

OPINION

Architecture and space are setting of city

This series examines the steps to creating successful communities around the world. This sixth stop on that journey looks at the importance of developing the physical elements that make the community what it is. I have already discussed the importance of infrastructure above and below the ground. Today I am writing specifically about great architecture and great urban spaces that are key to making cities memorable, exciting and inviting places to visit and to live and work in.

Great urban design is a reflection of the soul of the city and its intellectual and spiritual past and present. It is the backdrop of human theatre and a true measure of our culture and society. It can also point to the future. Excellence in urban design engages all aspects of the collaboration of design including architecture, landscape architecture and urban planning. The results can make a significant difference in the economy of a community. Furthermore, it can contribute to the repeat attraction of tourists and the ongoing loyalty of its citizens.

Excellence in design also stands the test of time. Billions of tourism dollars are spent globally by tourists visiting cities where the heritage of built form is exhilarating, the architecture is special and the sense of place is memorable. We pay large sums of money to visit these cities and we return home wishing for the same calibre of design in our communities. It is possible in all of our communities.

In the Waterloo Region there are some interesting urban spaces and wonderful buildings. The Seagram and Kaufman Lofts are exceptional renovations. Cambridge City Hall is an outstanding Gold LEED building,

early winner of this prestigious award is Kitchener's City Hall. The School of Pharmacy and the Lang Tannery development have the potential to create a synergistic hub in Kitchener.

We can also look at our natural assets and explore new ways to look at them in our urban landscape. One of the most incredible opportunities in the region is the Grand River as it flows through the city centre in Galt. A fortress of concrete holds the Grand River at bay, anticipating the next 100 year flood. However, it also separates the citizens (and potential visitors) from enjoying the beauty of this spectacular riverfront. As a result, the majority of buildings that line the river have turned their backs on the Grand. Now, imagine looking differently at the Grand River in Cambridge. Picture it as the new Main Street or Grand Avenue with future buildings facing the Grand River. With a focus on celebrating the riverfront, a whole new civic urban design could be manifested along the Grand River. Floating pedestrian & cyclist areas at the river's edge on each side of the river could be complemented by a new pedestrian level above the concrete barriers, with many new staircases to punctuate the walls and lead down to the water's edge. The riverfront can be programmed to be a bright, vital and invigorating new part of the city, as well as refreshing its role as a generator of economic activity for the region. The intersections with the bridges could be points of celebration where fireworks, waterfalls and lightshows could take place at certain times of the year. This is one of the top three major urban design opportunities in the region and should be fully exploited.

We can do even more in the future to add

to the depth of the region's urban design excellence. We can identify key areas, such as gateways to our cities leading from our expressways, which can be enhanced with landscaping improvements and by creating continuous streetscapes leading into the city cores. We should concentrate on our hub opportunities, and learn from intensification examples such as transit hubs in Toronto, Portland, Philadelphia and Calgary. We can build on great examples that already exist here and create unique heritage-based event and destination spaces such as those at Faneuil Hall Market Place in Boston and Ghirardelli Square in San Francisco.

The future of our region looks bright. With plans for urban intensification and light rapid transit, the hubs formed by major transit stops will become strategic opportunities for new architectural and urban design excellence. Kitchener's urban revitalization prospects will include new knowledge workers involved in digital media, medical arts and financial services. Uptown Waterloo's new Balsillie School will add to the critical mass of the city centre; and the major expansions of the universities and colleges throughout the region will create exceptional opportunities to create new excellence in architecture, landscape design and urban design.

To this end, a new video is being produced by a collaboration of community participants, which will examine the Waterloo Region's history of excellence in architecture and urban design. In addition to showcasing Waterloo Region's gems to the world, we can document the first-rate examples we have and use them as models and guides for future development.

John Jung is CEO of Canadad's Technology Triangle Inc.

CTT'S VIEW



and Enermodal, working with construction managers Melloul-Blamey, has designed its new headquarters, "A Grand View", to achieve three LEED Platinum certifications and become Canada's most energy-efficient office. The works of famous Canadian architectural firms such as Kuwabara Payne McKenna Blumberg (KPMB), Diamond & Schmitt, and Saucier-Perrotte, have added to the skyline in Kitchener, Waterloo and Cambridge. Unique activities take place in the extraordinary buildings at the Perimeter Institute, Centre for International Governance Innovation and the Canadian Clay and Glass Museum, all three winners of the Governor General's Medal for Architecture. Another