Municipal Urban Designers' Roundtable

Re-urbanization and Designing for Intensification
by Steven Bell and Ryan Mounsey

Jointly hosted by the Municipalities of Cambridge, Kitchener, Waterloo and Waterloo Region

Review of Proceedings : Meeting of May 6, 2010
Kitchener, Ontario

Twenty Two municipalities including representatives from the Province attended the Municipal Urban Designers' Roundtable in Kitchener, Ontario, on May 6, 2010.

Launched by the City of Mississauga nearly three years ago, the Municipal Urban Designer's Roundtable (MUDR) continues to enjoy significant momentum, popularity and participation by municipal staff across the province - particularly where urban design has become increasingly important in the delivery of municipal planning services and paramount in the quality of the built-environment. Roundtable meetings bring urban designers, landscape architects and planners in the public sector together for a one day interactive session to raise awareness and promote the importance, understanding and awareness of urban design opportunities and challenges facing jurisdictions across the province. The sessions also provide a meaningful forum where information and ideas can be shared and debated based on individual and collective experiences and moreover, the broad range of projects in which municipal staff are engaged.

On May 6, 2010, the Roundtable (MUDR) had its sixth meeting with 22 municipalities attending, including representatives from the Province's Growth Secretariat and Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The session was jointly hosted and organized by the cities of Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo and the Region of Waterloo at the historic Victoria Park Pavilion in downtown Kitchener, Ontario.

Welcoming remarks were provided by Rob Horne, Commissioner of Planning, Housing & Community Services at the Regional Municipality of Waterloo; Janet Babcock, Commissioner of Planning Services at City of Cambridge; Jeff Willmer, Interim General Manager of Development & Technical Services Department at City of Kitchener; and Cameron Rapp, General Manager of Development Services at City of Waterloo. Key messages included new tools and strategies to promote intensification with high standards of design excellence, building on partnership opportunities, and making good use of existing buildings that contribute to the City's built form and sense of place through *reuse, recycle and restore.*

The event was well attended with updates and representation provided by the municipalities of Windsor, London, Oxford County, Brantford, Woolwich Township, Guelph, Burlington, Oakville, Brampton, Mississauga, Caledon, Richmond Hill, Markham, Whitby, Ottawa, the host municipalities (Cambridge, Kitchener, Waterloo and the Region of Waterloo) and the University of Waterloo School of Architecture.

'Re-urbanization and Designing for Intensification' was the focus of this meeting, with a close examination of the Waterloo region – a region which consists of several municipalities in *transition* and which are promoting design excellence in an new era of city building. At the outset of the Roundtable session, a promotional video entitled *Symphony of Design* was presented to the group. Used as a tool to attract business to Canada's Technology Triangle, the production showcased a range of distinctive architectural design accomplishments and innovation throughout the Region. Following the video, the cities of Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo provided insightful presentations focussing on municipal planning approaches. In general, these emphasized how urban design tools, policy and administrative procedures and practices are being implemented to give effect to transformational agendas and new ways of thinking within each jurisdiction.

A common thread running through each presentation was that urban design transcends all strategic planning work, growth management and development strategies. Moreover, that municipal government has a very important role to play in the process and outcome of creativity, culture, innovation, integration of heritage resource management, environmental stewardship, place making and city building as a whole. Kitchener and Waterloo noted the importance of having effective design policies and are having notable success with their design guidelines implementation while Cambridge is just beginning this process. Also, that partnerships were seen as critical in the implementation of master

Staff of the City of Kitchener provide insight for MUDR attendees on important urban design initiatives in downtown Kitchener during a tour of the Kitchener-Waterloo area.

planned development initiatives and urban design needs to stay current to ensure that there is a strong policy framework and a clear basis for expectations and predictability in the implementation of projects, investment in public art, the public realm and overall municipal infrastructure. There were also numerous examples of innovative partnerships and funding arrangements that are contributing to creative city building such as the Centre for International Governance Innovation Master Plan, evolution of the Heath Sciences Campus and Warehouse District, and not to mention urban design funding sources and streetscape design elements.

The lunch hour proceeded with a special bus tour. The tour highlighted major streetscape initiatives incorporating environmental design solutions, open space projects, intensification opportunities along planned rapid transit routes, civic and institutional buildings, recently completed mixed-use projects, residential and commercial developments and master planned development sites within Kitchener and Waterloo.

Following two presentations in the afternoon on *Urban Form Case Studies* and *3D Visualizing Planning Tools* by staff of the Province, a debate proceeded on how to transform and bring the discipline of transportation planning and the use of conventional modelling techniques into the fold of urbanism and downtown intensification initiatives vis-à-vis *Places to Grow*.   Also tabled were issues related to the design of tall buildings for an existing commercial development site in Markham, with a focus on setting out effective built-form controls for the design of podiums, adequate separation distances between towers and public realm performance-based controls.   Ottawa raised the subject of how to plan and design for compact development in village areas with a discussion around providing a clear policy basis and vision for village expansion and use of master plan guidelines to address context and compatibility. There was also discussion on streetscape design and upper tier design standards. Roundtable suggestions included the need to become familiar with engineering lexicon; cross-discipline project teams; and the value of pilot/demonstration projects in promoting bold moves. It was noted that several municipalities have had success in using this approach.

Rob Horne, Commissioner of Planning, Housing & Community Services at the Regional Municipality of Waterloo, raised a challenge for all municipalities by quoting Architect John C. Parkin:

We have medicare, legal care, but where is our city care?

An important conclusion from this meeting and previous Roundtable sessions is that a growing number of municipalities in Ontario are ensuring greater *care* in their cities by placing a greater emphasis on sustainable development, place making and the physical design quality of the City.

Roundtable meetings occur every six months, with municipalities hosting subsequent sessions on a rotating basis. The next meeting will take place in fall 2010. Discussions are underway with the City of Windsor to host the next meeting with plans for an extended Roundtable session to include a possible design charrette and tour of the City of Birmingham, Michigan. Further information on the Municipal Urban Designers' Roundtable (MUDR) can be obtained by contacting Steven Bell, at (905) 615 3200 ext 5725, or email: steven.bell@mississauga.ca or Sean Galloway at (519) 661-2500 ext. 5361, or email: sgallowa@london.ca .

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