

UPCOMING

NOVEMBER

- 23 Toronto Local Appeal Body nominating panel, 3:00 p.m., committee room 3
- 27 Build Toronto & Toronto Portlands Company joint meeting, 9:00 a.m., 200 King Street West, Suite 200

DECEMBER

- 4 Inaugural meeting of Council, 2018-2022 term
- 5 Toronto Public Art Commission, 5:30 p.m., location TBD
 - Toronto Local Appeal Body business meeting, 40 Orchard View Boulevard, Suite 211, time TBC
- 11 Community Councils to elect chairs and vice-chairs, 9:30 a.m., location TBC
- 12 Striking Committee, 9:30 a.m., committee room 1
 - Waterfront Toronto Design Review Panel, 8:30 a.m., 20 Bay Street, Suite 1310
- 13 Council, time TBC, council chamber
 - Design Review Panel, time TBC, committee room 2
 - TCHC Design Review Panel, 12:00 p.m., location TBC
- 18 TTC board, time and location TBC

STRENGTHENING CITIES



Rob Jowett

A national urban policy could help the city address the challenges it faces more quickly and effectively, and now could be the opportune time to create one, say experts.

A recent [report](#) from the **Institute for Research on Public Policy** is the latest to explore the possible implementation of a national policy for cities in Canada. A national urban policy would be a coherent and comprehensive set of directions to coordinate the many stakeholders involved in city development across the country.

“The advantage would be... that we would be able to create more of a political consensus around the importance of cities, and greater recognition that the big sustainable development goals, which will define the politics and policy of the 21st century, increasingly play out in cities,” report author and **Huron University College** political science department chair Dr. **Neil Bradford** told *NRU*. “We need to bring together the different levels of government, and embedding this mindset and priorities in

institutions... would really signal this direction and this commitment.”

Outgoing Ward 21 St Paul’s councillor **Joe Mihevc** says that a national policy would help the city address issues such as poverty, the lack of affordable housing, and the need for better public transit service, in part by simplifying approval processes for intergovernmental projects. He points to the long process of approving and building the Toronto-York Spadina Subway Extension, which required negotiations among Toronto, York Region, Markham, and the provincial and federal governments, as an example of a process which was slowed down by the lack of an explicit policy framework.

“It would focus on issues that cities are struggling with across Canada,” he says. “The issues that we are struggling with in Toronto are not dissimilar to the ones that they... are struggling with in Vancouver, Montreal, [and] all the big cities. And... one of the big issues is a lack of simplified coherence. For us to get any money, any good programs going,

we have to work both with the province and with the federal government.”

The **United Nations** and the **Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development** have both been pushing member organizations to put specific policies in place to achieve sustainability and development goals. Canada is often identified as lacking a clear and comprehensive strategy that exists in other nations such as Brazil and the United Kingdom.

However, Bradford says that the way other countries create a national urban policy will not work in Canada.

“We’ve always done it differently here in Canada,” he says. “It isn’t plausible to think that we would have this centralized, national urban policy framework that’s explicitly designed and implemented in... a top-down way. But instead... we’ve weaved and threaded an urban lens across a whole variety of policy sectors, most notably [for] things like public infrastructure.”

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He says that the federal government has a lot of initiatives, such as the Innovation Superclusters Initiative or tri-level urban development agreements, that add up to an implicit urban policy rather than an explicit one. He points to the recent \$180-billion federal infrastructure plan, which will be implemented through consultation and coordination with municipalities across the province, as an example of how the policy framework currently works.

“The blood and guts of this implicit approach is that we have involved these tri-level and multilevel government arrangements that really, when you look at where the dollars are flowing, they are going to, essentially, cities in a place-based, bottom-up way,” he says. “And that is the way that we do urban policy and it’s not the kind of explicit, formal, legislated framework that the federal government will point to and say, ‘here’s our national urban policy’. You have to look a little bit more carefully in these different arrangements to piece it together.”

Bradford makes three recommendations for improvement. He says the mandate of federal development agencies needs to include urban

regions and they need to create collaboration between urban and rural areas. The federal government should create a Canadian Cities Innovation Fund to research ways to improve cities, and a national urban policy observatory to improve communication among various levels of government, policy experts, and stakeholders.

“It’s a really prime time for doing something at the national level around cities,” says **University of Toronto Global Cities Institute** research fellow and **Utrecht University** department of human geography and spatial planning assistant professor **Abigail Friendly**. Friendly published a [report](#) in 2016 regarding the way Canada could approach a national urban policy, and told *NRU* an explicit policy is needed.

“Although I think there’s a lot of valuable things that are happening, I think without an actual strategy, it’s hard for cities to figure out what they can do, how they can participate,” she says. “We really have to figure out what we need, and I think it has to involve strong funding... but really strong guidance. I think that’s the main thing.”

Both she and Bradford say that the current political climate is an ideal time to push for a

comprehensive strategy. The federal government, more than any previous governments in a long time, has made solving urban issues and building successful cities a priority.

“It’s a really prime time for doing something at the national level around cities,” says Friendly. “The only way we’re going to get anywhere is if we have the positive context for this sort of thing. And positive leadership... or political will.”

Although the policy would be created by the federal government, Mihevc says that Toronto council should pass motions to indicate its support of a national urban policy.

“We need to find ways to be supportive [of the federal government],” he says. “It’s

really, really important because it takes so long for these agreements to pass and so long for the shovel to get into the ground, then the government changes, and then everything changes. We need to find better ways to streamline the decision-making, and having three players is more complicated than having two players make those decisions.”

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