UPCOMING

OCTOBER

28 Board of Health, 9:30 a.m., committee room 1

29-30 Council, 9:30 a.m., council chamber

NOVEMBER

1 Special Committee on Governance, 9:30 a.m., committee room 2

4 General Government & Licensing Committee, 9:30 a.m., committee room 1

5 Etobicoke York Community Council, 9:30 a.m., council chamber, Etobicoke Civic Centre

North York Community Council, 9:30 a.m., council chamber, North York Civic Centre

Scarborough Community Council, 9:30 a.m., council chamber, Scarborough Civic Centre

Toronto & East York Community Council, 9:30 a.m., committee room 1

6 Economic & Community Development Committee, 9:30 a.m., committee room 1

7 Infrastructure & Environment Committee, 9:30 a.m., committee room 1

Design Review Panel, time TBC, committee room 2

12 Board of Health, 9:30 a.m., committee room 1

Preservation Board, 9:30 a.m., committee room 3

13 Planning & Housing Committee, 9:30 a.m., committee room 1

14 Executive Committee, 9:30 a.m., committee room 1

25 Budget Committee, 9:30 a.m., committee room 1

nrupublishing
TORONTO • GREATER TORONTO & HAMILTON AREA

RE-IMAGINING CITIES

Shaylyn Costello

Professionals and students of the planning world came together in Toronto October 18-20th for the PLACE19 conference at **Ryerson University** to network, collaborate and discuss the current strengths and shortcomings of Canadian cities, as well as how to re-imagine the future of planning.

The conference kicked off with a panel called Re-Imagining Cities, which was the theme of this year's conference.

On a panel moderated by **SvN** business development director **Blair Scorgie**, city councillor **Mike Layton**, **StrategyCorp** partner **John Matheson**, and **Metrolinx** transit commercial director **Sabrina Hamidullah** discussed what changes need to be made in city building in order to improve the quality of life in Toronto.

Panellists shared their insights on what they felt were the most significant challenges they face in striving to improve life in the city through their respective professions. Layton, the sole politician on the panel, shared that in his view, the political system is out of balance, and lacking steady leadership in order to make real progress. "Now we seem to be darting from one... emergency to the next. It's troubling," he said.

Layton noted that because of this, proposed policies are easily derailed, making it feel nearly impossible for local politicians to implement long-term change. This, hand-in hand with the challenges of the housing affordability crisis, the need to improve transportation in the city, and the urgency of taking action on climate change, make city building a daunting task for Toronto politicians.

Matheson discussed the challenges the city faces in implementing policy, describing five assets that are scarce but nonetheless required in municipalities in order to effect meaningful change: money, a vision for what to do with the money, time, capacity to implement, and the political will to make changes. Without these assets, transforming city-building vision into practice is impossible.

"…the most obvious [challenge] is money. There's not a shortage of money in the world— that's not the problem. The problem is frankly our unwillingness to extract it from our taxpayers and direct it to public services," he said. The conundrum is that despite a desperate need to fund critical city-building initiatives, politicians are reluctant to tax citizens more lest they jeopardize their own political popularity. And while taxpayers want improved transit and better quality of life in the city, they become infuriated when they are taxed higher to fund public services that they believe they are already paying for.

When asked what their respective organizations are doing to create meaningful change for the future of Toronto, Hamidullah said despite the

CONTINUED PAGE 8

> Now we seem to be darting from one... emergency to the next. It's troubling.
>
> - Mike Layton

NRU PUBLISHING STAFF

Ian A.R. Graham, Publisher
iang@nrupublishing.com

Irena Kohn, Editor
irenak@nrupublishing.com

Rob Jowett
Reporter
robj@nrupublishing.com

Peter Pantalone
Planning Researcher
peterp@nrupublishing.com

Jeff Payette
Design/Layout
jeffp@nrupublishing.com

Samantha Lum
Sales and Circulation
samanthal@nrupublishing.com

NRU PUBLISHING INC

SALES/SUBSCRIPTIONS
circ@nrupublishing.com

Annual subscription rate is $409 +HST (ON).

Complimentary trial subscriptions are available.

Advertising rates available upon request.

Novæ Res Urbis Toronto is published 50 times a year and is not to be redistributed without the written consent of the publisher.

Editorial Office
26 Soho Street, Suite 330
Toronto, ON M5T 1Z7
Tel: 416.260.1304
Fax: 416.979.2707

Billings Department
NRU Publishing Inc.
PO Box 19595 Manulife PO,
Toronto, ON M4W 3T9

ISSN 1918-7548

RE-IMAGINING CITIES

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

seemingly endless obstacles related to transit expansion in the city –especially while reflecting on the fate of Transit City (the transit plan announced by former Toronto mayor **David Miller** in 2007, which was cancelled by subsequent former Toronto mayor **Rob Ford** in 2010), she is still optimistic about the future of transit.

"I'm [working] on the subway project right now—the Ontario Line project, and I would say this is the best time of my career... there's so much support to do transit now," she said.

To dive deeper, panel members were asked to discuss what their agencies are doing to overcome the obstacles to city building in their respective fields. Hamidullah described the Transit Oriented Development Program (TOD), a collaborative new program between Metrolinx and **Infrastructure Ontario**. TOD is a market-driven transit development strategy that can be undertaken in partnership with private sector agencies or any third-party agency, such as a municipality, university, or hospital. Although the idea of transit-oriented development is not new to planning, this financial model focuses on joint venture partnerships to help fund and deliver transit stations and **GO Transit** network expansions. Hamidullah views this as an ideal way to match urban development with transit demand in the city.

Layton named Vision Zero 2.0, **City of Toronto**'s road safety plan to address the high number of pedestrian deaths across the city, as a strategy that he feels hopeful about. The city is increasing spending to improve pedestrian safety through installing accessible traffic signals with audible tones for the visually impaired, fixing missing pieces of sidewalks to enable cohesive pedestrian routes through neighbourhoods, and increasing investment in reengineering streets to make them more cycle and pedestrian-friendly. Layton noted that implementation processes take a very long time to deliver improvements, regardless of political will.

Matheson discussed the limitations imposed on city development due to the lack of funding tools municipalities have at their disposal. When asked if existing tools are adequate to instill change in cities, he noted that taxation is an imperfect system, because it is nearly impossible to compare assets and assessment bases, even from one municipality to the next.

"The bottom line is the most important tool in our business of solving these city-building problems is empathy," said Matheson. In order to address social needs, Matheson said, people must have faith in the political system to trust their tax money will go toward the common good.

Four areas of city-building were highlighted at the conference: culture, focusing on how to identify and leverage a community's cultural resources; evolving cities, examining resiliency in city planning, (re)connect[ing], (re) imagin[ing], exploring ideas that challenge traditional city-building, and sustainability, exploring strategies that address climate change through sustainable practices.

A technological innovation panel at the conference discussed the technological future of cities. A social innovation panel addressed how to involve non-planners in city building and change the way they think about urban planning.

This was the PLACE Canadian Student Conference's second year running. Last year, it was hosted at the **University of Alberta** in Edmonton. Organized by Ryerson University's **School of Urban and Regional Planning** through the **Ryerson Association of Planning Students**, the conference also offered opportunities for participating in workshops and design charrettes. Other keynote and guest speakers included **Justin Giancola**, **Andrew Gut**, **Nzinga Brown**, **Hayden King**, **Ian McVey**, and **David Cooper**.

Shaylyn Costello is a fourth-year planning student at Ryerson University's School of Urban and Regional Planning. She wrote this story on assignment for NRU.

> The bottom line is the most important tool in our business of solving these city-building problems is empathy.
>
> - John Matheson