

PLANNING

Toronto

The Planners, The Plans, Their Legacies
1940-80

RICHARD WHITE



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Cloud Garden |
Geoffrey James, from
the Series Toronto,
2003-2006

Introduction

TORONTO MAY NOT BE, by most measures, an especially important place. It has spawned no iconic cultural expression, as Buenos Aires has spawned the tango, Paris the Impressionists, and Chicago the blues. It has no world-famous art or architecture drawing tourists to its galleries and streets save for that done by internationally celebrated architects and artists whose styles developed and matured elsewhere. Its site is more or less forgettable. Great people rarely name it as the source of their character and vision. It has never even staged an Olympics – three other Canadian cities have – and not for a half-century have any of its professional sports teams attained the sort of “dynasty” status that elevates a city’s name.

Yet Toronto is known and admired internationally nonetheless. It is usually classed as some level of “global city” on the basis of its economic significance and reach, and it is widely recognized for its multicultural population. But it is also, above all, considered “a city that works,” a label that was first applied by an American journalist in the mid-1970s, when American cities were notorious for not working, and the appellation has stuck.¹ Toronto is unquestionably a fully fledged metropolis now, teeming with the products of human enterprise, savoury and unsavoury, that make big-city life so captivating, yet despite its enormous size and bewildering pace of change – it is among the largest and fastest-growing urban regions in North America – the city, even most of its downtown, remains remarkably liveable. The acclaimed

actor Peter Ustinov apparently once quipped that Toronto looked like “a kind of New York operated by the Swiss”; where and when Ustinov actually said this seems to have disappeared into the mists of time, so what he meant remains a matter of conjecture, but he is generally understood to have meant that he found the city to be culturally rich yet clean and well managed.² This characterization also struck a chord and is still often cited. All told, it is this notion of being a liveable, functional metropolis that is Toronto’s chief claim to fame, undistinguished though the city may be by other conventional measures.

From this has followed a belief that Toronto is well planned. But one need not be an expert logician to see gaps in this syllogism. Planning is, after all, just one of many forces that make a city what it is. Is a prosperous, functional city necessarily that way because of its planning? Opponents of state interventions might well argue that Toronto works *in spite of* its planning and that it would work even better with less planning – and they would not be entirely without evidence for their claim. Much is made of the fact that the American urban guru Jane Jacobs lived in Toronto from 1968 until her death in 2006, and so thoroughly does Jacobs embody current planning ideals that her simple presence seems to have contributed to the city’s reputation as well planned. But the logic is tenuous here too since her personal impact on the city’s planning has never been empirically demonstrated, not to mention that Jacobs herself was actually quite hostile toward planning, especially by public authorities. Then, when one moves to the actual planning on which Toronto’s reputation as a good planner might be based, an intriguing contradiction arises. The city’s best-regarded planning is probably that of its metropolitan planners in the 1950s and 1960s, who established principles such as a strict urban boundary, comparatively high suburban residential densities, metropolitan-wide infrastructure systems, and public transit as a central element of transportation, all of which are greatly valued to this day. Here is where one might find Ustinov’s metaphorical Swiss. Another highly regarded planning program is that of the City’s reform regime in the 1970s, well known for limiting downtown commercial development – its forty-five-foot “height bylaw” is legendary – and for promoting a liveable inner city. But, interestingly, these two programs are anathema to one another. The former was top-down and metropolitanist, and the latter predominantly bottom-up and localist. The former proposed the Spadina Expressway; the latter opposed it. Can two contradictory programs create one good reputation?

It is with such thoughts in mind that this history of Toronto’s planning has been carried out. Is Toronto well planned? Has planning helped make it

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a city that works? It is hard to answer such questions definitively, of course. As soon as one starts evaluating plans as good or bad, one trips over the question “for whom?” Planning so often sits at the intersection of competing interests that one side’s good planning can easily be the other side’s bad planning. And determining whether planning is the main cause of any aspect of the city is next to impossible with so many factors in play. What this history can do, however, is show where planning has and has not had an effect; in other words, it can answer the question of whether planning has made any difference. And when one adds up the legacies of the city’s various planning activities over the forty-some years of this study, the answer is that it has. Planning has mattered. The idea advanced some years ago by Toronto journalist Robert Fulford that the city happened by accident – which he would probably acknowledge was based on impressions rather than actual research – simply does not stand up. Admittedly, some major planning initiatives had little or no effect, such as the Province’s regional planning program, and some important developments in the city were essentially unplanned, such as the mass private gentrification of the inner city. But such failures – if that is the word for them – are not the whole picture. Plenty of planning programs did have substantial impact. The two just mentioned, that of the metropolitan planners and that of the reform planners, are probably the most consequential, but other plans and planning ideas have shaped the city as well. And one should bear in mind that the impact of planning can result from prescribed *inaction* as well as action, as one sees in the planners’ position against disrupting residential neighbourhoods, first espoused in the early 1960s, and against building new roads, explicitly taken in the 1970s, both of which have had so much impact that they very nearly define the existing city.

To this general conclusion, however, must be appended some important caveats. First, this study reveals quite clearly that planning, notwithstanding its impact, cannot possibly be deemed the sole, or even the prime, creator of the city’s physical form. Probably nobody would ever say that it was, but it warrants mention nevertheless. Toronto’s basic structure and land-use pattern were set well before planning (as defined here) was in place. This includes, somewhat ironically, the century-old streetcar suburbs that are lauded today as paragons of good planning; granted, they have their present form because planning policies protected them, so planning has had some effect, but it did not create them. Furthermore, this study has uncovered, time and again, the extent to which broader international factors such as economic cycles, immigration patterns, and demographic changes have moulded the city of Toronto.

So too has it revealed the considerable impact of private property owners, large and small. Then there are the numerous other public policies, from Canadian import tariffs, to provincial housing programs, to local building regulations, that shaped the city. At times, in fact, the limits of planning's impact have been as striking a finding of this study as its actual effect. So planners and planning played a part, channelling international forces and challenging private interests, and in doing so they made a difference, but one must be careful not to overdraw their significance.

Second, planning has never been fully supported by Torontonians. Populist and localist thinking runs deep in the city's and region's political culture; citizens, at times through elected representatives, have derailed more than one major planning thrust, notably the 1943 Master Plan, the 1970 Toronto-Centred Region planning scheme, and, essentially, the entire Plan for the Urban Structure in the late 1970s. Even formally enacted plans have often met stiff citizen resistance. Suburban property owners and their elected councils bridled at restrictions that the Metropolitan Plan imposed on their property; neighbourhood groups objected to high-rise apartment buildings as soon as the plans allowing them appeared. In fact, conflict between the planners and the people runs through this entire history; Toronto today is not the city that its planners wanted but the product of repeated compromises between its planners and its people. That is not to say that the planners had it wrong and the people had it right, and that Toronto's planning history is the story of a "glorious revolution" in which the people rose up and overthrew the technocrats – a surprisingly common trope in recent histories of planning. The research undertaken in this study does not yield such a narrative. Toronto's planners, even those of the now discredited modernist persuasion, saw and understood the city's problems rather well – the old urban fabric *did* need to be renewed, motor vehicles *did* need to be accommodated – and the solutions they proposed often show considerable sensitivity. The planners are not the villains in this history. Neither are the people, for populist opposition to planning schemes has at times clearly benefitted the city.

And third, it must be emphasized that the conclusion offered above refers only to the years of this study, 1940 to 1980. Planning now, in the early twenty-first century, is often criticized for its inability to achieve self-declared goals such as reducing automobile dependence and curbing urban sprawl, a criticism that seems well founded. But planning now operates under an entirely different paradigm. It often strives to change public behaviour rather than to

fulfill public desires, and because of this its goals are much more difficult to achieve – at least so it appears to this historian. Be that as it may, planning's inability to do what it now strives to do should have no bearing on assessing how effective it was in the past.



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CHAPTER 1

Planning Takes Root

1940–54

THE PLANNING SYSTEM that has shaped – or tried to shape – modern Toronto began to emerge during the Second World War and became more fully institutionalized after the war ended. This basic narrative has long been recognized by those who know something of the city’s planning history. The chronology of major planning events certainly suggests such a narrative – the city’s first comprehensive planning board was established in 1942, its first Master Plan was produced in 1943–44, and its first Official Plan was approved in 1949 – and the advent of planning at a time when government was actively managing an enormous war effort has always made good sense. But historical research, as it tends to do, has exposed some loose threads in this largely unexamined tapestry of explanation. For one thing, the two major plans – the 1943 Master Plan and the 1949 Official Plan – bear no resemblance to each other, so clearly the latter was not just an official version of the former. What is one to make of this? Moreover, neither plan pays much heed to the war. Surely the war was a factor. But what actually was the connection between

1.0
The city of tomorrow
imagined, c. 1944:
superhighway inter-
change near Bloor
and Shaw Streets. |
CPB, “Third Annual
Report of the City
Planning Board of
Toronto,” 1944, detail
of Plate 33 [UTL]

planning and the war? Rather surprisingly, considering the supposedly widespread acceptance of government intervention during the war, the 1943 Master Plan received only lukewarm support at city council and was unanimously rejected by the Board of Control. Planning did take root in Toronto during these years – research does not challenge this basic point – but just barely. The soil was none too welcoming, and the climate far from nurturing.

PLANNING AND THE WAR

Toronto in Wartime

The claim that Toronto was badly disrupted by the Second World War might seem rather dubious, even close to absurd, to anyone with an international perspective. The early years of the war saw Paris occupied, London bombed, and Leningrad and Moscow, by mid-1941, under all-out attack. Toronto residents being compelled to live in trailers, endure long waits for streetcars, and pay inflated prices for household essentials can hardly compare to what was being endured in the actual theatre of war. But Toronto's wartime disruptions were real enough for those who lived through them and were made all the more distressing by the fact that so many had a family member or close friend overseas who at any time might be placed in the line of fire, and by the fear, in the early years of the war especially, that things could get much worse at any moment. There was, admittedly, a certain excitement in it all as jobs proliferated, horizons expanded, and challenges were overcome – a sentiment obviously not experienced by people in cities that were truly at war – but the gravity of the war always loomed, eliciting a widespread fatalism and extraordinary intensity of purpose. These were unsettling times, even in Toronto, Canada.¹

The city was grappling with shortcomings in its physical infrastructure well before the war even began – a legacy of the Great Depression and an abiding aversion to public debt – and these problems would persist into the war years, aggravating its wartime predicament. A new sewage plant had been needed for years.² The existing facility, built in 1913 near the site of the present-day plant on the eastern lakeshore, was so overloaded that sewage often flowed through untreated, and its settling tanks were so primitive and outdated that they released effluvia that few could endure. So foul were its odours that some nearby residents had successfully sued the City for creating an environmental nuisance. Largely because of this lawsuit, the City had engaged engineering

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consultants early in the 1930s to propose a solution, and the engineers had advised the City to build an entirely new plant, with up-to-date treatment facilities. Council reluctantly agreed, but with public finances what they were, nothing was done. In 1939, just prior to the outbreak of war, council began considering a simpler, cheaper solution, but a board of expert advisors brought in to review the matter rejected this dodge, insisting that a complete new plant was essential.³

There was also a problem with roads. Torontonians, like most North Americans, had taken to the automobile with great enthusiasm during the 1920s. Vehicle registrations in the city rose from 11,000 in 1916 to 159,000 in 1941.⁴ Yet civic authorities had done little to accommodate vehicles, and traffic congestion had worsened year upon year. It was especially bad on the downtown streets that carried streetcars, where rush-hour traffic often came to a near standstill. A 1929 planning commission – an ad hoc advisory body outside the municipal administration – had recommended that the city open up its lower downtown with grand boulevards and public squares, but this scheme had been voted down by the electorate, largely on account of its cost, and the commission that made the recommendations was soon disbanded. Monumental City Beautiful schemes such as this had long since had their day.⁵ Senior city administrators had then struck a planning *committee* of city staff that in May 1930 prepared an ambitious, though entirely practical, plan of “street extensions, widenings and improvements.”⁶ But public finances hampered its implementation as well, and after an entire decade, few of its improvements had even been started. The central city’s roads remained in their pre-automobile form.

Another concern was the rundown state of inner-city housing. Though Toronto had not been a big city for long – its main period of growth had been before and after the First World War – some residential areas in the city centre and along the original rail corridors dated from the 1860s and 1870s, most of which housed workers who held low-paid, insecure jobs in the nearby abattoirs, factories, and warehouses.⁷ As the owners of these properties generally lacked either the means or inclination to maintain them, many had fallen into disrepair. Such is the setting, physical and social, of Hugh Garner’s classic Toronto novel *Cabbagetown* – a neighbourhood he famously labelled “the largest Anglo-Saxon slum in North America.”⁸ The situation had grown worse than ever during the Depression, prompting the provincial lieutenant governor, Herbert A. Bruce, to create a special committee to study the matter, and Bruce’s committee had reported in 1934 with an unequivocal call for

public action – a city planning commission to further investigate the problem, the demolition of several thousand dwellings, and their immediate replacement by new low-rent public housing.⁹ Little came of Bruce's recommendations. Council did pass a bylaw requiring building owners to maintain a certain standard, and the Public Works Department began inspecting older housing for compliance.¹⁰ But as with roads and the sewage plant, city finances impeded action, though in this case ideological opposition to providing the poor with publicly funded housing was probably at work too.

These problems all still remained – unsolved and seemingly unsolvable – when war broke out in September 1939, but they quickly lost their urgency. Canada's declaration of war met with enthusiastic support from the overwhelmingly British population of Toronto. Volunteers flooded the recruiting offices, and the public watched proudly as new recruits marched about in preparation for deployment overseas.¹¹ Apart from enlistments, the war seems to have affected the city very little that first winter, but that quickly changed in the spring of 1940, when France fell and a German invasion of Britain seemed imminent. Toronto's wartime transformation began.

The easiest change to see, and the prime cause of many subsequent social disruptions, is the vast increase in industrial production as Canada hastily mobilized to supply the Allied war effort.¹² Toronto had never seen anything like it. As early as August 1940, a local newspaper referred to the city's "unprecedented industrial development."¹³ By early 1941, several big government-owned Crown corporations were in operation in and around the city. Research Enterprises Limited in Leaside (just northeast of the city limits) was making radar components and precision optical glass, and General Engineering (GECO), just beyond the city boundary in Scarborough Township, was assembling munitions. Both were entirely new operations on previously undeveloped sites. Lesser-known Crown corporations such as Toronto Shipbuilding Company, at the foot of Dufferin Street, and Small Arms Limited, on the lakeshore just west of the city in Lakeview, were created as well. Farther out in the metropolitan area were Victory Aircraft in Malton and the huge shell-filling plant of Defence Industries Limited (later called the Ajax plant) in southern Pickering Township. Numerous private producers also contributed. Rogers Majestic (radios) and John Inglis (appliances) were two large firms on the downtown Toronto waterfront that converted to war production, Rogers to radar equipment and Inglis to Bren guns.¹⁴ Other manufacturers, such as Campbell's Soup (in Mimico), Dunlop Rubber and Tire, and Anaconda Copper (both in New Toronto), kept making essentially what they had always

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I.I

Cars pull aside to permit passage of the 48th Highlanders on Prince's Boulevard in the Canadian National Exhibition grounds, 7 October 1939. Young boys are present in nearly every photograph of a public military

display during the war, suggesting that martial life held considerable appeal in mid-century boyhood culture and that mid-century city children lived free of their parents' gaze. | CTA, Fonds 1266, Item 61029

made but in much larger quantities. Countless smaller firms were transformed as well, such as ES&A Robinson Canada, a British-owned paper bag manufacturer on Dupont Street in Toronto, which built a new three-storey facility in Leaside to meet wartime demand.

Several of these plants had huge workforces, with multiple shifts, labouring around the clock. Research Enterprises employed 7,500, Small Arms 5,500, and Victory Aircraft in Malton peaked at 9,500 in late 1944.¹⁵ By 1942, Toronto had gained 83,000 new industrial jobs and was being overrun with new arrivals.¹⁶ Military enlistments countered this somewhat, but still the city's population was rising and would continue to do so throughout the war, boosted by the tendency of whole families to migrate if they could. Moving workers to and from these large industrial plants, especially the entirely new ones, was a problem of the first order. Private cars offered no solution, given wartime rationing of fuel and rubber, limited parking space, and the fact that most new jobs paid just factory workers' wages. Public transit was the only hope, and the staff at the Toronto Transportation Commission responded by carefully counting and mapping workers' movements and devising new routes and services. Transit service downtown was pushed to the limit for the Rogers and Inglis plants on Fleet Street, as well as the cluster of Eaton's manufacturing shops along Yonge north of Queen Street. Farther west, the Queen street-car was extended to the Small Arms plant in October 1942.¹⁷

The city's housing market was swamped. Rental accommodations were effectively unavailable by 1942, and rental rates were rising. Householders

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I.2

Crowds of workers – most of them quite well dressed – prepare to board Toronto Transportation Commission buses outside the

Research Enterprises Limited plant in Leaside, 10 June 1943. | CTA, Fonds 16, Series 71, Item 14442-I

were doubling up and some private homes were being converted to rooming houses – changes that were opposed by some property owners until the federal Wartime Prices and Trade Board overruled them – but still the supply fell far short of demand.¹⁸ In the words of one report, Toronto was facing the “most acute housing shortage in half a century,” and city council was under constant pressure from the federal government to remedy the problem.¹⁹ In 1943, it permitted house-trailers in many locations, both public and private, and the following year it began erecting temporary housing on the edges of several city parks.²⁰ It was ordered to inventory sites for additional new housing, which it did initially in 1942 and then more thoroughly in 1944, although it found only a few buildable sites, most of which were quite small.²¹ The situation was different at the major war plants outside town. They were beyond the reach of public transportation, so on-site accommodation was nearly essential, and land for new housing was generally available. The Crown corporation Wartime Housing Limited built housing adjacent to the Victory Aircraft plant in Malton and the Ajax shell plant in Pickering, laying out residential streets and hastily constructing several rows of the distinctive, steep-roofed bungalows still usually known as “wartime houses.”²² The whole predicament was described, time and again, as a housing crisis, which it was, though it was quite different from the crisis identified by Lieutenant Governor Bruce before the war.

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1.3
Newly constructed
wartime houses north
of the Ajax shell plant,
Pickering Township,
c. 1941. | Courtesy Town
of Ajax, Ajax Archives

At the heart of all this activity was government, which the war was transforming into something unlike anything Canadians had ever witnessed. Building houses was just one of many things it did.²³ The federal government controlled virtually all industrial and commercial activity, including labour relations, wages and prices, and natural resource distribution. It responded to social dislocations caused by the industrial growth, creating employment and housing registries, day nurseries for mothers who worked in war industries, and of course, since 1940, national unemployment insurance – the first significant element of the welfare state. What is intriguing about this government growth, however, is how little of it occurred at City Hall. Not that Toronto's municipal government was untouched; civic administrators certainly knew of Toronto's population growth, housing crisis, day nurseries, and transportation challenges, and at times were prompted to take some action. But municipal records from these years reveal surprisingly few departures from routine: property taxes still needed to be collected, parks still had to be tended, and back lanes still needed to be built. While federal government expenditures increased by a factor of four over the course of the war, City of Toronto expenditures remained nearly constant.²⁴ The well-known wartime growth of government was not a municipal phenomenon.

What did grow in cities, however, was civic activism. Canadians were signing up and volunteering like never before, or since. At the heart of this surely was the war itself, widely supported from the start. A recent study of Verdun, Quebec, shows that appeals for public participation in salvage drives, civil defence preparations, and war bond sales consistently found enthusiastic responses.²⁵ But this was more than a wish to aid the military effort, in Toronto at least, because citizens worked to address local social problems too. There was, for example, considerable public involvement in addressing Toronto's housing crisis, and the city's day nurseries were staffed largely by

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1.4
Public rally and exercise demonstration sponsored by the Young Women's Christian Association at Varsity Arena, University of Toronto, during the height of the war. | AO, YWCA of Metropolitan Toronto Papers, F 794-6-0-12

volunteers from the local Women's Voluntary Services.²⁶ It is in this realm of civic engagement, more than in the municipal government per se, that the war's impact on Toronto public life is most visible. And nowhere is this more evident than in the work of preparing for the postwar world.

Reconstruction

Preparations began surprisingly early. In September 1941, long before anyone knew when or how the war would end, the Canadian government established its initial Committee on Reconstruction, the earliness of this action reflecting both Ottawa's awareness of how ill-prepared it had been to re-establish the country's affairs after the previous world war and the enthusiasms of a highly interventionist brain trust already well ensconced in the federal civil service.²⁷ This committee did little at first. Government was still focused on mobilizing for the war, and Prime Minister Mackenzie King was not as keen to take charge of the country's future as many civil servants thought he should be. But the wheels were turning. Then in January 1943, in the Speech from the Throne that opened a new session of Parliament, Mackenzie King promised to work toward creating a postwar Canada where "all peoples may enjoy equality of opportunity and a sense of security," and to establish federal social programs to help achieve this goal.²⁸ Something called reconstruction had been born.

Reconstruction was not just a government program, or even a collection of programs. It was a mindset, a profoundly utopian mindset, fuelled by a faith in victory, by a longing to move beyond a generation of deprivation and

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insecurity, and perhaps also by a need to rationalize the war's destruction and loss. By late 1942, such thinking pervaded the minds of Canadians. It shows in a special issue of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada's journal, in a course of lectures at the University of Toronto, and in the grandiloquent prose of F. Cyril James, head of the government's Committee on Reconstruction: "Reconstruction ... is the dreams of many millions of men and women who today sacrifice everything that makes life worth living in order that their children may tomorrow enjoy a fairer Canada and a happier world."²⁹ And it jumps from the pages of consumer advertising. "TODAY I live in Barracks," declares the uniformed airman in an advertisement for Marboleum flooring, "But we're planning our home of TOMORROW," adds his wife, fingernails painted and hair nicely coiffed.³⁰ It did have a practical side. The Government of Canada, believing that a recession was likely to follow the war, carefully devised programs for deregulating the command economy and facilitating the transition from military to domestic industrial production. And it provided generous veterans' benefits, which had a real effect. But even these practical programs, as historian Doug Owsram has put it, were premised on a "curious mixture of anxiety and optimism."³¹ Canada would not return to what it had been before the war; it would be *reconstructed* into something better.

Just two days after the 1943 Throne Speech, Toronto City Council established a special committee to study Toronto's postwar situation, its quick response doubtless reflecting an expectation that money might follow Ottawa's promises. And with public activism at such a height, the committee soon included representation from church groups, women's groups, labour groups, youth groups, bankers, veterans, manufacturers, and many others – which in turn necessitated forming a steering committee so that meetings could actually take place in one room.³² By November 1943, the steering committee was recommending a more permanent structure for itself, which council accepted, and in December a body called the Toronto Reconstruction Council was created to work with federal and provincial governments once the war ended, whenever that should be. It was still a sizable body, consisting of single representatives from some fifty groups – ranging from the Adult Education Association to the Young Men's Hebrew Association, and including established institutions such as Canadian National Railways and the Roman Catholic Church – but it functioned. Regular meetings began in February 1944.

The reconstruction mindset also reawakened concern over the city's run-down housing. Of course, the problem had never gone away. The Housing

1.5
Delaney Crescent, 15
June 1944. Although
much of the city's old
working-class housing
was physically dilapi-
dated, it was often
teeming with family
life, creating a chal-
lenge of the first order
for the planners of the
day. | CTA, Fonds 200,
Series 372, Subseries 33,
Item 930



Department had been inspecting and photographing substandard buildings for several years and had acquired good knowledge of the problem, but in 1942 city council set up a new committee of voluntary groups – among them the Welfare Council of Toronto and the Local Council of Women – to study it yet again. The committee's findings, reported in 1943, could not have surprised anyone.³³ Like the Bruce Report nine years earlier, it found “an acute and urgent housing problem” among low-income residents, with plenty of leaky basements, vermin (rats, bedbugs, or cockroaches), and non-functioning toilets. The purpose of this new committee is not entirely clear. Housing reformers may have grown concerned about how much attention the other housing crisis – the shortage of industrial workers' housing – was receiving, and wanted to ensure that *their* crisis remained on the agenda. But the growing reconstruction mindset, and the related possibility of federal government money, was certainly at work as well. Toronto's housing reformers were determined that a reconstructed Toronto would include social housing.

So too does reconstruction play a part in a proposal from the Toronto Transportation Commission (TTC) for a new rapid transit system, submitted to the mayor and Board of Control in January 1942.³⁴ The new system was not to be built now, with the war still on, but later, as a “postwar project,” when it would provide valuable employment opportunities and a general improvement in civic life. The proposal called for an underground double rail line beneath both Queen and Yonge/Bay Streets for use by existing streetcars, freeing the streets for cars and trucks. Though most of the line outside the downtown would be on a below-grade, open track-bed, and not

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underground per se, the project was expensive nonetheless, at some \$42 million. The TTC offered to pay half, but the City was expected to cover the rest – meaning a major public expenditure. The mayor and controllers generally approved but withheld any formal endorsement until the new sewage plant was completed. It looked feasible, though, because the war had transformed municipal finances. Local relief expenditures in 1943 had fallen to 18 percent of what they had been in 1939.³⁵

Also emerging directly from the “anxiety and optimism” of reconstruction was the City Planning Board. Its genesis can be dated as early as June 1941, when a special committee of council, charged with stimulating employment, recommended to the Board of Control that the City adopt a “long-term and comprehensive plan with respect to post-war works and undertakings,” and that it establish a planning commission to prepare it.³⁶ Lacking its own expertise in these matters, the Board of Control turned to the Board of Trade for advice, and the Board of Trade, after consulting City officials and a number of professional and business groups, submitted a comprehensive set of recommendations to the mayor and council on 31 October 1941. Typed entirely in upper case, its introductory statements read, “There is a unanimous opinion on the part of all those consulted that the present is the most opportune time for the appointment of a planning body.”³⁷ It recommended the immediate creation of a City Planning Board to advise council “on all matters connected with the use and development of land within and adjacent to the city, so as to provide for the greatest convenience, health, and well-being of the inhabitants, and economic advantage to the citizens and the community at large.”

As for what sort of “planning body” might be established, the Board of Trade’s committee had considered the options. Provincial law allowed for the creation of planning commissions – Toronto had had one in the late 1920s, and the Bruce Committee had recommended one in 1934 – but the committee thought them inappropriate because provincial law gave commissions so much power that their recommendations, even if opposed by an elected council, could be binding on that council. So the Board of Trade proposed, instead, a planning *board* over which council would have unquestioned authority. It is surprising that the Board of Trade and (presumably) the Board of Control were as concerned as they were about the powers of a planning commission since the City had had no trouble disregarding the recommendations of the 1929 Planning Commission. It is true, however, that a new provincial Planning and Development Act in place since 1937 did not

specifically define and limit the powers of planning commissions, and this may have been the cause of their concern.³⁸ In any case, the Board of Trade's recommendation was followed. Council passed the necessary bylaw, establishing the City Planning Board effective 1 June 1942, and the Board of Control soon appointed its personnel.³⁹

If there were dissenters, they have left no record, suggesting a substantial consensus in support of the planning board's creation and bringing to mind the Board of Trade's claim that the moment was "opportune" for planning. But what made it so opportune? What caused such consensus? Unfortunately, the historical record sheds little light on this. One point that stands out in the Board of Trade memorandum, though, is the complete absence of the war as a factor. The wartime economic and social dislocations described above – which one might think called for planning – are nowhere to be seen. Nor does the bylaw that created the board mention the war. It takes the planning board's purpose straight from the Board of Trade memo: to provide convenience, health, and economic advantage for Torontonians. Some months later, itemizing the problems it intended to fix, the planning board listed traffic congestion, blighted areas, and declining inner-city populations – reflecting the city's still unsolved pre-war predicaments – but made no mention of war.⁴⁰ Farther along in this report, the board briefly mentioned the problem of emergency wartime buildings in the city, but only because it wanted them to be situated with consideration of their postwar function. The City Planning Board was created in the middle of a war, but not to address wartime problems. Its job was to plan the city of tomorrow.⁴¹

Planning and Toronto

One cannot help but notice that the work assigned to this board – planning all land use and development in and around the city – was a good deal broader than simply preparing a plan of "post-war works and undertakings," as council's committee had requested. Clearly, the Board of Trade had moved some distance from that original suggestion. In fact, according to the bylaw that created it, the planning board would also review zoning appeals, accumulate data and maps, and educate the public about the pros and cons of planning proposals. Exactly how these additional ideas got into the minds of the men who wrote the Board of Trade's memorandum is not entirely clear. The memo does mention, however, that in preparing its recommendations, the board consulted the Association of Professional Engineers of Ontario, the Bureau

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of Municipal Research, the Ontario Association of Architects, the Toronto and District Trades and Labour Council, and its own Engineering Advisory Committee.⁴² So it would seem to have drawn from the world of professional practice, beyond Toronto's municipal politics.

It is worth pausing briefly to consider what the words "plan" and "planning" meant at this time, for not everyone seems to have used them with the same meaning in mind. First, there was the basic dictionary definition – planning in the sense of arranging to carry out a set of interdependent tasks, according to some sort of schedule – and with the future on so many minds the word was often being used in this way. Surely, this is the meaning employed when the City or other agencies mention the need to plan for the postwar recession, the increasing use of automobiles, or rising standards of living. And it is probably what the special committee meant when it recommended a "long-term comprehensive plan" to assist job creation.

There was also a more specific, and to some rather more sinister, meaning of the word – planning as government direction or control. Sometimes called "central planning," sometimes "economic planning," but sometimes just "planning," it referred to "the actual direction of productive activity by authoritative prescription, either of the quantities to be produced, the methods of production to be used, or the prices to be fixed."⁴³ Planning in this sense might be considered as old as government itself, but the more direct origins of the term as it was being used in the 1940s lie in late-nineteenth-century socialist thought, where it had emerged as a solution to the inefficiencies and injustices of unfettered industrial capitalism.⁴⁴ It remained associated with the political left and probably took its most complete form in interwar Soviet Russia, but European fascists favoured central planning too, as did some liberal-minded bureaucrats. Though it gained some legitimacy in North America by being associated with President Roosevelt's New Deal, in its purest form it remained fundamentally anti-free-market and thus well outside the political mainstream in most Western democracies during the interwar years. The concept entered Canadian political discourse in the 1930s, largely through the League for Social Reconstruction (LSR), a group of socialist academics that had played a central role in founding the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), Canada's social-democratic party, in 1932.⁴⁵

Radical though such ideas had been in the interwar years, they became remarkably normal during the Second World War, with governments nearly everywhere running command economies. In fact, in Canada the notion of centralized government planning moved right into the federal civil service,

finding a secure home in the Committee on Reconstruction, of which Leonard Marsh, economics professor at McGill University and active LSR member, was research coordinator.⁴⁶ Marsh's committee never proposed all-out state ownership or direction, being constrained even during the war by elected politicians, but the inclination of its members is clear enough in their reports.⁴⁷ There was also at this time an unmistakable leftward political drift in many parts of Canada, with the CCF coming second in the 1943 Ontario provincial election and winning four federal by-elections in the later war years. Whether the Canadian electorate really wanted the CCF platform – which included substantial public ownership and highly interventionist planning – might be questioned because the party lost ground once the established parties adopted watered-down versions of its policies. But centralized state planning undoubtedly was under discussion in Canada during these late-war years, in various forums, and the word “planning” often referred to this.

There was yet another meaning of the word – town or community planning, or urban planning as it is generally known today: the process of shaping cities or towns by restricting certain lands to certain uses and laying out streets and public spaces in a pleasing, efficient manner. It shared some tenets with central planning, being founded on a faith in government intervention and impinging on private property in the interest of the public good. But the two were by no means the same thing. A person could favour one and not the other. A program of central state planning generally included some degree of town planning, but it need not, and town planning certainly did not have to include central state planning.⁴⁸ The two also had fundamentally different ancestries, town planning having been born not amid socialism but among the practical concerns of engineers, architects, and municipal managers charged with building workable modern cities – though a degree of radical progressivism was certainly present in its genesis.⁴⁹ Nor were town planners usually agents of the state. They advised governments and could thus influence public policy, but their authority rested on their ability to persuade the state to act, not on state power per se; rarely could town planners, on their own, compel anyone to do anything. Also, they often worked not for the state but for property owners, to whom they sold their expertise. And furthermore, though true central planning was still a somewhat fanciful notion, in the capitalist democracies of the West at least, town planning was being widely practised. Great plans for Chicago, New York, and London were well known; Thomas Adams, Daniel Burnham, and Clarence Stein were the profession's

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iconic individuals; and concepts such as garden cities, diagonal boulevards, and greenbelts were its working language. The overlap between these two types of planning, all things considered, was minimal, a point that can be confirmed by perusing Thomas Adams's textbook *Outline of Town and City Planning* and the LSR's *Social Planning for Canada*, both published in 1935. The two books are on different wavelengths and serve entirely different purposes.⁵⁰

Notwithstanding the essential differences between them, the two may well have had enough common ground that believing in one could predispose a person to believe in the other, which is to say the wartime popularity of central planning might have prompted an interest in, even an acceptance of, town planning.⁵¹ Toronto's experience in these years, however, reveals something else: misunderstanding and miscommunication as various advocates of planning, with different meanings in mind, talked past each other. The special committee of council probably used the word in its first, simple sense when it made its recommendations – with perhaps a slight drift toward the second sense, central planning – but surely the Board of Trade was thinking of the third sense, professional town planning, when it wrote its recommendations. Confusing matters further, the federal government's reconstruction committee, which encouraged the City's planning endeavours and remained influential, leaned toward the second meaning, central planning; it included material on town planning in its final report, but in a separate section.⁵² Quite remarkably, nobody in an official capacity in Toronto seems to have noticed these inconsistencies or misperceptions, carried away as they were by enthusiasm for planning in all senses.

Precisely what was on the minds of Toronto's city councillors, we do not know, but we can surmise that they were not knowingly advocating *dirigisme*, the essence of central planning, or agreeing that objective professional expertise should trump the interests of the property-owning class – a basic principle of town planning. More than likely, they were not entirely sure what they were doing, but their limited understanding should not be held up for ridicule. Town planning, though well developed elsewhere, was quite alien in Toronto during the 1940s. Whereas a European city such as Stockholm had several fully planned new communities, and Chicago and Boston, and even comparably sized Buffalo, Cleveland, and Detroit, had their public squares, diagonal avenues, peripheral garden cities, and even in some cases overall planning schemes, Toronto had nothing of the sort.⁵³ The most obvious explanation for this is that Toronto was intellectually and artistically far from



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Southeast corner of Queen and York Streets, 29 August 1941.

Downtown Toronto in the 1940s was an intriguing blend of small town and big city, and it displayed almost nothing that could be

called modern. Bicycles are common in wartime photographs, perhaps because of restrictions on tires and gasoline. | CTA, Fonds 200, Series 372, Subseries 33, Item 790

the centre of the Western world. Chicago and New York were only a day away by train, but few people made the trip. Modernist architecture had barely touched the city in the 1940s, and few had even heard of modernist urbanism – Torontonians had not yet witnessed a planned community, a slum clearance, a Corbusian tower, or an expressway-style highway.⁵⁴

Yet there is more to this than simply being off the beaten track; Toronto's distinctive socio-political makeup was at work as well. In his 1982 study of urban political cultures, Harold Kaplan found that Toronto's government through the first third of the twentieth century was in the hands of a "populist" middle-class stratum that showed "impatience with ideas of any kind." This group, Kaplan maintained, treated education and expertise "with as much contempt as [it treated] the aristocrat." Town planning was thus anathema, and the group firmly resisted it. The proponents of town planning in Toronto, as Kaplan saw it, were a competing, more cosmopolitan, stratum that he labelled "Tory"; it had brought about some municipal interventions early in the century and was still active in housing circles, but overall it had been kept on the margins. The events narrated here, though pertaining to a slightly later period, fit Kaplan's model like a hand in a glove, with council as his populists and the Board of Trade as his Tories.⁵⁵

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It is true, however, that despite being ruled by an anti-planning political faction, Toronto was actually rather well planned in the sense that it was tightly regulated by municipal authorities – to use another, slightly different meaning of the word: planning as a “continuous administrative process.”⁵⁶ The city’s Assessment Department, Property Department, and Building Department kept close tabs on private property and what was built upon it. A small Planning and Surveying Department controlled the subdivision process, requiring most residential subdivisions to be set out on paper before being approved.⁵⁷ Most of Toronto’s streets had a standard width and its blocks a prescribed size, and its houses generally had consistent setbacks from the street. In addition, a few of the better neighbourhoods – Kingsway Park, Lawrence Park, Leaside – had been truly planned, in a garden-suburb style; this planning had been done by the land developers, not by or for the municipality, but such areas did at least have a distinctive, planned look.⁵⁸ The city had also enacted zoning bylaws for some of its residential neighbourhoods (though it had no *comprehensive* zoning bylaw); as a result, its industrial and residential areas were mostly separate, and its apartment buildings were largely confined to commercial streets with streetcar lines.⁵⁹ In short, Toronto was well ordered, but it was not, by most definitions of the word, being well planned.

It did have a permanent planning commissioner (a confusing title, for there was no commission) by the name of Tracy D. leMay, who served as head of the two- or three-person Planning and Surveying Department. He had come to Toronto from England in 1906 at age twenty-two, secured the position of city surveyor in 1910, and never worked anywhere else.⁶⁰ He retired in 1954, at age seventy, and died shortly after. Little is known of his personal origins. His lack of a professional engineering designation – he was generally identified as an Ontario Land Surveyor – suggests that he had not received a university education. He certainly had no design or planning training. His insistence on using the unusual, faux-aristocratic spelling of his surname suggests a particular concern for his social status, and his long service tells of a competent, if unchallenging, employee whose views and actions sat well with the populists who dominated council. He had his valuable qualities, but cosmopolitan and up-to-date were not among them.

So Toronto did have something called planning within its municipal operations in the 1940s, although most people educated in the field would not have agreed that what the city’s planners did was true planning. The work of these so-called planners shows no sign of current ideas in architecture and