

Better planning, more prosperity

by Philip McLeod (www.themcleodreport.ca)

TODAY'S REPORT #1,023: *In a new book published this week, former London politician Gord Hume argues that “vibrant urban design and sustainable development are critical for prosperous, healthy and successful communities.”*

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With varying inflections and degrees of commitment, the three top candidates for mayor – as well as many of the lesser-knowns – have endorsed the London Plan as the blueprint for this city's future.

One hopes they are not doing so just to secure votes in the Oct. 27 civic election. One hopes they all understand and believe London needs to make a very real course correction if it is to achieve success over the next two decades. One hopes they all realize this will require intelligent and courageous leadership on their part to prepare this city for significant change.

The London Plan, in case you've forgotten over the summer, is our first official plan update in a generation. It advocates a city that is more condensed, more tuned toward public transit, greener and leaner and keener in all aspects of the urban experience.

Making the transition from where we are now to where we need to be in 2035 won't be easy, but there is a payoff as a new book published this week makes clear.

Places and Spaces, by Londoner Gord Hume, provides the rationale for London's new plan – although it wasn't planned that way. Mr. Hume, who served on city council for a decade, has been slowly evolving a new way of municipal governance since he retired from politics in 2010. This is his fifth book and should be required reading for anyone seeking political office.

In this book he examines the connection between how cities use their space and their ultimate success. “The connection is now quite clear between planning and prosperity,” he writes. “It is also very clear that planning and public health are closely aligned. Vibrant urban design and sustainable development are critical for prosperous, healthy and successful communities.”



Gord Hume: Author of Places and Spaces

Which is precisely the point the city's planning leaders are trying to make in the new London Plan.

Mr. Hume, though, takes this argument much farther, linking better urban design to economic strength.

“The powerful links between the physical design, structure and components of a city and its economic strength and job opportunities are frequently misunderstood,” he writes. “When civic leaders fail to connect on this fundamental truth for local government, their community is in jeopardy. There is a new economy out there, driven by ideas and innovation, creative thinking and technology.”

He quotes Eddie Friel, an internationally renowned urban planner, who says the “nature of work in the 21st century knowledge economy is moving the goalposts for municipalities.

“In the global economy,” Mr. Friel says, “places have to be able to define themselves in terms of what they have that somebody else wants to purchase. That’s a very strange situation for cities to be in because it means we’re now in a marketplace.”

This reality, Mr. Hume writes, means making a community more competitive must drive the political agenda. But making a community more competitive doesn’t mean four years of below inflation tax increases.

“The legacy for municipal councils is increasingly dependent on the economic prosperity, cultural opportunities, social stability and environmental sustainability,” Mr. Hume writes. “These four pillars of smart municipal growth are critical. Great civic planning and urban design is a thread that runs through all of them.

“If you don’t have an attractive, sustainable, warm and friendly city that offers that great quality of life, the most fantastic slogan in the world won’t deliver results. You need to have the product before you can market it. That means a city needs to commit unswervingly to building a more livable community and encouraging local innovation.”

Approving the London Plan as is would be a good start towards this kind of city – which is a good opening question to put to mayoral candidates when they knock on your door in the weeks to come.

Places and Spaces is published in Canada by Municipal World, \$29.95. You can order a copy through [their website](#) or by phone toll free 1-888-368-6125.

FULL DISCLOSURE: Mr. Hume and I were co-founders of The Londoner community newspaper in 2002, although neither of us are now associated with the publication.