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Coordinating Land Use Planning in the Context of Multiple Plans

Interview Sample Summary Report

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Project Overview

Canadian communities have developed myriad plans and policies that affect the use and development of land. Official or community plans set the long-term vision and overall direction, and typically promote sustainability, smart growth, and urban efficiency. At the same time, governments adopt other policies in reaction to specific circumstances: some respond to demands from community interests; some follow regional trends; some are driven by conditional funding made available by senior government.

In the heat of the moment, within short windows for decision-making, policy-makers may not consider the consequences of new policies on existing plans and land use objectives. Hence policies created at different times for diverse purposes may be overlapping, inconsistent, untimely, or even contradictory. For instance, official plans may support greenways and wildlife corridors while hazard plans may recommend removing undergrowth or clearing fire breaks.

This research explores the strategies Canadian planners are using to coordinate the growing number of plans that communities are adopting. It is funded through a three-year (2013-2016) Insight Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Partners in the research are the Canadian Institute of Planners and DalTrac Transportation Collaboratory at Dalhousie University. The team is also grateful for assistance from ICURR and from the School of Planning at Dalhousie University.

The primary research team includes four colleagues in Planning from Dalhousie University and one contributor in Planning at the University of Waterloo:

- Jill Grant (Principal Investigator, Dalhousie University)
- Ahsan Habib (Dalhousie University)
- Patricia Manuel (Dalhousie University)
- Eric Rapaport (Dalhousie University)
- Pierre Filion (University of Waterloo)

Two of the team's research assistants, Nathan Hall and Amanda Taylor, aptly summarized project work completed in the initial phases:

In the first phase of the research, [Andrew] Burns (2013a) conducted a literature review of plans and scholarly articles on the subject of plan coordination. He identified examples of plans and policy efforts designed to promote coordination from a sample of 35 cities across English-speaking Canada. Burns (2013b) later performed an inventory of all types of plans being produced across English-speaking Canada, compiling a sample of over 350 plans drawn from 33 cities. He found that master plans, transportation plans, environmental plans, and green space plans were the most common. The commonness of corporate plans, recreation plans, cultural plans, downtown plans, housing plans, economic plans, resource plans, heritage plans, and growth plans varied regionally. Least

common were waste plans, waterfront plans, and urban design plans. Most plans had been prepared recently, with about half produced in 2010 or later. (Hall and Taylor, 2014, pp. 3-4)

In an article in *Plan Canada*, Burns and Grant (2014) summarized the key trends in producing plans in Canada.

Trends in the common types of plans prepared by Canadian cities reflect the priorities of councils, planning departments, and upper levels of government. While land use planning remains central to planners' missions, the study showed that transportation planning and environmental planning have become equally critical themes in contemporary practice. By contrast, concerns about immigration, energy, or urban forests may be on local agendas, but they generate stand-alone plans only in a few communities. Understanding the resources dedicated to various planning issues provides insights on the direction of the profession and the kinds of professional education practitioners may need. (Burns and Grant, 2014, p. 35)

During the spring of 2014, the research team administered a web-based survey to planners across Canada (Hall, 2014a). The survey collected information concerning coordination as a problem, the prioritization of coordination in Canadian municipalities, identification of coordination challenges, and effective strategies for improving coordination (Taylor, 2014a). In fall 2014, Hall (2014b) conducted preliminary analysis of some data from interviews conducted in summer 2014: his report examines respondents' perceptions of the role of other actors in the planning process. Taylor (2014b) examined data from Vancouver and Edmonton to consider formal and informal coordination strategies.

Interview Summary

Between June and September, 2014, the Coordinating Multiple Plans research team conducted in-person interviews to investigate the perspectives of practicing planners in Canada. The interviews contribute to the third phase of the research program: community case study analyses. The work seeks to understand how practitioners are responding to the current context of land use planning, and the strategies they use to assist in their work.

Three graduate research assistants--two from Dalhousie University and one from the University of Waterloo--interviewed municipal, provincial, regional, and consultant planners in the following metropolitan areas: St. John's, Newfoundland (SJ); Halifax, Nova Scotia (HFX); Toronto, Ontario (GTA); Edmonton, Alberta (EDM); and Vancouver, British Columbia (VAN) (Figure 1). This report provides an overview of the interview methods and describes the general characteristics of the interview sample. It begins by reviewing the census data and municipal structure of each study area.

Figure 1: Metropolitan Regions Studied across Canada



Base Map Source: Halton District School Board, 2011.

Overview of Study Areas

This section describes the size (land area), population, and municipal boundaries of each study area. The political boundaries of the metropolitan regions do not align perfectly with the census boundaries used by Statistics Canada; the CMA boundaries are used for the tables below. The populations, densities, and sizes of each study area may impact the perceptions and answers of interview respondents.

Table 1 compares recent changes in population within each CMA, and illustrates population densities from 2011. The five CMAs represent a wide variety of city types, from a small city of under 200,000 residents to a bustling metropolis of 5.5 million. All five metropolitan areas experienced population growth between 2001 and 2011: the table shows percent change in population over the period. The most significant growth occurred in Edmonton (23.67%), while Halifax experienced the least growth (8.67%).

Table 1: Population in the Five CMA Study Areas

	2001	2006	2011	% Change (2001-2011)	Density 2011 (persons/km²)
Halifax	359,183	372,858	390,328	8.67%	71.0
Edmonton	937,840	1,034,945	1,159,869	23.67%	123.0
St John's	172,918	181,113	196,966	13.91%	244.8
Greater Toronto Area	4,682,897	5,113,149	5,582,064	19.20%	945.4
Vancouver	1,986,965	2,116,581	2,313,328	16.43%	802.5

Sources: Pembina Institute, n.d.; Statistics Canada, 2001a; b; c; d; e; 2006a; b; c; d; e; 2012a; b; c; d; e.

The areas of the five CMAs vary substantially, from the smallest at 804.65 km² in St. John's to the largest at 9426.73 km² in Edmonton (Statistics Canada, 2012b; 2012c). The most densely populated area is Toronto, followed closely by Vancouver. The other three regions have relatively low densities, in part because they include large areas that remain sparsely populated. The three lower density regions each have higher density urbanized cores (e.g., Downtown Halifax and the Central Area of Edmonton). These variations will add an important dimension to the analysis of the interview data as each context offers unique challenges and opportunities to planners. Coordinating plans in regions with larger populations or larger land areas may pose different challenges and opportunities than those in smaller or less populated regions.

Halifax, Nova Scotia

The Halifax Regional Municipality (Figure 2), or Halifax, resulted in 1996 from the amalgamation of four municipalities: the City of Halifax, the City of Dartmouth, the Town of Bedford, and the Municipality of the County of Halifax. Although its population is second lowest among the study regions, Halifax is the third largest CMA in land area, occupying 5495.71 km². As a port city and provincial capital, its economy includes many jobs in government, military, logistics, marine services, health care, education, and creative industries.

Figure 2: Halifax CMA (2006)

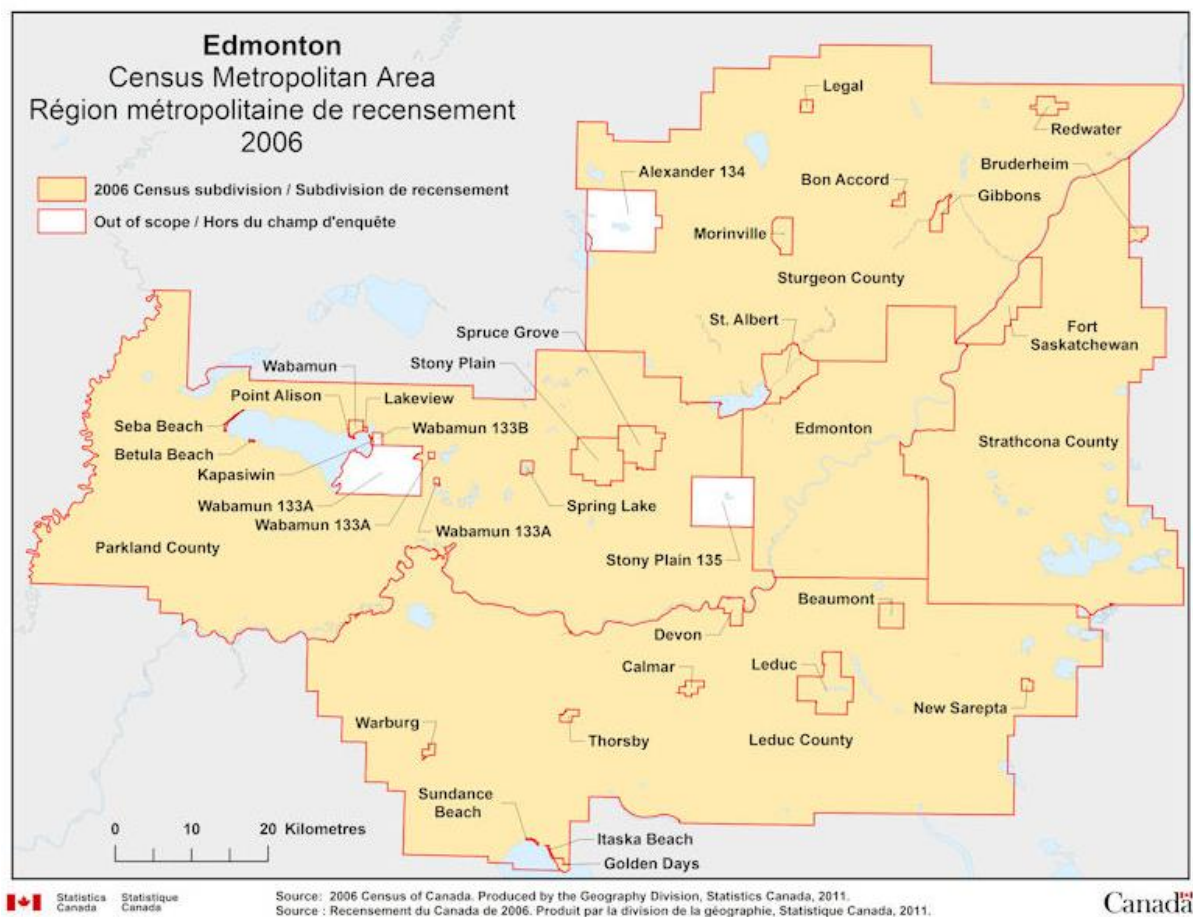


Source: Statistics Canada, 2011a.

Edmonton, Alberta

Edmonton covers nearly 9500 km² and comprises 35 census subdivisions (Figure 3). Through annexation, Edmonton absorbed neighbouring communities such as Strathcona, Beverly, and Jasper Place by 1982. The Statistics Canada boundaries, which mostly exclude Lamont County to the east of Strathcona County, vary from those of the Capital Regional Board (CRB) for Metropolitan Edmonton. The CRB is responsible for the Regional Growth Plan for Metropolitan Edmonton, among other duties (Capital Region Board, 2015). As the capital of Alberta, Edmonton enjoys an economy strengthened by oil sands development in northern Alberta and diamond mining in the Northwest Territories.

Figure 3: Edmonton CMA (2006) & Census Subdivisions (Municipalities)

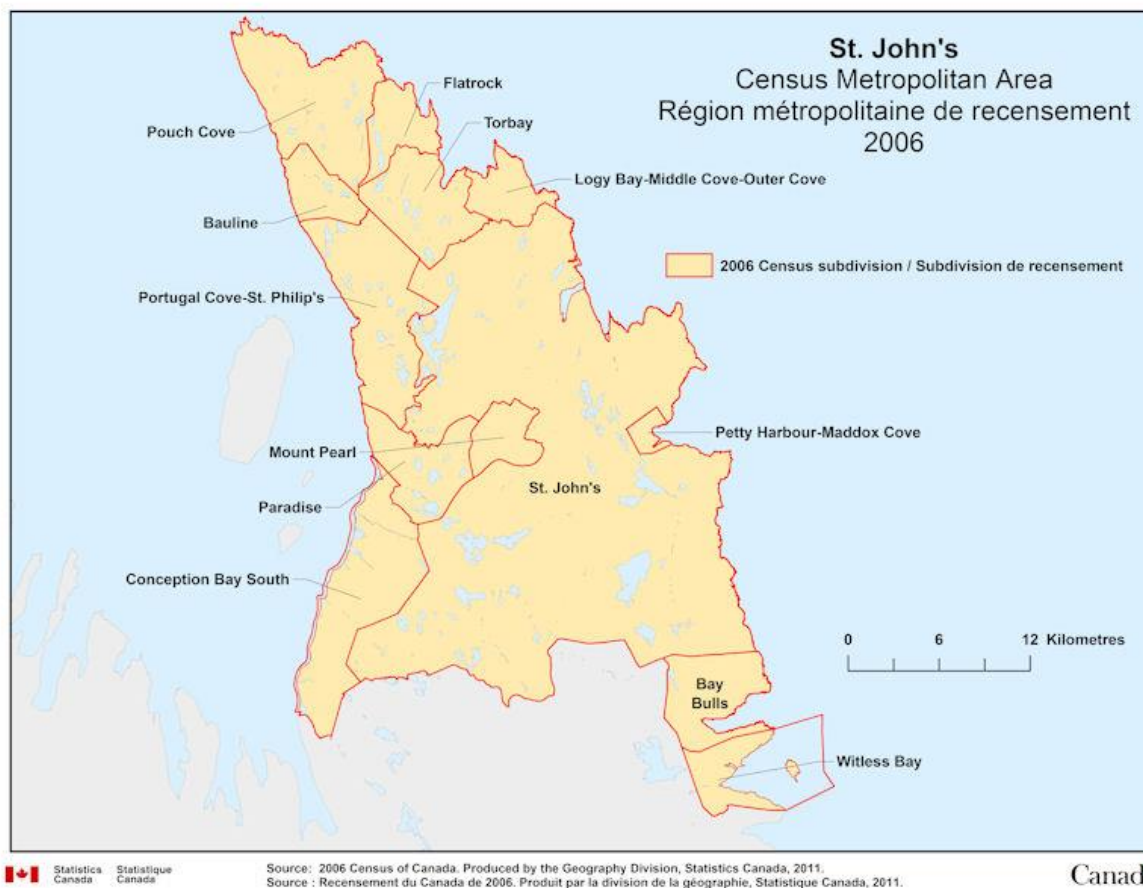


Source: Statistics Canada, 2011b

St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador

St. John's is the smallest metropolitan area included in the study, with a population of 196,966 in 2011, occupying just 804 km². The CMA comprises 13 municipalities, with nearly half of the population located in the municipality of St. John's and another 50,000 residents located in Conception Bay South and Mount Pearl (Figure 4). The capital of Newfoundland and Labrador, St John has a mixed economy, which has waxed and waned with offshore petroleum development and mining operations.

Figure 4: St. John's CMA (2006) & Census Subdivisions (Municipalities)

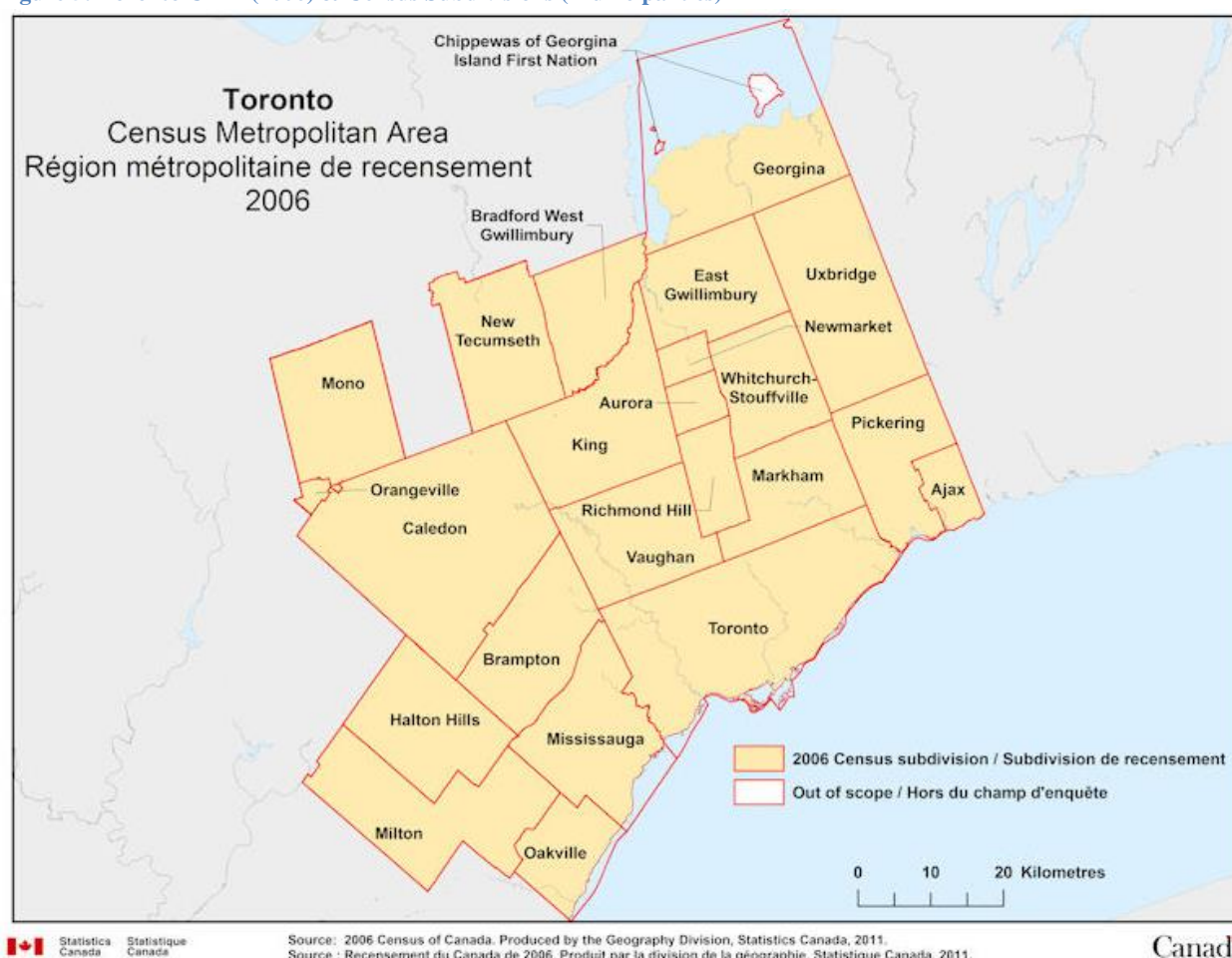


Source: Statistics Canada, 2011c.

Toronto, Ontario

The Greater Toronto Area is the largest metropolitan area in Canada. It is the second largest CMA in land area, occupying 5905.71 km² in Southern Ontario. Despite its size, it has one of the highest population densities of the study areas. The CMA encompasses 24 municipalities (Figure 5), including the amalgamated Toronto Municipality comprising the former City of Toronto, York, East York, North York, and Etobicoke municipalities (Figure 6). The region commonly referred to as the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) contains five regional municipalities (Peel, Durham, Halton, Toronto, and York) with boundaries that vary slightly from the CMA, which excludes much of Durham (Inset Map, Figure 6). As the capital of Ontario, Toronto has a robust mixed economy, which plays a major role in conditions across the country.

Figure 5: Toronto CMA (2006) & Census Subdivisions (Municipalities)



Source: Statistics Canada, 2011d.

Figure 6: Pre-amalgamation Municipalities in the Greater Toronto Area



Source: Wikipedia Commons, n.d.

Vancouver, British Columbia

Vancouver is the third largest metropolitan area in Canada (after Toronto and Montreal) occupying 2882.55 km² on British Columbia's southwest coast. The CMA includes 21 municipalities, one unincorporated electoral area (Greater Vancouver A) and one treaty First Nation area (Tsawwassen) (Figure 7). In the case of Vancouver, the CMA and the boundaries of Metro Vancouver (formerly the Greater Vancouver Regional District) align to cover the same region. Although Vancouver is not the capital of British Columbia, its diverse and dynamic economy plays a major role in the region.

Figure 7: Vancouver CMA (2006) & Census Subdivisions (Municipalities)



Source: Statistics Canada, 2011e.

Interview Method

The team used semi-structured, qualitative research questions (see Appendix) to interview a sample of 92 planning professionals in the five study areas. While the questions provided structure to the interviews, the interviewers had the liberty to adjust the questions based on the interviewees' responses. Most interviews were conducted one-on-one and in-person; however, in a few cases a researcher interviewed multiple respondents at once, and, in one instance, two researchers interviewed an individual respondent. The team conducted a handful of interviews over the telephone.

Interviews were done over the following periods:

- Halifax (Regional Municipality): June 19, 2014 - September 24, 2014
- Edmonton (Metropolitan Area): July 3, 2014 - July 18, 2014
- St. John's (Metropolitan Area): July 3, 2014 - July 30, 2014
- Greater Toronto Area: June 16, 2014 - August 14, 2014
- Vancouver (Metropolitan Area): July 7, 2014 - July 25, 2014

Each interview was scheduled for approximately one hour, although the shortest ran for only 11 minutes and the longest for 1 hour and 28 minutes. The average running time of interviews was 55 minutes and 52 seconds. All but one of the interviews was recorded (with permission of the respondents) and transcribed for data analysis.

Interview Sample Characteristics

A total of 92 respondents were interviewed from the five regions. This section describes the characteristics of those interviewed, including gender, years of planning experience, type of planning role, and educational background. As can be seen in Table 2, below, the majority of the respondent sample is male (63.04%). This is the case for the respondents from all five regions except for Edmonton, where more women (55.56%) were interviewed than men. St. John's had the most equitable balance between male and female respondents.

Table 2: Genders of Respondents

	Male	Female	Total
Halifax	11	4	15
Edmonton	8	10	18
St John's	7	6	13
Greater Toronto Area	20	11	31
Vancouver	12	3	15
Total sample	58	34	92
	63.04%	36.96%	100%

Table 3 shows the years of planning-related work experience among respondents for each metropolitan area. Respondents from Vancouver and Toronto had the most planning experience, with an average of approximately 20 years in each area. Edmonton had the lowest average years of planning experience. Each area had a wide range in years of planning experience among respondents; the least experienced interviewee was from Halifax with 3 weeks of experience (0.05 years) and the most experienced is from Toronto with 44 years. Although the range of years of planning experience was wide for all regions, Toronto had four respondents with 20 years of experience and Edmonton had three with 8 years.

Table 3: Years of Planning Experience of Respondents

	Min.	Max.	Range	No. of Interviewees	Avg. Years of Experience	No. of Respondents who did not provide this data
HFX	0.05*	30	29.95	15	15.75	3
EDM	1	35	34	18	13.22	0
SJ	1	34	33	13	16.00	1
GTA	2	44	42	31	19.77	0
VAN	5	42	37	15	20.27	0

**Represents a planning intern with three-weeks of experience.*

The various planning roles or positions of respondents at the time of interview are shown in Table 4. The "Other" category includes those in planning roles for transit agencies, along with development officers and planning technicians. "Regional" planners are those who work with more than one municipality but do not work at the provincial level: for instance, staff at organizations such as the Greater Vancouver Regional District would fall there. Those working for private companies are considered "Consultant" planners.

Our team interviewed 92 planners in total. Municipal planners made up the majority of the sample (66.3%) with a much smaller but remarkably even distribution of provincial, regional, and consultant planners (7.61% each). Those in other planning roles were just under 11% of the sample. The representation of those in planning roles varied between each region. Provincial planners were interviewed from Halifax and St. John's, but not from other regions. No regional planners were interviewed from St. John's or Toronto. Differences in planning roles of respondents may impact their perspective and, consequently, impact the interview data. The strong representation of municipal planners will influence interpretation of the data.

Table 4: Planning Roles of Respondents

	Municipal	Provincial	Regional	Consultant	Other	Total
HFX	7	2	2	2	2	15
EDM	16	0	1	0	1	18
SJ	5	5	0	3	0	13
GTA	26	0	0	0	5	31
VAN	7	0	4	2	2	15
Total	61	7	7	7	10	92
Percentage	66.30%	7.61%	7.61%	7.61%	10.87%	100%

As can be seen in Table 5 all respondents reported some form of post-secondary education. Overall, the majority of respondents (65.2%) have an educational background in planning, while 34.8% never attended a Canadian Institute of Planners-accredited planning program. This is true for each regions except Toronto where the majority of respondents (54.8%) had no formal planning education. Common educational backgrounds other than planning include engineering, urban design, geography, and environmental science. Educational programs other than accredited planning programs included planning technician diplomas, certificates, or non-accredited planning programs.

Table 5: Educational Background of Respondents

	Planning		Non-Planning		Number of Respondents
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	
HFX	12	80.0%	3	20.0%	15
EDM	12	66.7%	6	33.3%	18
SJ	11	84.6%	2	15.4%	13
GTA	14	45.2%	17	54.8%	31
VAN	11	73.3%	4	26.7%	15
Total	60	65.2%	32	34.8%	92

Limitations of Interview Data

The interview data have some limitations. First, while all attempts were made to ensure a diverse respondent sample, researchers often used a snowball sampling strategy, asking respondents to suggest other respondents. Furthermore, most interviews were conducted over the summer season when potential respondents in some organizations may have been unavailable due to vacations. Finally, provincial planners were interviewed in two regions, but not in three others.

Future Research

This report briefly describes the characteristics of the 92 planners interviewed by the Coordinating Multiple Plans research team in 2014, and discusses some of the characteristics of the five metropolitan areas studied. The research team will use the resulting qualitative interview data in conjunction with the results of previous project work to accomplish the following four objectives found in the research proposal (Grant et al., 2012):

1. To understand the context and practices within which planners develop, coordinate, and implement the diverse policies, plans, and regulations that affect land use;
2. To assess the ways in which factors such as community size, institutional arrangements, growth rates, and professional discourses may affect the development, coordination, and implementation of land use planning policies and regulations;
3. To evaluate current trends and best practices in plan coordination and implementation;
4. To identify opportunities to enhance the potential for effective plan development, coordination, and implementation in Canadian community planning.

Interview data analysis will be complemented and informed by work previously completed by the Coordinating Multiple Plans research team. Triangulating the interview results with the results from the other methods employed in the research study will be a key part of the fourth phase of the research: synthesizing, interpreting, and disseminating the project findings. The research proposal, working papers, and completed student papers can be found on Dr. Jill Grant's research website¹. The research team will post additional reports on the research as they become available.

Acknowledgements: The research team is grateful to our partners and to the many planners who took time from their busy schedules to participate in the research.

¹ <http://theoryandpractice.planning.dal.ca/multiple-plans/index.html>

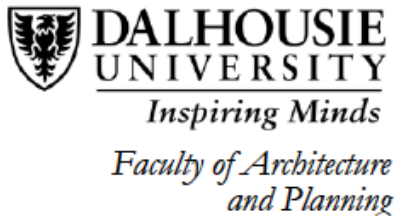
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Appendix



Project Title:

Coordinating land use planning in the context of multiple plans

Principal Investigator: **Dr. Jill L Grant**, FCIP LPP

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Interview Questions

1. **Describe your role and responsibilities.**
2. **How long have you been working for local government in these kinds of roles?**
3. Can I ask you about your education and training for the job: **Where and what did you study? When did you graduate?**
4. **To what extent is policy and plan coordination a priority here in [city name]?**
5. We have found that many cities have a large number of plans. **What factors explain the number of plans that Canadian communities are producing?**
 - Examples of factors [*these can be used as prompts, but should not be listed off. May be asked later if there is time.*]
 - Good planning practice has led to new kinds of plans.
 - Political pressure leads to particular kinds of plans.
 - Community expectations can drive the planning process.
 - Developer pressures can drive the planning process.
 - Strategic priorities of agencies or departments may lead to plans.
 - Responding to local risks generates plans.
 - Funding programs may require certain plans or policies.
6. [*Show the participant a list of possible **types of plans** and ask them to indicate which of these they have in their city, and who is responsible for them*]
7. **What do you see as some of the challenges to coordinating multiple plans and policies?**
 - Examples of challenges [*these can be used as prompts, but should not be listed off. May be asked later if there is time.*]

- Too many plans.
- Insufficient staff time.
- Insufficient staff expertise.
- Depends on political priorities.
- Depends on market conditions.
- Reflects changing needs in the community.
- Insufficient data availability.
- Depends on legislative requirements.
- Competing interests among departments.
- Professional rivalries affect outcomes.
- Difficult to change past practices.
- No established hierarchy of priorities.
- Plans don't apply to outside agencies.

7. Could you describe an example of the challenges of coordinating different plans and policies you have experienced in your own work?

8. What strategies do you use to identify conflicting policies or approaches in plans?

9. What are some strategies communities may use to coordinate plans? What strategies are used in your community?

- Examples of strategies [*these can be used as prompts, but should not be listed off. May be asked later if there is time.*]
 - Communities set a clear organizational hierarchy that facilitates choices.
 - Legal frameworks set out in planning acts guide decision making.
 - Policies are coordinated when the comprehensive plan is revised.
 - Collaborating, sharing data, and consulting with others facilitate consensus based decisions when policies may conflict.
 - Interdepartmental meetings provide opportunities to coordinate priorities.
 - Budgets provide mechanisms for communities to set policy priorities.
 - Communities allow plans to lapse because priorities and conditions change.
 - Processes or organizations are created to deal with particular coordination challenges.
 - Champions are appointed to facilitate coordination around critical issues.
 - Planning is inherently political, so plans have to be flexible.

10. What success stories do you have in [name of city] in coordinating plans?

11. What factors influence interdepartmental policy/plan coordination?

- Examples of factors [*these can be used as prompts, but should not be listed off. May be asked later if there is time.*]
 - Budgetary concerns
 - Links with external interest groups
 - Political leadership
 - Departmental hierarchies
 - Timing

12. Is there anything about coordinating plans and policies that you would like to add before we finish?