

## Vancouver lures Calgary's top planner west

New man called 'sophisticated urbanist' by his predecessor

By Monte Stewart - Business Edge

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Brent Toderian had no intention of leaving his post as Calgary's manager of downtown planning and design.

But now Calgary's loss is Vancouver's gain.

Toderian, 37, officially takes over as the West Coast city's head planner Sept. 14 from Larry Beasley, who is retiring Aug. 31 to become a consultant to other cities around the world and teach at the University of British Columbia.

Toderian will actually do the work of two people, because 30-year city hall veterans Beasley and Ann MacAfee, who has already retired, served as co-directors of planning for the past decade.



Dave Olecko, Business Edge  
Brent Toderian strolls along  
Calgary's downtown before  
heading to a similar post in  
Vancouver.

"I didn't want to apply," says Toderian, in a telephone interview from Calgary.

When Beasley approached him and asked him about his level of interest, Toderian said he wasn't sure. But then a corporate headhunter acting for the City of Vancouver contacted Toderian, and the Perth, Ont., native, who had expected to stay in Calgary for the rest of his life, decided to get "in the process."

"It was a very difficult decision to leave," he says. "I love my job in

Calgary. I love the city of Calgary, so I had no active interest in Vancouver."

Toderian hemmed and hawed about leaving, he says, because he "did not fully understand" Vancouver's development challenges.

"I understand the challenges here in Calgary," he says. "There's so much

more to do, and we're really at the start of things."

Toderian is at the prime of his professional life, notes Beasley.

He calls Toderian a "sophisticated urbanist" who understands political implications of development.

The new planning boss is also committed to public consultation and involvement, and has a good reputation among his colleagues.

"He has a very sophisticated concept of what cities are about and, of course, that's what Vancouver has to have in a new director of planning," says Beasley.

Toderian helped Calgary's downtown "not just to be a workplace but to be a whole new dynamic inner city," and assisted politicians in understanding Calgarians want the city to be more than just an oil and gas centre, adds Beasley.



Brent Toderian

Calgary's departing downtown planner also started city hall's urban-design review process that is still being developed.

Toderian will manage a staff of more than 100, compared to 20 in Calgary.

The City of Vancouver, he adds, grants its top planner more authority than any other municipality in Canada. He will be in charge of both policy and \$20 billion worth of annual development (based on an Urban Development Institute estimate), whereas MacAfee oversaw long-term policy and Beasley supervised all new building projects and the downtown.

Toderian's first major task will be to introduce outlying communities to Mayor Sam Sullivan's eco-density plan, which until now has only been applied downtown.

Other key challenges, Toderian says, will be to help put 2010 Winter Olympic infrastructure in place and revitalize the poverty-stricken Downtown East Side (DTES), which is plagued by homelessness, drug

addiction, prostitution and crime. Calgary has seen similar social issues but not to the same extent, says Toderian.

In recent years, Canada's oil and gas capital has become a haven for a rising homeless population.

Thousands of people from Ontario, Quebec, the Maritimes and other locales have migrated en masse to southern Alberta in search of high-paying jobs - but are often disappointed because they lack adequate education and employment and life skills, say social-agency executives.

Toderian introduced Calgary's first new downtown plan in 40 years as part of a three-pronged vision that seeks to create a livable, caring and thriving city centre.

He also spearheaded a new strategy for the Beltline district on the south side of downtown that has become a magnet for crime and prostitution.

The Beltline plan includes new housing projects that contain such environmentally friendly features as green roofs and renewable-energy sources, such as geothermal heating.

He also initiated a "zone of experimentation" downtown and began plans to convert the East Village, a former industrial district east of city hall, into a pedestrian-friendly area featuring shops and restaurants. (The controversial East Village plan, which was developed before Toderian arrived in Calgary five years ago, also involves literally lifting the neighbourhood 1.5 metres because it is located on a floodplain.)

Toderian has also advocated doing away with one-way downtown streets - which many Calgarians love to hate. One-way arteries, he contends, are good for getting people to and through downtown, but not very effective moving people within the core.

When asked if he will attempt to reduce Vancouver's one-way routes, he replied, "I might have the appetite for that kind of a discussion."

But Toderian says he first wants to listen to stakeholders' concerns before pushing for specific changes.

Describing himself as a "champion of the better idea," he advocates creative, flexible and collaborative development that "embraces more risk by being bold and doing things in a different way."

"We never let a rule stand in the way of a better idea," says Toderian. "(Vancouver's future growth) is not going to be about architecture and

planning. It's going to be about on-the-ground community development, thinking new things and establishing multi-governmental relationships and partnerships to get things done."

Sustainability, he says, is part of everything he does. Many of his Calgary initiatives, including a bonus-density program for developers doing work in the core, were based on lessons learned from Vancouver models.

During formal studies, Toderian obtained undergraduate and post-graduate degrees from the University of Waterloo and later received a planning and design certificate from Simon Fraser University in the Vancouver suburb of Burnaby.

During his early days in Calgary, he focused on shaping new outlying communities such as McKenzie Towne, but he has spent most of his career designing urban cores.

Before moving to Calgary in 2001, he spent nine years as an award-winning city planner and urban designer with Kitchener, Ont.-based MHBC Planning Ltd., then known as MacNaughton Hermsen Britton Clarkson Planning Ltd.

His experiences in revitalizing the downtowns of several Ontario cities, including the Greater Toronto Area, will help with rejuvenating Vancouver's DTES, he believes.

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