

Interpreting Intent and Applying Policies: Decision-Making

The Ontario Plan deals with the reality that the Vision must be achieved in increments over a long period of time. Many factors applicable to its achievement will change during future decades. Consequently, it is important that decisions be weighed in terms of both short and long-range benefits. Tradeoffs will sometimes be required between these two perspectives. As City leadership transitions over time, the record of past decisions and their rationale will become increasingly valuable in helping to stay the course and still exercise reasonable flexibility. Therefore, management of the City's decision-making process requires diligent documentation in a form that is readily retrievable. Some of the decision factors involved in this documentation include:

1. Qualities. Decision-making in Ontario must be viewed in the context of an institutional mind-set. In this case, that mind-set includes several critical qualities. They include:
 - Imagination. The Vision is ambitious. Imaginative thinking and approaches will be needed to achieve it.
 - Agility. Sometimes events move very quickly and in surprising directions. The City is determined to remain agile in adjusting to these situations, requiring a combination of wisdom grounded in experience and intelligence grounded in inventiveness.
 - Innovation. Often solutions are not ready-made. We live in a time of aggressive innovation, and municipal decision-making is capable of more far-reaching results if it benefits from innovative thinking.
2. Documentation. Integrating The Ontario Plan into day-to-day decision-making and its documentation becomes a powerful device for achieving the Vision. Decision-making must be documented at multiple levels (e.g., counter staff, department heads, city management, City Council, etc.) and incrementally over time. We are doing this for transparency so stakeholders will understand how and where decisions are made.
3. Information. What information was considered relevant in support of a decision? This is necessary to assess the degree to which that information is or is no longer relevant at a later date.
4. Fiscal Considerations. Virtually all of the City's decisions will have fiscal implications, and they must be carefully analyzed and documented. Included among these factors are:

- Potential return on investment;
 - Amount of value added;
 - Indebtedness;
 - General Fund versus Redevelopment balances; and
 - Land use net revenues (where applicable).
5. Indicators. Indicators applicable to decision options include qualitative as well as quantitative measures. Not everything of importance can be "counted." But it should be possible to describe options qualitatively with sufficient clarity to distinguish among them. In any case, these tools are available to enable more informed decision-making as well as to create records of value to subsequent decision-makers.
6. Feedback. The City's system of Evaluation and Feedback will draw heavily on the documentation associated with decision-making. This involves more than data documentation. It also includes consistency determination with appropriate goals and policies.
7. Project Steps. An illustrative table containing project evaluation steps was prepared to demonstrate how The Ontario Plan works as a tool for decision-making. It offers a guided process for determining how responsive to the Plan a proposed project is. It does not attempt to impose a rigid procedure but, rather, seeks to provide a checklist by which a project may be evaluated.