

Roadmap Soho and the Secondary Plan

The area south of Horton Street, commonly known as the SoHo Neighbourhood, has a prominent history of over 150 years in the City of London. It began as a place of refuge for slaves on the Underground Railroad and went on to housing Victoria Hospital, one of London's major medical facilities. These factors have given SoHo a prominent role in the development of the City of London.

Over the period of May 2009 to November 2010, the Community of SoHo, the SoHo Community Association and the City of London have worked together to prepare a plan that would guide the future opportunities for the neighbourhood. This was a community-led process that aimed to engage the neighbourhood through six public meetings in order to encourage community ownership for the Plan's future implementation. The final product of this community-led process was Roadmap SoHo: A Community Improvement Plan for London's SoHo District, released in June of 2011. The purpose of Roadmap Soho was to provide a plan with a vision, principles and strategic directions to help provide opportunities to meet both existing and future challenges that were identified through the duration of the study.

Roadmap Soho is made up of the following components:

- Vision Statement;
- List of Principles;
- Strategic Directions (divided into three components – economic, social and environmental);
- The Plan itself (divided into four components – The Old Victoria Hospital Lands, Neighbourhood Movement, Neighbourhood Places and Neighbourhood Public Spaces); and
- Implementing the Plan (also divided into four components – The Old Victoria Hospital Lands, Neighbourhood Movement, Neighbourhood Places and Neighbourhood Public Spaces).

Each section will be expanded upon in more detail to give you a better idea of how community improvement plans work and the importance of community involvement during the creation of these plans.

The **Vision Statement** of Roadmap SoHo highlights the community's aspirations for their neighbourhood:

"Our SoHo will be a vibrant and healthy urban neighbourhood that celebrates its rich sense of community and heritage. With its unique links to the Downtown and Thames River, SoHo will be a great place to live, work, shop and play!"

The **List of Principles** expands upon the Vision Statement, outlining the specific qualities that the community envisions for their neighbourhood:

- Desirable, vibrant and diverse (a great place to be);
- Greener and integrated;
- Creative and leading edge;
- Connected to people and places;
- Safe;
- Healthy;
- Pride and strong sense of community;
- Balanced; and,
- Historically and culturally enriched.

The **Strategic Directions** are divided into 3 components (economic, social and environmental) and identify the specific strategies that will be employed to bring the ideas in the Vision Statement and List of Principles come to life:

Economic	Social	Environmental
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build strong, safe connections with the Downtown, the Thames River, the commercial corridors and adjacent neighbourhoods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance recreational opportunities throughout the neighbourhood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrate the neighbourhood's built and cultural heritage
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximize the unique opportunity presented by the newly available lands at the South Street Campus of the LHSC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate and plan for social services in a balanced and integrated manner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance the public realm, including streetscapes, public spaces and infrastructure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create strong mainstreet commercial corridors along Wellington and Horton Streets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify opportunities for places and activities that foster community interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek out opportunities for sustainability

The Plan provides an overall framework to direct public and private investment into SoHo in order to achieve the community's vision. The Plan is divided into the following four components: The Old Victoria Hospital Lands, Neighbourhood Movement, Neighbourhood Places and Neighbourhood Public Spaces. Through these components, the Plan identifies key initiatives to improve neighbourhood streets, shopping areas and connections to the Downtown, Old South and the Thames River.

Implementing the Plan sets out the key initiatives for the implementation of the plan's vision identified by the SoHo community. Like the previous section, this section of the report is separated into four themes with the associated key initiatives attached to those themes: The Old Victoria Hospital Lands, Neighbourhood Movement, Neighbourhood Places and Neighbourhood Public Spaces. It is intended that by separating out these themes it will help to better communicate the key initiatives that are needed to implement the SoHo community's vision. Associated with each implementation theme will be a matrix that will identify the project lead, priority and potential costs for each of the key initiatives. In doing this, it is intended that champions will emerge to lead key

initiatives through their process and ultimate implementation. It is these smaller projects that will come together to achieve the overall community vision.

One of the economic initiatives in Roadmap Soho was the creation of a **Secondary Plan** for the redevelopment of the Old Victoria Hospital lands. The Secondary Plan was approved by City Council on June 24, 2014 and is now in force and effect. The Secondary Plan specifically includes those lands bound by Wellington Street to the west, Maitland Street to the east, Hill Street to the north, and the Thames River to the south. The Secondary Plan provides a detailed land use plan and urban design policies to implement the community vision set out in Roadmap SoHo. Further, the Secondary Plan serves as the policy basis for the review of future development applications within the area. The vision and principles of the Secondary Plan call for a community that is:

- Desirable, vibrant and diverse;
- Green and integrated;
- Creative and leading edge;
- Connected;
- Safe, healthy and balanced;
- Historically and culturally enriched; and,
- Anchored in pride and sense of place.

In addition to the above, the Secondary Plan includes a series of fundamental planning and urban design principles which serve as an organizing framework for policy. These principles include:

- Place-making, which is a multi-faceted approach to the planning, design and management of public spaces including streetscapes, in combination with buildings and the private realm;
- Transit and pedestrian-oriented development which promotes connectivity, mobility and accessibility within and between neighbourhoods, employment lands, parks, and open spaces;
- Design excellence in the public and private realm which calls for a comprehensive approach to design and design coordination between private and public realms;
- Natural and cultural heritage features and functions; and,
- Key community "building blocks" referred to in the Plan as the "Four Corners", "South Street Promenade" and "Riverfront Promenade".

During the planning stages, a series of public workshops hosted by the City of London took place to assist in the preparation of the Draft Secondary Plan. During the public workshops, participants were invited to take part in activities such as creating visual demonstrations of their preferred neighbourhood. This particular activity involved the selection and placement of photos portraying different examples of various community structure elements (buildings; uses; streetscapes; parks; and urban spaces). Another activity involved attendees reviewing and discussing three preliminary land use options for the Secondary Planning Area. After the draft Secondary Plan was completed, the community had the opportunity to review it and give their feedback.

As we can see, community improvement plans such as Roadmap Soho enable a community to establish a foundation with a clear vision and principles that pave the way for a strategic plan that can bring the community's aspirations to life. Roadmap Soho and the Secondary Plan have also helped the SoHo community to identify the economic, social and environmental benefits that will result in following through with both plans. These benefits have already come to fruition in the form of increasing real estate sales in the neighbourhood, for example. Community involvement played a vital role in creating both Roadmap Soho and the supporting Secondary Plan. The community in Soho will continue to play a vital role as the plans continue to be implemented.