

Third-Wave Neoliberalism in Theory and Practice: A Case Study of the Halifax Centre Plan

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Abstract

This study analyses a significant planning undertaking in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada to illustrate the pervasive nature of neoliberalism in planning theory and practice. It shows how smart growth and creative city narratives embody third-wave or policy-led neoliberalism and describes how the planning practitioner facilitates the expansion neoliberal narratives.

Keywords

neoliberalism, third-wave, property led development, smart growth, gentrification, Halifax

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1. INTRODUCTION

Planning activities, such as urban redevelopment initiatives, typically reflect the prevailing values and processes of the times in which they occur (Forester, 1989; Grant and Gillis, 2012). Examination of an initiative can reveal how a planning department, municipality, or specific actors navigate and relate to contemporary planning theory and practice. This paper discusses the implications of pervasive neoliberal politics and policies on the plan making process by examining a significant planning undertaking in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. The Halifax Centre Plan, “the first comprehensive planning policy for the Regional Centre” (Centre Plan Roll-Out, 2016, 2), redefines land use patterns in much of the urban core. This study highlights how, in an era where cities require capital investment to ensure operation, planning practice is influenced by neoliberalism to ensure the preservation of market interests, rather than issues of equity and the distribution of benefits. The Halifax Centre Plan advances the prime neoliberal logic that what is good for business is good for the city.

First, this article develops the argument that the advance of a ‘growth first’ approach to urban development in Halifax is consistent with the city’s adoption of neoliberal logics. The Centre Plan specifically is premised on revitalization through intensification that places urban competitiveness and economic growth above issues of social and economic equity. Tools employed by the Halifax Planning Department such as language construction, growth projections, and engagement tactics advance an intensification imperative. Despite claiming to represent public interest and embrace ‘livability’ and ‘sustainability’, the plan lacks policies enforcing affordability and protection for existing marginalized communities. I argue the Centre Plan constitutes a form of third-wave or policy-led neoliberalism with the potential to intensify issues of gentrification, housing affordability, and inequality.

Second, I argue ‘smart growth’ practices are inseparable from neoliberal political discourses. The Centre Plan advances selective definitions of livable, diverse, and complete communities, consistent with the obligations of competitiveness and growth. Given the environment of intense urban neoliberalism, restrictive engagement practices, and intensification policies that are broadly

consistent with private sector development practice, the depoliticized tenets of ‘smart growth’ development are deeply implicated in the propagation of an inequitable urban environment.

Third, consistent with ‘actually existing’ neoliberal outcomes (Brenner and Theodore, 2002), the Centre Plan represents a property-led, residential growth plan, rather than a comprehensive planning strategy. The plan’s adoption will immediately create vast wealth potential for Halifax developers, property owners and other “politically mobilized local elites” (Molotch, 1976, 310). Despite the neoliberal underpinning that what is good for growth is good for the city, planners rarely engage with their role in wealth production. Halifax lacks a mechanism to capture a portion of the immense new wealth the Centre Plan will create. Instead planners and politicians assume policies promoting human-scale development and livability will capture value for the city.

2. NEOLIBERALISM IN THEORY

2.1 A Brief History of Neoliberalism

The central tenet of Neoliberalism is the application of classic liberal economic arguments to the operation of society. Put simply, “society functions better under a market logic than any other logic, especially a state-directed one” (Purcell, 2009, 141). Though arguments for a neoliberal ethic in which the state was minimized and societal decisions left to the “invisible hand” of the market first appeared in the writings of Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, Neoliberalism was largely marginalized in favour of Keynesian interventionism until the 1970s and 80s (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Purcell, 2009; Peck and Tickell, 2002). After World War II, Keynesian economic policies established strong labour unions, national intervention into the economy, and a national welfare system (Purcell, 2008; 2009). However, faced with declining profitability of traditional mass-production industries and an extended global recession in the 1970s, faith in Keynesian institutions began to fade and free-market alternatives became increasingly attractive (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Purcell, 2009). Over the following decades, older industrialized states dismantled defining postwar economic structures and extended “market discipline, competition, and commodification throughout all sectors of society” (Brenner and Theodore, 2002, 350). In this first phase, commonly referred to as ‘roll-back neoliberalism’ (Peck and Tickell, 2002, 388) or

laissez-faire neoliberalism (Purcell, 2009, 142), neoliberal policies led to dramatic cuts in public service and infrastructure spending, and often the transfer of these responsibilities to lower levels of government (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Adamo, 2012).

The elections of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in the United Kingdom and United States coincided with particularly aggressive forms of *laissez-faire* neoliberal restructuring (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Olesen, 2014), but more moderate government policies were similarly introduced in nearly all industrialized countries, including Canada under Prime Minister Mulroney, New Zealand, Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, and Sweden (Brenner and Theodore, 2012; Stanford, 2014). In the 1980s, neoliberalism emerged as a global, rather than state-centric movement as the United States and other G7 countries extended the discipline of capital markets to less prominent, often resource dependent states through institutions like the World Trade Organization and International Monetary Fund (Brenner and Theodore, 2012). By the late 1980s, neoliberalism had emerged as the dominant political trend globally (Brenner and Theodore, 2012).

Many scholars distinguish between the first phase of roll-back/*laissez-faire* neoliberalism and that which developed throughout the 1990s. Rather than the restriction and minimization of state expenditures, *aidez-faire* (Purcell, 2009, 142) or roll-out neoliberalism (Peck and Tickell, 2002, 388) is characterized by an interventionist state apparatus rather than one which ‘gets out of the way’. Though the state may outwardly seek to limit regulations that inhibit free movement of capital, the actual practice of neoliberalism necessitates significant intervention (Purcell, 2009). Whereas *laissez-faire* state deregulation was concerned with the destruction of the Keynesian-Welfare state, *aidez-faire* policies reinforce neoliberalism through institutional and regulatory restructuring (Peck and Tickell, 2002).

The *laissez-faire* neoliberal experiment was not without limitations. States employing early neoliberal policies suffered market failures, environmental devastation, and social unrest (Adamo, 2012). In response to these critiques, newer iterations of *aidez-faire* neoliberalism integrate discourses of social and environmental reform, policy development, and service delivery, into

traditional issues like deregulation and welfare reform (Peck and Tickell, 2002). Rather than addressing systemic failings, *aidez-faire* neoliberalism represents a “reregulation, disciplining, and containment of those marginalized or dispossessed by the neoliberalization of the 1980s” (Peck and Tickell, 2002, 389). Economic policy is still on the agenda, but more frequently, *aidez-faire* neoliberalism seeks to extend policy making to cover all spheres of public life.

A useful point of comparison between the first and second phases of neoliberalization is seen in the modern history of welfare policy in the United States. Reagan’s *laissez-faire* policies vilified “welfare queens” for taking advantage of inefficient government structures. This type of characterization was used as a rationale to defund direct aid to American families. Conversely, Bill Clinton’s “workfare” policies, eventually formalized in the Welfare Reform Act of 1996, similarly retrenched state responsibility but did so by placing as many former welfare recipients as possible into low-paying jobs. Workfare was *aidez-faire* neoliberalism couched in the language of individual responsibility (Purcell, 2009). *Laissez-faire* largely ignored those it dispossessed, while *aidez-faire* fit them into a neoliberal narrative. The first two neoliberal phases were employed by different political parties over three decades to the same effect: retrenchment of state responsibility and the advance of market logics.

The history of planning practice is similarly underpinned by *laissez-* and *aidez-faire* processes. Compared to planning norms of the mid-20th century, the state’s role was reduced by *laissez-faire* governments and planning tasks were increasingly left to the private sector or public–private organizations (Olesen, 2013). Corresponding shifts of planning responsibilities to lower levels of government stressed municipal budgets and forced cities to focus on market facilitation, large-scale urban development and infrastructure projects (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Olesen, 2013).

Rather than facilitating market operation, *aidez-faire* planning practices that emerged during the 1990s intervened in markets to assist the accumulation of capital by generating public investments in infrastructure and urban development projects (Olesen, 2013). In housing markets for example, *laissez-faire* encouraged gentrification only to the extent proven viable by private interests. Under

aidez-faire, however, gentrification began to be treated as a development tool. Often branded as “reinvestment”, local governments, state level agencies, and federal administrations increased assistance to gentrifiers, relaxed zoning, and reduced protection of affordable housing throughout the 1990s. (Hackworth and Smith, 2000). Urban areas which capital interests had previously deemed risky or unprofitable were rendered safe for investment through *aidez-faire* state intervention.

More recent scholarship has identified a third phase of neoliberal policy making. Termed by Keil (2009) as “roll-with-it neoliberalization” (232) and often referred to as “third-wave” or “policy-led” (Smith, 2002), this period is characterized by increasing normalization of neoliberal narratives and practices in policymaking, including widespread adoption of New Public Management (NPM) techniques. NPM introduces corporate management principles into the public sector. In Toronto, Canada for example, Kipfer and Kiel (2002) document how the public sector has centralized financial controls, created benchmarks for departmental operations based on private-sector “competitors,” extended or introduced market pricing for services, and intensified public sector work.

Third-wave neoliberalism is the logical extension of what Purcell describes as neoliberalism’s political problem: “how to legitimize itself as it dismantles welfare systems, increases inequality, and unleashes into urban political life the harsh relations of market competition” (2009, 143). Neoliberalism must be understood as both a set of policy objectives designed to assist capital, but also as an ideology committed to establishing its assumptions as the dominant discourse (Purcell, 2009). If successful, third-wave neoliberalism “becomes so embedded in common sense as to be taken for granted and not open to question” (Harvey, 2005, 5). The desired effect is that political and economic entities lose any sense of alternatives and accept neoliberalism as the basis for their action (Keil, 2009). In an environment of normalized neoliberalism, a city that does not support corporate tax incentives, environmental deregulation, and streamlined development processes will stagnate and die (Purcell, 2009). While the first two phases of neoliberalism were concerned with dismantling and rebuilding the state, third-wave neoliberalism is understood as a period where neoliberal discourses pervade all scales of governance (Olesen, 2013).

Hegemony can be described as a political project through which a particular group establishes its interests as the general interests of society (Purcell, 2009). Neoliberalism, for example, is one in a long line of ideologies that have temporarily established dominance over politics and planning. The different phases of neoliberalism are representative of the ideology's struggle to maintain its current hegemony – to refortify itself against changing political environments. In this way, neoliberalism is also highly context specific, and its implementation uneven across jurisdictions (Purcell, 2009). While it is useful to categorize neoliberal tools as third-wave, *laissez-* or *aidez-faire*, contemporary neoliberalism is likely to resemble an overlapping hybrid that draws from all phases of neoliberal development (Peck and Tickell, 2007; Adamo, 2012). At a municipal level, third-wave neoliberalism may only be present in certain policy documents or state actions. It is just the latest in a series of tools employed to integrate neoliberal hegemony into governance and planning processes.

2.2 'Actually Existing Neoliberalism'

Neoliberalism is not a fully articulated and universally applied political project (Adamo, 2012). There is extraordinary variation in the application of neoliberal values. More often than not, states muddle through neoliberalization and sites of transformation are subject to experimentation and opportunistic reform (Peck and Tickell, 2007). 'Actually existing neoliberalism' draws attention to the different means by which neoliberalism is applied. Brenner and Theodore argue it is best understood as a process "defined by the legacies of inherited institutional frameworks, policy regimes, regulatory practices, and political struggles" (2002,351) in which it takes place. Neoliberalization is a "historically specific, on-going, and internally contradictory process of market-driven socio-spatial transformation, rather than a fully actualized policy regime, ideological form or regulatory framework" (Brenner and Theodore, 2002, 353). Though the ideology may be clean and easily understood, the practical processes of neoliberalism are inconsistent and varied.

Peck and Tickell argue that in order to properly analyze or contest neoliberalism, there is a need to move beyond the typical conceptualizations of neoliberalism as a Goliath to civil society's David (2007). The Goliath imagery implies a single, monolithic structure, rather than the multi-faceted neoliberal hybrids more common in practice. Neoliberalism is not the construction of a board of

world and business leaders. It is a process that adapts to suit specific socio-political situations. In the United Kingdom, for example, Thatcher's neoliberal policy reforms contested Keynesian economics, relied on highly centralized decision making, and fostered certain government structures like think tanks (Peck and Tickell, 2007). Mexico's neoliberal transition was very different. Martin (2007) suggests politicians sold neoliberalism to Latin America as an alternative to authoritarianism and violence, rather than as a means of state retrenchment. Different still, politicians in Alberta, Canada implicated oil production, grass roots democracy, and perceived need to establish a roll-back model for other provinces into neoliberal processes (Miller, 2007). Though these neoliberal projects share a common ideology, the processes by which they were established were neither coherent, nor comprehensive. As no distinct set of policies exists, neoliberalism can be difficult to identify in practice. Rather than attempting to define neoliberalism by its processes, academics have increasingly studied commonalities in neoliberal outcomes, or "actually existing neoliberalism" (Brenner and Theodore, 2002).

2.3 'Actually Existing Neoliberalism' in Urban Environments

Most of the preceding section covered the rise of neoliberalism at the national and intra-national level, but neoliberalism, and its social, economic, and ecological effects, is most aggressive at the urban scale (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Keil, 2002; Peck and Tickell, 2002; Kipfer and Keil, 2002). Generally, national and provincial neoliberal policies have had two effects on local governments. First, in an era of globalization and free movement of capital, cities have been asked to respond to an environment of increased financial speculation, intensifying interlocal competition, and global location strategies of major corporations (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). At the same time, decades of government deregulation, including retrenchment of national welfare regimes that shifted the burden of service delivery to the local level, have imposed a severe financial burden on cities (Adamo, 2012). As a result, urban forms of governance have become increasingly entrepreneurial under neoliberalization. Cities have been forced to act as businesses, moving "away from distributive policies, welfare considerations, and direct service provision towards more market-oriented and market-dependent approaches aiming at pursuing economic promotion and competitive restructuring" (Swyngedouw et al., 2002, 547-548).

Development practices and planning policies in neoliberal environments often act with the goal of integrating economic competitiveness into the city's built environment (Kipfer and Keil 2002; Swyngedouw et al. 2002; Weber 2002; Adamo, 2012). The devolution of higher level government responsibilities to local governments has increased the dependence of cities on self-generated revenue (namely, the collection of property tax). Long neglected inner-city commercial, industrial, and residential neighbourhoods have become the target of urban development and revitalization schemes (Weber, 2002). Large-scale urban redevelopment is the central strategy for revaluing land and increasingly municipal revenues (Weber, 2002). This is often referred to as property-led urban regeneration, and is part of a greater shift in planning away from long-term comprehensive planning, and towards project-based, project-led planning (Sager, 2013).

In capitalist urban environments, a city's health is predicated on growth, the clearest indicator of which is a steadily rising urban-area population (Molotch, 1976). Each urban environment competes to attract people to their city. Urban regeneration has become central to 'competitive city' strategies in many European and North American cities (Adamo, 2012). Inspired in large part by Richard Florida's (2002) ideas surrounding the 'creative class', cities have increasingly used urban structure as a method of attracting a certain type of individual to the city centre. Urban competitiveness, Florida believes, depends on attracting young, educated professionals whose presence will accordingly attract capital investment from businesses and developers. The 'creative class' is particularly amenable to socially diverse neighbourhoods, vibrant arts and culture scenes, modern public infrastructure, and recreation and leisure opportunities. In short, municipalities and planners have been tasked with facilitating an economic and built environment that can be easily leveraged for economic and political purposes. Urban branding and place making initiatives (Swyngedouw et al., 2002), large-scale megaprojects such as water front revitalization, 'historic districts', sports and cultural facilities, luxury condominiums, and conference centres are typical urban initiatives resulting from these policies (Adamo, 2012). Urban theories, like smart growth, new urbanism, or the creative class, that respond to prevailing political trends are particularly to appealing urban authorities. A model that accomplishes the goals of urban service provision, satisfies political actors who require business efficiency and fiscally viable municipal operations,

and addresses issues of social and economic inequity is likely to be replicated across jurisdictions. The rise of an ideology, in this case neoliberalism, creates the conditions in which certain urban theories become established methods of governance.

Brenner and Theodore provide a broad overview of the various contemporary processes and policies, or mechanisms, that have affected urban institutions throughout North America and Western Europe. They characterize ‘actually existing neoliberalization’ as a process both of creation and destruction. Given the nature *laissez-faire* neoliberalism as a dismantling of the traditional welfare state, and *aidez-faire* as a restructuring process, the mechanisms are generally correlated with the phases of neoliberal development. For example, when discussing urban housing markets, a neoliberal analysis might look for destructive policies like the razing of public housing or the elimination of rent controls and creative elements like increased opportunities for speculative investment (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). Twelve distinct mechanisms of urban neoliberalization are identified by Brenner and Theodore. Though the moments of creation and destruction are quite specific, Brenner and Theodore note the realities of ‘actually existing neoliberalism’ mean urban environments are likely to implement them in their own way. Brenner and Theodore’s list is a useful analytical tool for showing the rise of neoliberal institutions in a specific urban environment. (A full list of neoliberal mechanisms is included in appendix 1.)

Other scholars have identified categories of common neoliberal policies. Sager (2011, 2013) provides the most robust survey, grouping policies according to the areas of urban development they are designed to influence (appendix 2). Sager argues the identified policies represent three neoliberal trends in urban planning: the expanding use of private solutions to public problems, increased competition and use of private property, and planning that serves developers and their favoured customers (Sager, 2013). Though the categories are represented to some degree in most urban centres, policies that impact property development, economic development, and housing and neighbourhood renewal are most relevant to this study.

2.4 Smart Growth, Neoliberalization, and Third-Wave Gentrification

Deeply integrated in modern planning narratives is smart growth – a shift towards high-density, mixed use urban development. In many urban contexts, planning practice operates under the assumption that intensification is a more environmentally sustainable approach to urban development, in part because it reduces reliance on personal automobiles, reduces development pressures in rural areas, conserves valuable agricultural land for local food production, and lowers greenhouse gas emissions (Neuman, 2005; Adamo, 2012). Intensification and mixed use built form is often heralded in economic revitalization initiatives as a method for increasing urban vitality and attracting capital and the affluent ‘creative’ and middle classes back to the city. Like ‘actually existing neoliberalism’, smart growth is discussed and implemented differently according to the regulatory and political contexts of an urban environment, but support for the basic underpinnings of smart growth planning is consistently high across Canada, the United Kingdom, and United States (Grant, 2002; Adamo, 2012). Only after decades of experimentation were the vitality, prosperity, and equality promised by smart growth subjected to significant study (Grant, 2002; Bunce, 2004; Filion and McSpurren, 2007; Tretter, 2013; Goetz, 2013).

Of particular importance to discussion of the Halifax Centre Plan is emerging research that links smart growth intensification and city centre revitalization strategies to third-wave or policy led gentrification (Lees, 2003; Bunce, 2009). In contrast to the traditional renovation of old housing stock, Lees (2003) argues that contemporary gentrification can be incited by new build residential and commercial development. Support at the state level for the redevelopment of urban brownfields, underused waterfronts and run down urban neighbourhoods has increasingly been seen as imperative for maintaining urban financial health and competitiveness. To facilitate such development, smart growth strategies implicate the relatively uncontroversial concepts of sustainability, livability, and affordability into intensification policies. Bunce (2004; 2009), discussing sustainability and urban redevelopment specifically, argues that the concept is only selectively embraced to the degree that it aligns with the demands of neoliberal service provision and market-oriented development. Tretter (2013) is even more direct in his criticisms of smart growth, arguing that restriction of sprawl and intensification in ‘desired-development’ zones disproportionately affects traditionally

marginalized communities. Smart growth is justified as a sustainable, livable response to future growth, without acknowledging asymmetrical power relationships and historic inequality. In a study of smart growth policies in Austin, Texas that displaced existing communities, Tretter (2013, 309) put it bluntly. Smart growth, he says, may as well stand for “Send Minorities Across the River Today”. Despite policy language linking intensification with diverse housing offerings, socially inclusive neighbourhoods, and livable urban environments, market-driven intensification has the potential to displace low income residents from areas designated for “revitalization” by capital investment.

3. NEOLIBERALISM IN PRACTICE

3.1 Neoliberalization in Context: Seattle, and Washington State

In 2001, airline manufacturer Boeing relocated its corporate head office from Seattle, Washington to Chicago, Illinois. Though most of the company’s production was still based in Washington State, the departure was viewed as a warning by state and municipal authorities (Purcell, 2008). Shortly after, the Washington Competitiveness Council formed with the express mandate of ensuring the state would be able to maintain national and international competitiveness and attract capital investment. Over the next several years, a group of politicians, civil servants, business and labour leaders produced a comprehensive policy agenda with two main components. First, the public sector should agree that Washington State must make itself as competitive as possible in the global economy (Purcell, 2008). Development and planning policies should reflect the imperative of local competitiveness, and stress the importance of a prosperous private sector to a healthy public sector. Second, the council proposed a policy recommendations that reduced taxes and fees for businesses and streamlined environmental, labour, and planning regulations (Purcell, 2008). Along with deregulation, the council recommended new models for public spending including active intervention to improve public transportation and telecommunication infrastructure, increased research and development spending, and restructuring of public education. These changes deemed necessary to ensure an attractive environment for businesses and workers (Purcell, 2008).

The changes were especially profitable for the businesses and industries represented on the

Washington Competitiveness Council. Despite the obvious conflict of business interests dictating public policy, council decisions were far from covert. Council meetings were not conducted in secret. The decision making process was widely publicized and discussions were held at universities, public spaces, and city halls (Purcell, 2008). Consensus developed among politicians, government officials, public servants, and citizens that the agenda of the Council was consistent with common sense urban revitalization strategies. It was in the best interests of everyone for business and government to work together would together to meet the needs of business (Purcell, 2008). Though few examples of contemporary neoliberalization are as direct as that which took place in the early 2000s in Washington, the aligning of neoliberal policy with ‘common sense’ is a typical neoliberal strategy.

3.2 Neoliberalization in Context: Halifax, Nova Scotia

The capital city of Nova Scotia, Halifax is home to slightly over 400,000 people (Statistics Canada, 2016). The city experienced relatively slow growth rates throughout the twentieth century, with large scale downtown development not appearing until the 1950s and 60s (Grant and Gillis, 2012; Grant and Leung, 2016). Throughout the 70s and 80s, most high-rise development was project-based and often opposed by those seeking to maintain the character of the historic central business district. The scale of development was still not on the order of that featured in larger urban centres in Canada. Grant (1994) catalogues the extensive dispute over the Mitchell Property, one of Halifax’s last remaining estate houses. Eventually demolished despite great opposition in 1987, the contentious redevelopment process exemplified increasing tensions between development and growth interests and citizen groups seeking to preserve heritage or character assets (Grant, 1994).

In the mid-1990s, Halifax began its neoliberal policy shift. As the host city for the 1995 G7 meetings, the Canadian federal government invested heavily in waterfront improvement and the city was the subject of an international tourism campaign emphasizing colonial heritage and beauty of the waterfront (Grant and Leung, 2016). In 1996, with the goal of improving efficiency by integrating resources and increasing urban scale, the provincial government amalgamated Halifax and the surrounding municipalities. The resulting restructuring initiated economic development strategies focused on revitalizing the urban core (Grant and Leung, 2016). The same year, the

Greater Halifax Partnership was established as a public-private partnership to “keep, grow and get business, talent and investment in Halifax” (Halifax Partnership, 2016) and develop stronger relations between the public and private sector (Grant and Leung, 2016).

As in many Canadian cities, Halifax’s planners experimented throughout the late 1990s and 2000s with new urbanism, smart growth, urban design, and creative city/class approaches. In 2004 the Greater Halifax Partnership brought Richard Florida to speak and commissioned a creative competitiveness assessment study. The study encouraged urban entrepreneurialism and strategies to attract young, creative people to the city. The Seaport mixed-use development, for example, was heavily influenced by Florida’s theories and integrated cultural institutions and goals into the planning process (Grant, Holme, & Pettman, 2008). The municipality and province committed strongly to the idea that cultural development should drive economic development (Grant, Holme, & Pettman, 2008). Fusion Halifax, a network connecting young, urban professionals, also emerged in this period (Grant and Leung, 2016).

The scale of proposals and developer interest in downtown investment increased throughout the late 2000s. The Twisted Sisters development, twin 27 story towers, marked one of Halifax’s first forays into iconic urban design (Grant and Gillis, 2012). The project was described as growth that would both enhance the character of downtown, stimulate economic growth, and lead to a more vibrant city. Though the Twisted Sisters project was not built, high-rise development became common throughout the 2000s (Grant and Leung, 2016).

Since 2000, downtown development in Halifax has been generally facilitated by policy. Form based code was introduced by the 2009 Downtown Halifax Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy in an effort to limit bureaucratic red tape. As well, the ability of citizen groups to oppose development has been curtailed, and increasingly planners are being asked to weigh protection of heritage assets against economic development goals (Grant and Leung, 2016). In 2014, Halifax revealed a comprehensive rebranding campaign, marketing the city as a bold, “caring community that embraces creativity and innovation” (Strapagiel, 2014). More recent development projects,

including the Nova Centre and Halifax Central Library, are urban development showcase pieces, projecting the high quality urban design Halifax is promoting across planning policy documents, including the Centre Plan.

3.3 The Role of the Practicing Planner in Urban Neoliberalization

In an era of pervasive neoliberalism, practicing planners have adapted to an increasingly entrepreneurial, and growth driven corporate culture. Associated with this change has been a reorientation of the planning profession away from intervention and control of development activity and towards facilitation of private development interests (Fox-Rogers and Murphy, 2016; Sager, 2009; 2011). Roll-with-it or policy-led neoliberalization has been internally embraced by public organizations as a management model. Through NPM reforms, devolution, business rationality, and entrepreneurialism are encouraged to subvert perceived bureaucratic inefficiencies (Sager, 2011; Fox-Rogers and Murphy, 2016). As a consequence of this shift in culture, planners and authorities often feel compelled to adopt pro-development approaches to demonstrate their relevance (Fox-Rogers and Murphy, 2016). Strategies like smart growth are successful partially because they provide planners with a new vocabulary. Depending on the situation, a smart growth savvy planner can demonstrate efficiency and profitability to politicians, or address service provision and affordability with citizens.

This argument is furthered by planning scholars, many of whom acknowledge that some of the theoretic underpinnings of modern planning practice are particularly susceptible to neoliberal ideology. Bengs (2005), for example, contends that the main function of communicative planning (planning which seeks broad consensus before action) is to facilitate the neoliberal economy and the workings of the real estate market. Olesen (2014), similarly argues that the win-win outcomes sought by communicative planning struggle to deal with antagonistic pluralism. “Conflict and strife,” he writes “are often viewed as counterproductive for planning” and are thus avoided (Olesen, 2014, 295). In this way planning decisions tend to mirror broad political trends (Sager, 2005). In the context of pervasive neoliberalism, planning that attempts to avoid conflict and seek consensus would be unlikely to critique the broadly accepted virtues of economic growth and

competitiveness (Olesen, 2014).

Sager (2009) places this argument in a more practical sphere contending that the conflicting goals of Communicative Planning Theory and New Public Management (NPM) generate tensions that negatively affect everyday working conditions for planners. Planners are inclined to favour deliberative democracy, public involvement, and open processes and oppose manipulations by developers. However, NPM is the overwhelming political and economic paradigm (Sager, 2009). These conflicting values and expectations can make an already difficult job overwhelming. Even Bengs (2005), despite his slightly inflammatory argument, acknowledges the absurdity in what practicing planners are being asked to do. Planners are supposed to simultaneously engage in the design of a new society while rejecting the prevailing societal blueprint. In a profession that seeks no-lose scenarios, it seems that the contemporary planner can never win.

The working culture for planners has changed, but so too have the practical tasks of the job. In many countries, planning has moved away from long-term comprehensive planning and towards project-based, property-led strategies (Sager, 2013). In order to generate investment by the private sector, the market often needs prodding into action with government subsidies and favourable policy. Even if a master plan is in effect, it is often secondary to private initiatives. Rather than the long-term planning documents many planners have been trained to write and follow, increasingly short-term development management is common (Sager, 2013). Planners may be tasked with facilitating certain special investment zones, assisting organization with private planning firms, or analyzing how potential developments fit existing policy, knowing that planning recommendations are unlikely to be accepted by municipal council.

Property-led regeneration has been criticized by planners for its focus on projects rather than plans that deal with wider issues of equity and distribution of benefits in society (Sager, 2013). Neoliberalism asks planners to privilege economic actors as a means of revitalizing formerly unprofitable urban areas. Practicing planners have adapted to this imperative by trying to place a burden of social responsibility on private development. To a degree, they can include elements

of affordability, livability, and sustainability in development goals, but only to an extent that is embraced by developers (Bunce, 2004; 2009). Despite the best efforts of planners, a mechanism for leveraging developer desire into societal good has yet to appear.

4. METHODS

This study of the Halifax Centre Plan is not limited to the final draft policy document. More than 40 documents spanning background reports, engagement feedback, and draft policies spanning the entire two year planning process were gathered from the Centre Plan website, centreplan.ca, and a document library, shapeyourcityhalifax.ca/centre-plan/documents. Further information was sourced from Halifax Council and Design Review Committee minutes. Personal observations were conducted at three Centre Plan engagement sessions and various public presentations, but this data was used to provide context and background for the researcher and does not appear in this analysis.

After gathering the data, a thematic analysis was used to identify emerging themes in the Centre Plan documents. A preliminary coding framework was developed, borrowing from Brenner and Theodore (2002) and Sager (2011; 2013). Relevant passages from documents were coded by theme and banked for later use. When coherent passages were not available (engagement feedback, for example, often appears as hundreds of short, independent statements) keyword searches were performed to find relevant thematic groupings.

Finally, a discourse analysis of was used on policy documents to identify what types of language construction were used most often with specific themes. Policy language can imply that action is imperative, or that a theme is only to be considered rather than ensured. For example, using “must” or “will” implies immediate and distinct action. “Consider” or “explore” implies much lesser degree of certainty and importance. The language used to describe a theme indicates the degree to which that theme will be incorporated in practice.

5. THE HALIFAX REGIONAL CENTRE PLAN

5.1 Why the Centre Plan?

Beginning in 2015 and continuing for two years, the Centre Plan process was the primary focus for much of the planning, development, and political communities in Halifax. Engagement sessions were heavily advertised, planners promoted the plan in planning schools, and politicians and city staff encouraged involvement at every opportunity. Newspaper and media coverage was extensive, and the Centre Plan was billed continuously as an opportunity to shape Halifax and to clarify land use objectives for the future (Silva, 2016). Because of the importance of the initiative, the stated desire for citizen feedback, and impact the process had on development in the city, the Centre Plan touches on many aspects of planning practice in Halifax. A study of the Centre Plan reveals the culture of planning and politics in Halifax.

5.2 Background

The Halifax Centre Plan results from an extensive process that began in 2006 when the Halifax Regional Plan established an administrative boundary for the Regional Centre. Encompassing the Halifax Peninsula and Dartmouth, the Regional Centre is the locus of political, cultural, and economic activity in the Regional Municipality. As of 2011, it was also the most densely urbanized portion of the city, home to nearly 95,000 people, 50,000 dwellings, and most jobs in the municipality (Centre Plan, 2016). In 2009, Halifax adopted the Downtown Halifax Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy (DHSMPS) to guide renewed economic interest in the commercial core of the Regional Centre. The Centre Plan, conversely, is “the first comprehensive planning policy for the Regional Centre” (Centre Plan Roll-Out, 2016, 2).

The impetus for a comprehensive planning strategy for urban Halifax is the large growth in population projected for the next 15 years. A growth scenarios report published in 2013 projected a 2031 population of approximately 485,000, roughly a 25% increase over the population in 2009 (Stantec, 2013). Current Statistics Canada (2016) data shows these projections to be optimistic. The 2016 prediction, for example, overestimated population growth by approximately 5,000 people (Stantec, 2013; Statistics Canada, 2016). A more accurate analysis of predictive accuracy

will be possible after 2016 census data is released. Current Halifax policy is operating under the expectation that significant growth is coming to the city. The Centre Plan will be the primary planning tool for dealing with that increase.



Figure 1: The Regional Centre in Context (Centre Plan, 2016, 1)

5.3 Engagement Process and Timeline

Drafted in 2015, the Community Engagement Strategy for the Centre Plan outlines a comprehensive set of engagement strategies to take place throughout the plan creation process, including an extensive online presence, directed stakeholder outreach and community meetings. Informed by other planning processes across Canada and the United States, the strategies employed by the Halifax Centre Plan are reflect common engagement practices across planning in North America (Centre Plan Community Engagement Strategy, 2015).

Advertised as a process of “learning together” (Centre Plan Timeline, 2016) the Centre Plan engagement strategy began in earnest in 2015 with the launch of the outreach portal, targeted shareholder outreach, and the commissioning of various background studies. Throughout 2016, Halifax planning staff led three community gatherings and several education and consultation events. After each event, feedback was catalogued and posted to either the dedicated Centre Plan process website, www.centreplan.ca, or a document library on the Halifax planning department’s general engagement website, <http://www.shapeyourcityhalifax.ca/centre-plan/documents>. Most engagement feedback posted came from the community events. The first event introduced the plan, the second was a neighbourhood theme workshop, and the third focused on growth scenarios. Though Halifax planners hosted private engagement sessions with developers (Halifax Community Design Advisory Committee Minutes, 25 May, 2016) feedback from those meetings does not appear on the website.

Following stakeholder consultation, draft project goals, policy direction, and structural policies were released in the fall of 2016.

5.4 Draft Centre Plan Release and Structure

The Halifax planning department released the first draft of the Centre Plan in late 2016 via the dedicated project website, www.centreplan.ca. The public was invited to review and comment on the draft throughout November before the official end of the commenting phase on December 2, 2016. The plan contains four major sections: the introduction, general policies, urban structure

policies, and an implementation and monitoring plan.

The introduction outlines the purpose, role, and scope of the plan. It also describes core concepts and theme areas. The guiding principles used to generate core concepts come from the 2014 Halifax Regional Municipal Planning Strategy. Theme areas were used to direct engagement feedback. The general policy section of the plan outlines general directives responding to the theme areas, while urban structure policies focus on how growth will occur and be managed throughout the Regional Centre. The urban structure portion of the plan is by far the most robust, setting new zones, prescribing growth proportions, and providing distinct built form guidelines. Finally, the Centre Plan concludes with an implementation and monitoring strategy that describes time frameworks, key actions, and indicators to judge effectiveness.

This report analyzes the draft plan; therefore, any remarks will be subject to potential plan revisions.

6. THE CENTRE PLAN AS A PRODUCT OF A NEOLIBERAL ENVIRONMENT

6.1 A Growth-First Plan

The Centre Plan stresses the importance and inevitability of growth as the primary driving force in Halifax. In 2014 the Halifax Regional Plan set the goal of accommodating 25% of future population growth in the Regional Centre (Centre Plan, 2016). The Centre Plan, however, supports up to 40% of Halifax's growth, citing the need to encourage "economically and environmentally responsible growth" (Centre Plan, 2016, 23). The change in targets is presented as a common sense reaction "given current trends toward urban living and potential for greater growth" (Centre Plan, 2016, 19). Despite easily accessible data indicating overestimation of population projections and an internal acknowledgment that vacancy rates in the Regional Centre nearly doubled from 2008 to 2015 (Centre Plan, 2016, 14), the Centre Plan operates as if continued residential and commercial growth is inevitable.

This contention was particularly evident in community engagement sessions leading to the release

of the Plan. The third community session particularly focused on the need for population increase and the benefits that development associated with that increase will bring. For example, planning staff indicated that “increased development provides greater housing choice that, in turn, facilitates aging in place and improves affordability” (Centre Plan Growth Scenario Boards, 2016, 4). In citizen engagement sessions, intensification was directly associated with more successful shops and restaurants, easier accessibility by active transportation, and cost savings for tax payers (Centre Plan Growth Scenario Boards, 2016, 4).

The growth scenarios engagement session did not ask if Halifax should grow; it posited population increase and intensification as a fact. This was so engrained in the engagement process that constraints were applied to citizen responses to direct feedback. When asked “How should we grow?” (Centre Plan Growth Scenario Boards, 2016, 2) citizens were required to cast a vote for one of three development options.

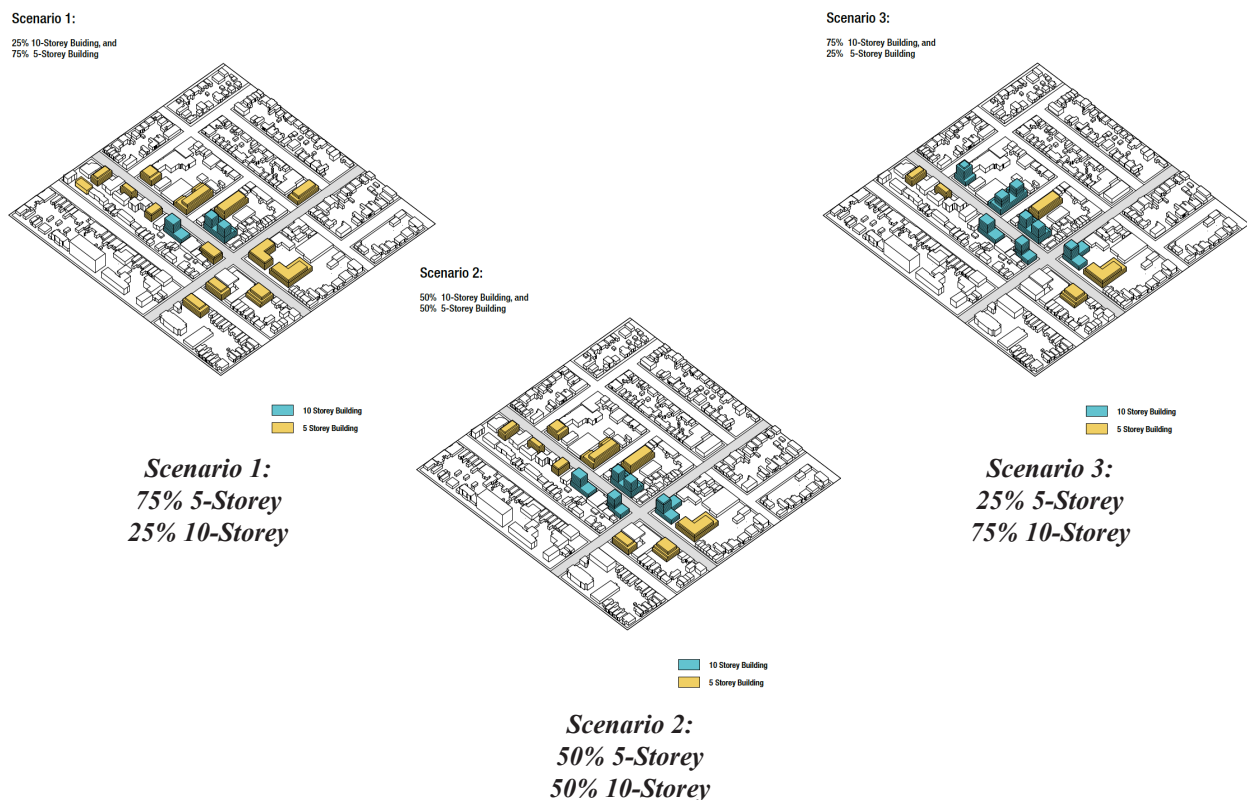


Figure 2: Potential Growth Scenarios (Centre Plan Growth Scenario Boards, 2016, 20)

The first option limits growth to 25% in 10-story buildings and 75% in 5-storey structures. The second allows 50% in each category and the third prescribes 75% in 10-story buildings and 25% in 5-storey structures. Each scenario was accompanied by the caveat that smaller numbers of stories would necessitate larger building footprints. By limiting citizen input to one of three categories, all of which provide a level of predetermined intensification and an increase in developer rights, planning staff directed outcomes to fit within a growth oriented neoliberal framework.

Growth is the primary driver of the Urban Structure portion of the Centre Plan. Each of Halifax's neighbourhoods and areas is given one of nine classifications. Policies directing development in all nine classifications include provisions for growth in population and intensification of development. Areas given the "centre" designation, for example, are expected to accommodate 28% of future growth in new structures ranging from 4 to 20 storeys (Centre Plan, 2016). Often different height allowances are coordinated with specific land parcels, indicating a level of deference to developers who already own land and likely contributed to the planning process.

Perhaps most telling of the pressure for growth is that residential areas, often cited as neighbourhoods whose character needs to be protected (Centre Plan, 2016, 109), are expected to accommodate 16% of future intensification (Centre Plan, 2016). While there is a policy encouraging developments to respect existing character, 4-6 storey structures, infill rental units, and garden suites are encouraged. The degree to which potential developments are discussed vastly exceeds discussion surrounding preservation, which is often reduced to single ambiguous statement. In established residential area, characterized by lower densities and single detached homes the Centre Plan permits

modest redevelopment opportunities that respect the existing scale, character and built form of these areas. Appropriate housing types may include:

- *Low scale apartment style buildings*
- *Detached dwellings*
- *Semi-detached dwellings*
- *Townhouses*
- *Duplexes/Triplexes*
- *Housing conversions*
- *Garden suites*
- *Secondary suites/Auxiliary Dwelling Units (Centre Plan, 2016, 110)*

One of the plan's explicit objectives is "to protect the character of residential areas" (Centre Plan, 2016, 109). On the next page, however, eight potential redevelopment and intensification options are listed. The Centre Plan does not define "respectful" development, nor provide an example of what that development could look like.

Residential neighbourhoods that are characterized by a mix of detached homes, student housing, and smaller apartments such as those bordering Windsor Street and abutting the Dalhousie and Saint Mary's campuses are afforded even less protection. In addition to the intensifications permitted above, four to six storey apartment complexes are allowed, provided they are "consistent in scale, or appropriately transition to adjacent properties" (Centre Plan, 2016, 112).

In all cases, property intensification in the Centre Plan is facilitated by private interests. Public housing is only mentioned in a description of the Hydrostone neighbourhood (Centre Plan, 2016, 55) and in a policy encouraging the repair and upkeep of existing public units (Centre Plan, 2016, 62). While affordability is touted as a primary objective of the Plan, only one policy, outside of density bonusing requirements, addresses the expansion of a more affordable form of housing.

(The Centre Plan will) explore options for supporting rooming houses in the Regional Centre while establishing contextually-appropriate requirements that address the cumulative impacts of these uses. Requirements may include limits on the number of bedrooms or maximum lot coverages, or requirements for landscaping and open space.
Centre Plan, 2016, 62

In this policy the Centre Plan commits to the ambiguous and unenforceable exploration of options for supporting rooming houses. Further, it immediately indicates that any policies it does come up with will include limitations and regulatory requirements that could disrupt rooming house operation. The sole policy that expressly discusses non-market affordable housing is largely inconsequential, and may even be detrimental.

Neoliberal policies identified by Brenner and Theodore (2002) and Sager (2011; 2013), catalogue the offloading of traditional public responsibilities on the private sector and the liberalization of housing markets. This is consistent with Centre Plan's assumption that affordable housing will

result from increased unit availability and density bonusing. Despite growing literature indicating policy-led intensification is likely to displace socially and economically marginalized populations rather than support them (Jones and Ley, 2016) the Centre Plan advocates growth as the primary means of addressing housing equity.

6.2 Property-Led Rather than Comprehensive Planning

At many points throughout the Centre Plan, the document refers to itself as a comprehensive plan, as its interdisciplinary approach covers seven foci: land use and design, mobility, public spaces and places, culture and heritage, housing, sustainability, and jobs and economic development (Centre Plan, 2016). Despite this claim, the policies governing the expansion of housing and facilitation of growth are far more robust and actionable than those in other areas and are likely to take priority over policies prescribing significant public expenditure. The General Policies are consistent with the values of smart growth and seek to attract development, economic and residential activity back to the urban core. In many cases the verbs used in policies provide planners and politicians with room to subvert the policy, for example by using “investigate”, “consider”, or “strive to” when discussing alternative transportation requirements, rather than “should” or “will”.

(The Centre Plan will...)

Investigate requiring level of service assessments for large-scale developments. Level of service assessments, provided by the proponent, will reflect the hierarchy of travel modes set out in the Plan, prioritizing pedestrians first then cyclists, public transit, car sharing, and lastly, private cars (Centre Plan, 2016, 40).

Strive to improve the comfort and convenience of active transportation options, such as on-street bicycle facilities, within the Regional Centre (Centre Plan, 2016, 41).

Consider the addition of new physically accessible pedestrian and cycling bridge crossings at major roads, railways, and waterways when at grade crossings are not feasible or safe for pedestrians (Centre Plan, 2016, 42).

Many policies directly relate to the entrepreneurial city Halifax wishes to cultivate, for example, by opening the door to pop-up commercial development within parks.

(The Centre Plan will) consider permitting small-scale and pop-up commercial development within parks where determined to be appropriate (Centre Plan, 2016, 49).

A useful and telling comparison is the difference between the general policies regarding housing and those regarding jobs and economic development. While the plan commits to developing “public and private partnerships to expand and promote the unique identities and features of the Regional Centre and market it as an attractive destination for residents, businesses, and tourists” (Centre Plan, 2016, 70) it only plans to “promote” or “encourage”, rather than mandate family-oriented housing, and a mix of housing options (Centre Plan, 2016, 60). This despite more than 30 mentions of the importance of maintaining family housing and two mentions of the Regional Centre as a potential destination for tourists in the community engagement sessions. There were no mentions of marketing or making the Regional Centre a destination.

In stark contrast to the General Policies section of the Centre Plan is the Urban Structure portion that prescribes property development. Policy directions are clear and actionable, often including quantitative measurements for density and height and requirements for building proposals.

Development proposals within Centres should include the following:

- *Ground floor uses that are active and oriented to serve pedestrians along existing commercial and main streets*
- *A mix of uses that support pedestrian traffic*
- *The land use patterns of the nearby areas extended, or logically completed, to support integrated mobility to and through Centres (Centre Plan, 2016, 82)*

Where developments abut, or contain a publicly accessible sidewalk or pathway, at-grade residential units should have accessible main floors set slightly above grade (typically 0.5-1.0 m) in order to achieve visual privacy from any sidewalk. (Centre Plan, 2016, 84)

In order to reduce the massing impacts of tall buildings, above the streetwall podium the Gross Floor Area shall be restricted to 750m². (Centre Plan, 2016, 84)

The Centre Plan provides mapping tools to indicate precisely what is allowed to be built on each individual lot, making it easy for a developer to start the process. Graphic maps are included in the plan and an interactive tool is available at www.centreplan.ca.

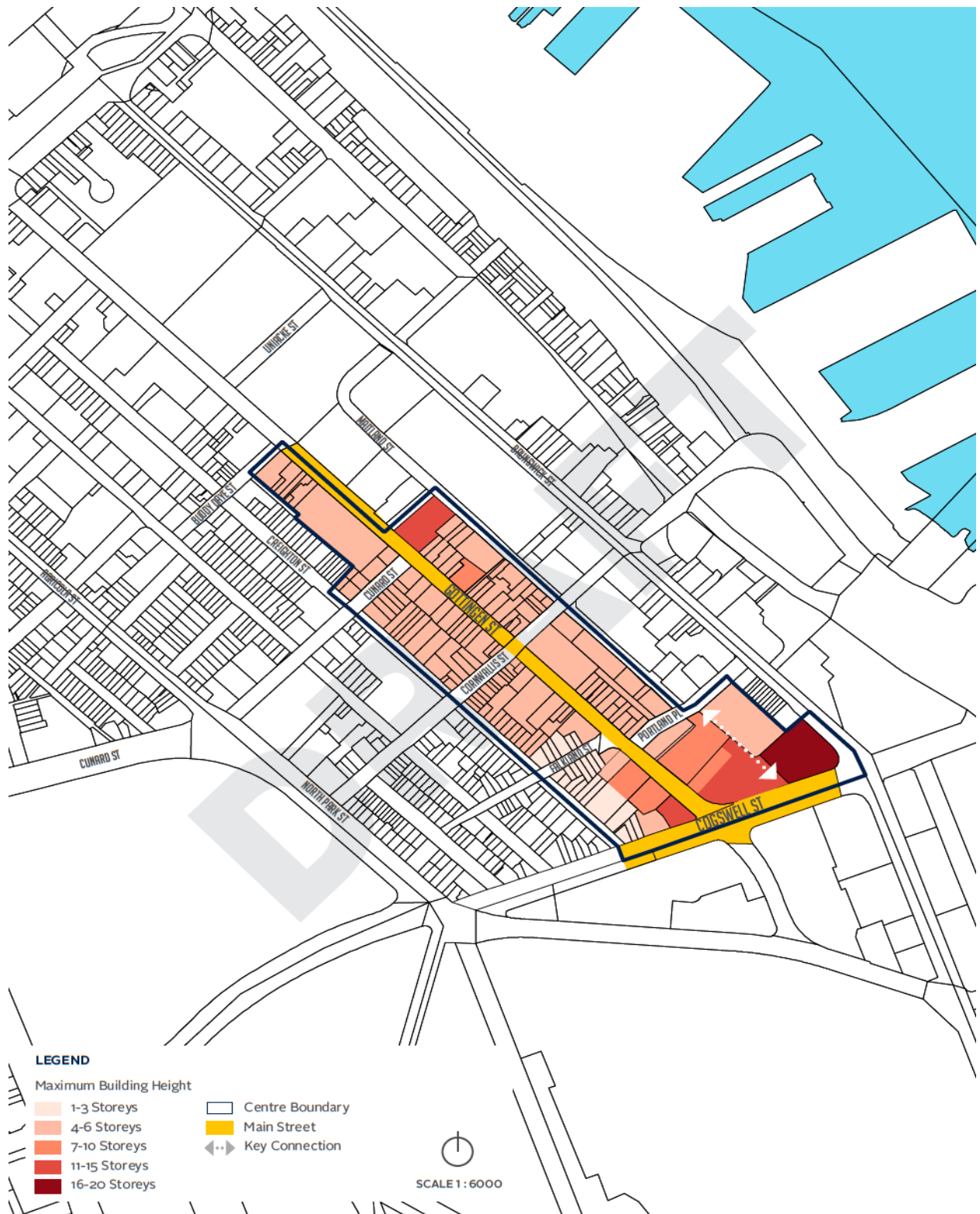


Figure 3: Gottingen Street Growth Centre (Centre Plan, 2016, 87)

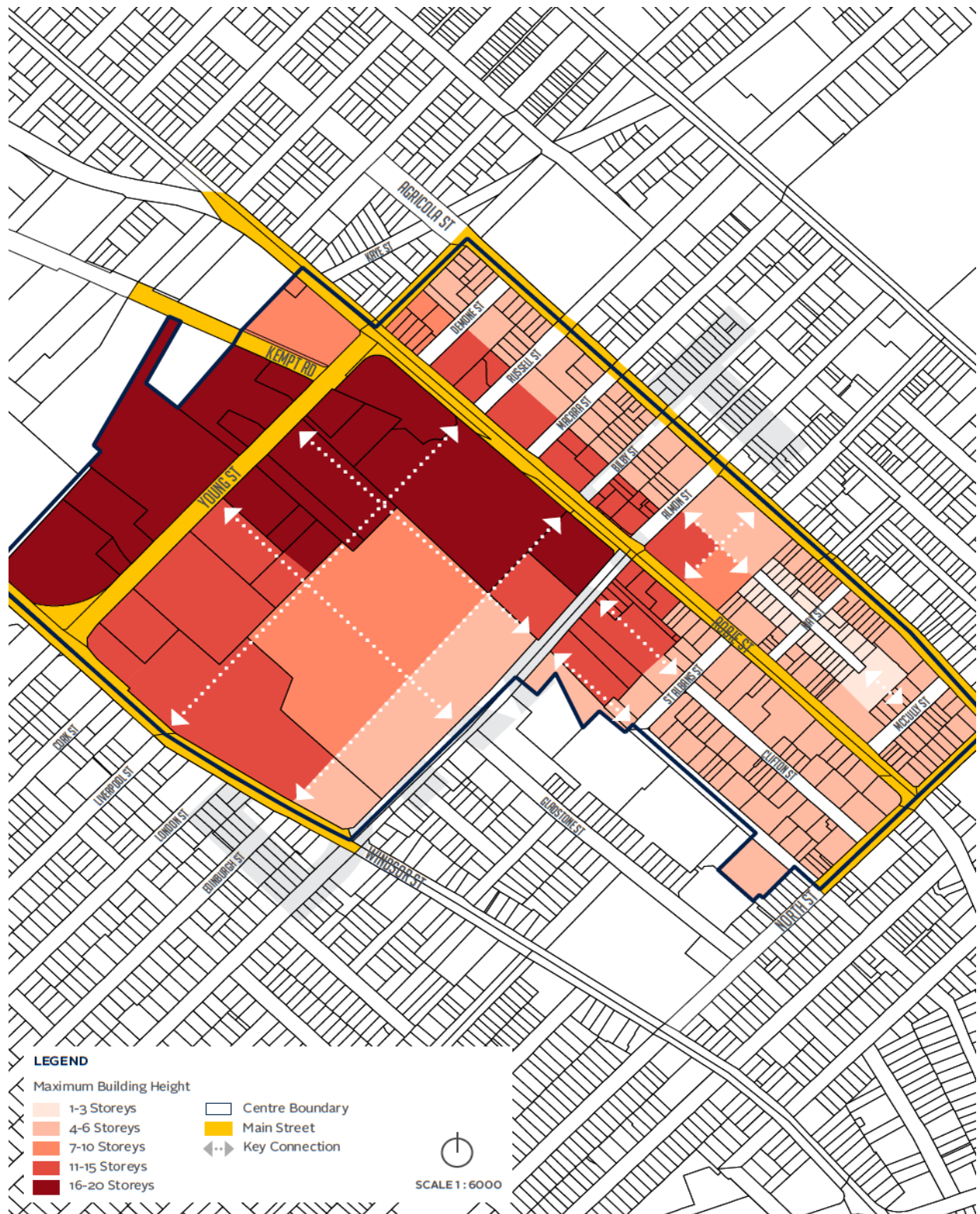


Figure 4: Young Street Growth Centre (Centre Plan, 2016, 89)

In the areas most desired by the city for intensification, small “profiles” describing the potential of the area redevelopment are included. At some points, the Centre Plan sounds less like a municipal document and more like a sales pitch.

A number of mixed residential and commercial uses make this a popular destination and an area with significant development interest (Centre Plan, 2016, 92).

The largest in area of the five Centres, the Young St. Centre includes blocks that border Young St. and Robie St. This Centre has capacity for growth due to a number of large blocks, and underutilized or single owner properties (Centre Plan, 2016, 88).

Gottingen St. contains a wide variety of buildings ranging from one to eight storeys with residential, commercial, office, cultural, service and entertainment uses. The Centre is also flanked by residential neighbourhoods, and a number of heritage properties. Recently, there have been a number of redevelopment projects with new retail and multi-unit residential buildings in this Centre. However, this area includes vacant or underutilized properties that can accommodate future growth (Centre Plan, 2016, 86).

In discussing the Wyse Road centre, the Centre Plan directly states its intention of shifting the responsibility of community building and infrastructure provisioning to the redevelopment industry.

*Growth can be accommodated as infill in vacant or underutilized lots. Over time, **this Centre can become pedestrian-oriented when redevelopment creates environments that are pedestrian and cyclist friendly** (emphasis added) (Centre Plan, 2016, 94).*

For Sager (2013), the plan is a clear example of property-led development. The Centre Plan assumes that by encouraging the development of property it is encouraging economic and community prosperity. This ignores the critique of property-led regeneration for its failure to address wider issues of equality and for the power it gives private market interests (Sager, 2013). If a strategy relies heavily on the investment of developers in order to be actioned, property and real estate become the lead players in urban renewal. Market actors are unlikely to be interested in the provision of affordable units and public amenities beyond making their properties more desirable. The Centre Plan gives power to development interests and hopes that regulations will be robust enough to accomplish the objectives of the plan.

The Centre Plan applies the principles of smart growth in General Policies under the assumption that they will lead to affordability, equity, and a more attractive city centre. These concepts are applied selectively: for example, by leveraging presence of cultural institutions as a reason to add growth. In the engagement sessions, maps shown compared “growth nodes” to a listing of cultural amenities including places of worship and sites of gathering for many of Halifax’s minority populations (Centre Plan Growth Scenario Boards, 2016, 18). The Centre Plan furthered the association by describing these areas as “growth centres”. This clearly fits the smart growth narrative that a culturally mixed community is a successful community, despite evidence that mixed communities can lead to social disenfranchisement and displacement of minority populations (Lees, 2008). The plan does not mention the African Nova Scotian community in any policy and offers limited mention of First Nations communities, beyond supporting the development of an engagement strategy. The Centre Plan’s leveraging of cultural diversity for the purposes of growth is evidence of the selective inclusion of smart growth principles that serve the interests of property development.



Figure 5: Community Assets in Growth Centres (Centre Plan Growth Scenario Boards, 2016, 18)

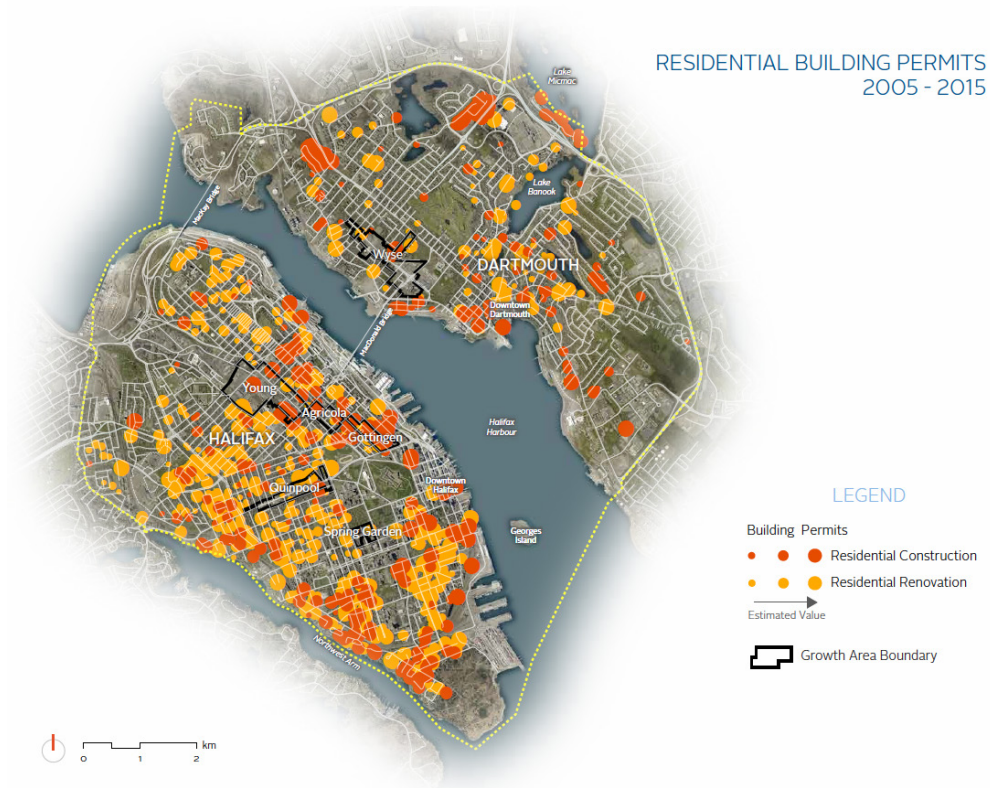


Figure 6: Developer Interest Map (Centre Plan Growth Scenario Boards, 2016, 16)

6.3 Outsourcing the Distribution of Benefits

In a neoliberal environment the state is in a position of trying to reduce the cost of service delivery while increasing revenues. This often leads to retrenchment of community services and outsourcing of those responsibilities to the private sector. The Centre Plan is a prime example of this. The process of creating a livable, walkable, affordable city is cost prohibitive to the municipality, so the Centre Plan outsources those responsibilities to property developers, via General Policies, in exchange for land use changes that allow intensification. This is a typical neoliberal market solution.

In this relationship, developers and the real estate industry are sought after by the municipality rather than the other way around. The city requires capital investment, and property development companies are happy to provide it. This is undoubtedly an oversimplification, but capital interests

clearly hold the balance of power in urban Halifax. The Centre Plan especially is so transparent in its desire of capital investment that it is unlikely to recoup any of the benefits it is seeking, unless they coincide with market desires.

In neoliberal urban policies, the state lacks the ability to recoup incremental value it creates when allowing development intensification. When the Centre Plan is accepted by council in 2017 it will immediately create tens if not hundreds of millions of dollars in potential value for landowners and development corporations. However, a mechanism to ensure direct economic benefit from that change does not exist.

Before the rise of neoliberalism in the 70s and 80s, the mechanism for capturing a portion of wealth created by land use changes was available to municipalities in some jurisdictions in the form of a development charge. Under the British Town and Country Planning Act of 1947, properties that benefited from a planning change were subject to a 100% tax on the difference between the former value and current value of the land (Healey, et al., 1995). Eventually this was changed to a negotiable amount, but the monetary influx from land use reform provided a remarkable tool for planners. It allowed a practitioner to leverage the power to control development in exchange for money that could be applied to service provision. Recently in the UK, the Barker Review of Housing Supply suggested reinstating a Planning Gain Supplement (PGS). The tax on planning gains would have been the first of its kind since 1985 (Daneshkhu, 2004). Though the report largely argues that planning policy should be framed in the light of market information (Halman, 2004) and fierce developer opposition prevented implementation of the PGS (Crook, 2016), the suggestion of a development gain tax indicates the incremental growth of alternatives to neoliberal planning paradigms.

Though the Centre Plan will create vast wealth, the capture of that wealth is limited to indirect investment, reliance on the market to act with a social obligation, and the promise of future property tax collection. Without a mechanism to ensure developments return investment it is unlikely that social responsibility will extend beyond those actions which increase the market for a new unit.

7. CONCLUSION

The Halifax Centre Plan is an example of planning policies that arise within a neoliberal policy environment. The Centre Plan is a ‘growth first’ approach to urban development, consistent with the city’s neoliberalization, developed throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Revitalization is directly tied to intensification, and urban competitiveness and economic growth are privileged over issues of social and economic equity. Despite embracing ‘livability’ and ‘sustainability’ the plan lacks policies enforcing affordability and protection for existing marginalized communities. This is consistent with third-wave or policy-led neoliberalism and is likely to intensify issues of gentrification, housing affordability, and inequality.

The Centre Plan advances selective definitions of livable, diverse, and complete communities consistent with the requirements of the market. It specifically depoliticizes community culture for the purposes of generating investment and intensification in certain areas. This is especially concerning for African Nova Scotian and First Nations communities whose cultural institutions are either encompassed by growth centres or directly border them.

The Centre Plan’s adoption will immediately create vast wealth potential for Halifax developers and property owners. Despite the neoliberal underpinning that what is good for growth is good for the city, Halifax lacks a mechanism to capture a portion of the immense wealth the Centre Plan will create. Instead it relies on policies promoting human-scale development and livability, assuming that those will capture value for the city when past examples show similar policies are likely to support developers’ preferred customers.

Halifax planners and politicians tout the Centre Plan as a crucial opportunity to direct development in the urbanized core, encouraging citizen engagement and input throughout the planning process. Planning practice is frequently accused in scholarship of serving the neoliberal economy and real estate market, while simultaneously creating the illusion of greater democracy (Sager, 2005; Bengs, 2005; Olesen, 2013; Roy, 2014). Throughout the Centre Plan process, planning tools were used to create an illusion of democratic decision making while ensuring broad consensus for neoliberal

imperatives. Growth projections stress the need for densification despite optimistic estimations, policy language enables development without mandating social objectives, and the engagement process was directed to ensure citizen support for intensification. It would be wrong to place blame for the failings of the plan to adequately capture the public interest on the heads of individual planners. The problem reveals the culture of neoliberalism wherein New Public Management and efficiency, inherently at odds with much of collaborative planning, are demanded by political interests. Future studies should continue to explore this gap between theory and practice, perhaps by exploring how practicing planners view themselves in a greater political context.

The Centre Plan is a prime example of neoliberal policy experimentation. It advances the market logic that what is good for capital is good for the city and expects social benefits to trickle down despite evidence to the contrary. Clearly, planning in Halifax represents both the current ideological hegemony enjoyed by neoliberalism and ‘actually existing’ neoliberal policies.

In hegemony, however, there is also hope. Purcell (2009) reminds us that hegemony is, by definition, a temporary condition that is always resisted. Neoliberalism is hegemonic, but not invincible. Counter projects are possible and inevitable. The form of resistance that will be generated in response to the Centre Plan remains to be seen.

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**APPENDIX A:
DESTRUCTIVE AND CREATIVE MOMENTS OF NEOLIBERAL LOCALIZATION
BRENNER AND THEODORE (2002, 369-372)**

Mechanisms of Neoliberal Localization	Moment of Destruction	Moment of Creation
<i>Recalibration of intergovernmental relations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dismantling of earlier systems of central government support for municipal activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Devolution of new tasks, burdens, and responsibilities to municipalities; creation of new incentive structures to reward local entrepreneurialism and to catalyze “endogenous growth”
<i>Retrenchment of public finance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imposition of fiscal austerity measures upon municipal governments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of new revenue collection districts and increased reliance of municipalities upon local sources of revenue, user fees, and other instruments of private finance
<i>Restructuring the welfare state</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local relays of national welfare service-provision are retrenched; assault on managerial-welfarist local state apparatuses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion of community based sectors and private approaches to social service provision • Imposition of mandatory work requirements on urban welfare recipients; new (local) forms of workfare experimentation

Mechanisms of Neoliberal Localization	Moment of Destruction	Moment of Creation
<i>Reconfiguring the institutional infrastructure of the local state</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dismantling of bureaucratized, hierarchical forms of local public administration • Devolution of erstwhile state tasks to voluntary community networks • Assault on traditional relays of local democratic accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Rolling forward” of new networked forms of local governance based upon public–private partnerships, “quangos,” and the “new public management” • Establishment of new institutional relays through which elite business interests can directly influence major local development decisions
<i>Privatization of the municipal public sector and collective infrastructures</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elimination of public monopolies for the provision of standardized municipal services (utilities, sanitation, public safety, mass transit, etc) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privatization and competitive contracting of municipal services • Creation of new markets for service delivery and infrastructure maintenance • Creation of privatized, customized, and networked urban infrastructures intended to (re)position cities within supranational capital flows
<i>Restructuring urban housing markets</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Razing public housing and other forms of low rent accommodation • Elimination of rent controls and project based construction subsidies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of new opportunities for speculative investment in central-city real estate markets • Emergency shelters become “warehouses” for the homeless • Introduction of market rents and tenant-based vouchers in low-rent niches of urban housing markets

Mechanisms of Neoliberal Localization	Moment of Destruction	Moment of Creation
<i>Reworking labor market regulation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dismantling of traditional, publicly funded education, skills training, and apprenticeship programs for youth, displaced workers, and the unemployed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of a new regulatory environment in which temporary staffing agencies, unregulated “labor corners,” and other forms of contingent work can proliferate • Implementation of workreadiness programs aimed at the conscription of workers into low-wage jobs • Expansion of informal economies
<i>Restructuring strategies of territorial development</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dismantling of autocentric national models of capitalist growth • Destruction of traditional compensatory regional policies • Increasing exposure of local and regional economies to global competitive forces • Fragmentation of national space-economies into discrete urban and regional industrial systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of free trade zones, enterprise zones, and other deregulated spaces within major urban regions • Creation of new development areas, technopoles, and other new industrial spaces at subnational scales • Mobilization of new “glocal” strategies intended to rechannel economic capacities and infrastructure investments into “globally connected” local/regional agglomerations

Mechanisms of Neoliberal Localization	Moment of Destruction	Moment of Creation
<i>Transformations of the built environment and urban form</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elimination and/or intensified surveillance of urban public spaces • Destruction of traditional working-class neighborhoods in order to make way for speculative redevelopment • Retreat from community oriented planning initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of new privatized spaces of elite/corporate consumption • Construction of large-scale megaprojects intended to attract corporate investment and reconfigure local land-use patterns • Creation of gated communities, urban enclaves, and other “purified” spaces of social reproduction • “Rolling forward” of the gentrification frontier and the intensification of sociospatial polarization • Adoption of the principle of “highest and best use” as the basis for major land-planning decisions
<i>Interlocal policy transfer</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Erosion of contextually sensitive approaches to local policymaking • Marginalization of “home-grown” solutions to localized market failures and governance failures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diffusion of generic, prototypical approaches to “modernizing” reform among policymakers in search of quick fixes for local social problems (eg welfare-to-work programs, place-marketing strategies, zero-tolerance crime policies, etc) • Imposition of decontextualized “best practice” models upon local policy environments

Mechanisms of Neoliberal Localization	Moment of Destruction	Moment of Creation
<i>Re-regulation of urban civil society</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Destruction of the “liberal city” in which all inhabitants are entitled to basic civil liberties, social services, and political rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobilization of zero-tolerance crime policies and “broken windows” policing • Introduction of new discriminatory forms of surveillance and social control • Introduction of new policies to combat social exclusion by reinserting individuals into the labor market
<i>Re-representing the city</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postwar image of the industrial, working-class city is recast through a (re-)emphasis on urban disorder, “dangerous classes,” and economic decline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobilization of entrepreneurial discourses and representations focused on the need for revitalization, reinvestment, and rejuvenation within major metropolitan areas

**APPENDIX B:
COMMON NEOLIBERAL POLICIES BY CATEGORY
SAGER (2011, 152)**

Urban Economic Development

- City marketing
- Urban development by attracting the ‘creative class’
- Economic development incentives
- Competitive bidding

Infrastructure Provision

- Public-private partnerships
- Private sector involvement in financing and operating transport infrastructure
- Private sector involvement in procuring water

Management of Commercial Areas

- Business-friendly zones and flexible zoning
- Property-led urban regeneration
- Privatization of public space and sales-booting exclusions

Housing and Neighbourhood Renewal

- Liberalization of housing markets
- Gentrification
- Privately governed and secured neighbourhoods
- Quangos (quasi non-governmental organizations) organizing market-oriented urban development