



TORONTO 2061: Toronto the big, or the great?



Updated: Fri Jan. 07 2011 12:11:25 PM

Over the next 50 years, there is no doubt Toronto will grow in size. But will it be a better city to live in, or just merely bigger?

Urban planning expert Richard Florida says the planning to make Toronto a world-class city in the same league as Paris or New York in the next 50 years must start now.

"The best cities in the world create a vision for the entire city and for the entire region. We're not going to solve our problems bric-a-brac, piecemeal," Florida told CTV Toronto. "The only way we're going to overcome this is to have a really compelling vision for what this city can be and for what it can offer future generations."

And it's a strong vision for the city that will have a two-fold effect, experts say. First of all, a vibrant city will attract immigrants, without whom the population would be stagnant. And it's these expat communities that open the doors for Toronto to the world's emerging economies, offering untapped economic opportunities.

"We're probably one of the best-positioned cities to do business outside of ourselves. I think that's one of the things we've got to realize," Florida says. "The 21st century is going to be the century of Asia and India and Brazil and the rising economies. Well, we have large populations of people from all of those economies, and we have to leverage that for our future."

And vibrant multicultural communities also offer other benefits, says Robert Freedman, the city's Director of Urban Design. Immigrants flocking to Toronto creates a buzz about the city, and that buzz is good for tourism, he says.

"I think in the years to come as our population increases, we will make the city a vibrant place that tourists are going to want to come to," Freedman told CTV Toronto.

But demographer David Foot says if a million people come to Toronto and there aren't enough jobs, and transit and other infrastructure haven't kept up with increasing demands, people will simply leave the city.

"Increasingly, Toronto will take the percentage of the people that it can accommodate given the available infrastructure," Foot told CTV Toronto. "And if the infrastructure is not changed, then people will find elsewhere to live."

Despite Foot's warning, Florida says fears of a crumbling city are misplaced. According to him, Toronto in 50 years is "not going to collapse."

"It's going to be good, or it's going to be great," Florida says. "And for my money, I'd rather be great."