PLACE MAKING AS A MEDIATOR FOR THE VULNERABILITIES OF ECONOMICS-BASED INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT: THE ALEXANDRA SQUARE REVIEW

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This paper is dedicated to my mother Sylva Mascotto; it is with her conviction and steadfast dedication that I stand here today and have been graced with the opportunity to attend such an honourable school and program.
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ABSTRACT

Place-making is a multi-faceted theoretical approach to the design, planning, and even management of a community or development’s assets, potential, and needs with the intention of creating public spaces or private accessible places that promote people’s well-being. In a municipal setting, economic development is the process in which a city or region improves the economic and political well-being of its people by incentivizing and politicizing private sector investments for multi-residential, retail, financial, or commercial programs and developments. This technique of encouraging development in the form of built infrastructure to accommodate emerging economic trends comes with its rewards and punishments to the agents involved. However, place-making can often serve as a mediating factor that cushions the pitfalls of riding development on economic waves or act as a lifeboat to decaying urban forms; such as the case for the Undermount Offices at Alexandra Square located in downtown Hamilton, Ontario. A large two-building office complex built at towards the end of the post-war economic boom and host to a popular bar and grill restaurant which served as the heart of an office complex riddled with disaster, disinvestment, and the issues of a postmodern economy that plagued its existence. Moreover, after a series of rash decisions at City Hall at the turn of the new millennium, in a last-ditch effort to transform derelict and empty office towers in the downtown core, the Undermount Offices currently stand as a condo development with no shred of its rich social past that once kept it afloat nor any community involvement its supposed revival. Considering the climate of Rust Belt cities towards the end of the twentieth century it is easy to sympathize with local politicians at the time, but to protect our collective built environment in the future from the pendulum swaying of market economics, a new set of policies moulded out of place-making is to be explored.
CHAPTER 1: PLACE-MAKING DESIGN AND REAL-ESTATE DEVELOPMENT

Preamble

Growing up in the Riverdale West neighbourhood of Hamilton, Ontario was never an easy feat. Dominated by mid-century apartment buildings, by the time of my birth the area was dilapidated and had fallen from its original place as a suburban paradise for middle-class bachelors to subsidized housing for the elderly and later for newcomers to the country. The decline in the maintenance of the sixteen apartment buildings in the area culminated in the rise of crime, with the community soon boasting one of Canada’s highest petty crime and poverty rates as well as a centre for gang-affiliated activity. Throughout the sharp decline of the neighbourhood, I can recall having many encounters with violence and many community activists, social workers, politicians, and police officers all of whom spoke deeply and passionately about the social and communal demographics of the surrounding as the cause of unrest. And while some of the hypotheses they purposed seemed correct, anyone who had ever lived in one of the apartments or even visited them could plainly see that the root cause of the issues was directly affiliated or linked to the design of the neighbourhood, the construction of the housing, and the architecture of the buildings. Gradually with investments by various private and public entities, the neighbourhood began to improve. With new recreation facilities in the heart of the area and publicly funded community groups that hosted yearly barbecues, immigrant resource centres, food banks, health services, and activities for children and seniors alike. It soon became clear that the answer to many of the area’s social problems was not widespread redevelopment, but rather alleviating the vulnerabilities in developments that were based on fragile economic trends through place-making design. This experience firmly planted an interest in the examination of urban planning and its effect on social behaviour, and how people can use place-making planning and design as a tool to create a comfortable and sustainable life for not only themselves but also the city.
To understand what place-making is, it is also essential to know that there is not a shared answer to this question. According to some interpretations, making urban places is a crucial goal in influential urban planning and design traditions, in fact, this topic brings forth historical challenges that have engendered both controversy and ever-evolving solutions in these disciplines. In its simplest form place-making can be defined as, making better places, and it should be the focus of every planning project in the 21st-century whether that influential role is given to urban designers or planners or both.¹ On the other hand, however, urban design itself can be understood as the art of making better places for people, and yet this view reveals an impatience with some of today's place-making rhetoric as well as the desire to tie theory with the concrete development process.² These loose definitions indicate a degree of convergence between two disciplinary traditions that long remained separate and often in competition. Increasingly though, the most popular conceptions of place-making seem to move in different and often opposing directions. This discourse, however, could provide new options regarding the issues of civic and social interest. Since place-making is an original way to discuss urban issues and their solutions, distinguished by precise features that have generated important work, this theory could potentially represent an autonomous practice with advanced forms of institutionalization deserving of special attention in the future.

Place-making is not a mere professional practice or a new disciplinary category since the concept alludes to a much grander topic, which is the production of sustainable and livable places. This idea should be included in the missions of various disciplines that address the organization and management of the built environment. It also refers to practices for achieving this goal with the application and use of appropriate tools and policies.³ While it is not necessarily a priority to attempt to find a new field of ideas and experiences in relation to urban
issues. It is much more important to reflect upon ways in which this topic can be approached from different disciplinary traditions to create sustainable built environments.

Place-Making Beyond Practice:

It is only within the last few years, due to current market and communications trends that new professional domains could be added to the field of built environment management, such as; landscape urbanism, urban design, and new urbanism. And as with many new movements, place-making also tends to become a target of criticism as it is opposed to both the physical idea of design and the regulatory practice of planning, as these positions are often represented in traditional and approximate ways. The fact that a new place-making trend is emerging could indicate a form of dissatisfaction with the accepted practices of planning and design of the last couple of decades. It would, however, be wrong to simply examine place-making as a new phenomenon without considering the disciplinary traditions that surround it. It is only through accurate explorations about similar issues that have been faced in urban design and real estate development practices that the need for a new field of experiences can be highlighted.

Place-Making and Real Estate Development:

Real estate development can be one of the most immediate areas for empirical evidence in the field of planning and design. And place-making could be thought of as a natural stem from the routine processes of urban development. To make a property more attractive both aesthetically and in the market, you must innovate construction methods to make it more sustainable but also guaranteeing the improvement of the built environment which plays an important role in economic value. That means that there are three types of place-making functions in urban development; product innovation, market value, and territorial marketing.
Therefore, the first goal of place-making could be to reinforce building models that have been tested on the market through traditional interventions that produce specific urban settlements such as upscale suburban developments or new young-professional-oriented condos with various amenities in the building unit itself. Another goal of interest is to attempt to modify building quality from the point of technology and the construction systems themselves which can achieve environmental sustainability or cosmetic changes that improve social conditions. Place-making can be associated with territorial marketing campaigns that not only modify a building’s formal and technological features but also affect the very image of urban space beyond that singular building.\(^7\) This orientation is associated with an attempt to impose an idea of an urban settlement on the market which continues to celebrate, at least in theory, the subjects involved.

These preliminary examinations can suggest many topics of discussion about the relationship between place-making and urban development. Generally, though it is conceived of codified models even if attention to place might suggest a project’s goals towards specific focuses such as an environment or market context. Moreover, in the field of place-making, as a concept, it responds to a utilitarian-like logic that is coherent with the primary functions of real estate development that concentrates on exchanging values.\(^8\) In this context, finding critical references and interpretations is improbable, however, assumed certainties continue to prevail that make it possible to reach some conclusions. Place-making as a tool in the context of market exchanges of value are not inherently negative, however, when placed under the influence of negative capitalism the very features meant to improve life for all can also make it inaccessible. It is also important to remember that place-making is not solely defined by democratized parks or open-spaces but can have a wide-range of applications that both include or exclude commercial features.\(^9\) Coffee shops are an excellent example of a space that creates a
democratized sense of place while also engaging in for-profit commerce that’s easily and almost equally accessible to all. Place-making in the form of civic commercial spaces can also be easily incorporated into the value/profit-driven real estate development process and can extend opportunities to both small and large vendors. In the case of the Undermount Office Complex at Alexandra Square, place-making and real estate were united in the form of a popular bar and grill restaurant that kept the development afloat through its food and beverage venue while also providing an opportunity for a sense of place to develop in the public memory – a true marriage of place-making and real-estate development.

**CHAPTER 2:**
THE UNDERMOUNT OFFICES AND THE ROLE OF PLACE-MAKING IN A CHANGING CITY AND DEVELOPMENT

Preamble

Like many children who grew up watching the news reports of the September 11th terrorist attacks in the United States, I was shocked at the images of the twin towers ultimate collapse. For me, however, these images were much more provocative and far-reaching. It was stunning to know that a skyscraper - the epic collection of a society’s economic and cultural prowess, could be knocked down in mere minutes. As a child, quite literally born into a high-rise apartment building, the idea that my pillar of life, the almost ever-stagnant podium of the community, could disappear in an instant, was horrific. Such a fear created a life-long yearning to understand what happens to buildings when they seize to form as a function for life and how urban space is transformed into place. While much negativity surrounds the skyscraper, urban society, despite its ambivalence, depends greatly on tall buildings to create a vision for the individual’s sense of place. Humans themselves, arrange both their sense of autonomy and belonging in material forms that communicate what that person needs and what their society reflects. And while the city’s offering of anonymity can be freeing it comes with an ingrained sense of personal disappearance that often only buildings can return to us. As the architecture critic, Ada Louise Huxtable once said, “What counts more than style is whether architecture improves our experience of the built world; whether it makes us wonder why we never noticed places in quite this way before.”10 By the turn of the millennium, the City of Hamilton faced the same crisis that Ada Louise Huxtable addresses in the quote above. With a floundering downtown core and a dissipating industrial economy, the city struggled to create a sense of place, security, and collective success amidst the abandonment of multiple properties and utter building maintenance decline. Using the history of the Undermount Office Complex at Alexandra Square as a microcosm for the transformation of space and the hope of place-making in Hamilton, a story of the quantitative influence of public memory and meaning in the urban environment will be highlighted.

Sprouting Up and Stretching Thin:
The square piece of property bounded by James Street South (west), Augusta Street (south), Hughson Street South (east), and Hunter Street (north) has had a long and exciting history in the city of Hamilton. Despite the opening of St. Joesph’s Hospital, four blocks south, in 1890 and the construction of the Toronto, Hamilton and Buffalo (TH&B) Railway Station adjacent to the plot in 1894, the property remained decidedly working class. With only a lumber yard, and a painter and plumber’s office dotting the block amid some empty storefronts as well as a few scattered workers cottages. [FIGURE 1] In 1906, the southern end of the block where the lumber yard was located, was replaced by a sprawling roller rink that became one of the city’s only venues for live music, dancing, and alcohol. The opening of the Alexandra Roller Skating Rink on December 25th, 1906 accelerated the growth of the block into an active working-class commercial centre, which by 1911 boasted a Chinese laundry, Dominion Express Company, tailor, and cobbler’s shop. [FIGURE 2] And while, the demographic make-up of the plot remained unchanged the Alexandra sealed the city-block as a place for entertainment, gathering, and social cohesion for decades to come.

However, wedged between the wealthy and predominately residential neighbourhood of Durand and the low-income working class borough of Corktown James Street South was undergoing significant social and economic changes during the interwar period. The introduction of the automobile and the rapid outward growth of Hamilton shifted economic power in the city. Upper and middle-class families moved to sprawling new lots and brick mansions in the east end of the city around the newly formed beaux arts inspired Gage Park, which opened in 1922, and suburban plots around Kenilworth and Parkdale Avenue, both of which were previously upper-class summer cottage areas. American urban historian and professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Robert Fogelson, in his book; Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880-1950,
chronicles the long battle between downtown business interests and the growing city periphery to maintain a thriving metropolitan core. Despite the compact size the downtown core, it contained virtually all of the city’s significant financial, governmental, and retail institutions, along with its corporate offices and much of the city’s light industry, wholesaling, and public amusements. Although concentration was seen as a significant social and economic convenience for businesses as proximity to the city's main arterial roads and public transportation hubs facilitated the tides of workers and consumers that flooded the area daily, the downtown streets quickly and inevitably became extremely congested. Folgelson begins by stating that while the sidewalks were always “…‘jammed to suffocation with pedestrians…” due to the close location of stores, offices, theatre, and bars. The introduction of the vehicle only worsened the situation by furthering the pushing of pedestrians onto the sidewalk, and clogging the roads with traffic that ultimately slowed down the streetcar and reduced its reliability. Such congestion allowed urban North Americans to witness an increasing distinction between the busy core and the quiet city periphery, and if they could afford it, they chose to live in the growing city's edge. Understanding the market preference for peripheral living and often opting to live in distant residential communities themselves, business owners advocated for rapid transit systems and glittering new office buildings to ensure that the dispersing population continued to venture and collectivize their financial interests downtown.

Conflicts between the centre and the periphery grew more intense as the twentieth century carried on. The downtown central business district, as it was frequently labeled in the early twentieth century, faced greater rivalry from satellite business districts in residential areas that ultimately caused downtown institutions to spread further outward which weakened the area’s overall power and pedestrian convenience. As a result, attention turned to James Street
South. Anchored by St. Joesph's Hospital at the base of Escarpment and one of the only roads that connected the expanding residential neighbourhoods on the cliff's plateau with the downtown core, the arterial thoroughfare represented prime real-estate for a reluctantly transforming core. Close enough to old-world industrialist influence, the downtown core itself, expanding suburban communities, a passenger rail line, and the lucrative medical industry by the time of Great Depression the area had morphed into a busy professional community that included commerce, retail, entertainment, and upscale Bay-and-Gable townhomes. The growth in commercial activity can be seen in various examples within the built environment itself. For example, the Hamilton Medical Arts building, a monumental seven-storey Art Deco office tower, opened a block south of the Alexandra Roller Skating Rink in 1930. After two decades of debates between TH&B and the city of Hamilton on October 20th, 1930 an agreement was finally reached and a contract signed which resulted in the closure of several streets and the construction of an elevated trackwork for the rail line. The original design of the new TH&B passenger station proposed a ten-storey office tower with multiple wings for passenger facilities as well as two platforms for incoming and outgoing train traffic. Unfortunately, the plans were reduced under the pressure of the Great Depression, with only several stories of office space and a singular passenger platform ultimately built. Construction of the new art deco inspired station and track line began in December 1932 and was completed almost eight months later, on June 26th, 1933. The Hamilton Conservatory of Music across the street also underwent a major overhaul and became the centre of musical higher education in the city which during this period gained the ability to grant degrees first under the University of Toronto and later the University of Trinity College.
Despite the exorbitant amount of growth occurring around the parcel of land directly south of the TH&B station, the plot remained relatively unchanged. However, towards the end of the Great Depression as passenger rail improved and grew to nearly 30 trains per day the Alexandra became so wildly famous that by the Second World War, even though the roller rink only comprised of a third of the block, the entire parcel was unofficially dubbed, "Alexandra Square". During the war, passenger levels almost doubled at the TH&B station as rationing forced people to use the rails for travel. Not only that, but troop trains ran through the station at all hours to carry soldiers to training camps in Niagara-on-the-Lake and airbases in Dunnville. Troops leaving for the war flocked to the Alexandra roller rink to have some fun and engage in a little romance before heading out to battle. Combined with musicians from the conservatory across the street looking to practice their craft, medical staff and students from the hospital down the road, and commuters waiting to catch a train it all converged to turn the area into one giant raging wartime party.
FIGURE 1:
Key Plan to 1898 Fire Insurance Plan of the City of Hamilton
FIGURE 2:
Key Plan to 1911 Fire Insurance Plan of Hamilton (West Half)
An Urban Hangover:

By the end of the Second World War, after fifteen years of urban negligence under the Great Depression and the nation's participation in a total war strategy, the city placed a new focus on reviving its stagnating downtown core. The newly amended National Housing Act (1954) stipulated provisions for cost-sharing measures to be taken by the federal and municipal government in cooperation with the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) to prepare urban renewal studies. Further legislation and amendments also allowed for provisions in regards to implementing public service upgrades in accordance with such studies. 

Modernism was also sweeping through the world, and it began to influence the architectural and planning sphere. Local politicians absorbed plans by renowned French architect and urbanist Le Corbusier, who's theories and prototypes stressed that modern architecture and efficient zones of productivity could uplift the standard of life of the urban poor and increase economic output.

This ideology suited Hamilton almost entirely, with a large working class populous and the centre of its economy placed in the manufacturing sector, the city's planners were enthusiastic at the idea of dividing up the municipality into different zones that served specific functions, connected by efficient transportation arteries that could move people and goods quickly. The dream of a futuristic, straight-edged, and fast-moving city soon favoured citizens, business owners, and politicians alike who started to look at the many Victorian streetscapes around them as antiquated, dirty, and unfit for a new vehicular world. In 1957, the Hamilton Downtown Association embarked on an extensive and detailed urban renewal study. Upon looking at the plans, when they were completed a year later the federal planner, Mark David, could not recommend the allocation of funds for a renewed business district in the downtown core. While the National Housing Act allotted for funds to be given to municipalities to
revitalize their downtown cores, it was only meant to clear and rebuild urban housing slums. Funds were, however, granted to Hamilton for the clearance of working class housing in the city's North End, and for the removal of derelict cottages on the beach of Lake Ontario.\textsuperscript{30} While the city's politicians were initially daunted by the idea of not having a funding source for their grand rejuvenation of commerce and entertainment in the district, wider national political trends were about the present the city with its wish.

Absorbing the Quiet Revolution:

For centuries, Montreal served as the centre of commerce in Canada, goods that flowed in and out of the nation, at some point transversed through the ports of the city. Conveniently located in the middle of the St. Lawrence River, it had always been used as a trading post before the arrival of Europeans and long afterwards, however, by the beginning of the 1960's multiple economic and cultural shifts began to converge and it left the city in despair. Between 1930 and 1960 Toronto slowly began to replace Montreal as the financial capital of Canada.\textsuperscript{31} As the United States' industrial output eclipsed that of Britain; it began to take the place of Canada's chief economic partner. Toronto, and indeed most of Southern Ontario, benefitted immensely from this new found partnership. American corporations opened up a litany of branch plants in Ontario and created with it a myriad of white collar jobs to fill newly created regional headquarters.\textsuperscript{32} American industrial companies also favoured Toronto over Montreal for its Anglophone roots. Business could be conducted easier in a predominately English speaking province; moreover, Toronto was simply closer to other Rust Belt Cities and could easily connect with expanding industrial centres in the Midwest. And finally, the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway in 1959 only added to this economic flight, as ocean-going vessels now had the ability to bypass the port of Montreal, thus reducing its image and status as a the centre of
Canada's transportation hub. By 1961, there were as many corporate head offices in Toronto as there in Montreal and the transfers of corporate commercial offices were by no means over at that point. The overall decline of Montreal as a national economic centre would serve as the petri dish for Francophone efforts to establish supremacy over traditionally Anglophone structures and institutions. The decline in corporate investment created an economic shift in the city from a global focus to a regional/provincial power and paved the way for the Quiet Revolution and later the radicalism that followed. Such political strife ultimately resulted in more corporate investment lost.

It is important to note that the shift in financial power occurring in Canada during this period was not entirely restricted to Toronto. In fact, Hamilton also absorbed a significant amount of manufacturing and white-collar corporate investment. As an already established industrial centre and port town, long before Toronto, Hamilton took on dozens of branch plants and head offices as well. City council was also very quick to approve zoning variances on high-rise apartment buildings, which soon saw the southwest corridor of the city covered in multi-unit dwellings. Despite not having the funds for a large commercial core renewal project, the city was still transforming into the Modernist paradise it dreamed up for itself years before. Realizing that city by-law prohibited the construction of commercial and residential buildings in the neighbourhoods of Durand and Corktown above seven stories, including the basement, early in 1964 city council removed the regulation, so construction of high-rises could occur with much less bureaucratic interference. And it worked, on April 30th of the same year, the Alexandra Roller Skating Rink closed. The Victorian Revivalist building long in decline after its heyday during the Second World War had come to represent an old symbol of the city's cluttered past,
and it was soon demolished to make way for the Undermount Office Complex at Alexandra Square.\textsuperscript{37}

Tiny Room, Big Party:

In the Spring of 1966, almost two years after the Alexandra closed, the Undermount Office Complex opened to surprisingly little fanfare. Comprised of two blue-black glass fronted buildings on top of a white brick partially sunken parking podium that boasted a rooftop plaza leading to the entrances, it was something that Hamiltonian's had never seen before. But while the glittering glass buildings were an entirely new architectural style to Hamilton, much publication now centered on council debates regarding the design plans for Hamilton Civic Square (now Lloyd D. Jackson Square). Compounded by the fact that the rate of high-rise construction in the southwest corridor was comparable to contemporary condo construction in Toronto, it makes sense that a progress-obsessed city wouldn't worship new commercial development regardless of how much it was previously wanted. Despite the weak public response though, the complex soon resumed the role of community life that the Alexandra had before its closure. [FIGURE 3]

Rose Symak, a petite woman standing no more than five feet, began waitressing at the age of sixteen. When she moved to the east end of Hamilton with her husband in 1955, she continued to work part-time to supplement her family's income. At the age of 44, she applied to work at the new Undermount Bar & Grill, which she initially thought would be a quiet establishment filled with meandering office workers, and the occasional nurse looking to drink somberly in the one room restaurant.\textsuperscript{38} With 28 years of experience she immediately got the job, and what once was a one room restaurant soon grew five-fold into a highly successful, bar and grill establishment that served the entire community from office workers to blue collar
industrialists, and medical staff alike. At her surprise retirement party, she reflected on her career and stated the following; "When I first started, the restaurant was one tiny little room, but it's gotten bigger and bigger..." And she wasn't wrong. In her 29 years of service, the restaurant had gone through four different managers and several expansions that towards the end of the commercial complex's life, took up almost the entire first floor of the ten storey tower and a third of the rooftop plaza.

**FIGURE 3:**
*View of the Undermount Office Complex, southbound on James Street, 1979. Photo courtesy of the Hamilton Public Library Archives (Local History of Hamilton).*

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When Rose started in 1966, the Undermount Bar & Grill was something of a watering hole for university students. McMaster University's partnership with St. Joseph's Hospital brought a plethora of young students to the area, and they took advantage of one of the city's only downtown patio bars at the time.\textsuperscript{42} Nino DiFilippo, the owner and operator of the restaurant in 2001 described the progression of the clientele and community as follows, "A lot of people from the hospitals, like nurses, went there. And I guess a lot of guys went [there] to meet nurses."\textsuperscript{43} With office professionals right above the restaurant, and a healthy stream of young hospital staff the restaurant became so profitable and popular it had to expand multiple times. A loyal customer for over three decades, Jon Buttrum remembered it being a place of constant excitement and energy. "Both buildings were full in those days, and lunches at the Undermount were packed. Fifteen or twenty years ago, if you got there on a Friday after four o'clock in the
afternoon, you wouldn't get a seat all night." Like most parties, however, they eventually come to an end, and like the Alexandra before it, the Undermount Bar & Grill was no different.

Troublesome Transit:

In the post-war era, Hamilton and Toronto, like most other North American cities, entered a period of urban sprawl, which was fed by the construction of large inter-urban highway systems. Funded and controlled by the provincial government, municipal citizens often had very little input or consultation in the matter and a few homes as well as business were usually destroyed in the construction. The first highway systems centered along the peripheral of the city and commuters could only approach what was then the outskirts of town, thus making daily trips to the commercial center and industrial lands time consuming and as an increasing amount of the population flocked to the suburbs an efficient transportation system to service the booming residential areas became a pressing issue. To achieve such a goal Hamilton focused on removing its trolley car system and transforming its downtown street grid into a one-way network, while the city of Toronto formed a new regional government that incorporated its early suburbs with priorities set on expanding its highways into the downtown core and did so with the construction of the Gardiner Expressway and Don Valley Parkway. Initially there existed very little controversy to the newly implemented urban policies but by the late 1960’s the mood of citizens had changed drastically. As highway routes were extended and urban streets converted into high-occupancy arterials the number of houses and business that required removal jumped dramatically. Additionally, with the arrival of Jane Jacobs in Canada there became an increasing understanding that more cars downtown fueled gridlock, polluted the air, and led to the fleeing of capital out of city cores, which directly correlated with growing urban decay. The Spadina
Expressway in became the focal point of citizen concern as the public debate surrounding transit raged in the counterculture era.

If mass transit networks were to replace the highway schemes the system would have to provide the convenience of car travel. Although public transit vehicles had the ability to travel faster than cars they required clear and separated right of ways that eliminated slowdowns due to traffic congestion or non-scheduled stops. Subways are a prime example of a separated mass transit system that outperforms cars, however they are extremely expensive to build and require high ridership levels to justify both the capital and operative costs; a density of people that the suburbs simply could not provide.\(^{48}\) Although, buses could serve the sprawling residential areas they are often subject to volatile traffic situations and stop frequently. What had to be provided was an entirely new system that could operate at the speeds of a subway system but at much lower costs. Since most a subway’s expense comes with digging underground, the routes would have to be aboveground and preferably elevated as to not ruin the idyllic nature of the suburbs they would serve.\(^{49}\) To also save on costs and not overtly alter the suburban landscape the tracks, vehicles, and stations would have to smaller than a typical subway and automated if possible. The new system would aim at obtaining ridership levels above that of a bus system but below the high capacity of a subway somewhere between 4,000 and 20,000 people per hour per direction (PPHPD), the result would be called an Intermediate Capacity Transit System, popularly dubbed; “ICTS”. The ICTS technology would be used in a new network of three major lines in Toronto, one in Hamilton, and one in Ottawa to combat the growing amount of traffic congestion, the faltering of private passenger rail, and the scaling back of both bus and streetcar route development in a plan that would become known as “GO-Urban” (Sewell: 78).\(^{50}\) Although the province was not willing to take over the Maglev system they were still willing to continue with
the development of some sort of ICTS concept. Purchasing several patents from the United States that focused on replacing the magnet, or rubber wheel concept and setting up a testing track just outside of Kingston, the provincial government created a scaled-down prototype that closely resembled an elevated subway system; a notion, which will play a large factor in its public disfavor. With the test system in Kingston nearing completion and showing signs of success a provincial sales effort ensued.

The government set its sights now on Scarborough and Hamilton, the latter being the preferred site since the Toronto Transit Commission was putting up both a public and legal battle. Unfortunately, on December 15th, 1981 after two years of intense debate and grass-roots activism, the Hamilton-Wentworth Regional Council rejected the proposal to build the $111-million elevated rapid train line from Jackson Square downtown to Lime Ridge Mall in what was then the center of the city’s booming escarpment suburbs. Much of the citizen groups and council’s opposition to the ICTS system stemmed from the details of the proposal. Presented with three options for the installment of the system, two of which would have been strictly within the lower city, a misinformed and pressured city council chose the seemingly least-impactful Jackson Square to Lime Ridge Mall route. However, in order to climb up the escarpment the tracks would have had to run along a 5.5 meter-high platform through John and James Streets disrupting the wealthy historic residential district and commercial strip that lines the bottom of the escarpment which would also require tunneling to make the system reach Fennell Avenue at the top. [FIGURE 4]

Making matters worse TH&B Railway refused to lend its railyard and station services the ICTS system. Thus, requiring it to loop around next to and through Alexandra Square potentially disrupting the rooftop patio operations of the restaurant and bringing amplified noise and
vibration to the property since it was next to crucial sharp curves – angering staff, patrons tenants, and the property managers alike. The elevated stations also brought fear into downtown citizens and business owners who worried that the distance from street-level view would make the shelters havens for crime and delinquency, which was feared, could reach the idyllic escarpment neighbourhoods quicker than ever before. The rhetoric surrounding the system’s naysayers painted the lower city as undeserving - littered with crime, and devoid of economic stamina for a new transit system. While property owners in the lower city were infuriated that the province and the municipality could consider a transportation system that brushes against and hovers over private property. Yet by not making considerable investments in transit the city flat-lined ridership levels and hurt its ability to attract further economic development by not offering much to service industry clients.

FIGURE 4:
View of ICTS route in downtown core. (From Hamilton-Wentworth Rapid Transit Project, Functional Plans, Metro Canada Limited, October 1981)
The Clock Runs Out:

Starting in 1990, the nurses at St. Joesph's Hospital were phased into twelve-hour shifts, and while a three-hour increase in work hours doesn't seem like a significant hurdle to the restaurant industry nearby, it had a major effect on the Undermount. DiFilippo in his 2001 reflection describes it as absolutely devastating. "We had nurses coming in at eleven o'clock after a three-to-eleven shift. But when they brought in twelve-hour shifts the nurses stopped coming."57 And in the same year when the conservative government introduced the federal GST, business at the Undermount was further pressed. "People didn't like to see that seventeen percent tacked on [the liquor tab] at the end of the night."58 Then the infamous recessions of the early 1990's struck and DiFilippo was barely able to hold on to his business as thousands of Hamilton steelworkers and manufacturers began losing their jobs. And finally, on September 3rd, 1993 Rose Symak retired from the Undermount Bar & Grill at the age of seventy-three. With an elderly husband ill at home, she had decided it was time to leave. And as long-time patron, Jon Buttrum described it, "It will certainly be different for me coming in here with her gone," and it most certainly was.59

Going Down in Flames:

By 1995 the state of Hamilton’s economy was in bad shape. The recession that struck North America had taken a toll on the city’s predominately industrial economy. Long in decline, the manufacturing sector could no longer sustain itself under the weight of international competition, rising production costs, and consistent periods of boom and bust in the stock market. Thousands of jobs were cut, and a loss of tax revenue from corporations and civilians alike resulted in the lack of funds to invest in the downtown core. Other modernist commercial complexes in the city, such as Jackson Square, once the bastion of retail and office productivity
in the city, suffered greatly during this period as well. In fact, ever since the opening of Limeridge Mall on the escarpment in 1981, commerce had slowly been leaving the downtown business area. Combined with the volatile state of retail in the 1980s that saw the entrance of fast-fashion into the North American market, the consolidation of regional brands, and the retraction of department stores the area surrounding the Undermount complex was no longer attractive and vibrant. Slowly, but surely, white collar jobs left Hamilton as well. In 1996, Stelco Tower had a workforce of 303 people and a vacancy rate of 69%, down from zero percent vacancy and a workforce of 1,697 employees just sixteen years prior in 1979. The Undermount complex at Alexandra Square was no different, and by the end of the twentieth century had only a few floors occupied mostly by government offices. Unfortunately, the vastly underutilized space attracted delinquency and a string of arson attacks that left the office towers very existence in question.

Around 8:00 p.m. on Tuesday, January 24th, 1995 a fire broke out in the elevator shaft of the smaller ten-story office tower at Alexandra Square. Smelling smoke, the patrons of the Undermount Bar & Grill called the police who quickly arrived and cleared everyone out of the building. While the fire was small and mostly confined to the elevator car where the firefighters suspected attempted arson, it caused over $60,000 in damage and resulted in the entire car having to be replaced, and the upper floors cleaned and painted over due to smoke damage. Already close to zero percent occupancy and vastly under maintained, the repairs had to be paid for by the property owners, much to their reluctance and frustration. A year later, on July 31st, 1996 another fire broke out in the Undermount complex. After a power failure had blacked out much of the downtown core, firefighters received a call saying that there was a fire in the larger fifteen-story office building. By the time, they arrived only smoke was visible in the building,
but the elevators had automatically shut down leaving a wheelchair bound insurance agent, David Binns, trapped on the eighth floor and an elderly woman with severe multiple sclerosis on the twelve floor. Both of which had to be carried out in specialized ambulance chairs supplied by Fleetwood Ambulance in a much publicized and dramatized fashion.\textsuperscript{63} The ultimate cause of the fire was found to be lit paper torches in the hallway. Rose Madaffari, a telemarketer on the eighth floor of the building admitted to being in the stairwell before the power went out and lighting paper to find her way out.\textsuperscript{64} However, much suspicion surrounded her story.

Investigators with the Hamilton Fire Department would ultimately come to accept her version of events, but they scrutinized Alexandra Square's owner and operator to figure out why the backup generator did not automatically supply the complex with power but suffered from a forty-minute delay that led to a tense high-rise rescue.\textsuperscript{65} No answer was ever provided to the public, but the buildings increasingly began to be viewed as antiquated and unsafe for habitation. This general uneasiness surrounding the complex only continued until a third suspicious fire on March 14th, 1998 that started in a closet of one of the offices led to another evacuation of the buildings.\textsuperscript{66} Frustrated, the owner began the process of selling the parcel of land.

A Condo Core:

On January 1st, 2001, the Regional Municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth underwent the process of amalgamation into a one-tier political system, thus creating the new City of Hamilton. The new city now comprised of the former municipalities of Hamilton, Dundas, Ancaster, Flamborough, Glanbrook, and Stoney Creek, and while the new regional municipality, as a whole, was doing quite well economically speaking, it faced the burdensome reality of a dying core.\textsuperscript{67} A study conducted by the Hamilton Spectator in December of 2000, highlighted that less than 3% of the total building permit values were located in the downtown commercial core.\textsuperscript{68}
The diaspora of head offices to newer buildings and facilities in nearby areas such as Ancaster and Burlington as well as the centralization of operations in Toronto led to chronically high office vacancies in the core. Compounded by high property taxes, with Hamilton's commercial office rate in the year 2000 being 7.5% in comparison to Burlington's 3.5%, it almost made economic sense to leave downtown Hamilton. With no new office construction since the second phase of Commerce Place on 21 King Street West in 1990, much of the commercial stock that the city had to offer fell into Class C value, which meant that they were almost functionally obsolete especially in a new internet age. Facing the pointless demolition of many structurally sound and architecturally significant buildings, the city desperately looked at options for its empty office structures. Many developers seeing an opportunity to grab large parcels of once valuable land approached the city with proposals to turn office buildings into residential units, which was one of the only stable markets in the core area anyways. City council quickly reacted and a created a ten-million-dollar loan fund which by the Spring of 2001 had already been completely tapped out.

One of those developers that approached the city was Bear Incorporated from Kitchener, Ontario. Long in discussion with the owners of Alexandra Square, they finally signed off on a sale on November 23rd, 2000. They planned to connect the two buildings together and create 170 apartments. There was a bit of speculation between the city and the developer as to whether or not the newly converted units would be sold as condominiums to repay the city the money loaned to them, and this created a bureaucratic bone of contention that delayed construction for almost four years. But when the building finally opened again in 2006 it received the fanfare it never did in 1966. On January 5th, 2008, the Toronto Star ran an article that discusses the exodus of priced-out Torontonians, and in it interviewee Kevin Bowers uses
the Chateau Royale and a microcosm for positive urban growth in the city of Hamilton. "I think the fact that Chateau Royale (a large condo project) did get finished, and that the Core Lofts (a condo conversion of a Bell Canada building) sold out so quickly proves something. People see the success." But while the condo was patronizingly lauded in Toronto as being a symbol of Hamilton's turnaround, local inhabitants saw it differently. The modernist glass towers were covered in bright yellow, beige, and orange stucco. Marble pillars and post-modernist vases in off-purple were added to embellish the square corners of the tower in an attempt to make it look like a French palace, when in fact it was nothing of the sort. Skyscraper Forum, a global blogging forum website where city dwellers post their thoughts amongst construction updates and policy debates surrounding new builds in different cities, strikingly opposed the newly transformed Alexandra Square. "The inside of that building is really ugly (the front lobby is pretty tacky looking). The granite countertops in the units seemed pretty cheap too." someone with the username, block43, posted. "I love the Hammer, but it's quite obvious our builders only know one thing - cheap, suburban crap." User Cambridgite shouted through his keyboard. And this sentiment continues on for pages. It isn't surprising however, after all, how could a city that knew Chateau Royale as the Undermount Complex at Alexandra Square worship a privatized space that they once tangibly called their own? A tiny fraction of the city's workers may have been employed at the Undermount but a vast amount of the city's citizens called its bar their home, and before that, the Alexandra Roller Skating Rink their past time. User Jon Dalton on Skyscraper Forum described it best when he said, "They should [at least] add a ground level cafe to sell people shots of expresso [sic] on the way to the GO station," another user quipped back, "That spot would be great for a cafe but it's been empty since the place finished construction." [FIGURE 5]
Summary:

The office building has had a long and colourful history in the city of Hamilton. Threatened by the horizontal spreading of urban development and population clusters, old-world industrialists sought the creation of a new commercial centre during the Interwar period on James Street South as it was close to business activity on King Street, expanding residential communities on the escarpment, and the TH&B passenger station. This new business district was relatively successful as it was anchored by the widely popular Alexandra Roller Skating Rink, which in its own right, had morphed into a place of community for the city. However, years of urban neglect during the Great Depression and Second World War pushed local politicians and
citizens alike to envision a new modernistic plan for their city. Lacking the funds to create a redeveloped civic square the city used by-laws and zoning to allot high-rise residential and commercial development in the southwest corridor. Combined with an influx of head offices from Montreal during the 1960s, the Alexandra was torn down and in its midst the Undermount Office Complex grew. While most modernist structures in Hamilton trampled community life and removed pedestrian ease, the Undermount Bar & Grill kept the area's lifeblood flowing as it replaced the Alexandra as the area’s entertainment venue and kept it going despite crippling political and economic trends in the 1990’s. After being converted to a condominium building in 2006, the Undermount Complex (now called Chateau Royale) seized to be a place of community life and instead turned away from the area that once allowed it to thrive thus causing outrage amongst Hamiltonians. Throughout this case study, the theme of community and public meaning was highlighted in both primary and secondary sources, buildings may be constructed as a reaction to or against political and economic forces but whether they thrive is contingent on the community around them and within them. It is up to the developer and the political institutions in place to maximize the health of the space and the people that turn it into place to incorporate essences of the surrounding culture to create peace amongst the urban environment which is too often at the hands of grander forces.
CHAPTER 3:
PLACE-MAKING AND SUCCESSFUL URBAN SPACES THROUGH DEMOCRACY

Preamble

When I was a young child I dreamed of growing up and moving away from Hamilton. At first, I desired to live in Burlington - I can still remember going around in my scooter, picking up realtor magazines, and staring at apartments for rent in the city; dreaming up some concoction of a life I thought I could have. Every time my father would drive over the Skyway Bridge and I caught a glimmer of the new condos in Burlington my heart would sink and my head would fill with desire. Yet as I grew a little older and my ambitions became a little bigger, I quickly set my sights on a flashier skyline - Toronto, and I openly and brashly defended my new decision to move there instead. During one heated debate with my older brother in the car, I yelled out that Hamilton was nothing but a dirty, culture-less hovel that was undeserving of my talents and presence. Rationality in this case was truly no rival for the ego of a young teenage male. I can remember this argument so clearly because it was at the moment in time that something had clicked in me; an epiphany of sorts. I remember thinking to myself, “Where is all this anger coming from? Why all of this angst towards a city I had hardly experienced?” Some of these emotions could be reasoned with, after all, my neighbourhood had a long history of violence and deprivation but to have such a deep rage, in my opinion, just did not sit right with me. When I began attending McMaster University though, I could slowly feel my intense distain dissipate with each waking moment. With my free bus pass I was able to explore and see every crevice of the city and I learned about its deep cultural heritage as well as its more pressing concerns. As I specialized in urban history I also became involved with community activist groups who were at the forefront of the civic fight for transportation infrastructure, affordable housing, and accessible urban design. I attended protests, published an article in the field, sat at city council hearings, and voiced my opinions to improve the city for all. It was at that time, roughly four years after my angry rant, that I had realized the hatred I felt for the city was not born out of my experiences in the Riverdale West neighbourhood but my from inability to partake in the place-making process of city-building. And through community engagement in the design and policy process in Hamilton I was able to become a better citizen and a passionate supporter of the city which I had previously hated. Channeling my young ego here, I’d even like to think that the city benefitted from my engagement too. My only wish is that more people could experience and access the opportunities I was able to as well, so we can have a whole new generation of democracy and less vulnerability in real estate and economic development because a voice unheard is a power lost.

Reflections:
When reflecting on the story of Alexandra Square and the Undermount office complex, many central themes begin to unfold. Geographically speaking, the Undermount offices were in the heart of downtown Hamilton, on the city’s main north-south arterial road, next to commerce, beside a regionally popular transit station, and in the middle of various distinct neighbourhoods. Theoretically, its geography alone should have guaranteed that any development placed on the plot would have security in its financial longevity no matter how beaten the economy. However, it quickly becomes apparent that physical urban geography alone is not the sole cause of market value, and rather than supporting a development it can serve to undermine it. In terms of the Undermount Offices, this process of relying solely on economic trends in tandem with geography to guide construction eventually caused the development to fail as it was unable to attract and support larger tenants and therefore contend with maintenance issues. However, the shining light in the story of this office complex is the fact that since the developer incorporated a semblance of community life through a bar and restaurant establishment, the building itself was able to leave a lasting impression in the public memory and stay afloat for over three decades. Unfortunately, the city council did not pay attention to the power of the place-making process and in desperation to salvage multiple dying office developments at the turn of the millennium decided to hastily create a loan program to encourage any residential development whatsoever. As a result, the Undermount Offices today is a ghoulish post-modern shell of a condo devoid of the active community life it once held. The lack of civic participation together with private and public sector management led to a privatization of space in a city thus depleting its social and market value in a way that needs to be addressed.

What is Participatory Place-Making:
As examined earlier, the strength of place-making is its ability to work within the system of real estate development and not have to be necessarily intertwined with open-spaces, parks, and community fairs. It can be used to develop spaces within capitalist environments and the profit-driven market to make places that benefit property owners/managers as well as tenants and the wider public - restaurants, coffee-shops, bookstores. And in the context of improving individual buildings to make them resistant to economic fluctuations in the wider economic development of the city, the best practice is to merge place-making design with planning (even in dire conditions) through participatory place-making.\(^77\)

The practice of participatory place-making can be viewed as a society being engaged by local politicians and developers alike to envision in both abstract and logical ways, urban social spaces that meet the needs of stakeholders and users.\(^78\) The disciplines of planning, urban design, and architecture, therefore, need to learn to merge their expertise to work with the more intangible side of urban landscapes. Stakeholders and patrons should be brought together, sometimes by a mediator, to develop a shared image of what they want for their public and private spaces that can be tangibly occupied once construction is complete. In effect, the product of interactive engagement could influence both the community’s urban life and even the wider market appeal of investing in that city or region.\(^79\) This goal is not as far-fetched as it may seem since stakeholders and communities share and aspire to similar goals. Both strongly desire a sustainable quality of life and an environment which is healthy financially and socially, and idea of which could be enhanced by a trained professional in the field of community planning and development.\(^80\)

Democratizing Place-Making in Design and Planning:
Not just in terms of singular projects, but to engage with both communities and potential stakeholders, advocates should set-up envisioning workshops that address the issues with topics such as urban growth or infrastructural investment and base policies upon these sessions. That way if developers are pressed for time or want to side-step community involvement there can be packaged set of regulations or loose guidelines to follow to guarantee some semblance of place-making.\textsuperscript{81} This system of participation does not even have to be a detailed process of asking the public to draw up rules on developments or make new planning legislation but could even initially start by casting a wide net and asking for different agendas to be addressed by different advocacy groups in the broadest perspective.

The prime objective of participatory workshops is to achieve an outcome that educates both parties and allows them to network meaningfully. Facilitation is the key to success, whether the wider urban community or the smaller details of one project are at stake.\textsuperscript{82} Information should also be depicted primarily visually rather than verbally for further accessibility and to enable every person in the group. The recording, documenting, and labelling of meetings and of specific aspirations should be the primary goal of someone, preferably a neutral party, in order to reflect care for the ideas presented and to preserve agreed upon demands. There should also be room for both privacy and social interaction within the space for both parties for invaluable insights to be assisted. The boundaries of social spaces should be put into operate workshops so each topic of discussion (main street, a building courtyard, etc.) since these components, while a part of a whole, have different attributes that require specific planning parameters.\textsuperscript{83} Essentially, a long-term view is encouraged but with specific and achievable projects in mind. The final product of participatory place-making workshops requires a logical method to process the priorities of the end results both graphically and with coordinated parameters within the deigns
and planning realm to achieve a holistic outcome. Cities in crisis, such as Hamilton in the year 2000, could provide the starting point for a discussion and analysis of many issues, which in turn could offer solutions and directions towards a healthier place-making future.

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