

Pillar Presentation on ReThink London Plan London City Council Public Session - June 23, 2014

On behalf of London's diverse nonprofit sector, Pillar Nonprofit Network commends the City of London for its extraordinary community outreach in creating The London Plan. It truly is Exciting and Exceptional, and stands as an unprecedented example of community consultation for our city ... and our country ... with more than 15,000 participants.

In response to the comprehensive Plan, Pillar recently hosted a ReThink Community Discussion to review those directions within the Plan, which are resonating most with nonprofit leaders.

They include 6 key areas of focus:

- Being a Smart City
- Being a Culturally Rich & Diverse City
- Being a Green City
- Embracing innovative City Design and Healthy Neighbourhoods
- Addressing Homelessness Prevention and Housing, and
- Maximizing our Food Systems amid London's access to rich agricultural lands

We have more than 1,200 nonprofits in our community contributing to the quality of life and social wellbeing of Londoners through arts, education, environment, faith, health, heritage, sports, and social services.

With this vast network, the nonprofit sector plays a critical role in attracting new investments and jobs to our community by providing strong recreational, cultural and social infrastructure.

Nonprofits also provide preventative services, and collectively work tirelessly to make London a great place to live.

As such, we are joining the City in embracing 'CONNECTIONS' as a pivotal theme, and driver for the new London Plan ... and our community's future prosperity.

To become a Smart City, open data is the essential *connection* we need to be, and to stay, on the leading edge as engaged citizens, who seize opportunities for positive community impact. The nonprofit sector benefits from ready access to data to more fully understand the community it serves and to make informed decisions on where we apply our limited resources.

With this in mind, we applaud the City's vow to create 'a culture of curiosity', as a fundamental role of the City is to encourage citizens to ask questions. And, together – we are smarter and stronger.

To be a Culturally Rich and Diverse City, we must meaningfully engage newcomers and immigrants, prioritize attraction and retention of young people, and harness the experience of the baby boomers.

Research shows that boards of nonprofits and municipal committees are not representative of our community's diversity, yet we need diverse leadership to prosper!

The nonprofit sector is here to support this area of the London Plan by helping to make *connections* between newcomers and the community they wish to engage with. Creating a welcoming City, with a sense of belonging for newcomers generates a social and economic benefit to our city and its residents.

Similarly, younger people are looking to more than nonprofits to have the lens of social responsibility – this is a cross-sector responsibility.

Also, to attract and retain emerging leaders, our City must not only have a heart, but a “soul” and a “vibe” where people are excited to be here, and feel they have places to go, people to see, and things to do. When we visit other cities like Chicago, it is often the arts and culture scene that impacts our memories most.

And, the nonprofit sector is here to work with the City and the private sector to leverage the energy and creativity of the younger generation to create our next Chapter of London.

Similarly, London can be proud of its Age Friendly designation by the World Health Organization. Our community has so many baby boomers eager to give back to their community and we need to harness this energy and talent. Engaging baby boomers in skills based volunteering that aligns with The London Plan priorities just makes sense.

To be a Green City with Innovative City Design, the river is our biggest asset and our greatest *connection* to the heart and history of our city. We need only look to other cities with a river to see its amazing potential as a gathering place and a quality of life enhancer.

So, we are delighted to see the river and transit, as key directions in the London Plan. Indeed, these two community components are resonating most with people of *all* ages and backgrounds. London has struggled to address these priorities in the past, so the City's new focus on bike lanes, light rail, and transit villages provides new hope and innovative ways of *connecting* people across the community.

In liaising with Andrew Lockie, CEO United Way London & Middlesex, he points to how the London Plan inspires him with goals of "Building Strong & Healthier Neighbourhoods for everyone." These are powerful words and the "for everyone" needs to be real and realistic.

As a community, we are confident we can achieve this, but must remind the City of what a bold choice this is. We do not know anyone who does not want strong and healthy neighbourhoods for everyone. Still, it is imperative to understand this commitment will impact future decisions, policies and taxes. Please know we strongly believe in this goal, but want to ensure the City fully comprehends its full scope.

For instance, the vast scope of ‘strong and healthy neighbourhoods for everyone’ truly hits home when **Addressing Homelessness Prevention and Housing**.

There are huge lists for affordable housing, yet the wait list is currently 8 years. So, we need a cross-sector approach with nonprofit, business and government to fully *connect* all the available resources to move from isolated impact to collective impact in order to meet this lofty goal in a reasonable period of time – for those many families waiting for a home.

For example, the London Plan’s goal of ensuring 25% of new housing is accessible to low and moderate income households will require a cross-sector strategy. And, the nonprofit sector is ready to play its part at the table.

In the same way, looking for new and innovative ways to **Maximize our Food Systems** amid London’s amazing access to rich agricultural lands is key to our future.

From community gardens to major food processors, we have the resources and the *connections* to change existing approaches to food distribution. For example, we recently heard the London Food Bank announce it is looking for new solutions because its current system is not making a paradigm shift. This is a bold and courageous example of social innovation and systems change thinking, which the nonprofit sector supports. And, in fact, we want more bold moves like this one to guide our future planning and City building activities.

So, looking ahead 20 years, there is certainly plenty of promise and potential contained in The London Plan. And, the nonprofit sector is poised to work together as a pivotal partner with the City and the private sector, to make *connections across our community*, so dreams can come true for future generations of Londoners.