

2012 Diamond-Schmitt Urban Futures Lecture

Toronto – October 30, 2012

As a planner and urban designer, one of the great things about coming to Toronto is that there is so much to talk about. You have so many interesting initiatives here that deserve their own commentary or are relevant to the rest of the country. At this point in time, I could talk about the pros and cons of your massive inner-city housing boom or your continuing transit drama or the effects of your dramatic cultural expansion over the last few years. But I think you have a lot of people already talking about those things and, frankly, that's what I'm usually talking about. I think Jack and Don want something different, something more on the edge than that. So, instead, tonight, I am going to talk about suburbs. For me this is a perfect forum of national importance to focus on suburbs – you have among the most extensive suburban patterns in the nation and what you do with your suburbs could be very influential in what others right across the country start to do about their suburbs. And, as you can see, I have titled this presentation “In Praise of Suburban Life”. What, me, Mr. Vancouver Urbanism, putting the words “praise” and “suburban” together? Have I gone nuts? Have I lost my hold on reality? I mean, it's often said that I can't even go east of Boundary Road in Vancouver without coming down with the flu (and I rarely get the flu). So, let's face it, I have to fess up before we even get going: I actually deplore modern Canadian suburbs. I think most of them are ugly, vacant and dull – and I know absolutely that they are not sustainable. And, as I say this, I bet most of the people in this room will wholeheartedly agree with me. But, before we finish tonight, I am going to try to convince you to actually embrace the essence of suburban life – not its current form but its underlying appeal – and to use it as our guide in transforming this huge part of Canadian cities to be sustainable. I am going to ask you to embrace the suburbanite and the aspirations these people have for their homes and families. I am going to ask you if there is not a way to embrace a lifestyle that a vast majority of Canadians prefer and at the same time secure the level of compatibility with the environment, and social harmony, and fiscal prudence, and cultural richness – the pillars of sustainability – that all Canadians will absolutely need for our survival in the 21st century and beyond.

I think this is going to be a tall order. As the urban cognoscenti, the planning and urban design establishment, most of us have spent our lives trying to pull our cities away from the seemingly inevitable suburban trends of the post-war automobile era in Canada, and throughout North America for that matter, and we have built up a rich and wonderful set of concepts, principles and practices to help us do that. And, I have to say, we have seen some great success. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that right across the land, we find our core cities in a wonderful revival; we find transit-oriented development nodes coming together out in the suburbs; we find models of dense living that are beautiful to see and public places we have made that are delightful to be in. We have secured a beach-head in heritage preservation and mixed-use development and, more recently, in sustainable building. We are finding positive partnerships between government and the development community and citizens. And, for all of this, we can be very proud – we are in a very good place, compared to what we faced when I came on the scene about 40 years ago. It feels good.

But, to a greater degree than most of us realize, I think we are also in a fool's paradise. We are very deep in a hole about the future of Canadian cities – and much of the success we have enjoyed over the last generation is not going to help us to get out of that hole. We are in what I call an intellectual cul-de-sac that, if we cannot punch through, will make it almost impossible to do what has to be done for Canadian cities, especially Canadian suburbs, in the future.

You see, I think we are facing a very tough and dangerous contradiction in regard to the future of our cities in this country. On the one hand, we have to find a way to make our future cities sustainable and affordable; and, on the other hand, the way we have in mind (in the collectivity of the professions of the urban design culture of Canada) is simply not endorsed by the majority of our people. This is dangerous because in a democracy, after all is said and done, it will be the people who rule the day. This is tough, because, once the status quo of our current thinking is rejected – as it is being rejected by a vast number of consumers every day – we have almost nothing fresh or new to offer that might be accepted and also effective to transform our cities to the sustainable mode.

To me, unfortunately, the numbers are just so telling.

60% of Canadians live in suburbs. Maybe about 15% of Canadians live in urban cores and the rest live outside cities, in towns and villages or in rural settings. We can quibble over these specific numbers – they are shifting all the time – but the reality is that no numbers in the country can challenge the fact that the majority of us have either foresworn or avoided city life. To address sustainability, we talk classical urban solutions, and everywhere we are showing excellent, liveable, quality examples. Because of lifestyle preferences and costs and background, most Canadians continue to make suburban choices. It was a shock for me to realize several years ago that in all my work over a lifetime (and I have been busy!) – in leading a huge group of very clever people to conceive and put in place the “living first” strategy to re-populate Downtown Vancouver – and with all the success in the market place of this new living option – and with the equal or greater success of people like me and like you in big and medium-sized cities all over the country – with all of this, we have only affected a 5 to 10% shift toward urban living by Canadians. 60% of Canadians still do not want what we offer. 60% of Canadians still prefer their single family home and their one or several cars and their private back garden and their quiet street and what they see as their modest scale, “family-oriented” and safe neighbourhood; their bucolic image of intimate neighbourhood life. 60% of Canadians will tell you in no uncertain terms that this is their best choice – and looked at from their perspective, I think it is hard to argue with them. I think, regarding their private interests, they are right.

Just for fun, let’s check the numbers in this room. How many people here tonight live in a single family home? How many of you usually drive a car to work or school? How many of you live next door to low-income people? How many live in a mixed use building (or at least over a shop)? Now, let’s do the same questions for only those over 35-years-of-age: single-family home; drive a car; have low-income neighbours; live in mixed use? I hope this makes my point. We are the most dedicated urbanists in our whole society but, even with us, looking at our consumer patterns, the numbers tell a different story.

Of course, just because the suburbs work for the majority of Canadians, as individuals, doesn’t make them sustainable or mean they work for the community as a whole. I think we all know they put huge pressures on our collective tax base and are impossible to service efficiently and economically. I think we all know that they put huge pressures on the ecology around them and are our single biggest national contribution to negative climate change. We may have founded

Greenpeace and we may think of ourselves as very “green”, very environmentally conscious, but the facts of how we live put the lie to all that. I don’t need to detail the science on that in this room. And, I think everyone in this room would also agree that if we don’t fix this, we will be in very deep trouble as a species on this planet within a very short time – in fact, we are already living on borrowed time.

And, I know that everyone in this room actually has a good idea of what it will take to fix this situation. We all understand and believe in that well-articulated formula for smart growth as the answer for sustainable cities. Just to remind you, here it is– it covers both the structure and the infrastructure of cities.

From a structural point of view,

- it is about the form of our cities – clustered density and mixed use and all kinds of diversity and protected open space;

- it is about the fabric of our cities – environmentally neutral construction of buildings and spaces; and,

- it is about the character of our cities – placemaking and quality and local uniqueness and cultural richness.

From an infrastructural point of view,

- it is about the circulation within our cities – more and more transportation choices, transit, cycling, with less and less dependence on the conventional private car;

- it is about the community services and social safety net within our cities – recreation facilities and childcare and good schools and all kinds of accommodations for those with special needs; and,

- it is about the utilities of our cities – managing water and waste and energy in a conserving way and where possible accessing local inputs and food.

We are also all confident that this formula works over the range of many challenges we face in modern life – of course it works for the environment; but also to address endemic and growing health problems; and to mediate social isolation; and to generate cultural expression; and to enhance the simple quality of everyday life. All these things can be addressed through this same city lens.

But, now let me give you the experience of the “eco-density” initiative for suburban transformation in Vancouver that attempted to apply this formula at face value. It was a total disaster. The planners talked density and the public hate density and certainly don’t want tall buildings next door. The planners talked mixed-use and diversity and the public fears crime and strangers. The planners talked eco-practices for building and infrastructure and the public worries about increased taxes and higher costs. The planners talked alternatives to the car and the public thinks they are going to lose their cars. And then, the public talked about impacts and the negative effects they could see in the whole strategy and the planners scold them for “nimbyism”. The planners and the public were just on totally different wave-lengths. And, in the end, even though the politicians adopted something – some sort of charter – the issue is pretty dead from a practical perspective and from a political perspective and the whole movement for smart suburban growth has been set back for years.

My point in all of this, and my first theme for this evening, is that the planning and design establishment in Canada are going to have to work a lot harder to find sustainable suburban solutions that will also be attractive to most of our people and affordable for most of our people. None of our current solutions are appealing to most suburbanites – or I might say to the average person. These will have to be solutions that can find popularity not just at the level of theory and talk but more so at the level of consumer practices. These will have to be solutions that find wide-spread endorsement that can start

to make big inroads into that 60% majority of Canadians that has been impervious to our ideas to date.

These will have to be solutions that stay true to that formula of smart growth but that offer it up in a fundamentally different package than we have seen so far in Canada. So I want to spend the

rest of my time tonight talking about some of the solutions that can meet this tough test; that might make this tough reconciliation between sustainable science and consumer preferences.

To start, let's put on the table several widely held professional planning opinions that I think we have to expose for what they are – widely held *myths* that are preventing us from being creative, particularly about our suburbs.

The first of these is that the car is on its way out with the arrival of peak oil. I think the very opposite may be true. Automobile technology is now starting to move very quickly toward more and more alternative energy sources and I think it could become a carbon neutral machine before too long. I am now even hearing the idea that it could become a clean energy producing machine. In fact, it is overwhelmingly evident to me that we will definitely re-invent the car (for price as well as political reasons) long before we wean ourselves from the car as a society. But, even short of that, my experience everywhere I work in the world is that as soon as people are wealthy enough, the personal mobility of the car is the first of the luxuries that they secure – and they are prepared to pay a very high proportion of their income to maintain its benefits – and they just ignore the impacts that result from their car. Also, I am very skeptical that any Canadian government that is electable will have the guts to stop subsidizing the automobile infrastructure to shift the full costs back to car users. So those who are hoping that the car, and all its problems to the humane shape of our cities and the environmental impact of our cities, that all of this will soon be a thing of the past – and that we can move on from there – are just deluding themselves. They are simply wrong. My take is that we have to come to grips with the car; we have to tame it as much as we can, keeping the monster at bay from gobbling up the entire cityscape; and we have to plan for it to have a place among a nice attractive array of options for moving around in the future city. My second thought is that the best alternative to the automobile will not be another device; it will be our feet – walking. And that will mean that we have to be very clever about *proximity* and *connectivity* as we look at the future shape of our suburbs. I suspect that the whole transportation drama in the future has to be about less mechanical movement: fewer trips and shorter trips and a lot more trips that use body energy rather than fuel. And in all of this, there will be definitive answers. It will be about adjusting probabilities in the right direction.

The second myth is that the single-family home is moving toward obsolescence and very soon we will start to see a natural shift to higher density multiple housing. Planners talk about the demographic shifts that are underway in the population (people marrying and having children later, living longer, retiring earlier), the affordability problems that are growing and the proliferation of housing alternatives that are now available in the marketplace. Again, I think the opposite may actually be more probable. In my view, the fundamental pre-disposition that most Canadians have against density and height and loss of privacy and loss of access to nature – these will all limit the shift to dramatically different alternatives. And, in most parts of the country, the single-family home in the far suburbs is still cheaper and more available than multi-family options. As a developer, I tried to fight that battle – and in places like Fredericton, the “split level” wins over the apartment every time. My take is that the changes that we will motivate will most easily happen within the context of the single-family morphology of the suburbs. These will be changes of tenure and infill and diversification and other subtle elaborations. These will be augmented through special opportunities at the neighbourhood margins that stay true to the modest scale and height that most people find most comfortable. Yes, we will have our TODs and town centres and clusters along arterials, all of higher scale and density, and these will help, but I am convinced that the changes that will accommodate the most people will be the incremental gentle changes.

The third myth that seems to limit a lot of creative thinking is that there are certain laws and standards that just cannot be changed. After many generations of building codes and street standards and sub-division standards and fire regulations and health regulations, a lot of planners seem to feel these are fixed, immutable laws that if we abandon or change too radically will cause our society to simply fall apart. Or they feel these requirements are just too vested, in control of powerful forces or made imperative by our fear of liability. I have come to the opposite conclusion. I think almost all the standards and laws that have shaped the post-war city have to be abandoned or changed because they reflect a reality that no one really wants. They also reflect a view of the world of at least a half a century ago. That's what we found in core cities and that is what I think is equally true in the suburban context. Each standard or law or regulation trying to do the most regarding its own area of control has distorted the totality of urban experience to become what people just don't enjoy or even need. They provide levels of

protection that are just too protecting. They limit the kind of diversity and serendipity that is just too limiting. And one of the strangest results that we see in all of this for the modern city is that to do what we really want, having full confidence that what we want to do is not going to hurt other people or create hazards, many otherwise law-abiding people have to become “outlaws” in their own community. I bet there are many outlaws right here this evening even though I am also pretty sure that you are all really nice, well meaning, socially responsible people.

Well, I could go on; but, having tabled these myths, what is more important to talk about is what might be positive, acceptable directions for sustainable suburbs in the future. Also, what might be the process to discover the solutions?

To talk about the process, I can go back to how we approached the dilemma of inner-city revival all those years ago. Essentially, we took nothing as given, realizing that the entire formula for the inner-city had to be rethought; nothing was sacred. And, on that basis, we did two things that made all the difference:

-we had to focus on people as consumers; and,

-we had to drill down beyond basic needs to look at the emotional drivers of consumption that really cause people to shift their behavior.

None of these things were natural things for planners to do or to think about at the time.

Even now, because most planners work for government, either directly or indirectly, the tendency is to see the urban challenge as a policy challenge. In other words, we see people as “citizens”, whose behaviour is directed by laws, and who express themselves as voters, as members of the body politic. In fact, we are a little skittish about the marketplace and understanding how it works or what effect it has. Well, those that have been involved with inner-city revival, where the whole strategy was to entice people to freely come back to live Downtown, will remember that the key to our success was to start to see people as consumers, and to spend a lot of time understanding what people think about and want and need as consumers. We had to know that well enough so that we could start to offer the essential needs and wants but in new ways that fit the potential and reality of higher density inner-city life. So we did huge programs of public

consultation and engagement and genuine empirical research, involving tens of thousands of people, to find out what people might be pre-disposed to want to consume and how that could be manifest in new ways in core cities. We used different words, but what we did was not much different from what smart companies do when they want to introduce new products and build new demand. And the result was that the “living first” strategy was not shaped by requiring consumers to do anything as much as it was shaped by tapping into a shifting sense of what consumers might really want to do by giving them cool new and different options that also met all our civic needs. The development community joined us in this inquiry and, together, we found new ways to fund what was needed, not depending upon the traditional municipal tax base, and we broke every rule in the book that had previously applied to downtowns (admittedly putting in place new rules so that the trends of growth would be directed to the kinds of things consumers preferred and to the standards they needed), and we created the new urban places and the new urban products that now make our downtowns everywhere in the country incredible market successes. My theme here is that even a modest shift in trends of consumer demand, being a spontaneous, widespread and positive thing, can have a lot more impact than all the government rules and regulations put together, which, of course, tend to prescribe what people can do in a negative way. Once we made the consumer the focus of our thinking, we started seeing success.

And, of course, what this meant was that we had to go beyond the traditional agenda of municipal public policy; we had to look deeper at how consumers view the world. As government planners, we tend to see cities as land-use maps and as the basics of housing and offices and industry and all the rest, and then as the community infrastructure and transportation arrangements to serve these sectors. We tend to shape all this within a web of policy. Well, that is just not where consumers are at. They expect the basics – civic and market offerings and protections – but they are searching for a lot more; they want meaning and relevance and image and those things that make life worthwhile. They want the emotional side and therefore see the city as potential *experience* – that meets their emotional expectations. In modern life, you all know that people will search a lot and pay a lot for wonderful experience – or even just tangible experience in a homogenizing and standardizing world. Look at the phenomenon of Starbucks where the product costs pennies to produce but is sold for dollars because it is delivered with the

rich offering of a hip experience. People want what is stylish and cool and new and exciting and meaningful; and it's not just a superficial thing, many go much deeper to what is socially responsible and culturally rich and beautiful and moving and, yes, many people do want what is environmentally sustainable. So, for downtown revival, we had to build all this back into the urban equation. In planning circles we often call this "placemaking" but really it goes well beyond that. My theme is that contemporary planning has to be about offering the fulfilling moment-to-moment experience that people tell us they want for themselves and their children in a way that is delivered on their terms and in their image. In fact, this became so big in the agenda that I've coined a word for it – I call it "experiential planning". For core cities, it was about realizing that government or the private developer could not alone deliver the totality of what people want and expect and therefore they had to collaborate to put the package together. It was about realizing that people themselves have a lot to do with delivery because it is the "society of others" that makes the experience most powerful – and so putting the institutional and social foundations and infrastructure in place for community life at the same time as the physical place was constructed was very important. And, it was about design – so for the first time in many years, the urban design agenda became just as important as the policy agenda at City Hall and the talents and expertise of architects and landscape architects and other real designers was again honoured in the way it should always have been. This kind of planning was very different in agenda and process from the planning that went on before it.

And now, these same attitudes and approaches for planning have to be brought to the suburbs. We have to reach out to suburbanites by the tens of thousands, we have to tap their needs as consumers and we have to search deep into the rich totality of those needs. And, to do this, we cannot continue to disdain the suburban aspiration and badmouth suburbanites – if we do, they will see and feel that and we will never be trusted.

We actually have to embrace their underlying values. Then, with the knowledge we get from this kind of process, we have to actually design these communities with all the prowess we can muster, not just draw them up or lay them out as the result of applied standards and regulations and requirements and templates. And, if we do this, I have faith that we can conceive completely new suburban typologies that will achieve that transformation that we need.

The reason I have that faith, is because of one more recent discovery that I want to share with you. I have discovered, in my work in places like Dallas and Regina and even in Abu Dhabi and Rotterdam, that the preferred suburban lifestyle that people describe and the suburban patterns that the modern world has delivered since the war are not actually in sync. People are not living in their definition of paradise in post-war suburbs; they are just living in the best choice they've had from the limited choices that have been available since the war – the suburbs that you and I abhor are not the ideal manifestation of the suburban lifestyle. Once you talk to suburban people, you learn that there are many changes and improvements that they need and want. So when, at the beginning, I asked you to embrace suburbanites and the suburban lifestyle, I was not asking you to embrace those ugly, vacant and dull places that are out there right now. I am confident that suburbanites want those places and typologies to be significantly improved and they will collaborate with us to determine how they should change – and I am confident that there is enough room to maneuver in that process to insinuate sustainable typologies and densities and mixes and movement options and all the rest as we bring on the other improvements that people really are asking for and hoping for.

So having thought about the appropriate process for planning, starting with the declaration of a positive support for suburbanites and their expectations, and then getting everyone into the action – citizens, and the development community and civic administrations and elected officials along with the most creative and artistic invention of the design professionals, the architects and landscape architects and engineers and city planners – what might be some directions that people would accept and that would be truly sustainable? Where do we start?

Well, I think we can take inspiration from a place that most people already feel good about and every city has good examples of, that people can go and have a look at – a place that's nearby and filled with solutions that planners have been overlooking for too long. I'm talking about the pre-war neighbourhoods, built between the early 1900's and the 1930's, which exist in every Canadian city and in every North American city. They are close-in now, but in their time they were certainly considered "suburbs" – in fact they are best known as "streetcar suburbs". I'm using pictures today of both Canadian and American examples.

Whether we look at these places from a liveability point of view or a sustainability perspective or as a visual statement or at a functional level, the pre-war neighbourhood has two things that pull it all together as an inspiration for the future. First, it has a sound basic urban structure and scale; and, second, it has been evolved and added to over time to include a richness of activities, people and supports. It has a charm and beauty that comes from its age, no argument about that, but that attractiveness also comes from the way it all fits together into a coherent logical whole – it offers the complete package that you just feel comfortable about when you are in these neighbourhoods. These are places average suburbanites would aspire to live in – in fact they are the very image of what people are often describing when they talk about or draw examples of ideal suburban life. These are places of real financial value and real emotional value.

The typical pre-war neighbourhood urban structure is usually a simple pattern of blocks of apparently single houses extending out from a commercial “high street” of shops (where the streetcar used to stop), with offices or apartments over the shops. There are often back lanes. There is always the local park and often some nice smaller greens as well. Streets are lined with big trees. There are lots of private gardens and many people even include a vegetable garden in the back. There is almost always a local community centre and school and other local services. Over the years, lots of additional housing has been tucked in along the lanes and as houses were converted into suites or a new infill development happened from time to time but just as often, many people have chosen to keep their single family home and that is OK as well. Overall, though, without anyone really trying, the density and social diversity have increased while the predominately one- and two-storey scale has been maintained. I remember Jack Diamond saying several years ago that a sustainable, walkable neighbourhood starts to work at no more than 40 units per acre – and many of these older neighbourhoods have that and more, even if most people would not realize it. The streets are usually quite narrow with parking on one or both sides. These neighbourhoods are certainly accommodating to the car but they do not let auto standards dominate every other consideration. I hope you get the picture of what I am talking about – and I bet every person here has a good example in your mind of one of these neighbourhoods; and I bet that you feel quite good about it. In fact, in this room will be a lot of people who actually have chosen to live in these places over the further out postwar suburbs for the simple reason that, intuitive, you found them so much more fulfilling.

Now, I do not want you to read me as “Mr. Nostalgia” – I’m not saying we can replicate these old neighbourhoods in whole cloth. We have to acknowledge the limitations of these places as well. While the houses are usually sturdily built, they do not have what we now call “green building” features – this idea didn’t exist when these places were built. Also, the utilities are pretty conventional, although the pattern is very amenable to conversion to more sustainable delivery arrangements. Some of these neighbourhoods have traffic problems and so special traffic management interventions have been necessary. And sometimes, if there are lots of housing conversions, on-street parking becomes difficult. They are almost never universally accessible for the disabled and aged. And, if the neighbourhood has really kept its “polish and shine”, it is often quite a consumer draw so housing prices can become disproportionately high even though the housing styles and layouts are not up to current expectations.

But, you know, we are talking “inspiration” here not a ready-to-wear “model”. There is no question that we have to build suburbs of the future that are contemporary, not nostalgic; and functional to today’s demanding consumer standards, not out-dated; and with state-of-the-art utility systems and public services. But the inspiration is still pretty powerful.

My big question is this one. Why can’t we build in the beginning of the 21st century, with all our wealth and knowledge, something as fulfilling as our great-grandparents were able to do at the beginning of the 20th century? Why can’t we build something as sustainable but, more importantly, something as suitable for suburban life?

My answer is that I think we can and I think we must. So, what are the “take-home” features from these classic older neighbourhoods that might work for sustainable suburbs of tomorrow?

Here’s the list that comes to my mind.

First, we can learn a lot from the prevailing scale: more housing, definitely, but maintaining the one-to-three storey building heights as well as the fine-grained, smaller building pattern. As much as I personally love the striking architecture of towers and the geometry of big building ensembles, and feel they make a lot of sense in downtown areas and TODs and along arterial routes, I think most people don’t like to see them popping up just anywhere, especially right next door. Small is simply better for the suburbs.

Second, the concept of incremental additions over time – very delicate densification – makes a lot of sense, so putting a lot of options for change within the zoning of a new suburban subdivision allows that community to evolve in a natural way as the local people want and need new things – slower or faster as the case may be. Planners who are thinking about this call this “invisible density” or “hidden density” or “gentle density”. You start with a slightly higher density than we generally see in recent subdivisions because lot sizes and street space are smaller but you add more as you go along, achieving the 30-to-40 units per acre target in a painless way. Remember that recent subdivisions usually start at about 6-to-10 units per acre, so it is not a big jump to get to the densities we need. And because it is incremental and can be done at a modest scale, the profits of change remain with the existing resident landowner, rather than going to an outside developer who takes it out of the area, so there is less resentment and “nimbyism”.

Many who are impacted also benefit.

Third, we can learn a lot from the diversity that you see in the old neighbourhoods on all fronts: all kinds of households; many lot and house sizes and types (single family homes but also duplexes, back lane units, apartments over shops, home conversions, infill housing); and many architectural styles; a rich socio-economic range from low-income to quite wealthy households; and many kinds of retail outlets and a lot of independent retail potential rather than just strip-mall options and “big boxes”; and many workplace opportunities and live/work possibilities. This diversity opens up economic opportunity close by as well as providing a plausible framework for a wide social engagement and supportive community life.

Fourth, there are so many benefits of the local commercial “high street” model, with building fronts proud to the sidewalk, parking lots behind, shops at hand and offices and apartments above. This can also be a good template for conversion of the existing malls and that strip retail that sits within a sea of parking. This is the “placemaking” form that engenders localized uniqueness and really sticks in the memory but it is also the realm for sustained social relations and interchange. It offers the economic potential for the start-up operation and fosters walking.

Fifth, the narrower streets and back lanes can be a big bonus. The traditional lane-and-a half driving area for a residential street naturally calms traffic, is a lot safer for children at play and takes up a lot less land than the current standards. The back lanes offer utility access and trash

handling without compromising the streetscape, and cut the number of vehicle crossings over the sidewalk. The lanes actually give the “front door” primacy back to the façade of a house rather than that ever-present “garage door” image.

Sixth, related to what I have just said, whether you see curvy streets or a straight grid pattern, the connectivity of the whole system, especially for pedestrians, is just so beneficial in the old neighbourhoods. Many planners don’t like cul-de-sacs but it seems a lot of consumers do like them – so what I think is important is that they not be designed as pedestrian dead-ends, but include walking linkages one to another – that’s what you generally see in the 30’s pattern and it works very well to tie everything together.

Seventh, you will find the old neighbourhoods always work well for transit and the levels of ridership usually make transit viable without much subsidy. If we can achieve the factors that make transit work in new communities it opens up great opportunities for residents: they can own fewer cars and spend less for their mobility (but this is not about getting rid of cars – it’s about offering other options for many of the trips that don’t need to be done in a car); people are also less victimized by gas price fluxuations; and more people in the household can get around more independently.

And lastly, that whole emphasis on landscape and gardening in the traditional neighbourhoods is really important to bring back to future suburban planning, rather than have landscape be such a secondary consideration with new subdivisions. Nothing gives a place a more gracious, homey feel than a nice row of street trees. Nothing is friendlier than an attractive front flower garden, unique to each house and tended by the residents. Nothing helps local food sourcing more than an individual vegetable garden. We don’t need wide front yards or even extra-large lots to make these things happen – we simply need more motivation to use landscaping strategically in the first place and to keep it up over the long run.

Well, this list could go on but my point in all of this is not to say that the older pre-war neighbourhoods are the only inspiration for future communities – they are just a place to start. All I want to do tonight is engender a new kind of discussion. My real theme is that the smart growth formula can be reconceived in the suburban image. All the elements of smart growth can

be insinuated into existing mundane suburban areas and can be built in from scratch in new suburbs. My related point is that this is not just an interesting exercise, it is a vital exercise since most of the growth that will happen in every Canadian city over the next 30 years will be growth in these suburbs, so if we don't get them right in terms of what they deliver in liveability, sustainability, health and economic viability, then we will continue to be in deep trouble. It is as simple as that.

Everything I have been talking about tonight doesn't really involve the big bold moves of planning; it is about embracing the essence of suburban living in the little stuff that affects people every day. Yes, you have to have those major land-use allocations and the complete transportation strategy, with massive expansion of transit, and the overlay of natural assets and a lot more. But make no mistake, when we take the domestic view, when we pay full attention to the specific features about how suburban communities are going to come together, we will have a dramatic positive impact. When we change the DNA of new suburbs, we definitely will change the DNA of the whole city. If we go back to the basic principles of good urbanism, in delicate forms from examples that are handy all around us, then new suburban neighbourhoods can deliver on all the big challenges but they can also have a great chance of being embraced by modern consumers and becoming truly beloved places. We haven't done it yet; there are no pictures I can show you because new neighbourhoods that meet this test just do not exist. But they can – and this kind of re-imagining will truly liberate people to draw out the very best from their home base. And, it will finally reconcile that contradiction between sustainable science and consumer preferences. It will provide the gentle urbanism that suburbanites want while supplying the responsible urbanism that all Canadians need.

Thank you very much.