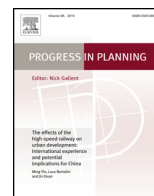




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Progress in Planning

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/pplan



Pursuing design excellence: Urban design governance on Toronto's waterfront

James T. White

Urban Studies, School of Social and Political Science, University of Glasgow, Room 216, 26 Bute Gardens, Glasgow G12 8RS, United Kingdom

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 10 December 2014

Received in revised form 24 June 2015

Accepted 25 June 2015

Keywords:

Toronto waterfront

Urban design

Planning

Governance

Waterfront redevelopment

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the governance of urban design on Toronto's waterfront. It examines the formation, mandate and powers of the Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation (TWRC) – now branded Waterfront Toronto – and critically evaluates the urban design policies, tools and mechanisms that have been put in place to support waterfront redevelopment and pursue a goal of 'design excellence' since 1999. The paper traces the key decisions that led to the creation of the TWRC by the federal, provincial and municipal governments and details the ambitious planning and design vision that emerged for the waterfront, but also argues that the TWRC was awarded a limited institutional mandate to fulfil its aims and objectives. The latter sections of the paper describe how a series of design-sensitive tools and mechanisms were introduced alongside the statutory planning framework for the waterfront to counter the governance and financial challenges faced by the Corporation. The paper contends that the Corporation is currently overseeing a broadly positive redevelopment programme that has been able to deliver a high quality public realm on the waterfront and facilitate design-led real estate development. An innovative public engagement strategy has been coupled with neighbourhood 'precinct' planning and design peer review to achieve these outcomes. It is argued that these positive shifts have begun to counter the long history of faltering post-industrial development and 'jurisdictional gridlock' that has plagued Toronto's waterfront since the 1960s.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. The governance of urban design

1.1. Introduction

The Toronto waterfront covers an area of 800 ha and is one of the largest redevelopment ventures of its kind in North America (Waterfront Toronto, 2010). Efforts to transform the city's waterfront are currently led by a public agency that is the steward of Toronto's waterfront redevelopment programme and the lead master planner of the waterfront. Since 1999 it has pursued a complex urban design, planning and real estate agenda and committed to a policy of 'design excellence' (TWRC, 2002a). To realize its agenda, the Corporation has employed a variety of instruments to govern urban design outcomes, including: design-led masterplanning, peer design review and public participation.

Systematic analyses of urban design processes across a broad sweep of time are rarely undertaken and, as Carmona (2014, 4) argues, "few urban design interventions are subjected to analysis that compares outcomes with processes of delivery". The purpose

of this paper is to do just that: unpack the urban design process on Toronto's waterfront and assess the initial outcomes. The paper examines the political context underpinning Toronto's waterfront redevelopment and the evolution of the most recent planning and design agenda; it assesses the tools and mechanisms used to deliver new buildings and public spaces; and, it evaluates a series of case studies to understand how the urban design process has shaped the waterfront's changing built form and public realm.

1.2. Toronto: a booming city

Toronto is the largest city in Canada. With a population of 2.8 million and a further 2.7 million people residing in its suburban hinterland, it is the commercial, financial and cultural hub of Canada and the gateway for around 30% of new immigrants to the country (City of Toronto, 2014). Toronto is famed for its diverse urban neighbourhoods and vibrant street life and, according to the widely quoted Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) liveability ranking, it is consistently recognized as one of the most liveable cities in the world (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2013). Toronto's waterfront district sits immediately south of the city's urban core on the shore of Lake Ontario (see Figs. 1 and 3).

E-mail address: jamest.white@glasgow.ac.uk.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.progress.2015.06.001>

0305-9006/© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.



Fig. 1. The Greater Toronto Area and the Toronto Waterfront Study Area. Map produced by the author using a base map from Google Maps.

The city's position in the EIU liveability ranking has helped precipitate a real estate boom which, despite a small decline in late 2008, has seen exponential growth ever since (Lehrer et al., 2010). In 2013, as many as 55,000 condominium units were under construction in the city (Austen, 2013) – a number that well surpasses the rate of development in other North American cities, including New York (Sturgeon, 2014). Condominium construction has mainly occurred in the city's downtown and surrounding inner city districts and has dramatically changed the image of the city. Where low-rise commercial and industrial buildings and parking lots once stood, a dense ribbon of glass and steel residential towers ranging from 20 to as many as 70 stories has



Fig. 2. Condominium development in Toronto's inner city. This image looks west from the Railway Lands with the Gardiner Expressway in the foreground. It illustrates the considerable amount of high-rise and high density residential development that has occurred in the last fifteen years on the post-industrial lands in-between Toronto's downtown core and the waterfront district. Photograph by the author, 2013.

arisen. The waterfront is thus at the epicentre of Toronto's redevelopment boom (Fig. 2).

1.3. A 'terrain of availability' on the waterfront

The story of redevelopment on Toronto's waterfront is not one of sustained 'design excellence', but rather a long saga fraught by "jurisdictional gridlock" (Eidelman, 2011, 263). Cast as a "terrain of availability" by the urban designer Ken Greenberg (1996, 195), the waterfront has been characterized by unrealized and quixotic planning and design visions since the early 1960s that have often been tarnished by government agencies vying for control over development rights. The construction of various commercial, residential and cultural buildings as well as numerous public spaces in the central portion of the waterfront during the 1970s and 1980s, have broadly failed to improve the visual and morphological qualities of the waterfront (see Fig. 4) and large areas of derelict land, especially in the eastern waterfront and the Port Lands (see Figs. 3 and 4), remain undeveloped.

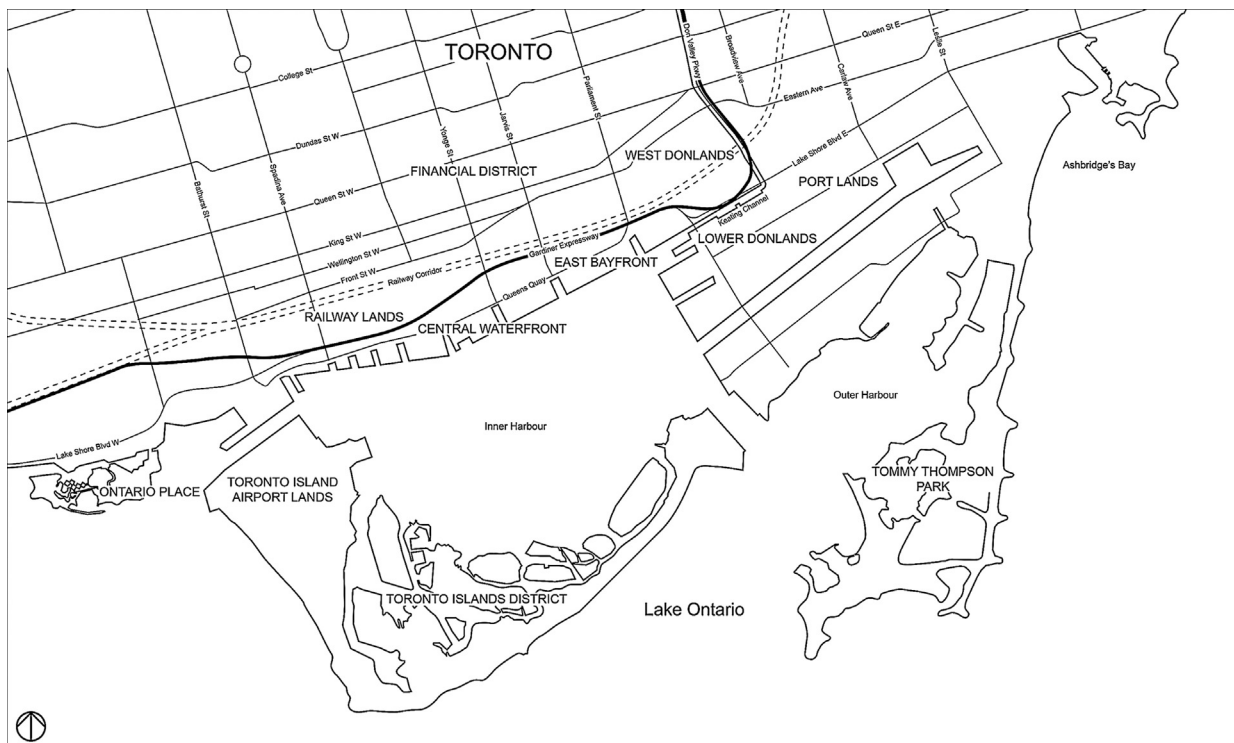


Fig. 3. Toronto's waterfront. Diagram by Tatiana White.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5115203>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5115203>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)