

## Toronto “Best Practices” Trip September 27 – September 30, 2015

### COMMENTS

#### **Notes from final discussion: Comments are listed by topic.**

Each comment was made by at least one person on September 30. Written comments are identified by writer.

*To put comments in perspective with facts that could be established in Wikipedia and other easy-to-find sources, see Appendix.*

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## **General: Why Go To Toronto? What can Portland learn from Toronto – or learn to avoid?**

### Comments:

- First, thanks once again for a very well-planned tour of a city. The one thing that I might suggest is that we get **a better sense of the regions, not just the cities**. I recognize that time is a constraint, but it would be interesting to “feel” the inner suburbs of these larger metropolitan areas by getting out beyond the city proper. Houston is a city that seems organized around its subdivisions, and given the flat landscape around Toronto, one wonders the influence of Mississauga (s.p.) and other big inner burbs.
- **Climate change:** Toronto doesn’t care very much about it! Lip service. Toronto is trying to get people out of their cars simply to reduce congestion and improve commutes. Emission reduction is a by-product. The opportunity is that they will ultimately have to care, and PDX faith that it creates an export opportunity for our expertise is reaffirmed. We should redouble our efforts to “sell” Portland expertise and technology on energy and sustainability worldwide. Do we have an adequately marketed program to recruit Oregon companies for international opportunities and to bring that to the world?
- Toronto is one heck of an **international, cosmopolitan** city. The city feels vibrant, and accepting of the good and the bad that comes from becoming a global metro region.
- I am optimistic. Portland has problems but I don’t see the solutions in Toronto. It feels like we know how to do it better. We have these structures in place, such as Tri-met, METRO, Greater Portland Inc.. While none necessarily is the sole solution for one of our problems, there is a structure in place.
- Toronto shines in many comparisons to other cities (#2 in Fast Company’s global ranking of smart cities, #1 in North America; “the most civil and civilized city in the world” according to National Geographic.)<sup>1</sup> but Richard Florida provided a perspective going beyond such comparisons. Richard Florida thought Toronto was civil and civilized until Rob Ford was elected Mayor. Since then, Florida has been grappling with the negative effects of (income) inequality on Toronto and other cities – a topic that Portlanders are being challenged to get their heads around, too.
- Richard Florida: As the divide between classes grows, there are strategies we can deploy to create more equitability: I hear Portland talk about these things, but **I don’t see efforts reaching lowest income communities.**  
**Housing...build more affordable homes**

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<sup>1</sup> Thank you for these, Mary! <http://plangreen.net/toronto-with-greater-portland-inc-part-1/>

**Transit**...bring it to ALL areas of the city, make it especially viable in low-income areas and where people are commuting to work.

**Wage equality**....”make bad jobs good jobs,” as the service sector in Portland grows, how do we make these living wage jobs?

- **URBANIZE SUBURBS!!!** We will have to do this in East Portland. We need **dense nodes around transit and good connections between nodes.** This will have to be, at least in the short term, subsidized by prosperity in the inner city. What will the **financial tool** be if not **TIF** or **SDCs**? SDCs often translate to higher rent rate for tenants after development. How do we get the dollars we need for infrastructure improvement without transferring that cost to low-wage earners?
- Our first stop on the BMP trip was at Evergreen Brick Works, a “community environmental centre that inspires and equips visitors to live, work and play more sustainably.” It is also home to Evergreen, a national organization whose mission is “inspiring action to green cities.” Approximately 180 employees help Evergreen to promote that mission in four areas of focus: greenspace, children, food and CityWorks (urban planning). If you took Dharma Rain Zen Center ( a group redeveloping a brownfield in far northeast Portland) and combined it with Groundwork Portland, Willamette Riverkeeper, Audubon Society of Portland and Zenger Farm, then topped it off with a national organization like the Sierra Club, you might have something close in Portland....I am watching the CityWorks portion of Evergreen’s site for the day when they advocate taking out the Don River Parkway that so greatly confines the river (except when it doesn’t) and getting the Don River out of its concrete channel altogether.
- In 2007 when I wrote *Greening Waterfront Development: Toronto*, I was highly impressed with official plans for greening Toronto’s waterfront....the scale of the ecological restoration that needs to be done there came nowhere close to the scale of the earth moving and skyscraper building that is taking place nearby. In fact, it seemed to be the proverbial drop in the bucket.
  - I found it disappointing that any city with 180 towering cranes in its core area alone was not making equally fast progress with the ecological restoration of one of its major rivers. It leads me to ask what kind of public benefit is the City extracting from each of these developments?

## Scale: Toronto is a Mega-City – and Also a Global City

### Comments:

- While Portland embraces the notion of being part of the global economy, it does that only on its own terms. I don't think this approach will hold up in the long haul. There's growth coming our way, and we're not ready for it. We're thinking way too small in terms of future population, transportation capacity, housing needs, etc.
- Toronto's much larger scale makes comparisons to Portland difficult.
- Do we want Portland to become a "global city"? What would that mean?
- I want to spend more time in the suburbs, and other parts of any region we visit. Just visiting the central city distorts our understanding of what's going on.
- Denver (the next region we will be visiting) is a competitor metro. We have good stats from **Market Strategies (the consultants hired for the 2020 Visioning work)**. I'd like to see that best practices trip organized far tighter along those areas we compete with Denver, and where they are doing much better than us in the metrics.
- **Provincialism:** I'm always struck by how all of the cities we've visited, including Toronto, wholeheartedly embrace being part of the global economy. That was drawn in to stark relief with the rather tense exchange on Pembina. He/they seem genuinely perplexed by our myopic view of global economics. It's especially ironic since Oregon is such a trade-dependent state. It goes to the outsized sense of proportion Portland has of its importance, to the detriment of the state, and the relations the city has with its neighbors, both with the Metro area, and certainly downstate.
- **Mental health:** It was particularly poignant to be in Toronto as the Roseburg shooting became worldwide news. Our delegate from Multnomah County pointed out **the attention that Toronto is paying to community in its affordable housing project, and connected it to mental health.** The income polarity, density, and information stresses need more attention as we contend with our own housing and de-institutionalization issues.
- **Population explosion:** **We're not prepared. And our tools for financing infrastructure are terribly weak.** The Gestalt on this is that intuition is telling us that an explosion in population in Oregon is a highly plausible scenario. It feels like a kind of urban renewal writ large on the Willamette Valley landscape, with similar kinds of the unintended consequences.
- Richard Florida: Talent drives production and firm location. Portland does not seem to focus enough on **talent development of the youth** that are currently living in the city. The lack of talent pool may prevent firms from locating in our area.
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## **Economy: Financial Sector & Services Downtown, Manufacturing in the Suburbs**

### **Comments:**

- **Portland is a small-business city;** By contrast, Toronto is a financial center. Portland is not going to be a Financial Center, nor needs to be, but we can **build our capacity through smaller building blocks; by being more sensitive to the neighborhood, listening to more voices, keeping the city livable.**
- I wish we were exposed to different aspects of the thinking in the Toronto region besides Richard Florida and some work by those in the Toronto City government. We never hear their views on how they see manufacturing in their economy.
- Is Greater Portland connected to EPAP? How do we create a value proposition for the private sector to be involved in public benefit projects or larger prosperity initiatives?
- **Invest Toronto: What are Portland's selling points** and how are we (PDC and Greater Portland and others) recruiting businesses to invest and locate in the region? How are we making sure we are developing the talent base to work in jobs that are being brought to Portland?
- Brickworks: New destinations outside of the city core require a transportation plan. Because this site is not currently accessible by public transit, they started their own shuttle system and are working with city on a longer-term plan to connect the city to the valley system.
- Destinations outside the city core benefit from having a clear activity that serves as an initial draw. The first thing they started was the farmers market as an entry point.
- LONG term free lease with City guarantees stability so that energy can be focused on programming.
- Revenue from parking alone is \$250,000 per year!

## **Demographics: Nearly ½ of Toronto's Population is Foreign-Born.**

### **Comments:**

- What has transformed Toronto is the ability to **attract talent**; to open doors. Portland has that on some level, needs to address that more, to see if we can **open our doors more, create more diversity.**
- How would Portland deal with massive immigration on the scale of Toronto's? "We should get ready."
- Toronto is experiencing growth on the scale of 150K people coming into the city every year, and so the city has no option but to grow.
- The message from the "best practices" trip to Toronto: **Don't sacrifice quality of life by allowing growth for growth's sake.** (By contrast, the message from the "best practices" trip to Detroit was: Don't be complacent. Detroiters were in the middle of a struggle.)
- The reason Toronto is growing is that people want to come here. Toronto's quality of life is good enough to continue attracting people to move to the city.
- Portland should observe Toronto's growth and ask: Why is Toronto growing so fast? Could Portland ever grow as fast? Should it?
- Climate change might affect Toronto and Portland similarly, by bringing large in-migration to each city, to take advantage of cheap energy, relatively abundant water, moderate weather, etc.
- Intensification has pros and cons. "The infrastructure can't handle that kind of residential development."

## **Immigration: Public Opinion Largely Favors Immigration, While National Policies Favor Educated Immigrants**

### **Comments:**

- Reasons for Toronto's tremendous growth include Canada's liberal immigration policies, welcoming attitude toward immigrants (who bring manpower and skills to an otherwise aging population), but also:
  - stable politics (compared to, say, Bangladesh)
  - strong economy, (ditto)
  - strong public K-12 education and free public university education (ditto)
- Toronto is close enough to New York City to benefit from a spillover effect
- Although Canadian policy favors educated immigrants, there is a cost for some of them in the form of a (relatively) high rate of unemployment or underemployment
- Portland can adopt local policies to welcome immigrants, and specifically well-educated immigrants, but I think the wisest policy would focus on **strengthening K-12 education**, which would benefit both immigrants and existing residents.
- To affect national immigration policy, Portland might start at home, through convening open discussion about the benefits and drawbacks of immigration, and conveying the results of that discussion to political representatives. (U.S. immigration policies have historically been highly political. Change usually takes decades. The last major immigration reform legislation was adopted in 1986. Recent reform proposals are stalled.)

## Governance: Toronto v. Ontario Province:

### Comments:

- It's amazing that the OMB can overrule or reshape decisions on real estate developments made by city planners.
- Portland has "consultation in our DNA," the need to bring people together in coalition, to develop something to benefit all
- In Portland, extensive consultation results in **good ideas being talked to death**. ~~Xxxxx~~ Too much consultation results in undistinguished architecture and undistinguished real estate development projects.
- Some Oregonians might have similar complaints about the state's Land Use Board of Appeals (although but LUBA appears to have more limited powers than the OMB).
- **GPI!**: Toronto clearly has created its own animosity with its suburban neighbors, and the Portland Metro area is a decade ahead of Toronto in weaving the region together with the creation of GPI. That's an accomplishment for PDX that we should be proud of, but it still seems weighted down by Portland throwing its weight around.
- **Deficit financing**: That's a powerful provincial advantage, unavailable to the state of Oregon, to help finance infrastructure and growth. Not sure I completely understood how they do it. But what was clear, philosophically, is how powerful the state is relative to municipal government in making unilateral decisions. Some envy...
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## **Real Estate: 15 Years of Rapid Development, Featuring Tall Residential Towers**

### Comments:

- Toronto's real estate development is on "mega scale," growth is "out of control."
- Toronto's many new towers are not architecturally distinguished.
- Out of scale 1: In the Distillery area, towers were out of scale with the old Distillery buildings.
- Out of scale 2: The danger in Toronto's building of many new, tall buildings is that the new construction is at a scale that dwarfs humanity, by, for instance, blocking views and sunlight. In NY City, developers purchase air rights on adjacent properties to protect the view. The developer then can guarantee condo purchasers a certain view.
- Toronto has many tall buildings on the waterfront, which has a narrow waterfront parkway; Portland has a wider waterfront park area
- Will plans for a high-rise to replace Portland's existing central Post Office be out of scale for the very concentrated, relatively low-rise Pearl/Union RR Station neighborhood?
- This comment relevant to the housing discussion, too: Espe. w/ the OMB, we are at opposite ends of spectrum in terms of public participation. In PDX, public meetings – too many – I think we get sausage at the end. Don't get strong statements in architecture, building, design. In Toronto: Developers have control, with very little public participation.
- Toronto has an organization (NEWCO) entity that (has attempted to) (or actually did?) build consensus about affordable housing, Bringing the Toronto region together, coordinating every Toronto neighborhood have conversations, thinking bigger than themselves.
- Realization at that level: coalition building, conversations,
- A positive outcome of consultation in Portland: the Rosewood Initiative started as a result of concerned people coming together, trying to figure out how to address the crime problem in far NE Portland, adjacent to Gresham.
- In Toronto, the ability to negotiate civic benefits from developers up front has resulted in developers contributing significant funds to downtown, such as in the form of a waterfront cultural center.
- **Weak Canadian dollar:** It's hard not to make note of the very weak Canadian dollar. I'm sure all of us were pleasantly surprised by the travel expenses. Notwithstanding that, what has a weak Canadian dollar meant for foreign investment in real estate development, and possibly the tremendous in-migration?
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## Housing: Expensive – Hence Those Residential Towers

### Comments:

- The Regent Park development impressively integrated low- and moderate-income housing, along with spaces for social service delivery.
- Regent Park was redeveloped in a public-private effort, and the privately run portion of the project was completed on time and under budget
- How can builders of new housing developments be persuaded to focus on creating community, integrating newcomers in the community, and integrating the people and their needs into the community?
- Impressed with Toronto efforts to rebuild low-income housing developments into mixed low-and-medium income housing and communities, so that the poor won't be stranded in "island" neighborhoods. Evidence shows that neighborhoods that are solely low-income breed inter-generational poverty, are more difficult for children to move out of.
- Public housing doesn't have to be poor design. By contrast, Portland's public housing design is relatively poor.
- Still, Toronto hasn't "solved" the affordable housing puzzle. The impact of economic inequality and lack of public money is the same in Toronto as in Portland. Investors and those who have money are bidding up prices on a limited stock of housing. If income disparity were not as great, and investment dollars were not available for bidding up housing prices, prices would not be as high.
- Toronto doesn't appear to be embracing the opportunities around climate change, although urban design is a critical factor in responding to climate change. By the same token, cities in the United States are not using urban planning as wisely as they should in order to build "green cities;" the U.S. instead is exporting architectural and planning talent to elsewhere
- We have been discussing inclusionary policies, but what we find is that the cost of building affordable housing is unaffordable.
- We are moving in a direction of improving incentives for the private sector to build housing that our public sector can't build afford.
- Up- front civic benefit negotiations with property developers for civic benefits are possible in Canada, not possible in Portland because of state law.
- What else could be done in Portland and Vancouver to produce greater civic benefits from property development?
- Toronto and Portland at opposite ends of a spectrum in terms of public participation. Portland has too many public meetings. I think we get sausage at the end. Don't get strong statements in architecture, building, design. In Toronto: the developer has more control, and there's very little public participation.
- People who move to Portland tend to become transit-users. For instance: the Oregon Bus project: young people are moving to Portland without securing jobs in advance. They are coming to embrace our culture and ethos.

- A gas tax, and other user taxes, might reduce traffic overall and increase the use of transit, in Portland – while also reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- To change behavior, make the less-desirable behavior cost more. Make it “painful” to use a car, and more people will use public transit. (Where public transit is not easy to find, what are the alternatives?) To help people learn transit-taking behavior, start them using the bus early
- Transit is an economic driver, but building “transit-oriented development” is not easy.
- Housing: Condos are being built with 3 bedrooms to accommodate families that are priced out of single-family homes. Are there 3 bedrooms being built in Portland?? Is there a market for this and could it alleviate some of the housing shortage?
  - City or State is offering first time home-buyers down payment loans. This could be an incredibly useful tool in Portland, but would probably have to come through Federal government grants? (*Jenny Glass*)
- Visit to Regent Park social housing development:
  - Planned in the social aspects as well as the physical from the start. “un-island” the neighborhood, make it mixed use and mixed income. Don’t isolate poverty!!! Bring in stores and amenities that will attract mid-income, not just social services.
  - East Portland seeing influx of social services and it’s making it difficult to bring in businesses and mid-income earners. xxxx

## **Transit: Catching Up to Rapid Population Growth and Real Estate Development**

### **Comments:**

- In Portland, we are experiencing terrible traffic, we are locked in physically. How are we going to learn from places like Toronto to respond to growth better on Portland's smaller physical scale?
- City investment in transit in East Portland will probably help increase developer's confidence in investing there, too.
- Toronto is suffering from heavy traffic problems. The city might look at Stockholm, Sweden and Singapore's models, where they have tolls that vary in price in the immediate downtown area. It is done electronically (no toll booths) hoping to restrict the amount of traffic during peak rush hours. We visited the Stockholm folks on a Best Practices trip and Greg has observed congestion pricing from an office in Singapore, where they use the same model. This might be just one of many options Portland could consider as the traffic situation continues to get worse.
- Do Toronto's efforts to improve transit provide enough money and planning to ensure movement of goods and services in Toronto's central city?
- Toronto is a "destination" not a "hub". Came to the airport and went to the suburbs. But there has always been a link to the downtown. It didn't seem to have w/ only 17 ppple on the train the other day.
- Oregon has too many crumbling bridges and roads. New financing ideas have been discussed but have not been accepted.
- In Portland, the "obvious solution" for reducing traffic congestion is "tax the hell out of rich people", and then put the money into transit to serve people who are less rich
- A lot of the trip sparked thoughts about the issue of density. We have been promoting increased density as a way to have less car driving, and yet people are still commuting from downtown to Hillsboro; a lot of commuting continues in private cars. Density may be a solution to some issues, but also causes its own problems.
- Greater density is not necessarily the answer to all problems.
- If we are going to have higher taxes and fees, we have to make sure that transit goes to all work locations: Columbia corridor, working waterfront. If you do one thing, you need to do the additional things to help make the first thing work. Don't penalize people for giving up cars.
- When we were at Metrolinx, I didn't think they were getting the maximum ridership from all their investment in the Union Pearson Express train.
- The pedestrian infrastructure in Toronto is not very good. Street corners are abbreviated to allow buses, street cars, make turns without slowing down, but the result is more difficult for pedestrians – especially the mobility impaired – to cross.
- Richard Florida: "Traffic congestion is because everyone still thinks they have a right to drive." Our big cities were not built to accommodate the

amount of cars currently on the road. Transportation culture will have to shift away from cars as cities become more and more dense. How do we encourage this? Provide infrastructure and make it viable to get around efficiently without a car. Make it more difficult to use cars for daily commuting. Make it cool to not drive.

- Spacing Store: People aren't happy about public transit in general, but the subway buttons seem to build neighborhood pride and get people talking about transit in general.
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## Innovation: Building a Biosciences District

### Comments:

- Barcelona had a very impressive record of asking “what can we do with what we have now?”  
Similar to Barcelona, Toronto is fostering new kinds of industries that don’t necessarily use a large amount of land. Toronto is focusing on life sciences, tourism, etc. Portland, too, is trying to foster life sciences, centered around OHSU, and bringing businesses back to downtown.. Clackamas County is thinking similarly, and fostering the film industry.
- Impressed by work of Ontario Cancer Inst. being about to capitalize on research here, use attraction strategy to keep companies that they spawn here. Focused on providing the infrastructure and support, to allow companies to grow and stay.  
Portland is in the early stages of thinking through a similar strategy to fostering innovation and trying to keep creative and dynamic companies in Oregon. ~~Xxxxx~~ Companies in the Oregon Incubator Life Sciences, are being recruited by Vancouver, among other cities, where they are being offered a better deal (e.g. lower cost space)
- **Think regionally:** As long as such companies stay in the region, benefits from the incubator spending will not be lost to the community.
- Cancer research: Everyone is doing it in a big way, in every city. **How is the Knight Challenge different from other multi-billion dollar efforts?** The OHSU relationship with both Houston, but especially Toronto was a testament to a network of researchers who are attacking a problem. The Big Data connection with Toronto and OHSU seems like an entrepreneurial opportunity for both—especially since it seems **Toronto’s commercialization apparatus is the best model we’ve seen.** Really worth exploring.
- Discovery District: Will be utilizing example of “Innovation Ecosystem” created here to **inform business incubator program at Rosewood.**

**Youth Engagement Strategy: Toronto and the private sector are working together to involve young people in planning decision-making**

- I will be using some of these insights to inform a **Civic Engagement and Leadership Development program at Rosewood!**
- Our next stop was to the Spacing Magazine retail store where publisher Matthew Blackett told us that he is working with Evergreen and the City of Toronto to create city planning podcasts aimed at a millennial audience. “Growing Conversations is our strategy to reach youth, newcomers, renters and those we’re not presently engaging in the official “consultations” the city planning department holds,” he said. His store sells many books about urbanism –and, of course, the magazine. Blackett, also on our agenda in the afternoon, claims that ‘most of Toronto’s growth is happening downtown–the fastest growing in NA- and that youth 18-34 are a driving force behind the downtown condo boom. He said the government will give you 10% down payment interest free and forgivable as long as you stay in the condo. The top three issues he sees for this age group: affordable housing; equity; and the environment.

My hope is that this new generation will insist on speedier implementation of environmental restoration plans–e.g., for the mouth of the Don River– and greater awareness with regard to how all aspects of the City’s future are tied to working with nature in an era of climate change.