

**"ECO-CITIES" IN A
CANADIAN CONTEXT**

"Eco-Cities" in a Canadian Context

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This overview of the concept of "eco-cities" in Canada was conducted at the request of the International Relations Division of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation in preparation for the 1992 Annual Session of the Group on Urban Affairs in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

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Issue

This project is intended to assess the applicability and relevance to urban Canada of the emerging concept of "eco-cities" as described by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development).

OECD Project Proposal

The proposed OECD project on The Ecological City is designed to "demonstrate a more complete integration of environmental and urban policies. It is more concerned with urban political institutions, social processes and economic functions that affect environmental change than with the setting of specific environmental standards. The goal is to promote responsible decision-making in the public and private sectors. " (OECD. 1992. *Ecological City*. Draft project description to be discussed at the next annual session of the Group on Urban Affairs. Drafted November 17: item 8. Project Goals.)

A summary description of the proposed project's objectives, working methods and operation is found in Annex I.

Methodology

To assess the applicability and relevance of the emerging concept of "eco-cities" to Canada, a number of Canadian and European authors were examined. In particular, Virginia Maclaren's three volume work: *Sustainable Urban Development in Canada: From Concept To Practice* and Mark Roseland's new book: *Toward Sustainable Communities: A Resource Book for Municipal and Local Governments* are valuable additions to the current thinking in this area.

In addition, contact was made with academics and government professionals who were expected to have some interest and views especially with respect to the relevance of the "eco-city" concept in Canada. In every instance, the discussions were of significant interest and provided valuable insights for the purposes of this assessment.

A Bibliography as well as Notes taken during telephone conversations with each of the people contacted are attached in Annex II.

Context

Canadians are overwhelmingly urban. Over seventy-six percent of Canadians live in urban areas and 96% of the national growth between 1981 and 1986 took place in urban areas. At the same time, opinion polls indicate that Canadians consider the environment a priority. A federal election will be called in 1993 and "good news" items that situate practical positive action on the environment in cities and towns may be well accepted by both the federal government and urban Canadians.

Little recognition exists in the environmental community that many of Canada's major environmental decisions are being made by the mayors of urban areas and their administrations. For instance, waste management, transportation management, the density of urban development, water conservation, storm water management and sewage treatment are just a few of the municipal responsibilities that have enormous impact on national environmental priorities.

Canada is an acknowledged world leader in the Healthy Communities Project with between 200 and 250 Canadian communities participating. In Europe, 20 to 30 cities participate and the USA, Australia and New Zealand each have a national level organization. The goal of the Canadian Healthy Communities Project is to increase the social, economic and environmental "healthfulness" of the places people live in. (See the Canadian Institute of Planners' Canadian Healthy Communities Project Kit.)

The concepts of sustainable development, "eco-cities" or ecological cities and Healthy Communities are understood to have the same fundamental goal with respect to urban areas. They are seen to be complementary: sustainable development (or "eco-cities") emphasizes economic and environmental concerns more than social equity while Healthy Communities emphasizes social equity and the environment more than economic issues. (See the Canadian Institute of Planner's *Reflections on Sustainable Planning: The Implications of Sustainable Development for Planning and the Canadian Institute of Planners.*)

The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Brazil made recommendations with regard to sustainability in human settlements. Canada's progress in implementing these recommendations will be monitored by the United Nations. Ministers of Environment from across Canada met November 26, 1992 at the annual meeting of the Canadian Council of Environment Ministers (CCME) to discuss follow-up on the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED)*.

*The Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) have submitted a proposal to Environment Canada and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation for one Canadian city to participate in an international project aimed at implementing the principles of the UNCED recommendations.

The Ministers agreed that Human Settlements would be a priority for immediate action by CCME. The Immediate Action item requires CCME, "in partnership with appropriate organizations, such as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, etc., [to] promote sustainable development approaches to human settlement, through the development of a handbook to assist local governments, planners, developers, and others in this area." (*Report of CCME Task Group for Follow-up on the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED)*). CCME Annual Meeting, November 26. Agenda Item 2: UNCED.)

Many Canadian communities are already integrating environmental and urban policies. Virginia Maclaren's three volume work illustrates well how much is being done now in Canada. Penticton's Environmental Strategy is a good example of how a community can plan growth. (*Environmental Strategy for the City of Penticton: "A Place to Stay Forever"*.)

Sustainable development in urban Canada is on "popular" agendas. The fact that British Columbia's Round Table on Environment and Development is interested in sustainable development in large and small communities demonstrates that the concept is an emerging "political" issue.

Suggested Position

Canada support an ecological city project in the OECD.

Canada could approach an ecological city project in the OECD in two ways.

- . Use the OECD project as a "jumping off point" to call for domestic changes in new urban development;
- . Use the OECD project to describe to Canadians and OECD member countries the progress that Canada is making in developing ecological cities.

Option One: Domestic Changes

Canadian water consumption is extremely high compared to most OECD countries. A project on ecological cities in the OECD could provide CMHC with an opportunity to call for regulatory changes for all new residential and commercial development in Canada.

An example of the kind of regulatory change that would benefit Canadians would be the requirement that toilets in all new residential and commercial developments conserve water.

Such an initiative would be seen positively by Canadians interested in the environment. With a federal election being called in 1993, this kind of initiative could be welcomed by the federal government. Provinces could see this as the federal government taking leadership. Industry in Canada could see this as a way of increasing market share and competitiveness with Europe where water conserving toilets are the norm.

Option Two: Demonstrating Canada's Progress

The Canadian Healthy Communities Project could be the basis for a specifically Canadian approach to an OECD ecological city project. The Canadian Healthy Communities Project is established with an existing network and process in place.

While it is undoubtedly complementary to sustainable development or ecological cities, the Healthy Communities idea has not as yet captured the attention of the Canadian environmental community in either the public or private sector. It would be important for any Canadian approach to make the link between the Canadian Healthy Communities project and ecological cities very early in establishing the Canadian position.

The Canadian Healthy Communities Project is considered a "grass-roots" movement in Canada as well as a particularly Canadian innovation. (Another Canadian innovation -- the Round Tables on Environment and Development -- were applauded in the OECD's Environment Committee when they were first mentioned at the OECD.)

An extensive network of Canadians in both academia and government exists to advise and assist in developing a Canadian approach, Canadian case studies, and other aspects of an OECD ecological city project.

Annex I

OECD Project on Ecological Cities

The objectives are:

- a. to provide a comprehensive overview of the role of environmental conditions in cities fostering or inhibiting economic development;
- b. to evaluate innovative concepts and methods promoting integrated and coordinated policies and to indicate how better policies can be implemented effectively;
- c. to promote and evaluate information based strategies which promise to help firms, institutions and individuals modify their behaviour so that environmental change can be effected.

Working methods will be:

- a. issues papers focusing on key policy instruments, difficult problems and conflict-generating situations and on areas where better knowledge is needed;
- b. case studies and national overviews, with emphasis on exemplary instances of policy integration, of behavioural or social change to meet environmental goals, of the introduction of market mechanisms, and of methods to incorporate better information on environmental conditions into administration and planning;
- c. attention to sensitive areas such as unused land to be reclaimed within agglomerations, land with the potential for urbanization on the edge of agglomerations, coastal zones, and earthquake zones;
- d. one or two conferences and reports, possibly for different audiences in government and the private sector.

Operation of the project:

1993: Launch possibly organized jointly with the European Commission.

Phase I: Analysis and evaluation of existing concepts and innovative approaches.

Seminar of experts (if resources are sufficient) to discuss:

- internalising environmental costs
- combining sectoral costs
- provision of infrastructures for environmental action in the public and private sectors
- cooperation among individuals, firms and institutions
- role of better information in decision-making.

Series of case studies in OECD countries.

1994: Completion of project.

Phase II: Seminar with the experts in Phase I and with representatives of cities on which case studies are based.

Annex II

"Eco-Cities" in a Canadian Context

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Canadian contributors to *Ecodecision*:

1. Pierre Dansereau, Professeur, Université du Québec, Montréal

Les Préalables Ecologiques du Design Urbain

2. Dominique Léger, Etudiante, Université du Québec, Montréal

Les Villes D'Hiver Et L'Environnement

3. Chris Bryant and Brock Carlton. Bryant, Director, International Program, Federation of Canadian Municipalities; Carlton, Director, Chinese Open Cities Project, Federation of Canadian Municipalities

Urban Co-operation between Canada and Developing Countries

4. Mark Roseland, Research Director, City of Vancouver's Task Force on Atmospheric Changes, Researcher, University of British Columbia's Centre for Human Settlements

Toward Sustainable Cities

5. Luc Gagnon, Conseiller auprès du sous-ministre adjoint au développement durable, Ministère de l'Environnement du Québec.

Les Consequences de la trilogie "Auto-bungalow-banlieue"

6. David Crombie and Ronald L. Doering. Crombie, Commissioner of the Royal Commission on the Future of the Toronto Waterfront; Doering, currently Executive Director for Canada's National Round Table on Environment and Economy and previously Executive Director and Counsel of the Royal Commission on the Future of the Toronto Waterfront.

An Ecosystem Approach to the Regeneration of Cities

7. Trevor Hancock, médecin et consultant en santé publique pour l'Organisation mondiale de la Santé et professeur à la Faculté de l'Environnement de l'Université York, Canada. Fondateur du groupe Paradigm Health.

Le projet des villes et communautés en santé

8. John Maskell, PhD candidate in the Faculty of Environmental Studies, University of Waterloo, Canada pursuing research on application of concept of sustainable development at the municipal level in Canada.

Leading the Way to Sustainability? A Role for First World Cities

9. Francois J. Belisle, Directeur associé au Centre de recherches pour le développement international (CRDI), Ottawa. Enseigneur l'environnement et le développement urbain a l'Institut de développement international et de coopération (IDIC), Université d'Ottawa.

Pour résoudre la crise urbaine des villes du sud

10. Pierre Bourque, Johanne Landry et Annick Poussart. Bourque, Directeur du Jardin botanique de Montreal et horticulteur en chef de la ville.

Montreal, Le pari de la douceur

11. L.D. Danny Harvey, Co-Chair, City of Toronto's Special Advisory Committee on the Environment.

The Role of Municipalities in Combatting Global Warming

12. Jean-Francois Leonard, Professeur de science politique à l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Dirige depuis 1990 le Groupe de recherche et d'analyse interdisciplinaire en gestion de l'environnement (GRAIGE) dont il fut l'un des fondateurs en 1987.

La Gestion des déchets urbains: trois villes, trois approches (Abidjan, Shanghai, Montréal)

13. Patricia L. McCarney, Director of World Cities and the Environment: the Five Cities Consultation Project, Centre for Urban and community Studies at the University of Toronto.

World Cities and the Environment: The Five Cities Consultation Project (Accra, Katowice, Sao Paulo, Jakarta, Toronto)

14. Stephen R. Tyler and David Brooks. Tyler, Program Officer in the Singapore Office of Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC); Brooks, Associate Director of Environmental Policy of the IDRC's Social Science Division.
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Telephone Contacts

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British Columbia's Round Table (Rick Wilson 1-604-387-5422 or 387-7186) looking at sustainable communities both large and small.

Penticton Municipal Government, (Tim Wood, City Administrator 1-604-492-3043 and Jerry Ton, Urban System Consultants, Vancouver and Peter Walten, Victoria) has developed excellent sustainable development plan. Penticton has between 20 and 25 thousand people and is part of the fastest growing region in Canada.

B.C. government is looking at new ways of delivering programs that will "empower" communities, will look at problems of sheer size as well as impact of urban on rural (eg. Peace River area must contend with impact of profligate energy use in Vancouver). (This is pretty vague.)

Green Plan, Sustainable Development Plan for the Lower Fraser Valley: Regional Director General, Earl Anthony, Environment Canada. (This is probably not of direct interest.)

Provincial State of the Environment Report just published includes a case study of the South Okanagan.

Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment (CCME). UNCED (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development) Follow-Up Task Group. Recommendations to CCME Ministers have been made to adopt areas of priority. One of those priorities is human settlement. Ken Richards, Ministry of Environment Ontario, is at the idea stage in preparation of think piece on urbanization that will eventually be used in the creation of a handbook on sustainable cities in partnership with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

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The idea of eco-city is not new. The first merger of environment and city planning took place during the 1970s when CMHC itself paid for studies to be done in the area.

It means energy efficiency, self-sufficiency. What it takes in energy to run a human settlement. There are a number of disparate ideas floating around. Each deals with resource conserving in one area or another - composting for waste disposal, transportation, subdivisions.

As a broad concept, there is little more to be said about eco-cities. If it is broken down into smaller components such as energy efficiency, however, there are a larger number of professionals who would be interested and who are working in the areas. Jean Wolfe at McGill/David Fartley at McGill, an Urban Designer, Jack Diamond, Toronto, an Architect, John Bosfield, Toronto, also an Architect.

The idea in vogue today is the neo-traditional city. The lecture circuit has people available to talk on this concept. Small settlements in Florida have been designed using this idea so that they have the structure of small villages.

There are policy related controls in existence that modify zoning among other things in the city's form. There is the issue too that in Canada, new subdivisions account for only 5% of the annual growth of cities. The remaining 95% of growth occurs in already existing settlement. How to make that 95% more ecologically efficient is the question. Even something as simple as the flush toilet that uses less water for instance could become a requirement in new installations. Another example is every municipality's difficulty in finding somewhere to dump their garbage. Each of these issues is part and parcel of the eco-city idea.

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I like the term eco-city. It means a city that is ecologically defensible.

A complete issue of Alternatives was devoted entirely to defining the term.

"Ecologically" means operating on all sorts of levels. - administratively where for example in the Healthy Cities movement every municipal employee must think about pollution etc. It means city policy on land uses, densities, standards for emissions, manufacturing procedures.

The Healthy Cities program fits under the umbrella of eco-cities of course. They have much the same assumptions and postulates. First there was the environmental movement. Then the healthy cities which is more of a prevention thing calling for cleaning up and reducing of all of the things that make life in cities difficult both physically and mentally. Finally there is the eco-cities idea.

Tony Hodge, a PhD student (398-4075) is the expert in the department on sustainability. Have a long talk with him. He's a member of the National Round Table.

There are many initiatives in the area. For example, Richard Gilbert at the Urban Institute, Toronto, was looking for funding for something called "Cities without Cars". The idea was to take 3 cities in Canada, look at what they would look like if there were no cars and then look at what it would take to get them there. Looking backward from a future scenario in other words. Because with most problems in the cities, we just don't know how to fix them.

Michel Gariepy, Head of Urban Planning (343-8763) at University of Montreal, Peter Jacobs and Phillip J. Dornan (?) wrote a good article for Plan Canada on this area.

Professor William Rees
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The concept of eco-cities is absurd. Cities are inherently unsustainable. A project on eco-cities would probably deal with only the peripheral or cosmetic things as most projects like this do.

If you look at the city in ecosystem terms, cities are by no means self-sustaining. The Lower Mainland of BC for instance which is an area of about 200,00 square kilometres with a population of 1.7 million people, requires an area 21 times larger in continuous production to provide the city region with the food, wood fibre, CO2 sink, etc. that it needs each day to exist.

The term sustainable has been corrupted. The global economy no longer makes it possible to see easily where the energy and resources are coming from to "feed" a city. The Lower Mainland is, for instance, destroying local agriculture in the name of sustainable growth. Another example of the hidden impact that so-called ecologically correct decisions in cities have is the emphasis put on the attraction of the "clean" industries like the high tech industries. But while the pollution at the site of software production may be non-existent, the highly paid employees are able to consume large quantities of goods produced in other places and the production of those goods is not ecologically benign.

If a project on eco-cities doesn't make sense, then the Healthy and Sustainable Communities project might. CMHC, a few years ago, put some funding into something called Healthy Communities. The idea of sustainable communities was added later as the word and its meaning came into vogue. Originally, healthy communities dealt with personal responsibility for personal health. It included things such as confidence in local government and other social and institutional facets of communities.

There is a connection between personal health and environmental health of a community. Look at the collapse of the North Atlantic cod fishery. It is an ecological disaster that has decimated the health of the people and communities dependent on the fishery.

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Eco-city means sustainable development in cities. It is ecological and economic development at the same time.

There is a world wide movement in which the belief is that because almost 50% of the world's population live in cities, the cities are the only place where real solutions to environmental problems can be found.

Most of the main environmental degradation in the southern hemisphere takes place in cities. Poverty is the impetus for the enormous growth in cities that were built to house millions fewer people than they do. Mexico City for example. There was an eco-cities conference in parallel with the World Conference on Environment and Development in Rio this year.

A grass-roots movement in Canada is built on the Healthy Sustainable cities program. The book by Mark Roseland published by the National Round Table has been a "best-seller" for the National Round Table. Can't keep it in stock.

At the national level, no one knows cities. Most of the big environmental decisions are in fact made by mayors of big cities. For instance, the day the Green Plan was announced, the front page story was that the Green Plan would be worth not \$5 million but \$3 million. A story that didn't even make the front page that day was a municipal sewage upgrade near the harbour front in Toronto that would be costing \$850 million.

CMHC funded through ICURR a 3 volume report by Virginia Maclaren that surveys what municipalities across Canada are doing in sustainable development. An invaluable report that can demonstrate that municipalities are doing a great deal in sustainable development.

CMHC should be interested in sustainable development in cities. Soil contamination may become a problem in terms of environmental liability for the Corporation. Many of the mortgages the Corporation holds could be on land that is contaminated.

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The term eco-city or ecological city has no currency with the Canadian public and little within the professional community.

The Healthy City program (or Healthy Communities as it is called in Canada) and Sustainable Communities are undoubtedly associated with the notion of eco-city or ecological cities. If Canada is thinking of becoming involved in a project on eco-cities or ecological cities, then it makes sense that the Canadian work in Healthy Communities be a fundamental part of the Canadian view. Canada is already the acknowledged world leader in Healthy Cities.

The Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP) is the host organization for Healthy Communities in Canada. Although not completely interchangeable, Sustainable Communities are very similar. In fact John Garner, the Planning Commissioner of Toronto stated in a speech that sustainable and healthy communities are the same. They may differ in vocabulary, in the people they attract, in the methods used. But they have the same goal.

The concept of sustainable communities may emphasize economy and environment more than social equity and Healthy communities may emphasize social equity and environment more than economy. The Healthy Communities process is, however, easier to get a handle on because it already exists.

The Healthy Communities program is endorsed by the World Health Organization. Whereas, 20 to 30 cities in Europe participate in the program, between 200 and 250 Canadian communities are in the program. The USA, Australia, New Zealand and Francophone Africa all have a national level organization in the Healthy Cities program.

The two hottest movements in Canada are Round Tables and Healthy Cities. The first tends to be more top-down, covering large geographical areas (provinces) and with small "E" elites as members. The Healthy Communities movement tends to be more bottom-up, inclusive, covering small geographical areas and even neighbourhoods, and attracting local environmental interest groups, municipal governments, volunteers.

Round Tables are good process models for large geographical areas. Healthy Communities have proven to be good process models for local level issues. Both are good working models that have achieved interdisciplinary thinking. Both could be seen as Canadian innovations.

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At the Canadian Council of Environment Ministers (CCME) meeting in Vancouver last summer, a discussion of priorities by Ministers endorsed a priority on human settlements for CCME.

Ruth Greer (Ontario Environment Minister) and the B.C. Minister of the Environment were particularly interested in some kind of Canadian response being made to the human settlement's issue and recommendations coming out of Agenda 21 of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). Minister Greer was undoubtedly being strongly influenced by the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and the Crombie Regeneration Report (Harbour Front) while the B.C. Minister was being influenced by the B.C. Round Table.

The Strategic Planning Committee of CCME asked that a "think piece" be developed that brought colleagues up to speed on what is currently being done in Ontario and British Columbia. The goal of the paper was to discuss urbanization in a general sense and to make it tangible to Ministry of Environment people.

The key theme expressed in the "think piece" was that 70% of the Canadian population is currently living in urban areas -- including cities and the regions around them. This was news to people in the environmental areas. The paper also drew in the new ideas existing in B.C. and Ontario concerning sustainable cities and green city regeneration.

The CCME Strategic Planning Committee liked the paper but decided to let it sit on a back burner until the CCME agenda is less full. The CCME Secretariat, however, felt that some kind of response to the UNCED Agenda 21 recommendations on human settlements might still be worthwhile. One suggestion made by the Secretariat was a practical how-to handbook for environmentalists living in cities.

The Healthy Communities program is certainly one that lends itself to a project on ecological cities but it is not one that has, so far attracted the attention of Environment Ministers or environmentalists.

With what is already happening in urban areas in Canada, an OECD project on ecological cities or eco-cities provides some real opportunities for including a Canadian approach. Of course, whatever position Canada takes has to be tangible not only in Toronto and southern Ontario but also in Charlottetown and Prince Edward Island.