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The Would-be Science and Occasional Art of Making Public Spaces

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Summary

This article explores one of the central concerns of contemporary urban design practice in Canada, the creation of new and renewed public spaces. In the post-war decades vast changes occurred in the structure of Canadian cities involving widespread urban renewal in the city cores and a major expansion of low density automobile-oriented suburbia on the periphery. These changes tended to negate the traditional role of public spaces. A reassessment of this period has produced a renewed interest in such spaces as a vital component of new relatively dense mixed-use urban centres. Several current Toronto projects are reviewed, which exemplify this trend, including the renewal of the St. Lawrence Historic District, the plans for the Uptown Core of Oakville and Northtown in North York, and the recent international architectural competition for the redesign of Toronto's Main Streets.

Résumé

Cet article traite d'une des questions les plus fondamentales de la pratique contemporaine du design urbain au Canada, soit la création de nouveaux espaces publics ou la réhabilitation de lieux existants. Pendant la période d'après-guerre, de vastes changements sont survenus dans la structure des villes canadiennes; on a vu naître les grands projets de rénovation dans les centres urbains aussi bien que l'accroissement de la banlieue dépendante de l'automobile. Ces changements ont tendance à nier le rôle traditionnel des espaces publiques. Le bilan de cette période a suscité un nouvel intérêt pour de tels espaces comme élément-clé des nouveaux "centres" à densité relativement haute et à usages mixtes. Plusieurs projets actuels à Toronto, qui exemplifient ce thème, sont exposés ici, y compris la rénovation du quartier historique de St. Lawrence, les plans pour le nouveau centre Uptown à Oakville et le secteur Northtown à North York, ainsi que pour le Concours International d'architecture pour le réaménagement des rues principales de Toronto.

1. Introduction

The following article explores one of the central concerns of contemporary urban design practice in Canada, the creation of new and renewed public spaces. In this introduction, an attempt is made to situate this activity in terms of recent history, and in the following section, specific reference is made to current Toronto projects which illustrate approaches to the problem.

During the chaotic decades of the 50's, 60's, and 70's, great swaths of the centres of most Canadian cities (like their counterparts elsewhere), were levelled in an orgy of public and private renewal and were reconstructed based on very different modernist conceptions of appropriate urban form. In the same period, vast new tracks of single-family houses at very low densities were extended out into agricultural lands and linked back to city centres via major expressways.

As we now look back at this period with an almost historical distance, we can discern a sequence of counter reactions; first, opposition to the brutality and wastefulness of this process of cataclysmic change and its tendency to squander a valued built and natural legacy, but ultimately also an objection to the frequently banal and unprepossessing form and character of the new city/suburb dichotomy as its manifestations began to be seen as a pattern distinct from the historic city and countryside they replaced.

Among the most salient characteristics of this new surrogate form was the loss of public space in the sense that it had existed historically within the fabric of cities and towns. To be sure, there was vastly increased "open" space, but its primary purpose was different, i.e., to separate functions, open up distance between buildings, allow for the penetration of sunlight and greenery, not to provide places for extensive social contact. A widespread privatisation of public life had occurred; urban space had become residual and its publicness ambiguous.

There has now been a highly critical assessment made of the changes introduced in those post-war decades and the most destructive and misguided aspects of the Modernist attack on the city as a spatial organization have been widely refuted. This does not imply, however, a clear break with Modernism itself. The underlying humanist impulses associated with Modernism's ambition to improve urban conditions remain, including the desire to allow for open social exchange.

To some extent, the ongoing search for viable alternative community forms and spaces has led back to the traditional city as a source of new inspiration. Notwithstanding that such traditional cities were often characterized by a severely stratified social hierarchy in earlier times, often reflected in their use of public spaces, there is a structural level at which they remain interesting to us which has more to do with their potential to accommodate contemporary life than their historic use.

Successful public spaces take root slowly and respond profoundly to local norms and customs which are in a state of continuous evolution. It is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to simply transplant successfully public spaces from one context to another by replicating dimensions and relationships. While a new appreciation for the traditional city may offer certain clues and suggest valuable precedents, it cannot be relied upon as a literal source of "off the rack" models, lest we fall into a naive and sterile formalism. As in every previous period, new public spaces must emerge as specific and appropriate responses to contemporary uses and purposes; responses to ways of life that make sense to us here and now.

There is an extremely important dialectical tension which must be maintained between the models of time-tested, archetypal public space passed on from generation to generation, and the modifications and adaptations brought to those models by local circumstances, new technologies and changing patterns of social and economic life. Public space does not exist independently from public man. The changing roles of men and women, the evolving nature of work and leisure time, to take a number of ex-

amples, are vitally important ingredients of the social setting which will influence the ways in which such spaces will be used.

There is now clearly a desire in the body politic to seek new forms of sociability in true public spaces. Indeed the perceived lack of "common ground" is increasingly seen as alarming in terms of the potential for severe social disintegration. At the same time, however, there is very little interest in giving up the highly valued attributes of private life: personal mobility, increased private space, and personal choice. The need to find a workable balance between the sometimes conflicting requirements of private (inside) and public (outside) life poses an extraordinary challenge.

The powerful influence of the automobile on urban form for example, especially but not exclusively in North America, cannot be overestimated. The resources presently devoted to accommodating its movement and providing for its storage within the cities are immense. Its impact in dispersing, diluting, and ultimately polluting cities has been enormous. Perhaps most drastic have been the consequences for public life in public spaces. Still, there is mounting evidence that North Americans in some urban settings may be coming to terms with the obsessive, one-sidedness of this relationship and may finally be willing to weigh the needs for unimpeded circulation and unlimited parking against other priorities.

Having tested the limits of automobile mobility to virtual failure, significant efforts are being made to increase modal splits in favour of transit, to create land-use relationships which foster walking between activities, to allow for the use of bicycles as a serious means of transportation and in doing all of these things to scale down the level of accommodation for the car. It is also true, however, that the creation of completely "auto-free" zones to promote pedestrian life has not been a particularly successful strategy, flying in the face of both practicality and need. Such experiments have often replaced one kind of sterility with another. Real solutions seem to lie in a successful balancing and partial accommodation of a number of needs simultaneously allowing cars and pedestrians to share public spaces in appropriate combinations and with clearly understood roles.

Renewed interest in traditional city form as a "model" is timely. For despite the misgivings about the form, quality, and distribution of the previous generation of redevelopment, the underlying pressures for concentrated urban development have, if anything, intensified. Conditioned by current environmental and economic concerns about the effects of sprawl, significant government initiatives have been launched in many jurisdictions to channel growth into under-utilized but already urbanized areas of cities and suburbs in an attempt to use less land, less fuel, and less asphalt, and make more efficient use of infrastructure.

The emphasis on strategic concentration of development to ensure that people can live and work close to public transportation and to other daily activities is giving rise to a perceived need to build relatively dense pedestrian-oriented "centres" within the urban fabric. While private space is still valued, revitalized and new public spaces of a high quality are frequently also seen as vital elements of such concentrations, providing necessary collective relief from the pressures of density. Although by no means universal, the pendulum swing back towards more compact cities and towns of well-defined public and private parts has now been absorbed, at least nominally, into the practice of many design professionals, municipalities and developers in Canadian cities facing the pressures of the next generation of urban growth.

Generally speaking, the search for new forms of public space is taking two forms. In existing build-up areas which already possess an underlying nineteenth or early twentieth century structure, there is an inclination toward strategic improvements to the definition of latent or implicit forms of public space. In many respects, more challenging and problematic, however, is the emergence of suburban centres possessing urban uses and densities in locations whose underlying structure has been totally defined by the car. Here new hybrid forms of public space particularly suited to each context must be found.

2. Some Current Toronto Projects

The following projects undertaken over the past twelve years illustrate the application of some of these principles to the creation of new and renewed public spaces in a Toronto context. The work in the St. Lawrence Historic District of the City of Toronto was begun in 1978 and continued over a ten year period. At that time I was Director of Architecture and Urban Design for the City of Toronto. The Uptown Core in Oakville, and Northtown in the City of North York, are current projects of the firm, Berridge Lewinberg Greenberg Ltd, and The Toronto Main Streets Competition is a City of Toronto initiative for which I served as Jury Chairman.

2.1. St. Lawrence Historic District

A nineteenth century warehousing and business district to the southeast of Toronto's downtown core, the St. Lawrence Historic District had the appearance of a war zone in the late 1960's and early 1970's. With expectations of eastward expansion of the C.B.D., up to 75% of the building stock had been demolished; empty lots were used for parking. Seeking to reverse overspecialization and monolithic expansion of the business district, a newly elected reform Council adopted a number of basic measures in the Central Area Plan of 1974 to bring a residential population back into the city centre, to scale down development expectations, to re-establish a public transit and pedestrian orientation, and to promote the retention of remaining historic structures. Integral to this strategy was a programme of improvements and alterations to public spaces as the framework and catalyst for the process of revitalization.

A phased programme for upgrading the existing public spaces in this whole sector of the city as well as adding new ones was initiated to encourage a new residential vocation as well as to invite overlapping sets of users from the adjoining downtown and visitors into the area. An annual capital programme was initiated to dovetail with the pace of redevelopment. The City committed itself to bearing a portion of the costs, the remainder was to be borne by the private sector on an incremental basis.

The approach reflected a shared conviction that the existing city grid was generally an adequate vehicle for the creation of a renewed public environment, but that significant modifications were also needed to: strengthen the pedestrian orientation, introduce a larger percentage of green space, and establish a finer grain in the public pedestrian network.

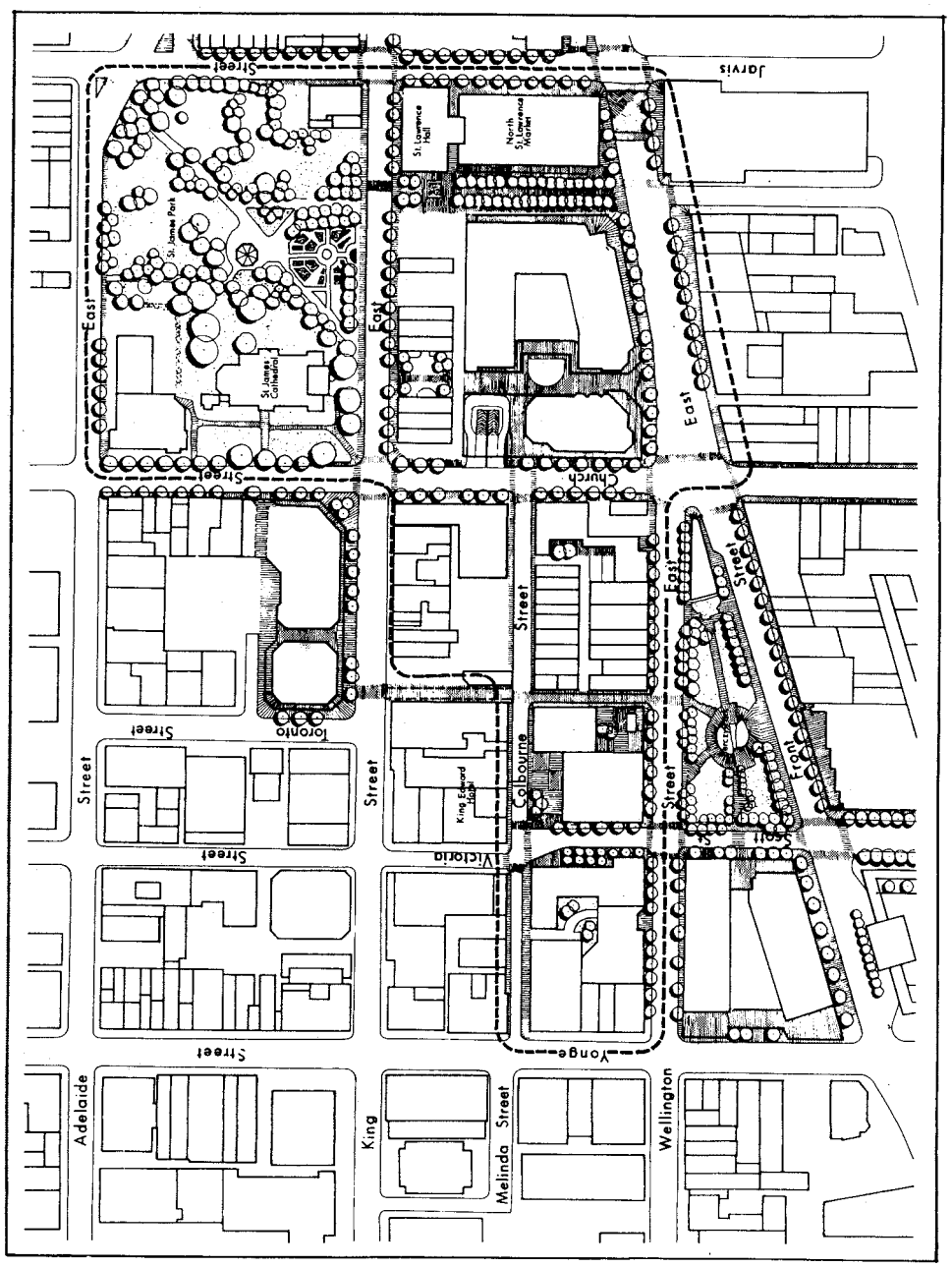

Fig. 1 Public Improvements Plan for the St. Lawrence Historic District prepared in 1980.
Plan de réaménagement des espaces publics pour le district historique de St. Lawrence (1980).

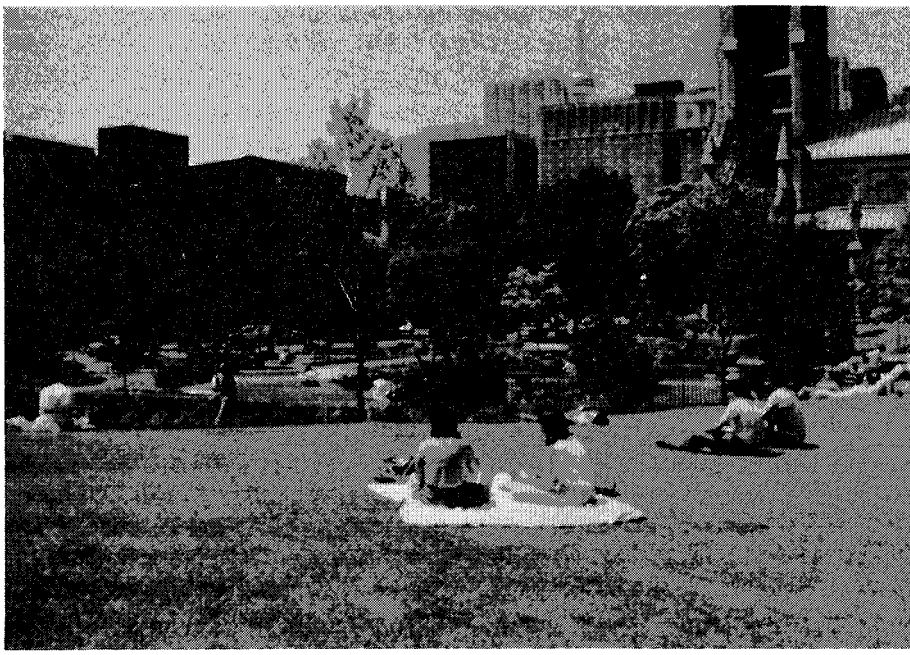

Fig. 2 St. James Park at noon hour.
Le parc St. James à midi.

Fig. 3 The Sculpture Garden viewed from the entry portico of St. James Cathedral.
Le Jardin des Sculptures vu de l'entrée de la Cathédrale St. James.

Although partially inspired by aspects of the nineteenth century legacy, and responsive to its underlying structure, the altered pattern of public spaces also reflects attention to issues and priorities not present in that century. A cornerstone of the new strategy for example, was the deliberate adjustment of the vehicular/pedestrian balance of streets by selectively widening sidewalks, narrowing and removing traffic lanes, adding street trees, new forms of paving, and a pedestrian scale of street lighting. Through this operation, property owners and tenants were encouraged to open retail uses out onto the streets and given the opportunity to create outdoor eating establishments on the enlarged sidewalk space. On the major artery which runs through the district, a landscaped median boulevard was introduced as a pedestrian refuge to facilitate crossing the large number of traffic lanes.

A second component of the programme involved the creation of two major new parks; green spaces were created which had never existed historically. Berczy Park was formed on a vacant triangle of land at the historic intersection of the orthogonal grid and an irregular portion of the shoreline. A strategic decision was made to turn a public parking lot into a park bounded on three sides by streets and on the fourth by the rear of the historic "flat iron" building, whose rear wall became the subject for a national competition to create a large-scale mural.

With two major public theatres on one side and a number of restaurants and cafes on the other as well as the presence of large numbers of office workers, residents, shoppers, this park functions as a green oasis in the grid. The position of its central fountain and crisscrossing pathways was determined by observation of footprints in the snow as pedestrians found their own way across during the winter months. Eventually these desire lines were supported by changes in level, with benches and low seating walls lining the paths. The park hosts a number of cultural events including the Toronto Jazz Festival.

A second and much larger new park called St. James, was formed by a combination of the historic grounds of St. James Cathedral and a large tract of adjacent land, cleared as part of an urban renewal scheme, which were consolidated into one large space occupying the majority of a full city block. On the periphery of this block, a series of mixed-use redevelopment projects have now completed the "frame". A portion of the park was used in collaboration with the Garden Club of Toronto to create a replica of a nineteenth century garden. A bandstand was inserted in the middle of the park along with a few strategically placed linking paths. The land was gently contoured and landscaped to provide a combination of clearings and treed areas. It is now intensively used by a broad range of users during the summer months.

Typologically, these two new spaces, Berczy Park and St. James Park must be seen in the Toronto context as hybrids. They can neither be classified as "active" or "passive" using the habitual terminology of the Parks Department, for while there are no facilities for organized sports there are certainly opportunities created for impromptu recreation. They are in part "gardenesque" and have a certain English landscape quality, but at the same time include elements of hard surfaced plaza catering to a more intensive pedestrian use. The visual arts and performing arts have had and will continue to have a role in shaping their character. In their new typological complexity, they accurately reflect the increasing diversity of the "mixed" city life around them.

A third element in the altered lexicon of public spaces in this district is a series of small pocket parks, courts and linking pedestrian lanes, some of which have already been created and others of which are still in the making. These have been used to bisect the larger blocks and introduce a finer grain. Such a link has been created, for example, on axis with the central spire of St. James Cathedral which historically was never afforded the opportunity for a distant view. Here, a public Sculpture Garden was inserted opposite the Cathedral spire in a small parking lot where rotating exhibits of contemporary work are curated by an independent board. Continuing this axis, a pedestrian "street" has been preserved through the adjacent condominium project called Market Square. Over time, this set of interlinked spaces has begun to take on a very distinctive character and attract a high level of pedestrian use.

In the first instance, there was a certain apprehension among the local merchants housed in the remaining buildings in the St. Lawrence Historic District about the removal of the surface parking, widening of sidewalks, etc., measures which would tend to limit or impede traffic. In fact, the vast increase in pedestrian traffic has more than compensated for any such loss, while at the same time, each of the newly developed blocks includes multiple levels of structured parking which are available for those who feel they need it. On-street parking has also been extended to all the streets in the district (in the case of the major arterials outside of rush hour peaks). Not only is this parking convenient, it also helps to civilize the streets, adding another layer of protection from fast moving traffic.

The majority of the parking lots have now been filled in, for the most part with residential buildings with shops at grade, and in some instances closer to the core, with a mixture of residential and commercial buildings. For much of this district, a height limit of 25 metres had been established which is the approximate height of the remaining nineteenth century warehouse structures. This provision coupled with an allowable building coverage of 4.5x the area of the lot has generally produced buildings of eight to nine stories built out to street-line and compatible in scale with the historic structures. This proportional relationship of roughly 2:1 between the permitted number of storeys and the allowable coverage seems to work very well up to this level of density. While no guarantee of good architecture, and the district certainly exhibits examples of good, bad and indifferent quality, such compatibility in scale is a basic factor in creating a space-forming architecture which properly defines the edges of the public space.

The St. Lawrence Historic district is not a megaproject. The results have been achieved in a relatively short period of time, but not instantly. The actors have been heterogeneous and independent of one another giving the area a highly desirable diversity. This district should not be viewed as a special case, but rather as a rediscovery of the ability to intervene strategically in the normal processes of city building on the public and private sides using public spaces as a catalyst. Many of the techniques developed in this area are now being broadly applied in other Toronto neighbourhoods.

2.2. The Uptown Core, Oakville

Bordering the shores of Lake Ontario to the West of Toronto, the Town of Oakville has grown rapidly for the past several decades as it has been integrated into the larger regional city. It contains a well preserved historic centre surrounded by older residential areas and increasingly a vast expanse of low density suburban housing. As early as the 1960's, the idea emerged politically of creating a second "centre" at the fringe of the expanding municipality to which the new population could relate. In the

1980's, the Town adopted a plan calling for the creation of an "Uptown Core" on a largely privately-owned 300 acre site at the edge of the urbanized area. The Town also adopted a set of objectives indicating its wish to see this Core emulate the best characteristics of the historic town, including a pattern of streets and blocks, a full mix of urban uses and animated pedestrian spaces. Our client, in this case, is a Southern Ontario land development company, the Metrontario Group, owner of most of the lands comprising the Uptown Core.

This Client Group faced a dilemma. On the one hand, it was clear that it must substantively address the Town's professed goal of producing an urban pattern of development. On the other, it faced the powerful realities of the suburban marketplace. In the typical suburban setting, the pinnacle of residential virtue has up until now been the single family home on its own large lot with a corresponding decrease in prestige and desirability as one moves into denser forms of housing. Public spaces, if present at all, are peripheral and unrelated to the building fabric. It was clear that if a serious attempt were to be made to challenge its value system, the compensating factor must be the presence of public spaces of a very high quality.

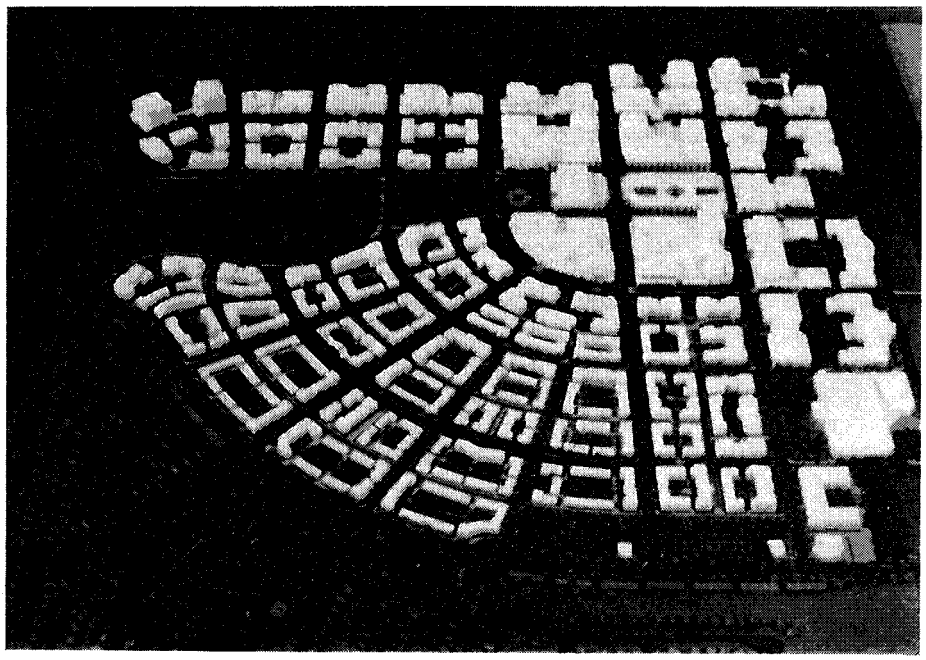

Fig. 4 Model of proposed Uptown Core Oakville.
La maquette du plan pour Uptown Core Oakville.

A plan was therefore devised, based on the creation of a major public park system for the Uptown Core which provides the desired green setting of suburbia in a different and collective form. This public park system takes full advantage of an adjoining watercourse etched into the relatively flat topography, which winds its way south toward Lake Ontario on the western edge of the site. At the point where it passes the Uptown Core, it has been substantially enlarged to provide a body of water which will serve for recreational use and for storm water retention. A sequence of linear park spaces has been conceived starting from the naturalistic wooded character of the watercourse itself, and becoming increasingly domesticated and urban as it enters the centre. The sequence includes an open park, a botanical garden and a hard surfaced square which can be used for such purposes as a farmer's market.

The park system is the most powerful identifying feature and organizing element of the Uptown Core. Both sides of the park have been lined with continuous blocks of mid-rise apartment buildings. Provision has been made for restaurants, cafes, galleries and other suitable uses to occur at ground level on the park's edge, and the street pattern has been designed so that all areas of the Core have ready access to it. The juxtaposition of this broad, generous, and varied park system with the tight built-form around it will create the choice and urbanity that distinguishes the Uptown Core from the surrounding homogeneous suburban pattern.

The extensive use of a parks and open space system to provide the underpinning and structure for development in the Uptown Core represents, to some extent, a return to some of the strategies employed in the late nineteenth and early part of this century by Olmstead and others in laying out new suburban areas. However, a number of new concerns and issues have had a strong influence as well, such as the much stronger integration of work-related and residential environments, and a greater emphasis on the issues of ecology conservation and social diversity.

This new agenda of social and economic concerns has led to a reconsideration of the typology of buildings surrounding the open space network. In order to credibly achieve the objective of a "townlike" environment, the plan has had to break from the typical suburban building typology. It includes a range of medium density residential options from individual houses on narrow lots to semi-detached and row houses, duplexes, small garden apartments, as well as six to eight storey apartment blocks. These forms which result in higher densities and facilitate the achievement of a critical mass of population, fall between the scale of the ubiquitous single family houses on 50 foot lots and the occasional high-rise towers which are generally all that is available in suburban areas. These divergent building types have been organized on tightly configured blocks in a radial pattern, building up in density as one approaches the retail centre of the Core.

The plan allows for over one million square feet of retail including department stores. The form that such a retail centre would generally take in suburbia is that of a single-storey, windowless, hermetically sealed, stand-alone structure, surrounded by large parking lots. Undeniably shopping centres have become a form of *de facto* community centre in the North American city. As a new form of public space however, they have a number of drawbacks. First, they are not truly public; secondly, the kind of activities and facilities offered are generally narrow in scope, catering almost exclusively to the consumption of goods and services; and thirdly, because of the tremendous emphasis on automobile access, they are generally very poorly integrated with their surroundings. Still there is a powerful market logic to their organization.

The attempt has been made here to work with this suburban "type" and create a hybrid by modifying its form. The proposed retail centre has been located on a large central parcel such that its major internal pedestrian axes line up with the heads of streets to form *defacto* "blocks". Within these blocks, provision has been made to incorporate the parking which would normally occur on surface lots. While it is not economically feasible to put all the parking underground or in structure immediately, a combination of below-grade and above-grade components can be introduced one section at a time as the population increases and the general character of the area changes.

Provision has also been made for the outside edges of the centre blocks to contain retail and other public uses facing the adjoining streets where buildings on the opposite side will have compatible uses. Treated in this way, the retail centre can be made to resemble to some extent (albeit in an entirely new set of circumstances) some of the nineteenth century European "passages" which originally inspired this distinctively North American form.

A similar transformation is required to the residential streets. The suburban street is usually lined by expansive driveways and double, or even in some cases, triple garages to house a fleet of cars, severely limiting any opportunity to give such streets a viable pedestrian character. Use has been made here of older urban strategies such as the introduction of back lanes to free up the front of the houses, enabling them to have front gardens, porches, etc. As the densities increase, this parking is shifted into structure or below grade, but never allowed to accumulate into large surface lots.

Within the retail centre, a Bus Terminal will provide links to the regional rail system, as well as the terminus for a number of local bus lines and also possibly direct service to the International Airport. On two sides of the centre, a large concentration of employment related uses are located including offices, high tech industrial, and some public institutions. Once more the objective is to modify the established suburban "types", in this case low to mid-rise office buildings, by collecting them into a denser pattern, pushing them out to the street line and forcing some of the parking underground or into structure. The compensating factors, of course, are immediate access to the public transportation system, to shopping and to other amenities which come with the presence of a pedestrian environment.

A number of public institutions will also be interspersed within the primary public network of streets and blocks. These uses which may include a sports arena, an art gallery, a public library, town offices, a firehall, a police station, religious institutions, etc. will add yet another element of animation to the core by further expanding the population of users.

The Uptown Core will eventually house approximately 8000 people and provide employment for an additional several thousand people. It is anticipated that there will be some level of live-work overlap, i.e. a segment of the residential population will also be employed in the core. Market studies conducted thus far also suggest that a general synergy can be anticipated between the residential, commercial and retail uses which improves the marketability and efficiency of each. For example, the same parking which is required for the retail can also be used for office workers since the hours of utilization tend to be complimentary. The trick is to get all of these uses in close proximity to one another in building types which (a) make generous gestures to each other and to a shared public realm, and (b) can be phased to respond realistically to the

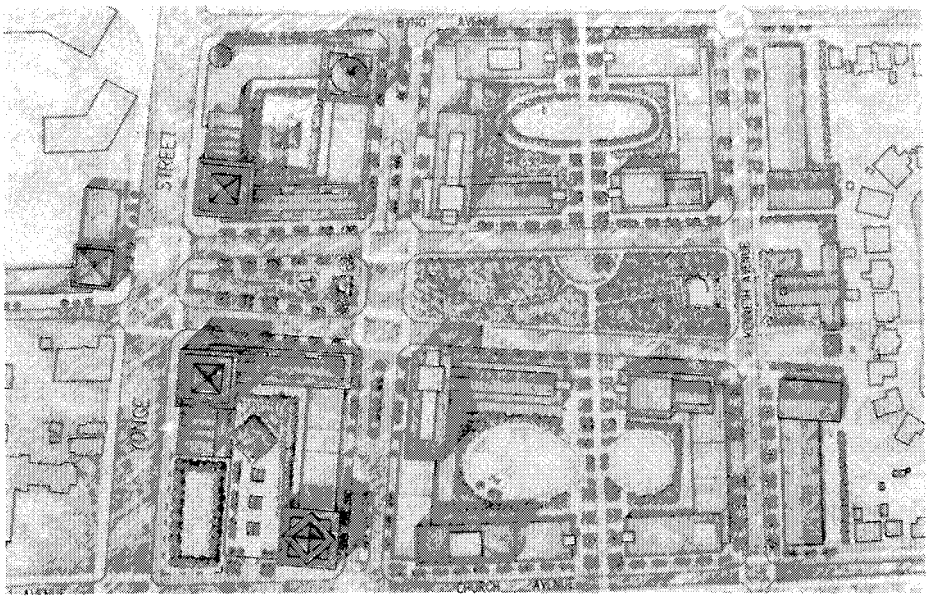

Fig. 5 Plan for Northtown site. Four city blocks define a central green (prepared in collaboration with Burka Architects Inc. and Milus Bollenberghe Topps Watchorn, Landscape Architects).

Plan du site Northtown. Quatre ilôts définissent une zone verte centrale (préparé en collaboration avec Burka Architects Inc. et Milus Bollenberghe Topps Watchorn, Landscape Architects).

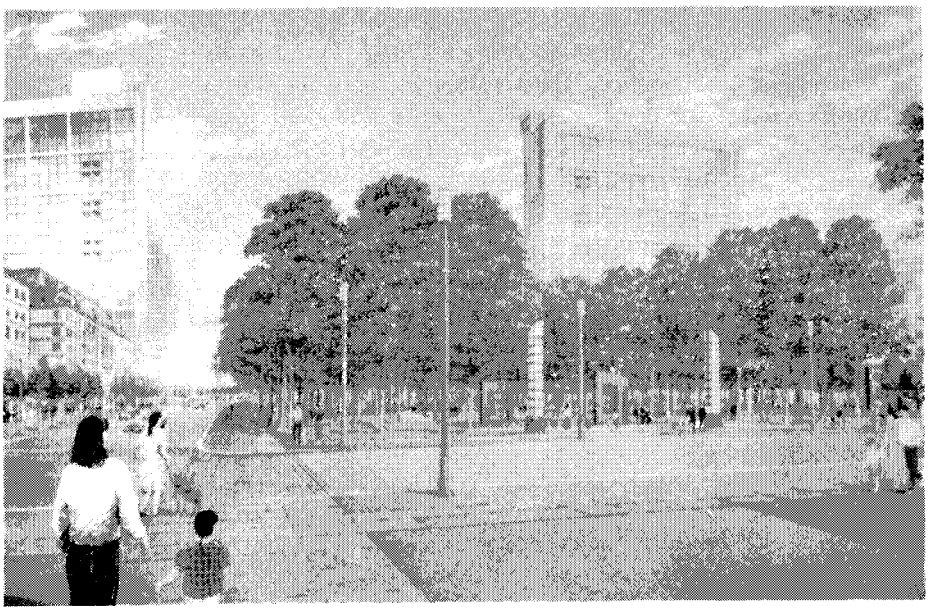

Fig. 6 Perspective view of Northtown Central Park.
Vue en perspective du parc central de Northtown.

present suburban realities, while at the same time anticipating the new urban pattern which will come into effect as densities increase.

Since our client is a land developer who intends to sell and lease parcels over a fifteen to twenty year period, the Plan will include urban design simulation studies to be submitted to the municipality and to be utilized by the land developer as a means of ensuring the quality and "fit" of building proposals for specific parcels. The urban design studies will define common elements such as build-to lines, setbacks, location of principal pedestrian and vehicular access points, architectural treatments of façades and so on. Likewise, the hierarchy of street types and landscape treatments within parks will be developed for the public spaces. In terms of phasing, it is intended that the major park system will be created in the first phase of development, and serve as a nucleus around which an initial grouping of components of all the varied uses will be organized.

2.3. Northtown

North of the City of Toronto lies the City of North York through which a major subway line has been extended. On this line a major new suburban "downtown" is taking shape in an area served by a number of stops. 9.6 million square feet of office development and 1200 apartments units have been constructed or approved here within the last ten years producing a built environment which will be of a vastly different scale from its surroundings, for the most part, single family houses. While most people agree that the emergence of North York City Centre is a good thing from a regional perspective and should be encouraged, the municipality has not really been prepared for the speed at which this transformation has occurred.

In particular there has been no systematic attempt to provide a comprehensive vision for North York City Centre as a major new urban setting with a network of public spaces and a coherent distribution of built-form. In the absence of such a public vision, the development industry has responded in many instances to this environment in flux by creating large internalized "compounds" which further exacerbate the barrenness of the public realm.

Recently there have been some initiatives aimed at improving the public realm. Policies have been adopted for example to reinforce a retail presence on Yonge Street, the major commercial artery. Faced with the prospect of momentous change, the municipal planners are pulled two ways. On the one hand, their efforts have been to attempt to isolate and contain the redevelopment by imposing height limits, creating a containing "ringroad" etc. On the other, measures to integrate major new interventions into a larger pattern are being tried, including negotiations for various categories of public benefits in exchange for increased development rights.

Our firm was retained by a major residential developer, the Tridel Corporation, to prepare a plan for one of the largest remaining parcels, a 27 acre site which fronts on Yonge Street, and includes a former shopping centre, the Northtown Plaza.

Addressing the second tendency of the municipal planners, we have advocated an approach which breaks out of the pattern of project isolation by carving out of the Northtown site a major new public space which will be of benefit both to the City Centre at large and to the development project itself. Only one major public space presently exists in the emerging North York City Centre, a large hard surfaced civic square framed by public buildings. The Plan for Northtown proposes a second and

complementary major public space in the form of a green linear park running east-west from Yonge Street to the easterly limit of the property where it abuts a lower scale residential neighbourhood. Framing this park of approximately three acres in size are four large city blocks within which housing units will be developed, as well as retail space fronting onto Yonge Street and extending along both edges of the park.

A common base-building height of about eight storeys along the park edges has been defined from which strategically placed towers rise up in corner locations. Within this range of built-form, a great variety of unit types and living arrangements will be possible. The buildings form perimeter blocks which contain very generously dimensioned interior courtyards. The two easterly blocks are further bisected by a linear walkway system which connects beyond the site boundaries to adjoining blocks.

As the park extends into the neighbourhood, it widens out and changes in character. A sequence of gardens becomes progressively more pastoral in nature. The building walls on either side of the park provide continuous arcades with an extra width of sidewalk on the northerly edge which will get greater sun exposure for outdoor cafes.

A deliberate attempt has been made to normalize the street network, resisting the severe segregation into traffic arteries and residential streets which is typical in this suburban area. On-street parking will be encouraged, and generous tree planting will occur throughout. Not all of the street frontage will be occupied by retail and where this does not occur, other public uses, entrances, and in some cases residential units will come to grade with front gardens along the sidewalk.

The model proposed here is that of a highly urban residential neighbourhood, within which a transition is made from the intensive scale of the City Centre on Yonge Street to an intermediate scale which adjoins the single family neighbourhood at the eastern end of the site. The "open" block system can be extended north and south; the park system can also be extended into these future redevelopment areas.

In effect the Northtown site's transformation will be the beginning of a larger residential precinct which will facilitate a live-work relationship with the very intensively redeveloped office uses nearby. There is a rare opportunity to ensure that the public space will be the focus of this precinct since the same developer controls all four sites of the urban "room" to be formed by the park. Although this perimeter will be built in a number of phases, the three-dimensional relationships will be controlled through site-specific urban design guidelines.

As in all such cases, parking is a major issue. Here the accommodation of the necessary spaces even with very high utilization of two subway stops within a ten minute walk, will require up to four levels below grade to serve both the retail and residential uses. This will be further augmented by on-street parking for visitors. With time, however, and the improvement of the overall pedestrian environment in the City Centre, there is a clear expectation that automobile dependency will be reduced.

2.4. City of Toronto Main Streets

When the City of Toronto was originally laid out in 1793, the primary instrument was a surveyed grid of concession roads at roughly 1 1/4 mile spacing which created very large rectangular parcels of land which were ultimately subdivided by their individual owners. These original concession roads have become the City's main arteries. Most of them carried streetcars at one time; many still do. Along these streets a particular grain of low scale commercial buildings developed supported by the streetcar

pattern with retail on the ground floor and one, two or three storeys of apartments above. It is this typical Main Street pattern which represents the most ubiquitous and historically successful form of public space in the North American City.

In the 1960's attempts were made in Toronto to break this pattern down in the name of some of the modernist canons of city planning then in vogue. Specifically, it was proposed to remove the streetcars and concentrate the retail into a series of strategically placed mini shopping malls, served by large parking lots. Fortunately, very little of this occurred and for the past two decades, the city's main streets have experienced a very convincing revival as part of the movement for neighbourhood preservation.

The City of Toronto is now proposing to capitalize still further on this valuable resource. Recently an International Competition was held for the city's Main Streets to demonstrate how their scale and intensity could be increased with buildings of up to five and six storeys. This would, it was felt, provide needed housing, while at the same time improving the quality of the Mainstreets as public spaces through the creation of more substantial "streetwalls". It was hoped that the Competition would suggest appropriate new building typologies for this situation and subject to the outcome of this Competition, and other ongoing studies, changes will be proposed to the City's by-laws to facilitate such interventions. With hundred of kilometres of Main Streets, the theoretical potential exists to add several hundred thousand new residents in highly appropriate locations.

The issues raised by the Competition were interesting ones. Many solutions involved the introduction of interior and exterior courts within building parcels to provide shared common space for the residents in compensation for the busy Main Street setting. New relationships to the adjacent residential blocks were proposed and a great variety of plan organizations were tested. The look of the proposed Main Street buildings varied enormously and it was felt that such a stylistic heterogeneity was entirely appropriate. What is really at stake here is the upgrading of what is now a marginalized form of housing into one of the main stays of the City's stock of dwelling units, and at the same time the improvement of the three-dimensional qualities of the most ubiquitous of public spaces - Main Street.

Parking is a fundamental issue. Since many of the Main Street sites are quite narrow, it is extremely difficult to meet current parking standards without incurring exorbitant costs if it is possible to do so at all. On the other hand, there is a strong argument to be made for a significant reduction in parking standards since all of these streets have public transit at the front door. This is an option being examined by the City. There is also a case to be made for being extremely permissive on the land use side allowing such buildings to house almost any desired mix of residential and/or commercial functions. By simply concentrating on increasing the scale with suitable built-form, it could be argued, there will be so many opportunities to build that there will be room to meet all needs, and the market should be permitted to make an appropriate response in each case.

In each of the City's neighbourhoods, the Main Streets have taken on a distinctive, different character, and it is important that the proposed changes and simplifications of the by-law be carefully examined so that these various characters can be understood and reinforced. Consistent with this philosophy, the major thrust of the Main Streets initiative will favour the redevelopment of relatively small sites of one, two, or three historic lots, as they become available, and not to encourage land assembly and

rebuilding at a large scale. This will bring small scale local entrepreneurs into the redevelopment process all over the City as opposed to pulling the larger developers into this market. In fact, the most typical version of the Main Street transformation thus far, has occurred on former gas station properties of generally about 1000 m^2 in area, usually on corner sites. While the increments of change may be small, the aggregate potential for change is enormous.

3. Conclusion

The projects and initiatives described above are very different in scale, location, and context. What they have in common is their clear reliance on the reassertion of a defined public realm, as the underlying structure of the city or town. In each case, a characteristic pattern of streets and blocks is proposed which breaks the private realm into discrete pieces and introduces a finer grain of building parcels. In addition to the generally neutral grid of streets, there is often a characteristic public space "figure" consisting of a generously endowed park and/or square around which development is organized. These figures are deliberately selected in each case for their potential to promote and encourage social life in a public setting. What are generally discussed here are fragments of cities, albeit large ones, and of necessity there is a concentration on the relationships within a given sector. But there is often a clear implication that the proposed plans contain latent possibilities for linkages into the surrounding urban fabric.

There is a deliberate downplaying in the plans illustrated above of buildings as free-standing objects (except where an exceptional role makes this appropriate) in favour of a conception which sees buildings as a "frame" defining the edges of the characteristic void or figure of the public space. On the parcels surrounding these figures, single use has been largely abandoned in favour of a more complex and diversified range of uses in almost every case. In this way, public space takes on an additional importance as the common ground where uses and users meet and interact. Finally, though it is by no means banished, there is a quite deliberate downplaying of the privileged position which has been accorded to the car in recent decades.

Taken as a whole, this set of attitudes and approaches which is by no means confined to the practice of one firm or to the examples cited above, is probably representative of a good deal of contemporary work in Canadian cities. It is part of a communal effort to reassert the validity of the City as an ideal negated by certain tendencies of the Modern Movement such as the emphasis on the specialization of functions, their physical separation and the treatment of buildings as objects in a spatial field. This effort should not be seen as an attempt to turn back the clock or to recreate historic settings. Instead, what is being attempted is to resituate the Modern "project" of evolving and continual response to new and emerging circumstances - a dialectical rediscovery of the living City, rather than its rejection.