

# SEEING LIKE A NEIGHBOUR:

Civic action in today's cities

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# 'Seeing like a state' and its critics

- Postwar era as golden age of highway-centred urban planning
- Experts rarely challenged
- Planned economy of World War II laid foundation for postwar prestige of planning

- Jane Jacobs: lived experience matters for policy
- Top-down planning leads to inhuman spaces
- Separation of uses problematic; separation of old from new buildings also problematic

# Changes in planning law and policy

- Consultation mechanisms added to existing zoning/planning law after 1960s
- Especially in cities with ward-based politicians, consultation mechanisms became intertwined highly local political networks, electoral politics
- Councillors often became key brokers, mediating between developers and neighbours and often overriding city-wide policies and plans; short-term perspectives

# The key challenges of urban governance in today's Canada

- Environmental crisis
- Transportation and infrastructure crisis
- Growing socioeconomic and spatial inequalities between neighbourhoods (cf. David Hulchanski's Three Cities research)



Aiming high. Growing smart.

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# Big city councillors, or village elders?

- Toronto research: councillors act as fixers, and use the complexity and irrationality of the system to gain political capital with homeowners, businesses
- A more rational system would deprive them of some political-capital opportunities
- Examples: comprehensive zoning bylaw not supported by councillors

(M. Valverde, Everyday law on the street: city governance in an age of diversity)

## Seeing planning law like a neighbour: 'bonusing'

- Official zoning rules unrealistic (heights and densities completely outdated)
- Hence big market for “variances” or exceptions
- Higher densities and heights ‘sold’ to developers
- Some cities have set rates and centralize proceeds
- Toronto: village elder process to decide on price of variances



# Selling height/density: an example



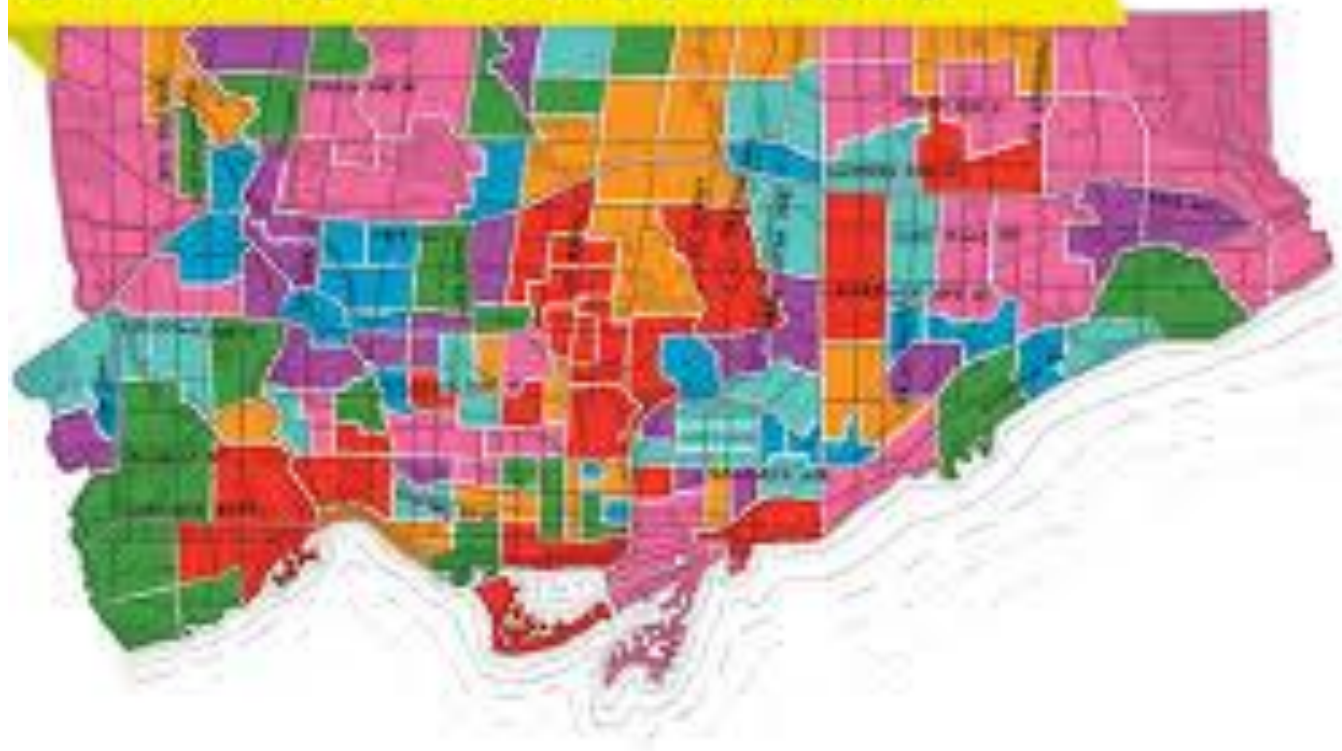
# Regent Park Aquatic Centre = x stories of Trump Tower



# How bonusing and other planning tools increase inequality between neighbourhoods

- Public resources such as the Regent Park pool depend on market demand (especially condos)
- Some neighbourhoods are not attractive to developers, hence do not get any 'bonusing' goodies
- More generally, public resources tend to be provided to those areas/groups who organize and make demands
- Skills, time, education and political and media contacts are highly concentrated in certain groups and areas
- These not necessarily wealthy, but well connected, and disproportionately Canadian born

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# Today's cities: context for civic action

- In each city, is there a consensus about values and about goals for future? Or competition amongst n'hoods and groups for scarce public resources?
- Socioeconomic context of growing inequality between neighbourhoods may mean one needs to be careful about unintended effects of neighbourhood empowerment
- 'Seeing like a neighbour' not sufficient

# Multi-scalar approach

- Seeing like a neighbour still important but not sufficient
- Seeing like a city crucial for
  - public transportation and infrastructure
  - addressing economic inequality
  - addressing structural factors such as disadvantages faced by new immigrants

Seeing like a state

- both transportation infrastructure and social policy cannot be purely local

Seeing like a planet

