

Comprehensive Planning Theory and the Urban Renewal Program in Canada

**by P.J. Smith
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**COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING THEORY AND THE URBAN
RENEWAL PROGRAM IN CANADA**

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Draft only. Notes and references to be added.

COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING THEORY AND THE URBAN
RENEWAL PROGRAM IN CANADA

Early in 1958, as a rather young planner, I represented the City of Calgary at a CMHC staff course on urban renewal. For a full month, in the depths of an Ottawa winter, we were exposed to a stream of "experts", American as well as Canadian, who gave us an exhaustive introduction to the theory and practice of urban renewal as it was then conceived. Although I could scarcely be aware of it at the time, Canadian planners were about to be engulfed in their most critical professional episode. For the first and only time, planners across the country came to work under a degree of central direction in the service of a truly national program. Moreover - and this was altogether more important from the standpoint of planning ideology - they were presented with their only opportunity to engage in "positive" planning on a national scale. The willingness of governments to become directly involved in the renewal of Canadian cities, and the promise of legislative authority and public funds that went along with that, all heralded the prospect that plans could be drafted with real assurance of being translated into action.

In the upshot, the consequences for the planning profession were both good and bad. On the good side, an enormous amount of planning work was generated, for consultants as well as public agencies. Some 200 communities were subjected to close examination, most of them for the first time, and Canada's planners were given an unprecedented opportunity to sharpen their diagnostic and prescriptive skills. On the bad side, the abrupt termination of the program in 1968, and the public opprobrium to which it was then exposed, left the planners in a vulnerable position. As the professional group most closely identified with the renewal program, they were convenient targets in the scramble to apportion blame for the fiasco that urban renewal was suddenly considered to be. Yet, for those front-line planners who

were actually working on the renewal plans and projects - as well as for the municipal governments that employed them - it was as though they had been set up for a particularly vicious blindside check. For 20 years the government of Canada and its agent, CMHC, had been dangling the carrot of federal grants before municipal governments, in the desire to persuade them that urban renewal was a socially responsible activity. Then, when they at last began to bite on the carrot with real gusto, it turned out to be poisoned bait.

This turn of events could not possibly have been foreseen 10 years before. In 1958, the idea of a government-sponsored renewal program was still strange to most Canadian planners, which was why CMHC organized special courses of training. Momentum was beginning to build, though, and it was a time of much optimism for the planning movement. Under CMHC's forceful leadership, urban renewal was enthusiastically accepted as one of the means by which a reinvigorated planning profession could contribute to Canada's bright promise.

Against that backdrop, my purpose in this paper is to offer a preliminary, and necessarily brief, assessment of the Canadian experience with urban renewal from a physical planning perspective. I will concentrate on two factors which combined to limit the effectiveness of the planners' contribution to the renewal program. These factors were, first, the discordance between the conceptions of urban renewal held by physical planners and the other key participants in the urban renewal program; and, second, the lag effect that is commonly associated with the design and implementation of public policies. In extreme cases, of which the Canadian urban renewal program seems to have been one, it can take so long to move from the recognition of a problem to remedial action that the circumstances that called forth the action will be utterly transformed.

To develop these general ideas, the paper is organized into four sections. First, the main groups of actors in the urban renewal program are described; next, the main elements of the physical planning theory of urban renewal are sketched out; and then the most important events in the Canadian renewal program are interpreted in light of Gunton's concept of the planning cycle. Finally, some implications for the relationship between planning theory and public policy will be developed.

THE PRINCIPAL GROUPS OF ACTORS IN URBAN RENEWAL

Since several distinctly different groups of actors were involved in the urban renewal program, all with their own perceptions of needs and appropriate responses, and since those perceptions were themselves likely to change in different ways over time, it follows that the changing interplay among the actors is crucial to any attempt to understand why events unfolded as they did. The basic pattern of relationships is illustrated in Figure 1. Here, I have identified five main groups of actors, though I have further subdivided the two on which I particularly wish to concentrate - the planners and the politicians. The politicians also occupy the focal position in the diagram, since they alone had the authority to order urban renewal projects to be implemented. By the same token, they were subject to influence from all the other groups, whether through organized lobbying and protest, or through the formal channels of planning advisory services, or, more generally, through changes in the prevailing climate of opinion.

A particularly important relationship, in terms of understanding the logic of the diagram, is that between politicians and housing reformers. The latter I regard as the true initiators of the urban renewal program, since they were the first to identify a problem and urge public action. The diagram is also designed to suggest

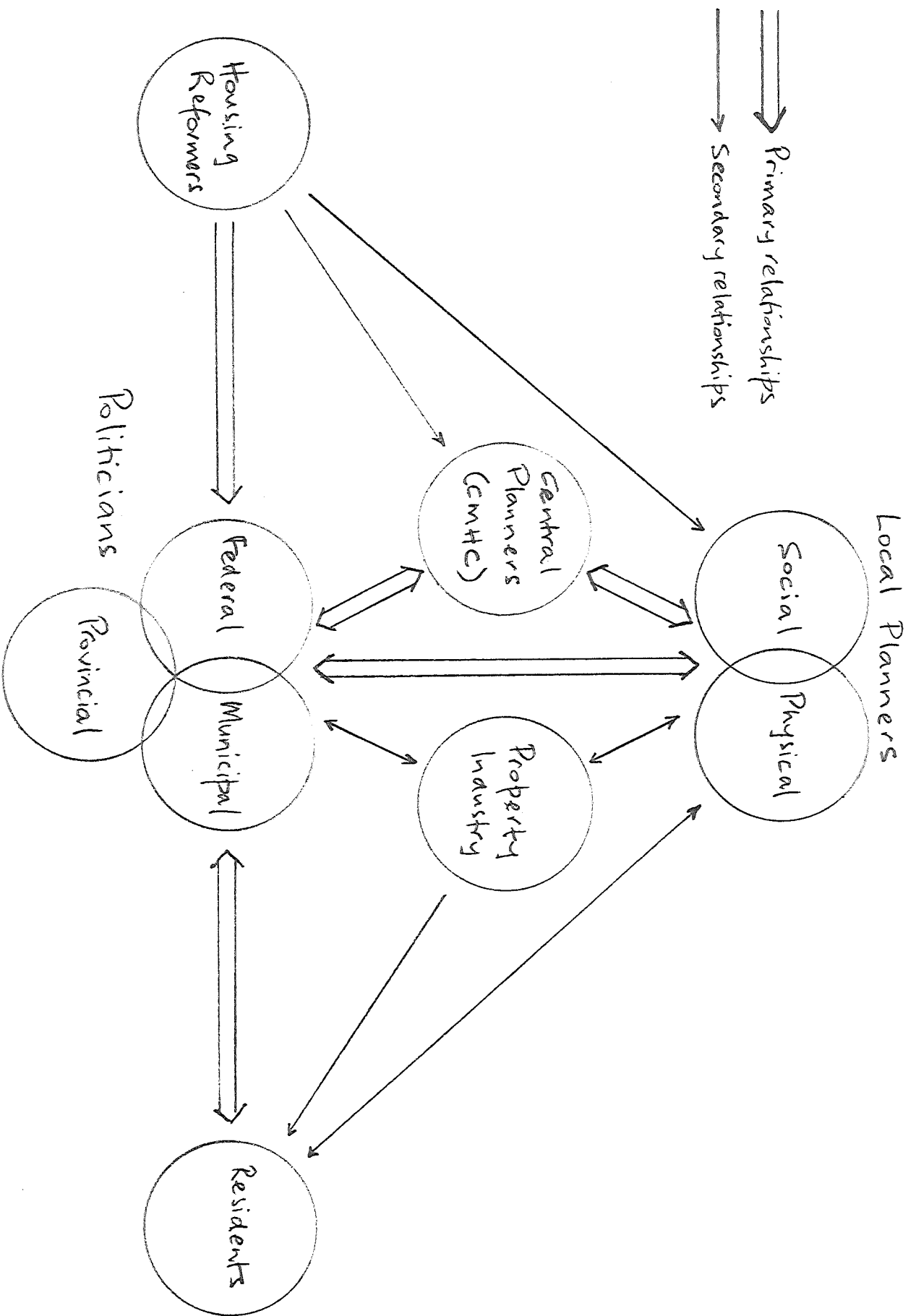


Fig. 1 Relations among the major groups of actors in urban renewal

that the reformers had their greatest influence at the federal level, since the urban renewal program was given form through a series of national housing statutes, beginning in 1944. The provincial governments, by and large, were content to play a secondary role. There were exceptions, notably Ontario, but the main contribution of the provincial governments was to mediate between the other two levels. Because of the division of powers under the British North America Act, municipal governments were prevented from entering into agreements with the Government of Canada unless and until they had express sanction from the appropriate provincial government. Eventually, all the provinces adopted legislation to facilitate the participation of their municipalities in the urban renewal program.

The actual implementation of urban renewal projects was entirely the responsibility of municipal governments. It was therefore their actions that had the most direct impact on the groups affected by renewal - the residents of the project areas and, to a lesser extent, those elements of the property industry for whom urban renewal afforded investment opportunities. It was also through the municipal governments that most of the planning work was done, from broad surveys of environmental conditions to the detailed design of new buildings and public facilities. Essentially, then, the planning profession's involvement with the urban renewal program was local and practical. The main exception was the staff of CMHC, who are also regarded as planners in Figure 1. Whether or not they were practicing members of the planning profession, they were in the best position to influence the development of national policy, in two respects: as advisors to Parliament they had a direct effect upon the evolution of the enabling legislation; and through their administrative procedures and regulations, they were able to govern the manner in which urban renewal projects of all kinds, in all parts of the country, were carried out.

In much the same way, planners working at the local level also served dual roles. Principally, they were technical advisors to government, but, like CMHC, municipal planning systems had their own administrative procedures which brought planners into direct relations with residents and property interests. For example, it became common practice to set up neighbourhood or project offices through which physical and social planners could provide immediate assistance to families with problems. On the other side of the coin, residents' difficulties were sometimes exacerbated by the planners' own well-intentioned diagnoses. This is the now-familiar problem of "planning blight", or the accelerated deterioration that is likely to result from uncertainty about an area's future - uncertainty that arises because the area is held in limbo, often for years, after it has first been identified as a target for renewal action. In extreme instances, such as the Don Vale and Trefann Court districts of Toronto, or Strathcona in Vancouver, the uncertainty provoked protest movements which eventually helped to bring about changes in local and national planning policy.

The occurrence of planning blight can also be seen as evidence, at the local scale, of the lag between problem identification and action. It was at the national scale, however, that the lag effect was most acute, in the sense that it was a function of the complex process of reaching agreement on an appropriate policy response to a nation-wide problem, and then carrying that policy forward through a host of autonomous jurisdictions. Throughout the urban renewal program, federal government officials lamented their lack of authority over municipal governments, and the constitutional barrier that denied them the right to direct control over urban development policy. Still, the federal government did have money, and it was through the promise of generous financial aid that some 200 municipalities, from the very largest in Canada to the very smallest, were eventually persuaded to participate in the national renewal program.

THE PLANNING THEORY OF URBAN RENEWAL

The idea that the urban fabric is in need of periodic renewal is an extremely old one in planning thought. Indeed, it is crucial to the ideal of environmental improvement which has provided the planning movement with its central inspiration. Yet it was not until the 1930s, when the British and American governments began to be active in slum clearance and housing assistance for low-income families, that a planning theory of renewal was consciously shaped. There had been earlier theoretical contributions, such as Geddes's concept of "conservative surgery" which became known later as area rehabilitation and gave rise, later still, to the neighbourhood improvement program in Canada. But the chief significance of the theoretical developments of the 1930s was their attempt to place the housing policy initiatives in the prevailing paradigm of urban planning. This was the so-called rational-comprehensive approach, or what Webman, following Lindblom, has recently referred to as the synoptic ideal. Indeed, the ideal of seeing things whole so as to arrive at complete solutions to problems was precisely what the term "urban renewal" was coined to capture, with specific reference to the problem of obsolescence in the urban environment. It was also axiomatic that comprehensive problem-solving depended on the principles of scientific inquiry, if the problems of environmental improvement were to be truly understood.

In Canada, the first definite statement of the comprehensive planning approach to the renewal of cities was published in 1935, in the chapter on housing that Humphrey Carver wrote for the League for Social Reconstruction, in Social Planning for Canada. The chapter begins immediately with the heading "Making town planning a reality", and the opening sentence establishes the link between housing and comprehensive planning:

"When we come to the question of housing, the first essential is to

approach it with imagination and breadth of view - not as the restricted problem of clearing our worst slum areas or even of providing cheap 'working class houses', but of planning and building better the urban environment in which so great a proportion of Canadians are born and live their daily lives".

In the comprehensive planning view, it was a grievous error to attempt to solve housing problems - or any other problems, for that matter - in isolation. The slum housing problem was just one aspect of the global problem of improving the quality of the Canadian urban environment. That, in turn, could be broken down into two general classes of problems: first, ensuring that all "new" development (i.e. the conversion of raw land into urban use) should conform to acceptable standards of environmental quality; and, second, maintaining the quality of the existing environment and improving it where necessary. The latter, by definition, came to set the scope for urban renewal in planning theory.

As general classes of problem, "new" development and "re"-development (as urban renewal was commonly known until the 1950s) were fundamentally different in their technical planning requirements. In terms of development policy, however, they were inseparable. Every city - or, better still, every city-region - was an essential whole, subject to a common set of pressures for growth and change. Whatever happened in one part was likely to affect other parts, and the problems of one part could not be solved without considering the implications for development elsewhere in the city and the city-region.

Today, we can recognize that the early theoreticians of comprehensive planning were groping towards a systems view of the city, without the convenience of systems terminology in which to express themselves. What they did have - and its influence permeates the physical planning literature on urban renewal until at

least the 1970s - was the social-ecological theory of the Chicago school of sociologists. McKenzie's formulation of the succession concept and Burgess's concentric zone concept were especially influential. The city was thought of as a dynamic organism, constantly changing and growing. In this process, it was inevitable that some parts would wear out or become obsolete - what planners came to refer to as physical and functional obsolescence. It was therefore natural and healthy that the urban organism should experience a continuous process of adaptation and regeneration. Equally, it was unhealthy for regeneration not to occur. Slums were the physical evidence of the urban organism's failure to renew itself. In the popular metaphor, which completed the biological analogy, slums were cancers.

When these general notions were combined with the ideals of comprehensive planning, they gave shape to the basic concepts of the planning theory of urban renewal. These I will summarize under four points.

(i) The scope of comprehensive renewal planning

To begin, a crucial distinction was made between those forms of renewal that occurred naturally or spontaneously in a healthy city and those that were called upon when the spontaneous processes failed. Both types of renewal required to be planned for, but in radically different ways. Spontaneous renewal would largely be carried out by individual entrepreneurs, or by public corporations acting in their own interest. The planning function would be to regulate or govern the renewal activities, to ensure that community standards of environmental quality were upheld.

Non-spontaneous renewal, by contrast, could be initiated only by government. Other interests might be enticed to join in at a later stage - indeed, the principles of citizen participation and co-operation between public and private enterprise were strongly emphasized - but in some situations government agencies would have to carry the entire responsibility. In theory, therefore, the need for

government-sponsored programs - which is all that the term "urban renewal" meant to everyone except physical planners - was restricted to those conditions with which the processes of spontaneous renewal were unable to cope, at least in the foreseeable future. The distinction was essential if planning theory was to accommodate the free enterprise ethic, but it proved difficult to maintain in practice. The line between collective and individual interests became increasingly blurred, especially with respect to the revitalization of declining business districts.

It also followed, as a close corollary, that the need for renewal planning was not restricted to the particular problem of bad housing conditions. To planners, it was axiomatic that obsolescence and deterioration could affect all types of land use and all functional facilities. A street system or a sewer system could readily become as unsafe as the worst houses, and business areas were as much at risk as residential areas of degenerating into slums. Unlike housing reformers or social planners, physical planners could not afford to focus on the residential slum problem as their professional specialty, because comprehensive planning theory required them to be concerned for the proper functioning of all parts of the city. In the words of one leading practitioner, urban renewal was best defined as "a planned process of reshaping the whole of the physical equipment of a city to meet present, and foreseeable future needs." That was actually written in 1965, but Carver had pointed in the same direction 30 years earlier.

(ii) The principle of social neutrality in renewal planning

In its philosophical bases, comprehensive planning theory combined a faith in scientific objectivity with the belief that planning, as a social institution, should — serve the interests of the whole community. The planning conception of urban renewal had therefore to be couched in terms of an objectively determined public

interest, not the special needs or "rights" of a select group. It does not follow that individual planners did not genuinely wish to help the less fortunate, but the planning theory of renewal could not depend on a prescribed vision of social reform. Instead, the theory had to be socially neutral.

It was on this point, most fundamentally, that the physical planning conception of renewal diverged from that of the housing reformers and social planners, and through them, to at least some extent, the politicians. The planners' distance from the reform cause also allowed them to avoid the intellectual quagmire that reformers found themselves in, when they came to justify their desire for public action. For generations, the reform movement was bedevilled by the "habits of the people" hypothesis, which said, in effect, that slums were created by slum dwellers. Ecological theory provided an objective counter to that charge, since it explained slums as logical outcomes of impersonal economic and social forces that were constantly re-ordering the city. But the ecological explanation did not, of itself, provide a rationale for government efforts to interrupt the slum-forming processes. On the contrary, slums were described as transitional areas which, in the very long term, would be absorbed into expanding business districts, while new slums were forming further out. This rather put the reformers in the position of King Canute.

In general, there were two kinds of response. In the first, a deterministic one, improved housing was presented as a benefit to society. Very crudely, it was said that slum residents would become better people and lead better lives, and so the community at large would be better. The report of the Lieutenant-Governor's Committee on housing conditions in Toronto in 1934 provided a good illustration of this logic. The second response might be called the natural justice argument. Here, it was claimed that all citizens had a right to a "decent" standard of housing, and it was the responsibility of the state to define the minimum acceptable standard and

to ensure that it was met. This principle was enshrined in the preamble to the American Housing Act of 1949, and it has been implicit in all Canadian urban renewal legislation as well.

Physical planners were naturally influenced by these ideas, but physical planning theory, by virtue of its focus on environmental improvement rather than social improvement, was able to resort to a more detached, "objective" view. Yet the theory was by no means devoid of moral assumptions. In particular, the rights of private property were a central problem for the renewal concept, and had a major influence on the way in which collective action was justified under planning theory. Public renewal projects inevitably required that ownership rights be curtailed or even extinguished. If the canons of comprehensive planning were to be respected in the process, it had to be possible to demonstrate that the renewal action was necessary to the good of the greater community. In American terms, the action had to be a defensible exercise of the constitutional police power. More generally, however, the public interest in urban renewal was identified in the conventional language of utilitarianism, which has long provided the planning movement with its ethical rationale. Put most simply, slums were wasteful and inefficient. They were destructive of health and happiness; they constituted an unproductive use of valuable urban land; and they absorbed grossly disproportionate shares of municipal government expenditures while generating little tax revenue of their own. These became the basic public interest criteria by which planners sought to defend wholesale interference with private property rights under the urban renewal program.

*Science was
objective; only
way to get
objective results*

(iii) Planning for progressive stages of obsolescence

From social-ecological theory it was understood that environmental deterioration, or "blight" as it was commonly known, was a continuous process in a

dynamic city. It was also understood that blight progressed through a series of stages, so at any given time it was to be expected that areas in different parts of a city would show different degrees of blight. A comprehensive approach to renewal planning required that there should be an appropriate package of planning techniques for every stage. The techniques had also to be devised to operate on an area-wide basis, as the processes of blight did. A piecemeal approach was the antithesis of comprehensiveness, and in the case of urban renewal was open to the special hazard of externality effects. If some features of a blighted area were improved while others were not, it was feared that the improvements would quickly be vitiated.

The theoretical response was to conceive of three general classes of renewal action, known as conservation, rehabilitation and redevelopment. The last, like old-fashioned slum clearance, was taken to mean that all, or virtually all, of a designated area should be demolished and something new constructed on the site. Redevelopment was obviously the most extreme form of renewal action and was envisaged to apply to areas of most advanced deterioration. This did not necessarily mean that every building had to be unsalvageable, but the area as a whole was to be of such poor quality that it would not be worth trying to save individual buildings. It was thought they would detract from the overall quality of the redeveloped environment.

In theory, then, redevelopment was designed for areas where the blighting process had effectively run its course. Rehabilitation and conservation, by contrast, were directed at areas where blight was still extremely active or was threatening to become active. Area rehabilitation was essentially intended to reverse the progress of blight before it had gone too far; area conservation aimed to prevent or suppress blight before it had fairly begun. Under a rehabilitation program, buildings would be repaired and modernized, and community services would be upgraded, along with

environmental amenities of all kinds. Spot redevelopment could also be tolerated, in the interest of area improvement, but it was clearly envisaged that most of the original buildings would be retained. The same was true of conservation areas, but there it was to be a matter of maintaining environmental quality rather than restoring it. The chief technique of conservation planning was code enforcement, or the use of building and occupancy by-laws to compel delinquent property owners to meet desired standards of maintenance and to prevent overcrowding. Concurrently, the adoption of an area conservation plan was expected to commit the municipal government to maintain its own facilities and services at an acceptable level.

(iv) Comprehensive survey and analysis for renewal renewal planning

In addition to providing a logical explanation for the blight that was all-too-evident in Canadian cities, and an objective basis for the design of planning strategies, social-ecological theory was thought to have predictive power. This was extremely important, since it provided physical planners with a scientific basis for the interpretation of future development trends and their effects on the total urban environment. In the preparation of a comprehensive renewal plan, it was not enough to identify some problem area as being immediately in need of remedial action. Rather, it was necessary to consider how all parts of the city were likely to change in relation to all other parts, and to determine from that the kinds of renewal action that were most appropriate to each area in the long run. Priorities had to be established as well, certainly for those renewal areas on which public funds would have to be spent, and planning theory required the system of priorities to be a rational one.

It was also axiomatic, in the comprehensive planning view, that long-term renewal needs should be determined in relation to all other long-term development

needs. In the well-planned city, the renewal plan would be but one component of the comprehensive plan, inseparable from the transportation plan, the public facilities plan, and so on. Above all, the renewal plan had to be consistent with the land use plan, since the determination of the most appropriate future uses is the most basic decision in any renewal project. Thus, Carver, in his 1935 essay, used Burgess's transition zone concept to argue that slum residents should be relocated to suburban communities, since business redevelopment would normally represent the best long-term use of inner-city land. Here, once again, physical planners were likely to be at odds with other groups of actors in the renewal process. Since the latter's interest was generally fixed on the housing problem, they tended to think solely in terms of residential areas being renewed for low-income housing.


The larger implication for the theory of the planning process was that the decision to undertake renewal action should always be preceded by the most careful, comprehensive analysis of development needs and environmental conditions. Ideally, a city's general renewal plan would have been prepared as an integral part of the comprehensive plan; but at the very least, if there was no general land use plan in force, a comprehensive renewal study would be required. This would assess the long-term renewal needs of the entire city and set a framework for the preparation of more detailed plans for the areas of highest priority. In comprehensive planning theory, this was the most rational way to proceed.

THE PLANNING CYCLE OF THE URBAN RENEWAL PROGRAM

As in other countries where urban renewal became a major public activity in the 1950s and 1960s, the Canadian program marked a climax in a long-rising wave of concern. Unfortunately for renewal planners, however, the crest of the planning

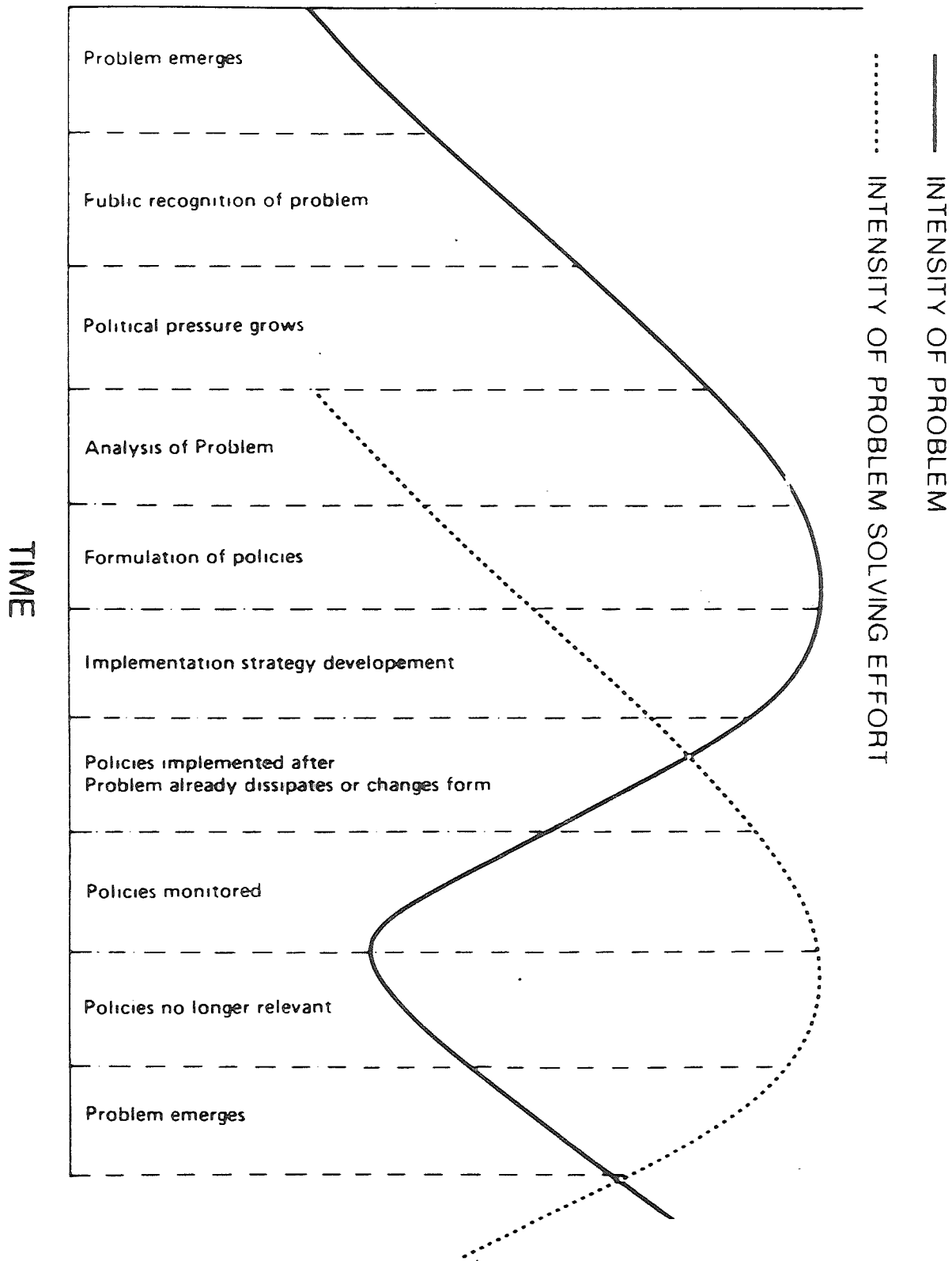
effort coincided with a radical re-appraisal of the need for urban renewal. Major changes in public policy eventually flowed from this, giving rise, in turn, to a substantial re-orientation of planning activity. Ironically, the "new" policy had always been a prime concept in the comprehensive planning theory of urban renewal, but that underlines the significance of the effect that conceptual discordance had upon the renewal program, especially when combined with the lag between problem identification and policy implementation.

Space does not permit me to develop this interpretation in depth, since it is impossible to describe the full course of events in the detail that would be required. Instead, by employing Gunton's diagram of the planning cycle (Figure 2), I hope to be able to bring out those highlights that bore directly upon the contribution of physical planning theory to the urban renewal program. As it happens, Gunton's sequence of steps does not fit exactly with the actual sequence of urban renewal events in Canada, but the general logic of a two-phase cycle certainly holds true. Above all, the most intense problem-solving effort, as measured by the volume of planning studies and the number of projects being implemented, came at a time when the inappropriateness of the established policies was widely conceded. There were many reasons for that, but the one I wish to emphasize, following Gunton's terminology, is the changing form of the problem that had to be solved.

At the risk of oversimplification, it can be said that urban renewal policy was initially conceived in terms of the problem of bad housing conditions.  It was intended to address the needs of those Canadians who were living in houses that were thought to be unsafe and unhealthy. This could mean that they were in poor repair, or that they were inadequately equipped for personal comfort and hygiene, or (perhaps the greatest threat of all) they were too crowded to permit decent family life. In general, too, as conveyed by the almost invariable use of the word

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Figure #2
THE PLANNING CYCLE



Tom Gunton, "A Theory of the Planning cycle", *Plan Canada*, Vol. 25 (1985), p.42

"slum", bad housing conditions were thought to be concentrated in areas that lacked the amenities of healthy community life. It was at this point that the housing problem became an urban planning problem as well.

Over a period of some 40 years, from the 1890s to the 1930s, there were brief flares of reform enthusiasm in various Canadian cities. Then, between 1934 and 1944, under the dual impact of the depression and wartime constraints on new house building, a sense of real emergency began to appear. Local commissions of inquiry were set up - in Toronto in 1934, Montreal in 1935, and St. John's in 1943 - and the incidence of poor housing and environmental conditions was increasingly remarked upon in municipal reports and plans. National investigations were undertaken as well, first by the Special Commons Committee on Housing in 1935, then by the Rowell-Sirois Commission in 1939, and finally by the Advisory Committee on Reconstruction in 1944. The last, in the Report of the Subcommittee on Housing and Community Planning, was responsible for the single most important document in the history of Canadian planning. In the present context, it was particularly notable for three things: it treated housing and community planning as inseparable social needs; it assumed that the state was obliged to ensure that low-income families were provided with decent living environments, both in their homes and in their communities; and it established, in exhaustive detail, the seriousness of the problem of bad housing conditions in Canada. Beyond that, the ideals of decent housing and well-planned communities were firmly linked to the Advisory Committee's larger vision of a national system of social security.

With this report, the fourth of Gunton's initial stages was brought to an end. The stage of policy formulation began immediately after, in the National Housing Act of 1944 and the Act to create the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation in 1945. As an urban renewal measure the 1944 Act was extremely

limited, but it did establish the federal government's willingness to contribute financially to the clearance of slum land, on condition that the use after redevelopment was "in accordance or in harmony with an official community plan". There was further provision, in Part V of the Act, for the government "to cause investigations" to be made into housing conditions and community planning needs. CMHC later used this authority to persuade the cities of Montreal and Toronto to undertake systematic analyses of their environmental problems. Then, in 1956, Part V was amended by adding a clause that empowered CMHC to enter into agreements with municipal and provincial governments to share the costs of having urban renewal studies prepared. This resulted in an immediate flurry of planning activity, with 50 studies being authorized over the next 8 years.

These procedures were clearly designed to ensure that a scientific approach would be taken to the preparation of urban renewal plans. They were also matched by substantive policy changes that served to move the legislation progressively closer to the expectations of the planning theory of urban renewal. Initially, in the 1944 Act, cleared sites had to be sold to limited dividend corporations or to life insurance companies for the construction of rental housing. That was modified in 1953, by the addition of a clause permitting cleared sites to be used "for any federal, provincial or municipal public purpose", as long as an alternative site was made available elsewhere for the construction of an equivalent amount of rental housing. Further small but significant changes were made in 1954, when the word "slum" was dropped in favour of "blighted or substandard areas", and in 1956, when the term "housing redevelopment" was replaced by "urban redevelopment". These changes all pointed to a broadening of the urban renewal concept, although, as befitted a housing statute, the emphasis was still on the provision of good quality housing for people of low income. If anything, that emphasis was reinforced in 1953 when public housing projects, to be financed through federal-provincial

partnerships, were added to the list of permitted uses for redevelopment sites. The effect was immediate. Of the 20 urban renewal projects approved between 1948 and mid-1964, 12 included federal-provincial housing, whereas only one (Regent Park North in Toronto) was financed by a local housing authority.

The convergence of planning theory and urban renewal legislation became most nearly complete in 1964, in a further set of amendments to the National Housing Act. In summary, five main changes were made: "urban redevelopment" at last became "urban renewal"; the requirement that renewal plans should satisfy the conditions of the comprehensive planning process was made even more explicit; a new type of renewal plan was provided for, in the detailed urban renewal schemes that were to follow from a general urban renewal study; and all limitations on the re-use of project sites were removed, as long as "decent, safe and sanitary housing accommodation" was made available to displaced families. Finally, municipal governments were encouraged to plan for area rehabilitation and conservation as well as for redevelopment, although the provisions for financial assistance from the federal government were still geared overwhelmingly to redevelopment. This point was soon to assume great significance.

In addition to these legislative changes, CMHC and the government of the day intensified their efforts to persuade municipal governments to participate in the urban renewal program. The result was dramatic. Over a span of 8 or 9 years after the amending statute was adopted, more than 150 urban renewal studies were completed, along with 150 urban renewal schemes. Ninety of these led to renewal projects being approved for implementation.

In Gunton's terms, the peak of the problem-solving effort occurred in the years 1966 through 1969. There was then a rapid decline in the early 1970s. This was a direct consequence of the appointment in 1968 of the Federal Task Force on

Housing and Urban Development, and the decision by its chairman, Paul Hellyer, the minister responsible for housing, to order a temporary halt to the government's aid program. The halt became an official termination the next year, after the Task Force's report was handed down. Further grants were authorized in the period 1969-1972, but only in cases where prior commitments remained to be honoured.

Several considerations entered into this abrupt about-face. For one, the federal government suddenly realized how expensive it would be to implement all the urban renewal projects that were then envisaged. For another, renewal proposals were becoming a cause of much conflict in some cities, and there was growing evidence of resistance to the personal and social costs that redevelopment, in particular, entailed. There was also a growing unease about the range of non-residential projects that were being undertaken in the name of urban renewal, and even the residential projects were not universally admired, particularly the public housing schemes that had been constructed on several of the early redevelopment sites. Most basically, however, the housing "problem" of the 1960s was not that of the 1930s and 1940s. The central issue was no longer housing conditions but affordability. To a large extent, the problem of poor housing had been solved by spontaneous renewal, as a consequence of the post-war growth of Canadian cities and the increasing affluence of the population. The census of 1961 recorded a striking improvement over 1951, and that trend continued, more modestly, through the next decade.

From 1966 on, talk of a new housing "crisis" was rampant. For the first time in many years there was serious concern that the housing supply in Canada was not able to match demand, chiefly because of a rapid increase in housing costs and prices. It came to be feared that larger and larger segments of the population would be denied the opportunity of home-ownership, and thus denied one of their

most basic rights as Canadians. The problem was compounded by the continuing erosion of the low-cost housing supply, in a period of large-scale reconstruction of inner-city areas. The public renewal program contributed comparatively little to that erosion, but it was a highly visible contribution. "Urban renewal" therefore came to be seen as part of the "problem".

This negative perception was enhanced by an insight that planners were able to offer from their growing body of local research and experience. When urban renewal policy was first framed, the conventional wisdom held that people who lived in poor houses would normally be tenants, which also brought the villainous image of the slum landlord into play. In fact, most of the prospective renewal areas proved to have high proportions of owners-occupiers, which cast an altogether different light on the morality of public renewal projects, and on the most appropriate strategy of renewal. If home-ownership was a national ideal, what public good was served by forcing low-income families to give up such houses as they had managed to acquire? - especially if the official alternative was a rent-to-income apartment in a public housing project.

As a matter of social morality, the question was one for politicians to answer, not physical planners. Nor was comprehensive planning theory of much help, except where it could be demonstrated that environmental conditions were so bad as to threaten the well-being of the whole community. By the 1960s, however, that was not the case anywhere in Canada. Probably there never had been extensive areas that truly deserved to be labelled "slums", and the worst concentrations, by and large, were dealt with in the earliest redevelopment projects. The urban renewal studies consistently depicted a pattern of blighted areas in which buildings of different quality were mixed, more or less indiscriminantly.

The practical implication, as planners well understood, was that area rehabilitation was the most appropriate strategy of renewal planning for those areas of Canadian cities where blight was in progress. Rehabilitation was also better suited than redevelopment to areas where most of the residents were owner-occupiers, since it implied a program of financial assistance to enable owners to upgrade their properties. Small redevelopment projects could still be accommodated in particularly concentrated areas of bad housing conditions, but if the renewal scheme was conceived at some larger scale, such as the neighbourhood, rehabilitation had to be the dominant focus.

Throughout the 1960s, in the Canadian planning literature on urban renewal, the importance of area rehabilitation was a constant theme. It emerged in almost all the urban renewal studies of the period, and led, in some instances, to detailed analyses of rehabilitation needs and practices. Several of the largest renewal projects under the 1964 Act were area rehabilitation projects which incorporated varying amounts of localized redevelopment; examples were Lower Town East in Ottawa, Alexandra Park in Toronto, and La petite Bourgogne in Montreal.

These observations lead to an obvious question: If the concept of area rehabilitation was so strongly accepted in planning theory and practice, why was it not translated more effectively into urban renewal policy, bearing in mind the influence that CMHC's planners had upon the evolution of the national housing legislation? The answer, somewhat surprisingly, is that the 1964 amendments were thought to have done all that was necessary. "There is now a focus on conserving and rehabilitating what is worth keeping," said Humphrey Carver, the chairman of the CMHC Advisory Group, in 1965. And Stanley Pickett, CMHC's Advisor on Urban Renewal, described at some length the different kinds of assistance to rehabilitation that the 1964 Act provided. With the blessing of hindsight, however, it

can only be said that CMHC's intentions were obscured by the language of the statute. Not until the urban renewal legislation was rewritten in the amended National Housing Act of 1973 was the concept of area rehabilitation clearly described, under the new title of neighbourhood improvement.

These events were most unfortunate as far as the planning profession was concerned, and their consequences were not a little unfair. In the political announcements that attended the amended legislation, it was made to appear that a totally new approach had been devised, an approach so new that it could not be associated with the old concept of urban renewal, all references to which were deleted from the statute. Yet, in reality, the 1973 amendments did not represent a rejection of the principle of government-sponsored urban renewal; rather, they were a retreat from the principle of comprehensiveness. Just as the original Act of 1944 had conceived of renewal in the narrow sense of slum clearance for the purpose of building rental housing for low-income families, so the 1973 amendments conceived of renewal in the equally narrow sense of the rehabilitation of deteriorating neighbourhoods.

That there were good reasons for the policy reorientation goes without saying. On the one hand, as planners had been pointing out for years, there were no large areas in Canadian cities that were in need of comprehensive redevelopment. All that was really necessary was to provide assistance for small-scale or "spot" redevelopment within larger rehabilitation areas, a need that was provided for in the neighbourhood improvement legislation in 1973. On the other hand, the use of housing legislation to sponsor urban renewal projects that had little, if any, housing purpose was dubious, to say the least. Non-residential projects proved to be very popular with municipal governments, and commercial and industrial renewal was no less desirable than residential renewal, but some other legislative vehicle would have

been more appropriate. In effect, the government had attempted to use its housing legislation to assume a leading role in the much larger field of urban development policy. Unhappily, in the public furore that accompanied its eventual retreat from that position, it was made to appear that it was really the planners who had got it all wrong, in their conception of comprehensive urban renewal.