

Interpreting Intent and Applying Policies: External Factors

External factors are forces acting on the City but not controlled by it. They include laws, regulations, decisions, activities, initiatives, and influences originating with numerous sources, including, but not limited to:

- State and federal governments,
- Courts,
- Quasi-governmental and non-governmental organizations, including non-profit organizations,
- Special districts,
- Utility providers
- Intergovernmental associations,
- Professional associations,
- Focused interest groups,
- Transportation system initiatives,
- The business community, especially development interests,
- Investors,
- Neighborhood and homeowner associations,
- Financial markets,
- Economic trends,
- Social changes, including demographic trends, and
- Environmental conditions and responses to them.

As encompassing as this list appears, it is not complete. But it illustrates the impressive array of interests and influences that are brought to bear on a single community, whether that is acknowledged or not. The essence of this component of The Ontario Plan is to deal with these forces intentionally rather than reactively. In many cases, there is little or nothing the City can do to influence, modify or blunt the impacts from these sources. Still, in these instances the City can understand and prepare for what is coming its way.

It is important to understand that this is not a new perspective for the City of Ontario. It has a track record of intergovernmental involvement, creative partnerships and scanning the forces that impact its options. Moreover, the City has developed a careful strategy for getting the most out of these forces in terms of what benefits the community. In this regard, it has been unusually effective. The thrust of this component of The Ontario Plan is to continue and build upon that foundation so that the City can sustain its awareness, consciousness and intent to make the most of opportunities it encounters or can create.

The new ingredient that has been added as part of shaping The Ontario Plan is a thoughtful and practical Ontario Vision that motivates everything the City does. It is understandable that, by definition, external factors are driven by their own agenda— one that may or may not involve conscious consideration of Ontario's priorities. Given that, the intent is that Ontario itself will inject that consideration into its influence or response to any external factor it must confront.

Clearly, it would be possible, given the rapid change and complex interactions of forces in our larger environment – regionally, nationally and internationally – to be overwhelmed by these forces. That would accomplish nothing. And that is the reason that a major aspect of The Ontario Plan entails a conscious effort to stay in touch with its context by focusing on those forces that have the greatest potential to advance Ontario’s future or, conversely, to detract from it. That insight then puts the City in the position to take timely action to achieve the best possible outcome.

It should be made clear that nothing in this Section is intended to suggest a reluctance on the part of the City to comply with the law nor to decline participation in thoughtful and mutually beneficial negotiations with any interested parties.

Rather, it is to announce that Ontario has a Vision about which it is very serious and anyone engaging the City for whatever reason needs to be aware of that. Hopefully, because the City chooses to be so forthright about this aspect of its future, this posture will enjoy the respect of others.

Regarding general forces of change – economic, political, environmental, social, and demographic – the situation is a bit different. These are factors that operate on a scale of their own making and do not typically respond (at least, quickly) to governmental positions. Some are actually worldwide in scale, the understanding of which is evolving even as we watch. Uncertainty is rampant. The interactions stimulated by many of these conditions are simply beyond comprehension. So, what is an aspiring City in the midst of all of this to do?

The answer is to understand first and foremost what it seeks. Then it knows what tack to take in influencing or adapting to the dynamic forces of change. It will not always be right. Mistakes will be made. Totally unpredictable changes will occur, or trends will completely reverse without warning. All of these uncertainties are part of the puzzle.

Within what often appears to be chaos, those who prevail are those who keep their heads and are clear about their interests. That is why Ontario Governance contains an intentional Section devoted to “keeping its head” no matter what may confront it between now and realization of the Ontario Vision.

None of this suggests a unilateral, inelastic course of action. Rather, it suggests maintaining an informed position, knowing what matters most and retaining the capacity to shift priorities where that makes sense. It entails openness to mutually beneficial collaboration, but with clear visibility of what is on the table. It is the exact opposite of intractability.

Finally, with respect to the business of forecasts and projections into the future, Ontario leans strongly on the use of scenario modeling rather than inflexible extensions of the past into the future. There are several reasons for this approach:

1. The data base underpinning the City's scenario-building capability is robust and will become more so in the future. This allows for generating implications of multiple changes, individually and collectively, that offer a useful understanding of how different choices perform.
2. Projections often become less accurate over time and obscure the factors that leverage change. Understanding those factors and their influence is more valuable than whether or not a particular anticipated growth number has or has not been achieved.
3. Ontario's future growth opportunities are tied to its geographic context. As such, GIS-based scenario building approaches are eminently suitable.
4. The Ontario Plan is a continuously improving plan and requires dynamic tools for its optimization.