

## On One-size-fits-all Planning, Over-simplification, and Trees

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Hello Better Infill--

One of the troubling aspects of Edmonton's new zoning bylaws is their one-size-fits-all approach. Regardless of age, population, design, density, location, road access, or anything else, Edmonton's 180 mature neighborhoods get much the same treatment. It's a recipe for dullness that makes life easier for infill developers, while stripping out the city's character and soul.

This is the third and final set of transcripts from our September 11, 2024 interview with renowned urban planner Larry Beasley. It focuses on the downfalls of one-size-fits-all planning; the danger of local governments using simplistic solutions; the importance of green space and trees; and on not giving up.

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“Cities are wonderfully complicated,” said Larry. “We love them for that. And we love the cities that are the most complicated. We love the cities that have character and style.” That’s a lesson for Edmonton’s councillors and planners alike.

BetterInfill’s full interview with Larry Beasley is posted at [BetterInfill.ca](https://BetterInfill.ca). The transcripts below have been edited for clarity and readability, with Larry’s approval.

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--From the team at *Better Infill*.

## ON ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL PLANNING.

“One thing that worries me in almost every city I work in, is this inclination by local government to simplify. Cities are wonderfully complicated. We love them for that. And we love the cities that are the most complicated. We love the cities that have character and style. While you can have overarching objectives and principles, you have to work within each community to decide what is and is not for those people.”

“One size can't fit all. You have to have a lot of tools which are applied many places, and every one of them has to be tailored with local people for local circumstances.”

“One size should never fit all, or we will live in cities where we all hate that one size fits all. We will hate those places because we want diversity, and we need diversity, because we are so different.”

*“One size can't fit all. You have to have a lot of tools which are applied many place, and every one of them has to be tailored with local people for local circumstances.”*

“There is an inclination by people in my profession, as planners, to think that when you complete a plan, you're done, and you move on to something completely different. What we've learned is that these overarching plans tend to be principle based, but they should not try to be the final plan from which zoning is crafted that would manage building by building and space by space.”

“Good planning has an overlay of different levels of plans, and each of those levels has a different level of public engagement, and you don't get a package that you can then apply, until you've come right down and made peace at the most local level. It's better to have convened that whole neighborhood a little earlier, and found out what fits and what doesn't fit, and craft your regulatory regime accordingly.”

“As you get closer and closer to people and the impacts of development, you have to broker more and more according to the actual needs of those people, as defined by those people, with those people. Planners need to take the principles of the city plan and go into each community and say, "Okay, what can we achieve in your community that helps us achieve this overall result in the end?" You always find ways to do that when you work with people.”

“You start from one basic principle as a planner: Citizens are as smart or smarter than you are, and they have a lot more information at the local level than you can ever have.”

## ON PROTECTING TREES AND GREEN SPACES.

“Many cities are concluding they have to manage the private tree inventory in the same way they manage the public tree inventory. They put in place a regulatory framework where a developer has to identify where there are trees and what they would do about the pattern of those trees. Sometimes it's preserved, sometimes it's replaced. And then how would the replacement happen, and is that planting consistent with the natural environment?”

“Managing trees in a respectful and thoughtful way is something that is in the public interest. This is not even very innovative anymore, it's something being done in cities all over the world.”

*“As cities diversify, and as housing becomes smaller and people live more out in the public environment, green spaces become very important.”*

“If you protect trees in the public environment, but you're losing all the trees in the private environment, then you might not be better off. You have to manage both, and working in a system which allows dialogue between community, government, and developers, you can always find solutions.”

“As cities diversify, and as housing becomes smaller and people live more out in the public environment, green space becomes very important. One of the things that often gets missed is that the social and community infrastructure doesn't necessarily follow along in line with densification. So you don't have enough green space, you don't have enough community facilities. Green space is vital.”

## ON NOT GIVING UP.

“There is never an end to how policy unfolds and development management unfolds. Don't feel that even if this round is enshrined in law and starts to be implemented, that's the end of the story. It's only the beginning of the story, because then, you begin to see what's working and what's not working. If people have felt they're not as involved as they should be, but it's coming to a finish, you just restart for the next round.”