

**THE URBAN ECONOMY AND THE POWER OF THE LOCAL STATE:
THE POLITICS OF PLANNING IN EDMONTON AND VANCOUVER**

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the connections between a city's global economic position and the political power of the local state. It is based on a case study that compares the systems of planning control in two cities that have different global economic positions, relatively more powerful Vancouver and relatively weaker Edmonton. Both local states were committed, in the 1970s, to the establishment of a system of control over the character of downtown development. Although the initial objectives were similar, the results were very different, for reasons which -- as the evidence makes clear -- were related to the different global positions of the two cities. At the same time, the data also show that local political dynamics helped to shape these differences.

The central contention of this paper is that different degrees of economic power imply, not only a difference in bargaining power in dealing with particular developers, but also different conditions for the development of a planning system, hence different planning systems. From secondary sources, I will present evidence to suggest that these differences, in turn, may be related to different citizen perceptions and demands, indeed a different local political culture. In short, a different degree of economic power leads to a substantially different local state. However, the paper concludes, the relationship between economic factors and the character of a local state is not deterministic in any simple sense. Although economic factors are primary, they are not the only factors and, in the end, an understanding of both the economic context and local politics is necessary to achieve a full appreciation of the situation of a particular city.

THE URBAN ECONOMY AND THE POWER OF THE LOCAL STATE: THE POLITICS OF PLANNING IN EDMONTON AND VANCOUVER¹

Introduction

The relationship between a city's economic power and the power of the local state is a subject much written about and yet inadequately understood. It seems beyond doubt that such a relationship exists, but its actual contours remain unclear. A substantial literature tells us that cities everywhere are becoming integrated into a network of producers, consumers and service-providers whose possibilities and limitations are shaped by finance and markets that operate on a world scale, and that this integration has an impact on local decision-making. Often, the literature invokes or implies a hierarchical metaphor: Markets force cities to specialize almost as individuals do, it suggests, and stratify them into a hierarchy reminiscent of human society: The most favoured cities -- the urban *crème de la crème*, as it were -- concentrate on producer services, ie serve as corporate decision-making centres, while others labour in the sparser fields of industrial production, tourism or housing for retired people, and still others languish in the "slums" of the urban hierarchy, where communities compete for the ignominy of hosting prisons or waste disposal facilities, lest they be consigned to the outer darkness of economic stagnation. In the words of Logan and Molotch (1987, 290), "Metropolitan areas... are driven... to make their deals for growth. Success or failure in these endeavours helps shape the status of place in the system -- and helps determine how various indigenous subgroups will fare." An on-going process of economic growth in some cities and decline in others has the effect of "developing a specialized space-economy that restructures industries at different times and

¹ I am grateful to Warren Magnusson, John Marshall, Frances Frisken and Vitomar Ahtik for exceptionally challenging and useful critiques of an earlier draft of this paper. But I have not always done what they wanted me to do, and the shortcomings of the article remain my responsibility. Thanks also to Andrew Thompson, Barbara Burr, Eileen Sheridan, and Gabriela Sparling for their very helpful research assistance, to the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada for financial support, and to the Institute of Urban Studies at the University of Winnipeg for seed money. Last but not least, my warm thanks to the numerous politicians, officials, academics, and business people -- most of whom would prefer not to be named -- who have taken the time to share with me their understanding of the politics of planning in Edmonton and Vancouver.

communities with different degrees of severity."² Economic growth and decline, it is alleged, forge a hierarchically patterned urban system.

Anyone who has observed the decline of some cities and the rise of others, especially in the United States and Britain, but elsewhere as well, will see the truth in these characterizations. They give us a clear picture of rusting industrial areas and the social dislocation and personal misery caused by them, of burgeoning high-tech industries contracting for labour around the world, of factories relocating to small towns and of "urban villages" springing up at the peripheries of metropolitan areas, while the city centre decays. Certain stereotypical cases stand out in sharp relief: Los Angeles, the ultimate urban village complex; Duluth, the quintessential victim; Boston, the rust-belt centre that came back; and in Britain, the stagnant north, the booming south. The political implication is clear: An overarching system of economic power strongly influences, or perhaps even determines, the political power that is capable of being wielded by, and in, individual communities, over a wide range of social and economic issues.

²Beauregard 1989, 228. The title of the Beauregard volume, *Atop the urban hierarchy*, makes the hierarchy metaphor explicit, as do Logan and Molotch in a passage in which they recommend a political programme of forcing firms to move "down the place hierarchy..." (295) from more powerful cities to others less powerful. Smith and Feagin 1987 refer to multinational corporations as creating "an integrated, worldwide network of production, exchange, finance and corporate services arranged in a complex hierarchical system of cities." (6, italics added) Many other writers seem to assume the existence of an urban hierarchy, even when they do not refer to it explicitly. For example, the widely discussed idea of "uneven development," a staple of the Marxist literature in geography and sociology, points to the existence of economic distinctions that raise and lower the status of cities in relation to each other, and thus seems to define a hierarchy. Smith 1984 offers a systematic attempt to come to terms with this concept. The notion of hierarchy is also implicit in writing about the competitive struggle among urban centres for economic development (Cox and Mair 1988, 315-20; Logan and Molotch 1987, 34-35, 52, 57-62; Peterson 1981, 27-29) and is well understood by commentators oriented to economics and policy-making. Noyelle and Stanback, for example, offer an elaborate scheme for the classification of cities, also without making the concept of hierarchy explicit, but clearly showing that cities occupy advantageous or disadvantageous positions in relation to each other (Stanback and Noyelle 1982, Noyelle and Stanback 1984). Hanson, seeking to draw out the policy implications of this scheme, develops a typology in which cities are classified into two tiers, referred to as "command and control centres" and "subordinate centres." (Hanson 1983).

But what is the significance of these generalizations for individual cities? It is one thing to recognize a large picture painted in broad brush strokes, quite another to imagine what we will see if we magnify one part of it. Knowing what is going on globally, and how it affects stereotypical cases, is not at all the same as understanding the effect upon individual communities. Most communities do not fit neat hierarchical pigeonholes: they are neither industrial slums nor centres of high technology or producer services, their situation is less clear-cut, their prospects more mixed, than those of the stereotypical cases. Even the stereotypical cases differ from each other in ways that cannot be read directly from an understanding of the global situation. There is a need to develop a much more concrete understanding than we now have of how cities are affected politically by their economic situation -- to cultivate an eye for local variation while maintaining a sensitivity to the global context, and the economic context.

This need is only one specific case of a more general shortcoming in the urban literature, one that is attracting increasing attention. In fact, there are at least two urban literatures, both lively and productive, but still largely isolated from each other: One yields a wealth of insight into the rich variety of local politics, while another penetratingly examines the global context, and the economic context, within which individual states can be seen to be working out the fates of the cities governed by them. As each of the two literatures becomes more sophisticated in its own sphere, the limitations of that sphere become more obvious. Writers oriented to political economy and to global structural change have been insightful in charting the impact of the global economy upon local communities, but suffer from a recurrent tendency to treat the communities themselves as interchangeable units. By the same token, those oriented to the diversity of local politics tend to lose sight of overarching economic forces.

Peter Saunders offers a particularly telling instance of limitations of the global orientation, precisely because he is more attuned to local variation than most such writers, and yet tends to lose sight of local nuance. In *Urban politics: a sociological interpretation* (1983), for example, he is alive to the economic differences among cities caused by the global forces of uneven development, but apparently does not see them as having any implications for the political autonomy of cities. "Both France and Italy," he notes, "are characterized by a stark division between highly industrialized areas and underdeveloped areas of peasant agriculture. Britain, too...has its 'regional problem'...here the imbalance is between the new industrial sectors located in areas like the Midlands and the southeast, and declining industrial areas in the northeast..." (132-

33) But in summarizing the current sociological understanding of city autonomy, a little more than 50 pages farther along (189-97) he treats the local state as a single entity, offering little or no hint that different local states might find themselves in different situations. The local state, he argues, faces a variety of constraints to its exercise of autonomy, including ecological, political and economic ones. But from a reading of the section one might well conclude that these constraints are the same for all local states. Any suggestion that states in different economic circumstances might face different constraints is absent from the discussion. National economies are characterized by stark divergencies, but the local state is just a local state.

What is missing here, and is hard to find elsewhere in the urban literature, is a plausible connection between the admirable body of broad-brush urban theory and the concrete realities of actual communities. Other commentators have noted this shortcoming. For example Clarke and Kirby (1990), complain -- a bit hyperbolically perhaps -- of

deductive views of capitalist development and the nation-state [which] presume that in most important respects impacts [of world economic change] are similar across communities and, consequently, attention is shifted away from localities toward analysis of "the unfolding logic of capital accumulation processes." This diversion is compounded by theoretical frameworks that portray the state and the local state solely as arenas for the struggle between capital and labour rather than as a set of entities with distinctive and important characteristics that influence political outcomes. (394)

Clarence Stone tries to address that shortcoming, but falls into the opposite trap of stressing local variety over theoretical uniformity. His account is particularly significant for the same reason Saunders's was: Just as Saunders stands out among commentators taking a global perspective as being more than usually concerned with local variation, so Stone is more concerned than many students of local variation with identifying the impact of economic power upon politics. And yet, in *The politics of urban development*, (Stone and Sanders, 1987) he seems almost reluctant to acknowledge the existence of overarching economic forces and their impact on local politics, and inclined to minimize their importance. In his words:

"...as we look at a variety of cities...we can expect certain continuities. Those who control investment capital are bound to be important actors,

along with those who control public authority. These two sets of actors must reach an accommodation. We can also expect differences -- variations in how that accommodation is reached." (5)

The problem with that formulation is that it all but loses sight of supra-local economic forces in the clutter of local variety. In the place of capital operating on a world scale to re-shape urban space we are shown a babble of local business people, interest groups, politicians and public servants, negotiating and jockeying for position -- a political life that seems bereft of any economic logic beyond the constellation of local powers. In reality, it seems likely that both accounts are exaggerated: In all probability, capital does not re-shape urban space with quite the facility and uniformity that is suggested in some accounts, nor are local outcomes quite as contingent as others would have us believe. But that is speculation. What is needed to confirm it or prove it wrong is more investigation of local politics from a perspective attuned to global political economy. The present study is intended as a contribution to that effort.³

Two cases. We pursue our subject by means of a comparative case study of two local states,⁴ similar in many ways, and pursuing a similar objective, but distinguished by clearly identifiable economic differences. The local states are those of Edmonton and Vancouver, and the objective they were both committed to pursuing was that of

³Among other writers who seek, as I do in the present article, to derive insight from a juxtaposition of the global economy with local politics are Feagin (1988), whose study of Houston reveals the interplay between the local ruling group and the oil industry; Smith and Feagin 1987, who seek to unearth the local ramifications of economic restructuring; Horan (1991), who poses the problem of local political response to global forces, offers a framework for addressing it, and undertakes a survey of relevant American literature; and Pickvance and Preteceille (1991), whose six-country comparison of the effects of state restructuring on local power proceeds with a sharp eye on changes in the global economy, while at the same time being attuned to local variation. The variations the Pickvance/Preteceille study looks for, however, are found more at the national than the local level.

⁴"Local state," is used in different ways by different writers. Compare, for example, Gurr and King 1987, 49-55 and Magnusson 1985a, 121-25 and 1985b, 577-81. As it is used in these pages, the term is largely synonymous with "local government," in that it refers to locally elected and locally appointed bodies which take decisions on public matters and exercise control. The reason for preferring "state" to "government" is that, in both the Marxist and non-Marxist literature using the term, governance is conceived of as part of a nexus of interrelated social and economic forces, and not just as a decision-making machinery responsive to public opinion. That is how it is conceived in this article as well.

establishing a system of control over the character of downtown development. Although the initial objectives were the same, the results were completely different, for reasons which -- as the evidence makes clear -- were related to the differing economic circumstances of the two states. We will examine the evidence, reach the conclusions it allows us, and explore the further implications of the conclusions.

My central contention, based on a comparison of development controls in Vancouver with those in Edmonton, and of the processes that produced them, is that different degrees of economic power imply, not only a difference in bargaining power in dealing with particular developers, but also different conditions for the development of a planning system, hence different planning systems. The evidence suggests that these differences, in turn, are related to different citizen perceptions and demands, a different political culture. In short, a different degree of economic power is associated, in Vancouver and Edmonton, with the existence of two substantially different local states.

However, the data make a second important point: The relationship between the global economy and local politics is complex. Although a city's economic situation clearly sets constraints, limits upon the local state's freedom of action, those limits leave substantial space for community action, and for the forging, through political action, of unique community identities. In the cases examined in these pages, local politics has played an active role in shaping the impact of capital upon the two localities. In the final analysis, these cases suggest that the impact of global economic forces upon the locality is contingent, not only on the configuration of those forces, but also on the character of the local political response to them.

The fact that I am characterizing my research as a comparative case study could -- indeed, in an earlier draft did -- leave the misleading impression that an attempt is being made to approximate the precision often associated with natural science research. It is important, therefore, to stress that this study is not in the behavioural tradition. The attempt is not to imitate laboratory conditions, by trying to constitute the two cities as "identical boxes" and undertaking a mechanical, quantitative comparison of a list of factors. The comparison is qualitative, interpretative and contextual, rooted in an attempt to develop a concrete understanding of the politics of both cities, and the factors that are introduced into the comparison are the ones that my research has shown to be relevant there. The disadvantage of this approach is that it is more heavily influenced by my point of view than a mechanical comparison would be. Its advantage is

that I am able to consider all factors relevant to the comparison, instead of operating, as a mechanical comparison must, in actual or pretended ignorance of the context.

Vancouver and Edmonton: the global context of local politics

The global economic context for a comparison of politics in the two cities is readily grasped: Vancouver is located "above" Edmonton in the "hierarchy" of Canadian cities. Even the most avid Edmonton booster would readily concede that. Edmonton is a modestly prosperous provincial capital while Vancouver is the major urban centre in western Canada. In the area of downtown development, the main focus of this study, the differences are especially pronounced: Vancouver city planners are besieged by development proposals for the downtown area while the city centre of Edmonton, referred to as Deadmonton by detractors, is struggling with decline. At this writing (1991), it has yet to recover from the damage to the downtown retail trade inflicted by the development in the early 1980s of the colossal, suburban West Edmonton Mall, and vacant store fronts and offices are a recurring embarrassment to Edmonton boosters.

What is the significance of these economic differences? If we draw on the literature about global economic change, and its impact upon cities, we can readily construct an answer to that question. The answer runs as follows: Both Vancouver's and Edmonton's downtown core are afflicted by the decentralizing forces characteristic of North American suburban development -- the suburbanization of industry, housing and routine administration. (Scott 1988, Kantor 1988) At the same time, however, corporate headquarters have become more concentrated in a smaller number of major urban centres, centres which are deemed by corporate decision-makers to be attractive locations, capable of sustaining the urban "lifestyle" of the affluent professionals -- the lawyers, accountants and financial advisers -- upon whose services corporate headquarters rely. (Noyelle and Stanback 1984, Knight and Gappert, 1989) Vancouver is capable of attracting more corporate headquarters and of sustaining more of the kind of "sophisticated" retail trade that tends to gravitate to city centres rather than the suburbs. Perhaps the single most telling statistic to sum up the comparative economic positions of the two cities comes from the listing of Canada's 500 top industrial corporations in *Canadian Business*. According to data culled from that list, the head offices of 38 of the top corporations are in metropolitan Vancouver, while only seven are

located in Edmonton.⁵ Judged by that statistic, Vancouver is a modestly attractive location for major corporate headquarters, while Edmonton is a backwater. That is the global economic context within which the two cities are located. What is the local political significance of that context? We turn to our comparative case study of the politics of planning for an answer.

Edmonton

The envelope system, incorporated into the downtown area redevelopment plan, was inspired by the kinds of city planning ideas that have been popularized by Jane Jacobs (1959) and William H Whyte (1988), both of whom advocate the use of urban design to achieve environments that invite people to make use of the streets in order to keep them lively, attractive and safe. According to these ideas, attractive street environments are ones that benefit from sunlight, and offer wind protection -- especially protection from the accelerated winds that high-rise towers funnel to the street surface; that are not overwhelmed by the blank walls and impersonal-looking show windows often found at the street level of office towers; that are roomy enough to accommodate pedestrian traffic in comfort, and that provide spaces where people are able to interact informally. In pursuit of these objectives, the plan bylaw (City of Edmonton 1981) provided for ten building envelopes, each setting design parameters for buildings in specified areas of the central city. The envelopes specified such things as relationship of building lines to property lines, width of sidewalks, height and dimensions of canopies and arcades, depth of front yards, and angling of building silhouettes to allow for sky exposure. Character area regulations specified which building envelope or envelopes applied to each part of the central city. The purpose of the envelopes was to ensure the maintenance of view lines, sky exposure and wind protection, and to provide for the suitability of buildings to the character of areas in which they were located. (91-100) Also integrated into the Envelope System was the concept of Mixed Use Areas, in which density bonuses and other concessions would be made available to developers in return for their including residential units in their developments.

The envelope system evolved in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when Edmonton's economy was buoyant. It was part of a wider downtown planning process that called for

⁵*Canadian Business*, June 1989. The top 500 rankings are based on sales, net income and total assets. A comparable use of similar data can be found in Friedland 1983 where the locations of the largest 1000 industrial corporations as listed in *Fortune* magazine are used as the basis for a wide-ranging categorization of American cities.

street improvements, the development of more attractive public space. The City Planning Department played an activist role, publicly making the case for the various components of the downtown plan even when it was not yet clear how much support the plans would win on Council, in the business community and among the public. The department carried out and commissioned numerous planning studies -- dealing with such matters as parks, open spaces and pedestrian malls; wind conditions on downtown streets and pedestrian circulation, as well as economic evaluations, tests of the envelope system and evaluations of the reactions of business people.⁶

This flurry of activity climaxed in a series of public hearings, meetings and communications by letter with representatives of a wide range of local groups, including Building Owners and Managers Association of Edmonton, landowners from affected areas of the central city, developers' associations, the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, the Alberta Association of Architects, the provincial government, heritage preservation and environmental protection groups, the Edmonton Social Planning Council and a municipal reform organization, the Urban Reform Group of Edmonton. The wide range of participation enabled the planners to demonstrate that allegations of too much state intervention from one group were often balanced by assertions by another that the degree of regulation was insufficient. At the same time, considerable pains were taken to meet as many objections as possible by making modifications. Special care was taken to introduce modifications to ensure the economic viability of the plan. Throughout, the plan was presented on one hand as an initiative to improve the attractiveness of the central city and on the other as an economic development initiative.⁷ In the end, Council was persuaded to pass the area redevelopment plan bylaw, and with it the envelope system.

Thus while the bylaw sought to impose standards of development, pains had been taken to avoid a regime of regulation that would unduly discourage developers. Building envelopes did not dictate designs; rather, they were intended to set parameters within which design would take place. Visually, the envelope, as set out in the plan bylaw, took the form of a partial building silhouette and a top-view schematic of the sidewalk. (See

⁶For a sampling of these studies, see the 1979-81 publications listed under Edmonton, Planning and Building Department in the bibliography.

⁷The public participation programme, or communication programme, as it was dubbed, is summarized in Edmonton, Planning and Building Department 1981 (*Report on the communication programme: a public review of the Downtown Area Redevelopment Bylaw draft.*)

illustrations) But these outlines did not mandate a particular shape for the building. "The Building Envelopes define the maximum volume of space within which buildings may be designed, and do not dictate the final form of the building." Additional flexibility was allowed for in the following provision: "...the Development Officer [a planning official], may, at his discretion, approve developments which do not comply with the provisions of the specified Building Envelopes..." (90) Thus, if an architect could make the case that a design not in conformity with the envelope nevertheless met the objectives of the bylaw then an exemption was readily obtainable.

Business reaction. To anyone who has remarked unfavourably on the street environment created by a canyon of office towers, the bylaw would hardly appear as an onerous statist imposition. But in the early 1980s, it did begin to appear so to many in Edmonton's business community. As we saw, the regulations in the bylaw had been formulated with participation from the business community. But that was in 1981 in the final days of a business boom. When the boom ended not long afterward, and downtown development stalled, business people began to perceive matters differently. In 1983 Mayor Cecil J Purves appointed a so-called Task Force on the Heart of the City, chaired by Joe Shoctor, a prominent local business person. In its report, published in August 1984, the task force, noting that "Edmonton's economic situation has reversed," recommended that the city's planning department and the business community join forces in "a joint review of the Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan Bylaw to evaluate its effectiveness and to prepare revisions if necessary."⁸ The perception that Edmonton needed a quicker, easier development approvals process to attract interest in the central city was widespread. For example, an official of the Edmonton Downtown Development Corporation, which was created at the behest of Shoctor's task force, noted, in a 1987 interview, that planners would have preferred a more controlled development process, but added that such a process takes time, while, for Edmonton, speed was of the essence.⁹ Business people and politicians alike were urgent in their calls for action. "Our biggest task," Alderman Lyall Roper was quoted as saying, "is to make the downtown atmosphere attractive enough so that the businessman, the entrepreneur, the large and small developers will want to come back downtown..." Shoctor raised the spectre of inter-urban competition, maintaining that Edmonton had, in the past, lost

⁸Edmonton, Mayor's Task Force 1984, 24.

⁹Interview, 4 May 1987.

development to Calgary because of delays.¹⁰ That sentiment reflects trepidation, which seems to be widely shared in Edmonton, about Calgary's more buoyant economy.

These ideas were rapidly translated into action. Already in early 1984, a joint committee of the City Centre Association, a business group, and the city planning department was formed to review the Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan bylaw. The committee found "universal objection to the built form requirements [ie the envelope system]" and concluded that "The changing economic situation in the city has forced the re-evaluation of other plan policies."¹¹ Clearly, the economic down-turn had evoked a panic reaction in the business community. In November the City Centre Association, in a letter to Laurence Decore, who had recently become mayor, suggested repeal of the building envelope regulations. The business group obviously expected a serious hearing and quick action because it added, "We would hope that the Planning Department would be able to present [the bylaw revision] to Council by January 1, 1985 [a little more than a month later]."¹² The letter included "a list of those individuals who had input into the above." Of 23 names on the list, at least 18 were from the business community, including four people involved in land development, six retail business representatives and representatives of three major banks, two hotels and an insurance company. Three representatives of the city were also on the list.

A year later, revisions of the Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan Bylaw were complete, and Bylaw #6477 (City of Edmonton 1985) was passed, with a variety of changes. A careful comparison of this bylaw with the 1981 plan bylaw shows that the system of design control had been gutted. To be sure, one or two of the changes could be defended as having been based on other considerations. For example, the deletion of ¶18.2.1 in the old bylaw eliminates a requirement that "high-rise buildings be designed as a podium-plus-tower composition, or as a variation thereof." It could be argued that this change removes some rigidity from the regulations, leaving more room for architectural creativity, though it is more plausible to see it as giving developers a free hand to build towers straight up from the sidewalk, thus overwhelming pedestrians even more than a tower with a podium would.

¹⁰*Edmonton Journal*, 24 September 1984. Shocter was quoted as saying, "We have an awful lot to answer for. We're the city that wrangled so long over the Husky Tower project that Husky said 'Forget it' and took its tower to Calgary."

¹¹Edmonton, Planning and Building Department, nd.

¹²City Centre Association to His Worship Mayor Laurence Decore, 26 November 1984.

Another change, which might actually be seen as a strengthening of design controls if it were read uncritically and without considering the rest of the bylaw, was a provision calling for compatibility of a new development with neighbouring buildings. In this provision, ¶18.2.1 of the new version of the bylaw, the design of a new building must "complement" neighbouring buildings while the earlier version of that requirement only referred to the podium portion of the building. Less significantly, the 1985 version of the bylaw adds a new provision, ¶3.1.6, not present in the 1981 version, to the overall plan objectives, namely to: "Encourage the re-use and renovation of existing buildings in the Downtown by providing for variances to parking, loading and amenity area requirements of the Land Use Bylaw. " The preservation of heritage buildings is likely to work in the best interests of design control. However, a close examination shows that changes in the provisions in the "Heritage Conservation" subsection, which sets out the detailed regulations, are limited to relaxation, in ¶16.2.2.4, of the requirements developers must meet in the case of older buildings.¹³ Undoubtedly there is a case to be made for such changes, but they are being made at the expense of design controls.

In any case, the overall thrust of the changes in the bylaw is unambiguously in the direction of freedom for developers at the expense of protection for the streetscape. The building envelopes are deleted and replaced by much more limited, and more cosmetic, canopy and arcade requirements.¹⁴ A change to ¶18.2.2 eliminates a guideline calling for the creation of "a streetscape at a human scale within which the pedestrian can feel comfortable." The deletion of ¶18.2.5 eliminates a policy calling for "the high-rise or tower portion of a building [to] be designed in scale model form not only for purposes of micro-climate testing but to easily evaluate the relationship of its form and materials to those of other towers on the skyline." The deletion of ¶18.2.8 removes wording designed to assure that the upper or tower portion of a high-rise be set back from the building line "in order that the podium will be able to deflect winds from the sidewalk, and to allow more sunlight to reach the street." In short, the changes limit the ability of the City of Edmonton to control wind velocities at street level, to ensure that sunlight can reach the street and to require street-level design on a human scale.

¹³City of Edmonton 1981, 64-72; City of Edmonton 1985, 46-50.

¹⁴City of Edmonton 1981, 90; City of Edmonton 1985, 65.

The planners' own explanation of the changes makes it explicit that the abolition of envelopes drastically limits development control.

"With the deletion of the built form requirements, the Land Use Bylaw will only contain the floor area ratio's [sic], uses, parking and loading and amenity area requirements. [Deletion of the envelopes] will put a greater onus on the developer and the City to ensure that the Plan objectives of improved street amenities and good design result. *The development officer's ability to influence urban design will be greatly reduced.* Providing the developer meets the requirements of the Land Use Bylaw, *the Development Officer would be required to issue a development permit even if urban design factors are not considered...The responsibility for good design in the Downtown will fall on the private sector.*"¹⁵

Changing development strategy. Having been compelled to abandon the envelope system, the planners found themselves grasping at the straws of volunteerism and public pressure. In an internal document dated 19 December 1984, a member of the planning department, seeking a means of responding to the loss of control, recommended that

the Planning Department... prepare design guidelines. These guidelines would be voluntary and could only be implemented with the support of the developer. The planning Department will also work with the City Centre Association to investigate the establishment of a volunteer design panel... a development permit cannot be denied on the advice of the design panel,

the planner acknowledged, but he added: "It is hoped that this panel could provide public pressure..." In the absence of political will on the part of elected representatives, planners were left with nothing to fall back on but the hope that the public itself would act in Council's stead.

That hope was in vain. The design panel was not established until the end of 1986, and it consists of representatives of the development industry and such development professionals as architects or engineers. A planning official involved with the panel observed that the group's influence depends very much on timing. It meets four times a

¹⁵Edmonton, Planning and Building Department, nd. Italics added.

year and, if a major project gets under-way between meetings, "it won't be held up waiting for their next meeting."¹⁶ The panel is strictly advisory and its role is persuasive rather than regulatory. Its mandate is to encourage good design, not in any sense to require it.

Business dominance. In the meantime, the abandonment of the envelope system marked the beginning of an era of more aggressive business leadership in the supervision of downtown development. It soon became obvious that the change in planning regulations was much more than simply a decision about planning, that it signalled a major change in the character of the local state.

The downtown area was designated a Business Revitalization Zone (BRZ), an arrangement whereby the businesses in the area are subjected to a municipally-administered tax, and the taxes turned over to a private sector organization which may spend the money on promotion and local improvement. In explaining the reasons for the change, John Hickey, executive director of the City Centre Association, was quoted as telling a journalist, "It is clear that the strong, 'hands on' direction required to help revitalize downtown and provide the critical liaison between civic government and the private sector can only be achieved by complete participation of all downtown businesses."¹⁷ With the establishment of the BRZ, the City Centre Association was replaced by the Downtown Business Association of Edmonton, formed in 1986 to administer the BRZ revenues, as well as grants from the provincial and city governments, corporate donations and parking revenues.¹⁸ Thus as the role of the local state in downtown development weakened, leaders of the business community were able to constitute themselves as a private quasi-state agency, which filled the power vacuum with control of a very different character.

The Downtown Business Association was not the only quasi-state agency created to facilitate private-sector leadership in the development of the city centre. The Mayor's Task Force on the Heart of the City, which as we noted above, was in the forefront of demands for the deletion of the envelope system, also proposed the establishment of a "'for profit corporation' which would initiate and participate in development projects (by

¹⁶Interview on 6 June 1990.

¹⁷*Edmonton Journal*, 9 September 1983.

¹⁸Downtown Business Association of Edmonton 1986.

itself or in joint ventures with others) in the downtown area..."¹⁹ The corporation, which was to be named the Edmonton Downtown Development Corporation (DDC) was to be jointly funded by the city and by privately purchased shares. Armin Preiksaitis, a former planner, was appointed president of the corporation. By his own account,²⁰ Preiksaitis, in the process of deciding how the DDC should be structured, considered examples from across the country -- most of which were some form of crown corporation -- but decided to opt for the US model of business leadership, as practised in Denver, Minneapolis and Milwaukee. Shares were priced at \$5,000 per year, and prospective shareholders were asked to make a three-year commitment.

To facilitate the search for members, the Westin Hotel sponsored a series of luncheons for local business people, which garnered pledges. Later, it was decided to try to sell Toronto head offices of major corporations on membership. Molson's breweries sponsored another luncheon and Toronto business people were urged, on one hand, to put something back into the community from which they drew profits and, on the other, to consider that they, as land-owners, had a strong interest in a vibrant downtown. They were also reminded that a contribution gave them a chance to get involved in decision-making. Preiksaitis noted that, unlike Minneapolis and Denver, where major corporations had also been persuaded to make a commitment to local development corporations, Edmonton is largely devoid of head offices. It was no mean feat, he felt, to get national headquarters to make a commitment of this magnitude to a branch plant city.

The selling job included assurances that local government would maintain a low profile. According to a newspaper account, Alderman Lyall Roper, returning from a Toronto meeting with major corporate executives, reported, "At the outset, they were cautious about the idea. They had concerns about the corporation being completely dominated by government." The fact the majority of the board will come from the private sector allayed their fears, he added.²¹ When the recruitment was complete, the DDC board of directors had 40 founding members, 33 of whom represented business concerns, including, among national corporations, Eaton's, Sun Life Assurance Company, Trizec Equities, Imperial Oil, Campeau Corporation and Marathon Realty. (Edmonton Downtown Development Corporation, nd) A 1988 DDC document also lists the Toronto Dominion

¹⁹Edmonton, Mayor's Task Force 1984, 48.

²⁰Interview, 4 May 1987.

²¹*Edmonton Journal*, 3 March 1985.

Bank, the Bank of Nova Scotia, Olympia and York, the Royal Bank, the Bank of Montreal, the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce and the Manufacturers Life Insurance Company among the corporation's members. (Edmonton Downtown Development Corporation, 1988)

As business dominance of downtown development intensified, business leaders also became more overtly involved in political affairs. In late 1985, a newspaper account referred to a plan, originating with principals of the City Centre Association, the DDC and the chamber of commerce, to run candidates against city councillors "who oppose the mayor" and a "'hit list' ...drawn up by chamber of commerce members aimed at getting 'negative' councillors off council."²² Whether or not one takes that report seriously, it was clear, from City Council's assent to the gutting of design controls, and to the establishment of the DDC and the BRZ, that an enhanced business role in the control of development was gaining widening acceptance, not only in the business community, but in the local state. The abandonment of the envelope system was part of a wider pattern of weakening the state and strengthening the business community in hopes of attracting investment to the central city.

Evaluation. There are at least three lines of defence that can be invoked in support of the abandonment of the envelope system, and the private sector-dominant development strategy that went with it. The most obvious, but also least plausible, is to argue that the unregulated market is the best arbiter of urban design, and that interference, whether from the state or from the public, is only likely to make things worse. In moments of extreme subjectivity, business people and others have been known to argue along these lines, but in fact few people are so enamoured of the ordinary run of modern (or post-modern) architecture and design as to hold seriously to such an argument. In any case, the unregulated market is at best a distant ideal for Edmonton. Both the DDC and the Downtown Business Association are subsidized by the state, and the development strategy that was pursued under their auspices involved heavy concessions to individual developers -- in effect, state interventions in the market to stimulate private investment -- concessions that were still coming back to haunt city council at this writing.²³

²²*Edmonton Journal*, 22 December 1985.

²³In August 1990. The concessions issue will be dealt with in a forthcoming article, in which the interactions between developers and the local state in Edmonton and Vancouver will be subjected to a more detailed scrutiny.

A second line of argument, which sounds more plausible at first blush, is that the envelope system introduces an undesirable element of bureaucratic rigidity that hampers both the development process and the creativity of architects. As an official in Mayor Decore's office argued,²⁴ the regulatory approach to development is what made Edmonton into "a downtown full of flash cubes" -- a phrase often invoked in discussions about Edmonton's downtown. Any amount of nonsense can be perpetrated while complying with regulations, she argued. Under the business-dominant system, business people talk to each other, propose innovative ideas and work with counter-suggestions. Substantive, as opposed to apparent, coordination of different points of view and different approaches is better under the new system than it was before.

Beguiling as it sounds, that argument too is difficult to credit. In the first place, as we saw, the envelope system was neither intended to be, nor did it work out as, a set of rigid regulations. It was intended simply as a means of setting some minimum standards for such things as availability of sunlight, wind protection, and pedestrian comfort and amenity, and exceptions to the rules were provided for wherever a plausible case could be made that a different approach would work better.²⁵ Indeed, it could as readily be argued that the "downtown full of flash cubes" was a result of too little regulation rather than too much. Certainly the development community cannot claim to have had no part in bringing it about, and seems poorly placed now to offer itself as Edmonton's saviour from a flash cube-infested future. In any event, Edmonton has not substituted a more flexible or less bureaucratic regulatory regime for a rigid one. That, as we will see, is what happened in Vancouver. The envelope system was not replaced by anything else. It was simply abandoned, and the idea that Edmonton as a community has the right to exercise control -- bureaucratic or otherwise -- over the appearance of streets and the design of buildings in the central city, was abandoned with it.

In the final analysis, there is only one real reason for Edmonton's changed development strategy: the perception that the city's economic position mandates business dominance, for better or worse. To an outside observer -- on admittedly impressionistic evidence -- one of the most pervasive features of the local political culture is a contradictory mixture of love for Edmonton, ambition to make it "great" in some ill-

²⁴Interview on 6 May 1987.

²⁵In practice many exceptions were made, and some of those exceptions went on to become the most widely criticized developments. Examples are the Bank of Montreal and the Eaton Centre, which will be dealt with in the article referred to in note 23 above.

specified sense, and nagging inferiority over its relatively slow growth. This psychology provides a fertile ground for the promises and threats of developers, and some of them have become practised in the art of gaining public compliance for unpopular developments by a deft combination of promises of investment, threats to go elsewhere, and high estimates of the cost of alternate proposals.²⁶ Indeed, the threats may not always be idle, and it may be true that Edmonton would grow more slowly, or on a different scale, or in a different way, if it placed less emphasis on a speedy, compliant development process. What is clear is that Edmonton's place in the inter-urban system of economic differentiation is far more than just a set of statistics. It is a major influence in shaping its style of governance, its political culture and the actual content of local state regulations.

Vancouver

The reader will recall that one of the purposes of this paper is to cast a jaundiced eye upon broad theoretical generalizations about cities and local states that tend to reduce them to an unwarranted uniformity. The story of Edmonton seems to confirm one of those generalizations, perhaps most pithily expressed by Logan and Molotch (1987) in the words, "Cities, regions and states do not compete to please people; they compete to please capital..." (42) In a discussion of British urban planning, Kirk (1980) expressed a similar conclusion: "...though it is ostensibly concerned to control commercial development, land-use planning in Britain can only do this to a limited extent, and in general terms supports the interests of big business and landowners." (181) And summarizing an article that documents the power of large corporations to shape cities as they will, Rimmer (1988) says:

Keen for the economic benefits and political spin-offs, the [Australian] states... are prepared to override the usual planning role performed by local government of directing development into preferred locations to meet economic, social and spatial preconditions. Job creation is paramount. Hence, the prime aim of the states has been to get super-projects started at almost any social cost..." (417)

²⁶For example, reluctant public acceptance of demolition of the Tegler Building was secured by release of a much-disputed estimate of the cost of preserving it. In other cases, numerous concessions, on both monetary and design issues, have been secured by implied or open threats to withhold investment.

All that sounds just like Edmonton, and, to some degree, it is undoubtedly true everywhere, but it is not the whole story, certainly not in Vancouver. Vancouver's case opens the door to a more nuanced view of the relationship between the state and capital than that put forward by Kirk and the others, "because in comparing it with that of Edmonton, we find that corporate power stands in a very different relationship to the two local states.

From envelopes to discretionary zoning. Vancouver started with an envelope system, similar to the one Edmonton decided to abandon, but instead of a weakening of control over development, the objective in Vancouver was a substantial strengthening, combined with greater flexibility. Attitudes toward development were influenced by a strong public attachment to the city's spectacular natural setting, with the ocean or ocean inlets never far away and mountain vistas in the background. In the 1960s there was a building boom, and towers began to sprout in front of the water and the mountains.

For the first time, the people of Vancouver felt the impact of the built environment on the natural setting. The special views to the mountains and water which they once took for granted began to disappear. New developments started to overshadow the waterfront and hinder public access. Many new developments also blocked off valuable sunlight to public streets and open spaces, and in return, provided windswept plazas on the street.²⁷

High-rise apartment development was already dominant in the city's West End, and was spreading. Moreover, in the words of a planning document, "The only alternative form of higher density housing being built was the repetitive three storey frame apartment. In the downtown underground shopping malls and 'black towers' appeared." There were growing fears that Vancouver would be overwhelmed, and cut off from the mountains and the ocean, by ranks of pedestrian high-rise buildings and cloned shopping malls. (See illustration.) The election of city councillors belonging to The Electors' Action Movement (TEAM), a reform party oriented to the idea of a "livable" city, signalled the growth of public pressure for greater control over development. When TEAM replaced the conservative Non-Partisan Association (NPA), it became obvious that a sea change was

²⁷*Quarterly Review* 1984 11 (4), 4. *Quarterly Review* is a publication of the Vancouver Planning Department.

in the offing. Officials, pondering the existing control system, sought a way of modifying it to meet the growing public pressure without creating a crisis of disaffection among developers and architects. The answer they found was a system of flexible controls, called design guidelines, based on firmly established principles, which could be implemented in various ways, depending on the outcome of negotiations involving developers, citizens and the local state. "The objective of the new zoning can be summed up in the word 'neighbourliness'. Sunlight preservation, view protection, privacy, topographic adaptation, tree preservation, social and recreational amenities, safe parking garages -- all these things are deemed to be part of this neighbourliness."²⁸ Flexibility and neighbourliness necessarily involve bureaucratic discretion in the interpretation of guidelines, and they entail sometimes protracted negotiations involving citizens' groups, developers and the local state. All of this has proven acceptable -- not without grumbling on all sides, to be sure -- and it appears now to have become part of Vancouver's regular way of doing business.

Guidelines. The design guidelines replaced Vancouver's version of the envelope system, which regulated the size and configuration of yards and included light angle controls and requirements designed to minimize obstruction of daylight. The guidelines are both more stringent and more open to interpretation than the rules they have replaced, because they stress the importance of the neighbourhood context of a development and thus necessarily produce different results in different places. In the words of a planning document, they "do not require literal interpretation in whole or in part." But they are taken into consideration in the process of deciding whether to grant a development permit. This decision is made by the Development Permit Board which "may, in its discretion, refuse or require modification to a Development Permit Application proposal, for failure to meet the standards of [the] guidelines in whole or in part."²⁹ The guidelines are extensive and detailed. Following are some of the main ones:

Public open space. A development should include

varied, accessible, and, where appropriate, interconnected open spaces to be used by a wide range of people throughout the year...Spaces should

²⁸Both quotations in this paragraph are from Vancouver, Planning Department 1981 (unpaginated), Introduction.

²⁹Vancouver 1985a, (hereafter Van 1985 a),1. As of July 1990, this document was the current version of the downtown design guidelines. Enquiry on 25 July 1990.

be varied [and] interesting... Elements such as level changes, plant material, and pattern should be carefully related. (Van 1985a, 2)

Social and cultural amenities.

...an attempt should be made to preserve as much of the historic townscape of the City as possible... Where viable communities exist... downtown, their presence should be maintained and reinforced... To strengthen these communities, it is advisable to encourage the presence of people working or living downtown during the full 24-hour day and to attract a wide range of visitors and users throughout... (Van 1985a, 6)

Specifics covered in this section include the location of day-care centres; of cultural facilities such as cinemas, theatres and community halls; of recreational amenities; of facilities for the accommodation of motor vehicles; the preservation of historic structures; the orientation of developments in relation to the street and to view corridors, and what kinds of activities should be located at street level and what kinds at other levels.

Views.

Existing views should be protected and, wherever possible, new views should be created...[including]

Views of the mountains and the water from street level and especially from street-ends ending near the waterfront.

Views of landmark buildings, art works...

Views and vantage points for viewing major pedestrian activity, and views of the most important activities of the city, such as the port... the pleasure-boating community... the commercial fishing fleet and... railroad activity. (Van 1985a, 9)

To maximize views, developers may be encouraged to provide such things as higher than usual ceilings at ground floor, minimization of columns at building perimeters and slender building cores. "All new development proposals should consider [views] of adjacent...public areas, of surrounding buildings [and] of the proposed building itself." (Van 1985a, 10)

Environmental guidelines cover such things as shadows cast by buildings, amounts of sunlight in public spaces within developments, weather protection for pedestrian routes, shelter for transit stops, wind currents caused by new buildings ("New developments should attempt to integrate into their design outdoor spaces of relative calm."). A section on noise conditions calls for incorporation of "quiet outdoor spaces" into the designs of new buildings and another section deals with the "introduction of nature," including the preservation of existing mature trees, the introduction of large trees and other plants, as well as "[w]ater basins, fountains and... waterfalls..." (Van 1985a, 12-13)

Physical design guidelines call for "a very high quality ...urban environment...", buildings that "observe energy-conserving principles..." and "a pedestrian environment along... major sidewalks which is attractive to, and in scale with the pedestrian." Meeting these objectives involves, among other things, the avoidance of "impersonal façades" as well as

sensitive proportioning and dimensioning of building elements... choice of materials, detailing, textures, colours, lighting, street furniture, landscaping and signage. In addition, the transparency of the façades and frequency of entrances contributes significantly to the interaction between building and pedestrian street traffic.

Tower portions of downtown buildings should be evaluated with respect to their compatibility with surrounding structures, their contribution to the... skyline, their adherence to other guidelines and the intrinsic excellence of their form ...their colour, reflectivity, shape, fenestration, materials, detailing and ease of maintenance will receive careful scrutiny." (Van 1985a, 14-15)

Enforcement. The enforcement of this highly detailed set of rules takes the form of a quasi-political, administrative review process designed to ensure that the various relevant points of view -- those of neighbours, developers, city officials and design professionals -- are brought to bear on the final decision, which is made administratively.³⁰ The object of the process is, as we have noted, the issuance or refusal of a development permit. The process begins with the filing of a development

³⁰Details on the process can be found in Vancouver 1981, Vancouver 1985b, Vancouver 1987a, and Vancouver 1987b.

permit application, which details the proposal and outlines how it is intended to comply with the design guidelines. The application is referred to an advisory body called the Urban Design Panel, consisting of architects and engineers nominated by their professional associations as well as representatives of the planning bureaucracy. At the same time, it is referred to city departments with an interest in the proposal, and citizens in the area are notified and given an opportunity for input. The process is an interactive one, and the application may be changed to meet objections before it goes forward for a decision.

If, at this point, the application is judged to be non-controversial, it can be approved by the Director of Planning. If not, it goes to a public hearing before the Development Permit Board, the voting members of which are the Director of Planning, the Director of Social Planning and the City Engineer. The board is assisted by a seven-member, non-voting advisory panel including developers, citizens and design professionals. At the conclusion of the hearing, the voting members of the board render a decision. However, the applicant may revise the application to meet objections and start over again.

The discretionary zoning system creates a decision-making arena within which a wide variety of participants -- citizens, architects, city officials, and the developers themselves -- can vie for their interests. Planning documents explaining how the system works are at pains to emphasize the degree to which all the parties, including developers, can gain concessions, and they are undoubtedly right to insist that developers continue to wield real power. But it is clear that the discretionary zoning system imposes significant constraints on developers and has a real impact on the appearance of the developments that result, thus giving a serious measure of influence, independent of developers, to citizens, citizens' groups and the local state.

Balance of forces in the local state. We have seen that the abandonment, in Edmonton, of the envelope system was not just a planning measure, but had wider significance for the character of the local state, for the emerging balance of forces within it and even for the local political culture. The discretionary zoning system is similarly pregnant with significance for Vancouver politics. It clearly grows out of a very different political consciousness, and is part of a politics of development that is distinct from that of Edmonton.

Evidence of the political consciousness associated with the rise of discretionary zoning is less impressionistic than that which was cited above for Edmonton, because, as it

happens, a study of locational conflicts is available that covers the period during which the discretionary zoning system was established. A study by Ley and Mercer (1980), published in a journal of economic geography, analysed all locational conflicts reported in the Vancouver *Sun* from the beginning of 1973 to the end of 1975. In examining the reasons for the actors' involvement in locational disputes, the authors found that both social and aesthetic factors were cited more often economic factors.³¹ Commenting on these and other findings in the study, they say:

the dominant status of social factors is notable. So too is the relative standing of aesthetic factors... Broadly social criteria were cited both by community interests and city hall officials in half the controversies that they joined. For these groups, economic grounds were mentioned in only 10-20 per cent of issues, no more frequently than aesthetic criteria. This demotion of the primacy of economic arguments is surprising and perhaps rare among politicians. The same trend was evident in the outcome to conflicts, where entrepreneurial lobbyists with their economic arguments were the least successful of the competing groups. (Ley and Mercer 1980, 100, 107.)

In a related article, Ley (1980) implied that the emphasis in Vancouver politics upon non-economic issues was not particularly characteristic of Vancouver, but was part of a wider social trend that involved "passing from an emphasis on growth to a concern with the quality of life... " He saw this trend as being associated with the growth of white-collar technical, administrative and professional occupations and characterized it as a "new liberalism" which could be "recognized less by its production schedules than by its consumption styles." Affluent white-collar workers, "With a secure economic base... represent the present day counterparts of Veblen's leisure class, displaying the canons of good taste, intent upon the aesthetic."³² Although there is undoubtedly much truth in that interpretation, it exaggerates in suggesting the predominance of aesthetic considerations in Vancouver's politics of development. As we found in Ley and Mercer's own study, social factors were seen to be dominant political motivators while aesthetic ones were much less prominent. More to the point of the present study, the evidence of our comparison with Edmonton shows that the political trends Ley and Mercer identified

³¹Social factors included need for improved services, compatibility with neighbourhood, impact on traffic, safety, and availability of housing. Ley and Mercer 1980, 98-99.

³²Ley 1980, 239, 242-43.

are not general to the society as a whole, but are more in evidence in some urban centres than in others. It may well be true, as the authors suggest, that the kind of development politics found in Vancouver requires the backing of affluent voters, but it is not true -- at least not in all cities -- that the growing prominence of white-collar occupations mutes the local state's concern with economic issues while bringing about a greater emphasis on social and aesthetic questions. Certainly it has not happened in Edmonton.

But it was happening in Vancouver in the mid-1970s, and it continues at this writing. As we noted, the rise of discretionary zoning was associated with the eclipse of the conservative NPA by the reform-oriented TEAM party. The period of TEAM's pre-eminence was followed by a period of dominance by the NDP and COPE, parties located to the left of TEAM on the political spectrum. In 1986, the NPA returned to power, and Vancouver politics underwent another sea change, but discretionary zoning has so far proved too durable an institution to be dislodged by a new conservative regime. Indeed, it was clear that many of the controversial premises first advanced by TEAM in the late 1960s had become part of the conventional wisdom of Vancouver politics. For example, a 1985 planning study confirmed an earlier finding (Vancouver 1980) that the preservation of views of the water and mountains was a top priority for Vancouver residents, indeed strengthened it. As Vancouver planners reported, "The powerful cluster of goals surrounding the unique natural environment of Vancouver was reaffirmed [by the 1985 study], but was now viewed as something that should be taken for granted, a 'given' and constant background for City policy."³³

The NPA-dominated City Council has confirmed that position. In 1989, council voted to accept a report on views preservation which, according to a newspaper account, "will form the basis of an interim policy on view preservation and require some restrictions on building heights in the commercial core." Before they voted, they heard from 17 architects and developers opposing acceptance of the report. Mayor Gordon Campbell, a member of the NPA -- who, significantly, has in the past been associated with TEAM -- was quoted as commenting: "I don't believe council's obligation is to try and maintain potential profit on land in the downtown core."³⁴ That statement rated page A9 of the

³³"Updating the goals for Vancouver," *Quarterly Review* 13 (4), October 1986, 10.

³⁴Vancouver *Sun*, 13 December 1989, A9. Cf the following quotation from Edward Koch, Mayor of New York: "The main job of government is to create a climate in which private business can expand in the city to provide jobs and profit." Katznelson 1981, 4.

Sun. In the Vancouver context, there is nothing remarkable about it. In Edmonton, such a remark, coming from a conservative mayor, would be unthinkable.

Evaluation.

If anyone thinks that the existence, and vigorous enforcement, of the design guidelines leads to a noticeably higher level of satisfaction with the government's performance in this area, they should disabuse themselves. What we find, rather, is a more competitive political environment, marked by higher expectations, greater uncertainty on all sides as to the outcome of political disputes and therefore more vociferous dissatisfaction with the outcomes. Vancouver's political woods are full of criticisms of the design guidelines and of the development permit process. Indeed, sometimes it is difficult to find anyone with a good word to say about it. It is worth our while to take a look at some of the most important criticisms.

The objections of developers are not far to seek. They are faced with a process that can take a long time if there are major objections to their proposal from citizens or the local state -- and time is of the essence to them, because delays cost money, and eat into their profits. The subjective element of design guidelines which respect the physical surroundings of a proposed building, and which put a great deal of weight on the opinions of neighbours, are also a thorn in the developer's flesh. Clearly developers are not happy with the system. Ley's judgement, published in 1980, and benefiting from day-to-day observation of the system, was as follows:

The Planning Director... consistently supported citizens rather than business interests in re-zoning controversies; he resisted granting a redevelopment permit to one proposed residential tower in a high amenity central location on the grounds of it being 'unneighbourly' in its intrusion on existing properties... The assault on high density living and particularly high rise developments was conducted with vigour and in four years council... achieved residential down-zonings in every major apartment district in the city. In almost every instance the down-zonings were supported by local citizens' groups and opposed by the land development industry. Nor were downtown commercial interests more successful in gaining council backing; repeatedly their viewpoint was rebuffed at public meetings in the council chamber. (Ley 1980, 252)

Undoubtedly the conservative regime of the late 1980s has been less severe toward developers, but it is far from having satisfied them.

Another set of criticisms, widely voiced, converges with the developers' dissatisfaction over the subjectivity of the guidelines. One version of those criticisms targets the former director of planning, Ray Spaxman, maintaining that he used the discretionary character of the guidelines to impose his personal vision. As one architect remarked, when a developer, or the architect, was seeking a development permit, "you didn't talk to [planning] staff, you tried to get an appointment with Ray."³⁵ Spaxman's successor, Tom Fletcher, is widely characterized as seeking to de-personalize the decision-making process, shifting decision-making downward in the hierarchy and encouraging the development of departmental, rather than personal, policies for enforcement of the design guidelines. That, however, brings with it a new problem. As the architect quoted above sagely remarked, Fletcher's approach is "good and bad, because now you have to deal with the quality of the individual at the lower level." It seems clear that such criticisms cannot be met to everyone's satisfaction. As we have seen in the case of both Edmonton's and Vancouver's envelope systems, a set of impartial guidelines is open to the criticism that it leaves insufficient flexibility and room for individual creativity. Any attempt to achieve greater flexibility in the enforcement of guidelines is bound to lead, sooner or later, to suggestions that the system is being applied arbitrarily.

More substantially, the discretionary zoning system is vulnerable to the charge that, on one hand, it helps to promote Vancouver as a corporate headquarters and a residential area for the rich and the near-rich while on the other it shirks the far weightier problem of how the metropolitan area as a whole will accommodate population growth and house the poor. The development permit system is proving to be a powerful lever for well-to-do neighbourhoods that wish to avoid densification, while the problem of homelessness intensifies and urban sprawl continues at the periphery of the metropolitan area, beyond the reach of City Council's authority. As Ley (1980) and Knight (1989) point out, cities that wish to accommodate corporate headquarters must also make themselves attractive to highly-paid professionals whose "life style," in Logan and Molotch's acerbic characterization, "emerges as an alternative American ideal; low-fat cuisine and BMW replace the dour gothic imagery of knitting needle and pitchfork... this vision of urban 'rebirth' helps justify... the subsidized destruction of old neighbourhoods for the sake of

³⁵Interview, 24 May 1990.

the rent-rich uses that will replace them."³⁶ To be sure, in Vancouver's Canadian variation on this American story, the neighbourhoods are being preserved rather than destroyed. It is fair to add too that, in such new developments as Coal Harbour and the North Shore of False Creek, the city is insisting on the inclusion of moderate and low-income housing. But serious doubts remain as to whether these and other efforts are enough, and certainly design controls by themselves do little or nothing to address them.

But our main concern in these pages is not the outcomes of policies, but the contrasting capacities of different local states. Therefore, we are less concerned with deciding just how good, or inadequate, or wrong-headed, the design controls are than with observing that there are controls, that they are taken seriously and enforced vigorously, and that they exert enough control over development to elicit cries of pain from the development community. A comparison of the fate of Vancouver's system of discretionary zoning with that of Edmonton's envelope system confirms Kantor's speculation:

Cities that own dominant market positions face limited competition from other cities, a relationship that increases their economic independence in the process of inducing capital investment. Potentially at least, they may be more responsive to popular control because of the diminished 'exit' opportunities of economically important population groups.³⁷

Two different positions on the urban hierarchy are associated with the existence of local states, and of local political cultures, that are very different from each other.

Conclusions... and more questions

Like many studies, this one makes some contributions to our understanding, while at the same time raising a host of new questions. A contribution that can be drawn from it is that it offers a fresh look at local political alignments, offering a substantially different picture than that which is conventional in the current literature of the line-up of political forces, especially in Vancouver. The questions it raises have to do with the relative importance of economic and cultural factors in determining the character of the local state. The answers to these questions, in turn, will influence the individual reader's judgement of whether Vancouver, and especially whether Edmonton, could have pursued

³⁶Logan and Molotch 1987, 287.

³⁷Kantor 1987, 496; see also Kantor 1988.

a different course than the one described in these pages. We can take up each of these subjects in turn, starting with local political alignments.

Political alignments. It has become conventional, in recent studies of local politics,³⁸ to see the politics of Vancouver as being marked by a radical subordination of the local state to the forces of capitalist development. These findings echo those of a variety of other commentators on the politics of other cities, including Logan and Molotch (1987) Kirk (1980) and Rimmer (1988), whose analyses are discussed above, in the introduction to the section on Vancouver. The picture that emerges from these studies, suggests, contrary to our findings, that there is not much to choose between local states as regards their relationship to capital -- or, as applied to our cases, that Edmonton's and Vancouver's local states are very similar in their subordination to developers. In the case of Vancouver, the conventional analysis is arrived at by discounting the importance of the essentially liberal restrictions designed to promote "livability" and "neighbourliness," which form such an important part of local state policy in Vancouver, as inconsequential, on the grounds that they are in reality responsive to the objectives of developers and the business community. Business people, so the argument runs, are interested in enhancing Vancouver's status as a centre for producer services and thus welcome the imposition of controls which will have the effect of making the city more attractive to the kinds of professionals who purvey producer services. Having thus been encouraged to discount Vancouver's most significant exercise of local state power as inconsequential, the reader is left with the impression that Vancouver and Edmonton are roughly equal in their subordination to the forces of capitalist development. In support of this interpretation, both Magnusson and Gutstein are at pains to emphasize the similarities between conservative and liberal programmes. This emphasis originates from a well-intentioned attempt to underline the importance of left-wing issues, but it is too theoretically sophisticated by half.

To be sure, it is fair comment to point out that TEAM was essentially a liberal, establishment party, concerned with middle-class issues, with at best a limited concern for such matters as affordable housing, inner-city education, homelessness, racism, and women's issues. It is no more than reasonable to point out, therefore, that TEAM devoted little or no attention to a long list of social questions. It is equally reasonable to charge, as Magnusson does, that the consensus in favour of "livability" in Vancouver in the 1980s grew out of the NDP acceptance of a liberal programme. What is problematic

³⁸See especially Gutstein 1983 and Magnusson 1990.

about that emphasis, however, is that it blurs the distinctions between TEAM and the even more conservative, development-oriented approach to city planning which TEAM succeeded in striking from Vancouver's political agenda. In point of fact, even if it is true that "livability" is in the long-term interests of the development community, developers themselves appear as yet to be blissfully unaware of this convergence of their interests with those of the political centre and the left, and are distinctly ungrateful for the bounty being bestowed upon them by the local state, in the form of onerous restrictions that they must observe. In the process of blurring the distinction between the centre and the right, the conventional view of Vancouver politics loses sight of the very substantial exercise of state power that TEAM initiated and made respectable. It is fair to point out that the achievement of "livability" leaves many important problems unsolved, but it makes little sense -- especially in North America, the home of so many bleak and ruined urban landscapes -- to dismiss it as inconsequential.

This tendency, widespread in the literature, to erase the distinctions among the various kinds of conservatives (or classical liberals), moderates and social democrats is a symptom of the paucity of political perspective in that part of the urban literature which -- as we observed in the introduction to this paper -- is oriented to global political economy rather than local variation. It mirrors the equally distorted attempt by right-wing political forces to reduce local politics to a simplistic sparring match between "free enterprise" and socialism -- long a staple of western Canadian, and especially British Columbia politics. In that version of the political world, all forms of liberal and moderate politics are conflated with the dreaded socialism, and the forces representing the business and development communities are portrayed as our saviours from the dead hand of the state. One version blurs distinctions between the right and the centre, the other blurs the left and the centre. Both serve an ideological end, but neither conveys an accurate picture of the political spectrum. Since a substantial proportion of the actual political clashes in Canadian cities, and cities throughout the capitalist world, pit liberal and conservative forces against each other -- as opposed to unifying them against radicals -- we are too often missing the point. Our analyses are in danger of expressing our aspirations rather than explaining the politics of cities. Those of us who share such aspirations will, of course, insist that their expression must remain a central feature of our research and writing, but expression of aspirations is not a substitute for analysis, nor will unawareness of the actual character of local politics, feigned or otherwise, assist in the realization of anyone's aspirations.

In practical political terms, it makes a great deal of sense to link the issue of livability with such issues as affordable housing, because this increases the size of the constituency for resistance to capital. Experience in Canadian cities suggests that either type of issue by itself is insufficient for a durable political offensive designed to secure critical scrutiny of development proposals, but that a coalition of forces concerned, in various mixes, with both liberal and left issues is capable of developing some staying power (Magnusson 1990b, 185). We have seen how the TEAM regime in Vancouver in the 1970s, followed by that of COPE and the NDP in the early 1980s, constituted, in effect, liberal-left coalition that addressed issues of livability and we noted briefly that they also devoted some attention to such concerns of the left as affordable housing, day-care, and, it could be added, tenant rights. Another example of joint liberal-left political action that achieved results can be found during the period in the 1970s when Civic Action (CIVAC) held the balance of power in Toronto and instituted a regime of downtown development controls with support from the left while yielding to left-wing pressure to promote affordable housing through the development of the St Lawrence Neighbourhood and the creation of Cityhome, a municipal housing corporation. In recent years in Montreal, the regime of the Montreal Citizens' Movement (MCM) is yet another example of a liberal regime that draws on left-wing support and pays some attention to left issues.

The left have had plenty to complain about during all these regimes, and with good reason. Liberals have probably, on the whole, done somewhat better during these periods, but that is neither here nor there. The point is that, while even a casual student of city politics could cite a number of examples of effective joint action drawing on both liberal and left support, it is much harder to think of examples of either group realizing a programme of reform without support from the other. In addition, the unhappy example of Edmonton's supine political culture points to the psychological importance of the belief -- seemingly absent in Edmonton -- that there are feasible alternatives to the proposals put forward by developers, and thereby the importance of keeping all the alternatives alive instead of taking the position that some of them are insufficiently radical to be worthy of notice.

Economics, culture, and the character of the local state. Our findings point to a strong correlation between the "location" of Vancouver and Edmonton on the "urban hierarchy," the political cultures of those two cities, and the different characters of the two local states. Since Edmonton's submissive political culture is clearly conditioned by

a belief, widely held locally, in Edmonton's economic inferiority, while Vancouver's is marked by a fine disdain for economic considerations, it seems clear that the economic situation of the two cities is the independent variable, to use behaviouralist terminology, and that the different cultures and differently constituted local states are results of the differing economic circumstances.

Even if that somewhat speculative finding is accepted, however, it begs a more interesting question. Do the economic conditions of the two cities determine their political cultures and their different local states? Is it the case that Vancouver's economic circumstances effectively mandate a local state policy of strict control over development and that Edmonton's "lower" position on the urban hierarchy leaves no choice but to allow developers to work their will? The likely answer to those questions is No. If Vancouver's political "clout" originates in its attractiveness as a corporate headquarters, as we have suggested in these pages, its degree of "clout" is by no means a necessary accompaniment of its degree of attractiveness. One could cite numerous examples of American cities as attractive, or more attractive, to capital than Vancouver -- New York, Los Angeles, Miami and Houston spring to mind -- where controls over the quality of downtown development are minimal by Vancouver's standards, or absent altogether. In Canada, Calgary, which is comparable to Vancouver in its attractiveness as a corporate headquarters³⁹ is governed by a local state that cheerfully eschews any serious attempts to control the quality of downtown development. By the same token, numerous European cities -- and even the occasional North American city -- at least as "provincial" as Edmonton manage to sustain workable city centres, unmarred, or at least less marred than Edmonton, by empty storefronts, or wind-swept streetscapes. To name only one of many examples in Europe, Geneva's renown as one of the most beautiful cities in the world is such that few people are aware that it is a secondary city with a metropolitan-area population of less than 400,000 -- substantially smaller than Edmonton. Clearly it has succeeded despite (or perhaps even in part because of) the fact that it does not enjoy the status of an economic powerhouse. In the US, Portland, Oregon, is widely cited as a success story in the establishment and maintenance of an attractive city centre. In Canada, St John, New Brunswick, a city that lost its economic

³⁹According to a listing in *Canadian Business*, June 1989, the headquarters of 41 of Canada's top 500 corporations are located in Calgary, compared with 38 for Vancouver. (It is worth noting in passing that the question of whether this figure should lead us to revise the common perception, cited above, that Vancouver is western Canada's major urban centre, may be worth considering. The figure does not, however, affect our conclusions about the relative positions of Vancouver and Edmonton, and is therefore peripheral to the argument in these pages.)

importance in the 19th century, and remains a backwater today, has done much, through renovation of older buildings and intelligently conceived new development, to re-establish the attractiveness and viability of its city centre. To be sure, these are impressionistic examples, not backed careful investigation. But a detailed study is unnecessary to establish the point that a city's place in the "economic hierarchy" does not, in any simple way, determine the degree of political will, or even necessarily the ability, of the local state to exercise control over development. As Michael Peter Smith and Joe R Feagin comment in the introduction to *The capitalist city* (1987), community responses to global economic forces "are not mere by-products of [global] economic and state restructuring; the everyday activities of people living in households and communities... are constitutive elements in the process of urban transformation; they shape as well as reflect the global flows of labour and capital and the character of state policies." In short, if we want to achieve a full understanding the differences between Edmonton and Vancouver, or understand any other local state, we must move beyond global economic forces and theories of political economy to a much more specific assessment of the local culture and local politics. Economic factors are a primary influence, but they are not the only influence.

Indeed, it seems likely that Edmonton's local culture and the character of its local state are conditioned less by objective economic circumstances than by a panicky misreading of its economic state. Edmonton is not a major drawing card for corporate headquarters, and it undoubtedly lacks a significant concentration of the producer services that are necessary to accommodate corporate headquarters, but it is a major centre of government administration as well as health and education facilities,⁴⁰ which are considered by students of urban economies to be important bases for the generation of prosperity. (Noyelle and Stanback 1984, Stanback 1984) Edmonton's objective economic circumstances hardly seem to justify the seemingly hysterical reaction of the local business community to the threat that even small delays in the development approval process would lead to withdrawal of investment. What we seem to have in Edmonton is not a business community and a public that have made a sober assessment of their economic circumstances and reacted to that assessment, but a business community that has been mesmerised by a subjective judgement that it occupies an insufficiently "elevated" position in the "urban hierarchy," and that has seized control of

⁴⁰Including the University of Alberta, Athabasca University, Grant MacEwan College, the University of Alberta medical complex, the provincial government, and a significant federal government presence.

the local state to implement a programme of capitulation to corporate demands, regardless of the cost to the community. Seemingly, the Edmonton business community, and with it the local state, has taken the "urban hierarchy" simile a bit too seriously for the city's own good.

It seems reasonable to conclude, then, that a balanced understanding of the circumstances of both Vancouver and Edmonton, while it must be based on a sensitivity to the global economic context, also requires a nuanced awareness of the particular circumstances of each city, including local political cultures as well as the political forces comprising the local state, and controlling the directions it takes. As we suggested in the opening paragraphs of this paper, a full assessment of the circumstances of the two local states is, in the end, impossible without both elements. The same is undoubtedly true for other local states. A major task confronting the urban literature, therefore, is the production of more studies that forge a plausible link between the uniform pressures exerted upon communities by global economic forces and the infinite variety of local political responses to those pressures.

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