

# The Future Party Platform

## Urban Revitalization

Runnin' through the 6ix with my woes -Drake

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### Goals

1. Bring back the liveliness that cities were known for
2. Pedestrianize attractive parts of town
3. Improve public transportation within cities
4. Solve homelessness and its associated drug crisis

## Overview of the Problem

The quality of life within our cities has been in a slow and steady decline for the past 20 years. During Covid, that decline accelerated to the point where downtown cores today feel dead. When taking a walk through their streets all we see are closed businesses, empty shops, and little to no people.

At the same time the cost of living skyrocketed while incomes stagnated. As a result more and more people were pushed further and further out into the suburbs while those who stayed barely scrape by. The end result was cities that, on paper, are the beating heart of our economy but in reality were nothing more than glorified office spaces. Exemplified by Toronto's 401 highway being the busiest in North America even though New York City has 3 times the population.

Now that working from home is a viable, and acceptable, way of working, people no longer have any incentive to go to the city during working hours. Since almost no one can afford to live within cities, they effectively die during the night. Only some parts of cities maintain an appeal that gets people to show up on the weekend.

Forcing people back into commuting won't solve the real problem, it would just return us to the slow decline we had before Covid. Instead, **we should make living and raising a family in cities a desirable option** or at the very least a viable one.

## A Snapshot of City Life

The numbers tell a much better story than us. Here's a sample of the trends:

- Straight up unaffordable
- Wide closures of downtown shops that relied on commuters
- Toronto's 401 highway being the busiest in North America even though New York City has 3 times the population.
- Rising homelessness and drug addiction
- Only a few areas in a few cities still feel lively enough to attract crowds like:
  - Yonge-Dundas square in Toronto
  - The old port of Montreal
  - Byward market in Ottawa
- Open air parking is taking way too much space

Lastly, it logically follows that if most of the people working within a city have to commute from outside it, the city will become a ghost town after working hours. And if those people can reduce their need to commute, the cities will become ghost towns even when the sun is up.

## The Solution

To create a positive feedback loop our approach will simultaneously target all the weaknesses holding back cities' potential:

### 1. Affordability

None of our quality of life or safety strategies will be effective if average Canadians remain priced out of living in their own cities. Our overall housing affordability policy is applied separately. Here are the policies directly targeting cities:

- a. Repurpose empty government offices
- b. Change downtown zoning and land use laws to encourage building denser residential apartments
- c. Directly build non-market residential apartments
- d. Clamp down on short-term rentals

### 2. Safety

The main reasons for the fall in safety within cities are homelessness and drug addiction. They both go hand in hand and result in desperate people who have nothing to lose. The big picture solution is in our broader drug policy. The following are our solutions that target urban areas' unique challenges:

- a. Establish rehabilitation facilities and shelters within downtown cores
- b. Establish vocational training opportunities for the victims
- c. Hire the homeless to do necessary jobs around the community

### 3. Pedestrianize more places

Lastly, to bring back life to our cities we will learn from the successful areas mentioned above:

- a. Pedestrianize more areas within downtown cores

- b. Densify open-air parking lots to compensate for the loss of parking spots due to pedestrianization
- c. Promote the establishment of new businesses
- d. Commission works of art and entertainment in said areas

#### 4. Improve public transportation

Better, more reliable public transportation will reduce traffic and boost accessibility within cities:

- a. More frequent weekend schedules
- b. Better coverage outside of rush hour
- c. Improve connections between different parts of greater metropolitan areas
- d. Address unreliability

## The Case for Our Approach

### Affordability and safety are the bedrock

To build any community where people would love to live and participate, said people must be able to afford life and feel safe there. Not much to argue here honestly.

### Zoning and land use laws are about quality of life, not property values

Originally, zoning and land use laws as we have them today were introduced to address the realities of industrialized urban life.

Today that is not the case, but it really ought to be. Zoning laws are directly responsible for the creation of "[exclusionary zones](#)" that boost value for existing owners at the expense of literally everybody else. This artificial restriction on our cities has turned them into a swiss cheese of neighbourhoods. Some are densely populated with highrises while others are lightly populated single home communities, all of which are unaffordable. All of which lack real character.

These laws were meant to be a way to ensure certain ground rules were met. For example:

- Separating residential areas from the polluting smoke of industrial plants
- Ensuring that new constructions don't overwhelm public utilities
- A set of safety standards necessary to avoid potential disasters

That makes sense, but as zoning laws became more complex and then got combined with increasingly specific land use laws, we ended up with a beast that prevents any meaningful redevelopment or upgrade in cities. This had the predictable outcome of pushing people out to the suburbs and suffocating city cores.

This don't have to be this way though, there are plenty of examples globally. So let's take a look at these zoning and land use maps of Canadian cities first:

- [Ottawa](#)
- [Vancouver](#)
- [Montreal](#)
- Calgary

Now check out the maps for these popular global cities:

- [Paris](#)
- [Amsterdam](#)
- [Barcelona](#)
- Tokyo
- Seoul

One thing becomes apparent immediately, Canadian cities have much longer map legends even though they house less people. A symptom of what the details hide, because in those Canadian cities we see a sea of residential-only areas dotted by mixed-use and commercial islands. Meanwhile, the global cities have a sea of mixed-use regions with residential-only areas being the exception.

These global cities have vibrant cultures because people can work, live, and contribute to the cities they belong to, and the smaller communities they are a part of. Unlike Canadians, they are

not forced to commute to work, commute to grocery shop, or commute to have some fun. This difference is what we seek to address.

By removing the excessive amount of red tape our cities have, we aim to give private individuals and groups the opportunity to get creative with how they try to meet market demands. After factoring in the downward price pressure from the non-market apartments we will build, we will have vibrant, affordable living spaces within our city centers.

## Canada is not Europe

Unlike in Europe Canada is huge and sparsely populated. This makes building cities just as dense harder, for the simple reason that many people would rather have a bigger place that is a little out of town over having a smaller one within.

Our goal is not to force densification onto every neighbourhood, because we do see the appeal of suburbs (and their wasted potential). Rather, we want to give Canadians options so that they are free to choose what suits them. Our target is to avoid forcing people into living situations that they don't want.

Which is why to achieve our goals, we crafted two separate policies to address the development of cities. This one which is focused on urban centers and another that focuses on suburbs. The two will compliment each other and attempt to achieve harmony between the two parts of city life, and in the process give Canadians the choice of leading the life they want.

To do so, we must **learn from inspiring cities and adapt them to our needs. Blind imitation will only lead to more problems.**

## Summary

Our cities today are shells of their former selves. A few pockets still feel vibrant and attractive but the majority of downtown cores became dead zones while most suburbs feel lonely and desolate. As part of reversing the decline of cities, we intend to revitalize urban centers by making them affordable, safer, and more vibrant.

## Specifics

The above shifts will be achieved through these policies:

1. Affordability:
  - a. Repurpose government buildings
    - i. Convert some to non-market apartments, in line with housing affordability targets
    - ii. Convert others to temporary rehabilitation centers and dormitories
    - iii. Sell others to developers
  - b. Zoning and land use laws
    - i. Change all city center zones into general mixed-use zones
    - ii. Reduce residential only zones close to city center
    - iii. Reduce low-density residential zones by half
    - iv. Automate zoning updates by accounting for urban sprawl
    - v. Infrastructure funding and the additional municipal 2% sales tax are conditional on rezoning
  - c. Directly build
    - i. Non-market apartments targeted at all segments of society
    - ii. Allow architectural creativity
    - iii. Avoid creation of ghettos
    - iv. Apartment buildings should all be mixed use
  - d. Short-term rentals
    - i. Assess current impact of short-term rentals on the market
    - ii. Assess impact of broad housing affordability reform on the market
    - iii. Identify whether additional legislation is need
2. Safety
  - a. Rehab and shelter facilities
    - i. For both addicts and generally homeless people
    - ii. Will be dorm styled with private rooms and common spaces
    - iii. Focus on reintegration by helping them with getting IDs, bank accounts, jobs, etc



- iv. Residents will be expected to pay a small rent once they get a job to further reintegrate them
  - v. Separate non-addicts and light users from more severe cases
  - vi. Severe cases would include added security and special care
  - vii. In line with drug policy goals
  - b. Vocational training
    - i. Partner with businesses to train them for certain trades
    - ii. Have on-site education and training
  - c. Hire them
    - i. While the above is happening, hire them to do simple jobs
    - ii. Cleaning the streets
    - iii. Doing various tasks around the dorms, cooking, cleaning, security, etc
    - iv. Must be paid no less than minimum wage
3. Pedestrianization
- a. Area selection
    - i. Cities propose most promising areas to be pedestrianized, e.g. in front of parliament
    - ii. A joint venture across all levels of government is undertaken to achieve that
    - iii. Done across Canada
  - b. New businesses
    - i. Zoning part of this
    - ii. Especially around pedestrianized areas
    - iii. Reduce red tape
    - iv. Cheaper loans for more creative endeavors that open later
  - c. Art commissions
    - i. Areas should feel unique and inviting
    - ii. Commission various local artists to beautify the areas
    - iii. Allow busking
    - iv. Endorse event hosting
  - d. Densify parking
    - i. Build-up more multi-story car parking spots outside pedestrianized areas on current open-air lots

- ii. Build-up multi-story parking near public transport stations at the edges of cities with metros/subways/LRTs

#### 4. Public Transportation

##### a. Scheduling

- i. Support weekend frequency increases
- ii. Increase coverage throughout the day

##### b. Reliability

- i. Create more bus only lanes within city centers where buses are unreliable
- ii. Increase funding for non street dependent public transportation

##### c. Improve suburb to urban core connections

- i. Increase funding for all public transportation endeavors in general
- ii. Address suspicious cost and schedule overruns

## Contingencies

None yet