DESIGNING THE FUTURE:

A PERSPECTIVE ON RECENT TRENDS AND EMERGING ISSUES IN ONTARIO'S URBAN ENVIRONMENT

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PREFACE

From time to time the Centre publishes 'position' papers which represent personal views on urban issues of current concern, rather than the results of a research project or program. These papers are intended to be short, readable and provocative, without unnecessary detail but at the same time avoiding superficiality.

This paper is one example of this genre; at least it is short. It attempts to step back from the limitations of existing data and to speculate on emerging trends in the urban environments of Ontario and the potential social issues which are likely to flow from these trends over the next decade or two. If it stimulates discussion and the re-evaluation of existing views of our urban problems, it will have served its purpose.

The paper was initially prepared as a report for the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing of Ontario as part of an internal review of their policies and programs. The Ministry has generously agreed to the publication of the paper in this series so that it might reach a wider audience. Reactions to its contents would be appreciated.

It should be stressed that the paper represents the views of the author and does not necessarily agree with or reflect the views or policies of the Ministry or the Government of Ontario or those of the Centre for Urban and Community Studies.

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ABSTRACT

In Ontario, as elsewhere in the industrial world, changes in the chemistry of urban development have undermined many of our expectations of the future and set in motion a re-evaluation of existing policy priorities. This paper examines some of the sources of change, as they are expressed in Ontario's urban environments, and identifies areas in which future urban problems might arise. The broad issues reviewed include the potential effects of a restructuring of local economies and labour markets, increased housing inequalities and residential segregation, inter-community relations and social unrest, the squeeze on local public finance and the deteriorating environmental-ecological balance. The concluding section looks at alternative scenarios on future urban forms and the consequent policy responses.

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A Perspective on Recent Trends and Emerging Issues in Ontario's Urban Environment

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Looking Ahead: The Need and the Challenge

Interest in the future, at least in contemporary society, is based on two principal imperatives. One is the expectation that the future will be different, in important yet undefined ways, from the past, and the hope that it will be an improvement on the present. The second is the assumption that the future, at least part, can -- in fact must -- be intentionally shaped or designed. This view of the future, as evolutionary and malleable, must, however, be tempered by the widespread disillusionment with our ability to anticipate the course of future events. The dual challenge posed by this situation is that of recognizing the need to act as well as the inherent uncertainty of the future and the limits on our knowledge.

Since most residents of Ontario live and work in an urban environment, and all of its citizens enjoy the benefits and bear the costs of an urbanized society, an important part of their future is intimately linked to the evolving state of that environment. Although to date Ontario's cities have provided a relatively high quality of life, in terms of housing, neighbourhood and working conditions, even these levels are now no longer socially acceptable.

At the present time, as in most of the industrialized world, those environments also appear to be facing renewed pressures, from both external and internal sources. The global context of urbanization has changed dramatically in the last decade. A lengthy recession, seemingly random sectoral shifts, high levels of unemployment and inflation and monetary instability have shaken the international economic order. Slower population growth, massive demographic and occupational changes and the diffusion of alternative life styles have redefined the structure and behaviour of western society and altered our perceptions of work, family, nature, travel and the existing social order. Rapid technological innovation, pollution, repeated energy

crises and spreading social unrest have further underlined our inability to predict the future. Governments, in turn, at all levels are now confronted with new demands for their services, at precisely the same time that declining real revenues, increasing restraints on the exercise of power and widespread questioning of their existing policy objectives and legislative instruments have restricted their capacity to respond.

In this context, both the processes guiding urban development and our assessment of the specific problems which result from that development are rapidly being redefined. Although most of these problems are not historically unique, the combination we now face -- and will face in the future -- is unique. The challenge is to identify which trends and problems are new and significant, those which are long-term or short-term and those which are susceptible to direct policy manipulation by each level of government. Our goal should be not only to understand but to redesign our emerging urban future.

1.2 Purpose and Approach

This report is intended as a modest contribution to that understanding and to the task of formulating more effective public policies. It undertakes a systematic yet concise synthesis of recent and emerging trends in urban development in Ontario and abroad and provides a sketch of some of the future issues which may flow from these trends. The intention is to raise questions for review and debate, in a manner which will stimulate a reassessment of existing views and policy directions.

The approach is essentially personal and subjective, with the advantages and disadvantages which that approach entails. It is not a document based on new statistics or analysis, although the author and his colleagues are involved in a program of continuing research on urban growth and change in both Ontario and Canada. Nor is the paper based on the use of an unpatented crystal ball or novel forecasting technique. Finally, given the immense scope of the guidelines and the desire for brevity, the report inevitably is rather superficial. Few of the complex topics selected for discussion here receive the detailed exposure they warrant.

1.3 Organization of the Report

The report is presented in four sections. The following section provides a brief overview of recent trends in urban growth, beginning with the

international scene and then focussing on Canada and Ontario. The third section identifies some of the key sources of change and section four anticipates specific problem areas likely to emerge in Ontario's urban fabric over the next two decades. Section five brings these threads together in a brief discussion of alternative urban forms and draws out some of the policy implications and the broad challenges we face in designing a preferred urban future.

2. RECENT TRENDS IN URBAN DEVELOPMENT: A SYNTHESIS

The 1970s, it is widely asserted, ushered in a new era in the growth of cities. There is, however, little agreement on whether this decade represented the end of a period of sustained and rapid urbanization and rising living standards or the beginning of a new, but as yet undefined, period of slower, increasingly diverse and uncertain growth. Terms such as de-urbanization, counter-urbanization and the post-urban society have been coined to define the new reality; and urban decline has become the currency of a new growth industry. What is the evidence? What are the determinants of these trends? Where will they lead?

2.1 The Global Experience

Most highly industrialized western countries clearly do show attributes of a transition to a new and very different urban era. That transition can be characterized as combining slower overall population and industrial growth with even more rapid social and economic reorganization. New systems and arrangements of production, and new patterns of consumption are beginning to emerge. The dominant pattern, at the national level, has been one of decentralization. This has involved a reversal of long-standing migration flows -- of people, jobs and capital -- from the national periphery to the older industrial heartland. The other traditionally dominant flow, from rural areas and small towns into the larger metropolitan areas, has also been surpassed by the flow in the opposite direction.

As a result, the level of urbanization in most countries (by the conventional and now out-dated definition of the proportion of population living in urban areas) has stabilized or begun to decline. In the U.S. at least non-metropolitan growth now exceeds that of metropolitan growth, for the first time in a century. On the other hand, urban growth, in terms of

the expansion of specific cities, has continued. Some major centres, and many small towns and semi-rural areas -- notably those in retirement, resource or amenity-rich locations -- have undergone an unexpected revival.

Within cities these trends have had even more dramatic impacts. Out-migration, complemented by a transformation of local demographic structures, has produced a massive 'thinning-out' of the population of older cities and most inner city neighbourhoods. Even those cities which have undergone extensive middle-class 'gentrification' have registered substantial population declines during the 1970s. At the same time, the decentralization of manufacturing, in concert with a restructuring of the local economy, the withdrawal of private investment and government financial cut-backs, has reduced employment opportunities. As a consequence, those less fortunate cities face a declining economic base, environmental deterioration, increased residential segregation, social unrest and fiscal stress.

2.2 The Canadian and Ontario Experience

Urban growth in Ontario, and in Canada generally, has shown similar, although somewhat less pronounced tendencies in the post-1970 period. In broad form, four such tendencies stand out (see Figure 1). At the national level the population growth rate has declined to a level similar to that of the 1930s, primarily due to a massive drop in fertility. Household size has declined at an even faster rate due not only to the presence of fewer young children but also to the tendencies to earlier household formation, higher divorce rates and alternative living arrangements.

Urban decentralization has continued apace. The proportion of the population living in urban areas over 100,000 population has stabilized and the proportion living in the three largest centres in Canada has actually declined. In part this trend reflects a definitional underbounding of the metropolitan areas and in part it is a reflection of the decentralization of population (as well as jobs and capital) to the west -- away from the older industrial heartland -- and to the outer suburban fringe.

Ontario's growth rate in population and employment also slowed during the 1970s. The province has shown a net loss in terms of population exchanges with the rest of the nation through most of the decade. The overall balance of population movements has remained positive, however, only because of a large net gain through foreign immigration and a

FIGURE 1: DOMINANT DIRECTIONS OF URBAN GROWTH AND POPULATION REDISTRIBUTION IN CANADA AND ONTARIO.

Scale	Dominant Tendency	Description	Explanatory Variables
nation	decentralization	movement of population (jobs, wealth) from industrial heartland to the west	decline in manufacturing, growth of resource-based sectors; life-style and retirement migrations
national urban hierarchy	deconcentration	shift in balance of growth from larger to medium-size and smaller urban centres	decline in agglomeration economies, shift of growth to newer regions and to smaller centres; diffusion of technology and culture down the city-size hierarchy
provincial (regional urban system)	centralization	relative shift in growth toward central regions and away from periphery of the province	decline in selected resource sectors, and in older industrial locations; retirement migrations; search for amenity locations
metropolitan region	decentralization	movement outward from the metropolitan core to the surrounding fringe (the urban field)	congestion and land costs, building restrictions, transport facilities, out-migration of labour

substantial -- but declining -- influx from Quebec. Moreover, as national growth rates have slowed, a larger number of individual urban areas have registered absolute population losses. Canada's only two declining metropolitan areas -- Sudbury and Windsor -- are in Ontario; and several smaller cities are undergoing similar trends (e.g. North Bay and Brantford).

It is of course only after a lengthy period of sustained change that the impacts of these trends will become evident. Canada and Ontario have always had smaller places in decline, but seldom for a long period and not among centres of metropolitan status. The decline of these centres may indeed be short term, reflecting the severe problems of particular industries. Yet the appearance of such problems will undoubtedly persist especially if Ontario's competitive economic position continues to decline.

In contrast to the national trend to decentralization, population and economic growth in Ontario, as in most other provinces, is becoming more concentrated. In the post-1976 period for example, nearly 90 percent of provincial growth has been in the central region, most of it within a broad ring of 100 kilometres in width around metropolitan Toronto -- in what can be described as the Toronto 'urban field'. This area is increasingly the living (or activity) space for Toronto residents. With a few exceptions (Kitchener-Waterloo, London and in the fringe areas of Ottawa) most of the rest of the province is now in decline.

2.3 Future Directions

The best guess of researchers at this point in time is that such trends will likely continue at least through the 1980s. Inflation will continue at a high level and real incomes are unlikely to rise appreciably. No new baby-boom is anticipated as fertility levels are unlikely to rise significantly. The population will as a result age and rates of new household formation will slacken. Those areas formerly dependent on natural increase as a vehicle of growth will show the sharpest declines.

Population decentralization will also continue. Migration to the west will almost certainly continue through much of the decade, although perhaps at a reduced rate. The other major uncertainties in the population growth equation for Ontario are the sizes of the future in-flow of migrants from Quebec and from abroad. Both flows are largely outside the influence of the provincial government or its municipalities. If both do decline

substantially in the future, urban Ontario in the year 2000 will look quite different from that of 1980.

Viewed in historical perspective, however, the trends of the 1970s are not entirely unique, nor do they necessarily constitute new problems. Canada has had periods of very slow population growth before, notably in the 1840s, 1890s and 1930s, and periods of rapid growth, such as in the early 1900s, and in the 1950s and 1960s. Ironically, most participants in the current policy-making scene were trained in the latter two decades and thus they take rapid growth for granted. Similarly, the movement of growth and investment to the west also represents the continuation of a process which began nearly a century ago.

The relative decline in the larger metropolitan areas, the westward movement of growth and, to a lesser extent, the return migrations to the Atlantic region in the middle to late 1970s, mirror structural changes in the Canadian economy as well as the expression of a changing demography and migration preferences. The important point is that Canada's regions and cities (and Ontario's) are so diverse and specialized that any large sectoral shifts in the economy benefit certain urban areas at the expense of others. The stagnant manufacturing sector and the boom in natural resource sectors is the most obvious explanation for the regional differentials in growth rates summarized above.

Yet the relationships between economic and population change and urban growth are far more complex than is implied here. Different urban regions respond to national or international trends in different ways. Changes in production levels, prices, disposable income, population, labour force participation, capital movements and consumption do not necessarily go together. They are associated of course, but through a variety of different 'transfer' mechanisms. At present, unfortunately, we know very little about these relationships or how they are changing over time.

The trend toward a decentralization of population within metropolitan areas further illustrates this complexity. It combines two different movements: the out-migration of households from the older parts of the city, especially family households, in the search for jobs, amenities, lower densities and less expensive housing; and the redirection of in-migrants from abroad who formerly went first to the inner city or older suburbs. In contrast a smaller but growing (and highly selective) flow

of migrants has been taking place into the city centre, notably again in Toronto. These migrants tend to be younger, professional households with two-incomes and fewer (or no) children. The balance of these two movements is still toward decentralization, but the attributes of the populations involved in each flow are very different. The resulting population structures within both city and suburb will thus diverge over time even without a change in the size of the populations involved.

3. SOURCES OF CHANGE: SIGNPOSTS TO THE FUTURE

The preceding overview provides only a broad background canvas, but one which helps to locate particular issues facing the urban environment in Ontario and from which alternative paths of future changes can be drawn. Initially, however, it is essential to recall the different scales at which changes in that environment derive. Here discussion focusses on two specific spatial scales, that of relative shifts in growth among Ontario's cities as a whole and, second, that of changes at the intra-urban (or within-metropolitan area) scale.

Changes at both scales can be seen as deriving from distinctively different sources, some of which are largely external to the province (or Canada) while others are internal (within province or within cities). The former, for example, include changes in international tariffs and competition, technology, inflation, energy prices and the activities of multi-national corporations. The latter include changes in the local demographic structure and economic base, the importance attached to the presence or absence of environmental amenities, the degree of congestion, site conditions and the actions of provincial and local governments.

The argument is that it is the changing relative mix of these factors rather than any single factor which will shape the future urban environment in Ontario. Although there might be a degree of consensus on what a shopping list of these factors might look like, there is little or no consensus on which factors will be most important and what their impacts will be on our cities. In the following sections four major sources of change are selected for discussion: the economy, social change, technology and energy, and government.

3.1 Economic Restructuring

The restructuring of the international economic system currently underway has produced substantial sector shifts in investment, high unemployment, particularly in manufacturing, and has led to a downward revision of expectations on the future growth of industrial societies. The former may be a short-term cyclical phenomenon, the latter certainly is not. Heavily industrialized areas have been especially hard hit, although Ontario has to date been partially shielded by its industry mix, tariff walls and by the relative newness of its industrial infrastructure. Nevertheless, low productivity growth, high labour costs and declining rates of plant modernization have reduced the province's comparative advantage and rendered its urban economies more vulnerable to international competition.

As a result, many industrial cities have seen their economic base undermined, with widespread and cumulative ramifications for maintaining levels of income, public services, infrastructure, housing and the quality of life generally. Growth in the service sector has not been sufficient to replace the decline in manufacturing employment, pushing up overall unemployment levels. Increasingly, local, provincial and even national governments feel that the economy is beyond their control and influence. The need for readjusting the local economic base to these new conditions has become a paramount public concern in most countries, but is in turn handicapped by slow revenue growth and by accompanying trends in population migration, social aspirations, technological change and government policies.

3.2 Social Change: Demography, Life Style and Attitudes

The importance of the social, demographic and life style changes which have occurred in all industrialized societies in the last two decades has already been acknowledged. Lower fertility levels, smaller households, fewer children and increasingly diverse life styles have changed the face of our cities and the needs and demands expressed by their residents. Even if the crest of the demographic transition has now passed, its effects will be felt for decades to come.

The population is slowly aging and aggregate dependency ratios (i.e. the ratio of non-working to total population) have begun to shift from an emphasis on children to one on the elderly. In Ontario, as in Canada, the proportion over 65 will increase from the present 9 to nearly 13 percent by

the end of the century. The dependency ratio, now at a post-war low, will increase slowly throughout the rest of the century, but its age composition and thus its consequences in terms of expenditures will shift dramatically.

Aging, although crucial, is not the only or the principal problem. The ratio of elderly population forecast for Ontario in the year 2000 is still less than that which several European countries presently cope with. If, however, the elderly population becomes concentrated in a few local jurisdictions, the fiscal strains will be severe. Public resources will indeed need to be diverted to the over-65s, and particularly to the very elderly, but the problems are solvable (at least until the year 2000, when the problem explodes).

More difficult over the next decade or so will be coping with the rapidity of changes flowing from the series of mini-booms and sharp declines in several age cohorts which are now markedly different in size. These shifts -- which in combination we can term as the 'population factor' -- will alter the growth and composition of the labour force, tax rates, pensions, housing demands, the need for public and private services, commercial facilities and recreational activities. They will also redefine the kinds of arrangements and locational choices made by households with respect to where to live and work. Some of these changes will be gradual; others will be more sudden. When these shifts are overlaid on changes in attitudes -- to authority, to work, to leisure and to life style -- and on changes in the family as an economic unit -- notably the rapid increase in labour force participation rates for married women -- the potential impact on our cities is even more substantial. Whether these trends continue in the future is pure speculation, but the probability is high that they will.

3.3 Communications, Technology and Energy

Adding further uncertainty to this picture are recent and projected changes in technology, communications, energy and commodity prices. Rapid technological change -- which again is largely beyond the control of local and provincial governments -- has reduced the life-span of fixed capital investments, revalued labour force skills, rendered many regulatory controls irrelevant and more generally added to the unpredictability of economic and urban growth.

Communications innovations have simultaneously had two opposite effects.

On the one hand, they have vastly expanded the volume and spatial scale over which social interaction, travel and economic linkages are possible and manifest. On the other hand they have reduced the need for direct interaction and movement of many kinds. One obvious consequence is that the element of choice in interaction, at least for those plugged-in to the system, has increased. Thus the potential for future change expands accordingly, and the predictability of these changes declines.

Considerable publicity has been given to the specific impacts of innovations such as two-way communication systems, and notably the impact of the micro-chip computer technology, on systems of production, distribution and consumption. Will the spread of these technologies alter the nature and organization of industry and employment, especially traditional female jobs, and reorder the locations of residences and offices? Will they thus transform social networks, the distribution of voters, the journey to work and the structure of urban and suburban land uses? Will large cities become out-dated? Will the home become the office of the future?

The obvious answer is that no one knows. Most predictions for sudden changes are likely to be exaggerated, at least over the short term of the next decade. Communications innovations in the past have generally not become substitutes for travel, social interaction or face-to-face contact. They have instead been complementary and mutually self-reinforcing. Moreover, applying new technology to a developed landscape is a slow and difficult process, particularly to an already urbanized landscape in which so many other and interrelated factors determine the direction of change. Yet, the past is now less useful as a guide to the future. Technology will alter the way we do many things, as well as the structure of manufacturing and clerical employment and thus will redefine the local economy and the nature of social interaction in our cities.

The impacts of rising energy prices, excluding the possibility of an absolute shortfall, are likely to be more muted. It is generally accepted that low prices and the lack of a coherent energy policy in earlier decades, encouraged a form of urban development which was energy intensive and is now obviously wasteful. The consequences of past decisions and behaviour are not easily reversed, however, even if policies are altered.

Ironically the trends in urban development outlined briefly in section 2 are, for the most part, in precisely the opposite direction that one might

expect in an energy-short world. This is true not only in Ontario, which has stubbornly resisted higher oil prices, but in other jurisdictions where energy is priced at its true marginal cost. A decentralized economy and dispersed population distribution, for example, usually require high levels of energy consumption. The tendency to write-off investments in older areas in preference for newer locations also adds to the use of both energy and capital. The latter two elements also do not appear, despite what theory suggests, to be substitutes.

In the final analysis, the potential effects of rising energy prices on the form of our cities remains indeterminate. And obviously these impacts depend not only on future increases in price levels, but on parallel changes in other sectors and in the prices of other commodities. Clearly, substantial adjustments to higher prices can also be made within the existing urban fabric. Changes in life style, such as a gradual rearranging of housing and work locations to reduce commuting; shifts in transportation usage through increased substitution among different transit modes and through smaller and more fuel-efficient automobiles; and improvements in energy conservation generally, can significantly reduce the consumption of non-renewable energy.

Nevertheless, some parts of our urban environment as well as certain sectors and social groups, are more vulnerable to rising energy costs than are others. Isolated suburban developments, far removed from places of work, have already been affected through reduced demands for housing. Those households whose income is low and/or fixed, and those dependent on low transportation costs have been penalized disproportionately and will be more so in the future. Residential densities will almost certainly increase, at least for the poor, and building designs will become more responsive to the costs of energy.

3.4 The Changing Role of Governments

In the midst of these economic and social reorganizations, the role of government -- and thus of intergovernmental relations -- has also been changing. Partly as a response to external conditions and partly through their own internal momentum, governments everywhere have been pushed into redefining their grounds of responsibility, revising their policies and reassessing their instruments for intervention. Some see in this process a new crisis of legitimation for the public sector, but more likely it is

both a gradual and essentially pragmatic process of readjustment.

As change takes place in the sources and dimensions of our urban problems, and in the scale at which our urbanized society is organized, so too does government change, but not necessarily at the same rate or in the same directions. In Canada and Ontario, as in many other jurisdictions, the recent swing of the political pendulum has been toward deregulation, of the economy and some social services, and a decentralization of public responsibility, in both fiscal and constitutional terms, to lower levels of government.

Although these are to a degree appropriate and sensitive shifts, they are nonetheless in broad outline at odds with the increasingly dense and broadening spatial scale of economic integration, population migration and social interaction reflected in the preceding trends. The latter instead call for both larger and more flexible administrative units for governing our urbanized landscape. They are also occurring at the same time as the ability of local government to respond has in many instances been diminished by a reduced flow of revenues and rising costs. We simply cannot ignore the widening differences between the resource base of local governments, often through no fault of their own. Such governments are not equal creations.

Thus there seems to be a growing mismatch between the organization of government and the structure of the society (e.g. the urban field or activity space of households and firms) to which it is responsible. Already in Ontario many of the regional government units established between the early 1950s and the late 1960s are out-moded, both in their range of functions and in their territorial boundaries. The most obviously out-moded is Metro Toronto, which as time passes bears increasingly less relationship to the broader socio-economic entity -- the urban field -- in which over a third of all Ontarians live, work and play. Most of the new jobs and housing units added to the Toronto market over the next two decades will be added outside the boundaries of Metro. The problem will be to find appropriate administrative arrangements to manage this evolving agglomeration.

Any rearrangement of current governmental responsibilities in Canada is -- needless to say -- complicated by the present constitutional settlement and by the mounting pressures for a further decentralization of power and new revenue-sharing agreements among different levels of government.

In the climate of international economic uncertainty described earlier, notably in terms of manufacturing, interest rates and commodity prices, the federal government has the most -- albeit limited -- capability to deal with those externally-derived factors affecting urban and regional growth. Local government has the least, and as noted a declining capacity to respond. One additional consequence of further political decentralization, without a reassessment of appropriate levels of responsibility, is likely to be a wider differential between winners and losers, both at the regional and the municipal level. The implications -- in social, fiscal and political terms -- for many local governments in Ontario could be immense.

4. SPECIFIC URBAN ISSUES

The range of specific issues which flow from the above trends is broad indeed. Here we select for further discussion five potentially serious areas of concern for Ontario cities: labour markets and employment shifts, housing and residential segregation, social change and inter-community relations, local public finance and infrastructure and the question of environmental quality and ecological balance. These issues are then used to define alternative future urban forms and their policy implications in the subsequent section.

4.1 Local Labour Markets and Employment

The combined pressures of economic restructuring and demographic change have already acted to disrupt many local labour markets in Ontario and indeed throughout Canada. Rising unemployment, although not by origin an urban problem, is most concentrated and visible in our larger cities. Because unemployment is more concentrated it generates additional spillover effects, on the environment, on social and family relations, on public revenues and on the alienation of the young. The social costs of these disruptions are growing.

Most Ontario cities have also witnessed an extensive relocation of different types of employment, for the most part to suburban or exurban locations. This movement has made possible, if not forced, a further out-migration of the labour force, often into areas in which the limited range of employment opportunities makes them more vulnerable to subsequent swings of the economic pendulum.

A further and substantial restructuring of the local economies of urban Ontario is likely to occur in the future, and again the scale will differ markedly between cities and regions. It is easy to suggest yet difficult to defend any predictions as to exactly where and in what sectors and occupations these changes will be most pronounced. Although manufacturing is clearly the most susceptible sector in the immediate future, in the longer term structural changes in the service sector may be more significant. These shifts, as emphasized earlier, will impact directly on a range of urban concerns: such as the maintenance of urban infrastructure, on public transportation, the local revenue base and on social service provision (e.g. day care).

The difficult policy question here is how to facilitate adjustment in the local economic base to sectoral shifts, and in some areas to an absolute decline in employment, without impairing local or provincial economic efficiency or damaging the social fabric.

4.2 Housing: All Fall Down

Housing problems it seems have always been with us and, despite frequent assertions to the contrary, will almost certainly be so in the year 2000 and beyond. It is ironic that at a time when we appear to have reduced the long-standing national problems of substandard quality and an inadequate overall supply, other problems have risen to take their place. The preceding trends will solicit a number of new or attenuated difficulties in housing over the next two decades. In many instances these problems will be more localized, complex and difficult to resolve than those of the immediate past. Some of these difficulties reflect the simple fact that aspirations have out-paced society's ability to produce new housing of the right kind and price in the appropriate location.

Other emerging problems, however, are more fundamental. Four such difficulties stand out: 1) an increasingly inequitable distribution of housing resources; 2) shortages of capital and maintenance of an aging stock; 3) increased social segregation; and 4) the emergence of distinctively soft 'underbellies' both in the private market and in the public sector created by low levels of demand, high costs or poor planning.

In an urban environment, all four of these issues are interrelated. If the growth of jobs and population continues to taper off, and public

sector expenditure cut-backs persist, maintenance of an aging housing stock will become a major social concern. Pressures will continue to be greatest in the rental sector, with or without rent review, at least until interest rates decline. In addition, with highly differentiated urban growth, a further polarization in the social and geographical distribution of housing resources in Ontario is likely. In the most favoured and accessible locations housing will remain a scarce resource, prices and rents will rise and vacancies will remain low. In less favoured locations, surplus housing will become more common, maintenance levels will decline, and prices will fall. Such market imperfections, as in many western European cities, will become more entrenched, more firmly embedded in the landscape and thus more difficult to remove. As a result, residential segregation will likely increase, and become more visible, leading most crucially to the fears and suspicions which breed social distrust.

Of more specific concern should be the future of many of the high-rise apartment blocks, notably those which are badly maintained, poorly managed and located in marginal environments. The problem is of course potentially more severe for those buildings which house a disproportionate number of poor or disadvantaged households. In western Europe very few new residential high-rises are now being built, and only for ownership or rental by the well-to-do. Changing attitudes and life styles, poor initial design and a lack of maintenance have combined to generate an anti-high-rise feeling among those low-income households with little choice in where they live, or small children, or both. The high-rise, for many, has become a residence of last resort; a permanent rather than the expected temporary address, and thus has become the source and object of increasing anti-social behaviour. They often act to dehumanize, to isolate and to alienate.

If real incomes rise, population growth slows and redistribution continues, a number of soft housing submarkets are likely to develop. Among the first areas of the housing stock to suffer will be the anonymous suburban apartment tower. When tenants leave, rents and thus revenues decline, maintenance falls and operating costs rise. Fewer tenants then move in and the spiral of disinvestment and decay accelerates. Those who cannot move are trapped, adding to their feeling of alienation. By the year 2000, urban Ontario could inherit a staggering problem of high-rise vacancies and deterioration. The current difficulties with some AHOP housing will seem minor in comparison.

4.3 Inter-community Relations

Of critical policy concern, in light of the rapid socio-ethnic-racial transformation of Ontario's post-war urban population, particularly in Toronto and other large centres, is that of inter-community relations. For the most part this diversity in social structure is welcome, constructive and economically valuable. Ontario, however, has been slow to adapt to this diversity. Nor is the province free of ethnic and racial prejudice, as Kenora and Penetang illustrate; in fact it has yet to be tested. The ethnic population composition of urban Ontario will almost certainly continue to change over the next decade or two, reflecting anticipated shifts in future immigration flows and the age structure of earlier migrations, but again at a reduced rate.

If this social transformation is also combined with more polarized housing markets, increased residential segregation, and high unemployment, we could witness more widespread antagonism and social unrest in our cities. The recent troubles in several English inner cities are perhaps still too fresh in our minds to permit objective assessments on this issue, and there are few studies underway which would provide solid empirical evidence. Nevertheless, recall that such unrest is not only socially destructive, but it has an immediate and negative effect on the local economy, levels of public and private investment and the quality of urban living environments.

The probability of future trouble can be reduced, assuming at least that the economy does not go into a severe tail-spin, if explicit but sensitive efforts are made to keep the political doors and other avenues of social communication open. As the English experience has clearly demonstrated, efforts to increase social 'control' without appropriate measures to facilitate inter-group contact and understanding, will simply exacerbate social unrest.

4.4 Local Public Finance

In response to the changing chemistry of growth outlined above, most urban areas have felt an increasing squeeze on their fiscal resources. Since public finance is in detail beyond the scope of this paper, and given that wide differences in institutional arrangements among countries and provinces make it difficult to generalize, here we examine only the associated urban implications rather than internal accounting problems of government

finance. In some countries the revenue base of many cities has been declining in real terms; indeed there are signs in some cities of a complete collapse of that base during the 1980s.

The major reasons for this squeeze are perhaps obvious. Revenues have declined because of disinvestment (in both private and public sectors) and a flight of capital, the out-migration of revenue-producing activities, strains in the local labour market, inadequate taxing powers, limitations on transfer payments from senior levels of government, and voter resistance to higher taxes. The dependence of local governments on property taxes also makes them especially vulnerable to changes in the location and composition of economic growth and population migration.

This decline in revenue has occurred in many communities precisely at the time when the costs of the services they provide, and the demands on their resources due to social and demographic changes, have increased. The diminished capacity of local authorities to respond to such demands, in turn, has had severe political repercussions and considerable redistributive effects. Many are caught in a classic catch-22 situation in which efforts to increase revenues through higher rates and new tax schemes also serve as inducements to further disinvestment and out-migration. People and firms do vote with their feet. Senior governments are caught in a different dilemma: the desire to increase local autonomy and accountability in fiscal matters while maintaining national or province-wide standards, efficiency in the allocation of resources, and social equity, all at no extra cost.

Ontario municipalities are not for the most part in as serious fiscal difficulty as those in many other jurisdictions, but the signs are in the same direction. Again, the problems are likely to be diverse and localized, particularly in areas where the local economy collapses, or the demographic transition is severe. In many other countries it is now generally agreed that substantially different forms of local government financing will be necessary over the next decade. Can Ontario be far behind?

4.5 The Environmental-Ecological Balance

The relationship between urbanization and both the natural and man-made environment of our cities has always been an uneasy and unequal one in Ontario in the past. The conservation and preservation movements, which

began in the 1960s and took legislative form in the 1970s, have helped to restore that balance somewhat. Since then, however, the imperatives of economic rejuvenation and fiscal entrenchment have diverted some of the political attention. The danger is that the broader forces outlined above will further subvert public resources and community action while the problems mount.

Urban environmental quality, except perhaps in the cases of air and water pollution (e.g. the effects of toxic substances) and waste disposal, is often subtle, difficult to define and even harder to treat. But it is crucial, and the downstream impacts of a decline in quality are considerable. The future expansion, for instance, of the space used by urbanites for housing, shopping and recreation, will place severe burdens on the countryside and fragile habitats of the urban fringe, particularly if energy costs restrict the distances people are willing to travel for leisure and if rural second homes become more common.

Within built-up areas the quality of the man-made environment is subject to equivalent pressures, although the criteria of assessment differ. Environments which are decaying, or are simply 'mean', because of poor design, a lack of investment or inadequate controls, tend to discourage a sense of social responsibility and encourage indifference, if not vandalism. These in turn feed-back on levels of private investment, building maintenance, social service needs and the local population's commitment to improving the public environment.

In Ontario's cities we have seen examples of both the positive effects of environmental improvement on selected inner city neighbourhoods (and employment) and the negative effects of environmental decay on other inner city and some suburban neighbourhoods. Many older suburban neighbourhoods, as in U.S. cities, are vulnerable to environmental decline in the future if the conditions cited above appear at the same time.

5. ALTERNATIVE URBAN FUTURES AND PLANNING RESPONSES

The preceding trends and emerging issues could lead to very different kinds of future living conditions and urban forms. At this point it seems appropriate to pull these disparate considerations and tendencies together as a basis for speculating on the future form and environment of cities in Ontario. In one obvious sense that future is here now. The bulk of the

physical infrastructure, housing and population of the year 2000 is here now. In another more relevant sense, as the following discussion suggests, the future remains to be designed.

5.1 On the Distribution of Growth and Decline

On a province-wide scale, the prevailing scenario is one of slower overall population growth and highly variable economic changes. The result will be a polarization of that growth in selected parts of the province. The differences between cities which are winners and losers will therefore become more evident, and there will be more of the latter than the former, and more of the latter than there were before. Many urban places in Ontario will see zero population growth, and several an absolute decline, over the next two decades. Accordingly, local population forecasts and plans for future growth will need to be completely rewritten. Expectations must be brought into line with reality.

The combination of trends described earlier -- the 'population factor', the changing activity patterns of Ontario households, the differential urban impacts of external economic adjustments, the fiscal pressures and environmental decay -- ensure that urban growth will continue to pose serious policy problems during the 1980s and 1990s. Rapid growth is clearly no longer the dominant issue, although it will remain crucial in selected suburban areas. Instead it is questions relating to the distribution and composition of growth and decline which will assume centre stage. These questions relate not only to the location of growth (and decline), but to the mix of jobs, households and social service needs which are involved.

Urban decline, at least in terms of population, is not of course a problem by definition. It may instead mean stability, peace and a chance to catch up to and correct earlier mistakes. In the past rapid growth has enabled us to cover many of these mistakes. But when and where population decline is combined with stagnant or declining real incomes and job shifts, tensions increase and the spiral of decay begins. Decline also redistributes wealth in ways different from those under conditions of growth, and in ways we clearly do not understand.

5.2 Urban Form: Contrasting Scenarios

The future form or internal structure of Ontario cities still remains

to be determined. Perhaps the most concise method of illustrating the alternatives is with two simple and contrasting scenarios. At one end the trends to a decentralization of jobs, alternative life styles, and new communications technologies point to a future urban form which is increasingly decentralized, low-density and dispersed. Earlier retirement, flexible and shorter work-weeks, the attraction of country living and a reaction against rising congestion costs, crime and pollution in the core of the city could facilitate this pattern. It may be that housing would be more family oriented, job locations could be further decentralized and the distribution of journeys to work would be more polarized between short and long distance trips, thus discouraging the use of public transit.

In a context of slow growth such decentralization would leave an inner city that is deteriorating and thinned of its population, as has already happened in a number of American and British cities. It might also produce a rural-urban fringe that faces severe problems of service provision, ecological-environmental destruction, increasing traffic congestion and the loss of good agricultural land. Thus, some fringe area municipalities would face the massive fiscal burdens of rapid growth, while others would have excess and underused infrastructure.

At the other extreme is the movement toward a more centralized, compact and higher-density city, reflecting perhaps rising energy costs, an aging population and other life style changes. This form would be in general more adult-oriented, with higher proportions of two-income households, extensive redevelopment, shorter journeys to work, smaller housing units and higher land prices. Urban sprawl under this scenario would be sharply curtailed, following the reduced demand for suburban single-family housing and low-density industrial sites. The inner city in turn could become the exclusive territory of the very rich, and the forgotten poor. Private investment would turn inward toward the central core and substantial public investments would be necessary for improved transit facilities and infrastructure.

Under slow growth conditions the latter scenario could lead to problems which are the reverse from those above. Most notable would be the potential decline of the older, or less attractive suburbs and poorly located exurban developments. In metropolitan Toronto, as elsewhere, these suburbs have already gone through a social transition, and in some instances

they now show many of the attributes of the classic poorly-serviced and decaying inner city.

In reality of course the path to the future will be much more complex and uncertain than is implied by these two examples. In Ontario the most likely scenario involves a balance of those two alternatives, but with different urban areas in the province arrayed along a continuum between the two extremes. Those cities with a weak historical and commercial core, a concentration of heavy industry, pollution problems and a declining rate of growth will likely follow the path to further dispersal. Those cities with a commercially strong and attractive core, with a relative absence of environmental disamenities and an economy based on services will more likely move in the opposite direction. In larger cities, notably Toronto and Ottawa, both tendencies can and will appear together.

Public policy decisions (or non-decisions) will heavily influence which alternative path any given city will follow. Over the next few years decisions on the timing, scale and location of infrastructure, social service provision, new investments in transportation, land use regulations and local government financing will effectively lock-in certain options on urban development while excluding others. In this sense our urban future will be designed, but for the most part inadvertently.

With the possible exceptions of Toronto, the Kitchener-Waterloo-Guelph area, London and Ottawa, urban areas in the rest of the province will face different and often relatively more severe problems. Their size makes it more difficult for them to absorb substantial shifts in household or job composition and in income levels. Toronto, on the other hand, is sufficiently large, with a diverse economy and linkages that span the nation, that it can better withstand economic adjustments and demographic transitions.

5.3 What Role for Planning?

These new trends call into question almost all the basic premises upon which the current machinery of urban planning is based. Over the last three decades, planning in Ontario, as in most western industrial states, has gone through a series of distinct phases. Each was based on the collective perception of a set of problems and each called forth a given range of policy responses, both conditioned by the then current socio-

economic and political climate.

Thus in the 1950s and 1960s the central concern was rapid urban growth, in population, building, jobs and traffic. In the late 1960s and early 1970s the focus began to shift to conservation, environmental concerns and the rehabilitation of older housing and neighbourhoods. By the mid 1970s, attention had again shifted to the social implications of planning and associated housing policies, the delivery of social services and equity questions. By this time, of course, social concern over urban environments had spread well beyond the unitary concept and restricted instruments of traditional land use planning.

What of the 1980s and 1990s? One trend is already apparent: the emphasis on the economy, jobs, local finance and the public sector generally, mirrored for instance in the preparation of local economic development strategies. Accordingly, the hunt for jobs and revenue sources is on, unfortunately at precisely the time when employment growth is slow, or in some areas negative. This movement, although considerably more advanced in the cities of western Europe and the northeastern U.S. than in Ontario, is nonetheless misguided. It tends to narrow and oversimplify the issues involved and to result in a shifting of problems from one area to another.

Ironically, this focus on the economy brings urban planning more squarely into the realm of regional economic policy, where in part it has always belonged. Local housing and labour markets, for example, almost always extend far beyond the boundaries of local municipalities, and in Ontario these markets also extend beyond the boundaries of the new regional government areas. As a result, the benefits and costs of public and private investments almost inevitably spillover into other political jurisdictions -- as a form of unintended transfer payment.

The Ontario Planning Act, then, is now increasingly out-moded. It has over time come to encompass a decreasing proportion of the mix of variables which influence urban development, and thus is of declining interest to the population and equally to its governments. Land use planning at the local level, however, will continue to be an essential component of sound civic administration. It must, however, be linked more effectively than in the past to broader planning functions, such as in social service provision and regional planning which also reflect the increasingly broad scale at which our society is organized. The responsibility here lies basically

with the province.

A second trend, already under debate elsewhere, is planning for urban decline. In Ontario urban decline is not as yet widespread, but it will almost certainly become more so in the future. What does happen to the planning process when a city or region is not growing or in fact is declining in absolute terms? As noted earlier, the challenge is one of devising procedures for a rational contraction, that is for reducing the size of both physical and administrative structures to meet the needs of a smaller and more diverse population and a reduced economic base. Although we have little experience in 'planned' decline, we do know that most of our existing planning instruments, geared as they are to controlling growth, are inappropriate.

Left to the unregulated market, the social and environmental costs of decline will be larger, and more unevenly distributed than are the costs of rapid growth. In this context, public intervention through the planning process becomes more -- rather than less -- crucial. It will, however, have to be more sensitive, flexible, precise and integrative than in the past. What is called for is a new planning process which extends beyond urban or regional planning to incorporate both social and economic dimensions, as well as the actions of the public sector itself.

5.4 The Challenge Ahead: Concluding Remarks

By international standards Ontario has had a relatively short urban history and one for the most part devoid of serious large-scale urban problems. Ontario's urban environments are generally safe, clean and pleasant -- although often dull and unimaginative -- places to live. As an optimist the author believes that this environment can be maintained if not improved in the future. The urban fabric is, however, vulnerable to both internal and external pressures, in a number of specific locations and sectors. Indeed, it will be a challenge to maintain the existing quality of those environments through the turbulence and uncertainty of the next two decades.

The new urban realities identified earlier in this paper do not, unfortunately, offer a very clear guide to that future. Population and urban growth will continue in Ontario, but at a reduced rate. Projecting any of these trends forward for two decades, however, is based on a series

of 'ifs' most of which are implicit or unstated. If the economy deteriorates, or if high interest rates and inflation continue for a long period, and real incomes decline, or if specific sectors (such as automobiles) disappear, all existing forecasts are void. If, on the other hand, real incomes increase, the employment level remains high and thus leisure time and consumption levels increase, a very different scenario will be necessary. At the same time we have assumed no major 'surprises' -- an assumption which is likely to be wrong.

Despite this uncertainty, it has been argued above that significant changes are likely in Ontario's future urban environment. There are a number of potential and emerging issues which warrant close monitoring and reassessment. In particular the paper has stressed that urban issues can only be defined, analyzed and tackled as a cluster of interrelationships. To attempt to isolate one sector or local area from this cluster for direct policy intervention is likely to be counter-productive. The effect of doing so is usually to shift problems around, often into another jurisdiction.

In a world of slower population growth, rapid economic restructuring, technological change and increasing uncertainty, policy-makers must revise their priorities and objectives as well as their methods of intervention. The broad urban policy questions facing government in the future will cut across most sectoral issues. Five such questions have permeated the preceding review:

1) adaptability: adjusting an existing urban fabric -- in terms of its economic and fiscal base, housing stock, infrastructure, and administrative structure -- to meet rapidly changing demands;

2) disparities: responding to the potential for substantially increased differentials between regions, cities and social groups, in terms of the quality of living and working conditions;

3) uncertainty: planning for and where possible constraining the volatility of external and internal events affecting Ontario's urban environments;

4) reallocation: revising our criteria for allocating public (and private) resources to reflect the future balance of needs and expectations;

5) autonomy and constitutional rearrangements: the redesign of governmental organization, and thus of intergovernmental relations to conform to the realities of an urbanized society.

These points suggest that the most important set of issues facing our cities over the next decade will be one of using our existing social resources, in terms of local manpower, housing, infrastructure and public services, more

efficiently and equitably. In many instances we must learn how to do more with less, as in the case with local public finance, and to build in more flexibility in allocating new public resources, as in the cases of social services, infrastructure and new transportation facilities. At the same time we must reduce the potential that these changes have for creating larger and larger inequalities between cities and social groups in the future. We must, in addition, develop administrative machinery for allowing some cities to contract in size, or to grow old gracefully, without undue social or financial consequences.

We must also establish the means for improving the match between the organization of government and that of the emerging urban society it is supposed to manage. In particular, there must be more effective mechanisms for co-ordinating the actions of local governments (and the impacts of private sector decisions) in those areas where urban development has spread across the boundaries of several local jurisdictions. Without such co-ordination we will recreate many of the problems of haphazard development typical of the 1950s, except that in a slow growth future the costs will be relatively greater, more visible and less socially acceptable.

A more diverse and demanding population in the future also calls for greater variety and flexibility in the design of our housing stock, neighbourhoods and social services. We will need to rethink our strategies for the provision of new living environments and services, and for the reuse of existing urban environments, to reflect the attributes and behaviour of that population.

The question of precisely who is to design this urban future, and on what criteria, remains to be answered. Is it to be primarily the private market or government; or a partnership of private and public initiatives? And, among the latter, which level of government should do what? How much autonomy should local government have in a society which is both increasingly interdependent and locally diverse? How should the services provided by such governments be financed?

Much of what happens in urban Ontario in the future, as stressed earlier, will depend on events taking place and decisions made outside of the provincial boundaries. Yet a considerable part of that future, indeed even the impacts of exogeneous changes, are shaped by government decisions within Ontario and by the shifting interfaces between government, the private

sector and households. As our society becomes more varied and more integrated in the future, the differential impacts of government actions or inactions -- directly and indirectly -- on our urban environment will inevitably increase in relative importance, despite widespread assertions to the contrary. The role of government will increase precisely because of the increasing diversity of our cities and neighbourhoods.

What we must avoid, as concerned citizens and policy-makers, is the tendency to make glib generalizations as well as overly-simplified and hasty policy responses. Most such reactions turn out to be wrong or misdirected and in the longer term are often counter-productive. Our urban future is indeed uncertain and the factors acting to shape that environment are variable and complex. Even if we feel that we know roughly how many people there will be in Ontario in the year 2000, that tells us little about exactly where, in what environments and how they will live. Nor will urban issues be solved easily or quickly. Many of our urban policy initiatives in Ontario, as in Canada, have not been particularly successful in the past because they have been partial, inconsistent and short-lived.

Neither complexity nor uncertainty should be a licence for inaction or the paralysis of our decision-making apparatus. Nor does a forecast of slower urban growth imply that there should be less direct government intervention in urban development in the future. That would simply leave the design of our cities to a combination of unequal market forces, the unintended effects of other government policies and random external events. Instead, it should be an incentive to undertake careful analysis and more sensitive, thoughtful but consistent policy responses.

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This paper has intentionally avoided making reference to existing studies and data on urban development in Ontario. Indeed for many of the issues cited there are no recent studies or concrete data. Nevertheless the paper does draw much of its momentum and insights from a number of background studies and reports. Among those publications which the reader may find useful in pursuing the themes of the paper are the following:

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