



BACKGROUND

Why development matters: Density & Sprawl

One of the goals of the St. John's Municipal Plan is to: reinforce existing commercial and industrial areas, supporting economic activity. Section 1.2.1 '*Development in Serviced Areas*' of the municipal plan states that "The City shall encourage new development and redevelopment in areas serviced with municipal water and sewer, extending existing networks in adjacent areas where capacity is sufficient but, especially, emphasizing opportunities within currently serviced areas where existing systems can accommodate increased density or infill."

The City of St. John's Integrated Community Sustainability Plan notes that "the goal of this policy is compact development, using existing water and sewage services. Projects to achieve the goal of compact development include: maintain the existing residential and commercial land-use districts of the Municipal Plan, and avoid major extensions of these districts unless there is a shortage of serviced land in the vicinity. Keeping development compact controls the outward spread of settlement, which can result in cleaner air as people have shorter distances to travel for work, school, shopping, and recreation."

The British Property Federation notes, in '*The economic impact of high density development and tall buildings in central business districts*', that "less urban sprawl means less need to use greenfield sites, more use of public transport and, with mixed use developments, a reduced need to travel."

Regarding height as a means of achieving density, the British Property Federation notes, "as it is not practical to add a few floors across many of the existing commercial buildings in a developed district, extra floor space will principally be delivered by the replacement of existing buildings with new buildings in a few selected locations." Making "redevelopment viable usually requires a significant increase in development density, which can sometimes be attained only by building up...in basic terms, efficiently adding height (and floorspace) to a building design adds to the density provided on the same footprint. So, for example, given a planned five storey building in a key commercial district, keeping the same footprint and doubling the floors to ten floors, while maybe not doubling the floorspace, still provides considerable added commercial density."

The Victoria (British Columbia) Transport Policy Institute's '*The Value of Downtown*' report notes a number of things that are 'special' about the downtown. It states that "downtown have a number of unique features that are important for the entire region", including: Business and Employment Center; Tourism; Transportation diversity; Cultural interchange; and Affordability. It also provides the following commentary on another feature:

- Environmental and Health Benefits (“By concentrating activities and increasing transportation diversity, downtown redevelopment helps reduce sprawl, reduces per capita automobile use and increases walking, which preserves greenspace, increases fitness and reduces traffic accident risks.”)

Amongst the suggestions the Institute offers on how to improve downtowns is locating activities downtown, noting: “as much as possible, major public facilities and services should be located in or near downtown”. Also, the City of Vancouver’s report ‘*How Density, Design, and Land Use will Contribute to Environmental Sustainability, Affordability, and Livability*’ notes that “traditionally controversial, density holds many keys to directly addressing climate change and our city’s environmental impact – reducing greenhouse gas emissions through dramatically reduced auto reliance, more efficient use of urban land and existing infrastructure, improved viability of energy efficient buildings and green energy systems, and more resilient and adaptable communities through a greater diversity of building types and land uses.”

EDGE, the research and innovation publication at the University of Toronto, notes in its Winter 2010 edition on Green Technology, that “low density, sprawled cities with poor public transit produce high GHG” (greenhouse gases). It also notes that something else that plays a part is “a city’s ability and desire to develop sophisticated public transit systems and energy-efficient buildings.” This is noted by author Paul Fraumeni in a conversation with civil engineer Professor Chris Kennedy on the topic of the cleanest cities in the western world.

The economics of building in St. John’s are different from 5 and 10 years ago. Costs such as construction and real estate have risen rapidly. Non-economical projects won’t get done. Developments require significant floor space to be economical. In the downtown, the means to acquire floor space other than via height are limited. It is footprint versus height. Density, sometimes achieved by increased heights, can be more environmentally friendly, foster greater productivity, and support public transit which would alleviate parking problems.

Reference documents

St. John’s Municipal Plan

<http://www.stjohns.ca/cityservices/planning/pdfs/Municipal%20Plan.pdf>

City of St. John’s Integrated Community Sustainability Plan

[http://www.stjohns.ca/pdfs/2%20-%20\(Draft\)%20Integrated%20Community%20Sustainability%20Plan%20\(ICSP\)%20dated%20Feb.%202,%202010.pdf](http://www.stjohns.ca/pdfs/2%20-%20(Draft)%20Integrated%20Community%20Sustainability%20Plan%20(ICSP)%20dated%20Feb.%202,%202010.pdf)

British Property Federation report <http://www.bpf.org.uk/topics/document/23467/the-economic-impact-of-high-density-development-and-tall-buildings-in-central-business-districts>

VTPI Value of Downtown report <http://www.vtpi.org/downtown.pdf>

City of Vancouver report

http://www.civicinfo.bc.ca/practices_innovations/eco_density_initiative--vancouver--2009.pdf

University of Toronto article <http://www.research.utoronto.ca/edge/winter2010/4.html>

-30-

For more information: Craig Ennis, 726-2961, ext 3, cennis@bot.nf.ca