Changing Planning Governance: The Woodbine Project and the Implications of the Resource Agreement in Rexdale

by
Sapthasvanaa Killewalavan

supervised by
Dr. Liette Gilbert

A Major Paper
submitted to the Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master in Environmental Studies
York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

July 31st, 2026

ABSTRACT

My Major Paper examines the Woodbine (re)development project at the Woodbine Racetrack and Casino located in Toronto's Rexdale neighbourhood as a case study of evolving urban governance. This study examines a Resource Agreement report *Woodbine Transit-Oriented Community Secondary Plan - Authorization to Enter in Agreements for Resourcing* between the City of Toronto and the Woodbine Entertainment Group as a governance arrangement that shapes planning practice. This research draws on theories of neoliberal urban governance, alongside scholarship on public-private partnerships and community benefits. Its conceptual analytical framework incorporates governmentality and collaborative and communicative planning to examine how cities are governed. Specifically, the study examines allocating planning resources and staff capacity to undertake the Woodbine Transit-Oriented Secondary Plan study.

Using a qualitative research design consisting of semi-structured interviews, policy and document review, media analysis, historical-geographical analysis, and socio-demographic profile of Rexdale, this research examines the evolution of governance frameworks and the Woodbine project overtime. It further investigates the role of planners and their involvement in the (re)development process. Key findings suggest that the Resource Agreement represents a shift towards new funding mechanisms embedded within broader governance frameworks due to lack of municipal capacity and budget. Findings also reveal that the Resource Agreement is subject to varied interpretations, among planners and the public, shaped by how the arrangement is communicated, understood and engaged with throughout the planning process.

This research argues that the Woodbine project in Rexdale reflects evolving forms of neoliberal urban governance. The Resource Agreement reshapes planning practice by redistributing resources, responsibilities, and power among public and private actors, while raising questions about community participation and whose interests shape the future urban (re)development outcomes of Rexdale.

KEYWORDS: Neoliberal urban governance, private-public partnerships, resource agreements, community benefits

FOREWORD

My Major Research consists of academic inquiry and a personal reflection. During my undergraduate studies at York University, I took a course titled ‘Public Space,’ which became one of my most influential courses. It introduced me to the field of planning and sparked my interests in the politics of shared spaces, questioning how urban environment shape human experiences, behaviour, and belonging. As I grew up in Rexdale, I began to observe how different spaces influence surrounding communities and whether people felt like they belong. This then raised questions about the role of large-scale economic spaces within communities and how these spaces are imagined and experienced by the people who live around them.

As part of my research, one day I decided to revisit the Woodbine area and walk through the site that had long existed within my neighbourhood but remained unfamiliar to me. I encountered a landscape undergoing transformation: bulldozers, piles of dirt, newly constructed commercial units, and the newly built hotel and parking garage. Looking more closely, I realized the scale of the (re)development and how distant the Woodbine grandstand felt from the new construction occurring around it.

During my walk, I noticed three Somalian women taking an evening stroll through the site. Their presence shifted how I understood the space. Rather than seeing the site only as a major (re)development project shaped by economic investment, I began to imagine its potential as a place where people could walk, bike, gather, and connect in public spaces. Could this transformation create meaningful shared spaces for the Rexdale neighbourhood, despite knowing its contested identity as a casino and racetrack? My research reflects on this question, and the role of planners, in shaping planning narratives attached to urban spaces. While planning can reframe how places are understood, these processes are shaped by complex governance relationships and competing interests which can ultimately affect the future (re)development of Rexdale and the ways in which people access, experience and use these spaces.

This Major Research Paper is a final component towards satisfying the requirements of the Plan of Study for the Master in Environment Studies (Planning) program at York University. My Plan of Study guided my interest in urban planning through coursework, research and experiential learning opportunities completed throughout my program. These experiences have contributed to achieving the program’s intended objectives while strengthening my

understanding of planning concepts and practices. My area of concentration 'Planning for Accessible Urban Spaces,' identifies three components: urban and regional planning; urban spaces; and community engagement and equity.

My Major Research Paper examines the political economy of contemporary urban governance, understanding how planning instruments operate in specific provincial and municipal governance frameworks. This project deepens my understanding of urban space and how it is reproduced, redefined, and governed through planning decisions and power relations. The last component of my Plan of Study examines how neoliberal urban governance structures and (re)development impact communities, and shape questions of equity and participation in Rexdale. This component explores how planners navigate community participation and involvement with powerful institutions to advocate for just urban outcomes in planning processes. My Major Research Paper engages with all three components in my Plan of Study, with questions of urban governance, the contested legitimacy of planning and its practice, and political participation in suburban communities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper would not have been possible without the continuous support, guidance and encouragement by my professors, mentors and fellow planning colleagues, whose insights have supported my academic journey.

I am grateful to have met many people from diverse backgrounds and with different lived experiences throughout the MES Planning program. Their willingness to share their stories and learn from one another has inspired me throughout this journey. Special thanks to my research supervisor, Dr. Liette Gilbert, who saw potential in my research topic and encouraged me to pursue this work. I am also grateful to Dr. Anna Zalik for providing advising guidance during the initial stages of my planning program and for discovering the significance of the Resource Agreement.

From Parkdale to Rexdale – thank you to my immigrant parents. Growing up, I discovered my dad's passion for geography and politics, fields that he was unable to pursue due to sacrifices he made to provide my brother and I a better life. During our family trips, he would bring physical paper maps and become my personal tour guide, sharing stories about the places we would pass by. Those moments sparked my own curiosity about geography and politics that shaped the path I have taken today with planning.

Thank you to my planning law friends. One of my most memorable parts of the MES program was the friendships I created along the way.

Lastly, thank you to my friends and family who have shown curiosity, love, and kindness throughout my Master's journey.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract …… ii
Foreword …….. iii
Acknowledgements …….. v

Introduction …… 1
1. Brief History of Rexdale …….. 11
2. Theoretical Frameworks …….. 19
3. The Resource Agreement ……. 25
4. The Housing Affordability Crisis ……. 35
5. Toronto's Employment Lands …….. 37
6. The Woodbine Planning Framework …… 40
Conclusion ……. 53
Bibliography …….. 57

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: The Great Canadian Casino Resort adjacent to Woodbine Racetrack & Casino …… 5
Figure 2: Woodbine Secondary Plan Study Area ……5
Figure 3: Vision of the proposed (re)development ……7
Figure 4: Detailed master plan and structure of the proposed vision….……7
Figure 5: Conceptual rendering of the envisioned Southlands Park……....8
Figure 6: Conceptual vision of WoodbineLive! infront of the grandstand.……9
Figure 7: Toronto's boundary of Rexdale ……18
Figure 8: Rexdale SNAP Study Area ……20
Figure 9: Woodbine Mall's parking lot ……...21
Figure 10: Illustration depicting future changes for the Woodbine Mall ……21
Figure 11: Employment Areas in Toronto ……...42
Figure 12: Map of SASP No. 296 and SASP No. 29 Parcel C ……...45
Figure 13: Annual Revenue from OLG from 2000 – 2007……....48
Figure 14: Survey results on visits to Woodbine Racetrack ……52

Introduction

Toronto increasingly faces complex urban challenges, including housing unaffordability, infrastructure gaps, traffic congestion, homelessness, unemployment, impacts of declining health and educational services, and widening social and economic inequalities (Golden, 2026). In response to these challenges, governments have relied on alternative governance arrangements, including public-private partnerships, intergovernmental funding agreements, and collaborative planning frameworks, to finance and deliver major urban redevelopment projects. While these arrangements may strengthen municipal capacity to implement ambitious projects, they also raise important questions about how planning decisions are made, whose interests shape those decisions, and how public accountability is maintained.

Planning is often understood as a process of shaping future urban outcomes. It is continually negotiated through changing political priorities, institutional constraints, and competing interests. It also reflects whose knowledge and ideas are prioritized throughout the planning process. But planners still hold agency to negotiate among competing interests to advance more equitable urban futures (Forester 1988; Fainstein 2010). Consequently, understanding planning requires examining how planning visions persist, adapt, and become embedded within evolving neoliberal governance frameworks.

Recent debates in Toronto demonstrate how authority over urban development extends beyond municipal government. The proposed expansion of the Billy Bishop Airport demonstrates how provincial and federal governments can intervene in long-standing municipal planning processes when broader economic or transportation priorities conflict with local planning objectives. Such interventions can dismantle years of municipal planning efforts and redirect planning priorities. Over the past decade, this tension has become more apparent as the province has increasingly relied on its legislative authority to push forward priorities such as housing supply, improving transit, and promoting economic development, even when their priorities conflict with the city's role and planning efforts (MacMillan, 2026).

The Billy Bishop Airport debate reflects a broader constitutional relationship with municipalities and the Province of Ontario. Municipalities remain legally subordinate to the province as 'creatures of the province,' deriving authority from provincial legislation, which downloads provincial powers and responsibilities to municipal governments. Yet, Magnusson (2005: 10) argues that this legal doctrine overlooks the democratic significance of local self-

government, “a principle that protects the municipalities against the provinces.” The ‘creature of the province’ doctrine overlooks everyday democracy, through city council, public meetings, neighbourhood services, and community decision-making. Local governments possess authority and the duty to represent local communities, not merely from provincial delegation. While acknowledging provincial constitutional authority, Magnusson (2005) contends that municipalities should be recognized as democratic institutions with responsibilities extending beyond powers delegated by the province. Building on this perspective, Flyvbjerg (1998) argues how power operates in real-life, including how knowledge and ideas that may inform rationality are mobilized by different actors, and to examine ‘what is actually done’ to practice democracy.

These broader governance dynamics provide the context for the Woodbine’s (re)development project at the Woodbine Racetrack and Casino in Rexdale. Rexdale is situated in northwest Toronto, a culturally diverse, inner-suburban neighbourhood that has experienced longstanding challenges of poverty, uneven investments, socioeconomic inequality, and access to services. These conditions provide an importance context for examining how the (re)development project may shape the future of this neighbourhood.

Over the past two decades, the vision for Woodbine has gradually evolved into one of Toronto’s largest mixed-use redevelopment projects. Through successive expansions of gaming uses and changing provincial priorities, the project gained momentum as a major transit-oriented community (TOC) centred on the future Woodbine GO Station. This project illustrates how long-term planning evolve across changing political, institutional and governance contexts.

Furthermore, the project’s recent advancement is closely connected to the 2023 Toronto-Ontario New Deal Agreement, which represents a significant shift in intergovernmental cooperation among the Government of Canada, Province of Ontario and the City of Toronto. This agreement provides provincial financial support with intentions to provide a relief in capital costs and improve long-term financial sustainability for the City while committing to advancing housing, transit-oriented communities, infrastructure investment, and economic development (Ontario, 2024). Within these commitments, the Woodbine (TOC) was specifically identified as a priority initiative in the agreement, with the City of Toronto agreeing to expedite planning approvals and collaborate with the province to facilitate development surrounding the future Woodbine GO Station.

To fulfil expeditious planning approvals, City administration prepared the *Woodbine Transit-Oriented Community Secondary Plan - Authorization to Enter in Agreements for Resourcing*, recommending that the City enter into a Resource Agreement with Woodbine Entertainment Group (WEG), owner of Woodbine lands. The proposed Resource Agreement would allow WEG to fund dedicated municipal planning staff for up to twelve months to expedite completion of the Woodbine TOC Secondary Plan study. In February 2025, Toronto City Council authorized the Resource Agreement by approving an exemption from the City's standard Donation Policy to permit the funding arrangement. Under the City's Donations Policy, in-kind contributions ordinarily "do not constitute a business relationship since no reciprocal consideration is sought" (City of Toronto, 2025). However, Council's exemption allows a large private corporation to provide funding directly linked to specific planning outcome, creating a governance arrangement that differs from a conventional donation or community benefit contribution. The Woodbine (TOC) Secondary Plan study now remains an active planning phase, having advanced several months into its planning process under the expedited timeline established by the Resource Agreement.

The Resource Agreement represents more than an administrative mechanism to accelerate the Woodbine project's planning process. It demonstrates how provincial policy commitments established through the New-Deal Agreement is translated into a new public-private governance arrangement at the local level. By enabling a private landowner to fund municipal planning staff assigned to a specific planning process, the agreement raises important questions about planning ethics and who does planning benefit, and how it reinforces power relations and reproduces the very forms of structural harm that reparative justice seeks to confront. I am inspired by the notion of reparative justice in political philosophy and planning, that was discussed by scholar Fainstein (2010) in their 'Just City' framework. This framework critiques top-down planning, arguing that planners can reform the system, and their capabilities to advocate for disadvantaged communities instead of acting as dealmakers towards speculative projects and entertainment industries with little concerns for sustainability and equity (Fainstein, 2010).

My commitment to planning is acknowledging histories of racialized exploitation and exclusion, addressing structural inequalities and power hierarchies, and creating spaces for community power. Considering planning's deep-rooted legacies of racial planning, and the ways planning historically contributed to the most disenfranchised and the reproduction of social

hierarchies, planning needs to move beyond distributive (Harvey, 2008) and procedural justice (Forester, 1988; Healey 1996). Planners should seek to address historical and ongoing injustices through the effects of capitalism, that would not just merely compensate for past harms and violence, but to rethink ways to repair social relations and represent disadvantaged groups to transform the world where the same kind of violence cannot exist to be repeated.

My research examines the Woodbine project and the implications of the Resource Agreement in a neighbourhood in Toronto, Rexdale of changing urban governance that influences the planning practice. This study investigates how planners navigate relationships with private sector actors possessing significant economic resources, how different actors exercise their power throughout the planning process, and how governance arrangements shape professional planning practice. Understanding the shifting social relations shaping urban development and the future possibilities for Rexdale neighbourhood, my inquiry is guided by neoliberal urban governance, urban politics and planning theory, which explores planning and its practical application.

The planning profession and its ethics is being reshaped by powerful actors that influence policy-making decisions that can impact vulnerable communities. Public and private interests are increasingly interdependent. This paper presents a unique governance arrangement in which a casino and racetrack operator is positioned as a key factor in shaping a future mixed-use community, while also providing financial resources to support an expedited municipal planning process. The transformation of a casino and racetrack into a future mixed-use community raises questions about the role of private sector interests in a community building and whether such development is appropriate to deliver broader social benefits for Rexdale. This governance arrangement raises questions about whose interests are prioritized and who is truly intended to benefit from the project that will transform Rexdale over the next 25 years.

The Woodbine (Re)Development Project

The Woodbine (re)development project is an ongoing City of Toronto planning initiative involving Woodbine Entertainment Group (WEG) as a landowner and development proponent. In recent years, the Woodbine site has undergone significant changes, evolving from a racetrack and gaming facility into a broader entertainment destination. The area is evolving into Toronto's 'destination for world-class gaming' encouraging visitors to extend their stays at the newly built

400-room luxury hotel, with improved road and street network, and additional entertainment spaces, including a theatre.

The racetrack, and existing gaming and entertainment facilities at the Woodbine site, is now known as the Great Canadian Casino Resort as a whole. It is operated by Ontario Gaming GTA Limited Partnership (OGGLP), a private-sector operator selected through Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation's modernization process in 2013. OGGLP operates under the name One Toronto Gaming and partners with Great Canadian Entertainment to deliver an integrated casino and entertainment experience, including gaming, dining, accommodations, shuttle services, and customer rewards programs (see Figure 1). The Great Canadian Casino Resort forms part of the broader Woodbine Master plan, which has been advanced through collaboration among many actors. The Rexdale Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) establishes commitments for One Toronto Gaming, to create pathways towards local and social hiring for casino operations. The Rexdale-Casino CBA is discussed throughout the paper.



Figure 1: The Great Canadian Casino Resort adjacent to Woodbine Racetrack and Casino
(Source: Rocca, 2023)

The Woodbine TOC Secondary Plan study area located at '555 Rexdale Boulevard,' is the southern eastern portion of the lands, at approximately 190 acres, which contemplates relocating existing uses such as ancillary facilities, including stables, dormitories, a small racecourse, and

communal facility for trainer and support staff to establish the Secondary Plan policy framework for the Woodbine project (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: Woodbine Secondary Plan Study Area
(Source: City of Toronto, 2026)

The Woodbine (re)development has been described as a "city within a city," a large-scale mixed-use project designed around neighbourhoods connected through parks, public spaces, and a flexible street network (see Figure 3 and 4). The proposed design integrates new residential communities through a low- to mid-rise with buildings generally reaching up to sixteen storeys, with three public park systems considering green connections to the area outside its study area boundary (Figure 5). The vision also highlights three distinct neighbourhoods 'Park Village, East Green and Station Quarter,' divided by unique characteristics that portray its different range of uses. Furthermore, the architect and designer for this project is Allies and Morrison, who worked on some projects in Toronto. Additionally, some of the consultants working on this project include Urban Strategies, SVEC Group, Aird Berlis, WND Associates, N. Barry Lyon Consultants (NBLC), Stantec, BA Group, Crozier and more (Woodbinelands, 2026). This approach responds to site area and specific policies (SASP), including the proximity to the airport and associated Noise Exposure Forecast (NEF)/Noise Exposure Planning (NEP) Composite Noise Contour. The proposal is further informed by supporting technical studies,

including a Transportation Master Plan (TMP), Land Use Compatibility Study, Infrastructure Master Plan (IMP) and other planning tools developed by the City staff, with WEG's cooperation (City of Toronto, 2026). The community consultations conducted to date also inform its study and planning policy framework.



Figure 3: Vision of the proposed (re)development
(Source: City of Toronto, 2026)

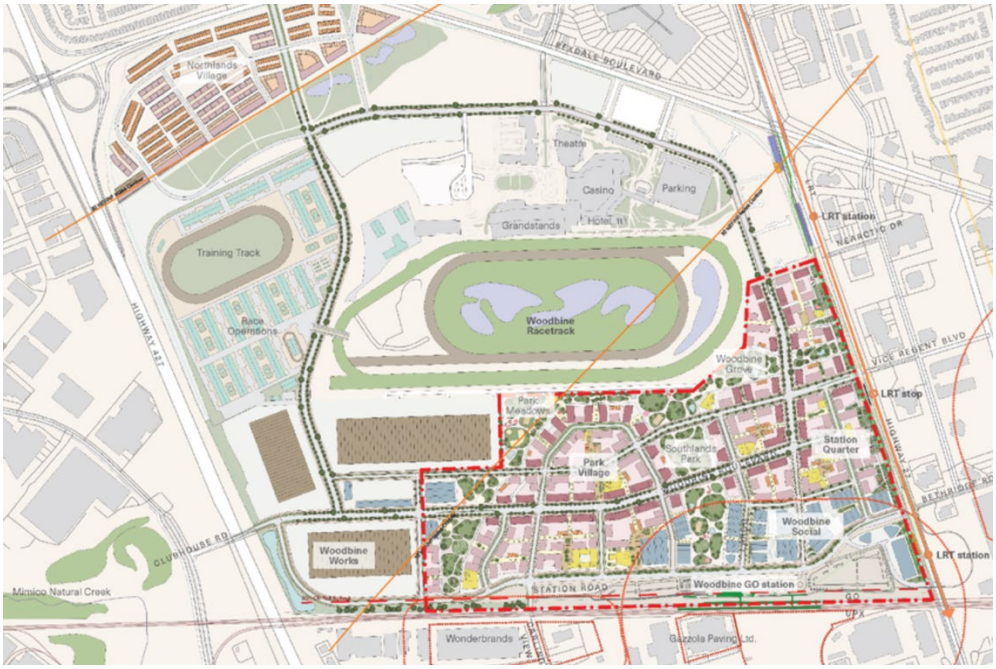


Figure 4: Detailed master plan and structure of the proposed vision
(Source: City of Toronto, 2026)



Figure 5: Conceptual rendering of the envisioned Southlands Park
(Source: City of Toronto, 2026)

WoodbineLive! Proposal as a Community Improvement Plan

Woodbine's project and planning framework can be traced back to the original *WoodbineLive!* proposal, which established many of the development concepts that continue to inform the project today. In 2007, a billion-dollar development was proposed and described as a major regional tourism and entertainment destination for Toronto (Figure 6). A partnership between owner of the lands WEG and international developer Cordish Group (The Cordish Companies) sought to transform a 112-hectare undeveloped portion of the 266-hectare, located northwest of the main grandstand of the racetrack (City of Toronto, 2007). It plans featured a mix of uses including offices, retail stores, hotel, restaurants, theatres and live performance venues. Studies submitted by the applicant suggested that the development was to generate approximately 9,400 jobs at full built-out, in addition to the existing 2,700 jobs already located on the site (City of Toronto, 2007). The entertainment and commercial components were estimated to generate employment, both indirectly and directly (City of Toronto, 2007).

The proposal was organized around a commercial district complemented by a future neighbourhood with residential uses (City of Toronto, 2007). In July 2007, Toronto City Council adopted the recommendations report from City planning, and approved the Official Plan Amendment and Zoning By-Law, endorsing the draft approval of the plan of Subdivision to implement Phase I of the *WoodbineLive! Proposal* (City of Toronto, 2007) The Phase I is like

what is evolving to become on the site today, that is a mix of uses including: a hotel, restaurants, retail stores, live performances and theatre (City of Toronto, 2007). Phase II suggested residential development and supported commercial uses in a new community, which is what the Secondary Plan is enforcing (City of Toronto, 2007).



Figure 6: Conceptual vision of WoodbineLive!
(Source: Peat, 2013)

Methodology

My research adopts a qualitative case study design to examine and understand the evolving governance relationships surrounding the Woodbine (re)development project in Rexdale. The study combines a historical-geographical review of Rexdale's development trajectory with semi-structured interviews with planners involved in the Woodbine TOC Secondary Plan study, alongside an analysis of relevant policy documents and media sources. Interviews with planners provide insight into how planning professionals navigate changing governance frameworks.

Much of the historical-geographical analysis of this project provides background information and context related to the evolution of the Woodbine project in Rexdale. This context includes understanding the key actors involved in the decision-making process, which is essential to analyzing how a series of events take shape, and influence planning narrative and implementation overtime. I compiled a chronological order of these events, related to the project that took place in Toronto between 2007 and 2026.

I refer to Rexdale's fact sheet presented by a United Way Greater Toronto and the Rexdale Community Hub that uses Statistics Canada Census (2021) data to understand the socio-demographics and socio-economic characteristics of Rexdale neighbourhood. The fact sheet includes understanding household income, percentage of visible minorities, prevalence of low-income, housing tenure, and age (United Way, 2021). These indicators provide a better insight into socio-economic disparities and demographic composition of Rexdale.

My research primarily consists of an in-depth policy document analysis from 2007 to 2026. I review many staff reports and recommendations, the Ontario's planning framework, and intergovernmental agreements. Staff reports include communication and recommendations regarding the *WoodbineLive!* proposal, revenue sharing, financial incentives, and development applications from WEG. Specific documents related to the project included *Woodbine TOC Authorization to Enter into Agreements for Resourcing, Expanded Gaming, the Rexdale-Casino Woodbine Community Benefits Agreement*, and other relevant documents that were presented to City of Toronto's Committee and Council meetings. I also review reports such as *WoodbineLive! Financial Incentives to Support a Tourism/Entertainment Attraction "Transformative Project" 2008, Toronto's Financial Incentive Program 2008, Public Consultation on the Woodbine Racetrack Casino 2015*, that were also presented to Council and Committee meetings. Ontario's planning framework is guided by provincial policy documents, including the Planning Act and 2024 Provincial Planning Statement (PPS). Additional, municipal-provincial and federal relationships have been influenced by agreements such the New-Deal Agreement and Revenue-Sharing Agreements.

I also review letters to the City clerk from different actors such as WEG planning consultant's and Toronto Community Benefit's Network (TCBN). I draw from in-depth media analysis with relevant sources such as newspaper articles, media and blog posts to understand the planning narrative and the scale of the project, especially during its initial stages, and how community organizations and the public perceive it throughout. This media review has enabled the review of the intentions of the (re)development and its impact on Rexdale. I also provide additional contextual analysis to Ontario's housing crisis and Toronto's scarcity of employment lands.

Drawing on academic scholarship on neoliberalism, public-private partnerships, community benefits, and casino/tourism development situates Rexdale's case study within

theoretical debates in urban planning. A conceptual analysis framework draws on governmentality and communicative and collaborative planning theory that focuses on analyzing the power dynamics that inform urban development. This is to understand how planning agreements and funding mechanisms shape governance and how power is exercised through formal arrangements of planning. The overall analysis reveals the evolution of the Woodbine project up until the Secondary Plan study phase, which was enabled through the authorization of a Resource Agreement. My research highlights the project's key moments throughout its historical-geographical analysis.

To further understand the role of municipal planners actively involved in this project and their thoughts about the Resource Agreement, I conducted three interviews with public sector planners at the City of Toronto between April and July 2026. The interviewees work in different areas of the Woodbine TOC Secondary Plan study, including Joanna Kimont Project Manager for the Woodbine Secondary Plan; a Senior Transportation Planner for the Woodbine Transportation Master Plan; and a Senior Planner in Development Review. Since the Resource Agreement was recommended by City Planning and Development Review, interview questions focus on how the agreement might influence planning capacity. Planners were asked about their involvement with the project, their views on the Agreement, project's proposal design considerations, planning process, community consultations, land-use implications, and regional issues or considerations.

Some questions asked what they thought about the Woodbine project and its impact on Rexdale, because the Resource Agreement advances its plan implementation. Questions about community benefits, and the community perspective were asked especially because the information about Woodbine project is released to the public. As a resident who lives in Rexdale, I read the Resource Agreement with a community and a planner perspective. I do not know what the general community would think of this arrangement, which is a limit to this study. I perceived the Resource Agreement differently compared to the planners I interviewed, and my perception of it can be biased by my residency. Nonetheless, the Resource Agreement is a negotiation between the City and WEG. The Agreement's communication and details are analyzed throughout this paper to better understand its purpose.

All three planners were asked a common set of questions regarding the Resource Agreement, along with additional questions tailored to their specific roles and responsibilities in the Woodbine Secondary Plan. The interviews offer perspectives and an opportunity for planners

to share their experiences as their role as a planner, and how effective policies can frame their work. The strategies they use to navigate institutional constraints can offer ways to advance planning objectives towards implementation.

Although this study initially aimed to include perspectives from Rexdale residents, resident interviews were not obtained. I participated in a virtual community consultation held on March 9, 2026, which provided insights and concerns regarding the Woodbine (re)development project. I was unable to attend the subsequent community consultations which is a limitation to understanding competing interests and capturing additional community feedback.

Overall, these methods reveal whether Resource Agreements and other public–private planning arrangements reshape the role of planners, shift power, and influence the social, economic, and spatial conditions of Rexdale. In doing so, they provide insight into how these social dynamics shape future development outcomes and illuminate the broader socio-spatial and governance impacts of neoliberal planning practices.

Paper Organization

This Major Research Paper is organized into seven sections. The first section examines the historical development of Etobicoke, exploring Rexdale's suburban expansion, the significance of the Woodbine Racetrack and Casino in the community, and the ways in which Rexdale is being (re)defined through recent neighbourhood changes and (re)development. The second section presents the Theoretical Framework that guides this study. It examines the theories of neoliberalism and neoliberalization, explores the role of public-private partnerships in urban development, and discusses Community Benefit Agreements as a policy tool for promoting more equitable planning outcomes for communities. Together, the theoretical framework supports an analytical framework to critical examine the Resource Agreement through governmentality and collaborative and communicative planning concept that is discussed in the third section. The fourth section discusses Ontario's housing affordability crisis, situating with broader economic and policy contexts. It explores the factors contributing to housing needs, the impacts on low- and moderate-income households and the relationships between housing affordability and planning. The fifth section examines Toronto's employment lands and the evolution of 'area of employment' policy definition. This section considers the implications of policy changes that impact protection of employment lands in Toronto. The sixth section focuses on the Woodbine

Planning Framework, and its long-term vision for (re)development on the Woodbine site. It analyzes the governance frameworks, planning processes, and shared interests that have shaped the vision and implementation overtime. The final section concludes the paper by summarizing key findings, discussing their implications for planning and practice, and identifying opportunities for future research.

1. Brief History of Rexdale

The lands that now comprise of Rexdale were part of the traditional territories of Indigenous people, including the Mississauga's of the Credit First Nation. The Humber River flows southeast through the Rexdale neighbourhood, a historically significant waterway system for Indigenous peoples, particular the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee nations, who used the river as a trail to facilitate trade, and link seasoning hunting grounds (Lakeshore Grounds, 2017).

Historical Development of Etobicoke

European settlers, mainly the French, arrived in Upper Canada and what is now Ontario in the early 1600s, with the area around the Humber River becoming part of the fur trade and transportation routes (Harris, 2017). By the late 18th century, the British had established control over the region that would become Ontario, and the area now known as Etobicoke was transferred to the Crown through treaty agreements with Indigenous peoples. The British distributed large parcels of land to colonists and other settlers for their allegiance during and after the War of 1812 (Harris, 2017).

Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, John Graves Simcoe, arrived in 1791 and played significant role in shaping the early settlements of Ontario. The 1812-1815 War, a conflict between the United States and Great Britain, accelerated the development in Etobicoke due to Simcoe's settlement policies (Harris, 2017). Simcoe settlements policies had a significant impact on the built form and applied the idea of granting large amounts of land to shape how the colony would develop. Etobicoke Township, formally established in 1798, developed as a predominantly rural and agricultural community throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. Its fertile soils supported farming, which remained the area's dominant land use for more than a century (Harris, 2017).

In post-war period, rapid population growth, industrialization, and increasing demand for housing transformed Etobicoke from rural township into a suburban municipality (Harris, 2017). These changes coincided with growing concerns over coordinating urban growth and servicing across the Toronto region. In response, the City of Toronto, along with several surrounding suburbs, came together to undertake a comprehensive study of the metropolitan region, examining regional planning challenges, ultimately contributing to the creation of the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto, as an upper tier government in 1954 (Rose, 1963). In terms of physical planning, Metropolitan Toronto exercised only limited control over the rapid growth of Etobicoke and other large townships such as North York and Scarborough (Rose, 1963).

The area was amalgamated in 1967, becoming the Borough of Etobicoke, which later became the City of Etobicoke in 1983. In 1998, Etobicoke merged with other municipalities to form the current City of Toronto, ending Etobicoke's identity as a separate legal entity but preserving its important historical significance.

Rexdale's Suburban Growth and Economic Transformation

Rexdale is a neighbourhood located in northern Etobicoke, Toronto. Its proximity to major highways, and the Toronto Pearson International Airport made it an attractive site for moving goods and people. Rexdale took its shape in the 1950s as a suburban area combining residential neighbourhoods with an industrial and manufacturing base. In this period, Toronto has undergone a twofold economic restructuring process that reshaped both its economy and urban space (Boudreau et al., 2009). On the one hand, manufacturing jobs have steadily moved out of the downtown core and even beyond the metropolitan region, relocating to suburban areas, exurban and other regional areas (Boudreau et al., 2009). On the other hand, the city's economic base moved towards a diverse mix of industrial and service activities toward a predominantly service-oriented economy rather than just producing physical goods (Boudreau et al., 2009).

Rex Wesley Heslop, businessman and a son of a farmer in Etobicoke, saw the future of farmlands on city outskirts in developing housing subdivisions (Filey, 2006). Heslop quickly established Rex Heslop Homes Limited and built 400 homes in Alderwood area within Etobicoke. In 1951, he recognized vacant farmland north of the about to constructed Highway 401, recognizing the growing demand for housing driven by the expansion of Malton's aircraft

industry (Harris, 2016). During this period, the Township of Etobicoke faced challenges in providing basic services to his rapid developing neighbourhoods (Harris, 2016; Mathuria, 2016). The municipality was unable to keep pace with infrastructure and service demands (Harris, 2016). In an agreement with Township of Etobicoke, Heslop built houses while introducing a balance of 35% industrial and 65% residential development (Harris, 2016). This approach set a precedent in Rexdale, where housing and industry were established before basic amenities and services. As a result, Rexdale can be described as disconnected because services lagged initial development. Over time, this pattern became embedded in the area's historical narrative, reinforced media portrayals that emphasizes poverty, violence and crime (Chaudhary, 2022; Loppie, 2023). This framing later informed policy responses, with targeted interventions and policies to stimulate local economic growth and rebrand the area that is discussed throughout the paper.

Located in the northern part of Etobicoke, Rexdale differed vastly to south Etobicoke (Dhopade, 2015). The period from the 1950s to1970s saw substantial Italian immigration, which resulted in neighbourhoods characterized mainly by single-family homes (Dhopade, 2015). Neighbourhoods were largely designed around the automobile, and unlike the more compact form of the south, North Etobicoke evolved more slowly, eventually taking on a more suburban character. After the post-war, North Etobicoke was made up of social housing, strip malls, high rise apartment communities, and some condominium development, slowing down new development as it began to attract newcomers and immigrants to its affordable housing area (Dhopade, 2015). Later, many South Asian immigrants migrated to the north part of the Etobicoke between 1996 and 2006 (Dhopade, 2015).

In an earlier Rexdale Boulevard/Highway 27 study for a new regional shopping center (Woodbine Mall), Ted Tyndorf (1986), former Toronto Chief Planner, reports Rexdale as "the first planned industrial node development in Canada" (23). Over the past few decades, the broader decline in manufacturing has raised concerns about the long-term viability of these industrial districts across the city (Mathuria, 2016). This characterization mostly reflects the recent industrial, manufacturing and transportation phases in the area's history.

The Woodbine Racetrack and Casino in Rexdale

The Woodbine Racetrack and Casino are situated within the Rexdale neighbourhood between Rexdale Boulevard and Queen's Plate Drive, operating since Rexdale's development as a suburban community. The development of the Woodbine Racetrack coincided with the post-war suburbanization of Rexdale and became one of the area's defining landmarks. The Woodbine Racetrack, established as the Ontario Jockey Club in 1881, reflects British-influenced horse racing traditions.

Horse racing, widely regarded as one of the oldest sports, involves jockeys riding highly trained horses of specific breeds developed for speed, competing against others. The specific horse breeds are developed through generations that enhance physical stamina and performance, which is further refined through training with their jockeys (Dubey, 2011).

Despite growing contemporary attention to animal welfare and advocacy, its longstanding traditions and institutions structures continue to endure. At the same time, critical perspectives highlight the industry's darker dimensions, including concerns about gambling, animal welfare and the exploitation of low-income and precarious labour, which persist in sustaining horse racing as a commodified spectacle. As Debord (1994: thesis 42) writes, "the spectacle corresponds to a historical moment at which the commodity completes its colonization of social life." Horse racing was more of a social and elite practice, but within the capitalist system the horse itself becomes a commodity asset, and it is where leisure becomes consumption through a business system and a space of class division. Those very spectators that participate are part of an alienated consumption, because horse racing involves one's image and representation. At the Woodbine Racetrack and Casino, space itself reflected hierarchy, with clear class divisions and separating exclusive areas from more marginal seating zones. In practice, it was the working class who generated much of the industry's financial base. The promise of betting and possibility of winning crosses class boundaries, which was central to this appeal (Dubey, 2011).

The Woodbine TOC Secondary Plan study reflects a broader historical pattern of private-sector consolidation and monopolizing racing shaping urban land use. In the 1950s, president of the Ontario Jockey Club, E.P Taylor, an influential businessman, envisioned intermingling industry, shopping, recreation and housing. Taylor became deeply embedded in the horseracing industry, reshaping it into a global business model (Dubey, 2011). His efforts to monopolize the

sector were tied to an attempt to regulate and centralize legal gambling within the province of Ontario (Dubey, 2011).

Taylor systematically acquired and closed competing racetracks across Ontario, shaping the horse racing industry (Woodbine History, 2026). Facilities such as Greenwood Raceway, located in Toronto's east end Beaches neighbourhood, were closed and redeveloped, while others such as Fort Erie Racetrack remained a secondary role. This strategy supported the development of a centralized "super track" in Rexdale, which was constructed in 1956 and opened shortly after, streamlining the province's racing industry. However, throughout the 1970s, his push for off-track betting was repeatedly rejected by the Pierre Trudeau government, largely out of concern that it would undermine smaller racetracks outside major urban centres.

Today, the Woodbine site still reflects this layered history, incorporating a racetrack, casino and a resort while maintaining areas of exclusivity. This is now particularly drawn from the current Woodbine (re)development project.

How is Rexdale being (re)defined?

Over the last few years, Rexdale has undergone significant changes with the introduction of major transit infrastructure including the implementation of the new Finch Light Rail Transit (LRT) and the recent major commercial (re)development at Rexdale and Islington Boulevard.

Its suburban layout and the diverse immigrant neighbourhoods in Rexdale are part of an evolving 'innovative district' within the in-between city. As part of the in-between city concept, areas like Rexdale contain some of the city's most striking urban contradictions: wealth and poverty coexist, university and education institutions bordering neighbourhoods, and suburban desires collide with inner-city needs (Boudreau et al., 2009). The Finch LRT, which runs along Finch West to Humber College, establishes a new regional connectivity that addresses the lack of transit services in these communities. Transportation infrastructure is more than just physical systems; it stimulates urban development which would direct attention to the proposed Woodbine GO Station as part of the Woodbine project. This integration positions transit as more than a means of moving people and goods; it serves as a planning strategy that shapes state-market relations and how that guides the emergence of innovation in cities.

For this paper, the Rexdale neighbourhood considers its city boundaries (Figure 7), and refers to the area near the Woodbine Casino and Racetrack. Rexdale is bordered by the City of

Mississauga and Toronto Pearson International Airport (to the west), Highway 401 (to the south), North York (to the east), and City of Vaughan (to the north). It is situated within the West Humber sub-watershed, the Humber River, where water flows from higher areas toward Lake Ontario.

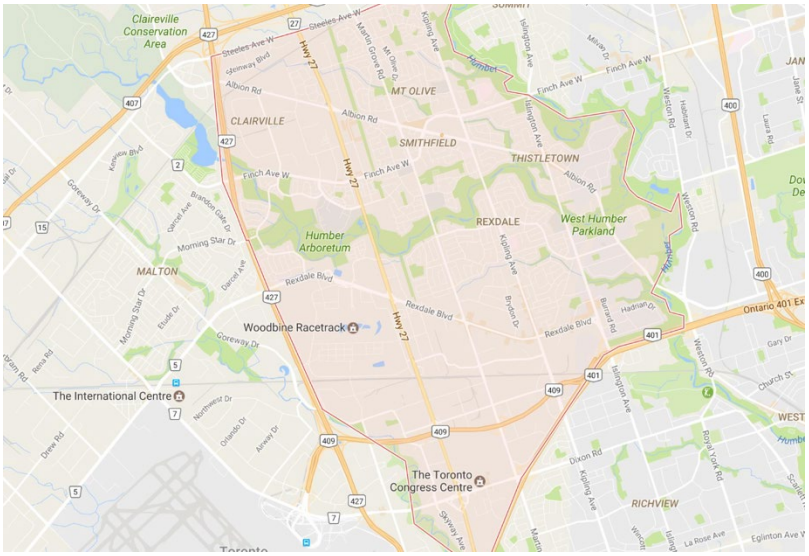


Figure 7: City of Toronto's boundary of Rexdale
(Source: City of Toronto, 2026).

Like many inner suburbs, Rexdale has had a complex history shaped by both lived experiences and persistent lingering narratives of perceived negativity. Kunal Chaudhary (2022) shares their lived experiences and Rexdale's urban politics explaining the emergence of crime and violence. In response to these challenges, the City of Toronto established a policy framework in 2005 that identified Rexdale as one of Toronto's targeted "Neighbourhood Priority Area." This framework was designed to alleviate and address poverty, social isolation, and crime and gang violence (Chaudhary, 2022). But, at the same time, Toronto was facing unaffordability, decline, and economic disparities between Toronto's racialized suburbs as downtown core began to grow (Chaudhary, 2022). Earlier this year, the federal government invested in youth gun and crime violence particularly in Toronto's Rexdale community, with intentions to help assist youth with employment and create positive pathways away from gang involvement as part of their crime prevention strategy (Government of Canada, 2026).

Rexdale has many stories and is of home to many different cultural background and ethnicities of South Asian, Latin American, West Asian, and Middle Eastern communities (United Way, 2021). There is a high portion of newcomers and occurrences of low-income households, that had been traditionally underserved by communities' amenities and services (Mathuria, 2016). In the last decade, there has been some initiatives to serve Rexdale. In collaboration with the United Way, the Rexdale Community Hub, opened in 2012 for assistance in health, legal and employment services (Mathuria, 2016).

Rexdale has also been the focus of the Rexdale Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Plan (SNAP) led by Toronto Regional Conservation Authority (TRCA), which identifies Rexdale as a neighbourhood facing climate vulnerabilities while recognizing opportunities to urban renewal and environment improvement through an intense community driven approach (TRCA, 2026). Rexdale's SNAP also addresses broader priorities such as urban agriculture, community needs and well-being, employment, affordability, community empowerment in response to local challenges such as aging park infrastructure, unemployment, concentrated poverty, urban heat and food insecurity.

Figure 8 illustrates the geographical area of Rexdale SNAP bounded by Steeles Avenue (to the north), the Martin Grove Hydro Corridor and the Humber Arboretum (to the west), the Humber River (to the south), and Kipling Avenue and another branch of Humber River (to the east) (TRCA, 2026). The red circle marks the area around the Woodbine Racetrack and Casino that is not recognized by SNAP boundary.

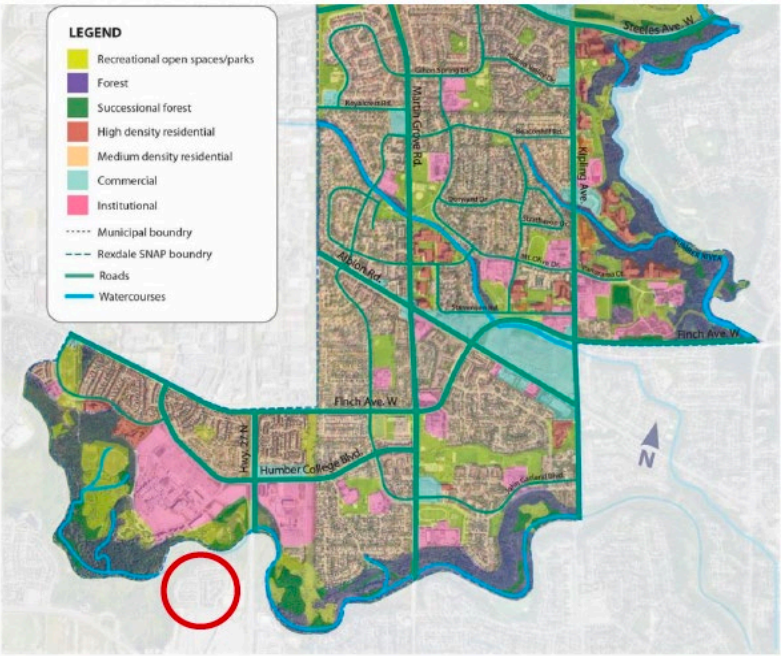


Figure 8: Rexdale Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Plan Study Area
(Source: Toronto Regional Conservation Authority, 2024: 6)

Rexdale's suburban strip malls and larger malls are not just part of its built form and architecture but has an ability to build communities at a pedestrian level. In 1985, Woodbine Mall near the Woodbine Racetrack and Casino provided much needed commercial development as well as jobs in Rexdale (Mathuria, 2016). The mall is still known for its unique indoor amusement park, called the Fantasy Fair that continues to operate today. Ever since the initial owner Cadillac Fairview left, several tenants like Sears and Zellers followed, marking its downfall (Thayaparan, 2026). As the mall began to decline and deteriorate, it became a pit stop shop with convenience: ATM, clothing stores, repair and service shops, deadstock items, food items. For myself, and many other residents, the mall carries memories with nostalgia. In recent months, the parking lot has become a storage and rental space for trucking companies. In some ways the new function erodes the public space, but it is a way the mall is making money to support its current financial situations (see Figure 9).

The mall still has illustrations of the future changes and development that would have occurred many years ago in the area which never came to fruition (Figure 10). The mall was recently bought by a corporation, following outstanding financial debt and difficulties under the previous ownership, where the owners are exploring opportunities of repurposing the 51 acres of

land to support the community (Thayaparan, 2026). This process highlights the broader challenges of revitalizing suburban commercial spaces and years to plan and implement.



Figure 9: Woodbine Mall's parking lot serving as a storage space for trucks
(Source: Sapthasvanaa, 2026).



Figure 10: Illustration depicting future changes for the Woodbine Mall area
(Source: Sapthasvanaa, 2026).

2. Theoretical Framework

To interpret the changes and (re)development at the Woodbine Racetrack and Casino, it is important to note since its earlier development phases in 2007, the project was considered a 'transformative' for Rexdale, during a period of global economic uncertainty. This is a conception of 'urban restructuring,' which remains a central focus to urban political economy (Kipfer & Keil, 2002; Brenner & Theodore, 2010). Soja (2011) argues that over several decades in North American cities, urban restructuring has altered the priorities of municipal governments, as cities began experiencing "hollowing out" in its initial phases of suburbanization and deindustrialization. This restructuring has shifted urban policy away from meeting urgent social needs toward 'marketing' and redevelopment to keep more-or-less proximate urban regions and cores attractive through investments. As cities expanded into larger regional networks and became more connected globally, capitalist development spreads and influence more widely across regions and across the world. This section understands neoliberalism and neoliberalization as a concept to capture broader transformations in the organization of capitalist society, including how the neoliberal state continually seeks new institutional arrangements, such as deregulation and privatization to improve its competitive position in the global market (Harvey 2005; Brenner & Theodore, 2005).

Neoliberalism and Neoliberalization

The rise of neoliberal theory provides a critical foundation for understanding contemporary urban planning and governance. Neoliberalism emerged in the late 20th as a response to the perceived failures of both *laissez-faire* capitalism and state-led economic planning. Its intellectual history is rooted in classical liberalism and neoclassical economics, particularly the Austrian School (Hayek) and the Chicago School (Friedman, Stigler). The Colloque Walter Lippmann (1938) was an important conference held in 1938 in Paris, that sought to rethink liberalism in the face of rising socialism, fascism, and state intervention. This set the stage for neoliberal ideas to take root in institutions like the Mont Pelerin Society (1947), which played a key role in development and disseminating neoliberal ideas and thoughts in the postwar Fordist-Keynesian period. These ideas became politically influential in the late 20th century, under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, whose governments implemented policies of privatization, deregulation and free market with limited state intervention (Peters, 2021; Harvey, 2005; Peck, 2013).

Scholars such as Brenner and Theodore (2005), Peck (2012) and Harvey (2005) argue that neoliberalism is not a simple political ideology, but as an evolving and a contradictory process that reshapes governance that promotes free markets and reduces state interventions. They also emphasize that neoliberalism's contradictory tensions; while it is framed as a solution to urban problems with a desire to support collective life, it often represses those very intentions in ways limiting democratic governance it claims to defend.

According to Brenner and Theodore (2005) and Harvey (2005), neoliberalism operates as a mode of urban governance, a spatially selective political strategy, and as a global ideological discourse that shapes contemporary urban development by adapting to local political economy and social contexts. In North American cities, neoliberalization has rescaled metropolitan governance through federal devolution, the creation of regional institutions, shifting local political alliances, and the prioritization of free-market and private-sector initiatives. Keil and Boudreau (as cited in Brenner & Theodore, 2005) contend that, rather than addressing urban challenges and problems or improving governance, neoliberalization has produced new forms of elite strategizing and popular resistance across key regulatory areas, including economic development, environmental policy, and transportation. This is realized in uneven geographical developments, with path-dependent processes producing outcomes that frequently diverge from its stated theoretical object as it adapts across time and place (Brenner and Theodore, 2005). Moreover, neoliberal urban governance provides a framework for understanding planning ideology, its instrumentalities of the state, and the ways in which the planning practice is shaped and constrained by broader political-economic forces (Harvey, 1985).

Bevir (2016) explores rethinking governmentality after neoliberalism. Foucault (2001) introduces the concept of governmentality, redefining 'state' and 'power.' Instead of accepting modern governance knowledge such as policy expertise and planning rationale, a governmentality approach gives new meanings to how the knowledge and power make certain policies and rules that influence people's lives. As Bevir (2016) argues, neoliberal reforms initially pushed government toward market-driven practices through privatization and breaking up large bureaucracies, but these changes produced fragmentation and coordination problems no single agency could manage. A second wave of reforms in the late 20th century introduced networks and partnerships between government, private firms, and community groups to address both the problems neoliberalism created and the issues it originally sought to fix. These

partnerships reconnected fragmented agencies around shared goals while allowing the state to work alongside private actors and maintain oversight.

This process elevates private-sector initiatives while diminishing policy transparency and coherence, becoming entrenched institutionally as public-private partnerships (PPPs) are increasingly framed in local political discourse as the 'best practice' in urban governance (Brenner and Theodore, 2005). Neoliberalism goes beyond ideology; it reflects a broader manifestation of capitalist logic. Brenner and Theodore (2005) and Lauermann and Davidson (2013) contend that neoliberal urban planning blends with development strategies across projects with broader capitalist strategies and goals. This blending involves the shift to entrepreneurial urban governance, that reorganizes local institutions spatially and place specific as a strategy. Some development strategies involve a stronger government role, such as strictly regulating projects and concentrating major infrastructure investments tied to fast-growing urban cores, while seeking to create more centralized and standardized systems of state territorial governance.

Public-Private Partnerships

Public–private partnerships (PPPs) have become a central feature of contemporary urban development, offering both advantages and drawbacks. Cities that face economic challenges, rely on business elites to remain competitive, creating mutual dependence where government benefit from private sector expertise and financing, while businesses get faster approvals and institutional support (Goldstein & Mele, 2016; Seimiatycki, 2010). In the case of Vancouver, Siemiatycki (2006) examines how planning processes promoting free-market have become increasingly popular in the delivery of public infrastructure, and in some approaches can also be seen as an attempt by cash-strapped governments to take advantage of the private-sector access to capital to finance projects, deliver innovation and manage risks.

However, critical scholars argue that PPPs empower private sector elites, shifting local government priorities away from community needs toward economic development agendas defined by private interests (Siemiatycki, 2006; Goldstein & Mele, 2016; Harvey, 2005). Harvey (2005) argues that state legislation and regulation often favour corporations, and in many municipal PPPs the state bears most of the risk while the private sector captures most of the profit. There is extensive literature debating the performance of PPPs, particularly regarding their ability to deliver public infrastructure on time and within budget. A recurring argument in this

scholarship is that PPPs draw attention to the role of micro-level institutional practices that shape how these partnerships are managed (Opara et al., 2022). Hybrid governance arrangements are emerging as new models that combine outsourcing and insourcing, reflecting shifting relationships between public and private actors. These arrangements use contracts strategically to balance market forces and state responsibilities in delivering public services and social programs (Warner & Hefetz, 2012; Gibson et al, 2023). PPPs often ignore or push aside communities of color. This separation raises the value of neighbourhoods, while making working-class residents feel that wealth and opportunity depend on being able to access certain locations (Dantzler, 2021). Miraftab (2004) states that most research on PPPs look mainly at technical aspects, such as how contracts and agreements are written or how risks are shared while paying less to the dynamics of power relations and questions of who benefits from the development and the 'public space' it promises to provide.

Community Benefits Agreement

A project like Woodbine Project is like the 2001 L.A. Live proposal, a multi-billion-dollar master plan sports and entertainment district proposed to revitalize downtown Los Angeles in the United States (Saito, 2012). It introduced 'Staples Center Community Benefits Agreement' as it provided provisions for affordable housing and local hiring for the community that the development can support (Saito, 2012). This was the first widely recognized 'Community Benefits Agreement' that first emerged and been formalized in the United States. Earlier forms of community, developer agreements and local hiring commitments existed in various informal ways in U.S. urban development during the 20th century (Saito and Truong, 2015; Wolf-Powers, 2010). Contractual agreements that function as state instruments manage urban development in partnership with private actors, and through these new forms of governance Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) emerged within the realm of PPPs and planning (Jassen-Jansen & van der Veen, 2017; Wolf-Powers, 2010). Its neoliberal roots have been directed towards a conception of 'communitarian civil society', who are seen as participating and self-governing areas in the planning practice and approach (Jassen-Jansen & van der Veen, 2017: 207). Fox-Rogers & Murphy (2015) discusses how planning agreements, such as CBAs can infiltrate the political sphere, its importance to understand these processes with particular attention to the shifting power relations between the different actors involved, which can deepen neoliberalism. This also

explains to what extend negotiated agreement reflect the underlying power configurations within the planning system, and whose interests and rights are prioritized regarding development.

To better regulate relationships that are 'mutual' and 'direct' between local coalitions, government, market actors, and communities involved in the urban development projects, contracts such as the CBAs are used to empower those disadvantaged in the urban development processes (Jassen-Jansen & van der Veen, 2017; Fox-Rogers & Murphy, 2015). As part of the L.A Live case study, the CBAs suggest political power for low-income residents and mobilizing better collaboration with labour unions seeking to secure permanent jobs for the area (Saito, 2012; Saito and Truong, 2015). CBAs can also counteract neoliberalism by challenging power dynamics through negotiation.

The role of contracts in urban governance has been transformed since the global financial crisis in 2008, which threatened municipal responsibilities on the delivery of public goods and services. It weakened municipal finances and reduced state funding, which led cities to search for alternative resources to support the growing population (Jassen-Jansen & van der Veen, 2017). But the role of these contracts has been overlooked in the planning field (Jassen-Jansen & van der Veen, 2017; Fox-Rogers & Murphy, 2015).

Communities can voice their opinions and challenge growth regimes (Fox-Rogers & Murphy, 2015). Some earlier foundation concepts of "city as a growth machine" were developed by scholars Harvey Molotch (1976) and Henri Lefebvre (1978) in the 1970s. Lefebvre's idea of the state's "mode of production" emphasizes the active role of the state in producing and managing urban space under capitalism. (Lefebvre, 1978). The state's role is to manage this space to ensure it does not collapse to maintain itself through capital accumulation (Holgersen, 2020).

The role of the state in planning and its technical aspects such as zoning and regulations is intended to support the labour market by creating spaces where people can live near their jobs, work in specific sectors, and access necessary services and amenities. At the same time, these interventions often benefit capitalist elites by increasing land values, stimulating economic growth, and reinforcing the growth machine and cycle of capital accumulation while reproducing space as an element of production in economic and social terms. Lefebvre (1991) views space as a tool for governance, by emphasizing that urban growth is influenced not just by elite interests

but also by state planning and regulation. Molotch (1987) suggests that growth is not merely about increasing population but is instead one symptom of economic and spatial transformation.

CBAs can be understood through Lefebvre's (1978, 1991) idea of equitable planning, where communities are actively involved in managing urban spaces for themselves. It reflects a bottom-up approach to urban development, where residents can assert their right to the city and challenge beyond the control of the state and capitalism. As noted by Gross (2008, as cited by Wolf-Powers, 2010), CBAs advocates maintain independence by declining any financial contributions from developers they support and by refraining from entering service contracts associated with the CBAs they negotiate.

However, from a governance perspective, CBAs also operate within broader planning systems shaped by funding mechanisms and power configurations. Oliveria & Herspeger (2018) reviewed case studies in 14 European urban regions and highlight that implementation processes of a plan are structured through negotiations over funding sources and institutional arrangements, which shape how planning outcomes are produced. In this sense, CBAs can also be understood as governance instruments embedded within complex power configurations that determine how community benefits are defined, negotiated, and implemented in planning practice.

Despite these safeguards, there are concerns of how CBAs advocates may act in their own interests, making questions of self-interest and accountability a continuing point of debate regarding the legitimacy and the effectiveness of CBAs as a public policy and planning tool. Wolf-Power (2010) and Fox-Rogers & Murphy (2015) note that CBAs have been criticized because of its legitimacy and effectiveness, and whether it commits to mitigating underlying social problems. Many agreements are structured independently. For instance, planning approvals are executed to reduce the likelihood of legal challenges while allowing governments and developers to negotiate community benefits outside of traditional planning processes.

Although, the Resource Agreement does not constitute a CBA, it is connected to the broader community benefits discussions surrounding the Rexdale-Casino Woodbine CBA. The Rexdale-Casino Woodbine CBA is examined throughout this paper as an important framework for understanding community benefits and priorities associated with the Woodbine (re)development project. The Woodbine TOC Secondary Plan study process is responsible for shaping (re)development outcomes that may address priorities commonly identified through CBA frameworks, including employment opportunities, providing services and amenities, and

local economic benefits. This relationship raises questions about how private funding of municipal planning capacity influences perceptions of planner independence, particularly as planners navigate relationships with private sector actors while engaging with community and advancing community benefits.

3. The Resource Agreement

This paper draws on governmentality and collaborative/communicative planning to examine how the implementation of the Woodbine TOC Secondary Plan study is shaped through neoliberal governance arrangements. Oliveria and Hersperger (2018) and Fox-Rogers & Murphy (2015) conceptualizes strategic spatial planning as extending beyond traditional and formal governance arrangements 'deepening neoliberalism.' This arrangement includes the different reconfigurations with decision making such as negotiations, funding mechanisms and social relations that shape implementation. These governance reconfigurations relate to Foucault's (2001) 'art of government' concept of which provides a framework for examining how governing is carried out through planning practices, institutional arrangements and administrative techniques. As Foucault (2001) writes, "the state is governed by rational principles… it has its own form of rationality which constitutes the specific reality of state" (96-97).

Drawing on Foucault's concept of governmentality, Ettlinger (2011) explains that Foucault moved away from understanding power as simple a relationship where one actor dominates another. Instead, power is understood as operating through "real and effective practices" (Foucault, 2001 as citied in Ettlinger, 2011: 542). It is a regime of practices and the mentalities and rationalities that take place, while also recognizing specific localized space for analysis (Ettlinger, 2011).

Through governmentality, Ettlinger (2011) argues that what becomes visible or invisible within urban spaces is shaped by governing practices and spatial arrangements. From a biopolitical perspective, power operates through the ways social issues are identified, categorized and managed within planning practices, influencing how marginalized populations are represented and addressed. In the context of the Woodbine project, unemployment is framed to address community needs through the Rexdale-Casino Woodbine CBA. This framing highlights how defining communities through categories such as unemployment, high crime, underserviced

can position populations are “at risk” while potentially overlooking broader economic and political structures that produce these conditions (Ettlinger, 2011).

The abstract discourse, media portrayal, and shared visions create a planning narrative. This narrative is created through the city’s planning process, through secondary plans, transportation studies, community-master plans, public consultations, implementation committees, community benefits, which show material practices as concrete actions towards the abstract discourse. Governmentality asks how the idea of revitalization become a real planning process, and how different institutional arrangement such as the Resource Agreement operationalize (re)development to produce different planning studies, public consultations, and cooperation with many actors, to advance its plan implementation (Foucault, 1978, Ettlinger, 2011).

Flyvbjerg (1998), Miraftab (2004) and Fox-Rogers & Murphy (2014, 2015) argue that planning research should move beyond questions of what planning ought to achieve and instead examine how planning operates in practice. Rather than assuming planning is guided by rational decision-making or the public interest, Flyvbjerg (1998) emphasizes investigating how power, knowledge, negotiations and strategic interests shape planning processes and outcomes. This empirical aspect complements governmentality by direct attention to institutional practices through which governance is exercised.

Building on this understanding of power, collaborative planning theory provides a framework for examining how different actors communicate, negotiate, and participate in planning processes. Healey (1996) argues that collaborative planning requires the creation of accessible “arenas” where stakeholder can engage in dialogue and negotiate competing interests. Similarly, Forester (1988) and Fox Rogers and Murphy (2015) emphasize that planners must address “communicative distortion” resulting from unequal access to information and expertise. This approach positions planners not only as technical professionals but also as facilitators and advocates responsible for recognizing power differences among stakeholders. Applying this framework to Woodbine project allows this research to examine whether planning processes that involve the city administration, stakeholders, and community actors create meaningful opportunity for engagement and participation, or whether decision-making remains influenced by those with greater institutional resources and economic power.

Finally, this framework incorporates the role of informal power and resource dependencies in planning. Fox-Rogers and Murphy (2014) highlight that although financial contributions associated with development may not be formal criteria in planning evaluations, municipalities often depend on private sector investment for "funding, infrastructure provision and job creation" (p. 15). This dependence on private sector gives more permission to informal planning that influences institutional priorities and attitudes toward development. The Resource Agreement is discussed and conceptualized in the next section using this framework to understand how it can redistribute capacity and influence decision-making within the planning process.

Conceptualization of the Resource Agreement

A resourcing agreement report highlights ongoing relations between Woodbine Entertainment Group (WEG) and the City of Toronto, enabling WEG to cover the costs of city planners time required to complete the future Woodbine TOC Secondary Plan study, which streamlines the proposed development. A key implication in this is that the developer in question, is transferring money to the city while a planning process affecting that developer's land is underway. The funding is not necessarily donations for community benefits, but under this policy becomes a financial contract where WEG, proactively funds municipal resources to support expediting planning and development.

During my interviews, one planner mentions that part of the "New-Deal agreement was to work in a collaborative process with existing landowners, and to work through in an expeditious manner." The accelerated timeline established by the province created additional pressures on municipal planning process, which required the Resource Agreement. To satisfy the requirements of the New Deal Agreement, which includes advancing transit-oriented communities, WEG agreed to fund dedicated City staff to expedite the planning process.

In 2022, Downsview Park had a similar approach and entered an authorization into a Resource Agreement to dedicate city staff and advance amendments to the Downsview Secondary Plan, where Northcrest Developments and Canada Lands had agreed to continued funding of a dedicated planning staff to carry its work and secure resources (City of Toronto, 2024).

Part of this research, I interviewed three Planners from the City of Toronto to inquire about why the resource agreement was needed, whether it benefitted them as a planner, and if the community should be worried about its arrangements. This is to understand the concept of governmentality and how power is operating through the Resource Agreement.

In this context, the Resource Agreement represents a form of governance that reorganizes relationships between different actors. Not only is the New-Deal Agreement a driving factor to why the City required a funding agreement, but Woodbine lands is a regional asset to the Province and the City. The Woodbine GO Station is a real driving force behind the New-Deal agreement, because it is delineated as a Major Transit Station Area (MTSA). WEG also contributed towards building the station in 2019, which curates the planning framework allowing the (re)development of the Woodbine lands.

When asked why the Resource Agreement was needed, Joanna (project manager) responded:

> "This is a resource that the City needed because in addition to the Secondary Plan, there is also a Transportation Master Plan, and Infrastructure Master Plan, and there are also urban design guidelines that are being developed, so the Resource Agreement was specifically created to help pay for those positions that would then deliver the Secondary Plan. Part of the resource agreement was also identifying the types of background studies that had to be submitted, in support of the Secondary Plan. Entering this resource agreement means we have specific clauses; it's a binding agreement between the two parties in terms of what the expectations are… in terms of staff they work independently for and specific things to be satisfied in terms of the material that WEG is submitting. So, we're in the position where we have appropriate level of information that we need to make the decisions that need to be made to go into creating policies for the secondary plan."

Joanna also views the Resource Agreement as a tool to strengthen the City's institutional capacity to act while giving legislative power to planners. As another planner (Development Reviewer) explains:

> "During the Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR), WEG wanted to do an employment land use conversion that would unlock the southeastern portion of the

> property, but the City said no. The MCR got taken away from us and applicants can apply on their own. At the same time, the New-Deal/Resource Agreement was struck, where that southeastern part is designated as regeneration areas. We are trying to rebuild the MCR in a way, by conducting compatibility studies through the tools… it's hard to say what I prefer… I prefer the MCR, but I don't have that anymore so we do the best we can in our framework."

Through the New-Deal and recent changes to provincial legislation, planners have lost the tools they once used to have such as the MCR, especially when the City had an intention to protect employment lands in Toronto. The planner mentions that situations change, and given their circumstances, they concluded that planners must adjust and do the best they can. It also shows how the mechanisms which planners exercise their power has been reshaped through changing governance arrangements.

Not only planners have lost these tools but so have communities. Instead, this planner (Development Review) emphasizes how broader institutional changes in Ontario's planning framework have reshaped the balance of power between municipalities, developers, and communities. While the Resource Agreement provides resource to advance the Secondary Plan, the planner (Development Review) argues that community influence depends on the participatory tools available within the planning system. This planner reflects on the Ontario Land Tribunal (OLT) process, "the community had more power because they can launch an appeal and it up for give year," whereas today "the community doesn't have as much power as before, but the city does go through all of our consultation." From this perspective, the concern is not necessarily the Resource Agreement itself, but the broader shift in planning tools available to communities that affect how communities can exercise procedural power. The same planner summarized this concern by stating that "people have slowly lost their tools" to influence planning decisions.

Yet, when asked whether the Resource Agreement give power to planners, the transportation planner responded:

> "Not necessarily… the Resource Agreement is to get the work done. My interpretation of it is that it's a big project that requires dedicated people, and there

> isn't enough budget to hire new people, from the City's budget. So, a big landowner wants to see this work."

This transportation planner argues that policy drives everything. The Resource Agreement is one component of a broader planning framework that enables the direction and implementation towards an official Secondary Plan policy framework for the Woodbine lands.

Interviews with planners reveal that power is conceptualized in different ways. The project manager viewed the Agreement primarily as a mechanism to provide staffing, technical studies, and resources required to complete the Secondary Plan. They emphasize that the Agreement remains a binding arrangement that enabled planners to obtain the information necessary to prepare evidence-based policies while maintaining the City's independent planning responsibilities. This capacity involves the aspect of peer-review studies where Joanna (project manager) mentions,

> "As part of the overall background materials that had to be submitted for the study included a compatibility mitigation study to ensure that sensitives uses identified could be permitted on the site…given there's heavy industry that surrounds the site…we had procured a consultant to do a peer review…we also hired the same consultant as WEG to fill in any gaps that they might find through peer review."

When asked whether the community should be concerned about the implications of the Resource Agreement, planners expressed differing perspectives. Some suggested that the agreement primarily functions as a mechanism to advance the implementation of the (re)development, while community perspectives are incorporated through established consultation and engagement processes. They noted that residents retain opportunities to participating in the planning process and provide input on the proposed (re)development. From this perspective, the Resource Agreement itself is not necessarily viewed as a limitation for community engagement, but rather as an arrangement that facilitates the delivery of development while engagement occurs through existing planning procedures.

According to Forester (1988), information is a source of power, and the 'incrementalist view' of information is organizational power. Forester (1988) argues that power operates through the production of information as technical expertise can privilege certain actors while limiting

ability of others to participate meaningfully. Collaborative planning theory highlights that information is a dimension of power, where the planner's role must "deal with misinformation, the source of communicative distortion" as unequal access to information and expertise can shape whose perspectives influence planning outcomes and decision-making (Fox-Rogers & Murphy 2015 as cited by McGuirk, 2001: 198).

In this sense, the Agreement strengthens the City's administration ability to manage the planning process by ensuring planners have knowledge necessary to evaluate development proposals and formulate policy. However, it also raises questions regarding whether community members and organizations possess comparable access to information and resources needed to evaluate and influence development decisions. Forester (1988) also highlights how information can be understood differently depending on how power is conceptualized. The Agreement raises a neoliberal governance critique showing how public sector planners increasingly depend on funding mechanisms to enhance municipal capacity, but also privately funded resources to obtain information. It demonstrates private actors can become embedded with the production of planning knowledge and decision-making processes.

Regarding community benefits, access to information becomes crucial to engage residents, but also to create a space for meaningful participation. If technical and planning expertise remain concentrated among municipal staff and private actors, community engagement risks becoming consultative rather than empowering. Forester's (1988) discussion of misinformation highlights the importance of ensuring that residents have access to understandable information and opportunities to challenge expert-driven narratives and (re)development outcomes.

This ties back to the planner in development review and their observations about how residents may still participate through consultation processes, but the reduction in formal planning tools and appeal mechanisms may limit their ability to contest or reshape political conversations and information guiding the (re)development. They also suggest that "on a broader level all citizens should be concerned to make a real difference if the concern is to be actively engaged and understand political parties."

The transportation planner rejects the notion that the Resource Agreement itself provided them with greater power, instead they argue that an administrative funding mechanism is

"designed to support a large and complex planning project that is going to add 40,000 people, 10,000 jobs."

The Resource Agreement is therefore considered to change Rexdale. The transportation planner saw the (re)development project to change Rexdale:

> **"**I think Rexdale will change, but I don't know exactly how it going to change… from a transportation standpoint I'd like to think, I hope it's going to improve connectivity… and when I say improved connectivity like access to a GO Station, access to the airport, Line 1, and access to Peel Region. We're not super focused on the rest of Rexdale, like we're making recommendations, but those recommendations aren't going to get you to from Humberwood Recreation center to West Humber Collegiate Institute… We're trying to improve connectivity in and out of the Woodbine Secondary Plan Boundary. There's the broader context to consider such as Finch, Martin Grove, Highway 409. But in smaller parts of the area, we are discussing how to improve facilities on such as cycling facilities… it's not necessarily in Rexdale."

As stated by the transportation planner, the Woodbine project has a specific geographic focus area, its broader scope requires consideration of how the (re)development may influence surrounding areas beyond its immediate boundaries. This is also what the other planners expressed and how the project itself could be an asset for Rexdale as it develops because of what it might bring to neighbourhood, such as new schools, community centers, connectivity, employment, more parks, and opportunities. The transportation planner also highlights that the goal is to snitch Woodbine into the areas to the north, south, east and west. The overall transportation modes on site and connectivity is a huge aspect of the project.

Although the Resource Agreement facilities the preparation of planning policies, the extent to which (re)development produces meaningful community benefits for Rexdale ultimately depends on how planning policies, consultations processes, and implementation translate to tangible social, economic, and environmental outcomes for residents. All three planners reflected on professional planning judgement and autonomy without changing their authority, within complex power structures within changing planning and governance frameworks.

My Perception of the Resource Agreement

My initial thoughts about the Woodbine's TOC Secondary Plan Resource Agreement considers PPPs and how it upholds neoliberal urban planning. Throughout my coursework, I shared my research topic to fellow planning students, who expressed that the Resource Agreement is practical mechanism for municipalities, and that it is becoming a common trend in Toronto. This tension reflects Healey's (1996) arguments that communicative planning involves examining how different actors construct meanings around planning practices. The Resource Agreement is one example of the technical nature of planning, and its object of interpretation. The main course of action for this research is to also expand my perception because I share a community standpoint. Although this is a technical document, the Resource Agreement contemplates the question of whether it is relevant enough for communities to know. I believe communities should be aware of this arrangement that enables planning studies for communities to voice their opinions, especially during a Secondary Plan study.

The Resource Agreement has no reference to community participation, and how public involvement can help produce background studies and inform the Secondary Plan. For instance, the 'Working Group' and 'Proposed Secondary Plan Process' headlines in the report mention specific actors under a collaborative study process, notably the Ministry of Infrastructure Ontario (MOI), Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH), WEG, City staff, and the Ontario Government. More specifically, the Working Group states:

> The Ministry of Infrastructure (MOI) staff initiated a working group with representatives from Woodbine Entertainment Group (WEG), Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH), MOI and City staff. The first meeting was held on July 15, 2024, with the second on October 8, 2024 (City of Toronto, 2025: 2).

Furthermore, the proposed Secondary Plan Process explains:

> "Staff's recommended modifications, if approved, will set out a framework for a collaborative Secondary Plan study process, where WEG will undertake a due diligence exercise and produce background studies that the dedicated City staff team will review. Based on staff's review of WEG's submitted material, staff will prepare a Secondary Plan for Council's consideration under expedited timelines. Given the

> collaborative study process, staff have committed to complete the Secondary Plan within 12 months from the day that WEG submits a complete set of required background materials" (City of Toronto, 2025: 3).

The statement from the Resource Agreement report raises questions regarding transparency, as the Agreement does not explicitly acknowledge community involvement despite being a public accessible document that introduces the Woodbine's Secondary Plan described as a 'collaborative study process.' Healey (1996) argues that planning decisions often rely on assumption about what is considered "good" or desirable, and that these assumptions are shaped by forms of knowledge and reasoning. This perspective shows that my interpretation reflects on understanding of how planning should operate, while interviews from planners share alternative ways, and view the agreement as a practical tool to increase municipal capacity and support community engagement throughout the Secondary Plan process. The exemption from the City's "Donation Policy" further exemplifies my interpretation that the City approached a different but rather alternative way to allow for this arrangement to be perceived as 'legal.' This is discussed later.

The project manager mentions a challenge with the Resource Agreement, where they explain its objection to perception. They recognize its unusual relationship but emphasizes that internal staff are also working on the project:

> "There might be a misconception and there might be a conflict of interest since the landowner is paying for those positions. And it's a sort of an exception that the landowner will… receive what their proposed or what they're asking for, so staff will sort of comply or be sort more lenient. But planners are held by professional standards board, so I must uphold those standards."

Forester (1988) highlights that the public conception of information are subtler ways of how power is exercised. As Forester (1988) states, "shaping who finds out what and when often shapes action (and inaction), while a more "insidious" form of power exists through the ability of major actors to shape citizens "self-conceptions" and "sense of legitimate expectation" (43-44). For Forester (1988), these forms of power influence whether citizens can meaningfully participate in planning processes, as information can either limit or enable democratic

engagement. My perception of the Resource Agreement raises questions of whether these arrangements between public and private actors are communicated in ways that support meaningful community participation or whether they reinforce perceptions that planning decisions are primarily shaped by expertise and knowledge, and powerful institutions and actors.

4. The Housing Affordability Crisis

Ontario is in a housing crisis. As one Development Review planner describes Rexdale's industrial character presents a direct conflict with increasing housing pressures, a challenge that the Woodbine Project seeks to address.

> "Big heavy industries come in direct conflict with the housing crisis… Developers want to see land as right, as potential, and want to fill the need and make money through development. Before recent upheavals with the economy, we saw a lot of development pressure with large towers to play off the existing apartments and condos that do work with the airport height restrictions, so developers want low rise."

This planner explains that decisions about the future of these lands remain an ongoing process involving continuous communication between the City, developers, landowners, and communities, to balance the need for housing with long-term protection of employment lands. In Rexdale, developers want to see what might work. Its unique location and proximity to the Toronto Pearson International Airport limits what can and cannot be developed in the area. What can and cannot be developed in Rexdale shows a tension between the priorities of building more homes and providing employment. But the housing crisis causes many urban problems such as increased sprawl, traffic, homelessness, and decreased human capital.

The study conducted by the School of Cities at University of Toronto "Ontario's Housing Crisis Explained" discusses why a crisis is there, what is causing it, and how can it be solved (University of Toronto, 2025). The growing unaffordability of housing, and Toronto being the most expensive city in Canada shows that housing is becoming more unaffordable (University of Toronto, 2025). The solutions to the housing crisis often associated with the supply of housing has become a mantra to "build more homes" but it is not just the main cause of it. The same

study discusses that people's incomes are hardly in sync with the cost of housing, thus the difficulty to keep up with a mortgage. Furthermore, intergenerational wealth also plays a role in who can afford a housing in Toronto and in the broader context of Ontario (University of Toronto, 2025).

Harvey (1978) discusses how the working class need housing to live and work, and this is why the housing is part of reproduction of labour, where workers must maintain themselves and continue to work. When housing becomes more expensive, workers either need higher wages, or they have less disposable income. If there are less jobs available, jobs that are temporary or low paying then the question is how will people find a living, and how will this help address the housing crisis?

Since homeownership has been normalized across society, it is a way of supporting livelihood and well-being. But rents, are also high, and as homeowners become new biopolitical subjects the financial process is not much different from renters because their lives and basic needs depend on global financial markets, real estate fluctuations, currency values and labour and conditions (Lamarca & Kaika 2016). Although many development proposals include affordable units and temporary solutions to social housing, they often dedicate only a small percentage of units to affordability. Housing as a commodity fuels urban capital accumulation, where a person's home and debt effectively become a source of income for the financial system, rather than just a place to live in (Lamarca & Kaika 2016).

Rexdale's post-war homes are examples of suburban planning, where it primarily consists of single-family detached, semi-detached housing and towers in the park. The neighbourhood also contains two homeless shelters, including the converted Comfort Inn Hotel at 445 Rexdale Boulevard, which provides transitional overnight accommodation for approximately 160 clients experiencing homelessness, through a partnership with the City of Toronto (Conccomuity, 2026). Located directly across from Woodbine lands, the shelter highlights the broader social conditions surrounding the proposed Woodbine (re)development project and raises questions about addressing community needs.

5. Toronto's Employment Lands

The City of Toronto always had an 'employment lens' with development review at the Woodbine Racetrack and Casino. Sunjay Mathuria (2016) wrote on the longevity and the future of Rexdale's Employment Area, conceptualizing its opportunities while also studying the vacant land of '555 Rexdale Blvd' at the Woodbine Racetrack and Casino.

Rexdale has long been recognized by the City of Toronto as a significant Employment Area, serving one of the city's largest industrial and manufacturing jobs (Mathuria, 2016). As a place of production and consumption, the Woodbine lands previously supported many former employments uses such as hotels, offices, retails, and institutions. It was highly protected from land use conversion that would permit residential. But this site is predominately at the center of heavy industrial and manufacturing uses. City administration safeguarded employment lands in response to growth management under the former PPS and Growth Plan, which emphasizes protecting these areas from encroachment to maintain long-term economic and employment opportunities (Mathuria, 2016). But, with past, intense development pressures, City administration resisted converting employment lands, where under the Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR) the proposal would have to demonstrate whether the site had potential and compatibility with non-employment uses (Mathuria, 2016).

Rexdale's employment area is particularly significant because it provides accessible jobs for the residents of surrounding Neighbourhood Improvement Areas, including Mount Olive-Silverstone-Jamestown, Elms-Old Rexdale, and Kingsview Village, and The Westway. As Mathuria (2016) discusses, Rexdale as an employment district developed overtime and making sprawled land use compatibility a challenge and an issue.

It is important to note the area's proximity to the airport, a 'mega zone' for the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), makes up most of the employment character of the area. This is supported by opportunities to provide for integrated transportation and connectivity, redevelopment, employment and amenities (Mathuria, 2016). Mathuria (2016) also notes that the City's Official Plan Amendment (OPA) 231 designated the Rexdale Employment Area as Core Employment, even though City staff acknowledged uncertainty regarding how this designation would shape the future of Rexdale's development.

Historically, the City's planning framework and SASP policies established a regional significance at the Woodbine property, while acknowledging these tensions between industrial

uses and sensitive uses. It has become more evident in the preparation of the Woodbine Secondary Plan that Rexdale's Employment Area employs many people from bordering Neighbourhood Improvement Area, carrying a multi-functional node in the city (Mathuria, 2016). The transitional uses created buffers between industrial and employment, which provided the City's rationale for maintaining designation of employment on the Woodbine site amid increasing development pressures (Mathuria, 2016).

The Rexdale-Toronto Pearson Airport boundaries are established under the 'Our Plan Toronto' framework part of the former MCR for employment conversions (see Figure 11). Since the Toronto Pearson International Airport shapes Rexdale's geographies of logistics and fleet, transportation, movement of goods and people, the airport is recognized as an 'economic zone,' the largest industrial employment area bounded by Highways 401 (to the south) and 427 (to the west), Islington Avenue (to the east) and Rexdale Boulevard and Berry Creek (to the north) (Hemson Consulting, 2022). Rexdale is part of the Provincial Specific Economic Zone (PSEZ), defined under the 2020 Growth Plan due its proximity to the airport. But, the portion of the Woodbine Racetrack and Casino serves as the largest employer, and its special policies only permitted residential uses on the northwest of the property (Hemson Consulting, 2022). The employment area accommodates about 43,100 jobs in 2019, increasing in 6000 jobs over 2011, and employment concentrations of professional education health care, and professional service sectors (City of Toronto, 2026).

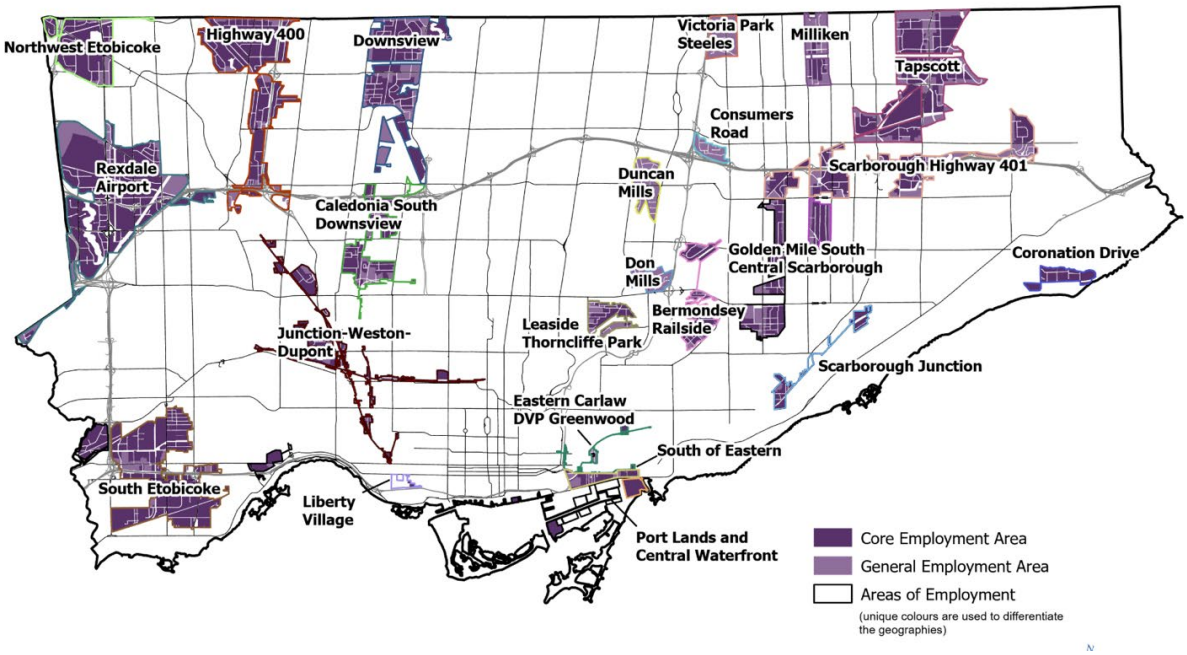


Figure 11: Employment Areas in Toronto
(Source: City of Toronto, 2026)

In 2023, provincial reforms through Bill 97 Helping Homebuyers, Protecting Tenants Act, 2023 significantly altered the planning framework governing employment lands by narrowing the definition of an "area of employment" to traditional employment uses such as manufacturing, warehousing, goods movements, and associated research and development uses. In response, the City adopted OPA 668 and 680 to align the Official Plan with the amended Planning Act. While OPA 668 allows existing commercial and institutional uses with Employment Area to continue, OPA 680 updates land use permissions through the Official Plan to reflect the revised provincial definition.

Together, these policy changes demonstrate the evolving governance of employment lands. In Toronto, the revised definition of "area of employment" introduced through Bill 97 and the reflected 2024 PPS raise concerns regarding the future protection of employment land that have historically contributed to the city's employment function.

The next section examines the planning history and framework of the Woodbine Racetrack and Casino, focusing on the City of Toronto's longstanding commitment to preserving employment lands. While the City has consistently sought to protect employment lands, recent changes to the PPS (2024), particularly the revised definition of "employment areas," have

introduced new uncertainties regarding what constitutes employment and appropriate employment uses. This revised definition has important implications for sites such as Woodbine, where employment is generated primarily through entertainment, tourism, and service-based activities rather than just traditional industrial uses. It also raises broader questions about whether the proposed Woodbine (re)development project can expand employment opportunities and deliver meaningful economic benefits for surrounding communities.

6. Woodbine Planning Framework

When the *WoodbineLive!* proposal gained attention, community coalitions formed such as Community Organizing for Responsible Development (CORD) and started a campaign in 2006 to advocate for a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) with The Cordish Companies. The campaign sought commitments to local hiring, workforce training, and social benefits, arguing that redevelopment to the Woodbine site should provide tangible community opportunities for existing residents (Tufts, 2008).

The *WoodbineLive!* proposal required financial incentives from the City, such as reducing development charges and parkland fees, which would give the developer long-term tax rebates (City of Toronto, 2008). It was argued that this mega entertainment project is not financially viable and mentioned that the proponent has stated that *WoodbineLive!* as planned cannot proceed "but for" financial incentives from the City (City of Toronto, 2008, p. 12). Hunden Partners a real-estate consultant firm, informed City staff and concluded that this project exceeded the City's transformative criteria, with a blend of "lifestyle retail and tenant mix." At the time there was not any comparable projects that existed in Canada, its "transformative" potential ultimately pushed the City administration to consider the project and proceed to support with the requested incentives. It also aligned with many economic development initiatives that would generally attract investment, economic competitiveness and growth to the Toronto region such as "Proactive Toronto, Global Toronto, Creative Toronto, and One Toronto." In May 2008, Toronto City Council approved Financial Incentives Program and Community Improvement Plan. The Community Improvement Plan by-law was adopted by City Council in 2008 for the *WoodbineLive!* proposal.

The Community Improvement Plan enabled the City of Toronto to launch a Financial Incentive Program to stimulate investment and job growth. Financial Incentives were becoming a

common approach through city-wide projects, particularly areas such as the Waterfront, South of Eastern Employment District, for Community Improvement Plans in Toronto. The program offered financial incentives to eligible property owners who undertake remediation, such as improvement to commercial and industrial areas, funded by incremental tax revenues from redevelopment. This is where urban development leans towards calculation and risk management. Tax Incremental Financing (TIF) is a local urban development policy that enables cities to designate 'blighted' areas for redevelopment, thereby increasing property taxes (Weber, 2010). It is also a governance mechanism because it uses public assets to attract investors by converting them into speculative financial products. In the last quarter of the 20th century, cities transitioned beyond simply financing collective infrastructure, backed up by credit and faith. Instead, now, cities rely on special authorities to extend credit to privately owned development projects.

The *Woodbine Live!* proposal was not financially feasible at the time, but it posed a 'value-added' economic sector because of its potential of becoming a global tourism attraction, the creation of more jobs attracting 'talented people.' At the time, there was a low market interest in building new industrial and small-scale office projects, when it was much easier to build residential development in the suburbs (City of Toronto, 2007).

TIF is an initiative to attract, finance global competitors and retain investment, while assisting industrial and commercial sectors Toronto (City of Toronto, 2007). Now, Toronto has a similar program specific for employment sectors called the 'Economic Development & Growth in Employment (EDGE) Incentive Program to support new construction or renovation buildings from new redevelopment.

Site Area Specific Policy No. 296 and No. 29

The study area is subject to Site and Area Specific Policy (SASP) No. 296 in the Toronto's Official Plan (2002 as amended), which applies to the entire Woodbine lands (see Figure 12). The site is bounded by Rexdale Boulevard (to the north), Highway 27 (to the east), the rail track (to the south), and Highway 427 (to the west). SASP No. 296 establishes a policy framework to guide future (re)development while maintaining compatibility with existing racetrack operations and associated entertainment uses.

SASP No. 296 was given to allow for development into those districts for commercial, retail, entertainment and residential organized around design features, amenities, and connections on the lands to the surrounding area (City of Toronto, 2007).

In addition to this special policy, SASP No. 29 allows for residential and other sensitive land uses only permitted on the northwest corner of the site (Parcel C of Figure 12). SASP No. 29 provides for "new residential" (Parcel C) on other sensitive land uses when zoning normally did not allow it. Woodbine property is located within the Transport Canada's approved 30 NEF/NEP Composite Noise Contour (City of Toronto, 2007).



Figure 12: Map of Site and Area Specific Policy (SASP) No. 296 and No. 29 Parcel C

(Source: City of Toronto, 2007)

WEG also proposed residential uses to be located on the southeastern portion of the site. Since that portion is close to heavy industrial uses, staff at the time, noted that it does not provide a sufficient buffer (Mathuria, 2016). The east side of the property consists of heavy industrial, hence employment buffers would ease into sensitive uses such as residential. This demonstrates that, during the initial stages of the proposal, special-area policies and City initiatives, including FIP and Community Improvement Plan, were implemented to facilitate the *WoodbineLive!* proposal. In doing so, the City laid the groundwork for discussion regarding the introduction of

residential uses only on Parcel C, and residential uses are also being allowed on the southeastern portion of the site which is now being formally evaluated through the Woodbine TOC Secondary Plan study.

As part of the 5-Year Official Plan and Municipal Comprehensive Review (MCR), between 2011-2013, the City administration was processing land conversion requests within employment areas. At the time, the Planning Act and Provincial Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe required the City to evaluate how effective municipal Official Plan policies protected and managed employment lands. These policy requirements reflect the broader planning objectives of safeguarding employment areas as a key driver of regional economic growth while ensuring that land use decisions supported sustainable development in the Official Plan.

But letters from solicitors from WEG was sent to City clerk, stating their serious concerns about the Woodbine's employment designations, which "ignored the uses carried on at the property for many years" (Emmons, 2013). WEG was not satisfied with the redesignation of General and Core Employment. The City reassured WEG that SASP has precedence in the event of conflict with the Official Plan. In WEG's view, the employment lens did not align or were not consistent with the existing conditions and uses on the site.

WEG argued that the uses permitted under the proposed Core Employment designation did not accommodate racetrack and casino operations, which are the key activities currently permitted through the area's site-specific policies. The proposed designation failed to accurately reflect the existing uses and function of the property. WEG expressed that the site has long operated as a "destination" large-scale use, a role that differs from typical uses within Core Employment Areas and should therefore reconsider the Official Plan designation. WEG did not support the proposed Core Employment designation for most of its lands.

During this conflict, WEG requested that the City to reconsider redesignation of the southeastern portion of the property to permit a broader mix of land uses, including residential development, as contemplated through the Woodbine TOC Secondary Plan study process. In the letter, it was mentioned that the SASP No. 296 also permitted uses on the southeastern corner which the Ontario Municipal Board approved of on August 27, 2001, and how its provision was removed from the Official Plan when the city adopted SASP No. 296 (Emmons, 2013).

The City initiated Official Plan Amendment 231 in 2013 to introduce a new framework for Employment Areas by distinguishing between "General" and "Core" Employment Areas (Mathuria, 2016: 16). Core Employment Areas are located within Employment Areas and allow limited supporting uses such as hotels, parks and small-scale restaurants that complement industrial activity (City of Toronto, 2013; Mathuria, 2016). In contrast, General Employment Areas are typically on the edges that permit broader, more public-facing uses such as major retail. Together, these destinations attempt to tailor land use policies with specific needs of industrial and manufacturing districts. Land use conversions are evaluated in accordance with Provincial policy and Toronto's Official Plan. Under the Official Plan Amendment 231 policy provided limited detail on zoning and implementation aspect of 'Core' and 'General' employment areas that WEG was concerned about. Since there was no site-specific appeal of those policies, the designations policies of Core Employment Area were in force.

Expanded Gaming Debate

In 1998, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing filed Ontario Regulation 688/98, a Minister Zoning Order (MZO) to allow for the operation by Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation (OLG) for slot machines and electronic gaming on the Woodbine site (Our Plan Toronto, 2021). In 2000, City Council authorized City staff to enter into a revenue-sharing agreement with the OLG, a provincial agency, regarding the operation of slot machines at Woodbine Racetrack (City of Toronto, 2008). OLG required all host municipality to sign a standardized "template agreement," ensuring a uniform revenue-sharing formula across all participating jurisdictions in the Slots-at-Racetrack program. Toronto was entitled to receive a portion of gaming revenue quarterly under the Racetrack Municipality Contribution Agreement with the OLG, whereby the municipality's share is calculated at 5% of gross gaming revenue (see Figure 13).

Distribution of Revenues at Slots-at-Woodbine:

At its 2000 opening, Woodbine had 1,700 slot machines. The blended rate for the City's share according to the formula was 2.794%. In August 2005, a total of 200 machines were added. At the end of 2006, it was reported to have about 1,950 machines, resulting in a lower blended rate to the City of 2.693%.

In 2006, the distribution of revenues from the Woodbine slot operation, a total estimated $550 million, was:

- City of Toronto: $14.8 million (2.693%)
- Woodbine Entertainment Corp: approximately $55 million (10%)
- Horse breeders: approximately $55 million (10%)
- Ministry of Health's Problem Gambling Strategy: approximately $11 million (2%)
- Province (including Consolidated General Revenue Fund and Ontario Trillium Foundation): approximately $414 million before operating expenses (over 75%,)

The following table shows the annual revenue from OLG since Woodbine Slot's inception up to and including the quarter ending September 30, 2007:

	$ million								
Woodbine Racetrack Slots	2000 *	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007 Q1-Q3 only	Total since opening
Annual Revenue from OLG	7.916	12.055	14.295	15.716	15.703	14.501	14.801	11.741	106.728

* Opening Mar 27, 2000

Figure 13: Annual Revenue from OLG from 2000 – 2007
(Source: City of Toronto, 2007)

In March 2000, multiple City divisions including City Planning, Transportation, Legal Services, Economic Development, Public Health, the TTC, Toronto Police Service, Fire Services, Emergency Medical Services, and Corporate Finance were involved in reviewing zoning compliance, building requirements, and the anticipated financial and service impacts of the slot machine operation and use. According to a confidential joint report of dating back on March 31, 2000, from the Chief Administrative Officer and the Chief Financial Officer, the City tried to amend the MZO to include zoning provisions to manage and limit the impacts of the slot machine operation. The City administration had limited control and added conditions that protected local planning interests, through limiting the location of slot machines to the grandstand building, establishing parking standard per slot machine, and limiting slot machines on site based on traffic capacity for the area and that thorough study had to be undertaken (City of Toronto, 2000).

Toronto's City Council initially directed staff to seek an amended template agreement and negotiate a larger percentage of slot machine revenue that would increase Toronto's share. The formula of the municipality's share was calculated to be 5% of the gross gaming revenue (net win) on the first 450 slot machines and 2% on the balance i.e., more than 450 machines (City of Toronto, 2007). As more slot machines were added, the City's percentage effectively dropped.

Hence, City Council sought to require a fairer and equitable share of gaming revenue, because the City would incur additional operating and capital costs to support this operation and use.

However, during negotiations in 2000, the OLG rejected this request, and the agreement finalized in November 2000 remained aligned with the standardized-revenue sharing model that applied across all host municipalities participating in the Slot-at-Racetrack program. The City continued to raise concerns in the years that follow, but the OLG Chair and CEO maintained that existing arrangement was equitable and indicated that no revisions would be made.

However, this issue re-surfaced in 2007 when Toronto City Council again requested an assessment of the feasibility of securing higher share of slot machine revenues from Woodbine Racetrack. A staff report to the January 2008 Executive Committee noted that the *WoodbineLive!* project had recently been approved and was projected to generate substantial new gaming revenues, highlighting again that the City would incur additional costs, including financial incentives to support the new *WoodbineLive!* development. In response, the report called for renewed engagement with the Province and the OLG to reconsider what it characterized as an outdated and inequitable revenue-sharing framework. The staff report argues that Toronto should, at minimum, seek a revenue-sharing model comparable to those negotiated with First Nations communities, as a negotiating benchmark. However, these arrangements should be understood cautiously, as First Nations gaming revenue-sharing agreements are founded on distinct treaty relationships with the Crown rather than the statutory powers available to municipalities. Staff also recommended continued efforts to ongoing negotiations between the developers, the City and the OLG with consideration of the future *WoodbineLive!* project on the Woodbine site (City of Toronto, 2007).

In 2010, the Government of Ontario directed the OLG to modernize charitable and commercial gaming, including a comprehensive review of land-based gaming facilities in Ontario which ultimately resulted in efforts to expand regulated private sector delivery of existing gaming sites (City of Toronto, 2022). This change became a city-wide contentious debate around the expansion of gaming and gambling operations and a proposed new downtown casino in 2012. The *WoodbineLive!* proposal was floated in 2013 and was strongly supported by local councillors, including then Mayor Rob Ford. During his subsequent mayor campaign, Ford stated that the project would transform “Rexdale into Rosedale,” and touted *WoodbineLive!* as a

proof of his ‘deal-making prowess’ (Alcoba 2013). The partnership with Woodbine and the Cordish Company also ended.

At the time, Jane Holmes, vice-president of corporate affairs at WEG, revealed that the project never broke ground and ended formal arrangements with Cordish, but hopes to move ahead with development and its long-term vision. (Alcoba, 2013). On November 13, 2013, Toronto City Council authorized the appropriate City officials to enter into a Revised Municipal Contribution Agreement (MCR) with the OLG expanded Gaming at Woodbine Racetrack. As part of the modernization, OLG was seeking a single private sector operator for the GTA Gaming Bundle, including Woodbine Racetrack in 2013 (City of Toronto, 2022). WEG owned and managed the racetrack, but it would not control the casino procurement process and operators of expanded gaming.

OLG’s modernization strategy meant a search for expanded gaming opportunities in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). The debate between 2012 and 2015 focused on the expansion of gaming since Toronto did not have a full-scale casino, and locations such as downtown waterfront sites and the Woodbine Racetrack were discussed (Pagliaro, 2015). Significant opposition led Council to reject a downtown casino in 2013.

A previous Executive Committee voted to ban expanded gaming at Woodbine during its contentious debate over a proposed downtown casino (Pagliaro, 2015). It was stated that, “WEG wants the city to take another look at the possibility of expanded gaming centre in Rexdale, some councillors are questioning how that expansion would take shape” (Pagliaro, 2015, para. 4). At the time, The Woodbine President and CEO Nick Eaves urged committee members to vote for a review and expressed to reporters that it is not up to Woodbine to decide what could be built at the racetrack. Eaves argued that this is subject of the public consultation process, but their position as a landowner means to consult broadly and identify what the priorities are with participants involved such as OLG, the City and the Province (Pagilaro, 2015).

David Shiner who was Councillor for Ward 24 Scarborough-Guildwood wanted details from public consultations, calling it a ‘secret’ proposal because it is not what Woodbine would like to see (Pagilaro, 2015). Shiner was direct with his concerns toward Eaves, and was unsure of the scale of the project, the future of this project in Rexdale and for Toronto, and how jobs will be delivered, raising issues about who owned and controlled the process of expanding gaming operations.

Cristani (2015), Councillor of Etobicoke in Ward 1, wrote a letter to then Mayor John Tory asking to reconsider the concept of expanded gaming to not only provide WEG a revenue stream and to support horse racing. In his view, such arrangement would benefit the City of Toronto and its residents, including creation of local jobs and vitality in Rexdale community, establishment of a new world-class gaming and 'entertainment destination' and a catalyst for more growth and a revitalization in the Etobicoke area.

In May 2015, the City of Toronto conducted public consultation in three ways: a public meeting in Etobicoke; an online questionnaire; and city-wide public opinion telephone poll. There were many reasons that supported or opposed expanded gaming at Woodbine, where one in five residents believed it will provide revenue for the City, and the same percentage of residents believed it will create employment (City of Toronto, 2015). Many factors opposed the expansion, notably negative impacts related to the gaming industry, such as addiction, gambling, increased traffic, increased criminal activity, and temporary jobs (City of Toronto, 2015). Many residents supported the expansion of gaming at Woodbine, only if there were compelling benefits such as new jobs and the creation of gaming and commercial development. Residents who initially opposed the proposal also found these reasons to be the most compelling and beneficial to the area (City of Toronto. 2015: 21). It was also noted that many residents rarely visited the racetrack. While there was some interest in expanded gaming, residents indicated that their decision to visit would depend on the purpose of the visit and its uses (see Figure 14). This perspective is reflected in the Woodbine TOC Secondary Plan study, which supports the development of the area as a destination with a broader mix of attractions, commercial and business development, and residential uses.

Overall, the survey indicated that respondents rarely visit Woodbine Racetrack, and the majority reported that the expansion of gaming would make no difference whether they visit or not (City of Toronto, 2015).



Figure 14: Survey results on visits to Woodbine Racetrack
(Source: City of Toronto, 2015)

Expanded Gaming Approved Under 21 Conditions

In 2015, Toronto City Council approved expanded gaming at Woodbine Racetrack subject to 21 conditions (12 planning and 9 non-planning) that would require the WEG and the gaming service provider to ensure appropriate planning approvals and community benefits to be realized (City of Toronto, 2015). The conditions are related to planning, economic, social and health considerations. As part of Toronto City Council's agreement, expanded gaming at Woodbine 'shall' occur within the context of an 'integrated entertainment complex' as previously approved by City Council in 2007, but under 21 conditions (City of Toronto, 2015). The City requested the Province and OLG to amend existing municipal hosting fees governed by the MCR to provide a fairer return to the municipality, following previous years of unsuccessful attempts by the City to negotiate revised terms (City of Toronto, 2015). Toronto City Council requested further studies on the social and financial impacts of expanding gambling and considering Toronto's hosting fee, as well as gambling awareness in schools, improvement in public transit, and creation of a community benefits fund using additional gaming revenue.

This approval of the expanded gaming was conditional upon the service provider to finalize outstanding Site plan Control and Plan Subdivision applications for the integrated entertainment complex and gaming district. In 2015, the City was referring to the *Woodbine*

Live! project as part of their approval of the expanded gaming, under 12 planning conditions. City Council also noted that the "City will not" consent to the expansion of the gaming unless WEG, OLG and service provider enter into an agreement and comply with Toronto's planning processes including Council's approval for any new development at Woodbine and confirm that MZO should not be used to bypass municipal oversight (City of Toronto, 2015). On August 2017, OLG announced Ontario Gaming GTA LP (OGGLP), a partnership of the Great Canadian Gaming Corporation and Brookfield Business Partners LP as the private sector provider for expanded gaming operations at the Woodbine Racetrack and Casino (City of Toronto, 2022).

The City's approval of the Woodbine gaming expansion was subject to 9 non-planning conditions. These conditions focused on creating opportunities for local hiring, labour relations, social procurement, and supply chain opportunities for local businesses. It also addresses developing an Employment and Labour Market Plan and an international marketing plan for the facilities to attract tourists nationally and internationally.

A report prepared by the Interim City Manager for City Council in 2018 estimated that Woodbine gaming expansion would create more than 3700 jobs by 2022, with commitments to local hiring and increased full-time employment. The expansion was also expected to generate between $26 million and $31 million annually in municipal revenue through gaming operations (Arce, 2018; CBC News, 2018). Furthermore, the conditions outlined to establish three governance tables including an Employment and Labour Market Advisory Working Group, a Casino Woodbine Responsible Gambling Oversight Committee, and a Community Steering Committee (City of Toronto, 2018).

The Toronto Community Benefits Network (TCBN) and Toronto and York Region Labour Council asked to be members of the Employment and Labour Market Advisory Working Group, but the operator's proposed membership initially included the City, OLG, Humber College, YMCA, and workforce development organizations. After consultation, the operator agreed to create one labour seat on the Working Group and have that seat filled by a representative from one of the unions representing Woodbine casino employees such as Public Service Alliance of Canada Local 533, Teamster Local 938, and Unifor Local 504 (City of Toronto, 2018). In a letter submitted by TCBN, Executive Director Rosemarie Powell (2018) argued that the operator was interpreting the community benefit conditions as narrowly as possible to minimize their obligations. The letter noted that stakeholders include UNITE HERE

Local 75 members who directly provided food and beverage served at Woodbine, as well as a construction union, which had been excluded from discussions regarding community benefits. TBCN maintain that strong community benefits could be secured through the City's existing planning powers.

Community benefits were addressed under the '9 non-planning' conditions, despite their close connection to labour, community concerns and local development outcomes. This classification suggests that community benefits were not treated as a planning matter, but rather as a separate non-planning consideration. Powell (2018) brings this issue to light when she addressed how community benefits could still be secured through the City's existing planning powers. The organization expressed concern that the operator was excluding key community and labour voices as part of committing to providing community benefits, but also from decision making point of view. It was emphasized that developers should have meaningful conversations with the community, especially when casinos have the potential to stimulate broader development and economic change within the area (Powell, 2018). A North Etobicoke resident and ACORN representative also expressed concerns regarding the conditions and with its overall vision and lack of community representation (Shephard, 2019).

City administration took recommendations from residents, community organizations and TCBN about the community benefits not being captured in the existing 9 social conditions (City of Toronto, 2018). These matters were also raised at a public meeting in 2017, where specifically community benefit targets were suggested for expanded gaming at the Woodbine site (City of Toronto, 2018). The Rexdale-Casino Woodbine Community Benefits Agreement includes OGGLP, Casino Woodbine Management, Humber College, the city, TCBN, United Way Greater Toronto, Atkinson Foundation, Kingsview Village Local Planning Table and Rexdale Local Planning Table as part of steering committee, monitoring the implementation of the agreement over the long-term, and was finalized in 2018 (City of Toronto, 2018).

In Rexdale's CBA Annual Report, since 2018, more than 2500 new positions have been created, with over half filled by residents or equity-deserving individuals. In 2025, One Toronto Gaming also spend $115.6 million to support local and diverse businesses (Great Canadian Toronto, 2025). Also, a Community Access to Space Policy was initiated with Rexdale CBA to create accessible spaces that reflect local community needs (Great Canadian Toronto, 2025). Part of the conditional agreement in 2018, One Toronto Gaming 'shall' contribute $5 million to the

City. In the Rexdale CBA, this amount was provided to support the development to a licensed childcare facility, which was requested through community engagement. Additionally, Great Canadian Toronto also contributed $10,000 to TCBN's Next Gen Builder program, a mentorship initiative for Black youth pursuing careers in construction through apprenticeships and professional development opportunities (Great Canadian Toronto, 2025). The Rexdale 2023 progress update report states the One Toronto Gaming is currently exceeding the target for social hiring and satisfied this target since 2018. But, One Toronto Gaming has not yet met the local hiring target of 20 percent and continue to work with staff and community partners to improving local hiring outcomes (City of Toronto, 2024).

In 2017, WEG submitted two applications to amend the former City of Etobicoke Zoning Code to permit expanded gaming on Woodbine Racetrack lands. In 2021, the City of Toronto was reviewing Employment Area Conversion requests, where the City was facing pressure to convert Employment lands to permit broader range of uses, including sensitive residential uses City of Toronto, 2021). Once converted to sensitive uses, it will be unlikely for the lands to convert back to industrial, manufacturing or distribution employment activity. The City received 140 conversions requests, considering Rexdale-Airport Employment Area.

In 2019, Metrolinx and WEG partnered with discussions to build the new Woodbine GO Station. In 2021, Toronto City Council approved a zoning by-law amendment to add transportation uses which permits the future Woodbine GO Station located at the southeast portion of subject site. The province also announced plans to relocate and remove the Etobicoke North GO Station to accommodate the community plan for the Woodbine Racetrack because it "lacked the capacity to handle growth" (Global News, 2022). The future Woodbine GO station connects the Racetrack to Union station, Kitchener, and Toronto Pearson International Airport. WEG also contributed $170 million to the cost of constructing the new Woodbine GO station (Global News, 2022).

Since 2019, WEG and Metrolinx had ongoing discussions regarding the timely delivery of the Woodbine GO Station on Woodbine lands (Aird Berlis, 2023). Once the potential transit use was permitted, WEG, the Ontario government and Metrolinx's partnership insisted on requesting subject lands to be redesignated to Mixed Use and Regeneration Areas to support a future TOC.

Regeneration Areas are study areas that explore transitional lands, and how it can be revitalized to support housing, jobs, community services, and public spaces (City of Toronto, 2026). Mixed Use Areas combine residential, commercial and institution use, entertainment, recreation and cultural activities, parks and open space in a single mixed-use building or designation (City of Toronto, 2026). Part of their master plan, WEG proposes (re)development of approximately 27,600 residential units and 7940,00 square metres of non-residential space (City of Toronto, 2021). City administration attempted to negotiate off-site transportation improvements to support the future Woodbine GO Station through Section 37 of the Planning Act, but the site plan control did not legally allow the City to require those improvements. This shows how the City might face financial risk with providing infrastructure to support future Woodbine (re)development project (City of Toronto, 2021). Following the New-Deal Agreement, the MMAH approved Official Plan Amendment 653, and converted the southeastern portion of the Woodbine lands from Core Employment Areas to Mixed Use and Regeneration Areas, adding a new Site and Area Specific Policy (SASP) No. 896 to the site (City of Toronto, 2026).

WEG's consultants WND Associates submitted Employment Area Conversion Requests through MCR process to redesignate the entire site from Employment to Mixed Use and Regeneration areas. According to the letter submitted by WND Associates on behalf of WEG to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) regarding Official Plan Amendment 653, WEG argued that higher-order transit investment justified a comprehensive transit-oriented community. It is important to note, that WEG was pursuing different planning pathways during public consultations and discussions with the Province for a Minister Zoning Order (MZO) to implement residential permissions and a comprehensive Secondary Plan that the letter referred to (WND Associates, 2024). This suggests that WEG had already established the foundation for the Woodbine (re)development project through earlier discussions with provincial agencies, including Metrolinx, and through consideration of an MZO, a powerful provincial planning instrument that regulates land use. These interactions contributed to framing the designations as "rational" and necessary even before the New-Deal Agreement was formally negotiated. Furthermore, the Etobicoke GO Station is being permanently closed, to allow and make way for the Woodbine GO Station, and arrangements for commuters and parking spaces.

Conclusion

Looking back across nearly two decades of planning initiatives and discussions surrounding Woodbine Racetrack and Casino, one of the most significant conclusions is not necessarily that the vision evolved, but that it persisted and emerged through changing political, institutional, and governance contexts.

The 2023 New Deal Agreement, following changes to provincial legislation including the 2024 Provincial Planning Statement, and Woodbine's designation as a Major Transit Station Area (MTSA), can be understood as the "icing on the cake" of planning vision that has been constructed over time. Its political and institutional capacity allows the plan to move forward with implementation. However, its foundation was built through prolonged process of negotiation and contestation between the City, provincial actors including WEG's partnerships with Metrolinx and OLG in shaping Woodbine's vision.

Throughout this period, the City administration and planners navigated tensions between protecting employment lands and accommodating (re)development pressures in Toronto. Although studies were untaken to access Rexdale's employment areas and clarify the application of General and Core employment designations, uncertainty remained existing zoning permissions, and how employment uses should be regulated under these designations, and how the future of employment areas would evolve. The City was also pursuing opportunities for economic development at the Woodbine site, and more fair municipal revenue share for gaming operations. While this was occurring, WEG continued to reshape its (re)development proposal in response to changing market conditions, political conditions such as the debate revolving expanded gaming, and the City's municipal comprehensive review (MCR) process. The New-Deal Agreement therefore represents not the beginning of Woodbine's transformation, but a new political moment that elevated an existing vision through provincial priorities for transit-oriented communities, with more housing and economic investment for the area.

Over this period, significant changes to provincial planning policy reshaped the planning role and its tools, available to municipalities. The withdrawal of municipal comprehensive review process and a new definition of "area of employment" removes some safeguards towards understanding whether proposed development is appropriate and good for the area or not. These policies did not replace Woodbine's long-standing vision; rather, they altered the institutional conditions through which such vision could advance.

The underlying vision for Woodbine and its regional pull as a destination remained embedded within planning narrative, demonstrating how planning ideas and visions are often reinterpreted and brought forward through new government priorities and arrangements.

The Resource Agreement reflects the practical realities of contemporary planning, where municipalities increasingly rely on alternative governance arrangements to address fiscal constraints and limited planning capacity and funding. It raises important questions regarding the boundaries between public sector planning and private sector planning, and its interests, as well as the financial resources associated with that collaboration connected to planning influence and decision-making.

At the same time, this influence is tied to WEG's unique position as one of Toronto's largest landowners, where the scale and regional location of the property create significant opportunities for broader objectives, including a more connected region, with the creation of jobs, mixed-use redevelopment with low- to mid-rise buildings, and opportunities for affordable housing.

Although the redevelopment was consistently framed as an economic opportunity for Rexdale, while bringing in community development initiatives, community participation remained limited within formal planning processes. In response to the *WoodbineLive!* proposal, community organizations advocated for a community benefits agreement (CBA) to secure local hiring and social benefits, with concerns about economic gains. While these concerns were acknowledged, they were ultimately classified as "non-planning" matters under the City's 21 planning conditions during the discussion and debate around gaming expansion, reinforcing a distinction between technical planning issues and broader questions of new opportunities for existing residents. This tension was further intensified by changes to the planning approval process, including the Toronto-Ontario New Deal Agreement and provincial reforms which reduced opportunities for community members and residents to exercise their power through the OLT appeal process.

Throughout my research, not only have I have learned more about Rexdale, but how Rexdale is perceived between the planners I interviewed. As I asked them their thoughts about the (re)development, all three planners believe Woodbine project might become an asset for Rexdale. Planners explained that as it develops overtime; it is only going to bring more schools,

employment, parks, and opportunities with good urban design. Also, the roadway improvement is going to create more accessibility and connections to the area.

Although, the project may bring new opportunities to Rexdale and Toronto region, the Woodbine TOC Secondary Plan study faces ongoing challenges related to land use compatibility and competing land use interests. Hence, the concurrent planning studies it is currently undertaking can inform mitigation strategies. Moreover, the studies are peer reviewed, by the consultants working with the City, as well the private planning consultants working with WEG. During the virtual public consultation I attended, concerns raised by business owners and community members revealed broader tensions surrounding the (re)development of Woodbine. While business owners' questions whether the project would impact their business and limit future expansion opportunities, some community members also questioned whether the (re)development will address Rexdale's needs such as housing affordability, and whether it might simply contribute to broader patterns of market-driven urban development. These concerns expose a fundamental question in contemporary urban planning: whether large-scale (re)development serves the communities in which it occurs or primarily advances the interests of those with greater economic and political influence. Overall, my research reveals both optimism and uncertainty regarding the potential impact of the Woodbine (re)development project and the future of Rexdale in the broader Greater Toronto Area.

As a long-time resident in Rexdale, the Woodbine Racetrack and Casino discourse can never be changed. But it also carries other name, renaming the site as a 'casino' and a 'resort,' but also becoming a 'transit-oriented' area. I am worried about how sensitive uses, such as residential can intermingle with a casino/resort/entertainment discourse. The grandstand always felt like a physical barrier, where the Transportation Master Plan (TMP) is committed to creating different accessibility routes that I hope can lessen those barriers for people to visit in and out of the area. The GO Station will also bring new visitors and more foot traffic, multi-modal transportation options, and use of public spaces, establishing new amenities, and services for the area that I feel like Rexdale would appreciate. I also wonder how the Woodbine Transit-Oriented Community Secondary Plan study might inform (re)development and create new experiences and improve quality of life in Rexdale towards drafting the Secondary Plan.

Throughout this program and research, I have learned that planning is not simply a technical process, but a social and a political practice shaped by competing interests, institutional

arrangements and power relations. Governance frameworks such as the Toronto-Ontario New Deal Agreement, Municipal Revenue Sharing Agreement, Community Benefits Agreement demonstrate how collaboration between public and private actors can reshape neoliberal urban governance. This study particularly examines the Resource Agreement as a distinct municipal-level governance arrangement, enabled through City administration, and explore how it influences planner's roles, creates new pathways for actors to exercise power, and shapes how urban (re)development decisions are negotiated and implemented.

This case study demonstrates that urban (re)development outcomes are shaped not only through formal planning policies and regulation, but also through institutional relationships that structure interactions among municipal governments, planners, private actors and community members. But this case also reveals that there is a crisis within planning, particularly in how private sector power is reshaping the planner's role and, more broadly, the relationships between state, the market, and public accountability. As a future planner, I see this as an indication of where planning may be heading toward increasingly embedded relationships between private-sector actors and the state, in which private interests become integrated into public planning processes and consequently impact and reshape urban governance.

However, this is not necessarily a direction that can be resisted outright, but one that requires careful consideration of how these relationships can be structured to advance more just and accountable planning practices.

To recall my earlier commitment to reparative justice, I believe that planning should therefore move towards stronger relationships with communities to share planning power. This can create opportunities to bridge public-private planning initiatives with meaningful and sustained community engagement. Planners should develop strategies that facilitate meaningful engagement while also acting as storytellers who can communicate planning processes in accessible and thoughtful ways. This means prioritizing and protecting the public sphere, both materially and socially, while fostering community connections and creating spaces for knowledge exchange. Ultimately, this approach requires planning to be grounded in reciprocal relationships, where knowledge is shared, expertise is shared, power is more equitably distributed, and communities are recognized as active participants in shaping the future of their cities.

In this sense, reparative justice offers a framework for planning to move beyond acknowledging past and ongoing harms, but towards transforming power relations that historically excluded communities from public participation and the planning process. Planners should therefore ask how historically and continually harmed marginalized groups can be meaningfully included in planned and sustainable futures, and how planning can support their participation within capitalist systems. Planners have a significant role in shaping these conditions by determining who can participate, and whose knowledge is valued, and how different actors exercise power and influence the planning outcome. This raises questions about the capacities within which planners work in, and whether the loss of planning tools really constrain these efforts and ability to advance more reparative forms of planning.

Bibliography

Adams, D., & Tiesdell, S. (2010). Planners as market actors: Rethinking state–market relations in land and property. *Planning Theory & Practice, 11*(2), 187–207. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649351003759631

Bevir, M. (Ed.). (2016). *Governmentality after neoliberalism*. Routledge.

Boudreau, J.-A., Keil, R., & Young, D. (2009). *Changing Toronto: Governing urban neoliberalism*. University of Toronto Press. https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442603363

Brenner, N. (2004). *New state spaces: Urban governance and the rescaling of statehood*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199270057.001.0001

Brenner, N., & Elden, S. (2009). Henri Lefebvre on state, space, territory. *International Political Sociology, 3*(4), 353–377. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-5687.2009.00081.x

Brenner, N., Marcuse, P., & Mayer, M. (Eds.). (2012). *Cities for people, not for profit: Critical urban theory and the right to the city*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203802182

Brenner, N., & Theodore, N. (2005). Neoliberalism and the urban condition. *City, 9*(1), 101–107. https://doi.org/10.1080/13604810500092106

Bucknell, A. (2019, December 9). *Learning from Susan Fainstein: Do planners have a responsibility to fight for social equity?* Harvard Graduate School of Design. https://www.gsd.harvard.edu/2019/12/learning-from-susan-fainstein-planners-have-a-responsibility-to-fight-for-social-equity/

Chaudhry, S. (2022, May 3). The sun is always in your eyes in Rexdale. *Spacing Toronto*. https://spacing.ca/toronto/2022/05/03/the-sun-is-always-in-your-eyes-in-rexdale/

CHIME Indigenous. (2017). Lakeshore Grounds Interpretive Centre. https://www.lakeshoregrounds.ca/chime-indigenous

City of Toronto. (2008). Adoption of a Community Improvement Plan by-law. https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/bylaws/2008/law1159.pdf

City of Toronto. (2026). Application details. https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/planning-development/application-details/?id=5732270&pid=565431&title=CITY-INITIATED-555-REXDALE-BLVD

City of Toronto. (2023). Aird & Berlis. Communication file. https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2023/ph/comm/communicationfile-171288.pdf

City of Toronto. (2018). Casino Woodbine Community Benefits Agreement. https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/98b6-Woodbine-Casino-CBA-Terms.pdf

City of Toronto. (2021). Davies Howe. Communication file. https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2021/ph/comm/communicationfile-133604.pdf

City of Toronto. (2017). Donations to the City of Toronto for Community Benefits Policy. https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/913d-donation_policy.pdf

City of Toronto. (2023). Eileen Costell, Aird & Berlis – Woodbine Entertainment Group. https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2023/ph/comm/communicationfile-171296.pdf

City of Toronto. (2013). Emmons, M. Fasken Martineau. Communication file. https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2013/cc/comm/communicationfile-42211.pdf

City of Toronto. (2018). Expanded gaming at Woodbine Racetrack – City conditions. https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2018/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-114000.pdf

City of Toronto. (2013). Final assessments of requests to convert employment lands. Toronto City Planning Division.

City of Toronto. (2008). Financial Incentive Program. https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2008/cc/bgrd/backgroundfile-13284.pdf

City of Toronto. (2007). 555 Rexdale Boulevard – Official Plan, zoning and subdivision applications – Final report. https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2007/ey/bgrd/backgroundfile-4936.pdf

City of Toronto. (2017). 555 Rexdale Boulevard – Zoning By-law Amendment applications and Draft Plan of Subdivision application – Preliminary report. https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2017/ey/bgrd/backgroundfile-104326.pdf

City of Toronto. (2007). Long-term employment land strategy. https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2007/ed/bgrd/backgroundfile-3361.pdf

City of Toronto. (2002). Official Plan.

City of Toronto. (2022). OPA 574 – 25 MTSAs city-wide by-law. https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/8909-cityplanning-opa-575-25-mtsas-city-wide.pdf

City of Toronto. (2018). Powell. Toronto Community Benefits Network. Communication file. https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2018/cc/comm/communicationfile-79903.pdf

City of Toronto. (2015). Public consultation on the Woodbine Racetrack casino. https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2015/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-81786.pdf

City of Toronto. (2007). Revenue sharing fairness of Woodbine Slots. https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2008/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-9690.pdf

City of Toronto. (2024). Rexdale-Casino Woodbine Community Benefits Agreement: 2023 progress update. https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2024/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-244540.pdf

City of Toronto. (2025). Rexdale-Casino Woodbine Community Benefits Agreement: 2024 progress update. https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2025/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-253715.pdf

City of Toronto. (2026). Site and Area Specific Policy 896. https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2026/ey/bgrd/backgroundfile-286818.pdf

City of Toronto. (2007). Stimulating economic growth: Toronto's approach to financial incentives. https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2007/ed/bgrd/backgroundfile-8924.pdf

City of Toronto. (2018). Supplementary report – Expanded gaming at Woodbine Racetrack – City conditions. https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2018/cc/bgrd/backgroundfile-114502.pdf

City of Toronto. (n.d.). Toronto-Ontario Gaming GTA LP Community Benefits Agreement terms sheet. https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2018/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-114001.pdf

City of Toronto. (2024). Update Downsview – Authorization to enter into agreements for resourcing. https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2024/ph/bgrd/backgroundfile-243062.pdf

City of Toronto. (2015). Crisanti, V. RE: EX7.4 Expanded Gaming at Woodbine Racetrack. https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2015/ex/comm/communicationfile-53850.pdf

City of Toronto. (2026) Regeneration Area Studies. https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/planning-development/planning-studies-initiatives/regeneration-area-studies/

City of Toronto. (2025). 555 Rexdale Boulevard – Woodbine Secondary Plan Study, Infrastructure Master Plan and Transportation Master Plan – Interim report. https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2026/ey/bgrd/backgroundfile-286817.pdf

City of Toronto. (2008). WoodbineLive! Financial incentives to support a tourism/entertainment attraction "Transformative Project". https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2008/cc/bgrd/backgroundfile-14708.pdf

City of Toronto. (n.d.). Woodbine Racetrack slot machines and financial impacts. https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/2000/agendas/council/cc/cc000509/pof6rpt/cl001.pdf

City of Toronto. (2025). Woodbine Transit Oriented Community Secondary Plan – Authorization to enter into agreements for resourcing. Agenda Item PH18.11. https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.PH18.11

City of Toronto. (2025). Woodbine Transit Oriented Community Secondary Plan – Authorization to enter into agreements for resourcing. https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2025/ph/bgrd/backgroundfile-251998.pdf

CONC Community Services. (n.d.). Shelter: Rexdale. https://www.conccommunity.org/shelter-rexdale/

Dantzler, P. A. (2021). The urban process under racial capitalism: Race, anti-Blackness, and capital accumulation. *Journal of Race, Ethnicity and the City, 2*(2), 113–134. https://doi.org/10.1080/26884674.2021.1934201

Debord, G. (1994). *The Society of the Spectacle*. Zone Books. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1453m69

Dhopade, P. (2015, August 18). The two worlds of my Etobicoke. *Spacing Toronto*. https://spacing.ca/toronto/2015/08/18/the-two-worlds-of-my-etobicoke/

Dubey, R. (2011). How monopoly took over a sport. *The Montreal Review*. https://www.themontrealreview.com/2009/How-monopoly-took-over-a-sport.php

Ekers, M., Hamel, P., & Keil, R. (2012). Governing suburbia: Modalities and mechanisms of suburban governance. *Regional Studies, 46*(3), 405–422. https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2012.658036

Ettlinger, N. (2011). Governmentality as Epistemology. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 101(3), 537–560. https://doi.org/10.1080/00045608.2010.544962

Elden, S. (2007). Governmentality, calculation, territory. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 25*(3), 562–580.

Fainstein, S. S. (2010). *The just city*. Cornell University Press.

Filey, M. (2006). Toronto Sketches 9: The Way We Were. *Toronto Sunday Sun* (1st ed.). Dundurn Press.

Flyvbjerg, B. (1998). *Rationality and power: Democracy in practice*. University of Chicago Press.

Forester, J. (1988). *Planning in the Face of Power*. University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520908918

Foucault, M. (2001) *"Governmentality" in Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984,* Volume 2. New Press, pp 201-222

Fox-Rogers, L., & Murphy, E. (2014). Informal strategies of power in the local planning system. *Planning Theory, 13*(3), 244–268. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473095213492512

Fox-Rogers, L., & Murphy, E. (2015). From brown envelopes to community benefits: The co-option of planning gain agreements under deepening neoliberalism. *Geoforum, 67*, 41–50. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2015.09.015

Friedmann, J. (1979). *The good society*. MIT Press.

Friedmann, J. (2000). The good city: In defense of utopian thinking. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 24*(2), 460–472.

García-Lamarca, M., & Kaika, M. (2016). "Mortgaged lives": The biopolitics of debt and housing financialisation. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 41(3), 313–327. https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12126

Gibson, C., Legacy, C., & Rogers, D. (2023). Deal-making, elite networks and public–private hybridisation: More-than-neoliberal urban governance. *Urban Studies, 60*(1), 183–199. https://doi.org/10.1177/00420980211067906

Golden, A. (2026). Toronto tipping point. *National Post*. https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/toronto-tipping-point

Goldstein, B. T., & Mele, C. (2016). Governance within public-private partnerships and the politics of urban development. *Space and Polity, 20*(2), 194–211. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562576.2016.1157968

Great Canadian Casino Resort. (2025). Annual Report Rexdale – Community Benefits Agreement. https://cdn.greatcanadian.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Rexdale-CBA-2025-Annual-Report-Final-Digital.pdf

Harding, A. (2009). The history of community power. In J. S. Davies & D. L. Imbroscio (Eds.), *Theories of urban politics* (pp. 27–39). Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446279298.n3

Harris, D. (2017). Brief history of Etobicoke. Etobicoke Historical Society. https://www.etobicokehistorical.com/brief-history-of-etobicoke.html

Harvey, D. (1978). The urban process under capitalism: A framework for analysis. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 2*(1–3), 101–131. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.1978.tb00738.x

Harvey, D. (1985). *The urbanization of capital*. Basil Blackwell.

Harvey, D. (1989). *The urban experience*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press.

Harvey, D. (2008). The right to the city. *New Left Review, 53*, 23–40.

Healey, P. (1996). Consensus-building across Difficult Divisions: New approaches to collaborative strategy making. *Planning, Practice & Research*, 11(2), 207–216. https://doi.org/10.1080/02697459650036350

Holgersen, S. (2020). On spatial planning and Marxism: Looking back, going forward. *Antipode, 52*(3), 800–824. https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12614

Hussain, S., & Siemiatycki, M. (2018). Rethinking the role of private capital in infrastructure PPPs: The experience of Ontario, Canada. *Public Management Review, 20*(8), 1122–1144. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2018.1428412

Jackson, J. (2018). Neoliberalism and urban planning in Toronto: How seasoned planners adjust to their changing circumstances. *International Planning Studies, 23*(2), 144–162. https://doi.org/10.1080/13563475.2017.1358606

Janssen-Jansen, L. B., & van der Veen, M. (2017). Contracting communities: Conceptualizing community benefits agreements to improve citizen involvement in urban development projects. *Environment and Planning A, 49*(1), 205–225. https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X16664730

Kipfer, S., & Keil, R. (2002). Toronto Inc.? Planning the competitive city in the new Toronto. *Antipode, 34*(2), 227–264. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8330.00237

Klosterman, R. E. (1985). Arguments for and against planning. *Town Planning Review, 56*(1), 5–20. https://doi.org/10.3828/tpr.56.1.e8286q3082111km4

Kjaer, A. (2009). Governance and the urban bureaucracy. In J. S. Davies & D. L. Imbroscio (Eds.), *Theories of urban politics* (pp. 137–152). Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446279298.n10

Lauermann, J., & Davidson, M. (2013). Negotiating particularity in neoliberalism studies: Tracing development strategies across neoliberal urban governance projects. *Antipode, 45*(5), 1277–1297. https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12018

Lefebvre, H. (1978). *State, space, world: Selected essays*. University of Minnesota Press.

Lefebvre, H. (2014). The production of space (1991). In J. J. Gieseking, W. Mangold, C. Katz, S. Low, & S. Saegert (Eds.), *The people, place, and space reader* (pp. 289–293). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315816852-56

Lennon, M., & Moore, D. (2018). Planning, politics and the production of space: The formulation and application of a framework for examining the micropolitics of community place-making. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning, 21*(2), 117–133.

Logan, J. R. (1976). Logan on Molotch and Molotch on Logan: Notes on the growth machine—Toward a comparative political economy of place. *American Journal of Sociology, 82*(2), 349–352. https://doi.org/10.1086/226313

Loppie, D. (2023). 36 Finch West bus: Rexdale's transit disconnect. *The Local*. https://thelocal.to/36-finch-west-bus-rexdale-transit-disconnected/

MacMillan, A. (2026). Toronto Billy Bishop financing questions. *CBC News*. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/toronto-billy-bishop-financing-questions-9.7232561

Magnusson, W. (2005). Are Municipalities Creatures of the Provinces? *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 39(2), 5–29. https://doi.org/10.1353/jcs.2006.0019

Mathuria, S. (2021). Working in Rexdale: Creating a long-term vision for the Rexdale employment area [Master's thesis, Toronto Metropolitan University]. https://doi.org/10.32920/ryerson.14652096.v1

Molotch, H. (1976). The city as a growth machine: Toward a political economy of place. *American Journal of Sociology, 82*(2), 309–332.

Oliveira, E., & Hersperger, A. M. (2018). Governance arrangements, funding mechanisms and power configurations in current practices of strategic spatial plan implementation. *Land Use Policy, 76*, 623–633. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2018.02.042

Ontario. (2023). Terms of the new deal between Ontario and Toronto. Government of Ontario. https://www.ontario.ca/page/terms-new-deal-between-ontario-and-toronto

Ontario. (2003). Community Improvement Plan – New Toronto Area: Revitalization Incentive Project. Toronto City Council

Ontario. (2024). Provincial Planning Statement. https://www.ontario.ca/files/2024-10/mmah-provincial-planning-statement-en-2024-10-23.pdf

Opara, M., Okafor, O. N., & Ufodike, A. (2022). Invisible actors: Understanding the micro-activities of public sector employees in the development of public–private partnerships in the United States. *Australian Journal of Public Administration, 81*(2), 237–278. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8500.12502

Peck, J. (2013). Explaining (with) neoliberalism. *Territory, Politics, Governance, 1*(2), 132–157. https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2013.785365

Peters, M. A. (2021). The early origins of neoliberalism: Colloque Walter Lippmann (1938) and the Mont Pèlerin Society (1947). *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 55*(14), 1574–1581. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2021.1951704

Rogers, D., & Gibson, C. (2021). Unsolicited urbanism: Development monopolies, regulatory-technical fixes and planning-as-deal-making. *Environment and Planning A, 53*(3), 525–547. https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X20952421

Rose, A. (1963). A decade of metropolitan government in Toronto. *Buffalo Law Review*, 13, 539.

Saito, L. T. (2012). How low-income residents can benefit from urban development: The LA Live Community Benefits Agreement. *City & Community, 11*(2), 129–150. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6040.2012.01399.x

Saito, L., & Truong, J. (2015). The L.A. Live Community Benefits Agreement: Evaluating the agreement results and shifting political power in the city. *Urban Affairs Review, 51*(2), 263–289. https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087414527064

Scott, A. J. (2001). Globalization and the rise of city-regions. *European Planning Studies, 9*(7), 813–826. https://doi.org/10.1080/09654310120079788

Siemiatycki, M. (2006). Implications of public-private partnerships on the development of urban public transit infrastructure: The case of Vancouver, Canada. *Journal of Planning Education and Research, 26*(2), 137–151. https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X06291390

Siemiatycki, M. (2007). What's the secret? Confidentiality in planning infrastructure using public/private partnerships. *Journal of the American Planning Association, 73*(4), 388–403. https://doi.org/10.1080/01944360708978520

Siemiatycki, M. (2010). Delivering transportation infrastructure through public-private partnerships: Planning concerns. *Journal of the American Planning Association, 76*(1), 43–58. https://doi.org/10.1080/01944360903329295

Soja, E. W. (2011). Beyond Postmetropolis. *Urban Geography, 32*(4), 451–469. https://doi.org/10.2747/0272-3638.32.4.451

Thomas, P. F. (1992). *Rexdale: A case study in suburban industry*. Richview Toronto Library.

Tufts, Steven. (2008). Labour and (Post)Industrial Policy in Toronto. *Relay: A Socialist Project*, no. 23, pp. 30–31.

Warner, M. E., & Hefetz, A. (2012). Insourcing and outsourcing: The dynamics of privatization among U.S. municipalities, 2002–2007. *Journal of the American Planning Association, 78*(3), 313–327. https://doi.org/10.1080/01944363.2012.715552

Weber, R. (2010). Selling City Futures: The Financialization of Urban Redevelopment Policy. *Economic Geography*, 86(3), 251–274. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-8287.2010.01077.x

Wolf-Powers, L. (2010). Community benefits agreements and local government: A review of recent evidence. *Journal of the American Planning Association, 76*(2), 141–159. https://doi.org/10.1080/01944360903490923

Roberts, S. (2016). Jockey Club history. Jockey Club of Canada. https://jockeyclubcanada.com/club-history/

Rocca, R. (2023). $1B resort featuring 'Vegas-style casino,' hotel to open in west Toronto this summer. https://globalnews.ca/news/9536108/great-canadian-casino-resort-toronto-woodbine-racetrack/

Shephard, T. (2018). Live gaming gets the go-ahead at expanded Woodbine Racetrack. ACORN Canada. https://acorncanada.org/news/torontocom-live-gaming-gets-go-ahead-expanded-woodbine-racetrack/

Romanska, A. (2021) The history of the Rexdale neighbourhood in Toronto. *blogTO*. https://www.blogto.com/city/2021/01/rexdale-toronto-neighbourhood-history/

Pagliaro, J. (2015, March 25). Debate over Woodbine Racetrack casino resumes at city hall. *Toronto Star*. https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/debate-over-woodbine-racetrack-casino-resumes-at-city-hall/article_74d56911-8240-588b-b890-6e3b639c4fd4.html

Thayaparan, A. (2026, May 30). Why the future of Woodbine Centre is in question. *CBC News*. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/woodbine-centre-fantasy-fair-future-9.7216868

Transit Oriented Community envisioned around future Woodbine GO Station | UrbanToronto. (2026). https://urbantoronto.ca/news/2026/03/transit-oriented-community-envisioned-around-future-woodbine-go-station.60568

Toronto and Region Conservation Authority. (2023). Rexdale Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Plan: A thriving community growing in harmony with nature and neighbours. https://trcaca.s3.ca-central-1.amazonaws.com/app/uploads/2023/11/20101025/Rexdale-SNAP-Action-Plan-Report-11-20-23-FA-2.pdf

United Way Greater Toronto. (2025). Rexdale Hub fact sheet. https://www.unitedwaygt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/2025-Rexdale-Hub-Fact-Sheet.pdf

WND Associates. (2024, February 9). Letter to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing regarding Official Plan Amendment 653 (OPA 653) with attachments. Environmental Registry of Ontario. https://ero.ontario.ca/public/public_uploads/2024-02/PART%203%20-%20_PAGES%20127-152_%20Letter%20to%20MMAH%20ERO%20re%20OPA%20653%20%289%20Feb%202024%29%20-%20with%20Attachments%201%20and%202%2855999945.1%29.pdf

Woodbine. (2026). Our history. https://woodbine.com/our-history/

Woodbine Entertainment. (2026). Woodbine Lands. https://www.woodbinelands.com/

Woodbine live is dead – but plans for Rexdale Project Continue | Toronto Sun. (n.d.-b). https://torontosun.com/2013/02/05/woodbine-live-is-dead---but-plans-for-rexdale-project-continue