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To cite this article: Robert Lewis & Paul Hess (2016) Refashioning urban space in postwar Toronto: the Wood-Wellesley redevelopment area, 1952–1957, Planning Perspectives, 31:4, 563–584, DOI: [10.1080/02665433.2016.1174073](https://doi.org/10.1080/02665433.2016.1174073)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02665433.2016.1174073>



Published online: 13 Jun 2016.



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## Refashioning urban space in postwar Toronto: the Wood-Wellesley redevelopment area, 1952–1957

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*(Received 24 July 2015; final version received 7 January 2016)*

This paper considers the creation and the subsequent meaning of ‘redevelopment areas’ in Toronto in the 1950s. The city passed a bylaw in 1952 that defined blighted areas as suitable for redevelopment. One of these areas was the downtown district that runs between Wood and Wellesley streets. The history of the Wood-Wellesley redevelopment area between 1952 and 1957 was important in several ways: it built on but differed from similar activity in the USA; it discursively reflected the needs of the city to refashion itself as a modern landscape; it provided the city with the tools to turn planning ideas into action; and it gave developers the forum by which they could push for specific areas of the city to be opened up for investment. Politically calculated and heavily contested visions of urban space, redevelopment areas such as Wood-Wellesley were used by the state and developers to physically reconstruct Toronto’s downtown area for private capital, to create a new modernist landscape, and to reproduce new and to reinforce existing social inequalities.

**Keywords:** urban redevelopment; property relations; redevelopment areas; postwar Toronto

### Introduction

On 10 November 1952, the Toronto City Council passed bylaw 18746. Composed of only two sections, the bylaw designated two parts of central Toronto as ‘redevelopment areas’, and gave the city the power to expropriate land and then to sell it to private developers at a nominal cost.<sup>1</sup> Surprisingly, the bylaw elicited little media comment. The daily newspapers said nothing about it in their weekly roundup of council meetings, focusing instead on the approval given to a new apartment building project in the city centre and the need for more public housing. Local property owners in one of the two districts designated as redevelopment areas under the bylaw, however, were not so quiet. At the end of October, owners along with the support of some city councillors vehemently protested against the bylaw. As the president of their newly created ratepayers’ association organized to oppose redevelopment, William Dennison asked, ‘what right does the city have to expropriate land on the behest of private enterprise?’<sup>2</sup> The City’s legal authority to designate redevelopment areas and use expropriation to concentrate and transfer property between private owners was, in fact, created by the Province of Ontario’s Planning Act of 1946. Bylaw 18746, however, was Toronto’s first and untested use of this new power.

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This paper examines the Wood-Wellesley district between 1952 and 1957, the first area designated for redevelopment under the new bylaw. In 1952 Wood-Wellesley was one of the first districts in Canada to experience what amounted to a decisive intervention by the state into the city's property relations for private interests. As such, it established an important legal precedent for the character of Toronto's residential redevelopment in the 1950s and beyond. We argue that the redevelopment area was an important new legal space in a double sense.

First, it created new legal authority and new planning tools for the city, including using a rationale of 'blight' for expropriating property, along with the ability to directly work with developers to shape the form of redevelopment. This was not more passive regulation in the sense of zoning, another new planning power the city was implementing in the early 1950s.<sup>3</sup> Rather it was a case of the City using its power to transfer property for a nominal cost and to pick and choose among developers and their proposals for development. For the period it was in existence, the redevelopment area thus redefined and challenged the existing understanding of the use of expropriation, which had centred on the use of city powers to redistribute urban resources for the collective good. The city could now use its expropriation powers to permit new forms of private enterprise control over property relations and to reorganize urban space. This was justified as meeting public goals such as reversing urban deterioration, providing needed housing, and increasing tax assessments. The redevelopment areas would be the vehicle for the city to provide incentives, specifically large assemblages of cleared, ready to be developed land at below market prices, to private, profit-seeking development interests.

Second, even though the City initially sought to use these powers across most of its central area, the redevelopment area was a new legal space in a geographic sense also. The Province determined that the City could not indiscriminately apply redevelopment powers, but could only do so within spatially defined areas that were planned and redeveloped in a comprehensive manner, not developed incrementally. The boundaries of the redevelopment area, thus, had to be specifically located, with the City authority over property differently defined within and outside of the boundaries. Linked to this, the boundaries created a differentiated space for the attraction and application of capital, with implications for both investment and disinvestment by different groups. This had the effect of mobilizing different sets of actors to define and contest City actions. In the case of Wood-Wellesley, the bylaw produced a strong negative reaction from Dennison's ratepayers' association while attracting international real estate interests looking to redevelop downtown. The boundaries of the redevelopment area were inherently political along a number of dimensions because of how they influenced use values, exchange values, and property rights. At the same time, their definition was critical for how and where the City could shape the material and social form of the city as it tried to remake itself as a modern metropolis.

The Wood-Wellesley redevelopment area proved to be an experimental site for the City of Toronto to work with large-scale private developers to modernize central Toronto neighbourhoods. The refashioning of Toronto's downtown as expressed in the redevelopment act involved building new property relations in which small-scale ownership was replaced by large, corporately managed housing projects, the social composition of the resident population was changed, with poor renters replaced by professional workers, and low-rise Victorian buildings were replaced by large projects comprehensively designed according to modernist ideas. All these changes were an attempt to attract capital, increase the value of property, and help the

City of Toronto compete with other cities and its own suburbs for development. Even though the Wood-Wellesley redevelopment area was largely unsuccessful in these terms, and was repealed five years after being established, it was important in at least three ways. First, the redevelopment bylaw was a key instrument by which the City worked through how to build a modernist landscape using the new planning powers created by the 1946 Provincial planning act. Second, the bylaw was part of a building of a new planning system, one that paralleled the American case in some important ways, but which had its own specific form. Third, the bylaw was the vehicle for the creation and imposition of a new set of property relations that reflected the growing power of a postwar alliance of developers, financiers, and politicians to set the agenda for urban change.

### **The redevelopment area and the rise and fall of Wood-Wellesley**

Toronto's redevelopment areas emerged out of the changing relationships between the capitalist imperatives of postwar urban redevelopment, the greater intervention of the state in urban matters, and the reworking of property relations in the USA and Canada. In the USA, pressure from powerful private groups shaped the rationale and operation of federal legislation that reworked the social and legal ordering of urban property.<sup>4</sup> Building on ideas set out in the 1930s, the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB) led the call for redevelopment by proposing neighbourhood improvement districts in 1941. These districts would allow municipalities to expropriate 'blighted land' from individual home owners and then sell the cleared property to private developers at subsidized prices. Blight had become a central concern by the 1930s, and federal and city officials used the concept of blight to tackle urban decline. The language of blight allowed city leaders to convert poor and minority areas from an existing 'lower' use to a 'higher' one. The push for the redevelopment of blighted land rested on both the conditions of the rundown areas and the social status of their inhabitants. By establishing the degraded circumstances of central-city property and the social pathology of the residents, city officials and land developers were allowed to push for wholesale redevelopment of areas marked as blighted. Despite differences, most urban renewal advocates in the USA and Canada believed in the city's right to use eminent domain as a device for arresting urban decline after 1940.<sup>5</sup>

The first piece of legislation in the USA that allowed for the transfer of property from one private owner to another was the District of Columbia Redevelopment Act of 1945.<sup>6</sup> The Act allowed the District of Columbia to assemble, purchase, and clear land taken from one owner and to sell to another in the name of slum clearance in the specific area and the improvement of the city in general. New York and Chicago quickly followed suit. In the former, Robert Moses worked with Fiorello La Guardia's municipal administration and a large national insurance company from the early 1940s to transform the old nineteenth-century Gas House district into the gleaming modernist apartment blocks of Stuyvesant Town. A few years later in 1948, Moses advanced the idea of clearance areas – redevelopment districts geared to building middle-class residential and commercial structures. Clearance areas, with their emphasis on state-supported private construction of a middle-class built environment, bear a striking resemblance to the redevelopment areas created by Toronto's political and business leaders.<sup>7</sup>

Seven hundred miles west in Chicago, various local organizations were responsible for the development and passage of the Blighted Areas Redevelopment Act of 1947. This Illinois

state statute set out the key elements of public–private redevelopment of designated parts of the city that were the basis for federal redevelopment policy two years later.<sup>8</sup> Title I of the Federal Housing Act of 1949 codified the idea that the reordering of property relations and the redevelopment of the built environment were possible only through the cooperation of the state and private enterprise. Title I gave municipalities the legal right and necessary tools to assemble, clear, and resell blighted property to private interests. In the process, the legislation targeted specific sites as both distinct from other sites and subject to specific redevelopment powers – it mandated a legal and geographic solution that favoured extensive public–private collaboration to the perceived problem of blighted land and urban deterioration. This collaboration it was believed would unlock the inherent investment possibilities that were denied by rundown areas and the loss of a middle-class population to the suburbs.<sup>9</sup> In effect, the federal government allowed American urban leaders in New York City, Chicago, and elsewhere to create what people in Toronto would come to call redevelopment areas.

The idea and intent behind bylaw 18746 and redevelopment areas that were put into place in the early 1950s in Toronto paralleled what had taken place in the USA, although class was the overriding focus of urban redevelopment in Canada in the immediate postwar period. Unlike the USA, where class and race intersected in a way and to a degree unknown in Canada at that time, the purpose behind the clearance of Canadian central cities was to replace poor white working class with the white professional middle class.<sup>10</sup> It is unclear how directly influential the American legislation was on the events taking place in Ontario, Toronto, and the rest of urban Canada. There is very little evidence in the city records and the local newspapers to suggest that the provincial proceedings were based on its American counterpart. Nevertheless, Canadian city planners and officials were knowledgeable about American projects and were attending planning, city engineering, and public administration conferences in the USA, where they would have discussed urban renewal projects, national legislation, and other related issues. Similarly, planners, architects, and others interested in urban redevelopment in Canada would have met at national and regional planning conferences. Canadian-based planners also moved between Canadian cities to work and teach, spreading information, ideas, and expertise. A case in point is Gordon Stephenson. Trained in the UK, he spent time teaching in Liverpool and Perth, Western Australia, before coming to the University of Toronto in 1955. A year after his arrival in Canada, Stephenson was hired by the City of Halifax to undertake the redevelopment of the city's central districts.<sup>11</sup>

Canadian national legislation also paralleled what was occurring in the US Provisions of the National Housing Act of 1944, for example, laid out a programme where the federal government would share land acquisition and clearance costs with municipalities to encourage life insurance or limited dividend companies to build low- and moderate-income housing.<sup>12</sup> However, the federal government resisted becoming actively engaged in housing production, preferring to stimulate mortgage markets with the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation established in 1945. Accordingly, the 1944 National Housing Act provisions were unworkable and produced no housing.<sup>13</sup> The National Housing Act of 1956, however, laid out a more robust urban renewal programme for 'blighted' areas with cost sharing and funds for producing renewal studies to identify appropriate areas. Ideas about renewal and redevelopment, housing construction and modernist apartments, and state intervention in property markets were circulating on both sides of the border.<sup>14</sup>

It is not surprising, therefore, that these principles, most notably the power invested in the municipality to expropriate the land inside the boundaries of a designated area such as Wood-Wellesley and to sell or lease this land to private interests for the building of middle-class apartments, were also central to the idea of Toronto's redevelopment areas. While the Ontario legislation of 1946 did permit municipalities to expropriate blighted property for sale to private interests, all previous cases of property expropriation were undertaken for public housing development, with Toronto's Regent Park project leading the way in 1947.<sup>15</sup> The builders of Regent Park relied on expropriation and clearance, but they created housing as a publicly owned and managed asset to house a lower-income population. Unlike the American case, expropriation of land in postwar Canadian cities until the creation of the redevelopment area in 1952 involved the building of state-led public housing not private-led redevelopment for the middle class.

The redevelopment area created by bylaw 18746 gave the city the authority to work with private developers to refashion the city. The inscribing of privatized redevelopment into local policy provided a boost to the pro-renewal bloc consisting of reformist councillors, Red Tory business interests, the labour movement, social service organizations, and senior provincial administrators who had long been seeking to extend and regulate both public and private construction.<sup>16</sup> The passing of provincial and federal legislation after the war allowed the city and its allies to undertake public housing projects such as Regent Park. The reform coalition was also looking for ways to undertake significant new private construction in the downtown area without creating large-scale economic and social disruption. This was only possible by reordering property relations. One form this took was the municipal designation of an area for redevelopment. In effect, the city created a spatial container that permitted different property regulations inside and outside the redevelopment area. The Ontario legislation allowed the city to designate a new space – the redevelopment area – to give the municipal authorities the power to implement specific building codes, to amass financial investment by a few development companies, and to gather hard-to-assemble land for private developers within a distinctive and bounded spatial container. The city worked with the postwar reform coalition to create a new set of property relations that formally cemented the state's right to acquire, clear, and sell land for private gain.

The redevelopment area thus redefined the existing understanding of the use of expropriation by permitting the transfer of property from one party to another. It differed from previous regulations that centred on the use of city powers to redistribute urban property for the collective good. Bylaw 18746 permitted the city to use its eminent domain powers, administrative apparatus, and financial clout to facilitate private enterprise control over the built environment. Redevelopment areas would be the vehicle for the city to provide incentives, specifically large assemblages of cleared, ready-to-be-developed land at below market prices not for the building of social housing for Toronto's poor citizens but to private, profit-seeking development interests. The refashioning of property relations in the form of the redevelopment area was justified as meeting public goals such as reversing urban deterioration, providing needed housing, and increasing tax assessments.

The November 1952 bylaw created two redevelopment areas. One was a one block area south of Dundas Street between Chestnut Street and Centre Avenue, and the other, and the focus of this paper, was Wood-Wellesley. Bounded by Wellesley, Church, and Wood Streets and a new rapid transit right of way created for Toronto's first subway line (Figure 1), the district covered 15 acres and was mainly residential in character.<sup>17</sup> It ran more or less parallel with

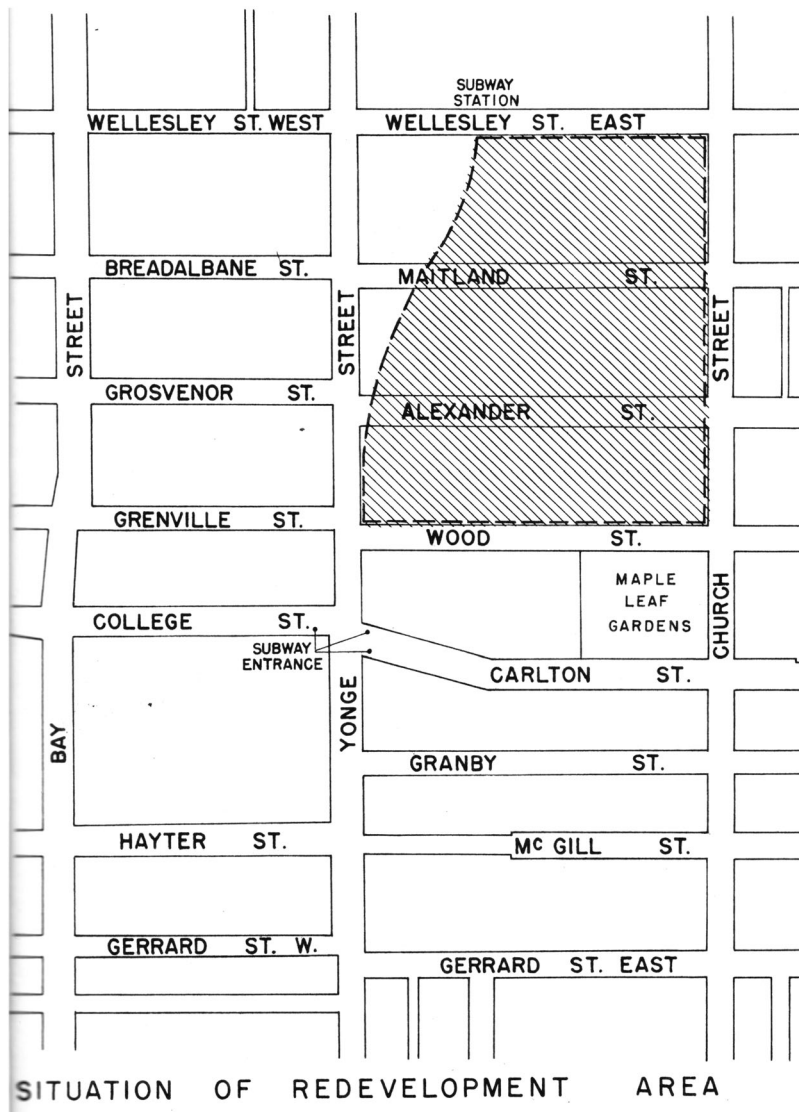


Figure 1. Wood-Wellesley redevelopment area, 1952.

Toronto's main north-south thoroughfare, Yonge Street, and was adjacent to the College-Yonge intersection, one of the city's downtown retailing nodes (Figure 2). The area consisted of a range of older residential and office buildings, most of which were in good condition. It was neither a slum nor a blighted area. This was made clear by a Planning Board report of 1956, which stated that few sections of the redevelopment area were 'in need of repair or renovation of some sort'. A federal housing official was of the same opinion and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation refused federal assistance for redeveloping the area was that it did qualify for funds



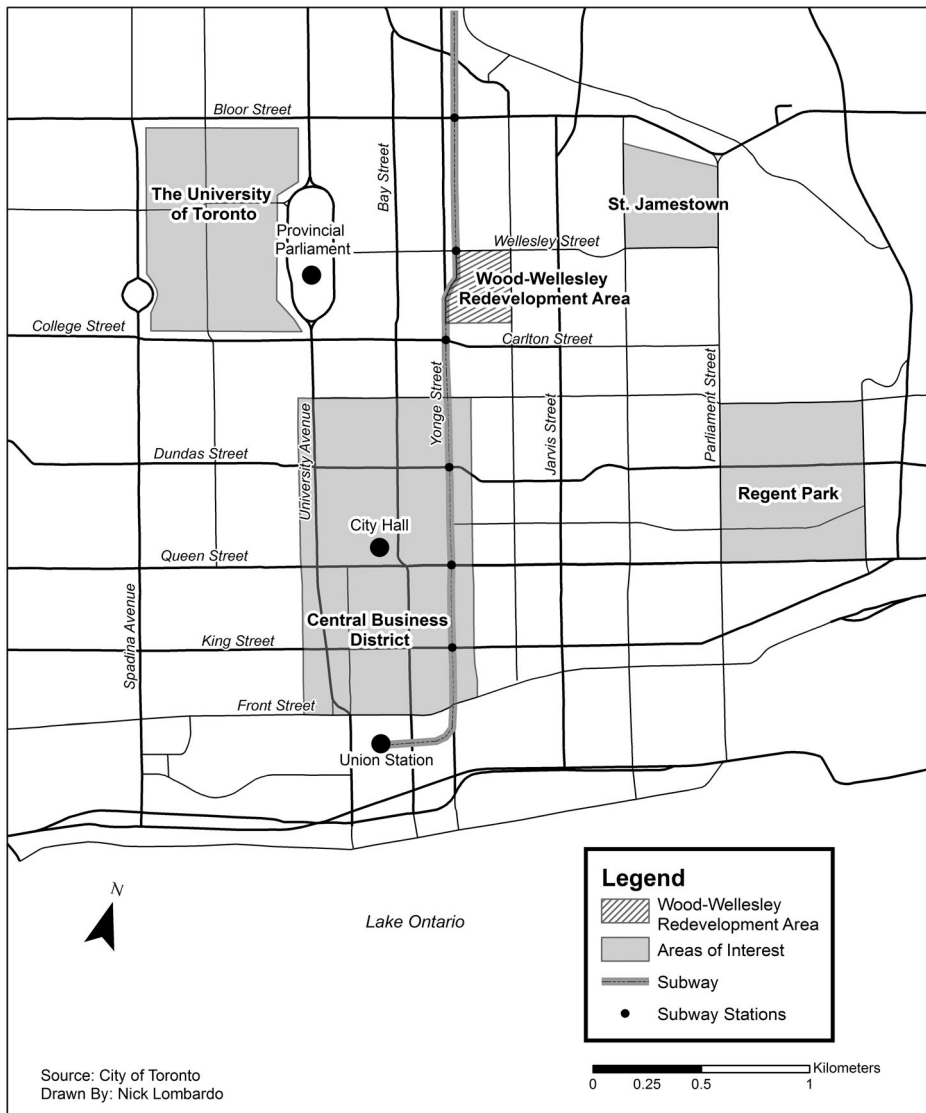


Figure 2. Map of central Toronto, 1952.

because it ‘cannot be considered a blighted or sub-standard’ area. Nathan Phillips, Toronto’s mayor, made the same point in a radio address when he told his Toronto audience that the area ‘could not be termed a slum’.<sup>18</sup> In fact, as the 1956 Planning Board report noted, the area was a mixed-income area: ‘occupations vary from bricklayers and garage mechanics of real estate operators and doctors’.<sup>19</sup> Despite the attempts by the city and developers to frame the district as a blighted area in need of substantial redevelopment, this was clearly not the case.



This district had been the subject of extensive planning consideration in the late 1940s. A Toronto Reconstruction Council report in 1947 argued that the City should consider incorporating Wood-Wellesley into a larger redevelopment programme centred on the College-Yonge intersection. This would involve city expropriation of the area's property and the maintenance of the area's residential character.<sup>20</sup> These ideas were used when Wood-Wellesley was marked as a redevelopment area five years later. Despite the previous interest in developing the Wood-Wellesley district, proposals to reconstruct the area were slow to emerge from the private sector after the passing of bylaw 18746 (Figure 3). It was only in the late winter and spring of 1954 that these proposals were submitted for consideration to the city's Board of Control.<sup>21</sup> One came from an international consortium led by the large British engineering and construction corporation, Sir Robert McAlpine. The company proposed a \$140 million (\$1.3 billion in 2015 dollars) plan consisting of eight 16-storey buildings with a total of 6500 units in March.<sup>22</sup> The City, however, was not ready to accept what would have been a project that dwarfed any other existing downtown residential development. The sheer scale of the proposal and the fact that it required further enlarging of the existing redevelopment area ensured that the offer disappeared from sight, never to reappear. In the other case, a local architect, John Galbraith, fronted a Canadian-based syndicate who wanted to buy the redevelopment area land for \$500,000 and build ten 16-storey modern apartments. Once again, the offer was refused even after the syndicate in March 1954 increased the price that it would pay for the land to \$1,250,000.<sup>23</sup> The City was reluctant to sign off on proposals that involved unheard of amounts of investment and the building of a large number of apartment buildings on a scale that the city had never experienced before.

The collapse of these proposals left the city in a state of limbo and the use of redevelopment areas as a planning tool in disarray. There may not have been consensus within the city on moving ahead with large-scale state-supported private redevelopment, but city council was unable to build an appropriate administrative apparatus that could accommodate the new plans and the new set of property relations that came with bylaw 18746.<sup>24</sup> The failure of 1954, however, was not the end of the matter. Another burst of activity in 1955 and 1956 led city officials to believe that they had found a solution to generating redevelopment. After a reassessment of the earlier failures, the city established a formal bidding competition and studied five submissions. After the developer that had received the initial approval had withdrawn, the redevelopment project was given to another construction firm, which after extensive negotiations went bankrupt. Yet another company was seriously considered, but negotiations broke down in the spring of 1957. By this time, it had become clear to even the staunchest advocate of the redevelopment area that a workable solution could not be found. As one *Toronto Star* columnist noted, the 'project has been a tragedy of errors' from the very beginning.<sup>25</sup>

### **Why the redevelopment area?**

Redevelopment areas as developed in Toronto after 1952 were a means for the postwar business-political alliance to gain greater control over downtown property and to refashion the central part of the city. Faced by an older housing stock that had seen little investment over a period of more than 15 years of economic depression and war, anxiety over suburban competition for development, population and industrial decentralization, industrial obsolescence, and housing

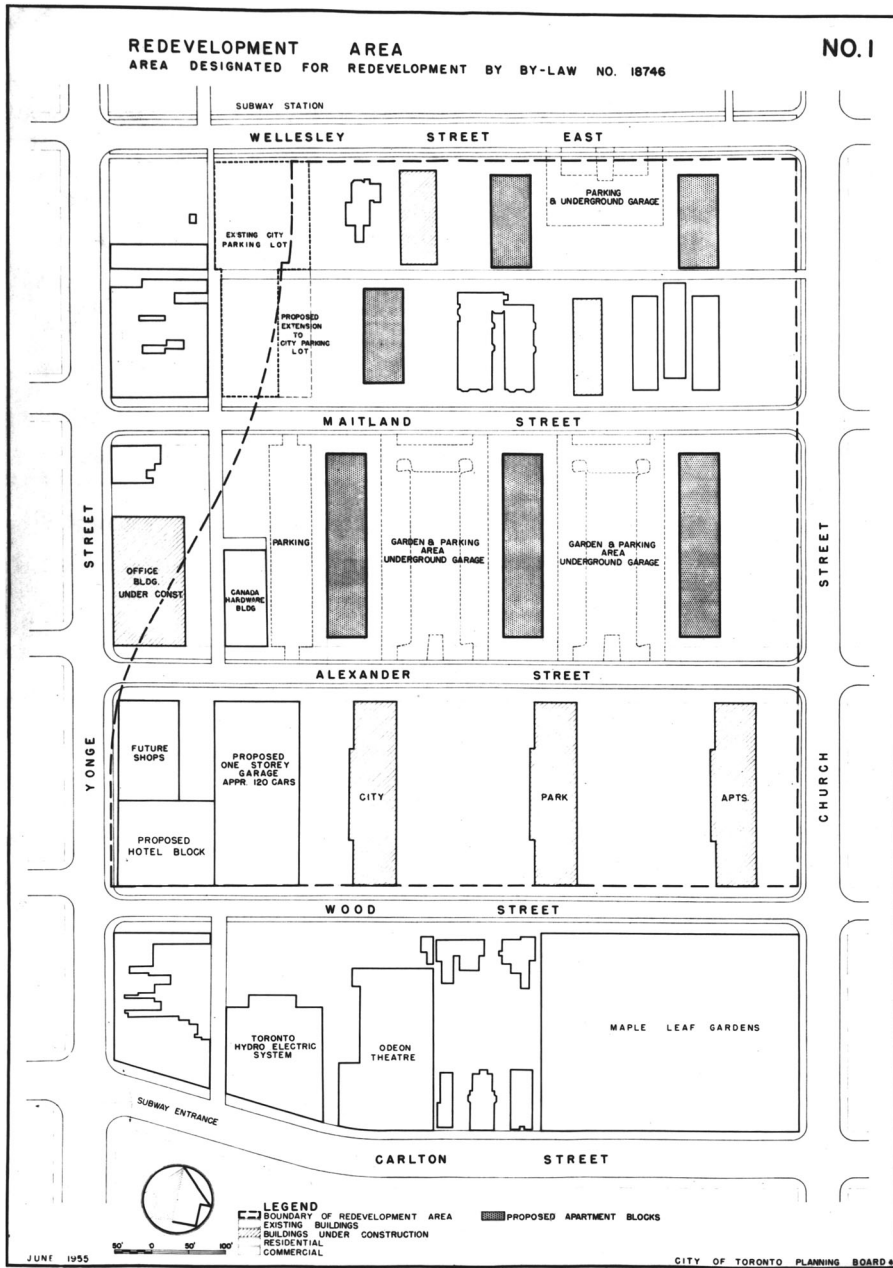


Figure 3. Plans for the redevelopment area, c. 1954.

underinvestment, city business and political leaders looked for ways to reverse the trends and to consolidate Toronto's dominance at the centre of a rapidly growing metropolitan region. For civic leaders the redevelopment area was one such way. According to Ford Brand, a member of the city's Board of Control, the redevelopment area was 'the way of progress'. Mayor Allan Lamport stated that it would serve as 'a magnet to draw further development'.<sup>26</sup> Politicians were not alone. According to a 1954 *Globe* editorial, the advantages of redevelopment for halting urban decline were 'numerous and very clear'.<sup>27</sup>

In this view, the redevelopment area was a policy tool that did not cost the city any new investment in civic services while promoting immediate and substantial increase to taxable assessments. It would facilitate the construction of new commercial and transportation facilities that, in turn, would make business more likely to relocate to Toronto, help retain existing employment, and accommodate the resulting population growth. The redeveloped areas, with their higher densities and their location adjacent to the downtown office district, would provide a modern housing environment for the new service workers enticed by the city's expanding tertiary and quaternary sectors. Redevelopment areas were viewed by most of the city's political and business elite as a key element of a virtuous circle of the city's growth, change, and modernization.

Redevelopment areas were one part of a postwar planning and design movement in Canada and the USA shaped by pro-renewal coalitions seeking to create a modernist order with new forms of architectural form and design, increased economic efficiency and standardization, enhanced land-use segregation, and active government intervention.<sup>28</sup> Toronto's idea to mark out specific city spaces that would be transformed by the public-private partnership was rooted in a broader set of ideas about the role of local alliances that were circulating throughout urban America and Canada. Redevelopment can only be successful if a key institution or player is able to assemble the necessary support, to neutralize opposition, and to gain ideological and material authority over urban resources. Competing and contradictory claims on city resources and urban property have to be corralled and channelled to ends defined and controlled by the leading alliance. This typically consists of three key institutions: local government, the real-estate industry, and federal and provincial governments.<sup>29</sup> This was the case with the Wood-Wellesley redevelopment area which was centred on well-developed planning rationales and supported by some of the city's important economic and political groups.

The direct origins of the Wood-Wellesley project, however, are to be found in the immediate desires of one of the city's most important businesses. The catalyst for defining the Wood-Wellesley areas as a redevelopment area lay not so much in a considered plan of where the city wanted to see redevelopment and what it should look like. Rather, it was a largely reactive response to pressure from the giant retailing company, T. Eaton, one of Toronto's large land-owners, which was seeking to increase the value of its property holdings in the area. The company had acquired extensive amounts of property in the area when it built its College Street store in the 1930s. The company wanted to use its new property holdings to stimulate commercial development in the area surrounding the new department store. They were not particularly successful due to the unfavourable building conditions of the Depression and war years, and the strategic mistake of moving its flagship store more than 1.5 kilometres north of the city's commercial centre at Yonge and King. The failure of the redevelopment plans in the Toronto Reconstruction Council's report of 1947 compounded the problem of what to do with the property. Accordingly, by the late 1940s, the property-owning arm of the company – International

Realty – was looking to dispose of the property in the College and Yonge streets area close to the Wood-Wellesley area.<sup>30</sup>

Several developers were interested in turning the old, mainly residential two- and three-storey rental property owned by Eaton into modern apartment blocks. From the late 1940s, International Realty considered several proposals from Canadian and international groups who sought to acquire the land, tear down the existing buildings, and construct new apartment buildings. After rejecting most of them, International's directors were close to selling some of the property to a Canadian developer who wanted to build a 200-suite, 10-storey apartment hotel with retail stores on the first floor. As one of the company's directors noted in June 1952, the offer should be accepted as the sale 'would not jeopardize the desirability of the remainder of the block for an apartment house project as contemplated by other groups'.<sup>31</sup> The deal fell through, but other developers were waiting in line.

Hubert Durrenberger, a Swiss developer looking to build a large apartment complex in Toronto, was eager to buy some of Eaton's property. This project was very desirable from the City's perspective. Eaton, however, was reluctant to sell the land without some control over what happened to the adjacent area. In its view, it had to protect its other property from devaluation and to ensure that its College Street department store was surrounded by an appropriate array of middle-class consumers. The company was very clear that it would not risk undermining its investments, both present and future, by selling property to just anyone. The value of its other property was contingent on what happened to the value and the social composition of adjacent property. The city agreed. As Mayor Lampport stated, we 'don't want the surrounding area to deteriorate with no possibility of it being built up'.<sup>32</sup> The answer that the city, International, and Durrenberger came up with in 1952 was to use the provincial planning act to create a redevelopment area that would act as a protective cordon to the department store, ensure that adjacent property values remained high, and provide the city with new assessments. At the same time Eaton sold a small parcel of land bounded by Wood, Yonge, Alexander, and Church streets to Durrenberger for his City Park project, the company pressured the city to designate the area immediately north of the parcel as a redevelopment area. In effect, the City used the legal authority given to it by the planning act to make a much larger area attractive to private capital in order to secure the private redevelopment of a portion of Wood-Wellesley and in response to the demand of one of Toronto's business enterprises. The requirements of the pro-renewal bloc, Eaton, and the City came together in the form of the redevelopment area.

### **Building in the RA**

Eaton and the city conspired with international capital to create the redevelopment area in order to facilitate the selling of property and the building of new middle-class apartment buildings. In order to hide their intentions, the alliance used the section on blight in the 1946 provincial planning act as the rationale for action. This was not based on an analysis of housing and building conditions across the central city before the passing of the bylaw. The city had, in fact, produced several such analyses over the previous decades and was in the process of producing another as attempts to develop Wood-Wellesley dragged on. The publication of the 1934 Bruce Report, for example, was a systematic mapping of areas considered as having deteriorated housing. The city's 1943 Master Plan marked out the central area for special attention, with many districts designated as blighted sites that could be redeveloped. A year later the Toronto Planning

Board's 'Neighbourhood Plan of Toronto' defined 78 neighbourhoods in terms of socio-economic status, thus signalling that the city was interested in planning at the district scale and defining which of the city's rundown areas were ready for redevelopment.<sup>33</sup> The Board classified the city's neighbourhoods as 'slums', 'blighted', 'declining', 'vulnerable', or 'sound', with only a small number of areas deemed to be 'sound'.<sup>34</sup> The studies that underpinned the authorization of Canada's first public housing project in Regent Park in 1946 built on a representation of specific working-class neighbourhoods as a 'blot on the city'.<sup>35</sup>

In none of these reports was the Wood-Wellesley area marked out as blighted and in need of extensive redevelopment. Indeed, as we have already seen, the mayor, a federal housing official, and the city's Planning Board had all stated that the area was neither blighted nor a slum. Nevertheless, building on the 1952 amendment to the 1946 Planning Act which defined a redevelopment area as land which should be developed 'because of age, dilapidation, over-crowding, faulty arrangement, unsuitability of buildings or for any other reasons', the Wood-Wellesley area and streets such as Wood Street were designated as blighted and in need of redevelopment (Figure 4).<sup>36</sup> In Toronto, as elsewhere, the discourse of blight established the logic for advocates of urban redevelopment for why property should be expropriated and it broadened the scope of the budding public and private partnership that would reshape postwar central Toronto.<sup>37</sup>

The vision of the redevelopment area as a solution to blight was embedded in a wider circulation of ideas and practices centred on the state's ability to manage the disorderly and



Figure 4. Wood Street, 1950. Courtesy of the City of Toronto Library.

declining city. After the Second World War, national governments in Europe, the USA, and Canada gave new powers to local government to reorder the city. 'By the end of the 1950s similar policy instruments and objectives were in place in Berlin, London and Toronto' as well as US cities.<sup>38</sup> In the USA, a language of blight was developed to reflect postwar urban conditions and establish the circumstances that made state intervention necessary and permitted the expropriation of private property for public and private purposes, and close to half of the states had created agencies that had the power to clear and prepare blighted land for redevelopment.<sup>39</sup>

In the case of Toronto, Bylaw 18746 was rooted in an increasingly interventionist provincial government that became heavily involved in land-use planning during the war and the early postwar years when new legal planning instruments were authorized. By the early 1950s the City of Toronto was actively experimenting with and institutionalizing their use, a good generation later than in many American cities. Despite regulation in Toronto to protect residential districts with low-rise houses from non-residential uses and apartments in the early twentieth century, the provincial government regularly resisted granting Toronto and other Ontario municipalities zoning and other planning powers against the regular lobbying by reformers including the likes of Thomas Adams throughout the first decades of the century.<sup>40</sup>

After the Second World War, however, the Province pursued planning as part of fostering economic development and efficiency. The Province first created the Department of Planning and Development and coordinated planning among government departments.<sup>41</sup> It also passed the 1946 Planning and Development Act, the goal of which was made clear in a 1946 speech to the Ontario Municipal Association by Dana Porter, a Progressive-Conservative Party cabinet minister for the newly established ministry of Planning and Development:

The objective of this planning is to make possible by wise arrangement and control the most profitable use of urban land; thus the capital that is invested in the buildings on it may be maintained in value, and those who live upon it may thrive more abundantly. This sort of planning is an economy; it is no more nor less than forethought, a view of more than just a piecemeal development.<sup>42</sup>

To this end, the Planning Act provided the ministry and the Ontario Municipal Board with strong powers over the urban environment, gave private enterprise considerable latitude over land-use planning and redevelopment, and allowed cities to create planning boards to develop official plans.<sup>43</sup>

The Planning Act brought forth the production of a tremendous amount of professional capacity. Modern planning instruments and objectives were brought to Toronto by a group of professional planners with backgrounds in European and American planning theory and practice. In their different ways, people such as Jacqueline Tyrwhitt, John Parkin, Eugenio Faludi, Gordon Stephenson, and Matthew Lawson brought ideas about land-use planning, land assembly, superblocks, and community that were incorporated into the curricula of the University of Toronto's architectural and planning schools, the deliberation of the Toronto Planning Board, and the city's emerging understanding of how to refashion the built landscape.<sup>44</sup> Private-sector architects and landscape architects such as Peter Caspari introduced Toronto's politicians and developers to new modernist designs and plans. Durrenberger's City Park apartments, which were built on the property purchased from Eaton in 1952, showcased the design types that were to heavily influence the apartment building boom that started a few years later. The new modernist apartment schemes such as City Park, St James Town, and Village Green



emerged out of the circulation of the modernist aesthetic of the International Congresses of Modern Architecture and the International Style that crisscrossed the Atlantic in the postwar period. The form of the Wood-Wellesley redevelopment area emerged out of linking this aesthetic with the pragmatism of functional land-use planning, the boosterism of local business-political blocs, the refashioning of property relations, and the economic imperatives of capitalist real-estate development.

The 1946 Planning Act gave the city the authority to expropriate 'blighted' property and pass it onto other private interests to create new private assets. In this way, the provincial government allowed Toronto and other Ontario cities to legally refashion the meaning of urban space and to reorder the social relations of the private property market by providing them with extensive expropriation powers for designated parts of the city. Although there were public goals in the province's growing authority over Ontario's urban land-use planning, Section 16 of the Act, which authorized municipal-led redevelopment, was strikingly broad without any mention of social welfare or any other public purposes other than the general provision of housing. What the act did do was to create the possibility of public-private partnership geared to state support in the form of land assembly, subsidized property values, and the production of profits for land developers. According to Section 16, a municipality with the approval of the Minister may acquire, hold, and 'sell, lease or otherwise dispose of land so acquired or held for a nominal or other consideration to any person or governmental authority having power to undertake housing projects'.<sup>45</sup> A 1952 amendment to the 1946 Act clarified the Section's meaning by extending the idea of using redevelopment to almost any land use, thus allowing property to be developed for industrial and commercial purposes. Thus, the 1952 amendment allowed the City of Toronto, which had been at the centre of long-standing debates on the use of redevelopment, to promote state-sponsored subsidized housing, to move towards using expropriation for straight-up economic development. Even if, as in the case of Wood-Wellesley, housing development was the vehicle for this purpose, Bylaw 18746 is a striking shift from using expropriation justified on social grounds as promoting needed shelter, to using redevelopment simply as a means of promoting private development more generally.<sup>46</sup>

In the early 1950s, however, the City was still working out how to use its new planning powers including zoning and redevelopment. Before the City's first comprehensive zoning bylaw was passed in 1952, the Planning Board was involved in mundane, day-to-day decisions about permitting even minor development applications. After 1952, a new Property Committee took on this responsibility and the Planning Board focused on less routine planning issues such as establishing the City's overall Official Plan and defining redevelopment areas. Yet the relationship between how these instruments were thought about was not always clear. For example, in April 1952, the Planning Board recommended that virtually the entire older part of the city which stretched more than six kilometres from east to west should be defined as 'a redevelopment area in one parcel... between the Don River and Dufferin Street'. This was seen as unworkable because the Planning Act required a 'redevelopment plan' for individual redevelopment areas. There was some discussion on whether zoning, which was defined by land use and building density, could be considered the plan itself, but this came to nought as the Provincial planning review and the Ontario Municipal Board determined that 'action cannot be undertaken in a smaller part of a larger redevelopment area'.<sup>47</sup> Looking for another solution, the city worked with Eaton's and Durrenberger's development company, and recommended in June 1952 the creation of Wood-Wellesley as one of a set of much smaller, defined redevelopment



areas. The ambiguous relationship between the redevelopment area and other planning instruments such as plans and zoning would continue to hamper the City's use of the redevelopment area.

Certainly, establishing a redevelopment area went beyond the imperatives of other planning instruments in that it established defined spatial boundaries within the city that were to be reworked to the legal and business specifications of political and business leaders. Whereas zoning defined a set of development restrictions and rights that were applied to property across the territory of the city, redevelopment area created zones where the city could redefine and redistribute these rights to new individuals and groups. As a strategy for refashioning the city, the marking of worked-on space allowed city leaders to focus their attention, resources, and energy on a delineated area that had been framed as blighted and in need of redevelopment. In this way, both blight and dilapidated housing could be locally identified and established as requiring a solution.

The marking of the boundaries of the Wood-Wellesley redevelopment area, however, was not straightforward. One reason for this was that the long period of waiting for developer proposals, the looming presence of expropriation, and the fear of property devaluation created an extremely aggressive, astute, and effective ratepayers' association, further hampering the City's ability to control the shape of redevelopment. The Bloor-Carlton Ratepayers' Association (BCRA) was born of resistance to the redevelopment area. More than 150 people packed the Workers' Hall at the Association's first meeting in October 1952 to protest the city's upcoming approval of designating the area for redevelopment to hear president Dennison tell them that the bylaw gave 'unprecedented power of taking over a man's property and giving it to someone else'.<sup>48</sup> Dennison, who was a homeowner in the area, was a social democratic politician who served as a member of provincial parliament (1948–1951), city alderman (early 1940s and 1953–1961) and Toronto mayor (1967–1972). As Dennison made clear, while expropriation may have been an acceptable although debated means for providing social housing, the idea that it could be used to transfer property from one private owner to another was, in his and the audience's opinion, not acceptable.

The BCRA continued to attack the city's attempts to redevelop the Wood-Wellesley redevelopment area. By February 1954 the BCRA was complaining bitterly about the lack of action. Stating that the redevelopment plans were 'backfiring', one executive argued that the district's designation as a redevelopment area has led to deteriorating property values and, ironically, the absence of redevelopment. He told the Board of Control that 'the redevelopment law is a Sword of Damocles, hanging over our heads'.<sup>49</sup> More than two years later, the BCRA wrote to W. Nickle, the Provincial Minister of Planning and Development, asking for repeal of the bylaw. According to Andrew Brewin, the BCRA solicitor, the redevelopment area had discouraged local investment and repairs, and without the designation, 'substantial parts of this area would by now have been redeveloped by private enterprise. Residents would have had an opportunity in the ordinary and orderly way to sell their properties at a fair price and to secure accommodation elsewhere'.<sup>50</sup> For many, the redevelopment area was a burden not a solution.

Another reason was the difficulty of creating an effective administrative system that would mobilize the potential of the redevelopment area. Despite the obvious interest to use the marked property for some new purpose, public and private interests were unable to formulate a workable relationship built on a well-worked-out administrative system to guide the transformation of the redevelopment area. City officials were unprepared to work on the redevelopment of a marked-

out space that balanced extensive public and private cooperation with an arms-length relationship between developers and city officials. It took the planning director and other officials several years to create a somewhat ineffective system to allow for the submission of plans and budgets and the appraisal of these proposals. Even five years after the passing of bylaw 18746, Toronto had not created the planning and administrative tools to effectively oversee the transfer of private property from one group of owners to others. Accordingly, after five years of faltering negotiations, stalled tactics, ineffective policy making, and stifled initiative, the Planning Minister had little reason to deny Brewin's continual requests to rescind the bylaw making the Wood-Wellesley district a redevelopment area. By the summer of 1957 even city officials realized the game was up. In both July and August, the City Clerk wrote to Nickle, asking that he dissolve the Wood-Wellesley area. After consulting with people and giving time for the city to reconsider its position, Nickle agreed. In October the bylaw was repealed.<sup>51</sup> Although redevelopment of the area was a failure, the ideas that it represented provide a window into the ways in which local boosters, which consisted of international and domestic real-estate developers, and local, provincial, and national politicians, reframed private-public redevelopment.

A final reason that the marking of the redevelopment area boundaries was unsuccessful was that the city bowed to the demands of private capital (the Eaton company and a Swiss development firm) in the designation of the area. Rather than a decision made on a technocratic assessment of the area and other areas in the city, council made a decision based on what was economically and politically feasible for outside business interests. The absence of a technical assessment of the conditions of the Wood-Wellesley area ensured that the city did not know what to expect when the bylaw was passed. As council quickly found out to their dismay, not only was the area in reasonably good condition, the area's owners were extremely vocal in demanding what they believed to be their property rights. This was compounded by the arbitrary character of the final boundaries. Ongoing conflict over the precise boundaries ensured that the drawing of the redevelopment area took several iterations. After several rounds of consultation, a report from the Planning Board on potential redevelopment areas, and the search for locations which the city considered uneconomical, a decision was made to limit the area to Wood, Jarvis, and Charles streets and the new transit right-of-way created by Toronto's first subway line. After strong criticism from local residents and city councillors about the impact on property values and the ability to effectively redevelop such a large expanse, the area was greatly reduced. By the end of October, the working boundaries that were to be part of bylaw 18746 were finally approved.<sup>52</sup> The redevelopment area as a spatial object to be worked on by public and private interests had been laid out, but the lack of a predefined plan and the arbitrary determination of blight continued to plague redevelopment.<sup>53</sup>

Nevertheless, the drawing of the redevelopment area in 1952 helped underwrite the private and public redevelopment partnership by marking out the class differences between social and private housing developments. On the one hand, expropriation powers as embedded in the 1946 Planning Act and its subsequent amendment in 1952 were used to build public housing. The construction of public housing from Regent Park in the late 1940s and Alexandra Park in the 1960s centred on the city's right to expropriate, clear, and prepare land in order to build publicly owned, low-rent housing. In these cases, expropriation was used to redistribute urban resources to the city's working class. On the other hand, the state's authority to expropriate property was used to mark a space and assemble land for large-scale investment in middle- and

upper-class apartment housing. The modernist City Park apartments built on the Eaton property just outside the southern boundary of the Wood-Wellesley redevelopment area catered to a professional class that worked in the downtown's office complex. The failed proposals to build in the redevelopment area were planned for a young and affluent population. Both paths used blight as the rationale for extensive redevelopment with the state solely responsible for social housing and public-private cooperation responsible for middle-class housing. While the former deployed an argument that the collective good came about through the provision of low-rent housing for the needy, the latter used economic arguments about the undervaluing of property values and the augmentation of assessments to rationalize the construction of high-end, modernist apartment projects that displaced low-income tenants paying rents below the city average.<sup>54</sup>

### Conclusion

The redevelopment area, which provided the City authority under Provincial Planning Acts to expropriate, prepare for development, and transfer property between private interests promised to be a key instrument in the movement to change the central city in Toronto as urban renewal laws were already doing in cities in the USA. In this way, the redevelopment area was the direct product of the search by Canadian and international corporate interests to create profit out of urban redevelopment. The designation of the redevelopment area by the city was part of a larger movement by a range of interests to remake the central city as modernist landscapes after 1945. As was the case elsewhere, private interests (mainly insurance, finance, and property development companies and their attendant groups such as architects and lawyers) focused on land assembly, the drawing up of plans, the search for finance capital and state funding, and a viable development coalition. All of this was geared to making profits from turning so-called blighted nineteenth-century housing and early-twentieth-century walk-up apartment properties into a postwar modernist landscape of International Style towering, streamlined apartment buildings on Le Corbusier style super blocks. While looking to oversee, coordinate, and represent the public interest in the built environment, many city officials were supporters of full-blooded private enterprise and were boosters, both directly and indirectly, of landed capital.

The politics and process of defining redevelopment areas, however, were not clear. The redevelopment area was one component of a new planning system in Ontario that was being defined and implemented in the early post-World War Two period. Planning, city politicians, and municipal administrators, however, had little sense of what they were doing and how to move ahead with the plans that were being concocted by developers. Planning the modern postwar city in Toronto was an experiment. Wood-Wellesley was a test case where the idea and practice of the redevelopment area was being worked out in an almost day-to-day manner. The legal framework for the redevelopment area was broadly created by the Province in 1946, and then further defined in 1952, but the city's planning and political officials had little practical experience of how to transform the city on the scale that was to take place. The role of development plans and the role of planning tools were not pre-conceived and systematically implemented. The city's administrative capacity was for all intents and purposes totally inadequate to shepherd through the scale and complexity of the new city. City planners in the early 1950s did not have the expertise that the new realities of urban development required.

Thus, the interpretation of the law, how and why boundaries would be defined, what constituted adequate redevelopment plans, how to attract and negotiate with developers, were all treated in an almost ad-hoc manner, where the City was learning by doing. Wood-Wellesley cannot be characterized as part of a redevelopment programme, because it was not always clear how enthusiastically or consistently the City embraced pursuing redevelopment in the district.

In the end, the City was not able to carry out the full-scale modernization that the redevelopment area promised. Still, Wood-Wellesley is significant as an early experiment in building a new public-private partnership, one that brought the city and private interests together in a unique embrace, one that gave rise to activist neighbourhood associations that would resist the City's attempt to rework their property, and one that would shape urban redevelopment in the long term. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, large areas of Toronto's near downtown neighbourhoods did undergo massive residential redevelopment, but most of this was not led by redevelopment plans as envisioned by the language of the bylaw and reinforced by the legal interpretations of the Province's review board. St. James Town, Toronto's best known downtown clearance of a more than 30 acre area of Victorian-era development, was replaced by more than 7000 apartment units in 18 modernist high-rises. The project, however, was not carried out as a redevelopment area, but by a consortium of developers under the auspices of zoning. Such redevelopment eventually led to a political backlash in the 1970s and the election of a new reform city council. Thus, much of the development of the city's core occurred in a much more ad hoc manner than the idea of the redevelopment area promised, in part because the use of the redevelopment area itself turned out to be more centred on political and economic objects than was suggested by its call for ordered development based on plans.

### Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Nick Lombardo for his excellent research support and three reviewers for their comments.

### Notes

1. See "No. 18746. A By-Law: To Designate Certain Redevelopment Areas, November 10, 1952."
2. Globe "Crowd hall to protest." The resistance of Toronto ratepayers to expropriation in various parts of the city is not the subject of this paper. For an examination of this see Hess and Lewis, "Property Rights, Redevelopment."
3. Moore, "Zoning and Planning."
4. For a discussion of the social relations of property see Blomley, "The Geography of Violence"; Staeheli and Mitchell, *The People's Property*. For the state's role see von Hoffman, "A Study in Contradictions," 303-9; Weiss, "Urban Renewal," 258-60.
5. Pritchett, "The 'Public Menace'"; Gordon, "Blighting the Way."
6. The Washington act became the basis for the *Berman v Parker* ruling in 1954 by the US Supreme Court which upheld the right of local government to use eminent domain to transfer property from one private owner to another. See Barros, "Nothing 'Errant' About It"; Pritchett, "The 'Public Menace'", 4.
7. Schwartz, *The New York Approach*, 106, 129-31; Zipp, *Manhattan Project*; Pritchett, "The 'Public Menace'", 3-32.
8. Hirsch, *The Second Ghetto*, 112-14; Rast, "unified business elite," 585-8.

9. Forest, "Federal Housing Act," 727–33; van Hoffman, "A Study in Contradictions," 309–10; Weiss, "Urban Renewal," 260–3.
10. Armstrong, *Making Toronto Modern*; Bocking, "Constructing Urban Expertise"; Bourne, *Private Redevelopment*; Brushett, "Face of the City"; Caulfield, *City Form*; Kaplan, *City Politics*; Sewell, *The Shape*.
11. Paterson, "Slum Clearance."
12. Pickett, "Programme in Canada."
13. Brushett, "Face of the City"; Caulfield, *City Form*; Lemon, *Toronto Since 1918*; Bacher, *Canadian Housing Policy*.
14. Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse*; Ellen Shoshkes, "Jaqueline Tyrwhitt."
15. Brushett, "Face of the City."; Lemon, *Toronto Since 1918*, 96–8; Purdy, "Place of Hope"; Sewell, *The Shape of the City*, 67–74; Pickett, "Programme in Canada"; Rose, *Regent Park*.
16. For Toronto's growth machines and reform blocs see Kaplan, *City Politics*, 604–82; Lorimer, *The Developers*. A broader discussion of these issues can be found in Molotch and Logan, *Urban Fortune*; Stone, *Regime Politics*.
17. It appears that no plan for the Dundas district was ever implemented under the bylaw. It was repealed in 1980. See "No. 615-80. A by-law to repeal by-law No. 18746, July 21, 1980."
18. Planning Board, "Wood-Wellesley," 5; Letter from HW Hignett to W. Angus, November 23, 1956; *Wood-Wellesley Redevelopment Area*; File 147, Series 430 Subseries 2, Fonds 200, City of Toronto Archives (hereafter CTA); Nathan Phillips, "The Mayor reports to the people," Radio Address, July 22, 1956; *Planning Board Subject Files, Wood Wellesley*; File 108, Series 722, Fonds 2032, CTA.
19. Planning Board, "Wood-Wellesley," 7.
20. Toronto Reconstruction Council, "Housing Committee."
21. The Board of Control was the executive committee of the City of Toronto that operated between 1904 and 1969. The Mayor worked with four councillors elected by the city's electorate. The Board oversaw most important municipal duties, including drafting bylaws, preparing expenditures, and nominating department heads. It reported to the Council.
22. Grey, Hamilton, "Bloor-Carlton Yonge-Jarvis site sought," *Globe*, March 4, 1954: 1.
23. Minutes 663 and 795, *Board of Control*; *Globe*, "Hope to extend."
24. The political factions are described by Kaplan, *City Politics*, 617–32, 57-6404-82.
25. "Drop it now," *Toronto Star*, January 21, 1957: 6.
26. "1,000 downtown apartments win approval of City Council," *Globe*, October 28, 1952: 1. "Yonge St. hotel too: start work in spring on 800-suite project," *Globe*, February 2, 1954: 1.
27. "Plenty of serviced land," *Globe*, March 26, 1954: 6.
28. For Toronto see Brushett, "A blot on the face of the city"; Caulfield, *City Form and Everyday Life*. For New York City see Chronopoulos, *Spatial Regulation in New York City*, 33–57; Schwartz, *The New York Approach*; Zipp, *Manhattan Project*.
29. Molotch and Logan, *Urban Fortunes*; Greer, *Urban Renewal and American Cities*; Kaplan, *Urban Renewal Politics*; Zipp, *Manhattan Project*; Kaplan, *Reform, Planning and City Politics*; Lorimer, *The Developers*; Pickett, "An Appraisal of the Urban Renewal Programme."
30. "Mathew Lawson to Homer Boland, October 26, 1961. Urban Renewal, Wood-Wellesley, File 219, Series 273, Fonds 202, CTA.
31. "Minutes of Informal Meeting," June 16, 1952; International Realty Company Limited, Informal Minutes book 4, Fond 229-238-18, The Archives of Ontario.
32. "1,000 downtown apartments." Also see Lawson to Borland.
33. Ontario, *Report of the Lieutenant-Governor's Committee* [Bruce Report]; Toronto Planning Board, *Master Plan*; "Third annual report of the City of Toronto Planning Board, December 31, 1944, File 221, Series 40, Fonds 220, CTA.
34. Lemon, *Toronto Since 1918*, 105.
35. Purdy, "From place of hope to outcast space"; Lemon, *Toronto Since 1918*, 102–6; Brushett, "Blot on the face of the city," 46–96.
36. *Statutes of the Province of Ontario, 1952 (Second Session)* (Toronto: Queen's Printer, 1952), Section 16(1)b, 274.

37. Gordon, "Blighting the Way"; Pritchett, "The 'Public Menace' of Blight."
38. Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse*, 5–6.
39. Gordon, "Blighting the way"; Pritchett, "The 'Public Menace' of Blight."
40. Hulchanski, *The Origins of Urban Land Use Planning in Ontario*.
41. Lemon, *Toronto Since 1918*, 106; White, "The Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe," 10.
42. Porter, Speech to the Annual Luncheon of the Ontario Municipal Association, Toronto.
43. The Ontario Municipal Board is an independent administrative tribunal that oversaw municipal appeals and disputes that dates from 1897. The planning act strengthened the Boards' existing powers. Moore, *Planning Politics in Toronto*, 37–44.
44. Bocking, "Constructing Urban Expertise"; Armstrong, *Making Toronto Modern*; Shoshkes, "Jaqueline Tyrwhitt"; Eric Mumford, *Defining Urban Design*; Paterson, "Slum clearance in Halifax"; Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse*.
45. Ontario, Planning Act, 1946, S.O 1946, c. 71.
46. For the role of Toronto reformers and Canadian housing policy, see Bacher, *Canadian Housing Policy*.
47. Letter from George Weale, September 30, 1952, Board of Control Communications, File 551, Series 783, Fond 200; CTA.
48. "150 ratepayers protest expropriation for block," *Toronto Star*, October 30, 1952.
49. Globe, "Bloor-Carlton."
50. Globe, "Kill Wellesley Area." See Hess and Lewis, "Toronto Ratepayers" for a discussion of the resistance of ratepayers to expropriation.
51. Letter from W.H. Nickle to George Weale, October 8, 1957; File 219; Series 723, Fond 2032; CTA.
52. See the minute books of the Board of Control, City Council, and the Planning Board for the history of the creation of the spatial limits of the Wood-Wellesley redevelopment area.
53. The City, for example, tried to get financial support for redevelopment from the Federal government under the National Housing Act. It was not successful because the area was considered insufficiently blighted. Letter from W. Nickel to George Weale, December 18, 1956; Urban Renewal, Wood-Wellesley, 1957–1961; *Planning Board, Urban Renewal*. File 219, Series 723, Fonds 2032; CTA.
54. City of Toronto Planning Board, "Report on the survey of residents of the area bounded by Alexander, Church, and Wellesley Streets and the rapid transit right-of-way." *Planning Board, Urban Renewal*, File 219, Series 723, Fonds 2032; CTA.

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