February 13, 2019

Chair Jan Harder and Councillors.

There's an old saying: If you don't know where you are going, any path will get you there.
Knowing where one wants to go is one thing. Getting there and knowing if you've arrived is quite another.

The Ottawa Next: Beyond 2036 report proposes making "Ottawa the most liveable mid-sized city in North America."

I suggest adding a neighbourhood dimension to that**: "Make Ottawa the most liveable mid-sized city of strong neighbourhoods and complete communities in North America".**

Strong neighbourhoods are the foundation to a strong, resilient and adaptable city; the very goals Ottawa Next has rightly identified as essential to dealing well with whatever an unpredictable future has in store for us. As to how to go about it, here is a process for your consideration.
In essence, what follows is all about the data: What should be counted and how do you count it?

1. Define your terms.
Decide what "liveable" means. Define what "complete communities" means. These are essential first steps. Without them, the proposed vision risks becoming an empty one.
These terms should inform the shape, context and content of the next Official Plan, including Secondary Plans and all associated Master Plans.
2. Pick the most liveable North American cities to compare with Ottawa.
 Calgary, Edmonton, Austin, Portland, Seattle, Pittsburgh, Minneapolis look to be good candidates. No doubt there are other worthwhile choices.
3. Decide what parameters of liveability you want to compare.
There are lots of choices.
However, one of them should be a consideration of what governance structure best supports the development of strong neighbourhoods / complete communities and whether Ottawa's current governance structure is the best one to achieve Council's vision for the future of our city.
For example, do we have the right number of Councillors for a growing population? Do individual councillors and other stakeholders, such as Community Associations and BIAs, have the right amount of delegated authority to make local community-specific decisions? Should authority to make local decisions be delegated further, to local bodies?
4. Assess/quantify how each city is doing using a common base line, say 2017 data.
There are lots of liveability metrics on-line to pick and choose from.
Here are just a few examples for illustrative purposes:

Safety & Security:
* Number of building code inspections.
* Number of safety audits.

Digital Security:
* Number of attempted city database hacks
* Does City have a robust Data Governance code? Yes/No.

In the coming age of the "smart city", having the right data at the right time will be increasingly integral to well-informed decision-making and to the efficient allocation of resources.

Infrastructure Security:
* Percent of budget allocated to maintenance/repair.
* Percent of city infrastructure beyond lifecycle.

Personal Security
* Ratio of speeding/dangerous driving fines to drivers.
* Ratio of shootings & armed robberies to population.
* Ratio of road deaths/injuries to population.

Economic Wellness
* Unemployment rate.
* Percentage of people below the poverty line.
* Housing Affordability: Ratio of median/average housing costs (rental/owned) to income.
* Wait times for supported housing.
* Percentage of workforce concentrated in top two sectors (E.g. Govt. High Tech).

Gender equality:
* Ratio of average male/female income.
* Ratio of men/women on city council.
* Labour market participation.
* Ratio of registered daycare spaces to work force size.

Healthcare
* Ratio of health care providers to population.
* Patient wait times.
* Patient beds/population.
* Wait times for MRI/CT scans.
* Ratio of Long Term Care facilities to population.

Environment/Climate Change Risk
* GHG emission tracking results.
* Public Parks/population.
* Water quality parameters (microbial, chemical).
* Energy savings due to conservation/efficiency programs.

Education
* Size of school age population as proportion of total population.
* Share of population by gender enrolled in primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education.
* Graduation levels, including by STEM qualifications.
* Employment rates within 1 year of graduation.

5. Create a Dashboard in the Open Data portal to track results.
As per the well-worn cliché: what is not measured does not count.
Make progress on results a Term of Council priority.
Engage local companies/residents, including children, to participate/contribute to the effort with corporate & personal goals.

6. Invite other cities, especially Canadian cities, to join in a race to the top.
This is a great opportunity to show commitment and leadership.
Everyone benefits from a spirited effort to get better.

3...
The OP Work Plan
As for **Ottawa Next's** scenario-building exercise, it's an interesting read but, as the authors of Ottawa Next acknowledge, it's of zero predictive value.
The city is a very complex open system. As it gets bigger, it will get even more complex. So will its challenges and its opportunities.
Predicting the city's future over the term of the next OP is a near impossibility. There are simply too many alternative contingent possibilities, including the high probability of unpredictable transformative discontinuities.

The authors of Ottawa Next anticipate, with a high degree of certainty, that such unknowable and unpredictable transformative discontinuities await us no matter what the future has in store.

I invite you to consider the implications.
By its very nature, we not only don't know what the future will bring but we also don't and cannot know when the future will bring it. If so, that's tantamount to saying: Forget about scenario-building as a planning tool for the next OP.
For example, we don't yet know how autonomous vehicles will transform our urban and inter-urban transportation networks, nor when. We can all guess but none of know or can know.
Same with respect to whatever or when the next natural disaster might be. There's just no way of knowing.
We can however prepare for it by building up Ottawa's adaptability and resilience, just as the authors of Ottawa Next suggest. That makes excellent good sense. The question is: How do we do that? Hopefully the themed discussion papers to come will help come up with answers to how best to achieve strong, vibrant, diverse neighbourhoods.

In Conclusion
I want to underscore that continuing to do what we have been doing, only better or doing better than any other mid-sized city in North America isn't going to be good enough.
That is especially so if you agree that unknown transformative disruptions are ahead of us; that they will be coming at us more often and more quickly and therefore our future will be more, much more, than just an extension of our past.

Doing better what we've been doing all along does not respond to two fundamental but unanswered questions:
 1.   What do we want Ottawa to be in 25 years?
As I've suggested, the Ottawa Next vision statement (make Ottawa the most liveable mid-sized city in North America) comes close but nonetheless, it falls short of what it should be.
I encourage you to recommend that Council adopt the following as an amended vision statement:
 "Make Ottawa the most liveable mid-sized city "of strong neighbourhoods and complete communities" in North America"
2. What do we need to do to make it happen?
That's for the OP review to determine. However, I would caution that using the previous OP as a base line for the next one is at significant risk of seriously undershooting what is needed for an OP designed to guide us through the next 10 years and well beyond.
The city's future is ours to re-invent. Let's do it. Let's do it together!

Yours truly

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