Hamilton:
Resurgence in the Ambitious City

September 11th, 2015

Hamilton’s resurgence is palpable, but what are the origins of this revitalization? What are the factors at play in this process? How does Hamilton’s revival compare to other “rust belt” cities? and what is the vision for Hamilton going forward?

Come join the conversation; the mic is open for all to share their city building ideas on this topic!
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.

Back in 2014, CNU Ontario Chapter launched its “Urbanism on Tap” talk series to address some of the most pressing urbanism matters across the province. These interactive and informal sessions are held in different communities and tap onto local expertise and interest to understand local issues.

On September 11, 2015, CNU Ontario hosted an interactive, Urbanism on Tap session with its membership and general public, the purpose of which was to provide background on the topic of “Hamilton: Resurgence in the Ambitious City” from various political, planning and development perspectives, and gather input from attendees. This document provides a summary of our findings.
Hamilton: Resurgence in the Ambitious City

September 11th, 2015

Hamilton’s resurgence is palpable, but what are the origins of this revitalization? What are the factors at play in this process? How does Hamilton’s revival compare to other “rust belt” cities? And what is the vision for Hamilton going forward?

Come join the conversation; the mic is open for all to share their city building ideas on this topic!

The Pheasant Plucker - Upstairs
20 Augusta Street
Hamilton, ON

6:30PM – 7:00 PM  Doors Open/Mix and Mingle

7:00PM - 7:30PM  Open Mic presentations by some of Hamilton’s key city builders:
Jason Thorne  Head of Planning & Economic Development Department, City of Hamilton
Martinus Geleynse  Creative Director & President of Urbanicity Foundation
Steve Kulakowski  Partner, Core Urban Inc.
Terry Cooke  President & CEO Hamilton Community Foundation

7:00PM - 8:30PM  Open Mic Session/Mix and Mingle
Urbanism on Tap
Congress of the New Urbanism, Ontario Chapter

Hamilton: Resurgence in the Ambitious City Open Mic

On Friday September 11th, 2015 CNU Ontario invited members and friends to the Chapter’s third “Urbanism on Tap” session, the topic at hand: “Hamilton: Resurgence in the Ambitious City”.

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 politics and non-for-profit organizations, development, city planning and economic development as well as community building briefly presented the manner in which Hamilton’s resurgence informs and/or is shaped by their respective disciplines.

The open mic night started with Terry Cooke. Terry is the current President and CEO of the Hamilton Community Foundation and a former Regional Municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth regional chair. Terry’s talk provided the contextual backdrop for the evening – highlighting Hamilton’s industrial history and more recent cultural transformation. Also of note, was the discussion of increased health- and income-inequality, which mirrored the decline of steel manufacturing in Hamilton. Terry finished his talk by providing lessons that could be learned, both good and bad, from a number of similar rust belt cities in the U.S.

Stephen Kulakowsky is a partner in Core Urban Inc., a development firm active in Hamilton that understands how, by transforming Hamilton’s urban landscape, they are also helping to transform our city. In his presentation, Steve discussed some of Core Urban Inc.’s current and previous projects in Hamilton’s downtown core, including the Empire Time building at the corner of King William Street and Hughson and the Witton Lofts (formerly McIlwraith Public School). While acknowledging that there will always be those concerned about gentrification, he exemplified how the revitalization and adaptive reuse of existing building stock can contribute to urban renewal.

Martinus Geleynse is Creative Director and President of urbanicity Omnimedia - a creative industries agency and the publisher of urbanicity Magazine - a publication and forum of ideas, issues, and experiences in Hamilton. Martinus presented a review and critique of how cities are created, maintained and governed in unique and often conflicting ways. Using local and international examples, he illustrated how the modernization of our cities often is undertaken without the appropriate consideration of lessons previously learned – resulting in unintended consequences that must subsequently addressed at significant costs later (i.e.: car-centred urban design). Martinus advocated for reflection and attention to history as we move forward in Hamilton’s resurgence, with the hope of mitigating or avoiding significant failures in our on-going city building efforts.
The open mic session concluded with Jason Thorne, the City of Hamilton Head of Planning and Economic Development Department talk who spoke to the City’s overall structure and role in City building. Using local and international examples, Jason presented key place making, city building programs and strategies already taking place in Hamilton. Jason’s talk highlighted the economic, social and environmental importance of vibrant and welcoming communities.

After the above described presentations, attendants were invited to comment. It is important to mention that at the heart of the ensuing conversation was a frank discussion on the demographic, economic and physical factors influencing Hamilton’s resurgence. By the end of the session, it became apparent that there is an urgent need to harness the City’s current momentum and to extend it into the future as reflected in the session’s main discussion topics:

1. Employment, and jobs, and
2. Development and business innovation.

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

**Employment and Jobs**

Hamilton must look within to better educate its workforce in order to allow for the creation of start-up businesses through entrepreneurship. Some of the key concerns expressed by the speakers as well as the public included:

- Results of the “Code Red” investigative report are a concern. What do we do about disposable income? 1/5 of everyone in the city is on Employment Insurance. Focus should be on job growth. Revitalization that is occurring plays a role in the answer. Although unemployment is low, the jobs are low-paying. There are two main ways to create wealth:
  - educate your workforce, or
  - welcome educated immigrants.

- Hamilton is not receiving as many immigrants as other GTA areas, so education must play a leading role. Past generations relied on industry; today more solutions are needed. Wealth needs to come from within – entrepreneurship / small business start-ups plays a big role.

- Hamilton economy is strong, but it’s still a “meds and eds” town. Huge amount of employment hinges on the public purse. It is recognized that there is a need to change this, the City needs start-ups and to be supporting innovation. Also need a local economy rather than commuting into GTA.

- Is Hamilton doing enough to present itself as more than a bedroom community? Price point is good, but need to develop something more interesting.

- Risk-takers are coming from elsewhere. Hamilton-based developers are used to low-density greenfield. Need to encourage Hamilton-developers to be more progressive.

- Hamilton has concentrations of poverty. It is important to have a range of affordability in every neighbourhood, rather than concentrating poor in specific areas. Need a policy approach to address this.
• Hamilton lacks an adequate number of well-paying jobs. Need to develop a plan to attract well-paying jobs internally. Government has to play a role and be open to investment/development.
• There was a concern about trees in the core. Maintenance and replanting. Trees are important for public realm, add beauty and reduce urban heat island effect. Should be considered more and funds should be directed as such.

Development and Business Innovation
Hamilton has more in common with US rust-belt cities than Toronto, Vancouver, etc. Those US cities have good stories that Hamilton can learn from in terms of local developers taking progressive risks. Hamilton must encourage the diversification of its employment base by:
• Setting the programs to harness “The people” of Hamilton’s progressive and innovative ideas.
• Strengthen the relationship between local universities /colleges that can lead to local innovation and co-working spaces (helps start-ups).
• Taking advantage of the fact that approx. 70% of Hamiltonians work in Hamilton, which is a high rate. Prospective companies are now coming and actively meeting with city staff. Economic Development staff at the City are actively engaged and showcase the city’s high quality of life.
• People follow jobs, but also vice versa. Keep pressure on.
• Thinking about the next step: Are we doing enough? Hamilton has a great “buzz” now, but main players are still non-believers. Need to be careful that new programs/policies doesn't kill the buzz. Need to avoid barriers. Careful on how to implement buzz.
Hamilton: Resurgence in the Ambitious City
Event Pics

1. Terry Cooke
2. Steve Kulakowski
3. Martinus Geleynse
4. Jason Thorne
Hamilton: Resurgence in the Ambitious City
Event Pics

1-4 Event attendants