Urbanism on Tap Series

on

“Winterizing” our Cities

Thursday January 22, 2015
This document has been prepared by the Ontario Chapter of the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU Ontario). The Congress for the New Urbanism is North America’s foremost advocate for advanced urban design.

On January 20, 2015, CNU Ontario hosted an interactive, open mic session with its membership and general public, the purpose of which was to provide background on the topic of “Winterizing our Cities” from urban design, landscape architecture and engineering perspectives, and gather input from attendees. This document provides a summary of our findings and is primarily focused on the Toronto context. It is being provided to our colleagues at the Winter Cities Institute to assist with future policy development and advocacy initiatives.
Have you ever wondered why people in some cities embrace winter, while people in other cities hibernate? Come and join the conversation on how we can make Toronto a more winter-friendly City. The mic is open for all to share their city building ideas… so come prepared!

Registration: www.cnuontario.org by Tuesday, January 20th, 2015

Where: The Ossington
61 Ossington Avenue

6:30PM – 7:00 PM PechaKucha Intros by:
Mark Sterling Principal of Acronym Urban Design and Planning and Director of the Master of Urban Design Program at the University of Toronto’s Daniels Faculty of Architecture Landscape and Design.
Scott Torrance Principal at Scott Torrance Landscape Architect
Mark Zwicker Principal at Architecture Unfolded
Mark Jamieson Associate at BA Group

7:00PM - 8:30PM Open Mic Session

Cost: $ 5.00 CNU and/or OPPI members
$10.00 non-members
Urbanism on Tap
Congress of the New Urbanism, Ontario Chapter

Winterizing Our Cities Open Mic

On Thursday January the 22nd 2015 CNU Ontario invited members and friends to the Chapter’s first “Urbanism on Tap” session, the topic at hand: “Winterizing our Cities”.

As part of CNU Ontario’s “Urbanism on Tap” speaking series, approximately 40 members and non-members gathered in an informal setting to listen to a panel of speakers and offer their thoughts in an open mic format. To introduce the night’s topic, four city building experts in the fields of urban design, architecture, landscape architecture and transportation briefly presented, in a Pecha kucha format, the manner in which winter shapes and informs their respective disciplines.

After the Pecha kucha session, attendants were invited to comment on how the winter informed and shaped their every day life.

It is important to mention that at the heart of this conversation was the concept of fostering the idea of “getting outside to be together instead of staying inside to be together”. This principle suggests that a larger public awareness strategy that runs hand in hand with winterizing initiatives is needed to reintroduce residents to WINTER in their Cities.

Overall, it was agreed that Toronto hosts some very successful winter festivals, such as the Christmas Market at the Distillery District. However it was also agreed that more can be done from design and programming perspectives to foster a greater acceptance of winter onto our daily lives, rather than just in set places during specific times.

The following is a summary of the evening’s comments and input, organized by main topics.

1. Wind Tunnels
Wind tunnels are a big problem, such as at the Yonge Street and Eglinton Avenue intersection in Toronto. It was stressed that current wind studies usually accompanying a site plan approval process are not effective as they do not account for the existing wind behaviour of an area. Current wind studies analyze the proposed building in a vacuum resulting in an architectural design solution that cannot respond to existing wind conditions. Point in case, the Four Seasons Hotel in Yorkville, where unaccounted wind conditions required the initial replacement of the building’s cladding and do not allow the central courtyard fountain to function. It also created a situation where, on a number of occasions, the umbrellas in the café outside of the Hotel were taken away by the wind gusts.

Building podiums do break wind tunnels or provide for cover altogether; however a better understanding of the local wind conditions might lead to better architectural design solutions.
Connections between building entrances and transit entrances or shelter should be stronger, more protected from the wind, and universally accessible.

**Recommendation:** Encourage municipalities to develop standards requiring an examination of a wider geographical area as part of wind studies.

### 2. Public – Private Partnerships

In Oakville the Town partnered with a local business to allow for the flooding of three tennis courts during the winter for skating purposes. The business maintains the ice and is allowed to place marketing and publicity material, in a discreet manner, along the rink. It was noted that other Ontario municipalities also encourage community groups, on a volunteer basis, to flood tennis courts for skating purposes.

**Recommendation:** Encourage municipalities to explore Public – Private partnerships opportunities.

### 3. Programming of Spaces

Programming of public spaces has to be extended to the winter season. For example, it was mentioned that Market Street, located to the west of the St. Lawrence Market, is programmed (i.e. closed to vehicular traffic) in the summer only but not in the winter.

Parkland should be better designed and programmed to reflect a winter climate. The presence of beach volleyball courts, for example, does not embrace winter and is left idle for the majority of the year.

Better programming is needed across the seasons; the City should not have to ‘close’ during the winter. A good example is Withrow park in the east end where snow making machines ensure the park is well used during the winter.

Laneways are also great spaces and they do offer some protection from the wind. Perhaps a rethinking of the lane system as a secondary mixed-use, highly articulated space should be studied.

Heating of sidewalks in pedestrian gathering places such as plazas and markets.

We need to use more incrementalism, pop ups, re-purposing spaces like Queen Street West has done with the Hershey’s storefront during the winter, where a re-purposed storefront hands out hot chocolate during the cold months.

**Recommendation:** Encourage municipalities to develop parks and recreation standards that require winter-friendly elements, programming and inclement weather design techniques.
4. Lighting

The use of exterior lighting can have a great positive impact on the look of a street, lighting can change colour and illuminate not only a building but also the public realm. Lighting at night is key to make the city more cozy and approachable such as Cartier Street light shades in Quebec. The City of Quebec does fund exterior lightning as an important streetscape element.

Many lighting displays exist through the holiday season, but are then removed in early January. This leaves the darkest, and for some depressing, time of the year unlit.

It was noted that LEDs could be a concern if not regulated.

**Recommendation:** Encourage municipalities to decrease regulations and restrictions associated with the use of down-lit lighting and the installation of down-lit lighting displays from January to March.

5. Transportation and Transit

Pedestrian movement in winter months is made more difficult by cold temperatures and the buildup of snow, ice and slush. Further, municipalities often prioritize the clearing of vehicular roads over pedestrian sidewalks and trails. However, some municipalities/regions have decided to make taking transit in the winter more appealing by installing heating lamps in bus shelters (e.g. VIVA Rapidways in York Region) or even adding public art/marketing campaigns to bus shelters that heat up if people join hands (e.g. Battery add in Transit Shelters in Montreal)

**Recommendations:**
- Prioritize snow clearing from pedestrian and cycling paths to make walking and cycling easier. This makes a great difference on resident’s every day life;
- Expand the underground pathway to high density residential areas; and,
- Provide for warming stations at transit shelters. Explore the possibility of re-using warmer subway air for warming stations or installing heat lamps in select transit shelters.

6. Architecture

Toronto architecture is lacking in colour. Most of our buildings are various tones of grey and brown. This only exacerbates the perception that during the winter, Toronto is a colourless, bleak landscape. We need to bring colour in a manner that reflects on Toronto’s quality of light. However, using the wrong colour can leave the City with a garish palette.

**Recommendation:** Encourage municipalities to adopt more stringent colour requirements, possibility through the urban design and architecture guidelines.
Winterizing Our Cities
Open Mic Pics

1. Event’s MC: Eldon Theodore
2. Mark Sterling
3. Mark Zwicker
4. Scott Torrance