outfit MetroQuest. It's a good tool designed specifically for community and economic development.

Diane Beckett

Does anyone have experience with Metroquest? It seems to be a powerful tool for communities to explore issues.

To reinforce what Rebecca said - the community level doesn't have the ability to access this sort of resource... and to dig the necessary resources out of the government to fund a community level initiative which would use Metroquest is such a long and uncertain process.

Rebecca Aird

Just a bit out of left field here, but one thing that strikes me as absurd in the extreme is that sizeable salaries are available to write reports and plans that sit on shelves (as a former consultant and a current federal civil servant I know this first hand); but when it comes to salaries for people to do real work in communities, not there. Frankly I consider the volunteer work I do at the community level more important for "transitioning" to sustainability than my paid work. Sorry. had to get that off my chest. Not sure how it can be dealt with. But even a few simple steps like City funding for community newspapers might help.

Heather H said awhile ago something along the lines that we should always be asking how the infrastructural things we do for sustainability can also build community. She use the example of composting, which with the centralized approach we now have does not do anything for community. I'm not suggesting everyone should carry their compost to a pile on the local sports field, but it does come back to the idea of more decentralized infrastructure. Maybe with respect to this example, residents of the community could be hired to run a local composting facility and do the collection.

Dominica Babicki

Dominica, as a long time resident of Vancouver, would you give us your opinions on what has made it billed as the one of the most beautiful cities in the world. What are the planning lessons, if any, Chris Ling, perhaps you want to contribute as well?

Chris Ling

It is beautiful because it is lucky and situated in a beautiful location - the city fabric itself I would say is no better or worse than most other places. There is no stunning architecture unless you like glass tower blocks - however it has done its best to keep the views and the ocean open to all, which is a good thing. Our research suggests that the natural beauty also attracts/stimulates a desire to be sustainable - hence the political drive to make Vancouver a green city.

However again - the whole thing only really works if you consider just the City and not the Metro area Metro Vancouver has sprawl, eats up farmland and has lots of big box stores and car dependency. If the City controlled the whole shebang - would they still be as resistant to freeways and big box stores as they are currently?

I confess I have never understood Vancouver's billing. Stockholm - that's a beautiful city.

Dominica Babicki

I think there are a number of important decisions that were made back in the 1970's such as not allowing the freeway go through the middle of the city (like Seattle) and keeping public access to the foreshore. Also the city centre historically had a large residential areas and therefore it was literally possible to build on this situation. There is a great book written by two people that had great influence it helping make these important decisions for Vancouver - it is called City Making in Paradise: Nine Decisions That Saved Greater Vancouver's Liveability by Ken Cameron and Mike Harcourt.

Rebecca Aird

I agree it is not either/or. On a planet pushing (or now exceeding) 7 billion people it is neither realistic nor would most people find it desirable to bring everything down to "community-sized" (whatever that is) scale. I don't have any comprehensive sense of what kinds of infrastructure, what kinds of services, what kinds of "provisioning", needs to happen at what geographic scale. But I'm sure other people have done some of this thinking. Certainly we all seem to be agreeing that in terms of basic provisioning, we need to produce a lot more of our food at the regional level. We have incredible

opportunities to do that even within City boundaries (given how much greenspace and rural land there is within those boundaries).

Jim Hamilton

Do be careful here; one can easily argue that the real cause of climate change is the general lack of birth control.

Chris Ling

I believe the latest estimates are for population to peak at 9 billion. But more significantly (for Canada at least) is the inevitability of millions of persons displaced by sea level rise and desertification. These people will have to move somewhere - why not one of the wealthiest least populated countries in the world...

Chris Wilson

The problem of scale tends to get addressed as the price of gas keeps climbing. At a certain point people will stop using their cars in favour of public transit, then buy their next home closer to their work in a community they can walk around to get the things they need.

One of the real issues we've not discussed concerns the impacts that are likely to happen with rural residents -- remember Ottawa is mostly (geographically) rural. It's one of the biggest if not biggest rural cities in NA. For rural residents sky high gas prices will impact them disproportionately because they don't have as many alternative choices except to raise the price of food to buy gas.

Chris Ling

But I think, Rebecca, that we can still plan at a community scale. That can always be in the context of a wider urban system - but without human scaled thinking we won't plan to be human scaled. At the moment we plan to be car scaled - and this takes up more land, leaves greater distance between services and greater problems if you try and retrofit transit systems. One example I have heard for improving big box stores for example is to build residential layers on top of them (capped with a green roof of course).

Chris Wilson

Chris I was just reading about big box stores and how Walmart has recently closed some 600 worldwide. They are being referred to now as ghost boxes. As the price of gas climbs the idea of spending 20-50 dollars to go to Walmart over walking to the corner grocery will be seen as prohibitive. Their time is passed. We should just put a moratorium on building new ones. They are just an incentive to use cars and the municipality subsidizes that with free parking compared to downtown.

Chris Ling

Agreed - but is it not better to re-purpose old ones than to let them rot. By introducing new uses - perhaps indoor markets or such like (and using up some of those vast car parks) the space left could still be useful and functional? The creation of new community - a diversification of the space.

Jim Hamilton

Chris; I think rotting may be the way to go. When these big boxes are used someone has to drive to them. Someone else has to operate sewer and water pipes to them etc. etc. These things are not costless, and, in many respects, it is the lack of density that leads to much of our climate change problems.

Ann Dale

Using a very Ottawa specific current example, there is raging debate over how one of our unique spaces, Lansdowne Park, should be redeveloped. There are two cultural heritage buildings on this site, the Horticulture Building and the Aberdeen Pavillon. Let's apply our collective intellectual capital, what would make Lansdowne a transition project from "old development think" to "new and future development thinking"? Can it be equivalent to the redevelopment of Granville Island in Vancouver?

Chris Ling

The loss of cultural heritage will I suspect result in a loss of sense of place. It is likely that the presence of such buildings is one of the reasons such places are places to linger and places people are drawn to - remove such heritage and it becomes a much more utilitarian place that only draws people to events - and leaves such places dead and hostile the rest of the time.

Heather Hamilton

A place that is dead and hostile most of the time is what Lansdowne is now, notwithstanding the presence of the wonderful Aberdeen Pavilion which is underutilized and under appreciated! Lansdowne Now epitomizes what you've just said, Chris.

Chris Wilson

Thanks for raising the Lansdowne issue Ann. My sense of things is that as proposed the project depends heavily on people coming there from outside the Glebe. At \$4 per litre how attractive is the new project going to be? How successful can it be for investors if it has to depend on visitors within a 10-15 km radius? I think the developers are envisioning a destination location that brings people from far and wide. In 10 years if implemented as is Lansdowne Live will go the way of the great huge airport north of Montreal. See I've even forgotten its name now.

Heather Hamilton

Given the public feedback in the various processes that have taken place, it would appear that the thinking of the citizens of Ottawa is ahead of the planners for the Lansdowne redesign project, and many of the politicians. Analysis of recent surveys, which came out yesterday, has shown that the three areas that the public most agrees on to be important in the redesign of Lansdowne are: good amount of greenspace, the farmer's market, and underground parking (which would suggest limited access to cars on the site, i.e. keep them out of sight!). I find this encouraging.

One thing that is somewhat discouraging is that the city does not appear to have given much thought to a transportation plan for the surrounding area of Lansdowne given all the new traffic, both for special events with tens of thousands of people to move about fairly quickly, but also the day-to-day movements of visitors to the site, that will be generated by the finished project. I think this is crucial to determine how to best manage and mitigate what will be increased GHG emissions from more cars, and more cars idling in traffic jams, etc.

Diane Beckett

There are some basic approaches to the Lansdowne redevelopment proposal that are quite disturbing... making it a destination shopping and movie mecca is just one. One that really bothers me is the lack of respect for or understanding of heritage. For example, the Aberdeen Pavillon was beautifully restored and the proponents of the

proposed redevelopment wants to renovate it to have modern facilities within the shell of the old building - which heritage architects state will rot the building. The proposed development is based on a lack of knowledge of basic issues - around scale, heritage, community. By sole sourcing the project, the possibility of developing a vision and identifying criteria that needs to be included is lost. It is an incredible urban jewel beside at World heritage site and we are letting a bunch of sports promoters decide what to do with it.

Rebecca Aird

I don't know nearly enough about permaculture (am about to learn more) but I'm pretty sure that the set of principles that underlie it is what we should be applying at Lansdowne. The idea of "stacking" functions. In a sense, Lansdowne could represent in miniature the mix of land uses, municipal infrastructure and activities that most of us agree should be replicated at smaller scales.

However, we are not going to turn the whole thing around completely, and real-politik dictates that we try to find a compromise with some of the uses that seem to have a fair bit of political and public support -- e.g., the stadium. The report on Lansdowne by George Dark is a good basis for re-envisioning how this and other aspects (some retail) can be accommodated in a much more creative, appealing and community enhancing way. It includes an approach to the built elements that would encourage desirable uses (e.g., locally owned businesses vs chains) and maintain a friendly and cohesive scale and relationships.

I'm also on the "sustainability node" hobby horse. As per previous comments, my view is that sustainability and future resiliency can be better served by moving towards more decentralized infrastructure services. For example, I think there is value in considering options for district heating infrastructure that could be extended offsite as existing infrastructure upgrades are made -- like the Lonsdale Energy Corp in North Vancouver which uses a system of mini-plants that service multi-unit residential, commercial and civic buildings. And on-site composters that could be sized to allow for collection from the surrounding community.

Dominica Babicki

While I agree that Lonsdale Energy Corp is a great example of the direction - the LEC fundamentally has a few problems - notably it uses natural gas - so technically it has a much greater carbon footprint than electric baseboards (which is the type of heating it is replacing in the high rises it serves). While recently the new library at the City installed the largest array of solar hot water panel in Canada I believe that are connected to the District Energy system - they supply less than 1 % of the energy currently . So District

Energy in my mind is only really useful once you have figured out a sustainable energy source for it - and I think that South East False Creek (the Olympic Village) and Dockside Green in Victoria are better at this.

Rebecca Aird

Good point Dominica, about the energy source for Lonsdale. But the energy we would be backing out in Ottawa would not be baseboards powered by hydro-electric. Most homes in the area are heated by natural gas or oil, and if we had highly efficient large boilers, and/or opportunities for co-gen, then maybe it could result in net efficiency gains. But of course it would be important to look at more sustainable energy feedstocks. I'm not at all a techie, but the point I think is that we should be looking at these kinds of opportunities as a matter of course. Maybe it's not right for this site, but we don't even have it on the radar screen.

Chris Ling

Dockside Green <http://docksidegreen.com/sustainability/overview/overview.html> is an excellent example - passive heating and cooling, heat recovery from on-site sewage treatment etc etc.

What is also interesting is that it was only made possible through the use of a Triple Bottom Line tendering system pioneered by a planner at the City (who has since move to Port Coquitlam) - this meant that the developers could offset the price they were willing to pay for the land (owned by the City) against the social and environmental benefits the development would bring.

Chris Wilson

There is a similar project in Toronto that uses water from lake Ontario to cool office building sin the summer and uses the energy from waste incineration to heat the buildings in winter. A group of my students wrote up a case on it last year.

Diane Beckett

I find it interesting that an Ottawa company is doing Dockside Green - one of the most innovative green communities in the world. They could be involved in Lansdowne - but I doubt that they have been invited and given the current sole-source approach wouldn't have a chance to contribute.

Jim Hamilton

I would like to add to this; the Lansdowne Proposal is about the most unsustainable thing I can think of. First, it is posed as a destination with no reasonable rapid transit attached. Second, if anyone looks at the financials, it needs high volume retail to survive. In our world you only get high volume retail from big boxes or something along the lines of the Rideau Centre. Third, all the benefits go to the developers and the risks to the City, especially the financial risks.

Ann Dale

Lansdowne Park is and of itself could be a bleeding-edge example of sustainable development, Rebecca, in everything it does. The Dark Report does hold some promise, at least he is recommending working with the heritage, and has some innovation, an urban stadium. Chris Ling has done a lot of work on multi-functionality, this should be one of the underlying principles of Lansdowne, perhaps Chris wants to explain this more, and there should be no parking anywhere, unless underground, and limited, radical, yes, but it needs a transportation strategy in and of itself, but it needs to be connected to an Ottawa with a model transportation system in place, which isn't happening yet?

I particularly like Dark's proposal that the Ottawa Farmer's Market use the Aberdeen Pavilion year-round, creating a unique fourth amenity attractor for this city. As well, to preserve the cultural heritage, and sustain surrounding retailscape which is vibrant in the Glebe, scale should be a critical factor and retail diversity should be key.

Jim Hamilton

Yes, but given the lack of urban transit, would it not be a better idea to convert half of the area into high density housing and the other half to a "nice" urban park. I mean why do we need that big stadium.

Chris Ling

Multi-functionality is essentially about recognizing that all parts of the landscape have ecological, economic, social, cultural, and aesthetic value. By ignoring any of these in a planning or development decision will reduce the total value of a landscape. What usually happens of course is that economic functions take precedents (or on rare occasions ecological ones, i.e. in conservation area). But ignoring the others devalues and reduces resilience and adaptability.

It sounds to me like Lansdowne Park could be hugely multifunctional - but the current proposals are ignoring anything other than the economic potential.

Rebecca Aird

I personally would love a moratorium on big box stores. But this ties into much bigger issues of consumer culture writ large. The optimism in me hopes that the signs of consumption fatigue I see around me are reflective of a larger trend (at least in highly developed countries like ours. China, India are a long way from such fatigue, and of course most of the third world actually needs more material wealth). The Citizen ran an article a few weeks back about how farmers at Ottawa Farmers Market (Lansdowne) were gouging consumers and many of the comments on that article were pretty disheartening. People almost see it as a sign of good capitalist citizenry to seek out the cheapest price and are still a long way from understanding the costs that often lie behind the cheap price.

But I digress. Sorry.

The possible relationship here though, relates to local businesses. We really need a much more active campaign to promote the many contributions to economic and environmental vitality that come along with supporting locally-owned businesses. Many cities in the States are onto this.

Ann Dale

Isn't that the essence of sustainable community development, perhaps paying a higher price to sustain employment in your local community, keep investment more local, because if you don't know a place, you won't love it, and sustain it. I don't know why we Canadians think it is all right to pay more for a tee-shirt than to buy local, organic food for a week. We need more of a connection between health and local food, and resilient communities. How to avoid exogenous economic global shocks, have some local businesses, they stay in place.

Rebecca Aird

Yes Ann, we're in agreement on that.

One thing I'm not keen on with the Bright Green plan (though it is generally brilliant) – and it is incredibly pervasive thinking and largely unchallenged thinking -- is the felt need to have an “expanding a globally competitive economy”. Maybe they have to say these kinds of things to make the whole idea of a strong green vision and agenda palatable to those who think it spells economic disaster. Behind this thinking are two linked goals that are in themselves unsustainable: the idea of an ever growing economy, and the idea of an increasingly positive balance of trade – i.e. exporting more value than we import. Of course, not all countries can do this. For some to have a positive trade balance, others must have a negative. And the ones that have a negative balance are often the ones most in need. .

Ultimately, I believe that to grow “biophilia” we need to provision a lot of our food and building supplies locally. The relationship this gives a community to its land base is the functional ground for sense of place. My utopia is cities and communities strongly rooted in this way, from which will also arise more unique cultural and artistic expression. Ultimately we'd get back to (and retain where it hasn't already been culturally homogenized) a much richer tapestry of economies and cultures, interconnected by the amazing communications technologies that continue to develop. Like this one.

Chris Wilson

I was in Glasgow recently. The downtown area has undergone extensive renovation and restoration. Wherever possible buildings were restored. If that wasn't possible the facade was retained and a new building created in behind. Same can be done here with the political will. That will however will not be there until the kinds of things we're talking about become common currency. It is the conversation among residents of a community that are fundamentally responsible for the nature of of the physical, social and cultural attributes. Through those conversations we say what is important and forge the basis of collective decision making. As my colleagues at TO have heard me say, we need to change the tenor of the conversation in Ottawa. Right now that conversation is dominated by a public bureaucracy mindset. Risk averse, believing some one else is in charge, suspicious of partnerships, and worshipping at the alter of romantic leadership.

We need conversations that re-affirm our ownership and our ability to choose our own future. With that, Ottawa will remain dysfunctional backwater because that's how most people think.

Heather Hamilton

One of the most disappointing things to me about the whole Lansdowne kerfuffle is that it was originally a wonderful opportunity for community-building through discussion about what could be done on the site and exploring the sustainable options for both the local Glebe community, as well as the bigger Ottawa community. Now it is so polarized and even poisoned that that opportunity is lost. It is very unfortunate.

To expand a bit on this.... It seems that most decisions that are made at the city level in Ottawa (and probably most other places) never take into account aspects of community-building as being as important as economics, efficiency, etc. Rebecca mentioned a while ago my example of the green bin compost programme. If the city had kept this localized at the neighbourhood or slightly larger level instead of making it centralized and top-down it could have pulled together many aspects of community including providing soil to community gardens, involving immigrants, elders and kids in the process, reducing crime by giving teenagers something to do and by having people on the street taking their compost to the depot on the corner, among many other things. The community aspects are never considered. If we added the loss of those to the cost of a project like the green bins it would be uneconomical!

Ann Dale

Thank you for your time and commitment, I shall remember romantic backwater. Any last comments before we close for the night, and I agree with Jim, that we can't go out for a beer. However, most of us are in Ottawa, and I will try and convene an evening where we can share a beer and wine sometime in the next month. Thank you, in particular, Chris Wilson, Rebecca Aird and Heather Hamilton, who are new to our platform, think of how much GHG we save meeting virtually.

We will ensure that our conversation is published on our website and given to Ottawa city councillors. Take care, good weekend, one and all.