



SUSTAINABILITY MATTERS: PROSPECTS FOR A JUST TRANSITION IN CALGARY, CANADA'S PETRO-CITY

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Where Do We Grow from Here?



Getting growth right will be crucial to global sustainability in this urban age. The essays in this chapter explore several of the key issues associated with urban growth in North America. Suburban development, usually endowed with the characteristics of sprawl, continues to dominate growth in Calgary. In this chapter, we highlight some of the causes and consequences of the inexorable expansion of Calgary into surrounding farmland. We also discuss the related phenomenon of big box retail and examine its real costs.

This chapter brings to light issues of urban governance. What is evident in many of the essays is that decisions on growth go beyond city government. Regional highways, the protection of farmland, education infrastructure, and the global ecological implications of city planning decisions demonstrate the need to bring more than just the narrow interests and jurisdictions of city governments to urban design and growth.

Calgary is a perfect example of another phenomenon of outward expansion, which some have called “school sprawl.” As we grow ever outwards, new families move to new suburbs; suburban schools become larger, capturing economies of scale in light of ever-tighter education budgets; and inner city schools empty out as families in established neighbourhoods mature. As a result, more kids are bused to school in Calgary, and scarce education dollars are diverted from the classroom to the bus fleet.

One instrument for sustainable urban growth is the urban growth boundary (UGB). The essay “No Limits, No More” takes up this planning tool. We examine the most well-known and successful UGB in Portland, Oregon. The essay describes the features of a successful UGB and examines its potential for Calgary and region.

These essays also highlight the political dimensions of urban growth. We revisit a particularly high-profile battle between Calgary’s mayor and a prominent homebuilder. At stake is who gets to decide how our city grows. Should urban growth be left to the market? What responsibilities do our elected representatives have in the process? What roles do professional planners play? And most importantly, what role do citizens have in ensuring that growth is for the common good?

Finally, “Lessons from the Left Coast” features Vancouver, considered to be one of the best examples of modern urban sustainability. The essay offers examples not only of what Vancouver has got right, but how it got it right. It didn’t just happen. Many dedicated citizens, planners, politicians, and developers made it happen.

A PRICEY RIDE TO SCHOOL: THE HIDDEN COSTS OF SUBURBAN SPRAWL

In the fall of 2019, the Calgary Board of Education made two significant yet contradictory announcements. The first was that cutbacks caused by budget shortfalls would result in the loss of four hundred teaching positions, among other losses.¹ The second—a proposed hike in school busing fees, forecast to increase the cost to families by 60 percent—was voted down by the Board.²

The province made it clear that there would be no new funding to cover budget shortfalls, so money once used for silly things like hiring teachers and ensuring adequate classroom resources was instead being diverted to pay for rising transportation costs. What a cruel irony.

A 2017 Brookings Institute study surveyed the issue of busing in American cities and estimated that delaying school start times by an hour would result in a lifetime earnings bump of \$17,500 per student through better academic performance.³ Reducing busing times would accomplish the same thing by allowing those perennially sleep-deprived teenaged students to sleep longer. Research published in the journal *Sleep Health* reported that later school start times resulted in improved attendance and graduation rates.⁴ A 2009 study in the journal *Preventive Medicine* found that in Toronto, “between 1986 and 2006, walking mode share for trips to school declined (53.0%–42.5% for 11–13 year olds, 38.6%–30.7% for 14–15 year olds).”⁵ Over roughly the same period, overweight and obesity became an increasingly critical issue for youth across Canada.⁶ Creating communities where kids can safely walk to school provides the opportunity for a daily dose of exercise and goes a long way to promoting health and fitness.

Many suburban families—already stressed by the effects of rising energy prices, which in turn increase the costs of almost everything, from fuel to food to manufactured goods—are reaching their limits, and all families that are confronted with busing fees of any size lose. This is because the “fee” is not a fee at all: it’s a targeted, regressive education tax penalizing families with kids in the system, with the poorest paying proportionally the most.

There are other, less obvious costs of excessive school busing. Getting 34,500 kids to and from school at the busiest times of the day adds considerable congestion to already crowded city streets. Counterproductive is a polite way to describe it. There are many culprits responsible for this backwards state of affairs, but at its heart, it's not a funding problem—it's a sprawl problem. Rising transportation costs, including school buses, are a byproduct of the way we have built the city—spread over the prairie like jam on toast. As the distance between where children live and where they go to school increases, so does the cost of getting them there.

School sprawl comes with other associated problems. In 2004 the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) created a firestorm by threatening to close seven inner city schools—a perennial problem in sprawling cities.⁷ The issue is in part a numbers game. The CBE had to show appropriate levels of occupancy in a school district in order to have new school construction approved, so closing inner city schools where occupancy was less than 100 percent allowed them to reach those district occupancy targets. Many young families move to sprawling suburbs without schools, so we spend millions of dollars closing perfectly good schools and opening up new ones. In many of these communities, kids are bused for years and graduate by the time a promised school is actually built. After the school goes up, chaos ensues, as the inner city schools that were accommodating the bused students become “ghost towns,” as one parent described the situation.⁸

In the CBE's 2019 *Shaping the Future of High School* survey of parents, staff, and community members, the principle “Allow students to attend school as close to home as possible” was rated highest among principles that should guide the Board's planning process. In that same survey, “proximity to home” was rated second only to “academics” when respondents were asked to rank factors affecting choice of high school.⁹

We tend to buy into the myth that suburbs provide affordable housing. But it only seems that way because many of the costs—school bus fees being only one example—are subsidized by taxpayers. Now that these costs can no longer be contained, another strand in that myth is unraveling.

BIG BOX BOONDOGGLE: WHY SMALL AND LOCAL IS BEAUTIFUL

In July 2012 City Council took a bold and unexpected decision to turn down an application from WinSport Canada to redesignate land uses at Canada Olympic Park.¹⁰ The redesignation would have opened the door for Winsport to sell land for auto-dependent, big box commercial and retail development requiring the construction of an eight-lane interchange. Faced with objections from residents of Bowness and Montgomery about the effects of the development on traffic and on local businesses, and in deference to the Municipal Development Plan's goal of creating a more compact city, the application was rejected. Unfortunately, Trinity Hills Group came back to Council with a similar proposal, and in 2015 the development was approved.¹¹ It is now moving ahead, with a massive expansion of the Trans-Canada Highway already complete and the soon-to-be completed west section of the Ring Road ready to bring shoppers from the entire region to its doorsteps.

City Council's original rejection of Trinity Hills and big box shopping was well considered. In 2008 the City commissioned a comprehensive study of the thirty million-plus square feet of retail in Calgary and the surrounding region. The study noted that Calgary has more large-scale auto-oriented retail than most jurisdictions. These include "super-regional centres" like Chinook Centre and Sunridge Mall, "power centres" like Deerfoot Meadows and Country Hills, and "factory outlets" like Deerfoot Mall. The study also found that Calgary is actually deficient in community and neighbourhood retail.¹²

The study noted that peripheral commercial developments like the CrossIron Mills megamall are oversized but are opportunistically located to attract car-driving shoppers from the entire region. In the discussion of what elements of urban form best support high-quality retail, diversity of housing choice, walkability, and compact development all made the list. Most critical were accessible and convenient transportation networks and the co-location of shopping, residential, recreation, and jobs (often referred to as mixed-use development). The recommended strategy was to focus on smaller-scale retail inside the city.

While big box has its challenges, it also delivers jobs, economic development, and, most important, consumer choice—right? Well, not according to Stacy Mitchell of the American Independent Business Alliance and author of *Big Box Swindle: The True Cost of Mega-Retailers and the Fight for America's Independent Businesses*. Mitchell makes a strong case for the corrosive effects of big box retail. She argues that “mega-retailers impose a variety of hidden costs on society and contribute far less to our economic well-being than they take away.”¹³ Case in point—the development of retail and commercial space at COP will require at least \$110 million of investment in road upgrades and interchanges.¹⁴

Mitchell goes on to argue that local business is a vital ingredient in the fabric of community life and that local business owners are more financially and personally invested in their communities. Unlike big box retailers, they have nowhere else to go. Their kids go to local schools, are taken care of at local hospitals, and swim at local pools, so they are more supportive of taxation that helps to fund these amenities. In fact, small business has been found to contribute twice as much per employee to charitable organizations as large businesses. Mitchell cites research showing that more local business ownership brings lower property crime and that citizens who live in communities better served by local businesses are more civically engaged, volunteer more, vote in greater numbers, and drive less.

The Institute for Local Self-Reliance, a research and policy non-profit based in Minneapolis, has done its homework on big box retail. A study in Austin, Texas, found that spending \$100 at a big box bookstore generates \$13 of local economic activity, while spending the same amount at a local bookstore generates \$45.¹⁵ A Loyola University study found that within a four-mile radius of a new Wal-Mart store in Chicago, one quarter of previously existing businesses closed.¹⁶ A 2013 study by Civic Economics found that in British Columbia, every \$1 million in sales by independent retail stores generates \$450,000 in local economic activity, compared to just \$170,000 for chain stores. The same study estimates that a 10 percent shift from chain stores to independents would create thirty-one thousand jobs in BC.¹⁷

All too often, the result of big box retail development is displacement of local jobs, depressed wages and benefits in the retail sector, reduced

local tax revenues, and increased costs for social programs that low-wage workers rely on to make ends meet. Why? Because local retailers buy more from local producers; they buy local services like accounting and legal services, and they do not have the overhead of employees based in distant head offices. More money stays put.

A city requires only so much retail, the North American average being about twenty-five to thirty square feet per capita. More big box retail means less local retail. Big box at Canada Olympic Park will probably mean that the communities of Montgomery and Bowness will face an uphill battle to attract and grow local business and build vibrant main streets.

Absentee landlords have little understanding of, or allegiance to, our community as anything other than a source of revenue. The growth of on-line shopping is an even more disturbing trend for local businesses and for retail workers, with Amazon seemingly intent on monopolizing the global retail market. To the extent that the profit motive drives them to provide good service, that's great—but local businesses offer that and much more.

In the end, we exercise our own choices about where to shop. Will those choices be based solely on the sticker price, or will we make decisions (with our dollars and our votes) in support of healthy, vibrant, and resilient local and regional communities and economies?

FISCAL CLIFF: CALGARY'S GROWTH MANAGEMENT STRATEGY UNDER SIEGE

It's March 2020, and former councilor Brian Pincott is speaking to *The Sprawl*, an online journalism project. Approving fourteen new communities in Calgary, he says, "was as close to throwing out the Municipal Development Plan as you could get," and abolishing the Growth Management Overlay (GMO), an administration mechanism put in place to determine the long-term costs of proposed greenfield community developments, "takes us back to before the 2009 Plan It and a developer free-for-all."¹⁸

To understand how we got to this point, we have to go back to 2012, just three years into Plan It, when this proposed plan, designed to avoid a fiscal cliff brought on by a tsunami of infrastructure spending and maintenance that will bury us if we continue business as usual, was under siege.

On 3 December 2012, in a legislative showdown to determine if we would pull up short of the cliff or continue galloping toward it, City Council considered a proposal put forth by developers to neuter the City's growth management strategy. As a result of this meeting, Council agreed to create a pilot project for developer-funded area structure plans (ASPs), with Cornerstone ASP, in Calgary's far northeast, being the first guinea pig. In retrospect, this may have been the first successful gambit to neuter Plan It.

You could argue that this story began decades ago. In the 1950s, the City of Calgary essentially handed the responsibility for residential planning to the private development industry. Since that time, developers have delivered the suburban, sprawling, car-worshipping, and fiscally unsustainable city we have today. There have been attempts to turn the tide, most notably in the 1980s, when city planners presented a new vision of a more sustainable, walkable city that would tame the automobile. That didn't work out so well for many of the planners. They were unceremoniously run out of town by then-mayor Ralph Klein, and a chill settled over city planning for years.

It wasn't until January 2005 that Calgary began to recover from that trauma, when, under the leadership of councilors such as Joe Ceci, the City embarked on unprecedented citizen engagement to chart a new course. That effort culminated in 2006 at the World Urban Forum in Vancouver, where then-mayor David Bronconnier unveiled the imagineCalgary hundred-year vision.¹⁹

Eighteen thousand Calgarians had a hand in crafting that vision. The citizen panel that led the process included Naheed Nenshi and Brian Pincott—who later became mayor and councilor, respectively—as well as the CEOs of United Way and Glenbow Museum. In July 2006, at a special hearing of City Council, dozens of organizations presented letters of support for the imagineCalgary document, including Sustainable Calgary, Calgary Economic Development, and the Calgary Region Homebuilders Association.

Between 2007 and 2009, with the participation of thousands of citizens and the unanimous endorsement of Council, a sixty-year road map on how to achieve the imagineCalgary vision was developed and given legal weight in the Municipal Development Plan (MDP) and the Calgary Transportation Plan (collectively known as Plan It). Change is sometimes

excruciatingly slow, but the planning process plods along. In December 2011, Council endorsed the continued development of a growth management strategy that would give teeth to the MDP.

The strategy established criteria, embodied in the GMO, for deciding where new residential development should occur. The point of the strategy is to encourage growth in places where providing infrastructure—transit, roads, water and sewer, and emergency services—is least costly. In the old system, we said yes to developments with little concern for the long-term cost to taxpayers or for the impending fiscal cliff. The growth management strategy, the MDP, and imagineCalgary represent the long road to fiscal prudence and sustainability for our city. The problem is that the road to fiscal prudence diverges from that of profit maximization for the development industry, and they were not amused. The industry refused to endorse the imagineCalgary vision in 2006; they challenged the MDP process every step of the way and, in the final analysis, diluted the plan during a closed-door eleventh-hour deal with then-mayor Bronconnier. In the winter of 2011, they were successful in lobbying Council to institute a 50 percent taxpayer subsidy of infrastructure costs for greenfield suburban development—over \$80,000 per hectare—rather than absorbing all the costs themselves.²⁰

The December 2012 proposal from developers to pay the cost of drawing up ASPs resulted in the aforementioned Cornerstone ASP pilot project. ASPs are the first of a series of statutory planning stages that culminate in the building of a new community. It sounds like a generous offer, but the industry's motivation was anything but altruistic. The existence of an ASP allows the developer to move forward to a stage of the development process where they are in the driver's seat. In effect, developers wanted to position themselves, with ASP in hand, to jump the land development-priorities queue that the growth management strategy would establish.

It is sad but true that over the last decade of a renaissance in city planning, the development industry has been consistently obstructionist. They appear offended by the notion of citizens having a place at the table when decisions are being made about the design of the neighbourhoods and communities where we will live and raise our families. They have profited handsomely from the back-room, closed-door development process, and they are loath to see it change.

Mayor Nenshi was elected in 2010 on a promise of more openness at City Hall. Over the last decade, thousands of citizens have responded, in good faith, to the City's invitation to participate in various planning processes. But the system still seems to be rigged in favour of developers. Many of the implementation decisions for the MDP have been made around an exclusive table featuring administration and developers, who constitute the City's Developer Advisory Committee.

We suggest that to balance the playing field, councilors need a gentle reminder about who they work for as they consider these crucial decisions. We place our trust in them to represent the common good rather than cater to a small but powerful private interest group.

NO LIMITS, NO MORE: IT'S TIME FOR AN URBAN GROWTH BOUNDARY

Calgary is losing valuable farmland at an astonishing rate. We need to draw a line around the city and say no to urban development beyond it. We can't afford any more sprawling, auto-dependent suburbs. We used to grow food in the Cranston, Tuscany, Taradale, and Coventry Hills neighbourhoods.

Rural sprawl is out, too—no more developments like Springbank, Heritage Pointe, or Bearspaw, where cattle once pastured or wildlife teemed. And certainly no more environmentally disastrous developments like CrossIron Mills, where an authentic rural community once prospered.

It's called an urban growth boundary (UGB), and many cities have one. Vancouver has its "green zone" and Toronto its "green belt." Ottawa has had a protected zone circling the city since the 1950s (thanks to the federal government). UGBs protect agricultural and natural lands from development by strictly limiting the permissible land uses outside it, where development such as residential suburbs, commercial and shopping districts, and industrial parks are forbidden.

The most famous and most studied UGB surrounds Portland, Oregon. Portland's UGB was created in 1972 as part of state legislation designed to inhibit rapidly accelerating urban encroachment on fertile, working agricultural lands. UGBs now surround not only Portland, but every major urban place in the state.

The Portland UGB is not an iron curtain. It includes a twenty-year supply of undeveloped land to satisfy natural growth pressures. The boundary can be extended when overall urban densities achieve target thresholds that support more compact forms of growth—like dense transit networks and walkable neighbourhoods. But in Oregon, extending the UGB is the last option, not the first.

UGBs are controversial and provoke intense emotions. They are opposed by a coalition of urban growth proponents—developers, home-builders, road-builders, and, not least, land and property speculators—as well as by owners of rural land eager to cash in on the urban bonanza. One claim of the growth coalition is that UGBs artificially restrict land supplies, causing unnatural price increases. This, in turn, limits growth proponents’ ability to offer so-called affordable housing on the city’s fringes. For them, the UGB is a pointless government intrusion on the free market. In Calgary, they say, a glance eastward, to the seemingly endless prairie, is all that is needed to confirm the “common sense” observation that there’s plenty of land for both development and agriculture.

Another assertion, often accompanied by threats to leave town, is that UGBs are ineffective because when prices go up in the city, development, and the economic activity it generates, moves away. Restricting land supplies in Calgary just means higher growth rates—and more business—elsewhere.

But as appealing and persuasive as these arguments seem, they lack substance. In response to the contention that UGBs cause unwarranted increases in land prices, research from Portland State University, published in 2006, shows that in Oregon, land values inside and outside UGBs increased at about the same rate.²¹ The same research found that, for comparable uses, land prices inside Oregon grew at about the same rate as in other states during the same period. Contrary to the free-market criticism, UGBs do not stifle growth; they establish sensible rules for locating it.

As for the claim that there’s lots of land available for growth—well, this is an example of what Paul Krugman, a Nobel economist and influential *New York Times* columnist, calls a “zombie lie”: no matter how many times you try to kill it, it refuses to die. The story, endlessly repeated by development lobbyists at public hearings, is that Canada is big—about nine million square kilometres. Of all that land, only 0.5 percent is urbanized.

Conclusion: There is no need for growth boundaries or density targets. It's mind-boggling.

Only 5 percent of Canada's land base is capable of producing food, and only a small fraction of that is rated Class 1 (the best agricultural soils). For geological, historical, and geographical reasons, many Canadian cities, including Calgary and Edmonton, sit smack in the middle of Class 1 farmland.

A 2014 study by the Canadian Forest Service reported that between 1988 and 2010, urban and suburban land use increased from 2.5 percent to 6.6 percent in the Edmonton-Calgary region, with 60 percent of the expansion occurring on agricultural land, of which two-thirds was highly suitable for farming.²² The rate of loss over the period was accelerating. The report found that up to two thousand square kilometres of agricultural land could be lost between 2010 and 2036. We're relentlessly expanding into the last of the best land we have.

And the threat of leaving town is hooey. UGBs are effective because they work at a regional scale. If Calgary alone were to draw a line, the leaving-town argument might hold water. But if Airdrie, Cochrane, Okotoks, Strathmore, and the other small towns in the region also had UGBs, the threat would be empty.

Evidence shows that the primary purpose of UGBs—directing urban development away from precious farmland—has been successful in other cities. We need one. Our sustainability could depend on it.

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE—OR WHY DEVELOPERS AND BUILDERS WANT TO CONTROL CITY HALL

In spring 2013, with the municipal election heating up, we caught a rare glimpse into Calgary's development industry when excerpts of an audio-tape of the CEO of a major homebuilder in our city were broadcast. The CEO was advising fellow development industry members on which city councilors should be supported and which should be opposed for re-election.²³ Leaving aside the sordid aspects of this affair, the episode sheds light on some fundamental issues about how we govern and grow our city.

Three aspects of this unfortunate incident are particularly informative—the single-minded self-interest of the development industry, the

presumed infallibility of the market (when it is convenient), and the shorts-in-a-knot bluster at having citizens sit at a table that industry insiders always thought was reserved solely for them and their buddies. The not-so-subtle message from the CEO was that the mayor and councilors have no business meddling in the workings of the all-knowing market. After all, they are merely the citizens' elected representatives, charged with steering our city toward the common good. How dare they think they have the right to create policy to that end!

Even more galling, how dare they invite citizens to roll up their sleeves and take an active part in shaping Calgary! Development industry players will have none of that. They are perfectly capable of deciding how our city grows, thank you very much. Never mind that as they make decisions about where Calgary should grow, they oblige the City to raise and spend tax dollars to provide the pipes, the police, the firefighters, and the free-ways that give value to their investments.

Most insidious perhaps, this CEO's actions imply a cornerstone of market thinking that has found its way into democratic deliberation—the virtue of self-interest. Instead of an election being an opportunity for citizens to debate, argue, educate themselves, and come to consensus about what is best for our city, market thinking suggests that we all just show up at the polls, vote in our isolated self-interest, and the common good emerges, as if by magic, from the ballot box.

Then there is the matter of whether these free market defenders actually believe what they are saying. One of the most vexing things for the industry is City Council's slow but steady moves to eliminate the handsome subsidies developers have long enjoyed. The City of Calgary's 2009 cost-of-growth study makes it abundantly clear that for decades, the development industry has been enriched by billions of dollars that help make it oh so profitable.²⁴

The market will decide. Really! Then why does the industry find itself in the uncomfortable position of having to defend its plan to build homes on land it purchased a generation ago? Most of those who buy a home in suburban developments were either yet to be born, still in diapers, or not living in the city, the province, or even the country when that land was purchased and developers began the process of making sure it would be where Calgary families would live. The industry shapes the market at least

as much as it responds to it. The market is a valuable tool when deployed effectively, but it is no substitute for critical thinking, moral judgement, and democratic deliberation. We need look no further than the tragic 2012 garment industry fires in Bangladesh to see where unchecked market self-interest leads.

Those involved in the development industry claim they should be making the decisions because they are taking the risks when they plan communities and build homes. Fair enough, but as homeowners, we have plenty of skin in the game, too. We live our lives and raise families in these homes and neighbourhoods.

Industry players claim to be the experts. Unquestionably, they possess unique skills and expertise. But they are not public finance economists or public health experts; they have no special expertise in what constitutes quality of life or how to build social capital, or in the environmental effects of alternative ways of building homes, neighbourhoods, and cities. Every person who volunteers for soccer, participates in the river clean-up, sits on the board of a community association or arts agency, or volunteers with the United Way is a builder of this city. Sadly, the industry is loath to make room at the table for any of this expertise.

To claim that City Council is seeking to shut the industry out of City Hall is absurd. Homebuilders and developers will be busy for decades to come designing neighbourhoods and constructing homes in suburban communities already approved by the City. What Council and administration have been doing since the inauguration of imagineCalgary is making room at the table for diverse voices to be heard and, in the process, enabling more transparent, well-considered decisions about the future of our city.

Developers and builders should swallow their misplaced pride, put aside their prejudices, and make room at the table for the rest of us.

LESSONS FROM THE LEFT COAST

From a restaurant deck overlooking English Bay, it is hard to imagine a more liveable city than Vancouver. In the words of Captain Vancouver in 1792, “to describe the beauty of this region will be a very grateful task to the pen of a skilful panegyrist.”²⁵ Beyond the city’s spectacular natural

endowments, those who eventually settled Vancouver have a long history of getting the big moves right.

In their book *City Making in Paradise: Nine Decisions That Saved Vancouver*, former mayor and provincial premier Mike Harcourt and city planner Ken Cameron provide an account of those big moves.²⁶ In 1949, two years after a historic flood that devastated the Fraser Valley, visionary pioneer planners gave birth to the Lower Mainland Regional Planning Board—later succeeded by the Metro Vancouver Regional District. From its inception, the Planning Board envisioned a regional land use pattern; started the vital process of getting neighbouring cities, towns, and rural municipalities talking to each other; and embedded city planning in its ecological context.

In Calgary, legislated regional planning dates to the establishment of the Planning Commission in the 1950s. The Klein government disbanded the legislated commission in 1995. Four years later, cities, towns, and rural municipalities established a voluntary Calgary Regional Partnership. It, too, disbanded following the reinstatement of legislated regional planning by the Notley government in 2018. That same year, the Calgary Metropolitan Region (CMR) Board was established. Made up of elected officials from the CMR's ten member municipalities, its ability to shape development patterns will be vital for the success of our region.

A second critical moment for Vancouver was in the fall of 1968, when ordinary citizens of the working-class inner city neighbourhood of Strathcona joined a battle to save their community from an elevated freeway. At the time, this sort of “urban renewal” was conventional practice, but it would have destroyed Chinatown and Gastown, which today are among downtown Vancouver's gems. Against all odds, community action was successful, and together with academics, planning and architecture students, and activist professionals—like the young lawyer Mike Harcourt—the action spawned a political movement that has shaped Vancouver for three decades.

A third “big move” took place in 1973, when the BC provincial government tabled legislation to create the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). Less than 1 percent of BC's land is Class 1 Arable, and by 1973, 20 percent of agricultural land in the Lower Fraser Valley had been gobbled up by sprawl. Today, cities everywhere recognize the critical need to protect

and nurture urban agriculture. Some version of an ALR or urban growth boundary would curb sprawl and respond to the growing citizen and consumer call for local food production in and around Calgary.

There is no better example of the promise of sustainable city living than Granville Island and the greater area of False Creek. The district is at the heart of forty kilometres of what is essentially a car-free, pedestrian- and bike-oriented thoroughfare (including the twenty-eight-kilometre Seawall) where you can find all of life's necessities and amenities and where the otherwise ubiquitous and imposing urban accessory—the automobile—is absent or marginalized, taking a back seat to non-motorized transport. Granville Island itself is the most convincing argument against the modern segregated planning model where homes, jobs, shops, and services are rigorously partitioned so that movement between them literally defines car dependence. Where else can you find heavy industry, arts production and retail, tourism, markets, shops, educational institutions, high-end condo living, and affordable housing co-operatives co-existing in what Harcourt and Cameron call “a gem of urbanity in harmony with its local context”?²⁷ Granville Island is proof that the new wisdom of mixed land use is not only possible but desirable and, we would argue, urgently needed in Calgary.

In 2011 Vancouver's mayor Gregor Robertson cut the ribbon on the city's newly refurbished and extended system of pedestrian and bike thoroughfares. By 2019 the bike infrastructure had expanded beyond the expectations of many Vancouverites—the program was a resounding success.²⁸ Who didn't marvel at the throngs of Lower Mainlanders who took over the streets of Vancouver during the Olympics and the Stanley Cup playoffs, as they do in lesser numbers on most summer evenings? Vancouver's aggressive bike planning strategy makes room for cyclists on dedicated lanes throughout the downtown and on some of the major arteries into the city—imagine dedicated bicycle lanes the length of Memorial Drive, Bow Trail, and 9th Avenue, and you get the idea.

We know Vancouver is not actually paradise. It has its own problems—unaffordable real estate, gang violence, homelessness, and a certain Left Coast smugness, perhaps—not to mention the odd riot in the streets when Stanley Cup fortunes falter. But Calgarians shouldn't let that get in the way of learning a thing or two from Vancouver's many successes.

The lessons for Calgary? The market has a role to play in making a city great, but only under the guidance of a collective vision. And we have a great start! We're back on the road to regional planning: imagine Calgary and Plan It together provide a collective vision for the future, and we've begun to move on a cycling strategy, the Step Forward pedestrian strategy, and the Calgary Eats! food system action plan.²⁹ But grit and determination and the ability to work together as a community will be required to build on this foundation. Most importantly, Vancouver shows us how average citizens, students, academics, and dedicated public servants can make a real difference. Activism is not a dirty word but a badge of honour.

NOTES

- 1 Dean Bennet, "Alberta Finance Minister Says No Money Available for Teacher Salary Increases," *Edmonton Journal*, 4 March 2020, <https://edmontonjournal.com/news/local-news/alberta-finance-minister-says-no-money-available-for-teacher-salary-increases>.
- 2 Sarah Reiger, "CBE Retroactively Scraps Fee-Free Busing, Calgary Transit Rebate for 2019–20 School Year," *CBC News*, 10 December 2019, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/cbe-bus-costs-1.5391732>.
- 3 Marco Hafner, Martin Stepanek, and Wendy Troxel, *Later School Start Times in the US: An Economic Analysis* (Cambridge, UK: Rand Corporation, 2017), https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR2100/RR2109/RAND_RR2109.pdf.
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- 6 Noel Keough, Bob Morrison, and Celia Lee, *State of Our City 2020: An Urgent Call for a Just Transition* (Calgary: Sustainable Calgary Society, 2020), 54, <http://www.sustainablecalgary.org/publications>.
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- 10 Jason Markusoff, "WinSport 'Extremely Disappointed' in Council's Rejection of Plan to Sell Land," *Calgary Herald*, 31 July 2012, <http://www.calgaryherald.com/news/calgary/winsport+extremely+disappointed+council+rejection+plan+sell+land/7020115/story.html>.
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- 12 Global Retail Strategies Inc., *Recommended Directions for City-Wide Commercial/Retail Policy (Macro/Micro Final Report)* (Calgary: City of Calgary, December 2008), amended 5 March 2009.
- 13 Stacy Mitchell, *Big-Box Swindle: The True Cost of Mega-Retailers and the Fight for America's Independent Businesses* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007), xii.
- 14 I (Keough) was present at the meeting of City Council on 30 July 2012 when this number was presented to Council verbally during debate over the Winsport expansion proposal.
- 15 Stacy Mitchell, "Local Stores Create Triple the Economic Activity of Chains," *Institute for Local Self-Reliance*, 1 February 2003, <https://ilsr.org/local-stores-create-triple-economic-activity-chains/>.
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- 22 Federico Martellozzo et al., "Urbanization and the Loss of Prime Farmland: A Case Study in the Calgary-Edmonton Corridor of Alberta," *Regional Environmental Change* 15 (2015): 881–93.
- 23 Doug Vaessen and Lisa Geddes, "Mayor Calls for Investigation of Civic Election Campaign Contributions," *Global News*, 23 April 2013, <https://globalnews.ca/news/504916/mayor-calls-for-investigation-of-civic-election-campaign-contributions/>.

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- 26 Mike Harcourt and Ken Cameron, *City Making in Paradise: Nine Decisions That Saved Vancouver*, with Sean Rossiter (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 2007).
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