

Ex-London councillor Gord Hume's new book calls for civic leaders to be bold



By Megan Stacey, The London Free Press
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Gord Hume, a former London city councillor (Free Press file photo)

Cities need to be bold and zero in on the big issues – the rest is just noise.

That's the formula a former London city councillor offers for vibrant, thriving cities in his latest book.

Gord Hume, who served four terms on council, argues that cities like London need to tackle pressing issues like climate change, the role of artificial intelligence and the tax system to remain competitive.

"They need to be audacious in a beige government world," Hume said of civic leaders.

"London hasn't been very audacious for the last decade."

Getting Cities Right is the former longtime councillor's seventh book.

And getting it right, according to Hume, depends on strong leaders who are willing to embrace the newest technology – think self-driving cars and robots. Those technologies will revolutionize the way cities operate within the next decade, he said.

"People really need to be looking ahead, and that's why our political leaders need to be looking ahead," Hume added.

But Hume argues the way cities are funded throws up a serious roadblock, even for the best leaders.

“The property tax system is broken. It can’t be fixed. It is completely inefficient for municipal needs in the future,” Hume argued. It’s not impossible to change the system. Saskatchewan now funnels a small portion of provincial sales tax revenue to its municipalities. But those are the high-level ideas. Crafting a strong vision for the city can start with smaller, achievable solutions, Hume said.

He offered a simple example from Melbourne, Australia, named the world’s most livable city for the last seven years: More trees. Bright foliage, especially along downtown streets, can pay social, environmental – even some economic – dividends, Hume argued.

“Surely the Forest City can have a few tree-lined streets in downtown London. That’s the kind of specifics that I think we need to hear,” he said of municipal election candidates.

Big ideas, bold vision – that’s the way to get cities right.

“At least some of the answers are going to be a fascinating mixture of really big government initiatives and really small personal actions,” Hume writes in his book, available at www.municipalworld.com.

“This is where local governments can really shine. They can be innovative and creative. They can be nimble.”

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