

Suburbanization

Beyond stereotypes

By Sean Hertel and Roger Keil

We have been talking suburbs since 2010 and soon our roadshow is coming to Niagara Falls, as one of the many rapid-fire ignite sessions planned as part of OPPI's 2014 Symposium.

Suburban talk, largely, has been limited to stereotypes. This limits our ability to see beyond what we think a suburb is, to understand what a suburb truly is. We started the Greater Toronto Suburban Working Group not only to find this out, but to begin to turn our talk into action.

The working group is a forum for suburb-building professionals in the Greater Toronto Area suburbs to come together and discuss issues related to suburban governance—government, market and private forces that influence processes of suburbanization. Between 2010 and 2013 we hosted several rich conversations on topics that included urban planning, development financing, infrastructure, community services, natural environment and greenbelt, aging and ways of life.

We heard from over 50 participants from our 11 partner organizations: Building Industry and Land Development Association, Canadian Urban Institute, City of Markham, City of Toronto, DIALOG, Evergreen, Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, R.G. Richards & Associates, The Neptis Foundation, United Way York Region and Urban Strategies Inc.

While simply bringing people together to talk is a good thing, we recognized early on in our collaboration that we had to work towards turning our talk into action. That is, sharing with a wider audience our ideas to make suburban governance more responsive to the needs and opportunities of suburbs that are, increasingly, outgrowing the very foundations that led to their creation.

Suburbs are evolving in ways with which old thinking and processes can't keep up. The notion of the suburb as a "bedroom community," for example, denies the fact there are more jobs in the suburban periphery than in the central cities they surround. This is the case in the Greater Toronto Area, and virtually every urban agglomeration in North America. In fact, in many ways, the periphery has come to the centre.

The suburbs are the new arenas for forming and contesting politics, the machines of economic growth and where new Canadians establish a home. It could be said that the suburb has become the new city.

Our process, ideas and recommendations are summarized in the [Roundtable Report](#), published in September 2013 to mark

the conclusion of our formal collaboration. But our talk, increasingly geared to action, continues.

The Greater Toronto Suburban Working Group is part of a seven-year Major Collaborative Research Initiative funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and housed at the City Institute at York University, *Global Suburbanisms: Governance, Land and Infrastructure in the 21st Century*. Information about the working group, the larger research project and related publications can be accessed at www.yorku.ca/suburbs.

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