

Our Future Mississauga

Mississauga's first three decades of development were shaped by a clear strategy of suburban growth, strong service delivery, and prudent fiscal management. Since 1974, Mississauga has grown from a collection of cherished villages to a major Ontario growth centre, home to more than 700,000 residents and an employment destination for more than 400,000 people. Growth was rapid and reached all four corners of the city resulting in a new financial reality for Mississauga with slower revenue growth and increasing costs – status quo development cannot continue. Shifting demographics are another influence as Mississauga will have a higher percentage of residents aged 55 and over than the provincial average and fewer residents aged 20 to 34.

Mississauga's success has been guided by clear, focused plans based on the values of public trust, enhancing citizens' quality of life and delivering excellence in public administration. The City has had a Strategic Plan in place since 1992, which was updated in 1999 – this was the foundation for policies and decisions as the city continued to develop. Mississauga now needs to confront the challenges, embrace the opportunities, and capitalize on the assets that will allow it to continue to grow. It's time to fill in the gaps in the urban fabric, complete communities and realize a shared vision for the future. To do this, an understanding of how the people who live and work in Mississauga – citizens and businesses, community groups and institutions – feel about the city was required.

That's what Our Future Mississauga was all about. Launched by City Council in June 2007, it aimed to capture the shared hopes and dreams of the city through an extensive community engagement process resulting in a new Strategic Plan. Our Future Mississauga was a civic conversation, involving every segment of the community – an interactive process to stimulate thinking and generate new ideas. Central to the initiative was the ability of diverse

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groups to share the same table, listen and learn from one another and be inspired. It connected with over 100,000 people – making it Mississauga’s largest community engagement process ever – through a meaningful and relevant discussion about the city’s future that produced achievable actions.

Community engagement was conducted in an inclusive and transparent manner allowing participants to track progress, contribute new perspectives and become meaningfully connected. Positive feedback was received throughout the initiative demonstrating the enthusiasm and number of engaged participants. A tremendous amount of work and commitment were generated by the community which remains ongoing. The initiative successfully engaged residents to encourage a sense of ownership over the plan. A common understanding about the city was identified – what works, what’s cherished, what needs to be preserved, and what needs to change. These conversations identified where Mississauga should head – the Strategic Plan will lead the way.

Our Future Mississauga was composed of five phases, each building on and informing the next. Reconnaissance established an understanding of the Mississauga context through stakeholder interviews, 110 community meetings, an interactive website and 6,737 puzzle piece comment cards. Inspiration encouraged dreaming about future possibilities through the visioning events. The highlight of this phase was a four-part Speakers Series, attended by over 3,000, which inspired thinking about change and transformation. Vision explored tangible ideas for Mississauga’s future, helping to define the city’s direction. Ideas were prioritized and strategies to achieve Mississauga’s vision were developed by over 500 participants at a two-day visioning symposium. Direction synthesized the recurring themes and ideas into the 18 Drivers for Change, which were refined into the Strategic Plan’s foundation – the Strategic Pillars for

Change. In the last phase, Plan, the Strategic Plan was approved by City Council in April 2009 followed by its launch in May 2009 with a revival of the Speakers Series, attended by 1,300.

The Strategic Plan and accompanying Action Plan reflect the views of participants, prioritize where change should happen, and outline how to achieve it – guiding Mississauga to become a leading 21st century city. The Strategic Plan is organized by the five Pillars for Strategic Change: Developing a Transit-Oriented City (Move), Ensuring Youth, Older Adults and New Immigrants Thrive (Belong), Completing Our Neighbourhoods (Connect), Cultivating Creative and Innovative Businesses (Prosper), and Living Green (Green). A Direction and Principle for each Pillar was identified in addition to Strategic Goals, which form the basis for the 87 actions found in the Action Plan.

The Strategic Plan will serve as a litmus test for all other City initiatives, guiding decision-making over the next forty years. It's important for cities to set audacious goals and dreams, but dreams won't be realized unless action is taken. The community engagement process leading to the creation of the Strategic Plan cost approximately \$500,000. The full cost of realizing our vision has yet to be incurred, but will be far outweighed by the benefits.

The progress of the Strategic Plan and Action Plan are measured annually through the Progress Report. It tracks the progression of the actions and provides a means to make adjustments if necessary. By December 2009, more than half of the 87 actions were underway and three were complete – introduce an affordable service card for recreation programs (ActiveAssist), attract and integrated post-secondary education facility downtown (Sheridan College) and establish a “Centre for Innovation” (RIC Centre). The indicators, both for the Pillars as well as the Cool Indicators will also assist in tracking Mississauga's progress towards its vision for the future. The indicators associated with each pillar help in measure the impact and

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success of the actions and progression towards achieving the Strategic Goals. The Cool Indicators track the vibrancy of the City and its desirability for people, jobs and opportunities.

The Our Future Mississauga community engagement process may be replicated by any body seeking to engage stakeholders in determining and delivering a Vision, Strategic Plan or public service. Replication may take the forms including creating a process where ideas build upon one another and result in common themes. This would entail assessing and analysing existing conditions (Reconnaissance), encouraging participation and big thinking (Inspiration), collaborating on the important issues (Vision) and analyzing and synthesizing emerging themes (Direction) to create a new vision, strategic plan or public service (Plan). Alternatively, replication may take the form of utilizing one or more of the specific tactics used in Our Future Mississauga. The variety of tactics allows each government or body to adapt the process according to its needs, target groups, or budget and time constraints.

This initiative has been shared with numerous other municipalities and countries. The initiative was presented at the 2008 CAPAM biennial conference in Barbados to senior public service, head of government, academic, and research institution delegates from a number of Commonwealth countries including Australia, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritius, New Zealand, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and others. As a result of the presentation, delegations from both Namibia and Nigeria travelled to Mississauga to learn more about it. A presentation was also made to municipal and other representatives at the Public Sector Strategic Planning Conference in Toronto. Additionally, representatives from the City of London, England observed the Visioning Symposium.

The dedicated core project team and the collaboration and cooperation from staff across the corporation were central to the success of Our Future Mississauga. However, one of the

principle changes that would be made is involve the Region and Province in a more active manner and earlier in the process. Throughout the process, local MPs and MPPs were invited to the events, as were employees and representatives from the Region of Peel, however it would have been beneficial to form partnerships with the Region and Province – truly engaging them throughout the process rather than inviting representatives to events and sharing the draft and final plans.

Another change would be to reduce the time allocated for the process. The Speaker Series was held in October and November 2007, but the Visioning Symposium was not held until February 2008 resulting in a large gap between the major events from the public's perspective and the Strategic Plan was not brought to Council until June 2009. From the public's perspective this was an unnecessary time lag as they believed that they had completed the work necessary for the Strategic Plan at the Visioning Symposium. While time between the events is required to synthesize ideas and identify themes, a tighter timeline would be advisable. In addition to a tighter timeline, a tighter budget could also be beneficial. Only half of the original requested budget for the process was approved, which turned out to be an advantage. This reduced budget forced the process to be conducted in a more creative way resulting in a more unique and tailored process.

As declared by Justin Trudeau at the Speakers Series "As you share in hopes and dreams, then changing the world becomes possible" – Our Future Mississauga demonstrates the validity of this statement.