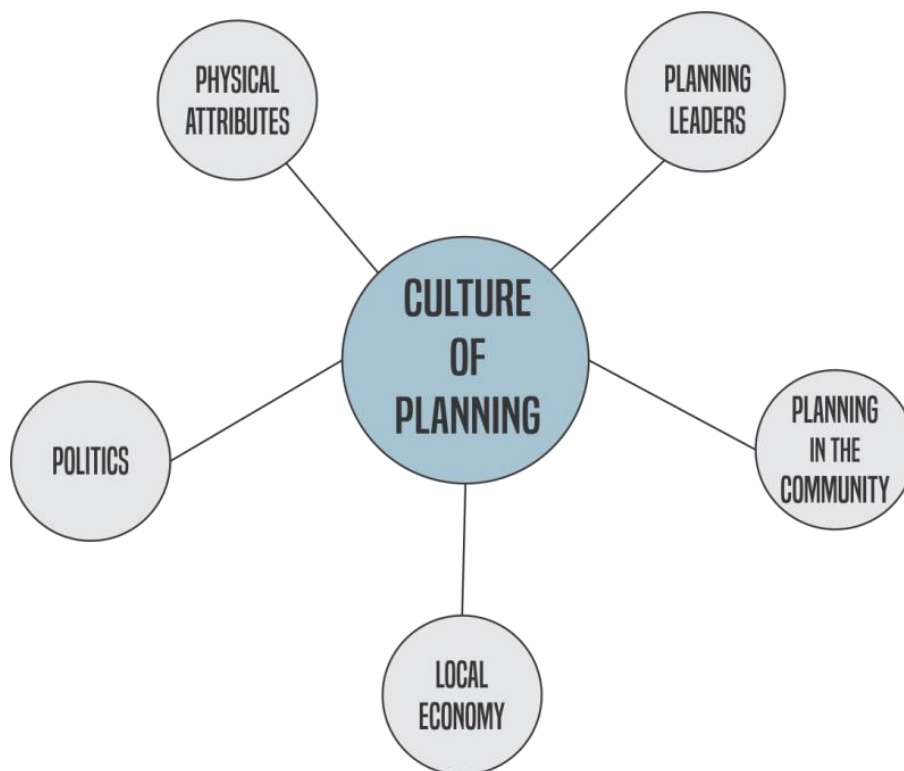


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Coordinating land use planning in the context of multiple plans
School of Planning, Dalhousie University

Planners' perceptions of the culture of local planning

Ian Harper – May 2016



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<http://theoryandpractice.planning.dal.ca/multiple-plans/index.html>

Canadians increasingly choose to live in urban or suburban communities, which now accommodate more than 80% of the population (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2014). As our communities become increasingly compact, spatial, social and economic conflicts arise. “Community planning has been adopted as a function of local government in Canada because of its essential role in helping to focus priorities and coordinate decisions about the use of land in the context of competing interests, objectives, and strategies” (Grant, et al., 2013, p. 1). The planning profession in Canada has grown by 30% since 2009 (Canadian Business, 2016), indicating a recognition of the need to plan in Canadian communities. If we accept that planning is an important task, then it is useful to identify the factors that affect the efficacy of planning efforts. In this working paper, we investigate some of those factors using case studies from three of the country’s largest metropolitan regions: Metro Vancouver, the Alberta (Edmonton) Capital Region, and the Greater Toronto Area. We explore what organizations involved in planning can do to foster a “culture of planning” (Figure 1) that may result in improved coordination and implementation of planning efforts.

Between June and September, 2014, the Coordinating Multiple Plans research team conducted in-person interviews to investigate the perspectives of practicing planners in Canada. Three graduate research assistants—Amanda Taylor and Nathan Hall from Dalhousie University and Tanya Markvart from the University of Waterloo—interviewed municipal, provincial, regional, and consultant planners in five Canadian metropolitan areas: St. John’s, Newfoundland; Halifax Regional Municipality, Nova Scotia; Greater Toronto Area (GTA), Ontario; Alberta (Edmonton) Capital Region (ACR), Alberta; and Metro Vancouver, British Columbia. The dataset included a total of 92 respondents in 82 interviews across the regions; approximately 66 percent were municipal planners, with another 23% equally shared between provincial, regional and consultant planners. **Because of our focus here on strategies for managing rapid growth, this research only analyzes data from the GTA, Metro Vancouver, and Edmonton, using a dataset of 64 respondents (62.5% of whom were male).** The results discussed here are based on analysis of interview transcripts, along with examination of relevant census data and documents produced by local and provincial governments.

Table 1: Gender of Respondents

	Male	Female	Total
Edmonton	8	10	18
Greater Toronto Area	20	11	31
Vancouver	12	3	15
Total	40	24	64
	62.5%	37.5%	100%

Contemporary planning theory, such as Smart Growth or New Urbanism, advocate compact, transit-oriented and mixed-use urban forms; these theories are reflected in many municipal and regional plans across the country (Burns, 2013; Grant, 2009). If urban form is an indicator of successful planning strategies (given popular planning theory and municipal planning objectives), then the first factor that contributes to the “culture of planning” is physical attributes.

Physical Attributes

Each of the three case study regions has different physical attributes, both in the natural and built environments (Table 2). All three study regions had rates of growth significantly higher than the Canadian average of 5.9% between 2006 and 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2011). The Alberta (Edmonton) Capital Region grew fastest with a rate of 12.1 percent (Statistics Canada, 2011). Growth is expected to continue in all three regions, but each takes a different approach to managing that growth. While the Greater Toronto Area is the largest in terms of population and urbanized area, the Alberta (Edmonton) Capital Region has the largest total land area and the smallest population.

Table 2: Attributes by Region

	Metro Vancouver	Alberta Capital Region	Greater Toronto Area
Land Area	2,877 km ²	11,933 km ²	7,124 km ²
Number of Municipalities	21 + 2 (Treaty First Nation, Electoral Area)	24 (in 5 counties)	25 (in 5 regional municipalities)
Population	2.48 million	1.16 million	6.05 million
Population Density (Total)	861 persons/km ²	97 persons/km ²	850 persons/km ²
Population Density (Central City)	5,249 persons/km ² (City of Vancouver)	1,187 persons/km ² (City of Edmonton)	4,150 persons/km ² (City of Toronto)

The table indicates that **Vancouver** has excelled in constraining growth, posting the highest population densities throughout the region in the smallest land area. This is, perhaps, unsurprising, given that “the Vancouver Region is widely recognized as one North American jurisdiction where strong growth management plans and policies have been put in place in order to control urban sprawl” (Tomalty, 2002, p. 2). Vancouver has been viewed as a desirable place to live for many years, and has seen near constant growth since its founding. As one respondent interviewed told us, Vancouver is “very much a growing city. We have been for 100 years. So growth is the primary driver. People want to live here and people are moving here, and they have been doing that since the city was founded” (VAN01m¹). To manage continuing growth, Metro Vancouver has had strong regional growth strategies in place for decades. Two important policies developed in the 1970s have had major implications for the nature of growth: the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) adopted by the province in 1973 and the Livable Region Strategy (LRS) adopted in 1976 by the Greater Vancouver Regional District shaped where and how growth would occur. Even when the Provincial government eliminated the planning powers of regional districts in British Columbia, municipalities in Metro Vancouver continued to follow the LRS, a respondent noted (VAN13m). Planners in the region recognize the role that natural physical barriers play in growth management: “in general because we are...a constrained region... [due to] the [ALR] ...[that creates a] fixed boundary, and ... [the] water and mountains ... that ... [create]a more constrained region. ...So...in our region, it is less of a factor that there are individual municipalities doing their own plans because there are such big constraints [to growth]” (VAN11m). In Metro Vancouver, mountains, oceans, an

¹ The coding system describes the city of the respondent, the sequence of the interview, and gender. Thus VAN01m is the first person we interviewed in Vancouver, a male planner.

international border, and the provincial Agricultural Land Reserve constrain growth. These factors result in an environment that supports effective growth management and planning in the region.

In contrast to Metro Vancouver, the Alberta Capital Region that includes **Edmonton** has few physical or legislative constraints to growth. The population is spread at lower densities across a significantly larger land area. With few physical constraints to growth, there may be less consensus in the region about the need to plan or manage growth. One planner illustrated these struggles while discussing the challenges surrounding the development of the regional Growth Plan 2.0: “At the moment in the regional plan, the challenge...is that we are dealing with very different perspectives. ...Simply put, we have a county perspective, a village perspective, a town perspective, a city perspective, and a big city perspective” (EDM11m). Regional planning in the Alberta Capital Region is a more recent endeavor than in Metro Vancouver, and without the support of physical barriers, there is significantly less support for or acceptance of the policies contained within the regional growth plan. Even within the City of Edmonton, where support for compact urban form is the strongest, a lack of consensus is evident; for example, one planner noted that “we want to encourage smart growth. And that's in our strategic plan. And our strategic plan has been approved by council. But whenever we bring a higher density residential to council, they always reject it. And so even though they have smart growth in their strategic plan, they're continuously rejecting having a variety of housing types” (EDM01f). The Alberta Capital Region is the youngest and smallest (in population) of the three study regions, and is therefore has had less need to and experience in trying to contain its growth.

Presenting a more complicated case study than the other two regions is the Greater **Toronto** Area (GTA). The GTA is not a political entity, but comprises five regional municipalities containing 25 municipalities spanning more than 7,000 km². The GTA is one of the largest metropolitan regions in North America, with more than 6.5 million residents. To the south the Great Lakes and the United States border constrain growth, but there are few physical barriers to growth to the north. In 2003 and 2004, the Ontario government implemented two pieces of legislation to combat urban sprawl and protect agricultural land in the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH, the larger region that contains the GTA). The Places to Grow Act and the Greenbelt Act work together in the GGH to essentially tell municipalities where they can develop (Places to grow) and where they cannot (Greenbelt). Urban form in the region is further constrained by a planning decision in the 1950s: the now defunct Metro Toronto Planning Board implemented a lake-based system for providing essential servicing to the region. “The link between this key engineering principle and the chosen regional form was direct and explicitly stated: if the region was to be serviced by a centralized lake-based system, the most appropriate regional form was a large, single urbanized area” (White, 2007, p. 17). Because of nearly constant growth, and despite decades of suburban growth, the GTA retains comparatively high population densities but spread over an area nearly three times the size of the Vancouver region.

Metro Vancouver and the GTA have physical constraints to growth and have implemented strong protectionist policies, such as the Greenbelt Act or the Livable Region Strategy. They demonstrate comparative successes in constraining growth and establishing more compact urban forms. The Alberta Capital Region, by contrast, spreads over nearly 12,000 km² at comparatively low densities, in part due

to a lack of physical constraints or growth management legislation. However, the constraints to growth are just one factor that affects the local culture of planning. Politics also play an important role in determining not only the objectives of planning, but their coordination and implementation as well. Regions that have fostered a supportive culture of planning demonstrate higher levels of coordination of planning objectives between municipalities than may be found in other regions.

Politics

Using Metro Vancouver as an example, where an early recognition of the natural restraints to growth influence both politics and planning, a senior planner in Vancouver indicated that planners “all believed in the livable region plan. We believed in the idea of town centres. We believed in the idea of a strong downtown. We believed in the idea of mixed-use densification. We believed in rapid transit alternatives for the car. On all fronts, we were kind of in accord” (VAN13m). Metro Vancouver region politics have been dominated by centre-left politicians since the 1970s. The City of Vancouver is governed by members of the Vision Vancouver party under Mayor Gregor Robinson, whose platform focused on creating the ‘Greenest City’ by 2020 and promoting better and more-efficient public transit options. Many other municipalities in the region have supported the New Democrat Party (centre-left) or the British Columbia Liberals (left). However, some of the suburban municipalities, such as North and West Vancouver, more frequently support Conservative (right) politicians. Recently, the left-wing politics have translated from the municipal level to both provincial and federal elections in the region (<http://www.vancouver.sun.com/news/bc-election/results.html>). The shared political platforms and approaches contribute to shaping the culture of planning in the region. For example, a city planner noted that “some of our biggest [planning] champions are actually our councillors. We have a very clear council on where they want to go and what their objectives are. And they generally align with the sustainability and affordability [efforts] and such” (VAN01m).

The Greater Toronto Area has a long, complicated political history. According to John Lorinc, “municipal government across the GTA is a cumbersome, expensive, balkanized embarrassment, the legacy of ill-considered decisions by successive Ontario governments” (Lorinc, 2011, online). The challenges are a result of the two-tier political system imposed in the 1970s by the provincial Progressive Conservative government under Bill Davis that created “a ring of suburbs now known as the 905, outside Metro’s borders, ... [that have become] a ring of large, powerful municipalities—Mississauga, Brampton, Oakville, Richmond Hill, Markham, Vaughan, and Ajax-Pickering—that compete with the city for private and public investment” (Lorinc, 2011, online). Municipal and regional tensions have been so evident that the provincial government stepped into planning in the early 2000s in an attempt to slow the rapid suburbanization of residents and jobs, the rise in crippling gridlock, and the associated loss of agricultural and environmentally sensitive lands (Boudreau et al, 2009).

Politics in the GTA are characterised by a ‘flip-flopping’ between left-wing and right-wing provincial governments—with significant effects on planning in the region. For example, in 1994, under a New Democrat government, a task-force (known as the Golden Commission) was formed under the stewardship of United Way chair Anne Golden to determine how best to manage growth in the rapidly

expanding GTA. The task force suggested abolishing Metro Toronto “and the other 905 regional municipalities in favour of a single Greater Toronto Council, with a mandate to plan and oversee such services as transportation, waste management, and economic development. The task force also recommended preserving the larger, lower-tier municipalities (for example, Toronto, Mississauga, and Oshawa), so they could continue offering residents access to local services like parks and planning” (Lorinc, 2011, online). However, in 1995, the newly elected Conservative government (under Premier Mike Harris) ignored the recommendations of the Golden Commission, choosing instead to amalgamate the City of Toronto and retain a polarizing two-tier government system. These political shifts between left- and right-wing governments affected changes to the Planning Act, transportation projects and other planning related objectives.

To this day, planners in the GTA feel influenced by the unsettled politics. In some instances, it can be good, as one planner notes:

I think our politicians, their understanding of what's important in the community.... Having a well planned community is what gets them elected. ... I think it's important for them to have vision on what they would like to see happen in the community. And our senior leaders working together to make that happen. They have to be a team. They have to work as a team [to accomplish] the 4-year mandate of the council and what they want to see delivered” (GTA03f).

By contrast, some planners perceive politics as a reason for proliferating plans that challenge coordination, because plans are “done as a result of direction from council. And that is often in response to a perceived issue by a councillor or by a group of councillors. [They are] directed by a councillor and it's something they would like to say in the election basically” (GTA02f). Election driven plans can be even more problematic due to “a lack of leadership on the political level” (GTA02f) in the region. Another planner summarized the challenges associated with political leadership in the GTA:

[The planner's] job is to lead them (councillors) in providing them with ... advice. But if they can't function well together then it definitely can limit the success of coordinating between plans, especially different departments. One political group may want a certain department to go in a certain direction, and another group, want it go in a different direction. And if they can't agree then it creates conflict that really hinders sort of coordination between the groups (GTA06m).

To summarize the challenges, Lorinc (2011, online) writes, “the [City of Toronto's] forty-five-member council is riven by chronic factionalism that pits the older central city against the postwar suburbs. Council meetings go on for days and often become mired in tortured arguments about issues as inconsequential as councillors' office expenses.” It is no wonder, given the political tensions, that planners in the GTA identify that the “largest challenge for [them] is dealing with senior levels of government” (GTA01m).

It is not all doom-and-gloom in the GTA, however, and the individual regional municipalities approach planning and politics differently. One planner suggested, for example, that York Region is “a leader in planning in Ontario” that “has done a really good job of coordinating their plans” (GTA12f). Nonetheless, unlike Metro Vancouver, none of the respondent planners in the GTA identified a consistent approach or high-level objectives that create a common political approach to planning in the region.

Much like the GTA, the Alberta Capital Region’s political history reveals tensions between the central city and the surrounding suburban municipalities. Repeated attempts to develop regional plans and planning bodies have dissolved over concerns surrounding the comparative dominance of the City of Edmonton over other municipalities (Alberta Municipal Affairs, 2007). Nonetheless, in 2008 the Government of Alberta mandated the participation of 24 municipalities to form the Capital Region Board with the promulgation of the Capital Region Board Regulation under the Municipal Government Act (Capital Region Board, 2011, p. 30). The “regional plan is really still in its infancy” (EDM07m), but unfortunately “with [the Capital Region’s] regional model, that challenge that we’re having in the county and I think a number of other municipalities is...the politics gets in the way of ... good planning” (EDM07m). Like Vancouver, the “regional planning in Alberta ...was done away with in the early '90s...and...now there's focus to bring that back. ...I think municipalities are realizing that there needs to be some sort of regional coordination in terms of infrastructure and green areas,” for example (EDM12f). Unlike Vancouver, however, there is no evidence of a culture of planning where planners and politicians in the region persisted with regional growth management efforts despite the lack of a provincial mandate to do so. While politics influence the culture of planning in a region, perhaps it’s planning leaders who have a greater impact.

Planning Leaders

Wheeler (2015, p 43) noted that “the ‘culture of leadership’ (VAN06m) in Vancouver helps coordination because it empowers all staff, including planners whose expertise generally makes them effective coordination leaders, to lead”. By creating a ‘culture of leadership,’ planners feel empowered to take charge of initiatives and focus on implementation. Even though Councillors in Vancouver are the final decision makers, planners believe that “some of our biggest champions are actually our councillors. We have a very clear council on where they want to go and what their objectives are. And they generally align with the sustainability and affordability [initiatives] and such” (VAN01m). In the end, fostering leadership results in happy planners. “I love my job as a senior planner because I definitely see my role as... not just championing urban design and good land use planning, [but] also grasping what the other objectives are... [and] knowing who to go to and talk to and at what point” (VAN02m).

In the GTA, leadership is perceived differently, in part due to the size of the region.

In a large organization like Toronto... it's not like you're in a smaller municipality or a smaller town where, you know, to get all the people in the room in a small town, it could be 3 people or 5 people, ...and...it's easy to get agreement or discussion between 5 people. But between 25 people is very difficult. And so it starts with

leadership at all the different levels of those different groups. So those departments, I guess, if you want to call them that, they all need to have excellent leadership in order to work together well and communicate effectively together, and to coordinate that work. So that's my opinion. It's really strong leadership. If you've got leaders who don't get along or leaders that don't do that work well then I think that's where you'll see the coordination not happen as well as it could be. Because really for us it's a lot of...almost all of our work is about partnerships between our interdepartmental partnerships. So if we don't have that then we don't...you know, the plans don't get done as well they could (GTA06m).

At the time of these interviews in 2014, the City of Toronto was in political turmoil under the leadership of Mayor Rob Ford. Planners acknowledged the turmoil, noting that “political leadership is interesting. I'm not sure... Well, it depends. I think that's actually pretty big right now at the City of Toronto given our current political leadership. ... In a few more months, we'll see what happens” (GTA06m). At the time, one planner said, plan coordination was viewed as “definitely... not a top priority. And I say that because I have to think a lot about how it's done. Which means it's not done in any really clear higher profile or centralized way. Now, to some extent, there was recently an exercise initiated by the city manager because we, as you may know, had a somewhat dysfunctional council this term. ...We had a bit of a lack of leadership on the political level” (GTA02f).

Outside of the City of Toronto, however, some planners are able to achieve stronger leadership. For example, York Region is identified as “a leader in Ontario in planning” that “has done a really good job of coordinating their plans. [The Region] has a really strong planning department and they have a really strong new regional official plan” (GTA12f). It is possible that York Region planners are perceived this way because

political pressure usually only comes [in York] when there's a community outcry that they need something. Because I don't think in our organization, there's a political driver for changing the planning process. What [the politicians] do is they let the planners go through good policy development and then council says ‘yes, we agree with that’ or ‘no, we don't agree with that’. I don't think there's a lot of political influence in York Region other than doing what their role is, which is to approve good policies. And they've been really supportive (GTA28m).

Ultimately, it appears that political turmoil and conflict within and between the regions in the GTA reduces the agency of individual planners to be leaders.

Leadership functioned differently within the City of Edmonton than in the surrounding municipalities in the Alberta Capital Region. Wheeler (2015, p 30) found that “perceptions of the Edmonton city manager’s leadership approach were overwhelmingly positive in regards to the impact on coordination” of plans. Within planning departments, planners said that Edmonton experienced successful leadership. “I'd say our supervisor is pretty good at acknowledging that we have to build bridges. And I've made suggestions to her that she's like, ‘Yeah, good idea.’ So we made it happen. So she's pretty good at making things happen and bringing people together” (EDM03f). Despite these perceptions, however, planners still experienced conflict with political leaders. For example, planners “want to encourage smart growth. And that's in our strategic plan, ...[which] has been approved by council. But whenever

[planners] bring a higher density residential to council, they always reject it. ...Even though they have smart growth in their strategic plan, they're continuously rejecting having a variety of housing types" (EDM01f).

The City of Edmonton's planners are being lauded for their leadership and innovation by many Canadian communities. Recently, the city re-wrote their guiding plans, using a framework known as "The Ways." The Municipal Development Plan (*The Way We Grow*) and the Transportation Master Plan (*The Way We Move*) were developed relationship between transportation and land use. The introduction of "The Ways" in Edmonton corresponded with a high-level policy and culture shift that has been well received by city planners. One planner explained that

one of those things that you work at in good governance is that... you've got the right functional arrangement. It changes all the time depending on what your needs are. But you've got people that buy into the culture of what's a good city about, what is it to be a great city. And that's really a strong theme within the City of Edmonton. We want to go to the next level. Our city manager has started a process of translating a vision and building a culture where the people that work for the corporation believe in the value of being a great city and all of the great things that it can mean for both themselves and the citizenry (EDM09m).

The evidence suggests that planners, particularly those in the City of Edmonton, believe that they benefit from a strong culture of leadership within planning departments; however, effective implementation of plans is hindered when values do not extend to councillors and political leaders. One Edmonton planners summarized that "when there is that culture of *one city* collaboration, it makes such a difference in coordination" (EDM10f).

Planning in the Community

The culture of planning – that is a system of beliefs and activities that support planning activities and values -- must extend beyond planners and politicians and into the community if it is to be successful. Effective planning should serve the 'public good' and the needs of the community; thus, acceptance of planning initiatives in the community would be a key component of the culture of planning. Planners in the City of Vancouver appear to benefit from a highly engaged community. For example, one planner noted that "there [are] lots of people in the community who are very engaged. ... Planning is almost a hobby here. It is pretty...common that there is some sort of planning-related article in the news every day" (VAN01m). A culture of planning in the community does not mean that community members support all planning initiatives, but rather that the community supports the idea and the act of planning. That same planner stated that "we have been able to quite effectively direct growth and to achieve our objectives...[because] there [are] a lot of champions in our city, both internally and in the community" (VAN01m).

As may be expected, the culture of planning in the community varied significantly across the GTA. Residents of the central city seemed to accept the need for planning and engage with planning activities,

while residents in some of the more peripheral areas were notably less supportive or involved. One planner in an outlying area of the GTA recounted how

after the creation of this [plan] and getting it adopted by council and going through almost 2 years of community consultation, it's always mind boggling to me that after it's all put in place, you still get people coming up and saying, "I didn't know about this. How come I didn't know about this? I wouldn't have agreed to this." ... And you say, "Well, don't you open your mail?" You know, snail mail, email, whatever, we tried. We tried really hard. But we can't force you to read things. (GTA16f)

In some communities, distrust of the planning process can mean that "some people feel that community consultation sessions are pointless [because]... [planners have] made up our mind ahead of time that this is what's going to happen" (GTA16f). Further, a York Region planner found that "we don't feel [community pressure] at the regional level but certainly... it varies across our 9 municipalities" (GTA27f).

In the City of Toronto, interest in planning in the community presents a challenge in itself.

I will be honest with you, [there] is a pressure that we experience because the development community wants us to respond faster. However, responding faster doesn't mean... better. And to me, community engagement is an important part of the process. Personally, my personal approach and goal is always balancing having sufficient community consultation, special interest groups, development community consultation with bringing a product forward. Because you can consult for ever and a day...[and] you can also do analysis forever and a day" (GTA04f).

Many respondents in the City bemoaned the volume of public consultation required to plan effectively, but also acknowledged its importance, and the benefits of public interest in planning objectives. Ultimately, community involvement in planning projects is critical to ensuring "that [the] Planning [Department] has a voice and ... become[s] a leader in terms of dealing with planning and change in the city, and city building in effect" (GTA05m).

Responses in the Alberta Capital Region were similarly varied. In the City of Edmonton, planners referred to the "One City" mantra regularly as reflecting a culture that supports effective planning: a "really important [factor] is having a corporate culture where people are seriously invested in ... a one city approach to doing business. ...That seems a bit cheesy to say that but it's all about the human relationships when it comes to implementing plans and prioritizing actions and working together to get things done" (EDM02f). One City is still in its infancy in Edmonton, however, and not all planners are so optimistic about its effect: "We're repeatedly told that we're One City but we're not.... As much as we aspire to be, we are very departmentalized" (EDM03m).

Outside of the bureaucratic system, residents in the capital region respond to planning differently. For example, one planner discussed challenges with local community groups or leagues:

the problem is nowadays a lot of [the leagues] aren't representative necessarily of people who are living in the area. ... I would say in my experience of interacting with them, most of the community leagues are very much just... I don't necessarily see them thinking about the bigger picture of how does our plan fit in with the larger city

context at all really. Usually it's a lot of NIMBY (not in my backyard) and a lot of ... "we just want things to stay the way they are". (EDM06f).

The sentiments expressed by EDM06f are rooted in the ACR's ground-oriented development history. Another planner bemoaned the 'out-dated' policies lingering in her department:

the revitalization strategy set out some expectations that we won't be able to meet in terms of protecting single-detached homes And the residential infill guidelines ... actually have this horrific policy statement that was advocated by this neighbourhood about a core of single-detached homes will be retained in all mature neighbourhoods. And it's just ... the most vague language. ...It's not a well thought out planning principle (EDM10f).

Edmonton's new 'overarching policies' are, by many accounts, progressive documents that support contemporary planning objectives such as infill and mixed-use developments. However, council and residents in the region regularly seem to reject the objectives contained within the planning documents. Wheeler (2015, p 27) noted that "a city planner in the Town of Beaumont (in Edmonton region), gave an example: council approved smart growth policies but continuously rejected implementation projects based on the policies because they did not understand how smart growth policies would look when put into practice". Further, the experiences noted by EDM06f and EDM10f suggest that while council and residents support smart-growth and infill in theory, in practice they continue to promote single-detached housing development. The lack of support for the planning objectives in the Edmonton area suggests a relatively weak culture of planning in some communities.

Each of the regions has fostered a culture of planning through different interactions with their physical attributes, politics, planning leaders and communities. One further factor influences the culture of planning in a region: economics.

Local Economy

In Canada, Toronto and Vancouver have been major economic engines for nearly a century. With the discovery of oil in the Alberta Capital Region, Edmonton emerged as a major economic force as well. How does the economy of a region affect the culture of planning?

Metro Vancouver has a diversified economy. The City of Vancouver contains western Canada's primary sea-port, and is the closest North American port to Asia (Vancouver Economic Commission, 2016). Further, "Vancouver has three of Canada's four tech unicorns (start-ups valued at more than \$1 billion), namely Slack®, Hootsuite® and Avigilon®" (VEC, 2016). The tech industry in Metro Vancouver employs more than 100,000 people and "generates more than \$23 billion in revenue and \$15 billion in" Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (VEC, 2016). The region is the third largest film and television production hub in North America: the digital entertainment and interactive industry (e.g. visual effects, animation, and video-game production) "generates more than 40,000 jobs in Vancouver, contributing billions in direct GDP to the city's economy" (VEC, 2016). The region is also home to two-thirds of British Columbia's largest forestry companies and nearly seventy percent of BC's life sciences industry, including biopharmaceuticals (VEC, 2016).

With such a diverse economic base, Vancouver has been able to continue to grow despite recessions: “even during the last recession, it really didn't slow development in Vancouver. Our development permits and re-zonings are above the peak levels in the past and have remained that way. So we continue to see a lot of demand” (VAN01m). Another planner recounted that “Vancouver is unique in the sense that... we went through a year of contraction in 2008/09.... We also had a period of contraction in the early '90s but it only lasted a year. ...Otherwise, since 1986 when we had the World's Fair, we've had a significant amount of growth” (VAN02m). Continuous growth and prosperity in the region has supported planning initiatives and implementation.

I'd say all of [these planners] have been attracted to Vancouver because we have a history of not creating plans that don't do anything but actually implementing them clearly on the ground. ... And that's ... due to...the fortunate state we're in, I would say, that there actually is growth. You know, a lot of communities create plans and there's just no growth to realize them. And I understand that growth is a double-edged sword. But we have been able to quite effectively direct growth and to achieve our objectives (VAN01m).

Without economic prosperity and growth, residents and politicians often shift their focus away from land-use or cultural planning towards economic development.

Much like Vancouver, Toronto has a diverse economy that has helped it to resist recessions. “Toronto is Canada's chief economic powerhouse, with 6 million regional inhabitants, 40% of the nation's business headquarters, nearly a fifth of Canada's GDP, and 45% of Ontario's GDP” (Invest Toronto, 2016). The City of Toronto has the second largest financial services centre and the third largest aggregate stock exchange, the Toronto Stock Exchange (TSX), in North America (City of Toronto, 2016). Furthermore, the region exports more than \$70 billion in goods and services annually (Invest Toronto, 2016).

Because the GTA is so large and diverse, however, it experiences significant internal economic disparity. An economic development officer in a Peel Region municipality noted that “the Region, working with the town of Caledon, started a process to ensure that all these villages [near Alton Village] would have the proper safe water and wastewater systems. The problem is that those villages aren't growing to a large extent, so the development charges aren't coming to build that infrastructure. And that's why we haven't been able to complete those plans within the villages, just because the cost associated with it is too high” (GTA01m). On the other hand, a planner in Markham boasted that in that “area of the GTA ... growth has been huge; ...we have doubled [our] population” (GTA03f). Areas, such as Markham, blessed with strong population and economic growth, though faced with other planning conundrums, have the financial wherewithal to implement planning objectives.

Of the three regions, the Alberta Capital Region has the least diversified economy. The region is supported by resource-based industries, such as oil and gas. According to Edmonton's *The Way We Prosper*, “without question, global economic trends, particularly as they relate to oil, gas and petrochemicals, will continue to positively benefit Edmonton in terms of population, employment growth and a strong local economy” (Edmonton, 2013, 14). Recent trends in the cost of oil have exposed the weakness of the linkage between oil and the Albertan economy. “Alberta's current economic

prosperity and substantial growth largely rely on exporting heavy oil to the United States. With the third-largest deposits of recoverable oil in the world, Alberta is not at risk of running out of oil. However, production costs are high. Additionally, the global environmental movement and trends toward alternative energy and reduced greenhouse gas emissions casts a shadow of uncertainty over the long-term outlook of the energy economy” (Edmonton, 2013, 15). As of 2010, the six industry groups of retail trade, health care and social assistance, construction, manufacturing, professional, scientific and technical services, and educational services accounted “for 53.2% of total employment. Although direct employment in the mining and oil and gas extraction sector is relatively small, at 3.4%, [it] is a major driver of employment in other sectors, in particular construction and manufacturing” (Capital Region Board, 2011, p. 22).

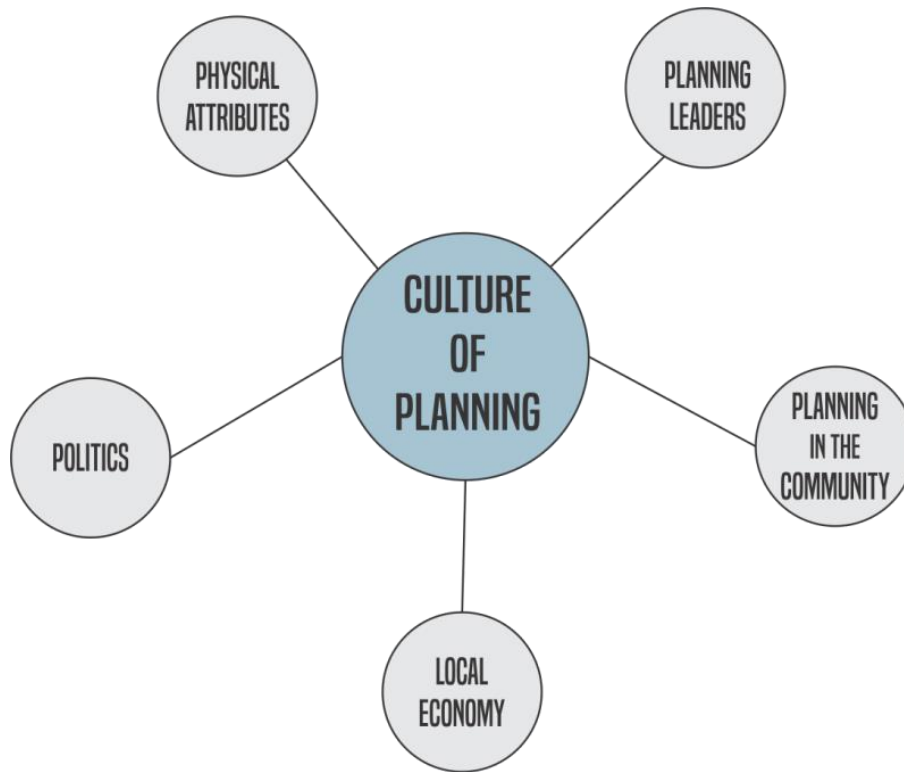
According to planners, the importance of the oil and gas industry is felt beyond the economy. One planner noted that “the two times that the province has stepped up and been serious about regional planning in Alberta has always coincided after a major oil boom here in Alberta. ... And the carrots are too big by the province to potentially have this fight with oil-sand developments and potentially refineries for major infrastructure projects in the region. And therefore the province was forced to step back in to protect its interests” (EDM07m). The economic benefit of the oil and gas extraction sector, when healthy, is significant: “growth is not a problem. For us, the industry is certainly managing that relative to funding. I think in the last two years our population will have jumped: the results will show by about 60,000 people. We've got a high rate of... So a very robust economy here” (EDM09m). Unfortunately, the lack of economic diversity in the region means that it is more vulnerable to economic recessions and fluctuations, which makes long-term planning more difficult. In early 2016, unemployment in Alberta threatened to hit eight percent, and Deron Bilous, Alberta’s economic development minister, directly correlated unemployment to the drop in global oil prices (Howell, 2016). Comparing the ACR to the other two study regions, evidence suggests that a diversified economy could help to support stable economic and population growth by helping the region to pass through economic recessions with minimal impact.

Culture of Planning

Many things contribute to developing a culture of planning. Figure 1 distills these contributing elements into five factors: physical attributes, politics, planning leaders, planning in the community, and local economy.

Just as living near water shapes the cultural values of residents, the landscape of a region can affect the perceived scarcity of land and, therefore, the perceived need for planning. Metro Vancouver demonstrated the strongest links between physical attributes and their attitudes towards planning. The region is situated on British Columbia’s west coast surrounded by oceans, mountains and an international border, which have helped constrain the region to fewer than 2500 square kilometers. Similarly, in the Greater Toronto Area Lake Ontario, the Niagara Escarpment, and the Oak Ridges Moraine presented physical environments that either contained growth or provided the ideological justification for containing growth.

Figure 1: Factors influencing the local culture of planning



Politics also influence the culture of local planning. In Canadian municipalities, municipal planners advise members of council, but final decisions and approvals are the responsibility of politicians. When those politicians are informed about planning issues and support planning objectives, they help to foster a culture of planning. However, when they do not support planning objectives, “politics [can get] in the way of ... good planning” (EDM07m). Effective planning leaders can help guide politicians, community members and other planners. Planners in Metro Vancouver perceived themselves as powerful: “I think we really do have like a pretty strong culture of leadership there, like where there are definitely strong planners who lead the charge in developing the plans and then making sure that they happen” (VAN06m). Wheeler found that, while planners in Vancouver operate in a typical system “where council makes the final decisions, ...planners feel they hold considerable influence” (Wheeler, 2015, p. 26). A strong culture of planners is supported by strong leaders who empower planners, residents and politicians to champion planning initiatives through to implementation. At the provincial level, government can make political choices that support planning. For instance, strong growth management strategies, such as the Places to Grow Act in Ontario, clearly help support a culture of planning.

Another key influence on the culture of planning is the support for planning initiatives in the community. Ultimately, planners and politicians serve the public, so community involvement in planning can be considered an indicator of a planning culture. Metro Vancouver benefits from “lots of people in the

community who are very engaged.” (VAN01m). Public involvement can help drive plan implementation when the community supports municipal planning objectives. However, in some instances, community members can seek to exploit planning tools, such as Edmonton’s Area Structure Plans (ARPs), to stall change. “I think a lot of residents view ARPs as a way to protect what they currently have. ...So that’s a challenge of the city... communicating that ...if you... get an ARP that does not mean you are going to be able to maintain single-family homes. That ARP has to align with our strategic direction and part of that is making more sustainable use of our land and increasing density and some areas, and encouraging infill” (EDM06f). The four factors discussed thus far are most effective when they are present together. To create ideal conditions for containing growth, a region would be physically constrained with scarce land resources, led by visionary planners, with informed and supportive politicians, and inhabited by an engaged constituency.

One final factor supports a culture of planning: the local economy. A planner in Vancouver referenced municipalities that struggle because they “create plans and there’s just no growth to realize them” (VAN01m). While “growth is a double-edged sword” (VAN01m), it provides the financial support and demand for plans. “We have been [growing] for 100 years. So growth is the primary driver. People want to live here and people are moving here... So we’re constantly struggling to deal with a growing population and job base” (VAN01m). Both Metro Vancouver and the GTA benefit from long-standing immigration and natural population growth supported by strong employment growth and highly diversified economies. As a result, the two regions have managed nearly perpetual growth, despite recessions elsewhere in the country and the world. By contrast, the ACR’s economy is closely linked to the oil and gas extraction sector, and is, therefore, more vulnerable to fluctuations in the economy. When global oil prices are high, the Edmonton region economy prospers, and experiences growth and renewed interest in planning. When oil prices decline, the region suffers economic decline, population loss, and a decreased interest in planning initiatives in the public and politics.

Evidence suggests that Metro Vancouver has a positive and supportive culture of planning. The region is not without its struggles; for example, as one planner noted, “affordability is a huge challenge in Vancouver, as you know” (VAN01m). Nonetheless, it appears to have had relative success in constraining growth thanks to its physical attributes and strong policies. Metro Vancouver planners applaud their planning leaders and politicians for fostering “a culture of leadership” in planning (VAN06m). Furthermore, despite a lack of legislative responsibility to do so, planners across the region agreed to support the regional growth strategies because they “all believed in [it].... We were all...in accord” (VAN13m). Metro Vancouver residents are engaged in planning, so much so that one planner characterised planning as a “hobby” in the region (VAN01m). Finally, the Metro Vancouver economy is highly diversified and one of the strongest in Canada, which affords planners the financial wherewithal to plan, and a demand to do so. All of these factors combine to create what can be considered a strong culture of planning in the Metro Vancouver region.

In Toronto and Edmonton, some elements of the local planning culture have strengthened local efforts to manage growth, while counter-vailing practices increased resistance. In the GTA some of the communities, such as Markham, have developed a more supportive culture of managing growth than may be found in other areas. Tumultuous local politics and sometimes adversarial relationships with the

province have undermined the concerted efforts and commonality of purpose necessary to control growth. In the Alberta Capital Region, different municipalities take divergent approaches. While the City of Edmonton implemented internal approaches to share values and coordinate policies, the many smaller communities in the region vie for a share of growth.

This working paper briefly reviewed some key factors influencing municipal approaches to managing growth. In an era where resources are finite, and concerted actions are necessary to ensure that our communities employ sustainable approaches to planning for the future, developing and supporting local planning cultures that contribute towards effective growth management becomes increasingly important.

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