

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



**L**earning. It is what we do as students. Successful learning at an accredited planning program is a key step in the journey to becoming an RPP. However, professional learning is not something that can be completed on one day or over the course of just one year. Continuous learning is a cornerstone of being a professional. It is a lifelong endeavour. It is important to our credibility with the public and decision-makers. Learning is part of the OPPI culture and is embedded in our legislation and our Standards of Practice.

The Registered Professional Planners Act, 2017, if passed, will raise further awareness about the importance of planning and the role of the planning profession in creating and fostering healthy communities—putting the public interest first.

To protect the public interest, the bill sets out a process for regulating professional practice through membership, investigation of complaints, discipline and fitness to practice hearings. The accreditation process for the university planning programs and the certification process for Candidate Members is not affected by the proposed legislation.

As the future of the profession, I urge students to continue to assert our position with respect to the value of professional planning in shaping our communities and environment. Recognition of the profession is not a given. Staff and OPPI members worked hard to have the original Ontario Professional Planners Institute Act, 1994 passed and we are on the cusp of new public legislation being enacted.

We must keep up the momentum so that planners of the future are recognized as the skilled professionals they are.

Great plans need great planners.

~ Andrea Bourrie

While some observers have predicted that AVs would encourage a new generation of suburban sprawl, it is more likely that the primary impact for at least a decade will be precisely the opposite. The real disruption will come from “autonomous transit” in the form of shared autonomous vehicles (SAVs)—six-to-12-passenger electric vehicles that run on-schedule or on-demand (ordered up by smartphone). Not having a human driver, it will cost half of what shared services cost today—and offer the added advantage of almost never needing to park (or pay for parking).

SAVs will not be equal-opportunity disruptors. Built not to speed along highways but instead to navigate dense urban environments, they will spread rapidly in urban areas where a critical mass of people and varied activities combine to generate lots of trips. SAVs will not replace rail or bus rapid transit but instead connect urban centres to these transit networks. Urban areas will increasingly signify places where vehicles are shared, not owned. In lower-density suburbs, privately owned and operated—and far more expensive—AVs will make more sense, but will phase in slowly.

Today cities provide as many as eight times more parking spaces than they have cars. All of which take up scarce urban land and push up costs—adding \$50-100,000 or more to the development cost of a condominium unit or 1,000 square feet of office space. Replacing a significant share of owned with shared vehicles will reduce costs and free up parking spaces to support new development. In turn, as SAVs reduce parking demand, they will facilitate increased densities. Citywide, surface parking lots will offer new opportunities to build affordable housing, schools, health centres and other building blocks of livability.

Public transit authorities are already looking at SAV services to provide critical “last mile” access, connecting people who live more

## URBANDESIGN

### The next big disruption is here

By David Dixon & Harold Madi, RPP, contributing editor

**T**he autonomous mobility revolution is about to give a big boost to walkable urban places in cities and suburbs. Virtually all of the projects we are debating, planning and designing today will open their doors at the dawn of a new mobility era.

Congested suburban arteries and the lack of transit access have long complicated efforts to accommodate, and build community support for denser suburban developments. The arrival of autonomous vehicles (AVs) over the next five years will begin to dramatically shift this equation.

than a 10-minute walk to the nearest transit station. These services will make transit more convenient, and enable more distant sites to command the value premiums that transit-oriented development brings.

Within a decade, SAVs will unlock unimagined opportunities to green our cities. Redeveloping acres of impermeable parking lots will reduce ground water pollution. Shared trips will mean fewer trips, and reduced emissions. Automated vehicles—shared or not—can travel within inches of each other, requiring far less pavement than traditional vehicles. The resulting opportunity to repurpose one-third to one-half of our existing street pavement will enable municipalities to redefine and optimize their public amenity space. Instead of a car in every garage, imagine that every street can host a rain garden. Major boulevards can become continuous ribbons of urban trees coursing through the city.

Before we finish painting this picture of urban renaissance, we need to hit pause and ask: Are we planning a next generation of urban development that will be outmoded from day one? Will SAVs exacerbate gentrification as they enhance urban amenity and mobility, reinforcing trends that according to the Brookings Institution have seen a more than 60 per cent increase in suburban poverty since 2000? Should SAV services be operated by private companies or as extensions of public transit, with corresponding public accountability? To remain proactive, we would need to start planning now to ensure that policies are in place anticipating both the implications and the opportunities.

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