

Urban Development Agreements: Lessons from the West  
April 27, 2004

Government of Canada Perspective

Susan Anzolin

Speaking Points

I want to thank the organizers for the opportunity to participate in today's session.

It is great to see such a committed interest by so many different people and across the three orders of government exploring ways to work together to make their community a better place to work, play and live. I want to come back to this notion of community later on in my comments.

Many of you have probably asked why should the Government of Canada be involved at the community level, given that it has no legislative authority with respect to municipalities.

While respecting jurisdiction and existing strengths of all orders of government, the Government of Canada has a great interest in the well-being of our cities and communities across the country.

The Government of Canada interacts and has a great impact (and I will admit that this impact is not always positive) at the community level in a number of direct and indirect ways, for example:

- monetary, fiscal and trade policy
- taxation policies and intergovernmental transfers
- regulation
- land and property owner, and
- income security funding (CPP, Employment Insurance).

The Government of Canada also plays a more direct role in community development, through initiatives like the Homelessness Initiative, Housing, Infrastructure Works, Crime Prevention, and Urban Aboriginal Strategy.

While many of these initiatives have been developed in the last few years, the Government of Canada has always played an important role in community development. For example, after World War II, the Government of Canada initiated significant reconstruction efforts to build great communities.

I think throughout the years, the pendulum of interaction has swung from great

federal involvement to less involvement. I think the introduction of community-based federal initiatives such as Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative demonstrates that the pendulum may have swung too far to the point of national programs and programs designed for individuals, that a re-balancing is necessary.

There is a large body of research that argues that where one lives is perhaps the most fundamental component because it significantly influences every other component: housing, education, labour market, social system, criminal justice system, financial market and politics. Furthermore, these studies have found that even after controlling for personal and family characteristics, neighbourhoods have independent and ongoing effects on the social and economic outcomes of those who reside in them.

However, it is my opinion that the pendulum need not swing completely to the point of having all interventions designed at the community level. As is the case with national or person-based initiatives, community-based initiatives alone are insufficient and inadequate to respond to the complex issues facing Canadians and communities. We need to work together to find the right balance.

Working together, I think this is the fundamental philosophy that needs to underscore our activities at the community level. There is no doubt that the challenges facing our communities are very complex and are beyond the responsibilities and resources of any one order of government.

Strong, vibrant and sustainable cities and communities are the key to achieving Canada's social goals and enhancing our economic competitiveness.

Therefore, it is no surprise that the Prime Minister has made it clear that cities and communities are at the heart of his government's priorities.

And so, he has appointed Mr. John Godfrey as his parliamentary secretary with a special emphasis on cities (and communities) to help develop the New Deal for Cities and Communities. The Prime Minister has also appointed an External Advisory Committee for Cities and Communities, chaired by Michael Harcourt. I should add that Mr. David Pecault from the Toronto City Summit Alliance is also a member of the PM's Advisory Committee.

But what is the New Deal? It is a purposeful and integrated approach that focuses on new partnerships among all orders of government to achieve real, measurable progress toward the economic, social, environmental and cultural sustainability of Canada's cities and communities.

It's about cities and communities articulating where they see themselves in the future, identifying real outcomes and what's required to lead them there.

In response, governments must then be able to find a way of supporting communities to achieve their vision.

We need to start developing a common vision for our cities and communities and how they can play a role in sustaining Canada's quality of life. As such your efforts today are an important step in identifying a vision for Toronto.

I also think the dialogue you are having today is also important in determining how governments should work together, perhaps through an urban development agreement similar in style to the ones developed in western Canada, perhaps different, or perhaps you may want to consider a completely different approach.

I say this because, I think one of the lessons learned from the experience in the West, is that the mechanism needs to be locally driven. One size does not fit all.

Having said that, I want to make a couple of final comments for consideration:

- It is important that we work together in a collaborative manner thereby maximizing our investments through collective action rather than by doing things independent of each other. I'm not only referring to the three orders of government, but the private sector, non-governmental organizations and citizens.
- Having champions, particularly at the community level, but at every level is important to the success of the community process.
- Working together is not easy. We need to spend a lot of time communicating with each other and understanding each other.
- Formal agreements, like urban development agreements, are an effective and transparent mechanism for articulating what we want to achieve and how we will achieve it.
- As Minister Goodale would say often, governments need to find ways of responding to the needs of communities rather than communities responding to the terms and conditions of government programs.

I think there is a real interest by the Government of Canada, through the New Deal for Cities and Communities to be a partner in making sure our communities are great places to live.

Thank you!