

# Peel Region at planning crossroads

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PEEL — It's long been said cities make up the engine of a nation's economy. In the future, the most successful cities will be sustainable, creative and designed for people, said author Gord Hume.

“A big part of your job as community leaders is to build a dynamic, sustainable region that can compete in this global hunt for talent and investment,” said Hume, former London city councillor and keynote speaker at a workshop held in Mississauga Monday.

Hosted at the Hotel Novotel, 3670 Hurontario St., Monday's event was the second in a series of growth management workshops hosted by the Region.

Peel is in the process of drafting an official road map for future growth and brought stakeholders, urban growth experts and regional politicians together to discuss some of the challenges.

With Peel's population expected to grow by 46 per cent to 1.97 million new residents by 2041, how this growth is managed will have widespread implications for the economy, environmental sustainability, health and overall quality of life.

“Borders don't mean much to younger generations anymore,” Hume said. “When bright, young students graduate they are now making a distinct decision, which is what city do they want to go and live and work and raise their family. My question is how do you get them to choose Peel Region?”

“We're in a competitive global economy, and Canadian cities need to think carefully about sustainability, the creative design of both suburbs and the core, how to pay for future growth, and how to animate their streets and neighborhoods. These are crucial decisions for prosperous and livable cities, and the local community has to be engaged.”

Hume is a national columnist and speaker on improving local government and redesigning sustainable communities. His work also focuses on cultural planning and creative cities, and the inter-relationship of governments.

Jim Dunn, chair in applied public health at the Canadian Institute of Health Research and the Public Health Agency of Canada, joined Hume as a guest speaker.

Addressing some 100 community stakeholders and policy makers Monday, Hume talked about how making those tough planning decisions now will pay off in the future.

In North America, the car is king. And that, consequently, has caused people to “fall out of love with cities.” The Exodus out of cities into suburbs has made community gathering places disappear and streetscapes diminish.

But many cities around the world are making great strides in adopting new trends. There are cities being built on a green, high-tech, sustainable foundation with modern technology.

Although there are many jurisdictions in Canada and the U.S. that have moved to create vibrant communities, by way of intensification and improved transit, the level and scope of change required for cities to flourish isn't happening fast enough.

In Canada, the so-called municipal infrastructure gap — the number of aging infrastructure and ability to pay for it — is holding cities behind. Canadian municipal government must consider bold steps in order to overcome these funding challenges, said Hume. In the face of shrinking revenues and increased public debt, Hume suggested more private sector involvement is perhaps the way to go.

“It takes great political leadership, a lot of courage and a lot of vision to lead communities and change cities,” Hume said.

He also argued municipal governments need to flex some muscle

“Local communities still have considerable control over land use,” Hume said. “You (municipal government) have the power to decide on your community and how it will grow and develop. And if you are smart, I hope you will retain community ownership of those decisions.”

Following Hume's speech, participants were split up into groups for a workshop session.

The session focused on three key planning priorities.

Groups were asked to tackle issues like the link between design of communities and overall health of residents.

They also addressed how Peel can manage and invest in essential infrastructure and ensure that planning for Peel's growth is done in an environmentally and financially sustainable manner.

The Ontario Planning Act requires municipalities to update their Official Plan every five years to ensure policies stay current, meet Provincial plans and policy statements, and achieve the Region's goals and objectives.

Jim Tovey, Ward 1 Mississauga councillors and Growth Management Committee chair, said to ensure a sustainable future in Peel, "we have to think differently as to how we'll continue to plan for growth and where these investments will be most impactful."

Today, the Region is largely suburban and rural. By 2041, Peel's population will grow to almost two million people.

"We have arrived at a crossroads in our history," Tovey said.