



Maureen Looby, P.Eng.: holding keys to city's future

by Sharon Van Ihinger

Last October, Maureen Looby, MEng, P.Eng., was appointed commissioner of environmental services and city engineer for the City of London. As top engineer, she oversees 15 divisions for the city of 340,000. The divisions, which encompass engineering, customer service, finance and operations functions, employ more than 750 staff, depending on the seasonal needs.

Maureen Looby got acquainted with engineering drawings early on in life thanks to the family's construction business in Dublin, Ont., near Stratford. An aptitude for math and science led her to the University of Waterloo where, in 1972, Looby graduated with a degree in civil engineering. She eventually went on to obtain her Master of Engineering degree in environmental engineering from the University of Western Ontario.

Becoming a professional engineer, "was a natural choice—and it worked out," says Looby. She recalls that early on in her career, it was encouraging to see others whose careers were progressing. Looby

recognizes how encouragement from her family helped to steer her in the right direction. "I credit them for arming me with a belief in unlimited potential."

Looby first came to London in 1998 as a consultant working on area water systems shortly after the Ontario Ministry of the Environment's Transfer Act was implemented in 1977. Prior to the Act, the province owned a portion of water and sewage plants, but it turned that ownership back to user municipalities. Describing how her knowledge of London's water system was a significant plus, Looby says: "This expertise positioned me as the front-runner for a new position at the City of London, and in 1999 I officially joined the municipality as manager of operations and compliance in water engineering."

Looby was instrumental in the transfer of London's two water systems, Lake Huron and Elgin Area. Since then, each water system has set up its own water board and the City of London acts as the administering municipality. Noting an ironic twist of fate, Looby was appointed as the chief administrative officer of the two water boards by the then city engineer. "So I've really come full circle on this project," she says.

With the successful ownership transfer underway, Looby went on to manage the city's Subdivision and Development Division, where she was in charge of providing engineering review for standards compliance and coordination of residential, commercial and industrial development.

Looby's earlier career experience took her to many areas in Ontario working with several branches of the Ministry of Environment, including project engineering, and intergovernmental relations. She served with the Ontario Clean Water Agency and held senior positions in private business in construction and project management.

A strong community
"These are exciting times for London, and the city is well positioned, both geographically and municipally, to attract eco-



Meeting challenges is all in a day's work for the City of London's top engineer, Maureen Looby, MEng, P.Eng.

conomic development," says Looby. Her Environmental Services Department will be at the centre of many programs and projects that are on the horizon, and she believes there are several key elements to future development. "We have an immense and ongoing task, not just in roads, but also in sewers and sewage treatment," she explains.

The City of London went through a major annexation in 1994, which allowed the boundaries to expand greatly. "The 401/402 corridor is now in the City of London," Looby says, "and that's our main door to the NAFTA highway."

With so much on her plate, what's the main priority for Looby right now? Her immediate goal will be to focus on the city's many projects, which, she says, are integral to building a strong and vital community. "I look forward to the challenge of being at the hub of a hardworking staff that have put so much into planning London's future," she notes. And it's definitely a two-way street as far as hard work goes according to Looby's colleagues, who seem to appreciate her "team" management style. Looby is quick to admit: "I'm very much a team player, relying on the experts work-

ing with me. If there are things I can do to help anyone do their job better, more efficiently, and with a higher level of satisfaction, then I'm all for it."

Projects underway

Exciting new developments for London and the surrounding area, which Looby's Environmental Services Department will be supporting, include construction of a new \$22-million, state-of-the-art library.

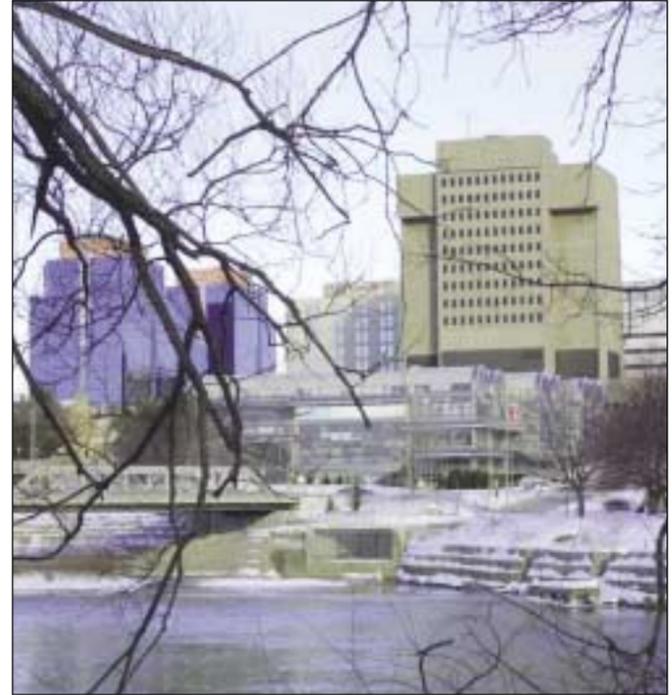
An \$11.5 million Oxford Street bridge and accompanying roadwork is another project underway, while erection of the bridge will take place this year. With several infrastructure enhancements finally materializing, Looby is beginning to realize the positive impact these changes will have on the construction industry and in the local economy in general.

The largest infrastructure project on the roster is the \$500-million sewage improvement plan to include a long awaited \$67-million Southside Sewage Treatment Plant. The southerly portion of the city, in particular, grew during the annexation and providing sewer servicing is a key element in developing the region. According to Looby: "When the plant is built, it will ensure that we are able to develop and grow in this city for at least 50 years." However, it has also stirred debate within communities downstream from the plants proposed site, which are opposed to the idea. Environmental assessment work will be carried out and fully analyzed, and Looby's been in the business long enough to understand that this is one of the challenges that goes along with the territory. With her expertise and determination, it looks as though Looby has a clear view to the city's future.

Environmental Services Department

Operating and capital budgets for the 15 divisions exceed \$220 million. The divisions are:

- Engineering Group**
 - ◆ Administration
 - ◆ Transportation
 - ◆ Subdivision & Development
 - ◆ Wastewater & Drainage Engineering
 - ◆ Water Engineering
- Customer Service Group**
 - ◆ Public Service & Solid Waste Management
 - ◆ Technical Services & Inspection
 - ◆ Special Events & Approvals
 - ◆ Facilities Planning & Engineering
 - ◆ Parking Division
- Finance Group**
 - ◆ Administrative Services
- Operations Group**
 - ◆ Maintenance & Operations
 - ◆ Water & Sewer Operations
 - ◆ Fleet & Facilities Operations
 - ◆ Pollution Control Operations



The Thames River, as well as its parks, pathways and trees, are an integral part of London, branded the "Forest City."