

BOOK REVIEWS

Bunting, Trudi and Pierre Filion.

Canadian Cities in Transition: Local Through Global Perspectives.

Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press. 2006. Third Edition.

532 pp.

ISBN: 978015422191.

Canadian Cities in Transition is the third edition of an edited volume that first appeared in 1991. Like its predecessors it attempts to provide a state-of-the-art view of urban Canada. The book is targeted at geographers and planners with most of its contributors drawn from these two disciplines. But its intent is to reach a wider audience and “provide information that will both help readers understand cities and assist them in making judicious urban-related personal and collective decisions,” and “help the next generation of citizens, consumers, experts, business people and politicians in their efforts to solve the urban problems they will inherit” (p.vi). By these measures the book is a success.

Each chapter is clearly written and largely devoid of theoretical considerations that might deter the non-specialist reader. The book’s perspective is deliberately broad both topically and geographically with examples drawn from across the country, although the Toronto region receives more attention than most, and Québec’s urban areas seem underrepresented.

The editors introduce urban Canada in Chapter 1, which provides essential background information on how the country’s urban areas have evolved, and introduces three principal themes that permeate the book: sustainability, uneven development and uncertainty brought by about global competition. The remainder of the book is divided into seven parts. Part 1 considers the mega-trends affecting urban Canada; the features and parameters that shape Canadian cities are examined in Part 2; the processes behind the changing characteristics of downtowns, inner cities and suburbs are considered in Part 3; patterns of employment, housing and commercial activity are reviewed in Part 4; the processes behind public decision-making in urban areas are dealt with in Part 5; pressures that urban areas place upon the natural environment are summarized in Part 6; “pressing urban issues” including slow and rapid population growth, the challen-

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ges of accommodating thousands of new immigrants in concentrated areas and homelessness are covered in Part 7.

Chapter 27 concludes the volume with a summary of key policy issues confronting Canadian cities in the first third of the twenty-first century. One of the biggest policy issues is the unsustainability of Canada's continued suburbanization with its attendant environmental, economic and social costs. Yet as Smith observes, the vast majority of "ordinary" Canadians see "suburbs as providing their best choice of living place" (p. 229). Reconciling the academic assessment of suburbanization's negative consequences with the desire of most Canadians to live there is at the heart of a planning dilemma common to most democratic societies. How does a society maintain its citizens' freedom of choice while at the same time ameliorating the worst effects of those choices? This issue may be resolved by the market, when the price of gasoline forces metropolitan area residents to shorten their commuting distances.

Uneven development within and across Canada is at the heart of another key policy issue. Despite the role of cities as job creators, they remain desperate for revenue to meet service demands. For Toronto this has meant facilitating the construction of high-rise condominiums for upper-income groups in and around its downtown. This process has produced "islands of wealth" (p. 447) in areas that used to be diverse, and accentuated the social and economic polarization common to post-industrial societies.

If there is one omission from the collection, it concerns the fate of small to medium-sized metropolitan areas located in resource hinterlands. What should be the appropriate urban policy for Thunder Bay, Saint John, Sudbury, and Chicoutimi-Jonquière, whose populations are either in decline or stagnant and which face rising service demands from an aging population?

Economic uncertainty brought about by globalization is likely to threaten the economic base of many municipalities, and while none of the authors proclaim clairvoyance, Simons and McCann come closest with their prediction that four mega-regions, Toronto, Montreal, the Georgia-Basin and the Calgary-Edmonton corridor will form the "strategic growth points in Canada's future urban system" (p. 63). And it is within these areas that the issues of environmental, economic and social sustainability will confront policy makers. In the remainder of the country slow growth and population decline will provide a different set of challenges.

In sum, the book provides an excellent survey of the many challenges confronting urban Canada. Our ability to meet these challenges will determine the overall quality of life for most Canadians, and as such the book deserves to be read beyond its core audience of urban planners and geographers. It is highly recommended.

Michael J. Broadway
 Associate Dean,
 College of Arts & Sciences,
 Northern Michigan University

Bogart, William T.

Don't Call it Sprawl: Metropolitan Structure in the Twenty-First Century.

New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

196 pp.

ISBN: 052167803X.

The city of today is the result of someone's answer to the problems of yesterday. Because of this, William Bogart argues, one cannot describe a city in a specific moment in time and call it "sprawl" as cities, settlements, and rural areas evolve over time.

The primary purpose of this publication is to convince the reader, through economic analysis of historical trends in metropolitan development, that the use of the term "sprawl" is not helpful in understanding the structure of cities around the world. A quotation relating to some historic precedent precedes most sections and is used to set the context for the upcoming analysis by relating that history to today and to the future.

Largely geared towards economists, the book is ripe with data, statistics, and in-depth discussions of those data sets, using economic analysis and deconstruction. The author does a convincing job of setting out historical data about a sampling of cities, primarily in the United States, in various stages of their development. An American perspective dominates the book, but the author himself points to this as a constraint on his argument. The benefit is that within the United States there exists a cross section of metropolitan areas in different stages of development. Using that cross section, and applying commonly held beliefs, e.g. 'that Los Angeles is the most sprawling metropolitan area which is rife with negative consequences', the author is able to compare metropolitan areas using economic data and analysis to lay quiet most of those arguments, showing that they are largely based on anecdotal evidence.

Bogart bases his analysis on three premises: an emphasis on examining the connections between different parts of metropolitan areas; that mass transit was only dominant for a certain period of time as the solution to mobility needs, and that its time has now passed; and that the development of a metropolitan area is so gradual that these changes cannot be perceived if one only looks at a specific time in the recent past.

It is difficult to dispute the premise that, to look forward, we must analyze what has transpired in the past. Historical trends are valuable indicators of where we are going and the same holds true for metropolitan development. However, by using economic data concerning taxes, profits, location of commercial vs. residential uses the author demonstrates that what may be commonly referred to as “sprawl” is really just a natural phenomenon in the evolution of metropolitan structure.

T.J. Cieciora, Registered Professional Planner
Design Plan Services Inc.
Town Planning Consultants
Toronto, Ontario

Elliott, Donald L.

A Better Way to Zone: Ten Principles to Create More Livable Cities.

Washington: Island Press, 2008.

239 pp.

ISBN: 1597261815.

Zoning is at one and the same time the most boring and ordinary of implementation strategies, the most comprehensive and powerful of regulatory tools, and perhaps the single greatest challenge to modern urban planning. Don Elliott, a well-known planning lawyer, takes a serious look at what is needed to reform zoning in order to make it more relevant in the context of the post-industrial metropolises in which most people in the developed world now choose to live.

The book is organized into eight chapters, with a separate introduction, a suggested reading list, some detailed notes, a brief bibliography, and a short but eminently useful index. The first chapter provides a brief history of modern American zoning and its hybrid evolution from standard enabling legislation (1920-1940) through planned unit developments (1940-1970), performance zoning (1970-1990), and form-based zoning (1990-present). The second chapter discusses the failures of traditional Euclidean zoning, including unnecessary complexity, a moiety of false assumptions, and lack of flexibility in implementation. The third chapter discusses major forces for change in the ongoing urban development process, including the vast size of the North American real estate market, tax revolts and other gross limitations, transportation system connectivity and housing affordability issues, and increasing citizen opposition to an ever-widening variety of ‘undesirable’ land uses. The fourth chapter discusses related governance issues, including efficiency and effectiveness, fairness and understandability, responsiveness and the need for what Elliott refers to as ‘predictable flexibility.’ The fifth chap-

ter discusses the legal framework for change, mainly in the context of evolving U.S. constitutional requirements. The sixth chapter briefly considers eight lessons learned from a century of zoning experience, with implications for changing zoning for the better. The seventh chapter details ten methods to improve Euclidean hybrid zoning, including which failed assumptions, land use drivers, and governance issues are likely to be affected most, as well as the legality of each such method within the U.S. planning system. The eighth chapter discusses implementation strategies to reform traditional zoning ordinances along more modern lines in a more comprehensive, meaningful, and effective manner.

The book is easy to read and well worth reading more than once. While it is not as detailed or thorough as it might be, it is not intended to provide all of the answers for any one specific city, but rather to guide one on where to look and how to find such answers for a broad range of cities in potentially much different urban and regional milieus. There are occasional references to Canadian zoning, but most of the emphasis is on the U.S. planning and zoning tradition.

The author has done an excellent job of illustrating the current weaknesses of zoning, and identifying ways that may potentially reduce or eliminate such weaknesses through administrative regulatory reform. What the author fails to do is justify whether zoning in any form will still be relevant in the modern post-industrial metropolis of tomorrow. Building regulations may always be necessary, and activities can be regulated as activities, which are dynamic, rather than land use categories, which are all too often as cold and static as the grave. Subdivision regulations are needed for greenfield developments, but are these quite as necessary for brownfield developments, which will be of increasing importance as population growth slows, and cities mature into more stable versions of themselves, in the coming decades?

The book is primarily intended for professional planners and others actively engaged in urban development practice in either the public or private sectors. It might easily be transferred to classroom use as well, particularly in the hands of someone with practical experience in the application of zoning to specific urban planning and development problems. For example, a studio course in which all (or part) of an old-style Euclidean zoning ordinance is modernized by the students along the lines suggested by Elliott would benefit greatly from this clearly-written and well-organized guide to the current practice of—and future improvements to—contentious zoning regulations.

Erik Tillman Ferguson
School of Architecture and Design
American University of Sharjah.

Frisken, Frances

The Public Metropolis: The Political Dynamics of Urban Expansion in the Toronto Region: 1924-2003.

Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 2007.

363 pp.

ISBN: 1551303302.

The Public Metropolis is a detailed, nuanced history of politics, policy, planning, and growth in the Toronto region. Frisken's intensive qualitative and statistical research produces a sophisticated chronology of how multi-level governmental politics, individual actors, and demographic changes have woven together to form the processes of change in the Toronto region since the post-World War I period. As stated in the introduction of the book, Frisken presents the history of these developments in order to inform and assess the "options for addressing challenges facing the region at the beginning of the 21st century" (30). This active notion of historical accounting, one where history informs analyses of and speculations on current and future urbanization practices, is a core benefit of the book. Frisken's skillful use of interdisciplinary approaches to present and decipher urban transformations over the course of the mid-to-late 20th century and onwards results in a book that is fulfilling and relevant for academics working in a variety of disciplinary environments, as well as policy-makers, planners, and other urban practitioners.

However, her central argument is quite a short one—that the interventions of the government of Ontario in Toronto's central and regional growth has created the city's consistent development over the course of the twentieth century. Although a helpful argument in addressing a myriad associations, tensions, and compatibilities between the province and different levels and scalar arrangements of lower tiered governance, it does serve more as a broad framework for encasing the abundant data rather than function as a richly developed theoretical argument.

The sheer abundance of this data and density of details often overtakes the general assertion presented in the introduction; so much so that the reader is often compelled to return to the overall framework at the start of the book as a reminder. As such, the structure of the findings could have been organized in a different way—perhaps as a thematic rather than a chronological presentation of empirical information and analysis.

As it stands, the book's chronological organization, although tied to topical issues such as the example of "Chapter Four: 1975-1985 Provincial Retrenchment and Local Inaction," concentrates the reader's attention on sorting through the chronological developments of multi-scalar government associations in relation to time periods documented in the other chapters. This presents a thematic

disconnect and detracts from fully focusing on the development of urban issues such as the ones presented with close attention to specificity—housing, transportation, utilities infrastructure, planning policy and legislation, and growth management, for example. If the book's chapters were organized thematically, with a chronological approach to each chapter, the details in relation to a theme or issue would appear less fragmented and also provide an easier format for accessing information.

Despite this drawback, the book serves as an outstanding reference for academics interested in the history of growth, development, and transformation in Canada's largest urban centre and urbanized region. For teachers and students, it provides a helpful resource for factual information, as the data is comprehensive and compelling. The tables of data are helpful, well-organized, and user friendly. For urban policy-makers and planners, the book also acts as a rich reference guide due to its sophisticated presentation of the interrelationships between politics and planning. *The Public Metropolis* is a recommended read and an excellent Canadian scholarly resource—making written notes on the abundant data while reading is advised.

Dr. Susannah Bunce
Department of Social Sciences,
University of Toronto at Scarborough

Varady, David P. and Carole C. Walker.

Neighborhood Choices: Section 8 Housing Vouchers and Residential Mobility.

New Brunswick, NJ: Center for Urban Policy Research, 2007.

184 pp.

ISBN: 0882851802.

American housing policy has veered over the past number of years toward efforts to spatially deconcentrate subsidized households, dispersing them in an effort to achieve greater levels of racial and class integration. The chief tool used in this effort is the Section 8, or Housing Choice Voucher program. The Section 8 subsidy is a portable housing allowance that families can take with them and, with some restrictions, use on the market to lease-up apartment units from private owners. The program has steadily gained prominence among U.S. housing program providers because it allows greater choice for subsidized households than do traditional project-based subsidies, and has resulted in a greater dispersion of subsidized families than other forms of housing assistance.

Since the 1990s, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has begun to convert many of its project-based subsidies into vouchers,

a process called 'vouchering out.' The dispersal potential of Section 8 is limited, however, because the vouchers can only be used on units that are at or below a rent threshold, and can only be used where landlords agree to accept the voucher. In practice, this has generally limited Section 8 voucher holders to poorer neighborhoods within metropolitan areas. Seeking to increase the geographic dispersion of subsidized households, HUD has gone beyond the basic Section 8 program to create special 'mobility programs' such as the Gautreaux program and the Moving To Opportunities (MTO) program. These programs provide vouchers that can only be used in low-poverty (in the case of MTO) or racially-integrated neighborhoods (in the case of the Gautreaux program) along with mobility counselling that will help low-income families make such moves. The ironic tradeoff is that program participants actually enjoy less choice in these mobility programs than they do in the regular Section 8 program because they are forced to use their vouchers only in certain approved neighborhoods.

David Varady and Carole Walker have written a short book that provides empirical evidence on how poor families use the Section 8 subsidy, and they conclude that HUD's insistence on geographic dispersion via mobility programs is both unnecessary and unwise. The book presents findings from two separate studies the authors carried out for HUD. The first is a study of vouchered-out projects in four cities. Varady and Walker tracked residents who were forced to move and given Section 8 vouchers in the process. The second study is an examination of the regular Section 8 program in Alameda County, California. Alameda is the county that encompasses Oakland, California and its surrounding communities, and it has been much more successful in getting Section 8 voucher recipients into the suburbs than most.

The chapter on the vouchered out projects provides important information on how families react when forced to move away from their subsidized homes. The four projects studies were chosen for vouchering out based on how distressed the families were, fiscally, physically, and socially. Families dislocated in the process tended not to move far away from the original site. In that regard, they probably disappointed HUD policymakers who might have hoped for a greater degree of suburbanization or relocation to what dispersalists like to call "neighborhoods of opportunity." Varady and Walker show, however, that longer moves and relocation into such neighbourhoods are not necessary for residents to report higher levels of housing and neighbourhood satisfaction.

In the chapter presenting the findings from the Alameda County study, the authors report that families who managed to use their Section 8 voucher to move to the suburbs had no more difficulty finding a unit than did other families, nor were they more likely to have problems adjusting to their new neighbourhoods. Nevertheless, suburban movers did relocate to neighbourhoods with higher socio-economic status than those who remained in the central cities. Oddly, the reasons

for Alameda County's success in getting families into the suburbs is not one of the research questions pursued by the authors or by HUD.

In between these major findings is a wealth of detail and data on the housing searches of Section 8 households, the neighbourhood characteristics valued by the families studied, and their degree of housing and neighbourhood satisfaction as it relates to their neighbourhoods of origin and their ultimate destinations. Stylistically, the book is heavy on data reporting. It reads a bit like a research report in that respect. However, the literature review in the first chapter sets the stage nicely for the specific analyses to follow. These findings have been reported in journal articles before, but having them together in this format makes the book a useful reference.

Edward G. Goetz, Professor
Director, Urban and Regional Planning Program
University of Minnesota
Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs