

WHAT'S UP? CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF
ENGAGED URBAN CITIZENS:
EXAMINING THE HIGH SCHOOL GEOGRAPHY CURRICULUM IN
ONTARIO FOR EDUCATION ON URBAN PLANNING ISSUES

by

Evan Perlman
Bachelor of Arts (Honours), Queen's University at Kingston, 2011

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ABSTRACT

The consequences of planning issues like suburban sprawl are well-known in academia and the planning profession, however there is a disconnect between this knowledge and the actions of decision-makers, as well as, the populations who elect them. It is argued that if students in Ontario were better informed or knowledgeable about urban planning issues within the high school curricula, then there could be a stronger framework for which to improve upon planning urban regions according to best practices and principles. A focus is placed on geography education and the provincial geography curriculum due to it having the strongest potential for inclusion of this topic. Through a literature review and semi-structured interviews with educators and planners, this paper examines the current geography curriculum, best practices, as well as the barriers to incorporating urban planning issues into high school geography classrooms. Lastly, recommendations are provided for stakeholders in the planning and geography education professions on how to overcome these barriers.

Key words: Urban planning education, youth and urban planning, urban geography education, Ontario high school geography curriculum

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The idea for this project stemmed from a frustrating thought about why the GTA was so ‘behind’ on addressing planning issues like transit and sprawl. I realized that things are unlikely to change in a big way with the current generation in power who grew up in far simpler world than today. Therefore, the best opportunity lies with educating the upcoming generations who are still in high school. Even if they do not engage directly with community planning, they can at the very least vote for politicians who act on good planning principles.

DEDICATION

This major research paper is dedicated in the memory of my cousin, Stewart Silver.

Contents

Introduction.....	1
Background information	5
Research significance.....	5
How Ontario governs curriculum	6
How current curriculum on sustainability and environmental education needs to consider urban form and the built environment	8
Literature review	11
Planning issues and high school curriculum	12
The role of planning and public education.....	13
Planning as a tool of civic literacy in high schools.....	14
Making the connection with urban geography in secondary education	15
Methods	17
Results.....	20
1A) What are ideal urban planning topics and issues to teach at the high school level?	20
1B) Interviewee perceptions of these topics	22
2A) A curriculum assessment from looking at the Ministry’s curriculum for geography	25
3) What are examples of good urban issues education? Current case study examples.....	28
3.1) Case study #1: OPPI Initiative.....	28
3.2) Case study #2: Maximum City program at University of Toronto Schools	31
4) Moving forward – overcoming barriers.....	33
4.1) Barriers in the current geography curriculum.....	34
4.2) Barriers related to pedagogy and high school educators	35
4.3) On-going learning and networking with the planning profession	37
5) Recommendations	38
Conclusion	41
References.....	42

List of tables

Table 1: Results for core topics in urban planning	23
Table 2: Results for emerging issues topics in urban planning.....	24

Introduction

As of the 2011 census, 49.3% of Ontarians live in census metropolitan areas (CMAs) – urban areas with a population of at least 100,000 – while nearly 89% of the province is urbanized as a whole (Statistics Canada, 2012). Large scale suburban growth is a reality in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), particularly beyond the borders of the former ‘old’ City of Toronto. Between the 1950s and the end of the 1990s, the GTA’s developed land area tripled while its population only doubled (Sewell, 2009). There is an extensive and growing popular literature available documenting the social, economic and environmental damages we as a society have caused to our cities. The consequences of unchallenged suburban growth range from decreased air quality, to increased congestion and commute times, and to lost productivity. In Toronto there is certainly not a lack of awareness in the planning profession, academia, or the media of how to plan urban regions ‘better’. Rather, there appears to be a disconnect between this easily available knowledge and the actions of the decision-makers as well as the populations who place them in power (Speck, 2012).

This research paper is concerned with the fact that this reality of a separation between knowledge and action can be in part attributed to a lack of education on urban planning issues. Therefore, it will be argued that if Ontarians were better informed about urban issues then there could be a stronger framework for which to improve upon planning urban regions according to best practices and principles. Student exposure in the public school system to urban issues in Ontario is not what it once was. Today, only a handful of Ontario high schools offer a grade 12 course in urban geography (Agrell, 2011). However in 1988 just over 7,600 students across

Ontario were enrolled in a senior (grades 11 and 12) urban studies geography course (Bardecki, Jacobs & Jones, 1990).

Education on environmental issues is currently strong in Ontario schools, however this paper argues that urban planning issues need to be incorporated into the curriculum to inform future generations on the crucial impacts that land use, built form, and transportation play in shaping how (sustainably) we live. Currently, curriculum in relation to sustainability focuses mostly on personal energy or resources use and the ‘greening’ of school sites (Ministry of Education, 2011). Owen (2010, p. 104) in *Green Metropolis* succinctly summarizes how thinking about sustainability without considering the built environment is misguided in stating that:

“The critical energy drain in a typical American suburb is not the Hummer in the driveway; it’s everything else the Hummer makes possible – the oversized houses and irrigated yards, the network of new feeder roads and residential streets, the costly and inefficient outward expansion of the power grid, the duplicated stores and schools, the two-hour solo commutes.”

For a perceivable comparison, the National Geographic Society campaigns on the issue of “geo-literacy” in which the organization advocates that people need to have greater geographic knowledge about their world in order to make more informed life decisions (National Geographic Society, 2012). Thus, this notion also aids in pushing geography forward from its well-known, yet very simplified role in memorizing places to a more complex, critical analysis-focused role. Similarly, this paper takes the idea of this concept one step further in applying it specifically to issues of urbanized areas. Although not popularly recognized as such, geography can play an immense role in citizenship education, civic responsibility, and critical thinking development (Stoltman, 2006). The research purpose of this project is to examine what is the

current appearance and instruction of urban planning issues in the high school (grades 9 to 12) geography curriculum in Ontario and the Greater Toronto Area. This project selects the final years of formal education as its focus as these are the years when students are starting to form their opinions about the world they live in (Chauhan, 2005).

Education is a key tool in bringing about change to a particular issue, as it is not merely about the regimen of absorbing knowledge but is also part of a process that shapes one's identity and character (Castree, 2005). Teachers can therefore do a better job in instructing today's youth about urban issues - whose consequences will greatly impact the lives of the upcoming current generation. This study will address the following:

- Why it is important for today's youth to learn about urban planning issues.
- What is the current level of urban planning issues that is stated in Ontario's high school curriculum?
- What are current best practices and case studies in the GTA regarding both advocating for and instructing urban planning issues at the high school level?
- What are the barriers to incorporating urban planning issues into the curriculum for geography courses?
- What are some recommendations for stakeholders in the planning and geography education professions to overcome these barriers?

To distinguish this paper from a research exercise in urban geography and education, it is important to incorporate the field of urban planning as a profession. There are already established educational organizations in geography education in Ontario, while the planning profession encourages public outreach (e.g. World Town Planning Day). Thus, there is great opportunity for increased collaboration between the two fields and professions. The field and

profession of urban planning should be concerned with this topic not for increasing the visibility or membership of the profession, but for the extensive long-term benefits that can occur when working for and with a potentially better informed public. On a broader scale, it can be argued that students educated in critical urban issues will become better stewards of their communities. For example, those who reach voting age can elect leaders at the local, provincial and federal levels who are critically and socially aware of urban planning issues.

Background information

Research significance

Why geography, why the high school level, and why connect it with planning?

On a personal note that likely resonates with many planning graduate students; critical exposure to the major issues of sprawl, transit and others only primarily occurred when one was in planning school. Even for those completing undergraduate studies in geography, like I did, may have only received a few courses in urban issues due to the enormous breadth of the field – a factor that applies just the same at the high school level. It also largely depends on one's interests. Although I did not grow up in Ontario, during my high school education in the early 2000s, mandatory geography courses bring back mostly memories of memorizing countless physical and human phenomena like place names. In discussing geography education in America, Bednarz, Downs and Vender (2003, p. 468) note that the “old” geography education method of textbooks and fact memorization drove the subject “into near extinction by the 1970s”. In comparison, “new” geography education emphasizes human-environment interaction, the role of technology, hands-on learning, and critical thinking/problem solving (Bednarz, Downs & Vender, 2003, p. 469). Students (and their parents) chose courses in high school that not just interest them but by the subjects' perceived usefulness for later in life. An inclusion of urban planning issues not only fits in with the ‘new’ method of geography education, but it can also revitalize the subject by giving students knowledge in matters that directly affects their local environment and how they will be able to live.

Regardless of the broad scope offered by the field of geography, it is argued here that urban geography and planning issues in particular should not be exposed to just those who wish to specialize in that subject in post-secondary study. This paper does not advocate for the creation of a new course in planning. Even in identified best practices on this specific topic, teaching about planning is always in conjunction or within a similarly related subject course. High school course offerings are a ‘zero-sum game’ whereby a new course cannot usually be added without removing another. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of planning as a school subject, it has the potential to be incorporated into several existing subjects and this project proposes geography as being an optimal fit. In assessing geographic education, Stoltman (2006, p. 33) asserts that geography teachers often see their role as “teaching content, rather than considering future applications to life outside of school”. Furthermore, a research study found that most respondents did not associate geography education with citizenship (Stoltman, 2006). Often in curriculums, there is a specialized course or integrated course component in responsible citizen participation and Ontario has a mandatory half-credit course in civics in grade 10. Examining the grade 10 civics class specifically as a course to incorporate planning has already been a topic of research by Chauhan (2005). This project acknowledges that research while also identifying the even larger role that the geography curriculum can add.

How Ontario governs curriculum

Education in Canada is a provincial responsibility and Ontario’s Ministry of Education sets the standard curriculum including approved textbooks for all public schools. Individual school boards and school principals have the ability to choose textbooks and pre-approved learning materials based lists already approved by the Ministry (Ministry of Education, 2009).

This project is based on both the most recently available Canadian & World Studies curriculum (which includes geography, history, and civics) which was last revised in 2005, as well as the newest update due later in 2013 of which only the basic list of course descriptions was available. Strategic policy for the secondary school curriculum is also provided by a Curriculum Council, established in 2007 with appointed members to advise the Minister of Education (Ministry of Education, 2013). The Ministry of Education (2010) does state however that “teaching and assessment strategies are left to the professional judgement of teachers, enabling them to address individual student needs and deliver the curriculum in a context that is locally meaningful”.

The latest update to the Canadian and World Studies curriculum due for release in 2013 was a process that began in 2009. The Ministry undertakes a fairly thorough procedure in consulting over one thousand different stakeholders across the province including teachers, university faculties, various provincial ministries (including infrastructure, transportation, and municipal affairs and housing), community leaders, and all school boards. Feedback was also gathered directly from geography teachers as a Ministry representative attended the annual conferences of the Ontario Association of Geographic and Environmental Education (OAGEE). Stakeholder feedback informs a recommendation report that is sent for higher level approval at the Ministry of Education. A written document on the report is sent out for further feedback and revision from stakeholders before a final report is sent to education academics for validation.

It is important to remember that the curriculum must apply at a broad level for all communities across the province, even the remote communities only accessible by aircraft. Subjects that are included in the formal curriculum represent “a form of legitimacy” in their deemed importance to educating a massive audience (Chauhan, 2005, p. 17). Formal curriculum

also acts as a ‘top-down’ - and therefore more coordinated – approach to spread knowledge, as opposed to the ‘bottom-up’ or ad hoc approach case studies that are presented later in the paper. However, while curriculum policy is about what one teaches in a classroom, the teaching methods are up to the individual teacher. In addition, geography teachers are supported by instructional leaders, school board resources and organizations like the Ontario Association of Geographic and Environmental Education (OAGEE).

How current curriculum on sustainability and environmental education needs to consider urban form and the built environment

Today’s Ontario high school students are already exposed and taught to thinking critically about their own world in the form of environmental education. Environmental education has shifted from being merely one component of a geography or science course into a fully inter-curricular theme (Tilbury & Wortman, 2006). The Ministry of Education released a document in 2007 entitled, *Ready, Set, Green! Tips, Techniques and Resources from Ontario Educators* that supports environmental education across the province. In addition to ‘greening’ school sites, the document encourages recycling, reducing one’s own energy consumption, and taking environmentally friendly forms of transportation (Ministry of Education, 2007). In taking this initiative a step further, the Ministry has set out specific expectations in environmental education for grades 9 through 12 across major subjects ranging from the arts to mathematics to social sciences.

In reviewing the Ministry’s expectations document on environmental education for geography courses as well as the grade 10 civics course, there is very little mention of the connections that built form, land use, and transportation play in environmental sustainability.

Surveys of environmental education learning have found that the knowledge students receive (being mostly science-based) lacks a greater understanding of the cultural, social, and political factors behind environmental issues (Tilbury & Wortman, 2006). Traditionally, environmental education pedagogy has been oriented towards raising awareness about environmental issues and focused on distributing knowledge. Tilbury and Wortman (2006, p. 197) instead argue that “environmental education” must shift towards “education for sustainability”, which instead places an emphasis on student-community interaction. More significantly, Tilbury and Wortman (2006) advocate that pedagogy must focus on exploring issues and problems in sustainability that are in contexts that are directly relevant to students and their neighbourhoods. This approach encourages practical and hands-on learning, while also encouraging students to reflect critically on their own lifestyle choices. From the perspective of this project, it also supports the connection of the planning profession with classroom learning, which teaches students to analyze their communities and encourages deeper discussion on the awareness of one’s own environment.

Popular topics in planning like sprawl, transit, mixed-use neighbourhoods, and citizen participation are all linked with the goals of saving resources and reducing greenhouse gases, although this is a connection that may not be inherently obvious to many individuals. Critical literature has argued that the truly effective factors that contribute to sustainability – and therefore reducing greenhouse gas emissions – are related to more compact built forms and less car use, rather than switching light bulbs or installing a solar photovoltaic system. In addition, Owen’s (2010, p. 104) quote in the introduction of this paper (“...[it] is not the Hummer in the driveway; it’s everything else the Hummer makes possible”), Speck (2012, 56) states that there

currently exists a “gizmo green phenomenon” in which there is a fixation on sustainable products, which have a relatively insignificant impact on the carbon footprint compared to how much driving a landscape encourages. As a result, the greenest home with a Toyota Prius hybrid car in suburban sprawl still has a bigger carbon footprint than the least green home in a walkable neighbourhood (Speck, 2012). Furthermore, it is argued that gizmos like Prius vehicles and LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) accreditations for buildings give people “get-out-of-jail-free cards” that do not necessarily promote thinking more critically about their larger carbon footprints. Tilbury and Wortman (2006) classify areas of learning that contribute to environmental education through critical thinking, enquiry-based learning, and empowerment as ‘adjectival’ education. Therefore, teaching urban planning issues would qualify extremely well as adjectival education in its goal of promoting a deeper understanding of environmental topics from contexts like land use, communities, or transportation. Despite its enormous potential, adjectival education remains far from a widespread practice (Tilbury & Wortman, 2006).

Literature review

Literature directly on the topic of including urban planning issues into high school curricula is relatively sparse. However, it is not a new topic, and as discussed elsewhere in this paper, some practical progress has been made outside the world of academia. This section will seek to establish the extent of the critical discussion that exists on this matter, as well as to determine how other researchers have interpreted this issue. The findings of such will inform the methods, results, and recommendation of this study.

To compensate for the little literature directly on urban planning education at the secondary level, studies on this subject also have to be drawn from several closely related fields such as urban geography and geographic education. The subject of youth participation and education in the planning process is also useful in understanding the scope of this project. In addition, at least two major research papers by urban planning students in Toronto in the past decade have directly addressed the issue of planning topics education at the secondary school level (one with community planning in the Ontario grade 10 civics curriculum and another regarding sustainable development in grades 7 and 8).

Academic literature that supports this study can be grouped into three main types: 1) those that discuss the relationship between planning and secondary schooling/curricula; 2) those relating to the importance of urban geography within geography curricula; and 3) those that consider the role of youth participation (children or adolescents) and the planning profession. Nevertheless most of this spectrum of literature does not directly address the issue from a Canadian or Ontario-specific context.

Planning issues and high school curriculum

Although planners deal with schools from the perspective of land use, economic development or public safety, they have had a much less significant role in dealing with educational policy (McCarthy, 2009). Strengthening the bridge between the planning profession and secondary schooling is a mutually beneficial endeavour. Educators can increase the connection between their schools and their local communities, while planners can gain greater community participation (McCarthy, 2009). It is interesting to note that urban planning and modern education have similar origins as they both arose from the industrial era through the desire to improve life in cities (Vitiello, 2006).

Previous research studies that directly discuss planning as part of high school curricula are few and far in between. All studies reinforce the notion of planning studies serving as a medium to encourage critical thinking and strengthen one's involvement in the local community. Rajkovich (1997) advocated for the inclusion of a separate urban planning course in American high school curricula under the purpose of authentic (meaningful) pedagogy to promote critical thinking and prepare students to be global citizens. However, the possibilities of incorporating planning studies into various courses (American history, government, field trips) is discussed only in hypothetical terms by Rajkovich (1997) and the article does not deal with barriers to implementation. The feasibility of including planning in Ontario high schools specifically are the theses of major research papers by Chauhan (2005) and Roselli (2006). In examining the feasibility of placing community planning as unit with the Ontario grade 10 civics curriculum, Chauhan (2005) interviewed students, parents, teachers, academics and planners in addition to analyzing the existing curriculum. Although focusing on multicultural local citizenship for

newcomers to Canada, Chauhan's (2005) report aligns with Rajkovich (1997) in promoting learning through empowering and practical assignments like attending a public consultation meeting. Chauhan (2005) identified several challenges associated with such an endeavour but provided suggestions with how to pursue the dissemination of the new unit to classrooms through training workshops run by a school board. Research on how to move the idea to the province and how to further engage the planning profession is needed. Using a survey approach, Roselli (2006) examined the teaching of sustainable development issues at the grade 7 and 8 levels and concluded that the main barrier to dissemination of such knowledge lies with teacher education. The paper briefly recommended that a reform of the Bachelor of Education program is needed to ensure future educators are familiar with sustainable development issues. However the idea of addressing this issue from the perspective of Ontario senior high school geography courses – grades 9 through 12 – has not been thoroughly researched in the past.

The role of planning and public education

Planning as a profession has made a significant shift from its previous role in being a technical profession using a top-down, comprehensive planning approach. Today's major planning decisions are made by a range of professionals and non-professionals across many networks and agencies. Thus within this 'new' framework the role of planners also involves empowering stakeholders and educating the general public (Susskind, 2000). These tasks do not diminish the importance of planners but rather recognize the participatory and political nature of the planning process (Susskind, 2000). Interestingly, Forester (2000, p. 257) argues that planning will increasingly have to take on a "public education function" and that planners "will play the roles of public educators". Due to advances in information technologies like geographic

information systems and the increasing realization of the interconnectedness of physical, social, economic realm, planners play a key role in presenting compelling information (Forester, 2000). In making the link with geography education, this changing role of planning aligns well with the renewed framework of geography education that emphasizes the role of technology, hands-on learning, and critical thinking/problem solving (Bednarz, Downs & Vender, 2003, p. 469).

Planning as a tool of civic literacy in high schools

Advocating for the teaching of urban issues in high school curriculums is not simply promoting the inclusion of certain facts or information, but rather of promoting the importance of critical thinking – particularly of one’s own neighbourhood. Youth are often not involved with community development but McCarthy (2009) notes that planners have a professional duty to encourage citizen participation in the planning process. Indeed, the *Codes of Practice* of the Canadian Institute of Planners states that planners shall “provide opportunities for meaningful participation and education in the planning process to all interested parties” (Canadian Institute of Planners, 2013). Youth participation in particular represents a population group that is typically under or minimally involved in the planning process. In researching youth participation in neighborhood development, Checkoway (1998) argues that youth would fall on the lower rungs of Arnstein’s (1969) theoretical ‘ladder’ of participation, where the highest rungs represent true power and partnership and the mid and lower rungs symbolize ‘token’ or non-participation. Participation levels within youth groups vary further among socio-economic and ethnic groups (Checkoway, 1998). One of the forms that youth participation can take is “community education” whereby “youth are challenged to question their environment” (McCarthy, 2009).

Checkoway (1998, p. 792) concludes that youth are still part of an “adultist society” and that neighbourhood (planning) problems are caused by larger forces.

Youth participation should consider that secondary school students in Ontario and Canada can vote in elections at 18 years old and many students reach this age by or soon after completing grade 12. Voting in elections, especially at the municipal level, is one of the simplest ways in which a person can advocate for positive change in their neighbourhood. In looking at federal election voter turnouts, Canada ranked 14th out of 17 developed nations and young people represent the lowest participation rate (Conference Board of Canada, 2013). It can therefore be argued that the teaching of urban planning issues to students cannot simply be lecturing on topics from a textbook but must engage students and give them skills and tools to be able to advocate for better communities. The process of learning about urban planning issues is as important as the topics themselves. Learning how to participate in one’s local community must be made “as real as possible” in using simulation and participatory exercises (Hicks, 1986).

Making the connection with urban geography in secondary education

In advocating for urban geography education in high schools, Robinson (1966, p. 240) remarked that it was “discouraging to think that...10 or 15 will pass before current academic research reaches the high school texts”. Unfortunately, it could be argued that over four decades have passed and still urban geography remains only a small slice of the one mandatory grade 9 geography course in Ontario. In the teaching of geography to youth, there is often an emphasis on the description of phenomena, where in fact there should be a greater focus on getting students to learn how to view those phenomena through a critical lens. Historically, geography

classes have often not discussed the functions and purposes of cities and how and why they have changed over time (Robinson, 1966). Geography is a discipline of analysis, research and technology, yet it has received much criticism for its lack of contribution to problem-solving and public policy (Rogers, 2005). One study of international urban geography curricula found a distinct gap between high school and university levels (Béneker, Sanders, Tani, Taylor & van der Vaart, 2007). An analysis of urban geography course textbooks revealed limited attention more critical issues like planning and the positive aspects of living in cities (Béneker, et. al., 2007).

Within Ontario's high schools geography has seen a noticeable decline in prominence over the last several decades. Between the early 1970s to the late 1980s, geography course enrollments dropped by 21% (Bardecki, Jacobs & Jones, 1990). This figure includes when grade 13 or Ontario Academic Credit (OAC) still existed and accounted for a significant portion of geography enrollments. As mentioned in the introduction, only a handful of Ontario high schools offer the grade 12 course in urban geography (Agrell, 2011). This can be compared to 1988 when just over 7,600 students across Ontario were enrolled in a senior (grades 11 and 12) urban studies geography course (Bardecki, Jacobs & Jones, 1990).

Methods

Answering the question of how to increase the prevalence of urban planning issues in the Ontario high school geography curriculum in this paper involves a combination of the following research methods:

I. Curriculum document analysis

The most up-date curriculum documents for geography courses on the Ontario Ministry of Education website were examined. In the Ontario Ministry of Education curriculum, geography, history, and civics are grouped together under the banner of Canadian and World Studies. At the time of writing this paper, the curriculum available on the Ministry's website for Canadian and World Studies was last revised in 2005. A 2012 update for this curriculum is due for release later in 2013 and only a list of courses and their brief descriptions were made available to me – the same information that teachers across the province currently have as well. In order to assess the level and amount of planning topics in the curriculum, I examined the current information available in the curriculum documents on knowledge and education goals for geography courses. The selected courses were the mandatory *Issues in Canadian Geography* class in grade 9 and the elective geography courses listed for grade 12.

II. Semi-structured interviews

Several interviews were held with people who worked in the fields of geography education at the high school and university levels, urban planning, and at the Ministry of Education. Interviews were conducted either in person, over the phone, or by e-mail. The

interviews had a list of main questions to be addressed but the flexible, conversational nature of the interviews allowed new questions to be brought up based on participants' responses.

III. Short survey questionnaire

To further quantify participant opinions on one of the research questions of which planning topics should be included in the curriculum, a short survey was created on SurveyMonkey.com and distributed all participants after the semi-structured interviews. A list of 'core' and 'emerging issues' topics were created by examining introductory planning textbooks and further refined down with consultation from planning scholars. Using a Likert scale, participants were asked to rate the importance of each topic as it pertains to the relevance with (or benefit to) current geography courses, the ease of understanding for all stream levels (applied, academic, etc.), and the suitability for high school level students. They were also to consider how important each topic was for students to know about in order to be better stewards or engaged citizens of their community. The four-level Likert scale format allowed participants to rank each topic as 'very important', 'somewhat important', or 'not important', as well as the option to select 'don't know'. Respondents were also given the opportunity to explain why or how they made their selection, as well as the option of suggesting additional topics that they felt were missing.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. Only a small sample size was used due to time and logistical constraints. Given that each person had a wealth of information to offer, a greater sample size, even if by an increase of a few people, would have added more detail and insight.

Most of the participants worked in the Greater Toronto Area and therefore this project has a

geographical bias towards this region, despite the curriculum being used province-wide. A more comprehensive study would have to interview participants from other major urban centres in the province, in addition to rural regions where the local planning issues would be significantly different.

Results

1A) What are ideal urban planning topics and issues to teach at the high school level?

It is important to establish what constitutes a good curriculum in urban planning – including what topics should be considered. This project seeks to answer this question by using a combination of urban planning textbooks, and input from planning scholars, professional planners, and educators. Educators interviewed noted that such a list should focus on topics that promote critical thinking but also include basic material - like vocabulary and facts - that allow for students to be easily evaluated. Two prominent introductory planning textbooks, one Canadian and one American, were examined for which topics are present (and therefore deemed most important) and how these topics are organized.

Planning Canadian Communities(5th ed.) by Hodge & Gordon (2008) is a definitive text in Canadian planning used by the Ontario Professional Planners Institute for the material on their ‘Exam B’ for planners seeking full membership but who lack a planning degree from an accredited program. The American textbook, *Contemporary Urban Planning* (9th edition) by Levy (2010) was recommended by planning scholars as a definitive intro level planning text. In comparing the two texts there is much overlap in the core topics based within the broad realms of the history of planning and urbanization, the practice of planning, planning tools, and larger scale issues for planners to address. The following list was therefore created where both texts overlapped and based on feedback by planning scholars for how appropriate these topics were for a secondary education level. A focus was placed on topics that would be especially relevant

for the general public and not specifically people wishing to enter the planning profession. These topics remain relevant in almost any size municipality in Canada, and therefore are applicable to schools located throughout Ontario. The list is divided into ‘core’ topics that are important for basic knowledge and evaluation, and ‘emerging issues’ which introduces to current issues but while promoting holistic and critical thinking.

The ‘core’ topics

- The need for planning – solving problems and the public interest
- History of urbanization and planning
- Social planning and housing
- Land use and the built environment
- Transportation
- Urban design
- Economic development
- Participation in community planning, politics and development
- Urban renewal
- Growth management (sprawl) and sustainable development
- Regional and metropolitan planning

The second set of planning topics that could be considered for secondary education is ‘emerging planning issues’ in urban planning. This list was determined by examining the Hodge & Gordon (2008) textbook and with consultation from planning scholars. These topics reflect more specific topics/issues within planning and are interdisciplinary in nature. In the classroom these could be considered supplementary to core topics, but this list also allow for discussions on solving complex problems. These emerging planning issues could be more challenging for teachers to evaluate or test compared to the core topics but encourage critical and holistic thinking from students.

Emerging issues topics

- Environment sustainability
- Addressing homelessness and poverty
- Rapidly aging society
- Multiculturalism
- Retrofitting the suburbs
- Planning for healthier communities

1B) Interviewee perceptions of these topics

Despite their relevance, the above mentioned topics are drawn from textbooks aimed towards university students and planning is a profession that begins being taught as a distinct subject only at the post-secondary level. Not all topics will be appropriate for high school learning levels, nor will all fit into existing course structures. This project therefore sought the professional opinions of the participants (high school teachers, university educators, and planners) in this study on these topics via a short survey. As previously stated in the methods section, participants were asked to rate the importance of each topic as it pertains to the relevance with (or benefit to) current geography courses, the ease of understanding for all stream levels (applied, academic, etc.), and the suitability for high school level students. They were also to consider how important each topic was for students to know about in order to be better stewards or engaged citizens of their community.

Table 1: Results for core topics in urban planning

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not important	Don't know
Land use and the built environment	100% 6	0% 0	0% 0	0% 0
Transportation	83.33% 5	16.67% 1	0% 0	0% 0
Growth management (sprawl) and sustainable development	83.33% 5	16.67% 1	0% 0	0% 0
The need for urban planning	66.67% 4	33.33% 2	0% 0	0% 0
Urban design	50% 3	50% 3	0% 0	0% 0
Participation in community planning	50% 3	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	0% 0
Economic development	33.33% 2	50% 3	16.67% 1	0% 0
Urban Revitalization	33.33% 2	50% 3	16.67% 1	0% 0
Housing	16.67% 1	83.33% 5	0% 0	0% 0
Social planning	16.67% 1	66.67% 4	16.67% 1	0% 0
History of urbanization and planning	16.67% 1	50% 3	16.67% 1	16.67% 1
Regional and metropolitan planning	0% 0	100% 6	0% 0	0% 0

After answering the Likert scale participants had the option to explain why they selected particular topics as either more or less important than others. One participant stated that due to the limited time available in courses - especially in the grade 9 geography course – that only growth management and sustainable development, transportation, land use and the built environment, and participation in community planning were the most important. This was a similar trend with other responses, as land use and the built environment, transportation, and growth management and sustainable development in particular received near unanimous support

as very important core topics. The history of urbanization and planning received the least amount of ‘very important’ or ‘somewhat important’ votes. Another respondent noted that only a brief introduction to the history of planning was necessary for a high school setting in order to set a context for the rest of the material being presented. Participants were also given the option to include any topics that they thought were missing from the existing list. Several topics were suggested as core topics:

- Resilient and green planning practices
- Parks planning
- Landscape architecture

Table 2: Results for emerging issues topics in urban planning

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not important	Don't know
Environmental sustainability	83.33% 5	16.67% 1	0% 0	0% 0
Rapidly aging society	50% 3	50% 3	16.67% 1	0% 0
Planning for healthier communities	50% 3	33.33% 2	16.67% 1	0% 0
Addressing homelessness and poverty	33.33% 2	50% 3	16.67% 1	0% 0
Retrofitting the suburbs	33.33% 2	50% 3	16.67% 1	0% 0
Multiculturalism	16.67% 1	66.67% 4	16.67% 1	0% 0

In explaining their chosen responses for emerging issues in planning, respondents remarked that almost all of the issues could fit within the realm of environmental sustainability, given the broad scope of the topic. In aligning with the now strong environmental education

component in the high school curriculum, environmental sustainability was nearly completely agreed upon as a very important topic. The remaining topics were more split in their perceived importance due to being seen as too advanced for the high school curriculum. Again, participants were given the option to include any topics that they thought were missing from the existing list.

Several emerging issues were suggested:

- Cities as innovation centres
- Schools as community hubs
- The role of urban universities and colleges
- Smart city technologies and open urban data

2A) A curriculum assessment from looking at the Ministry's curriculum for geography

As previously discussed, the Ontario Ministry of Education is releasing an update to the Canadian and World Studies curriculum at some point later in 2013. While it is not possible to know exact details of the curriculum at the time of writing this study, one instructional leader for geography said that the geography curriculum is not expected to have major changes compared with what currently exists. Therefore some assessment of the current curriculum (from 2005) is still a worthwhile endeavour. Current curriculum policy aligns with Bednarz, Downs & Vender's (2003) methodology of "new geography education" in promoting critical thinking, responsible citizenship and understanding human-environment interaction. The high school curriculum in Ontario is regarded as having the strongest offering of geography courses in Canada (Mansfield & Semple, 2006). However, geography courses are optional after grade 9 and are only offered if a minimum of twenty-five students chose to enroll and if the schools/school boards actually even

chose to offer them (Mansfield & Semple, 2006). It is also important to note that what may be listed ‘on the books’ does not necessarily mean that all schools will offer geography courses beyond the mandatory grade 9 class (Smith, 2010). Indeed, it has been noted that many schools in Ontario offer no classes in geography beyond grade 9 (Smith, 2010). This assessment looks briefly at the grade 9 mandatory course, and an optional grade 12 course entitled *World Geography: Urban Patterns and Population Issues* as this course specializes in urban geography and therefore covers a large number of urban planning topics.

Geography of Canada - Grade 9 (Course codes: Academic CGC1D and Applied CGC1P)

Geography is a mandatory course in grade 9 and offered in ‘applied’ and ‘academic’ streams. The course material is organized into five ‘strands’, two of which, *Geographic Foundations: Space and Systems* and *Human-Environment Interactions* directly relate to planning topics. In examining the curriculum document for both strands, there are numerous educational goals that relate to planning issues. Students in the academic stream are expected to be able to “distinguish development patterns”, “explain the geographical requirements that determine the location of businesses, industries, and transportation systems” and even “identify criteria with which to evaluate the effect of government land use policy on planning in the local community” (Ministry of Education, 2005a, p. 30). Likewise, a student in the applied stream would still be expected to “identify characteristics of urban, suburban, fringe, and rural environment”, and “describe the views of key stakeholders on a local environmental issue (e.g., urban sprawl, highway expansion, waste management, resource extraction, recreational development, changing land use, residential infilling)”.

World Geography: Urban Patterns and Population Issues - Grade 12 (Course code:
University/College Preparation CGU4M)

Of all the courses offered at the high school level, this course could be considered to align best in terms of its coverage of urban planning issues. The course description in the upcoming updated curriculum states students will examine, “global population distribution, why people live where they do, and variations in their quality of life. Students will examine current population patterns and trends related to urbanization and their impact on human and natural systems” (Ministry of Education, 2012). Similar to the applied nature of urban planning, this course will seemingly go beyond simple geographic analysis and “will propose courses of action aimed at enhancing the sustainability of cities around the world” (Ministry of Education, 2012).

Currently, this optional course at the grade 12 ‘college stream’ and is offered at only a handful of schools across the province (Agrell, 2011). A notable change in the upcoming 2013 update to the curriculum is that this course will become available to students in both the university and college streams. This change will possibly boost its popularity as technically more students will have access to the course. It is still up to individual schools to offer to course, and numerous barriers will likely continue to limit its availability including a lack of teacher familiarity with the subject. A full discussion of the barriers to including more planning topics in the curriculum is discussed later in this paper.

3) What are examples of good urban issues education? Current case study examples

3.1) Case study #1: OPPI Initiative

From the perspective of the planning profession in Ontario, educating high school students about planning (and the planning profession) is a growing trend in recent years, however this particular case study highlights the ad hoc nature of current initiatives in the Greater Toronto Area. Nevertheless, it is also a strong example of what a short, dynamic lesson plan on urban planning can be.

The planning profession in Canada does have some existing initiatives for engaging and educating youth. Firstly, the Canadian Institute of Planners has a youth resource guide entitled *A Kid's Guide to Building Great Communities* published in 2002, which provides several activities on community planning for elementary, middle, and high school students. Secondly, World Town Planning Day is an event held annually in November by the Canadian Institute of Planners and its provincial affiliates to promote awareness of the profession and its mission (Canadian Institute of Planners, 2012). Activities are organized by individual districts (or branches) of the Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI) within the province. Initiatives that involve OPPI planners and secondary school students have occurred with success in the past. In 2003, OPPI partnered with the York Region District School Board to educate 500 grade 9 geography students on five topics of sustainable planning including infrastructure, urban design, transportation, land use, and environment (Chauhan, 2005). Planners also took students on a bus tour of the region to view examples of “good planning or the lack of good planning” (Chauhan, 2005, p. 12). The following year, in 2004, planners in the GTA spoke to just under one thousand students in grade 9 geography classrooms (Chauhan, 2005).

This case study expands on previous OPPI initiatives and focuses specifically on Toronto. This particular case study information primarily originates from one professional planner (herein called Planner A) in the Toronto OPPI district who had volunteered to lead the initiative of visiting and coordinating with high schools along with other district volunteers. It exemplifies how the momentum of one planner can significantly expand the pedagogy of urban planning issues. Through a direct connection with a high school geography teacher (herein referred to as Teacher B) at a high school in western Toronto, Planner A volunteered to lead a lecture entitled, *Ontario Planners: Who we are, what we do, and what we have accomplished*, to Teacher B's grade 9 geography class. The aforementioned lecture was created based on a previous version of a more general OPPI presentation. Planner A coordinated a team of volunteer planners to prepare and facilitate this lecture. This opportunity was strengthened through close collaboration with Teacher B and other professional planners, to develop an appropriate list of core topics to teach, as well as, develop an evaluation method based on the lecture content. Following Planner A's lecture, students were given an assignment that incorporates the following steps:

- Stage 1: Investigation/Research: The section requires students to go out into their neighbourhood and photograph places they like in their community and places they feel need remediation.
- Step 2: SWOT analysis: At a follow-up class (perhaps the following week) students discuss their findings and with the help of the planner and teacher, examine an area near their school and discuss the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of that area.

This encourages critical thinking about their local environment, but also gives the assignment an applied purpose that students can easily relate to.

- Step 3: Prepare a land use plan: In the final stage students work in small groups to participate in a mini design charrette exercise that includes the students drawing their own neighbourhood plan on paper (similar to creating a ‘SimCity’). Students’ plans must include basic land use elements such as a new school, large and small parks, a library, a road, residential zones of varying densities, and employment uses of various types (office, retail, and, industrial).

This assignment affords several advantages that make it feasible and appropriate for geography teachers to incorporate into their courses. It promotes both group and individual work, facilitating variability of cognitive levels of learning as the activity is used in both applied and academic stream geography courses. The applied, dynamic and hands-on nature of the activity also helps retain student interest, as Teacher B noted that a didactic lecture format may not sustain the attention from most students. Following this first initiative with the collaboration of one planner, the Toronto district has augmented the volunteer participants/planners of approximately thirty in 2012/2013 who visit an increasing number of high schools. Planner A noted that new teachers are implementing the program on their own as schools are increasingly expressing a sincere interest in engaging planners to present and interact with geography students.

3.2) Case study #2: Maximum City program at University of Toronto Schools

Review of practices outside of the public school system can also provide innovative examples of pedagogy of urban planning topics at the high school level. *Maximum City* is a unique summer educational program that offers students a direct, hands-on ‘mini course’ on a range of planning issues. It targets a high school audience from grades 8 through 11, as these are formative years when students begin to generate ideas on how they can participate within their local environment (micro) and the world (macro) (Maximum City, 2013). The program’s curriculum covers many, if not a majority of the core topics, listed in this project’s survey. Comparable to the main long-term objective of this research paper, the goal of Maximum City’s is to “formalize urban studies curricula at the high school level” (Maximum City, 2013).

In 2011, Maximum City was created as a one week pilot program by Josh Fullan, a high school teacher at University of Toronto Schools (UTS) - a private school in downtown Toronto - and a director of the school edition of Jane’s Walk, a program that offers neighbourhood walking tours to promote urban literacy. As a non-for-profit program, Maximum City has grown to now include students from across the Greater Toronto Area, and has been integrated into the UTS civics and geography curriculum during the 2012-2013 academic year (Maximum City, 2013).

Public school geography classes are always limited by time and resources when covering a broad range of topics and often minimal time can be devoted to learning about urban planning issues. Maximum City provides some successful practices – many that are in common with the OPPI’s initiative – that can be adopted by educators to enhance the learning experience of this important subject (geography), which is often perceived by students as unimportant.

- Engaged, hands-on learning: The pedagogy moves beyond traditional didactic lecturing and empowers the students to directly participate in class activities. As the curriculum is divided up into many modules, students experience a range of learning experiences from walking and biking tours, to design charrettes and site visits. In one example, students are given a group activity in which they have a density map of Toronto and a theoretical budget of ten billion dollars to construct new subway lines and stations. In this case students learned valuable basic concepts of transportation planning while being able to directly relate to the public transit system many of them used daily. One's experience with urban planning issues needs to move beyond course textbooks in order to encourage critical thinking.
- Linking theoretical and practical knowledge: As with the OPPI initiative, Maximum City's program focuses on students grasping the concept of thinking critically about their own local neighbourhoods. Rather than learn about broad concepts in transportation or parks planning, students are taken on guided site visits that link information taught in the classroom with the local environment.
- Partnering with experts and professionals: As will be discussed in the following section, a key barrier to encouraging more high school instruction in urban planning topics is a lack of teacher familiarity and expertise with the subject. Maximum City enrolls a range of educators, planners, and urban thinkers for each of its curriculum modules to both animate and instruct lessons on a range of planning topics from active transportation to public transit to sustainable development. This approach allows students to see how the information they are learning is applicable in a real environmental setting outside the

classroom, comprising concepts and application of advocacy, choices for future career paths, as well as, participation in local government and community planning processes.

4) Moving forward – overcoming barriers

Pedagogical strategies to teach planning issues at the high school level is logical from both the standpoint of the planning profession and within the paradigm of ‘new’ geography education that promotes “doing” geography (Bednarz, Downs & Vender, 2003, p. 468). Despite supportive case studies, what are the barriers in integrating planning issues into more Ontario’s high school geography curricula and into the classrooms? The literature review highlights two research papers that identify the key challenges in incorporating planning issues in the high school curricula. In analyzing the grade 10 Civics course, Chauhan (2005) reported that major constraints to including community planning in the course include time restrictions, limited teacher knowledge on the topic, and challenges accommodating a range of student learning levels. Roselli (2006) had similar findings relating to a lack of educator knowledge and awareness of sustainable development topics.

In this qualitative study, comprising interviews with both planners and geography educators at high school and university (bachelor of education faculty) levels, several significant barriers impede planning being introduced in more high school geography classrooms. The results of this dialogue can be summarized into three main areas:

- 4.1) Barriers in the current geography curriculum
- 4.2) Barriers related to pedagogy and high school educators
- 4.3) On-going learning and networking with the planning profession

4.1) Barriers in the current geography curriculum

Courses offered on paper, but not in practice

Geography is a main route through which planning issues could be taught. The actual availability of geography courses as listed in the curricula is an important factor as it provides an opportunity for planners to collaborate with educators. Officially, the Canadian and World Studies curriculum lists a significant number of geography course offerings at the grade 11 and 12 levels. In practice however these are just considered “on the books” and many schools offer no geography classes beyond the mandatory grade 9 course (Smith, 2010). When asked if senior level geography courses are being adequately offered in schools today, a high school educator replied “try and find one”. According to a university professor in geography education, it is very unrealistic to expect the Ontario Ministry of Education to incorporate urban issues into the curricula the same way environmental issues have been, as it laboriously took “nearly 50 years to get the environmental material prominent”.

Declining prominence of geography as a subject

Geography teachers unanimously agreed that geography is treated as an “afterthought” subject and that a significant number of students do not see the career benefits of studying geography. Students in grades 11 and 12 have the freedom to select most of their subjects but geography receives a very small audience. In the past when OAC (or grade 13) existed, students were required to take one “senior level” social science course, but the elimination of this course has resulted in a reduced pool of students taking “optional” courses such as geography (Smith, 2010). Students choose courses that they feel will augment their academic record for successful

entry into university. One teacher remarked that “students feel there is no room for anything but high marks”.

4.2) Barriers related to pedagogy and high school educators

Lack of high school educator familiarity with urban planning issues

Teacher familiarity, enthusiasm and expertise with planning issues, or even urban geography, are major determinants in whether students will receive exposure to the field. While provincial curricula dictate overall learning objectives for each course, high school educators do have freedom in how they wish to achieve those expectations. One high school educator mentioned that teachers of the grade 9 geography course do not have to have a specialized background in order to teach the class. This is a trend that pertains as well as to other subjects other than geography (Smith, 2010). Roselli (2006) found that education students in Ontario approaching graduation are not taught about concepts in sustainable development when completing their Bachelor of Education degrees. A university geography educator for a Bachelor of Education program stated that although students are introduced to the geography curriculum, they do not receive any specific “course by course” training and instead the instruction focuses on methodology and pedagogy. While more expertise is usually required for teachers of grade 11 and 12 geography classes, it was noted by a teacher that even the grade 12 world issues course is not always taught by someone with a relevant background at their school. A similar case is made for geo-technology or geomatics courses offered in grades 11 and 12 where very few schools offered the course and very few teachers had the necessary training to implement such courses.

Pedagogical and time constraints

The Ontario Canadian and World Studies curricula document states that, “success in these courses is not measured simply by how well students memorize a series of facts” and that they “actively involve students in research, critical thinking, problem solving, and decision making” (Ministry of Education, 2005b, p. 3). However from the perspective of pedagogy, teachers felt it was difficult to come up with concrete lesson plans on urban planning issues. A university educator remarked that teachers who are not as familiar with geography course content rely more heavily on approved course textbooks or their school department’s methods. This case underlines teachers who lack expertise in the subject, and therefore do not teach the material in a dynamic manner that engages students. Chauhan (2005) reported similar findings in his study on a grade 10 Civics course. As the grade 9 course serves as an introduction to many sub-fields of geography (both human and physical geography), there is very limited time for teachers to heavily devote time to one topic – hence even the OPPI case example takes up a maximum of only two full class times. Spending too much time on one topic would necessitate reducing or eliminating other topics, which is not an optimal pedagogical strategy when a diverse range of topics need to be covered in the 110 total hours of the grade 9 Canadian geography course. In this case, the grade 9 course often is the only opportunity to “sell” students on senior level geography courses – if they are even offered.

4.3) On-going learning and networking with the planning profession

Professional development opportunities

Presenting an ideal situation in which many geography courses could be offered with opportunity for choice for enrollment by many students, there are significant obstacles that prevent urban planning issues from being taught to a wider audience. More opportunities are needed for teachers who wish to further their geographic (and in this case urban geography) knowledge (Smith, 2010). All teachers have continuing learning expectations and take part in professional development (PD) initiatives but these are focused on “non-subject specific initiatives coming down from the Ministry of Education” (Smith, 2010). The annual conference of the Ontario Association for Geographic and Environmental Education (OAGEE) is a prime opportunity for subject-specific professional development for geography teachers. School boards have money to cover all expenses to send teachers to the “non-subject specific” Ministry professional development conferences, however a teacher wishing to attend the OAGEE conference may have to pay their own expenses and ensure coverage for their absence with a supply teacher (Smith, 2010).

Connecting with the planning profession

An OAGEE conference organizer and teacher stated that the Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI) does not attend OAGEE conferences on a consistent basis, although they have attended in the past to offer workshop sessions on planning topics and to provide teaching resources. A teacher remarked that even the small Association of Ontario Land Surveyors attends the OAGEE fall conferences on a regular basis to offer workshops.

Furthermore, as identified in the OPPI case study, the number of planners visiting classrooms is on the rise, but this remains an ad hoc initiative. A school board instructional leader mentioned that in the past when a planner visits a classroom, their delivery via lecture focuses mainly on what planners do. Therefore, OPPI needs to consider how it can make a stronger connection between high school classrooms and preparation of students to become engaged participants within their communities. A commendable suggestion reinforced an initiative by OPPI to produce learning resources for teachers to use in their classrooms.

5) Recommendations

Based on the research, case studies, and barriers identified in this paper, the following actions are recommended to further augment the content and quality of urban planning issues being taught in Ontario's high school classrooms. These recommendations apply to a network of stakeholders in the planning and geography education professions including, but not limited to:

- The Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP)
- The Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI)
- The Association of Canadian University Planning Programs (ACUPP)
- University planning programs like Ryerson's School of Urban and Regional Planning
- The Ontario Association for Geographic and Environmental Education (OAGEE)
- University Bachelor of Education programs that prepare teachers for geography education such as OISE at the University of Toronto
- The Ontario Ministry of Education
- School boards

Recommendations list:

1. The Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI) needs to start a provincial-wide initiative to push its members to connect with geography teachers and schools to give engaging presentations and learning activities as identified in the OPPI case study example in Toronto.
2. The OPPI should adopt the classroom lesson activity as identified in the OPPI case study section as its ‘universal’ classroom lesson activity for planners who visit grade 9 geography classrooms. The lesson plan could be modified for higher level geography courses.
3. The OPPI should use and build upon the Canadian Institute of Planners’ youth resource guide entitled *A Kid’s Guide to Building Great Communities* in addition to the lesson activity in recommendation #2 to promote as a teaching resource for high school teachers.
4. The OPPI should connect with the organizers of the annual fall conference of the Ontario Association for Geographic and Environmental Education (OAGEE) so that planners become regular attendees of the conference to offer subject-specific workshop sessions to interested teachers.
5. The Association of Canadian University Planning Programs (ACUPP) and individual planning programs should connect with relevant stakeholders like OAGEE, OPPI, and school boards to have planning students visit high school classrooms to help implement classroom lesson activities on planning issues. Planning students that have engaged with such initiatives are more likely to continue doing so upon entering the workforce.
6. Lastly, the creation of a network is needed to connect all relevant stakeholders. The combination of the current ad hoc nature of involvement of planning professionals

combined with the barriers identified in the geography curriculum and among geography educators highlights the need for a network to help tackle these issues in a systematized manner.

Conclusion

In beginning this project, I imagined that exposure to urban planning issues at the high school level was almost non-existent. Many months of research later have revealed that this was far from the case, as urban planning issues are present both in formal curriculum and through informal initiatives such as the case studies on the OPPI and Maximum City in the City of Toronto. All relevant stakeholders should continue to advocate for the teaching of urban planning issues when the next provincial curriculum update is undertaken in eight to ten years time. Hopefully this paper will increase the urgency and importance of this issue.

This project revealed how the opportunity to instruct on urban planning issues at the high school level is at the mercy of the quality and quantity of geography education offered both in practice and on paper. Numerous major barriers related to constraints in time, pedagogy, knowledge, and curriculum affirmed this reality. Addressing this issue benefits many stakeholders. This paper emphasizes that urban planning has the opportunity to strengthen the declining status of geography as a school subject by giving it an applied nature while also encouraging students to think critically about their local communities. The long-term benefits for planners are more informed and cooperative future residents, while society can benefit from residents who vote for politicians who act on good planning principles.

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