

# CHIEFPLANNER *roundtable*

## volume 5

Design Excellence: Implementation





# What is the Chief Planner Roundtable?

The Chief Planner Roundtable is a public forum for Torontonians to discuss key city-building challenges and to identify innovative “drivers for change.” The Roundtables are founded on a platform of collaborative engagement, where industry professionals, community leaders and City staff can discuss pressing issues in an open and creative environment. A variety of options for participation are available including attending in person, watching the live-stream online and contributing to the conversation via Twitter, comment cards, or e-mail. This flexible and informal forum enables the City Planning Division to form new partnerships with community and city-building advocates, other City Divisions, the private sector, academics and beyond. The Chief Planner Roundtable reinforces City Council’s Strategic Plan principle of community participation and the Official Plan policy of promoting community awareness of planning issues.



[toronto.ca/planning/chiefplannerroundtable](https://toronto.ca/planning/chiefplannerroundtable)



@CityPlanTO #CProundtable



# CHIEFPLANNER roundtable



At this pivotal time of unprecedented growth in Toronto's city-building history, it is of key importance to ensure that we maximize the value of what is being built in terms of adding to the quality of the City's public realm and its building stock. The need to fully exploit the design opportunities presented by this period of rapid urban growth was emphasized in a strong message conveyed to City Planning staff at a recent special "Summit" meeting of all the City's Design Review Panels. The members of the Toronto, Waterfront, TCHC and Metrolinx Panels are distinguished design professionals who advise staff on architecture, landscape and urban design for public and private projects. The City owes a debt of gratitude to these panel members.

City staff and the panel members recognize that excellence in city-building is a result of collaboration by the development and design community, city staff and the general public. As a starting point, we would like to look at our public streetscapes and public buildings – how can we raise the bar on design excellence? In particular, we want to focus on the question of how best to transform great design concepts into successful city-building projects.

Implementing design excellence often poses many challenges. All municipalities face similar issues of balancing the desire for quality against the need to manage limited budgets. To build on our collective knowledge, we invited city staff experts from Edmonton and Vancouver, as well as Toronto, to assist us with advancing the design quality of our public buildings, our transportation network and our public realm. By sharing Lessons Learned, we are able to gain insights from the implementation strategies of other cities that will help us improve our effectiveness in delivering better design outcomes and overcoming challenges. Thank you to the Canadian Opera Company who graciously hosted our event.

**Jennifer Keesmaat, M.E.S., MCIP, RPP**

*Chief Planner & Executive Director, City Planning Division*

# Design Excellence: Implementation

Featuring experts from Vancouver and Edmonton to meet with our City departments and invited public on November 21, 2016, the Roundtable focuses on how, in practical and specific terms, we can better implement design excellence. While Toronto has had its share of successes, we know that we can learn from other cities and how they deliver excellent projects while facing similar sets of issues related to such factors as budgets, process, interdivisional collaboration and maintenance.

**City Buildings** - The procurement process of the City of Edmonton has been commended for being innovative and has been shown to effectively secure design excellence in public buildings in a timely manner. Edmonton's new approach was launched by the Mayor's 2005 State of the City address and can be used as a precedent for achieving successful built works.

**Public Realm** - We will share examples of successes and challenges in enhancing the quality of design in public streetscape, open space and transportation projects. We will identify what we have accomplished and what we are struggling with. Importantly, how might our past experience and that of other cities point the way forward to achieving even better design outcomes for public realm and infrastructure projects?

To paraphrase from Mayor John Tory's opening Roundtable remarks, adequate is not good enough and we need to identify and pursue "best design standards" as other major cities are doing.





**“With a commitment to building a livable city...If we build transit, affordable housing and design excellence – we can continue to be a shining light.”**



**Mayor John Tory**

City of Toronto



# panelists



## **Alka Lukatela**

Alka Lukatela, Acting Director of Urban Design for the City Planning department in Toronto and Manager of the Civic Design unit.

Alka is an architect, planner and urban designer with a career dedicated to city-building. Having overseen many of Toronto's major public realm projects, Alka brings extensive implementation and design expertise with many years of practical experience.

As manager of Civic Design, a strong commitment to design excellence has been demonstrated through her ongoing involvement in civic improvement capital projects, policy initiatives, the creation of Toronto's Design Review Panel and Urban Design Awards program.



## **Carol Belanger** **Public Buildings - Edmonton**

Carol Belanger is City Architect at the City of Edmonton, Facility and Landscape Infrastructure Department, and has overseen the management of public buildings and related procurement processes since 2010.

The result has been a spectacular collection of public buildings that has received nationwide acclaim. Carol's experience in effectively balancing budgets and ensuring legacy-building design quality sets a very valuable example from which others can learn.







### **Lon LaClaire** **Public Transportation Projects - Vancouver**

Lon LaClaire is the Director of Transportation for the City of Vancouver. Leading progressive approaches to transportation projects and street design, Lon and his 100 staff are responsible for overseeing all long-range transportation planning, transportation design, transportation monitoring, traffic management and parking management for the City of Vancouver. His 19 years of experience at the City of Vancouver includes work on greenways and bikeways, neighbourhood traffic calming, rapid transit planning and the award-winning Transportation 2040 plan.



### **Brent Raymond** **Public Realm Projects - Toronto**

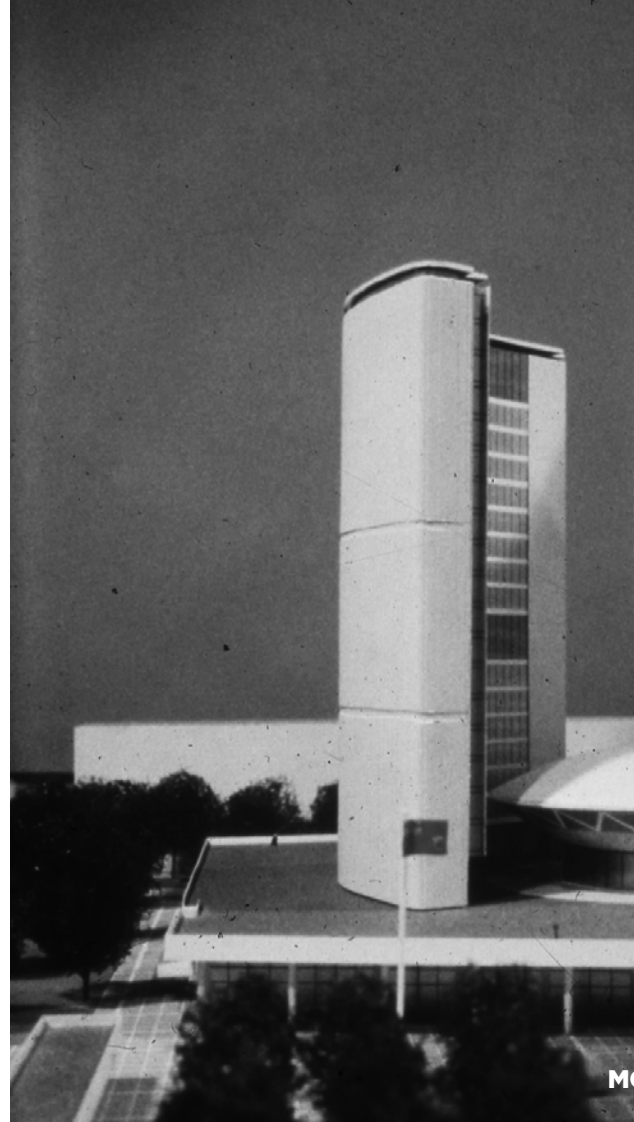
DTAH is a highly respected multi-disciplinary design firm at the forefront of outstanding streetscape and public realm planning and design in Toronto.

Brent Raymond is a landscape architect, planner, urban designer and partner of DTAH, with over 17 years of experience throughout North America.

Brent has a particular interest in large-scale park systems and the quality of space between buildings, especially streets. He is highly adept at making the connection between transportation, land use, built form and public realm design. Brent has contributed to parks and public realm initiatives for numerous agencies and municipalities in Canada, the United States and Mexico.



**HUMBER BAY ARCH BRIDGE**



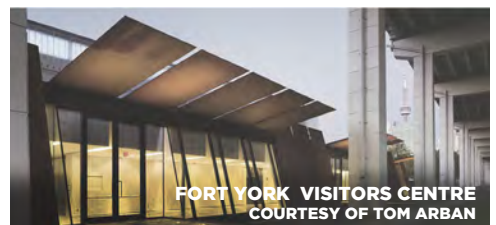
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**REGENT PARK AQUATIC CENTRE**  
COURTESY OF SHAI GIL



**FRASER MUSTARD EARLY LEARNING ACADEMY**  
COURTESY OF TOM ARBAN



**FORT YORK VISITORS CENTRE**  
COURTESY OF TOM ARBAN



## Toronto Overview



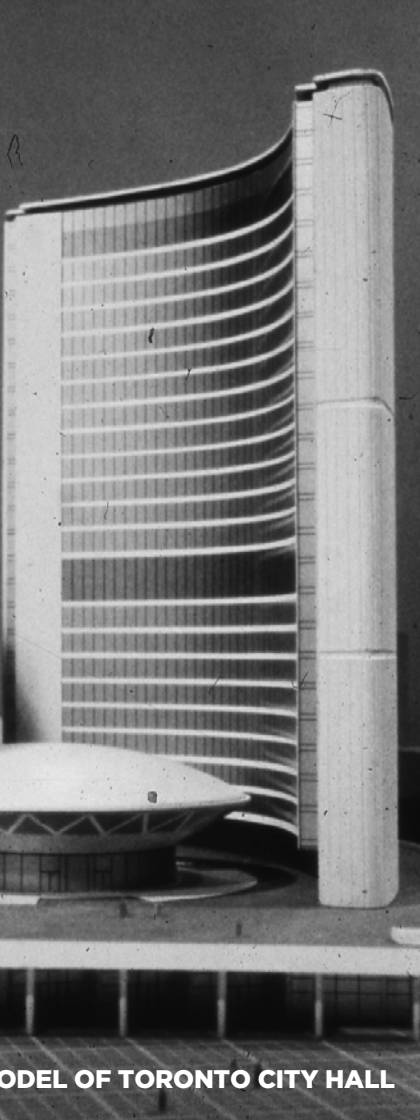
*Speaker: Alka Lukatela, Acting Director of Urban Design and Manager of Civic Design, City of Toronto.*

As we experience the next wave of development during this period of intense growth, it is a good time to recognize the legacy that was built by past generations and which we continue to enjoy today.

Ranging from private development such as the historic Mies Van der Rohe office towers, to public features that include bridges and City Hall itself, examples of the past remind us of the importance of our earlier design and investment decisions and the effect they have on future generations of Torontonians.

While the City has continued to support design excellence with successful streetscape improvements, public buildings, and initiatives such as the Design Review Panels, Toronto Urban Design Awards and Public Art program, there is still more that can and must be done.

Striving for the best design outcomes for public buildings, public spaces and for private development will increase the attractiveness of the City and significantly raise the quality of life for all Torontonians.



MODEL OF TORONTO CITY HALL



"RISING" SHANGRI-LA PUBLIC ART  
COURTESY OF ED O'NEIL



# Toronto Overview

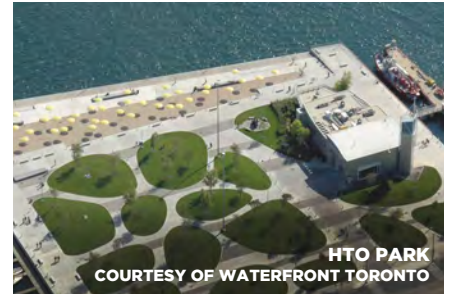
## MAJOR STREETS



## MAJOR PUBLIC REALM SYSTEMS



## NEW PARKS AND OPEN SPACES



Now is a pivotal moment in the City for public realm projects both at a major network level and at the local community scale. There is an ambitious number of projects that have been built with success, and a significant backlog of projects needing to be completed.

## TRANSIT



## LOCAL STREETS



## GREENING

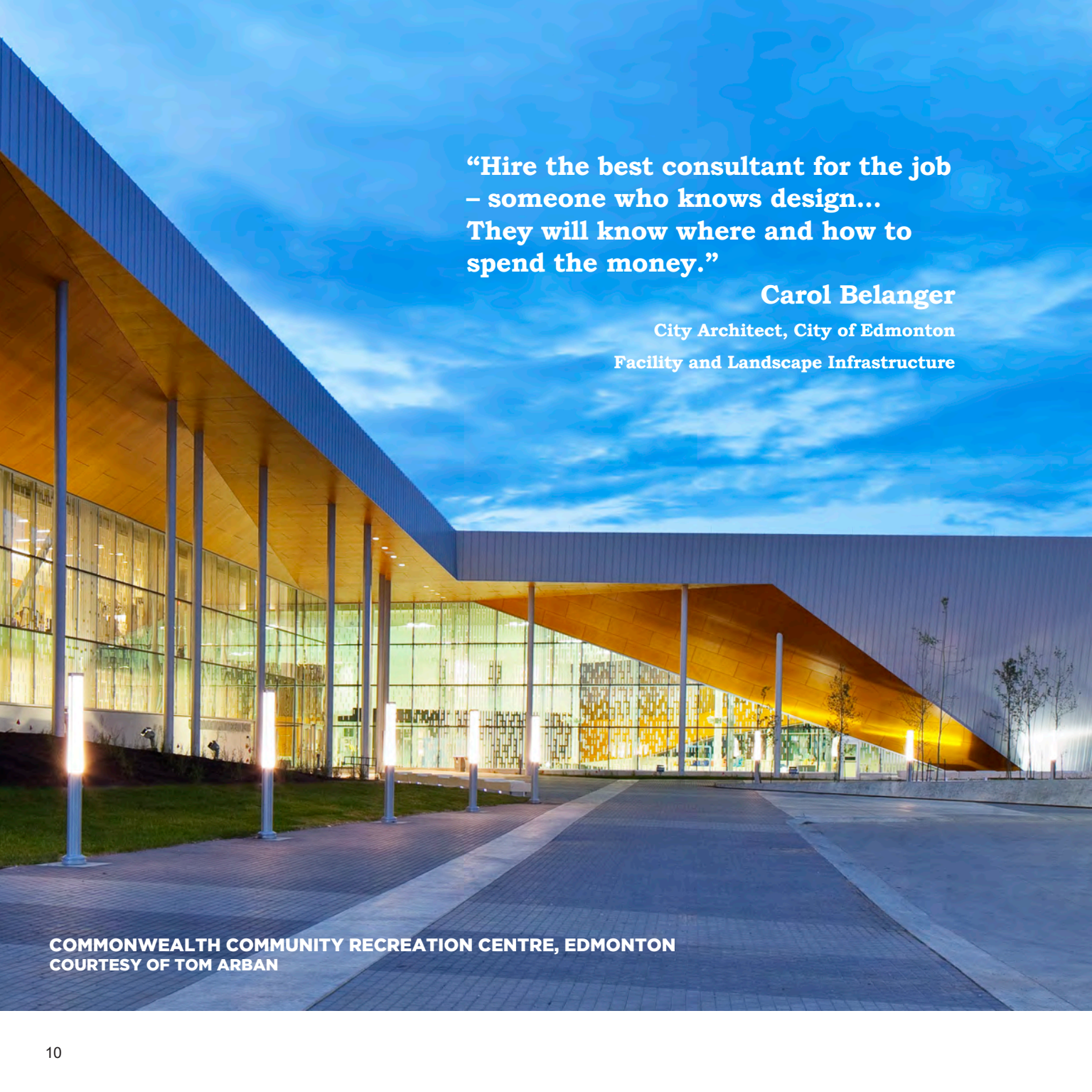


**“The key to unlocking the problem is funding and coordination between divisions... Some projects started as visionary schemes but if we don’t have backing from the political council and budget – we are struggling all the way.”**

**Alka Lukatela**

Acting Director of Urban Design



A photograph of the Commonwealth Community Recreation Centre in Edmonton at dusk. The building features a large, illuminated glass facade and a prominent, angular, golden-brown roof structure. The interior lights are on, and the building is reflected in the glass. The sky is a deep blue with some clouds. The foreground shows a paved walkway and some landscaping.

**“Hire the best consultant for the job  
– someone who knows design...  
They will know where and how to  
spend the money.”**

**Carol Belanger**

City Architect, City of Edmonton  
Facility and Landscape Infrastructure

**COMMONWEALTH COMMUNITY RECREATION CENTRE, EDMONTON**  
COURTESY OF TOM ARBAN

# Public Buildings - Edmonton

*Speaker: Carol Belanger, City Architect at the City of Edmonton.*

Carol presented insights into Edmonton's unique and highly successful public building program. The program includes projects that range from small park buildings to larger community centres, libraries and police stations. Overall, the Edmonton program aims for consistency, transparency and accountability. Edmonton's procurement process has been key to the success of its public building program.

## Successful Practices + Lessons Learned

### Political Support

"Our tolerance for crap is zero" was the eye-catching mandate set by the Mayor's Office for high design standards in public buildings. Without political leadership, the program cannot succeed.

### Hiring Design Consultants

The standardized procurement process sets out clear steps for pursuing requests for qualifications (RFQs) and requests for proposals (RFPs). The RFQ process emphasizes the need for sustainable design experience. All projects valued over \$75,000 are posted on the Alberta Purchasing Connection and are open to public bids. When scoring proposals, the Fee is only given a weighting of 10% (compared to 25% in Toronto). Efforts are made to encourage small, emerging architectural/design firms to bid on projects of less than \$75,000.

### Bundling Projects

Groups of similar projects, for instance three recreation centres or libraries, are "bundled" in a single RFQ to make it more attractive to apply.

### Process

The City Architect actively advocates for architects and design excellence within the City,

so that the design keeps its integrity as it goes through the process. During the process, there are a minimum of four reviewers, including the client, the City Architect and the Project Manager. It has been demonstrated that good architects have a strong sense of knowing where to cut costs while keeping value.

### Importance of Public as Advocate

Well-designed public buildings become successful hubs of the community and have been warmly embraced by the public. Now in Edmonton, with many successful public buildings such as community centres and libraries, it is the public that advocates for design quality.

**"Every city has to have an architect at the table who is a steward of buildings and looking out for the public interest."**

**Carol Belanger**

**City Architect, City of Edmonton**

# Transportation Projects - Vancouver

Speaker: Lon LaClaire, Director of Transportation for the City of Vancouver.

Lon spoke to the need for incorporating good design into the planning of new transportation facilities and their supporting public infrastructure. It is important to collect data and other evidence that supports the case for implementing higher design standards for transportation projects.

## Successful Practices

### Ambition of the Transportation Plan

Since the 1997 plan, there have been more trips in Vancouver but fewer cars. A 20% reduction in vehicles entering the downtown has occurred while the population and jobs have grown by 75% and 26% respectively. One of the goals of the ambitious Vancouver 2040 Transportation Plan is for 2/3 of all trips to occur by foot, bike or transit.

### Zero fatality Safety Target

Transportation related fatalities have declined while population and trip volumes are growing.

### Walking First

While transit is important, the focus is on walking and cycling as the top priorities in the hierarchy of travel modes.

### Cycling

Cycling is the fastest growing mode share. Total cycling trips increased by 32% from 2014-2015. Improving cycling infrastructure has been demonstrated to increase ridership.

### Integrate Transportation and Land Use Planning

Locate major activity generators near great transit services. Pay particular attention to ground floor building design to create a lively and interesting experience for pedestrians.

## New Department for Public Open Spaces

Council wanted to deliver significantly more public plazas and programmed spaces so a new Street Use and Public Space Division was created that collaborates with the Transportation Department. A recent example is Robson Square public plaza, which was built on the success of temporary summer closures of Robson Street and will become a permanent car-free plaza next year.

## Lessons Learned

### Standard of Measure

An important standard of measure is whether or not people go out of their way to use the amenities. Statistics such as how many people come and how long they stay there are among the key metrics to gather.

### Monitoring and Consultation

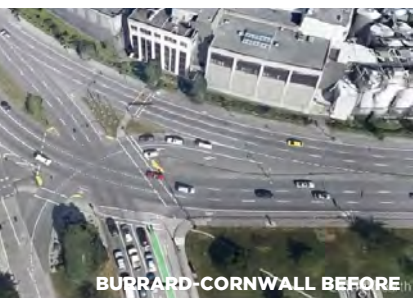
Public consultation on transportation projects is of key importance. This was reinforced with the experience of Arbutus Greenway along the rail corridor. Monitoring the Comox Greenway with the help of University resources showed that the extra investment in the paving finish detail was a valuable design feature. Built with a smoother surface using concrete saw cuts versus the typical trowel finish, the monitoring results showed that more seniors were walking due to a decreased tripping hazard.



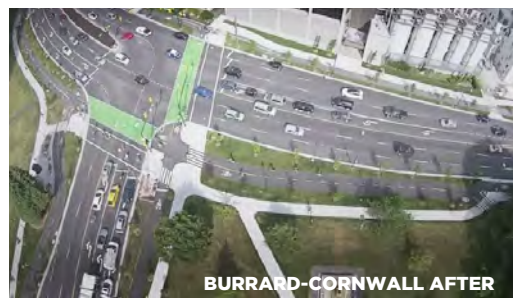




**BURRARD BRIDGE, VANCOUVER**  
COURTESY OF KEN OHNR



**BURRARD-CORNWALL BEFORE**

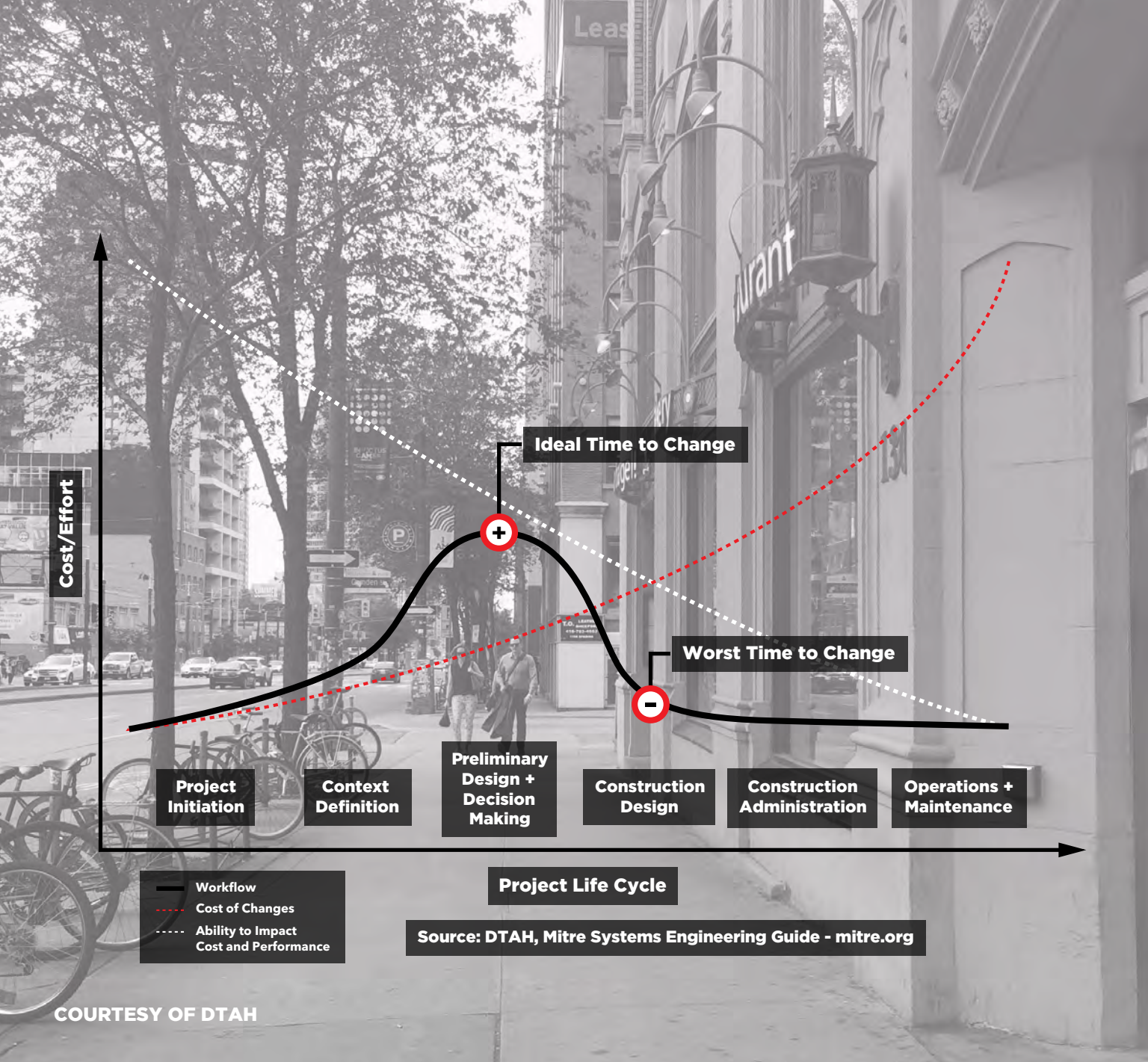


**BURRARD-CORNWALL AFTER**

Upgraded infrastructure and stronger separations between uses for all transportation modes leads to increased ridership, stronger route connections, improved safety and a more sustainable city.







COURTESY OF DTAH



# Public Realm Projects -

## Toronto & Ottawa

Speaker: Brent Raymond is a landscape architect, planner, urban designer and partner of DTAH.

Brent emphasized the value of learning from experience and building upon past design successes; not to repeat the past but to improve upon it. Again, the importance of the procurement process was stressed.

### Successful Practices + Lessons Learned

#### Building a Knowledge Base Over Time

The evolution of details and collective knowledge of how streetscapes have stood the test of time is key to creating good projects. Streets such as Spadina Avenue, Market Street and Queens Quay in Toronto as well as Confederation Boulevard in Ottawa have each built upon the benefits of expertise gained over decades.

#### Working on Non-standard Elements

There were over 30 non-standard elements in the construction of Queens Quay that contributed to making it the acclaimed streetscape that it is today.

#### Quality and Longevity

It is vital not to under fund the design phase of a public realm project. The design fee over the life cycle of the building is very small, yet impacts the outcome and maintenance of the project over the long term. The investment in design proactively addresses future, long-term maintenance issues. Bad or shoddy work must be avoided: "Price is what you pay, value is what you get."

#### Higher Quality Simple Details

The City should look at ways to improve streetscape quality by improving the simple streetscapes that form the majority of streets in Toronto – pavers are in limited areas. Higher quality concrete work should be a focus. Spadina Avenue is an example that has stood the test of time.

#### Procurement Process

Consider having the same consultant from beginning to end for better results due to continuity and professional investment in project-quality implementation. Builders who do not produce good quality work should not be subsequently awarded more contracts based on lowest bid.

#### Streetscape Details Continue to Evolve

The first tree trenches in Canada were built on Confederation Boulevard in Ottawa as recently as 1996. Soil science continues to improve since that time. For Spadina Avenue in Toronto, lessons were also learned about the impact of vibration from streetcars and vehicles on soil compaction. Current knowledge would result in wider medians and structure for soil. The exemplary Queens Quay project represents progress and experience gained from previous projects.



## Confederation Boulevard

This ceremonial route, designed by DTAH, physically and culturally unites Ottawa and Gatineau, and connects major cultural and political institutions in the capital. The route incorporates various modes of transportation including generous pedestrian paths and dedicated bike lanes. The scheme both develops and preserves the character of the city through key streetscaping elements and the implementation of building height regulations.







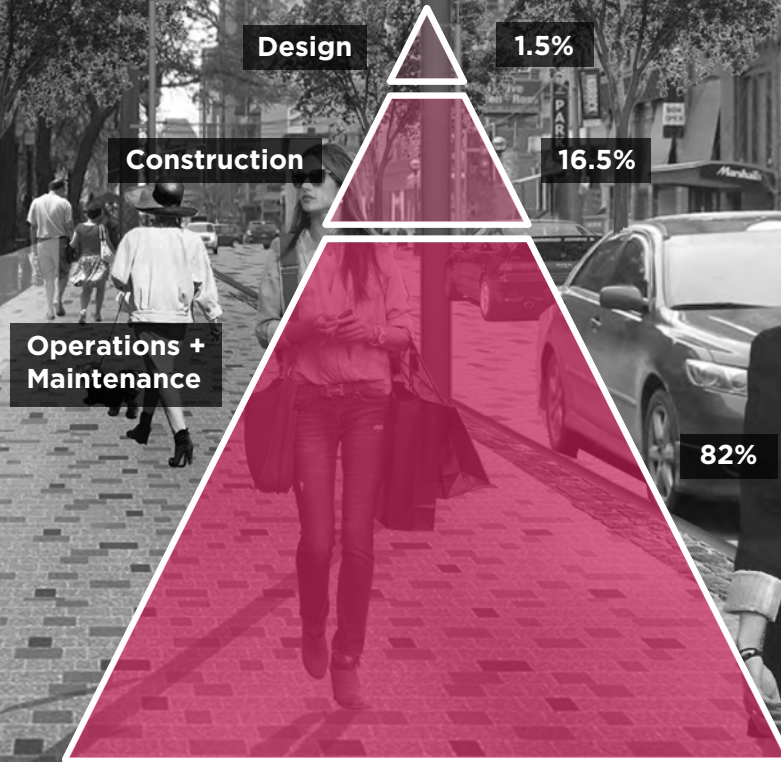
## Queens Quay

Toronto's most recent civic street "captured the imagination of the public on what a street could become". The transformation from industrial waterfront took 10 years from its start in 2006, and was designed with DTAH and West 8, under the Waterfront Toronto agency. It has gone from a street without cycling to one of the busiest cycling routes in the entire city.





# INVESTING IN QUALITY



Typical building costs over a 35-year life cycle

COURTESY OF DTAH



# Next Steps



The Chief Planner Roundtable on Implementing Design Excellence looked at challenges and examples of successes that highlighted the wealth of practical experience and outcomes that each of the selected cities holds. The Roundtable demonstrated how valuable it is to share lessons learned between cities, to their mutual benefit. Recommendations as developed from our speakers' presentations are listed below:

## Procurement Process

To improve the procurement process:

- » Compare procurement and scoring structures between cities, including quality control measures.
- » Recognize that the hiring of design consultants will have better results if the focus is on value and quality over lowest bidder. Public projects need to stand the test of time.

## Streetscape Quality

- » Provide higher quality concrete work as evidenced in past projects in the city.
- » Aim for continuity of consultant teams from conception to completion.
- » Selection of builders: factor in accountability for past projects versus lowest bid scoring only.
- » Advance civic generosity in the public realm particularly for areas that are not subject to private development streetscape improvements.

## Transportation Vision and Metrics

- » Incorporate quality design into the building of new transportation infrastructure and integrate with land use planning.

- » Gather more information and statistics for transportation projects to more persuasively illustrate the impacts and value of good design.
- » Further enhance Community involvement as a tool for setting directions and standards.

## Advance Education and Research

- » Advance conversation about design excellence for height and density to better address the city's growth.
- » Further engage other municipalities on specific issues to more efficiently and quickly gain a body of knowledge from built results.

## Promote Legacy-Building

- » Ensure adequate funding for the design phase of projects.
- » Develop a supportive civic management structure to ensure that what we are creating today will lead to a lasting legacy of quality public spaces and buildings that bestows pride and enjoyment on future generations.





PLANNING A GREAT CITY  
**TOGETHER**



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