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TO: Finance and Economic Development Committee

DESTINATAIRE : Comité des finances et du développement économique

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SUBJECT: Report on a Healthy City for all – International Making Cities Livable Conference

OBJET : Rapport sur le congrès « A Healthy City for all – International Making Cities Livable »

Experiences at the Conference

It was my privilege to attend this very positive conference and have the opportunity to meet with planners, public health workers, designers and other municipal politicians from around the world as we discussed positive initiatives on making cities a healthy place to live. My over all sense of this conference was that there was optimism that we can make changes in a world where climate change is a constant concern.

My most memorable experience was a bus tour using local transit of Portland where we were introduced to the areas outside the city core where many of the city's well known initiatives like LRT and bike paths have not yet penetrated. It was pointed out that despite Portland's stellar reputation they can admit they have much action to do as bringing better transit to older suburbs and improve active transportation. It was a reminder of how cities are large and complicated and must continually work on improving themselves neighbourhood by neighbourhood.

I enjoyed presentations on how other cities have turned themselves around by reducing car centric roadways into walkable areas and bringing in more separated cycling lanes and car-free zones in city centres. Many of the presentations centred around areas that were low income areas where revitalization brought back a lot of affordable liveability to the community.

What was learned

I learned that forward thinking cities are integrating public health experts in their planning and design stages with big payoffs. The major benefits are that well designed communities have more social interaction leading to less social isolation and better mental health. There was an emphasis to have child friendly communities within the urban environment where it is safe to let a child out to play on the street. Public health planning was looked at as an investment that pays dividends in lower health costs from everything from to mental health to better air quality levels for healthier living. Despite the need for intensification it was emphasized that green space particularly trees are an important part of healthy infrastructure. It was pointed out at presentations how street design can change behaviour patterns.

There was a lot of emphasis on equitability in neighbourhoods where different income groups can live in the same community. Most of the workshops were working on the theme that a city had spaces that were not working well and needed to be changed. In some cases it was a face lift and in others it was a complete rethink of the use of space. The projects were not necessarily costly but because they were so innovative they needed dedicated research and planning to get it right. Many of the presentations emphasized the importance of affordable housing with easy access to transit. There was a strong emphasis on public transportation as an essential element in keeping cities healthy and equitable. I was pleased to see Canadian representation at this conference including a presentation from a Kingston, Ontario councillor on free transit for those on social assistance and the positive effect it had on the city.

City of Ottawa interests at the International Making Cities Livable Conference

The City of Ottawa was the host of the 55th IMCL Conference in 2018 and is well respected in its efforts to become a more liveable city. As the only Ottawa city representative at the conference it was positive experience for me to hear feedback from past participants on the role our city played in last year's conference and discuss the progress we have made since then. I was happy to talk about positive Ottawa examples in working groups and in conversations with participants on the advances we are planning for the future such as our own LRT system as well bring back ideas and best practices from other communities for our future planning on areas that need improving. Upon returning I was pleased to give a debrief on the conference to Ottawa Public Health staff to pass on my observations and learning from this conference as they reflect to public health initiatives here in Ottawa.

Conclusion

It is through the commitment of Members of Council, to attend conferences like this one, that the City of Ottawa's interests are advanced.

Councillor Theresa Kavanagh

CC: City Council