

Zoning for a Better Toronto

The City of Toronto recently finalized a new Zoning Bylaw that will govern the growth of the City. As part of the Cities Centre's Toronto 2010 Election Series, we've prepared *Zoning for a Better Toronto*, a consideration of the potential for more innovative zoning options in the city.

The potential of zoning

Owing to its long history of amalgamation and annexation, Toronto has one of the most complicated zonings systems in North America. The work done over the past eight years to harmonize the 43 disparate bylaws into a single city-wide bylaw is almost at an end. The ambitious Zoning Bylaw project from the City's Planning & Growth Management Committee promises a plentitude of implications for the future of the city, the character of our neighbourhoods, and even economic vitality. Despite the passing of the new bylaw on August 27, 2010, the negotiation of zoning bylaws within the city is far from over. Zoning is an ongoing process between the City, developers, and the community. Strategically employing zoning bylaws is vital for promoting equality, safety, and vibrant mixed-use development while also negotiating land use conflicts, encouraging the revitalization of neglected areas of a city, and providing underserved neighbourhoods with additional amenities. With this potential in mind, discounting the significance of the Zoning Bylaw project during the election period ignores the ability of zoning to ameliorate or intensify pressing city issues that have shaped many mayoral talking points. As a key component in managing Toronto's future growth, zoning is worthy of more of the public's attention than it has thus far received.

Our research has suggested that zoning is a powerful tool in shaping not only the physicality of the city, but also its feel and personality. It is also a way of promoting democracy, in that it provides opportunities for citizens to actively engage with bylaws in their local community, in turn providing input for the broader shaping of the city. Extensive debates and consultations about zoning at the corner of King and Spadina, along Ossington Avenue, and in the West Queen West Triangle are prime examples of community involvement to help shape the development of surrounding communities.

Exhibit 1: Communities thrive under mixed-use zoning policies



Source: Martin Prosperity Institute, 2010
Design & Illustration by: Michelle Hopgood

Zoning for healthy communities

Beyond simply managing growth, zoning bylaws are an important planning instrument for encouraging social equality and discouraging income segregation. Reports such as the Centre for Urban and Community Studies' *The Three Cities Within Toronto: Income Polarization, 1970–2000* (2007) and the Toronto Community Foundation's most recent edition of *Vital Signs* (2009) show powerful evidence of increasing disparity between neighbourhoods in the city. Toronto's City Planning Division is committed to mixed-use development, whereby many land uses are permitted within a given area, as an integral part of building sustainable, healthy neighbourhoods that help mitigate geographical income polarization. Mixed-use development encourages localized live-work opportunities, and improves the housing mix within neighbourhoods.

Inclusionary zoning, an ordinance requiring that a given share of new construction be affordable for people with low to moderate incomes, is a policy option that is used widely in the United States. The City of Toronto does not have an official inclusionary zoning policy, but it is one mechanism from which to leverage the potential benefits of zoning outlined here.

Another form of zoning employed by the City is incentivized zoning, which loosens zoning by-law height and density restrictions for developers in exchange for community amenities such as developed parkland, non-profit cultural, community, or child care facilities, public art, transit improvements, or rental housing (see Toronto Official Plan 2009). Incentivized zoning can also be used to offer financial incentives for developers to move into struggling neighbourhoods, or to include a percentage of affordable housing.

Exhibit 2: Incentivized zoning can bring many benefits to a community



Source: Martin Prosperity Institute, 2010
Design & Illustration by: Michelle Hopgood

Zoning is an omnipresent force that significantly shapes our city and holds political, social, economic, and design-related implications. We believe that it is important for citizens to understand the power and influence of zoning in a wide range of compelling municipal issues.

Further reading

For a more detailed description of the significance of zoning, a brief history of zoning in the City of Toronto, and policy ideas, see our full discussion paper.

The Martin Prosperity Institute at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management is the world's leading think-tank on the role of sub-national factors—location, place and city-regions—in global economic prosperity. Led by Director Richard Florida, we take an integrated view of prosperity, looking beyond economic measures to include the importance of quality of place and the development of people's creative potential.