

**The National Development Framework**  
***Ideas For The Next Draft, March 2017.***

Our experience of places is determined by the details of our up-close encounter with their edges. For landscapes it is the rhythm of walls or trees; for towns and cities it is our experience of their street edges. But that know-how is tugged at by larger planning and societal preferences making it critical to begin to examine the connections across scales, between disciplines and articulate what's at stake in panning for change more vociferously and publically. I welcome this opportunity to offer suggestions in the spirit encouraged by your briefings on the making of this *National Development Framework* and am heartened by your stated desire to engage more publically.

My suggestions for consideration in the next draft are;

- 1. Subject Decisions By Local Authorities To Internal or External Design Review**
- 2. Publish The Evidence Of How Growth Can Be Distributed.**
- 3. An Urban Recentralization Strategy To Counter Years Of Rural Decentralization.**
- 4. Can City Strategies Permeate To Town Planning?**
- 5. Prepare Visuals Of Cost Benefit Analysis of Comparative Location Of Homes to Support Policies of Sustainability.**
- 6. Encourage Bottom-Up Actions With Every Top-Down Rule.**
- 7. Make Planning More Public.**

**1. Subject Decisions By Local Authorities To Internal or External Design Review**

The specifics of place and place-making is at the core of peoples' associations with the purpose of planning. The current report recognizes this. One means to achieve this purpose more explicitly would be subject decision to internal or external reviews at the early design stage. This is when plans are more flexible to informed feedback. The cost benefit analysis of Design Reviews versus post-planning-appeals would assist in making such a transition.

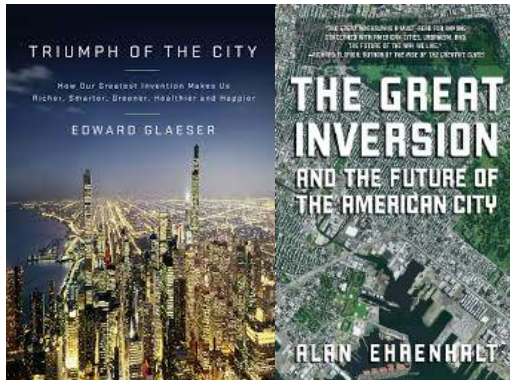
Local Authorities could benefit from formal and informal Design Reviews, which are common in other countries. Groupthink is endemic to systematized planning so subjecting decision to internal or external reviews or a cross-check by discipline other than trained planners would make the planning system better informed and so more accountable. Internal or external reviews would counter the subordination of judgments to process driven conformity and the unintended consequence of ever narrowing horizons.

**2. Publish The Evidence Of How Growth Can Be Distributed.**

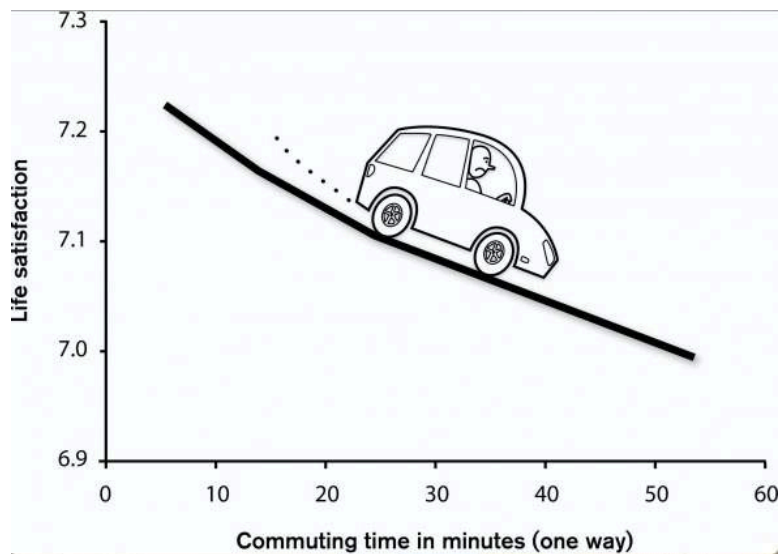
If the battle for sustainable planning is to be won, it needs to be won with facts and tangible evidence. The desire for any rebalance of Dublin's growth, even if politically expedient, needs to be evidence based. If there is any statistical evidence for an economy and population like ours of the long-term benefits of siphoning-off growth to second tiered citie, how much effective has this been and how has it been measured? It is of course desirable to boost all Irish cities but just how should have research to substantiate and to measure.

As the driver of our economy in a Global sense, is it worth the risk of sitting on the Golden Goose of Dublin in the hope of distributing political eggs to other cities? If it is, why not include the evidence or comparators where this has succeeded?

### 3. An Urban Recentralization Strategy To Counter Years Of Decentralization.



If we could be persuaded by recent studies by economists in the US, a phase within grasp is for urban centers to reemerge as social and entertainment hubs for a savvy population wishing to have a life afterhours all within a walkable distance of home. (Glaeser, Ehrenhalt). But this would require first and foremost a recentralization policy to counter years of default decentralization and the commuters' paradox of travel to work.



The Commuters' Paradox Graphic by Dan Planko from Charles Montgomery, *Happy City*.

Radial links from dispersed suburbs could be enhanced using greenways, cycle routes and intensity of after hour uses to connect inner suburbs with active streetscapes to their closest urban center.

A pilot of walkable neighbourhood could be the first step towards tipping the balance towards livability for a majority population that is suburban.

#### 4. Can City Strategies Permeate To Town Planning?



Cartoon of an Irish Main Street based on image of Potemkin Town  
<http://www.straightdope.com/columns/read/2479/did-potemkin-villages-really-exist>

Architect and urban theorist Erwin A. Gutkind in his *The Twilight Of Cities* in 1962 made a proposal to turn the center of declining city centers into a wilderness, a park for its orbiting suburbs served by a ring road. By so doing he put a figurate name to the stratification of urban patterns i.e. the 'donut-plan' i.e. eviscerated and hollow in the middle. The realization of the 'donut' effect was to spark a few decades of investment, backfilling this hole mainly led by cities concerned for sustainability and smart growth. Could their ideals of a compact urban renaissance and a realization of an essential image booster to attract creative types have some lessons that could be adopted for town planning?

Former Indianapolis Mayor Bill Hudnut used say that "you can't be a suburb of nowhere". The question for our towns today is what % of each town population lives in its center. In other words where is the heart of a town today and what ought its future function be? This needs collective attention and tangible research.

Moreover, towns should be differentiated by their urban dynamics rather than by overall population numbers- whether orbital to Dublin, growing or declining- as these urban structures matters to how they can plan their future and indeed connect as networks.

**5. Prepare Visuals Of Cost Benefit Analysis Of Comparative Location Of Homes To Support Policies of Sustainability**

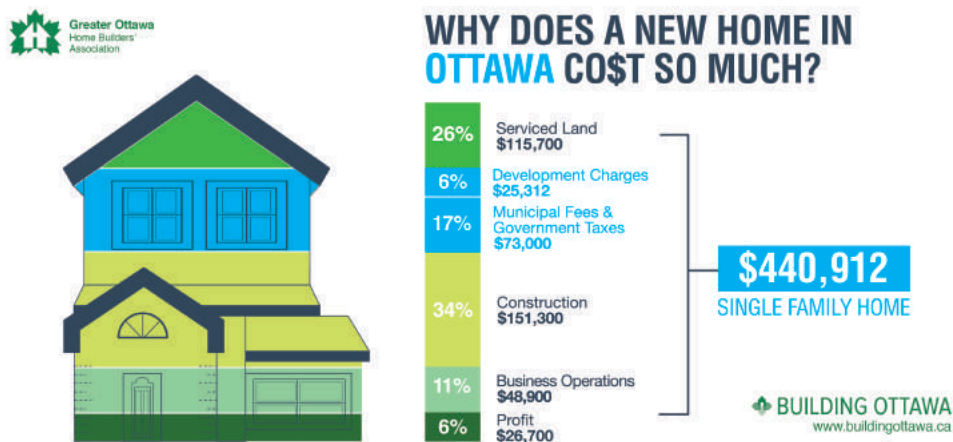


Image from <http://www.gohba.ca/why-does-a-new-home-in-ottawa-cost-so-much/>

The plan needs to put its facts where its heart is. Info-graphics make sense of planning for citizens so if the plan is written for them their judgment will determine what is to become of it.

More info-graphics on the real and full cost benefit analysis of housing units would help build any objectives towards smarter sustainable growth; for instance why not illustrate the full cost of infra-structure to service a one-off houses, the comparative cost of new and converted units within existing town centers or the cost of inner-city retrofits? This is to illustrate costs to the tax-payer not price or profit. In this context, could the next draft use the more recent census data for illustrations rather than 2011.

**6. Encourage Bottom-Up Actions With Every Top-Down Rule.**



Image of dispersed pattern of an Irish Town and one for the design of walkable routes.

More feedback loops should be encouraged between making a plan and its delivery. Least the follies of our de-centralization loophole be a reminder of the unintended consequences of unraveling a well-made plan, the delivery of a plan needs regular recalibration as to its outputs and its impact.

For instance when Mayor John Lindsay negotiated a first comprehensive plan for New York, one measure of its impact on the ground was through a study called *'The Street Life Project'* which in turn adjusted the Plan by specific ordinance shaped by empirical research and feedback. This bottom-up groundswell is also the philosophy of *Massive Small* (<http://www.massivesmall.com>) which is gaining momentum in the UK and beyond. This is an idea to facilitate good ideas at a local level. The tangible support for Heritage Week is evidence of the positive potential of such locally driven initiatives. Planning needs to keep pace with our changing expectations for places.

## **7. Make Planning More Public.**

Without the countervailing pressure of engaged citizens and civic groups planning suffers; it becomes irrelevant so please continue to make the framework and planning processes more public. Consider more videos or TV footage on the value of planning, on urban design and the role of public space and encourage feedback for the life of the plan.

To conclude bringing life back to urban centers and to streets is a possibility within our reach and our know-how for after all it is the people who like living in urban centers and towns that make these places attractive to people who don't. The multiplier effect of thriving centers could be tremendous not just the number of people using them, but the larger number who can *'enjoy them vicariously, or even the larger number who feel better for knowledge of them. ... such places are priceless, whatever the cost. They are built of a set of basics and they are right in front of our noses. If we but look'*.

The plan is an opportunity to do just this to look at best practice and ensure others continue to do so well after the plan is made.