

opinion

Best practices guru could be better idea

JONATHAN MCLEOD

Should Ottawa have a best-practices commissioner, someone who would research the success and failure of city operation and planning projects from other municipalities? Beacon Hill-Cyrville councillor Tim Tierney thinks we should have just such a person at city hall.

Tierney believes such a role could “bring new innovative practices to our conventional municipal thinking.” He believes such a commissioner could “save taxpayers money, and avoid pitfalls and pain-points other municipalities have experienced.”

A best-practices commissioner could have helped us fix past mistakes, and it has the potential to help council make sound decisions now and in the years to come.

Bike lanes

A few years ago, the city embarked on a much-needed reconstruction of Bank Street. This was the perfect time to install proper bike lanes on the traditional main street. In study after study, the economic effect of bike lanes has been positive. From Toronto to Portland to Auckland, the value of proper bicycle infrastructure has been proven and re-proven. Such economic stimulus could have been helpful in the Glebe, where Bank Street is currently littered with empty storefronts.

Safe injection site

This past month, Ottawa’s medical officer of health, Dr. Isra Levy, made some waves when he declared that Ottawa would benefit from at least one safe injection site. Though controversial, this isn’t news. Two years ago, a study was released demonstrating that, aside from the health benefits, a safe injection site would save Ottawa \$1M.

Vancouver knows this. Their InSite facility has been reducing overdoses, limiting the spread of disease and helping people get treatment for years. It has saved lives (and money). The results are so definitive, that former Vancouver mayor Philip Owen has stepped in to implore Mayor Watson to reconsider his position.

Minimum parking

requirements

Ottawa is currently — and perpetually, it seems — grappling with traffic and parking issues. Unfortunately, the evidence would indicate that the city’s requirement for minimum parking spaces for new developments is only making the problem worse. Recent studies in the United States have shown that minimum parking requirements have increased traffic congestion and decreased the use of sustainable transportation. They have also led to the loss of millions of dollars of potential tax revenue because those spots could have become home to new businesses.

Albion-Heatherington rejuvenation

The Albion-Heatherington community suffers from a number of socio-economic ills, most notably crime and poverty. Last year, seeking to rejuvenate the area, Gloucester-Southgate councillor Diane Deans looked to the community of East Lake in Atlanta.

The violence in East Lake had earned it the unfortunate nickname “Little Vietnam.” Facing the dual issues of poverty and crime, an innovative re-development project was undertaken, and it worked. Violent crime decreased 95 per cent and employment grew more than fivefold.

Deans wanted to replicate that success in a vulnerable neighbourhood in Ottawa. Unfortunately, after getting approval from the planning committee, Deans was stonewalled by the mayor and council. Deans' vision may eventually be realized, but the delays will cost the community dearly.

At the last city council meeting, Rideau-Goulbourn councillor Scott Moffatt argued that creating city policy "that is not based in fact is no way for us to govern." Moffatt is absolutely correct. Ignoring facts leads to wasteful, inefficient and often counterproductive policies. Having a best-practices commissioner would give council the information necessary to make wise, rational decisions.

Jonathan McLeod is an Ottawa freelance writer