

Perspectives on a Canadian Urban Strategy: An Overview

This inaugural issue of *Canadian Planning and Policy* represents a contribution to the urgent task of formulating a national urban strategy in Canada. It embraces a breadth of approaches to urban issues and illustrates the work of many different communities of scholars in planning and urban affairs. The authors and peer reviewers contributing to the project are mainly academic members of the Canadian Institute of Planners, and hail from every region of the country.

The topics of interest and the methodologies upon which the contributions rest vary widely, yet the authors share an interest in contributing their perspectives to the urban crisis as it is manifest in Canada. They have moved well beyond the recognition that current practices in planning and policy making have failed to come to terms with several key issues. The pages of the journal suggest planning and policy alternatives for adoption over different time horizons, and numerous new areas for investigation.

A particularly important thread unifying the different perspectives and foci in the collection is the connection between the physical form of urban areas and the governance structures that have administered the production of settlement space. It can be seen that contemporary governance arrangements are consistent with predominant physical patterns, and that alteration of urban form will, in many cases, require alteration of governance structures.

In the lead article Jeanne Wolfe, FCIP and Professor Emeritus at the School of Planning at McGill, sets a rich context for the papers by providing a critique of the Task Force on Urban Issues. Focussing on the historical record as well as recent events, Wolfe examines the tradition of urban policy in Canada as a federal institution and relates the Task Force recommendations to these precedents. She pulls no punches in pointing to major gaps in the analysis and focus, and argues for a research funding mechanism in order to support the production of useful knowledge on urban issues.

Larry Bourne and Jim Simmons of the University of Toronto note the differentiation of the country into two types of regions: the few dozen large and growing urban areas; and the multitudinous small places, with low or negative rates of growth. They argue that the entire urban system should be the lens through which territorial development is considered, and highlight the urgent policy issue that governance practices in Canada do not relate to the urban system as a whole, severely undermining the collective capability to organize basic functions such as urban expansion.

Pierre Filion of the University of Waterloo examines smart growth as a set of principles militating against sprawl, first tracing the origin of the concept. He offers an insightful account of the factors underlying the persistence of contemporary patterns of urban expansion, in terms of three “systems of interrelated causation.” Filion is critically supportive of smart growth and suggests, that, despite restrictions imposed by the political environment, it can avoid confrontation with these three dynamics, and he provides two schematics to illustrate the claim.

The focus of Guy Mercier, Laval University, is on the Saint-Roch district of Quebec City where a loss of population and investment, and the subsequent failure of large-scale renewal schemes have taken place. Noting the current portrayal of the area as “the Latin Quarter of the 21st century,” Mercier scrutinizes urban narratives associated with the area through the use of contextualization and deconstruction. By untangling key planning issues he illustrates their complexity and their multiple and contradictory meanings, and poses the challenge of developing deeper local democracy.

Conditions of urban Aboriginal populations call for enhanced practices in planning and governance. Ryan Walker of Queen’s University provides a comprehensive set of arguments, closely linked with contemporary planning theory, making the case for planners to engage urban Aboriginal people in new strategies for the production of affordable housing. Research in Winnipeg informs the study, enabling Walker to form a balanced assessment of current practices and to map out new directions.

The contribution of John Meligrana, Queen's University, examines the processes through which governance apparatus in fringe areas of British Columbia has been formed. The myriad organizations, often working at cross-purposes, are described and problems of annexation by existing urban governments are drawn out. Meligrana laments the lack of coordinated structures and planning vision, and his paper should be of interest to planners concerned with the development of planning capabilities and organizations in Canada and abroad.

Ray Tomalty of Co-operative Research and Policy Services in Montréal and Andrejs Skaburskis of Queen's University provide a critical review of practices for setting development charges over time in Ontario. They account for the disconnect between planning goals and fiscal goals in relation to development charges, and suggest that in the context of downloading fiscal responsibilities to municipalities, provincial governments could provide subsidies in lieu of development charges for socially desirable developments.

This stimulating collection of articles is intended as a contribution to the debate on urban policy in Canada. It is a product of the vision and leadership of the Canadian Institute of Planners in collaboration with *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*, the Institute of Urban Studies of the University of Winnipeg and the Association of Canadian University Planning Programs. The guidance and material support of all these organizations is gratefully acknowledged. Realization of this project would not have been possible without widespread collaboration. Andrejs Skaburskis was instrumental moving the project forward in its early stages; authors and reviewers have done dedicated work in a timely fashion; and the editorial and production staff of the *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*, especially Michelle Swanson has been invaluable. I appreciate the work of these contributors, and trust that readers find their efforts worthwhile.

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Editor