

An aerial photograph of a city street, showing a mix of modern glass skyscrapers and older brick buildings. A semi-transparent blue overlay covers the top two-thirds of the image. The text is centered in white, bold, sans-serif font.

INTRODUCTION TO THE MID-SIZED CITIES RESEARCH SERIES MAKING SPACE FOR CHANGE



EVERGREEN

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Thank you to everyone who contributed their time and energy to the 2018 Mid-Sized Cities Research Series.

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MAKING SPACE FOR CHANGE

One doesn't have to look far to notice the rate of change across the world's urban centers. Spurred by mass migration, advancements in technology, and an increasingly interconnected geography, cities are the site of humanity's greatest extremes, where economic power meets abject poverty, and where architectural mastery meets contaminated wasteland. As the hosts of our most complex systems, cities have the greatest potential for transformation—and transforming they certainly are. These shifts can be seen in Canada's changing demographics, housing and mobility needs, industry focus, employment futures, and many other areas.

At Evergreen we do a lot of work in Canada's cities. Over the past year we've seen a particular focus on two key areas: technology and inclusion. Technology refers to the many conversations and initiatives, from across sectors, around "smartness," "openness," and the need for cities to *up* their digital prowess. This trend has been further amplified by the Federal Government's Smart Cities Challenge and the arrival of Sidewalk Labs in Canada's largest city, prompting Canada's municipalities to race towards a smart future. In the cautionary words of Ian Goldin, a leading voice on sustainable development, "when the world changes rapidly, ... you see people being left behind more quickly."¹

Inclusion is the necessary remedy to ensure we get this moment right. Spurred by grassroots movements across North America, such as Idle No More, Black Lives Matter, #metoo, March for Our Lives, and many more, we've seen previously unrecognized voices elevated to influence established leadership in a whole new way. This presents an opportunity for Canadian cities—big, mid-sized, and small—to set an example for others around the world.

Tackling problems successfully requires new approaches that put people at the center, address issues of inclusion, use evidence-based decision-making, and recognize the role of lived experience in shaping and informing policy.

And just how might we lead as Canadians? By putting people first.

Cities are driven by structures and systems of governance, which shape the way we live, work, and play. Governance doesn't simply refer to our federal, provincial, or municipal governments, but encompasses a multitude of stakeholders—public, private, academic, and civic—who inform the future of our cities. While governance should be shared, it is often concentrated in the hands of a few who make important decisions that affect us all. We have heard from people across the country that many of Canada's municipal governance systems are short-sighted, siloed, disconnected from residents, and focused on advancing the status quo, all of which limits the capacity to solve our most complex urban challenges. Tackling problems successfully requires new approaches that put people at the center, address issues of inclusion, use evidence-based decision-making, and recognize the role of lived experience in shaping and informing policy. By investing in and empowering people, we can change the future of Canada's cities.

¹ Boston Consulting Group. Navigating the New Renaissance. November 30, 2016. <https://www.bcg.com/en-ca/publications/2016/navigating-renaissance-interview-with-university-oxford-ian-goldin.aspx>

While it might seem like the obvious approach, cities empowering their citizens is not the norm. And as many of us know, “the status quo is remarkably resilient.”² It takes a multitude of actions, practices, and ongoing commitment to test new ideas, challenge assumptions, and make space for change. Making this transition is an even greater challenge in the mid-sized context, where cities often lack resources and can be skeptical of new voices and perspectives. Many mid-sized cities (MSCs) are experiencing economic restructuring of their industrial pasts, which is, in turn, causing extreme changes in employment options, infrastructure demands, and the labour market. Many MSCs are also facing significant social issues: systemic racism against newcomers, rising rates of mental health issues, drug abuse, and homelessness concentrated in the downtown core, as well as an aging population and the ongoing outmigration of youth.

A crisis is a terrible thing to waste. Times of urgency can also lead to greater things—and they are. Mid-sized cities are seeing a new generation of civic and municipal leaders that are more attuned to the unique assets of the mid-sized city. There is a rising recognition of the benefits of dense living as well as the issues created by sprawl and suburban planning. Mid-sized cities are also the perfect size for maximizing the impact of focused actions. A powerful group of **city-builders** can have a huge influence on the future of their city. It is this group that we aim to support through Evergreen’s Mid-Sized Cities Program—an

CITY-BUILDER:

A person who influences positive change to the cultural, social, environmental, physical and/or economic components of a city to make it flourish.

Good ideas—evidence-based and informed by the lived experience of city residents—are the foundation for planning and policy, and, just as importantly, for the evaluation of what works and why. Canada’s urban stakeholders need the right information and skills to make informed decisions that can lead to the best outcomes.

interdisciplinary initiative to help mid-sized cities thrive. By working in partnership with municipal staff, elected officials, private sector, civic leaders, residents, and academics, we are advancing new perspectives of knowledge, learning, and collaboration to shape the future of our cities.

Why focus on knowledge, learning, and collaboration? Good ideas—evidence-based and informed by the lived experience of city residents—are the foundation for planning and policy, and, just as importantly, for the evaluation of what works and why. Canada’s urban stakeholders need the right information and skills to make informed decisions that can lead to the best outcomes. Capacity building and training (i.e. site visits, learning exchanges, webinars, and workshops) can equip leaders with the knowledge and tools best matched for 21st century demands. In turn, these leaders are able to gain empathy, empower residents, and deepen relationships with unlikely partners to foster new forms of problem solving.

² Baumgartner, Frank R. 2009. “Rethinking Policy Change,” in *Lobbying and Policy Change: Who Wins, Who Loses, and Why*, pp. 254-275. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.



Building on these three areas, we've launched a variety of initiatives within Evergreen's MSC Program.

The **Mid-Sized Cities Research Series** offers a platform for researchers to publish their work in a format that's geared towards Canada's city practitioners. Through our monthly column in *Municipal World* magazine, contributors are able to share their work with municipal staff and elected officials across the country. The series was created after hearing from practitioners in MSCs that they don't have access to the data, knowledge, case studies, and policy analysis that applies to their unique context. Over the past two years, we've received contributions from over 30 academics, representing more than 20 research institutions from across Canada. We're also piloting an **Age Friendly Working Group** in partnership with the Ontario Age-Friendly Communities Outreach Program to facilitate collaboration and learning between researchers and practitioners, focusing on specific vulnerable populations and policy issues.

The MSC Program is anchored around an annual **Mid-Sized Cities Researcher + Practitioner Roundtable** which brings together MSC practitioners and researchers to learn through deep-dive sessions on key topics such as data and technology, Indigenous partnership-building, and newcomer supports, among others. We also integrate the local perspective into the Roundtable's design through community tours and a free public event delivered in collaboration with local partners and media in London. This year, we are bringing together a small cohort of municipal staff and Indigenous leaders from across Canada as part of the inaugural **Mid-Sized Cities Learning Exchange** to work on complex urban development issues by learning from one another through a six-month coaching program and two-day site visit.

To more effectively empower the broader community across mid-sized cities, we launched the Civic Incubator to support emerging city-builders to have a greater impact. Through a platform that provides mentorship,

celebration, experimentation, networking, and access to resources, the Civic Incubator enables the power and capacity of the grassroots—the often forgotten component of governance—to influence and participate in city decision-making. As the “users” of their cities, people need to be at the center of the policy-making process to ensure we create the communities that we want to live in. The program is well underway in Hamilton, and in its early phases of development in London, Ontario. Hamilton has been a critical part of the MSC Program; through our community storefront space at 294 James Street North, we have been able to test new approaches to engagement and gain knowledge through collaborating with city staff, community groups, residents, and local businesses. Through re-

search, learning, and partnership development, these initiatives allow us to work with the range of city-builders and stakeholders that influence, or should be influencing, the future of Canada’s cities.

RESEARCH SERIES SUMMARIES

This year’s Mid-Sized Cities Research Series highlights important conversations and trends underway in Canadian cities: our urban population is growing, leadership is changing, municipalities need to be smart and open, and inclusion is a must, not a nice to have. The 10 discussion pieces, prepared by academics from across Ontario demonstrate these



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perspectives through the lens of Canada's mid-sized cities, with the goal of supporting Canada's city-builders in creating the inclusive, innovative, and regenerative cities of the future.

New Civic Leadership for Mid-Sized Cities: Pillar Nonprofit Network in London

explores the theory and practice of "new civic leadership". Different from traditional municipal models, this leadership approach values holistic community visions, multi-sectoral collaboration, and broad-based public engagement in shaping the city's future. While much of the research remains focused on the largest, global cities, Michelle Baldwin and Neil Bradford argue for closer attention to evolving patterns of civic leadership in mid-sized cities. To make the case, they profile the history and achievements of London Ontario's Pillar Nonprofit Network. Committed to inclusion and innovation, Pillar deploys various strategies for community impact including social finance, shared space for social innovators, community innovation awards, and nonprofit/governance capacity building.

With the ongoing expansion of the Internet of Things, and the launch of Infrastructure Canada's Smart Cities Challenge, municipalities are increasingly leveraging technology to create smarter, healthier and more equitable and sustainable communities. But the range of connected devices and technology choices may be difficult for a municipality to navigate. In **Smart Planning Our Future Cities: Supporting Healthy, Equitable and Sustainable Communities in the Digital Age** Amanda Smith and Geneva Starr argue that developing a Smart City Master Plan can help municipalities identify needs, unite stakeholders and create a roadmap for using technology to achieve community goals. Mid-sized cities may have smaller budgets than larger cities, but can also have the nimbleness to be innovators in using Smart City Master Plans to create our future cities.

Digital Strategies and Smart Technologies in Ontario's Mid-Sized Cities: An Emerging Role for Administrators

Angela Orasch conducts a preliminary assessment of the current governance models of smart city initiatives in Ontario's mid-sized cities. The research looks to assess where smart city strategies are housed, who is in charge of their management, and how these factors may be important considerations for good governance practice. For practitioners, this research offers a preliminary administrative model that a) highlights the importance of the administrative role in smart city implementation and b) suggests a best-practices, public accountability model for the future administration of smart cities.

The Role of Southwestern Ontario Mid-Sized Cities in a Regional and Rural Broadband Partnership

Helen Hambly, Jamie Lee, Geoff Hogan, Tammy McQueen, and Matt Rapke consider the role of mid-sized cities in the evolving architecture of regional broadband infrastructure in Southwestern Ontario and argue that mid-sized cities play an important role in the building and expansion of scalable high-speed internet. Using the case of the SouthWestern Integrated Fibre Technology Inc. (SWIFT) project, they examine the collective action involving mid-sized cities within the emergent broadband network. The findings suggest that MSCs act as an integral part of the aggregation of communities across the SWIFT regional broadband network, creating a regional innovation system through collective action.

Each year, the Canadian government welcomes nearly 300,000 immigrants to the country. Settling largely in the country's "gateway cities" (Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal), newcomers are attracted to the urban amenities and opportunities found in these larger urban centres. In **A Welcome Place for Newcomers? Immigration and Mid-Sized Cities**, Audrey Jamal examines the current literature on immigration and mid-sized cities and, using the City of Guelph as a case study, provides an overview of the strategies that local institutions in this mid-sized city are using to attract, retain, and support newcomer communities.

The Provincial Policy Statement encourages municipalities to coordinate their efforts with Indigenous communities, and further states that the PPS "shall be consistent with the recognition and affirmation of existing Aboriginal and treaty rights in the Constitution Act, 1982". Since 2004, when the Supreme Court of Canada clarified the Crown's duty to consult and accommodate Aboriginal peoples through a number of cases, the duty to consult and accommodate has been increasingly on the minds of municipalities as they navigate this grey area. Is the duty to consult the framework within which to build those relationships, or is there a broader ethical framework in which to do so? In **Indigenous–Municipal Relations: Beyond Consultation**, Clara MacCallum Fraser addresses the question of how municipalities begin to build relationships with Indigenous communities within whose territory they reside, and begin to move beyond token gestures and acknowledgements, towards deeply meaningful engagement.



Canada's rapidly aging "baby boom" generation has overwhelmingly expressed a desire to age-in-place. But do Canadian communities support the health and wellbeing of older adults? Examining fourteen of Ontario's mid-sized cities, Samantha Biglieri and Maxwell Hartt find that an extremely large proportion of vulnerable adults are living in unsupportive built environments. This means a substantial portion of our potentially most vulnerable older adults are also being limited by, and facing significant barriers in, their physical surroundings. In **Identifying Built Barriers: Where do our Most Vulnerable Older Adults Live in Ontario's Mid-Sized Cities?** they discuss what this means for municipalities and what can be done.

In **Connecting Memories with Nature: Opportunities for Residents of Long-Term Care Facilities in Mid-Sized Cities**, Christopher Fullerton, Liette Vasseur, Kerrie Pickering and Marcie Jacklin demonstrate that mid-sized cities have the opportunity to accommodate elderly citizens in ways that larger cities cannot. They use a case study to illustrate that simple nature activities, such as birdwatching, can be beneficial for residents of long-term care (LTC) facilities. Lower land values allow MSCs to build new facilities near natural habitats, while in large cities space is at a premium and usually not available for these facilities. For planners and politicians, leveraging these LTC facility opportunities in the development of local land use planning policies can attract and retain not only older residents, but also their families looking for a better, healthier life.

Over the last few decades, many of Canada's mid-sized cities have declined or stagnated while large cities like Toronto and Vancouver have flourished. However, more recently, major metropolitan areas have become increasingly unaffordable. Policymakers are now beginning to view mid-sized cities as the key to Canada's future growth. In **anchors and Diversity: Understanding Decline and Resilience in Canadian Mid-Sized Cities**, Austin Zwick, Nick Revington and Maxwell Hartt explore the role of economic resilience and anchor institutions in the stabilization of population loss and the stimulation of local economic development.

Growth in our mid-sized cities has to be concentrated if it is to be sustainable. In **Visualizing Density and the Drivers of Complete Communities** Ariana Cancelli and Jeff Evenson summarize the methodology and key findings from Visualizing Density – a pilot project created by the Canadian Urban Institute (CUI) to help planners, designers, elected officials, residents' groups and private sector builders better understand density in the context of growth in their own communities. The project used a case study approach to measure and visualize the density of existing communities and explore how the attributes of a complete community can work with density to make great places to live and work.