

Derailing Toronto's Industrial Legacy: Building Toronto into an Ideal Liveable City through Rail Deck Park

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Abstract

In this last decade, the City of Toronto has introduced a number of new plans and projects aimed at creating a more ebullient, liveable urban fabric through reintroducing, revitalizing, and restoring nature within the city. Rail Deck Park, the development this Paper critiques, is but one of these projects that has been proposed with the intent of enhancing urban life by bringing nature back into the urban core. Sold on the promise that it will create a “more liveable Toronto for everyone”, this staggering twenty-one acres of proposed Park, at first glance, represents an important city-building moment. Yet, this Paper questions and exposes the potential dark side that lies beneath this seemingly moral city-building opportunity and the broader trajectory of building the ideal “liveable city” through mega-natures.

At present, there is a growing body of work dedicated to illuminating the problematic sociopolitical and economic motives masked behind mega-nature developments, such as Rail Deck Park. This work suggests that while these nature projects appear to be “inherently good”, they are often mobilized to transform the urban landscape into one that ostensibly caters to the valorized drivers of the economy, known as the creative class. The commonness of these motives raises important questions about the authenticity and benevolence associated with Rail Deck Park and the “liveable city” vision it seeks to extend.

Departing from these suspicions, in this Paper, I investigate the authenticity of Rail Deck Park by explicating the politics and planning behind its development. Theoretically, I draw upon political ecology, the global city research paradigm, and neo-Gramscian theories, to demonstrate how this project and the City’s “liveable city” vision are subsumed in the landscape of creative and competitive city-building. Particularly, when confronted with the logics of the market, neoliberal urbanism, and the City’s longstanding vision to build a more competitive Toronto, the authenticity of this development quickly unravels. Despite its promise of creating “liveability for everyone”,

ultimately, I suggest that the Park is being built to create a more liveable city *but only* for the valorized drivers of the economy and those willing to buy into the product that is the city of Toronto.

Keywords: Creative City-building, Neoliberal Urbanism, Political Ecology, Urban Nature, and Liveability (Livability)

Forward

Since my first encounter with political ecology as an undergraduate student, I have become increasingly immersed in curiosity to learn more about the complex relationships between nature and social power. This interest drove me to further pursue my academic studies through this Master's program – where I sought to delve more deeply into matters of political ecology as well as related subjects of social constructivism and neo-Gramscian realms of thought and chose to expand my knowledge on these subjects by applying them in practice through this analysis on Rail Deck Park.

Having learned of this project by happenstance at an early stage of the Master's program, I became fascinated with its seemingly contradictory character and the interplay of nature, the city, society, and the economy coalescing around this project. Yet, it was not until I further explored the history of the city's longstanding debate on what should be done within the Rail Lands that my interest in studying Rail Deck Park was solidified.

In researching more on the history of this debate I became consumed with questions regarding the tensions surrounding: who has had the legitimacy to speak on behalf of the city; who gets to decide what should be done within the corridor; what kinds of developments might give expression to the collective memory of Toronto; and how are the various competing demands for this space being reconciled. Additionally, I became fascinated when studying how nature and liveability in this project were seemingly being used by certain urban actors to control this debate and essentially, normalize and reproduce power relations within the city. What was strikingly curious was the lack of conversation taking place in academia regarding this manipulation of power in the city. Having identified this gap in research and having solidified Rail Deck Park as the project I was to study during the Master's, I organized my Plan of Study and Major Research Proposal accordingly.

Coming from an academic background that was prominently focused on rural geography, in order to effectively conduct my analysis on the Park, it was necessary I build my understanding of urban planning and urban theory, urban nature-making, as well as urban political ecology. Selecting “Urban Environmental Planning” as my Area of Concentration, throughout the Master’s program I partook in courses and set out Learning Objectives that guided my academic development in these subjects.

This Major Research Paper intends to present the development of my learning through the Master of Environmental Studies and Planning Program, including the workshops, courses, and internships I participated in. Moreover, it represents the completion and fulfillment of the Learning Objectives which I established in my Plan of Study. Primarily, it fulfills Objective 2.1 of my Plan of Study which was to gain an understanding of the complexities of nature-based urban revitalizations and the liveability planning discourse. Having rigorously grappled with these subjects throughout this Paper, I have come to learn that the production of nature and liveability in cities is often mediated by problematic sociopolitical and economic interests. Outstandingly so under neoliberal urbanism, I learned that both are often used to forward a City’s entrepreneurial imperatives and used to build urban forms into landscapes that valorize the drivers of the urban economy. In coming to this conclusion, through this Paper, I dismantle the smokescreen surrounding projects, like Rail Deck Park, and satisfy my overarching research objective that is to “disrupt the idea that [urban revitalization projects] are inherently good” for urban society and ecology.

My hope with the completion of this Paper is to contribute to the body of research that precisely examines the complexities, unique issues, and nuances associated with planning for nature and liveability in neoliberal landscapes. As academics, policymakers, and city-builders, begin to grapple more and more with the popularizing discourse of liveability planning, this research will hopefully be a useful tool for those seeking to understand both the positive and problematic sides

of urban transformations, like Rail Deck Park, which seek to enhance the quality of urban life through nature. For me, the work presented here marks the beginning of what I hope will be a long and joy-filled career in environmental and urban planning. In both completing this Paper and the Master's program, I am grateful to have established the technical skills and theoretical knowledge that will be needed to make this career a successful one. For that, I am grateful to all my professors, internship mentors, and, in particular, my advisor and supervisor for preparing me for my upcoming planning career.

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Sincerely, to my mom and dad, thank you for instilling in me a desire to always learn, a desire to take on challenges irrespective of their rigorousness, and a desire to never settle. It is because you instilled these lessons in me and it is because of your incredible support that this Paper was completed.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Forward.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	viii
List of Figures	ix
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Perspectives on Nature’s Place in the City	6
1.2 Research Methodology	9
1.2.1 Analysis of Policy Documents and Planning Reports.....	11
1.2.2 Participant Observation	13
1.3 Organization of Paper	13
2. The Art and Politics of “Liveable Nature” Making	16
2.1 Understanding the Discourse of Liveability	17
2.2 Understanding Nature’s Role in the Liveable City	23
3. The Entanglements of Liveability and Urban Nature in Toronto.....	27
3.1 Liveability Planning in Toronto: A Discourse of Branding, Entrepreneurialism, and Creative City-Building.....	27
3.2 “Liveable Nature” Making in the City	32
4. The Planning and Politics Behind Rail Deck Park	36
4.1 Derailing Toronto’s Industrial Legacy	36
4.2 The Introduction of Rail Deck Park.....	44
4.3 Competing Urban Visions	46
4.4 Gaps in the Planning Process.....	48
5. Critical Reflections.....	51
5.1 Reflecting on the Past.....	51
5.2 Understanding the Present.....	53
5.3 Looking Ahead	65
6. Conclusion/Epilogue	73
6.1 Future Research	74
7. Bibliography	78
Appendix A.....	89
Appendix B.....	92

List of Figures

Figure 1. Example of a Biophilic Intervention - Singapore's Gardens by the Bay. Source: Gardens By the Bay 2

Figure 2. Map of the Rail Deck Park Site and Immediate Surrounding Context. Rendering: City of Toronto 4

Figure 3. Conceptual Rendering of Rail Deck Park. Rendering: City of Toronto 5

Figure 4. Conceptual cross-section of Rail Deck Park. Rendering: City of Toronto 5

Figure 5. Old Union Station, June 18th, 1926. Source: The Toronto Archives 37

Figure 6. Toronto's Railway Lands in the 1940s. Source: Toronto Public Library 38

Figure 7. Aerial View of the Initial Rail Deck Park. Source: The Core of the Central Waterfront (1962)..... 40

Figure 8. Metro Centre. Source: City of Toronto Archives 41

Figure 9. Karl Jaffary and John Sewell playing chess in Toronto Council Chambers to theatrically demonstrate how these meetings were a “sham”, 1970. Source: How We Changed Toronto (2015)..... 42

Figure 10. Visual Rendering of Rail Deck Park. Rendering: City of Toronto 44

Figure 11. Aerial View of ORCA Project. Source: P.I.T.S. Developments Inc..... 47

Figure 12. New York High Line. Source: BDC Network 68

Figure 13. Visual Rendering of The Well. Source: The Well Toronto 71

Figure 14. The Well and its proximity to Rail Deck Park. Source: The Well Toronto 71

1. Introduction

In no other landscape is the nature/society antithesis more pronounced than in modernity's metropolis. Inspired by Cartesian thought, urban planners, politicians, and developers have sustained long histories of producing cities that embody the ontological dualism between 'the natural' and 'the social'. Beginning in the industrial era, Cartesian ideology was embraced by urban decision-makers who routinely used spatial design and provisioning as mechanisms to separate nature from the city (Laporte, 1978). Necessitated in this era by the need to manage burgeoning industrial pollutants and human waste carried within water supplies, early cities catalyzed a tradition of diverting nature, such as water, away from people to the urban fringes (Laporte, 1978; Gandy, 2006). While considered appropriate at the time, this pragmatic separation of nature from society has become obsolete and even problematic in today's cities which have outgrown their industrial heritage and economy.

No longer plagued by burgeoning pollutants, post-industrial urban landscapes now struggle with the lasting impacts of these early dichotomous designs. Since separating nature from the urban fabric, liveability in cities has diminished alongside their evolution – evidenced by the deterioration of quality-of-life and mental health and wellbeing (Sandifer *et al.*, 2014; Wolch *et al.*, 2014). In further consequence of this design, cities of today have found difficulties in maintaining a competitive edge in the global economy and accommodating sustained urban growth.

Out of recognition of these consequences, a revolution to bring nature back into cities has awakened across the globe – and namely, within the context of post-industrial urban landscapes. Inspired by a return to Frederick Olmsted's plan for the city – a city that recognizes the value of preserving nature to create more liveable and competitive urban forms – urban publics and decision-makers have begun to reimagine their banal and empirical streetscapes. What has emerged is a *liveability discourse* characterized by modes of urban planning and design that aim

to enhance the liveableness of communities by bringing nature back into the city core. Whereas earlier industrial infrastructures hid nature from society, under the discourse of liveability planning, spectacular infrastructural interventions have emerged which challenge the traditional urban nature narrative. From Portland's waterfront transformations to Chicago's Millennium Park, Melbourne's Federation Square (Wetzstein, 2013), and Singapore's many biophilic interventions, see **Figure 1**, (Teo, 2014), these are just some of the prominent post-industrial developments articulating this emerging discourse of liveability and nature's new role in the modern city.



Figure 1. Example of a Biophilic Intervention - Singapore's Gardens by the Bay. Source: [Gardens By the Bay](#)

Though academic investigation on the liveability discourse is still in its early stages, what can be concluded about liveability, simply by looking at these aforementioned projects, is that its modes of planning and design typically result in the creation of mega-developments or urban revitalizations that not only bring nature back into the city but do so in dramatic ways which recast the aesthetic of the urban landscape. It can also be said from these developments that the liveability discourse boldly presents urban dwellers and goes with the opportunity to radically experience and reconnect with nature outside of its rural confines. By bringing nature back into

the city in mega bold ways, liveability projects thus offer both the chance to undo the Cartesian legacy and inspire meaningful relationships with nature for those who have, since the industrial era, long been separated from it.

Given the significance that liveability planning and the reintroduction of nature seems to hold for urban society, it is important that academics seek to better understand such projects. In an effort to help contribute to the growing scholarly material focused on this goal of understanding the undoing of this Cartesian legacy, the impacts of these mega-developments and revitalizations, and the emerging discourse of liveability, in this Paper, I examine an instance of such development proposed for Toronto, Canada. Stemming largely from my own curiosity about the entanglements of liveability and nature in the urban landscape, this Paper takes a sharp focus on analyzing the discourse by looking into how nature is being articulated, reworked, and manipulated to create specific “liveable” urban realities in Toronto.

In this last decade, the City has introduced a number of new plans and policies aimed at enhancing liveability in the face of projected urban growth. In tandem with many modern cities that have outgrown their industrial economy, Toronto is attempting to undo its Cartesian stronghold by making nature a central component of the urban fabric. As evidenced in their most recent planning documents, nature within the city will be radically reintroduced throughout its core parts – most notably, the industrial Waterfront and Downtown. Narrowing in on a specular development proposed for Toronto’s core, in this Paper, I analyze the articulations of liveability and what I call “liveable-nature” (that is, mega-nature produced under the discourse of liveability) by exploring the plans and policies of the proposed \$1.9 billion CAD Rail Deck Park – see **Figure 2** and **Figure 3**.

Despite there being a number of interesting projects taking place in the city, there is no project more interesting or appropriate, in my perspective, than Rail Deck Park, to study this emerging

discourse and the production of “liveable natures”. This is apropos of the fact that many aspects of the project perfectly articulate the characteristics and patterns that have been developing within liveability planning elsewhere in the world. The site itself where the Park is to be situated, the historic downtown rail corridor, is also particularly relevant for examining liveability and the production of “liveable natures”. It dramatically portrays the impetus within this discourse that focuses on enhancing the liveableness of cities by dramatically transforming urban spaces where the legacies of social and ecological dislocations from an industrial past remain the most intact (Hagerman, 2006). Of all the projects underway in Toronto, I would further add that Rail Deck Park is by far the most widely anticipated development – from the perspective of local decision-makers, planners, and the public alike.



Figure 2. Map of the Rail Deck Park Site and Immediate Surrounding Context. Rendering: [City of Toronto](#)



Figure 3. Conceptual Rendering of Rail Deck Park. Rendering: [City of Toronto](#)

Proclaimed as the project that will “transform the way we experience our city”, Rail Deck Park was formally announced by Mayor John Tory in August of 2016. Shortly following his announcement, City Council endorsed a work plan for the Park outlining how the proposed twenty-one acres of public green space is to be feasibly built atop the active rail corridor between Bathurst Street and Blue Jays Way (City of Toronto, 2016, October 5). Using an innovative deck structure akin to that used to construct Chicago’s Millennium Park, which, in a similar fashion, sits atop an active rail corridor, Rail Deck Park has been designed with the intent of adding a layer of public space and nature to Toronto’s “park-starved core” – see **Figure 4**.



Figure 4. Conceptual cross-section of Rail Deck Park. Rendering: [City of Toronto](#)

While the Park, to quote CBC news, was “proposed somewhat unexpectedly” by Tory and City Council, it has since garnered tremendous support from local community groups and institutions. Furthermore, the Park has also been supported by a number of planners and architects from both local and global areas, who have referred to it as a “bold planning endeavor” and as the “last opportunity” to create a contiguous park space of this scale in the heart of the city (2017, September 25).¹ Not unlike other liveability-inspired projects, the Park has also been framed as “good planning” and as a project that will enhance the attractiveness of the city for tourism-sake and improve liveability for the sake of families, students, residents, and workers occupying the city.

1.1 Perspectives on Nature’s Place in the City

While from these perspectives, Rail Deck Park represents a significant opportunity for Toronto, in this Paper I question the overwhelming benevolence associated with the project. Moving beyond what are seemingly apolitical assumptions of the Park, I aim to better understand Rail Deck by looking critically into the sociopolitical complexity of constructing “liveable urban natures”. In deeply examining these complexities, through this Paper, I question both the benevolence associated with the making of the Park and similar “liveable natures” as well as the broader discourse of liveability planning.

Though it may seem heretical to some to question the morality of Rail Deck Park and the City’s vision of creating a more greener, liveable Toronto, it is necessary that a more politicized analysis be undertaken – as anything shy of the latter will produce superficial and incomplete understandings of this urban transformation. Furthermore, a more critical analysis of the Park is

¹ Outside of Toronto, Rail Deck Park has received global applause, being cited by Daniel Jongtjen, architect and partner at one of Amsterdam’s leading architectural firms, as a project that could potentially dramatically improve pedestrian life and the overall ebullience of the city (MacKay, 2017).

necessitated by the “coincident and less socially equitable transformations [that are] embedded” in the art of nature-making (Foster, 2010, pg. 316).

Whether the aim is to reintroduce nature in a city to create a more liveable, or a greener, or even a more sustainable urban form, the art of nature making (of any sort) has always been associated with a multitude of issues. With the history of nature’s urbanization in mind, there is a stacking amount of examples pointing to the more egregious realities that can come with the establishment of park space and other natural amenities in the city. These examples demonstrate that despite being masked by our preconceptions of environmental preservation, the existence and production of urban parks are mediated by various sociopolitical and economic interests and values that are not always necessarily inherently good for either society or ecology.

Though they are routinely perceived as moral places by the public, parks, like Rail Deck Park, have the potential to produce the typical power struggles and social injustices redolent of other urban developments. This is because, like other urban developments, parks are products of hegemony in the city. They are places where powerful figures, forces, and ideologies can mold their legacies unevenly onto the landscape – sometimes creating realities of displacement, coercion (Neumann, 1998), terrorization (Neumann, 1992; Cronon, 1995; Dahblerg *et al.*, 2010), and social exclusion (Brockington, 2002; Ramuntsindela, 2002; Goldmann, 2011; Ojeda, 2012; Koibassa, 2014). Yet, additionally, parks have also become places of manipulation – or, in simpler terms, places that are used to manipulate and regulate urban subjects and the structures of urban societal hierarchy.

Notably so with the rise of neoliberalism and neoliberal urban governance, scholars have increasingly cautioned how City’s have begun using parks as places to discursively manipulate

and legitimize their authority and define social order in the urban context.² Regarding the latter, through the establishment of particular park designs and park policies, governance bodies have used these developments to curate and regulate the types of people and behaviors permitted within the urban form. See **Footnote 3** for example.³ Whereas in a previous era, City's would have used more corrosive means to exercise control over the conduct of urban subjects, under neoliberalism, such control is mediated far more discursively. And often, it is mediated and exercised through park spaces.

Yet, beyond using parks to discursively control and buttress political hegemony, scholars also have found that under neoliberalism, governance bodies have used these developments to embed the logics of neoliberalism – such as entrepreneurialism and competitiveness – into the urban fabric. Such egregious realities and motives associated with the establishment of parks are what raise important questions about the authenticity and benevolence associated with nature

² The term “City” here is used to refer to regulating bodies, such as Municipalities like the City of Toronto. And the term “neoliberal urbanism” in this context is used to refer to the connection between the processes and ideologies of neoliberalisation (the belief that competitive and unregulated markets represent the optimal mechanism for socioeconomic development) and its effect on urban politics and urban transformations (Peck, Theodore, and Brenner, 2009).

³ In the example of Central Park, a development quite conceptually similar to Rail Deck Park (being a large, central, and traditional urban park space), prominent scholars have revered that this landscape was largely constructed by the state in order to rebrand the city and gain control over the “ill-tempered” struggling class (Olmsted, 1971, pg. 96). Ultimately serving as a form of capillary power, the park reconfigured civil society through influencing, “the conduct of conduct” (Michel Foucault, 2000). It achieved this through park designs and policies that presented a highly monitored leisure realm which materially articulated a bourgeois social and cultural preeminence (Gandy, 2002; Sevilla-Buitrago, 2017). As Sevilla-Buitrago (2017) note, it was a design aesthetic that, first and foremost, prefigured a “new common sense of urban order – a representation of space whereby the elite reinforced class boundaries through promenades and carriage drives” (pg. 169). And secondly, served as an intrinsic part of the urban pedagogy, as it prefigured a new common sense about how to conduct oneself in the city. It was ultimately a new way of being that rendered the struggling working-class ‘others’ as “a polite, respectful assemblage of subaltern classes” (Sevilla-Buitrago, 2017, pg. 167). From this example, it can be concluded that park developments are not always beneficial for everyone. For the struggling class, Central Park created urban conditions which muted their struggle in the city and for some, created conditions of displacement. Yet for others, like the upper class, Central Park conversely allowed for the legitimization of the elite urban vision and served as a novel ideological terrain for the expansion of state and bourgeois hegemony.

making in the context of Rail Deck Park. For myself, they are what also initially sparked my curiosity and anxiety surrounding this project and are what lead me to ask the following research questions about the Park:

If parks are often used as mechanisms of social control and as canvases to rebrand the city according to more neoliberal logics, what is Rail Deck's true purpose in Toronto? Is it, in fact, a development that is being created with the sole intention of making a more liveable city or is the Park being used as a political mechanism? Is it alternatively, a development set to buttress the political hegemony of the City; perhaps forge a new consensual spatial imagination for Toronto; transform the city into a competitive landscape; or is it a development that is set to create particular urban subjects (as seen in example provided in **Footnote 3**)?

Through this Paper, I answer these leading questions about the Park which are largely centered around suspicions of power in the city. In answering these questions, a major contribution of my Paper is focused on how discourses of space (through the common aspiration for liveability and the production of park space in Toronto) are potentially being used to normalize and reproduce power relations in this city. In other words, as it will be seen, power operates not only by coercion and exclusion but, in the context of Toronto's modern neoliberalism, by normalization through spatial persuasion.

1.2 Research Methodology

In order to answer these questions about power in the context of Rail Deck Park and to understand this development in the context of Toronto's neoliberalizing landscape, my research has been grounded exclusively in qualitative research methodology. In particular, it draws exhaustively on a discursive analysis of grey literature – which is the policy documents, official plans, and planning reports related to the project that were published by the Municipality. It also draws from insights gained from conducting participant observation as well as insights gained

from studying urban planning literature covering the subjects of: political ecology; neoliberal urban governance; urban revitalization; and liveability.

Qualitative research methods, like the ones I used for this study, allow for an investigation of *lived experiences* – a core component of my analysis. Through employing these methods, I was thus able to explore the multitude of ways people/institutions *experience*, understand, interpret, and value concepts of liveability and nature in the city.

It is widely accepted in academia that the definitions and meanings behind these concepts of liveability and nature are not fixed but hinge on the political and socio-cultural contexts in which they are situated. As “unfixed” terms, people’s understanding of these concepts (including my own) may differentiate along lines of gender, ethnicity, race, income, and age. Meaning, that to answer the questions of *why is the Park being built* and *who is it being developed for*, I needed to investigate which understanding(s) of liveability and which of nature are being represented in the project.⁴ Are the representations of liveability and nature in the context of the Park a reflection of the City, of entrepreneurs, the white community, the non-white, the privileged, or the non-privileged? These are just some of the leading questions which I grappled with throughout the analysis process to better understand the *who* and *why* of Rail Deck Park.

On the subject of differentiating interpretations of liveability and nature, I might disclose here that my own subjectivity and positionality (as a white, female, living in a suburb outside of Toronto) has influenced my personal understanding of what I believe liveability and nature looks like in the city. By extension, my unique understanding of these concepts has undoubtedly influenced my forthcoming perspectives and arguments on Rail Deck Park and Toronto’s related policy and planning interventions. In equal measure, my positionality too, being a relatively privileged white,

⁴ The decision to use qualitative methodologies over quantitative ones, thus, was simply the analytical choice as the former does a better job of seeking to understand multiple ‘truths’ and the making of consent and common sense (Adamo, 2012).

academic and my subsequent position in the social structure of the city has inevitably influenced my research. It has, for instance, created a personal bias in my reading of City documents, city-building more broadly, and my capacity to assess information as it relates to this project.

1.2.1 Analysis of Policy Documents and Planning Reports

As noted, an analysis of City documents and grey literature was a core component of the methods I employed to understand the City's approach to liveability. However, apropos of the fact that the Park is still in the early stages of the planning process, my analysis of grey literature was solely focused on the planning reports, online presentations and panels, rationales, and policy documents released to date, such as:

- *Parkland Strategy* (2019, November 26)
- *TO Core: Planning Toronto's Downtown* (2019, June 5)
- *TOcore: Building for Liveability? Rail Corridor Planning Study* (2017)
- *Rail Corridor Planning Study* (City of Toronto and Urban strategies Inc., 2017)
- *Growing Up: Planning for Children in New Vertical Communities* (2017)
- *Rail Deck Park - Results of Feasibility Analysis and Next Steps for Implementation* (2017, November 20)
- *Rail Corridor – Bathurst Street to Blue Jays Way – Official Plan and Zoning By-law Amendments Application – Preliminary Report* (2017, June 1)
- *Rail Deck Park – Work Plan for Official Plan Amendments and an Implementation Strategy* (2016, October 5)
- *Backgrounder #2: Rail Deck Park* (2016, September 15)
- *Backgrounder: Rail Deck Park* (2016, August 3)
- *The Railway Lands Proposed Goals and Objectives* (1978, January)
- *The Core of the Central Waterfront* (1962, October)

In reviewing these materials, it was my aim to determine, through a discourse analysis, the Municipality's 'official line' or dominant planning narrative on liveability, nature, and the entanglements of the two. As a project that was "proposed somewhat unexpectedly" by Toronto Council, the intent of delving into the planning regime and decoding this 'official line' was undertaken to tease out the *who*, *what*, *when*, and *why* of Rail Deck Park. When was it conceptualized, who envisioned it, and why is the project of such importance to the City?

This analysis of discourse which I used to tease out the ‘official line’, is essentially a means of understanding the role of language in creating and legitimizing knowledge’s and interventions – in this case, the intervention of liveability policy and planning. Unique to other perspectives which hold that language is a reflection of social reality, discourse analysis accepts that it is more so the vehicle for creating it (Adamo, 2012). With this perspective in mind, I evaluated the way the City potentially used Rail Deck Park to legitimize or obtain consent from stakeholders, with support from the public, for the establishment of a new urban vision and employed such methodology to uncover the production of knowledge making in the planning process. As noted by scholars McArthur and Robin (2019), to understand a discourse, such as the liveability discourse and the associated art of making “liveable nature”, it is important to identify the ideas and concepts that result in the production of knowledge and the subsequent making of common sense and consent. In order to evaluate how the City used “liveability” and “nature” rhetoric” to gain consent to develop this project and its associated liveable urban vision, I therefore used something of a ‘discourse toolbox’ in my research. Whereby, I codified for words and analyzed linguistic and rhetorical mechanisms I believed were strategically being used by the City to pedal forward a new consensual spatial imagination for Toronto.⁵

⁵ Used in political ecology as a means of analyzing revitalization and restoration projects, discourse analysis is a common methodological approach for researchers seeking to understand the use and production of nature in urban developments. Chris Hagerman’s study on Portland, Oregon, for instance, is but one example where this approach was used to frame the City’s ecological project as an instrument of masking experiences of social injustice. A similar approach can also be seen in Jennifer Foster’s analysis of the problematic design and aesthetics of New York’s High Line and Paris’ Sentier Nature. As part of my own analysis, in my critique on Rail Deck, I compared the descriptions of the problematic natures described by these researchers to the descriptions/visions of nature to be found at the Park – according to the City’s planning documents. Of particular interest, I looked for marketable urban forms commonly used in redevelopment that reinforce ideas of nature linked to consumerism and material luxury – i.e. European nature aesthetics, boardwalks, foundations, etc.

1.2.2 Participant Observation

To triangulate and contextualize my findings on this analysis of grey literature, my methodology also included participant observation at planning events held by the City. My aim through attending events was to gain additional insight on how the City of Toronto as well as the *people* of Toronto define and describe liveability and nature.

I will note that one of the major limitations of this research was that I was unable to attend events *specifically related* to Rail Deck Park (given that my research started after the fact). And so, to overcome this limitation, I undertook participant observation at events (detailed in **Appendix A**) which I believed were conceptually similar to Rail Deck Park or in some way related to park planning and redevelopment.

In listening to the comments and concerns voiced by City Staff and by members of the public at these meetings, participant observation proved helpful in allowing me to better understand the different voices, imaginaries (or nightmares), resistances, and competing visions for the future of the city. Despite being unable to attend the meetings related to the Park, I felt that by attending these similar project events I was able to gain a sense of who narrates the story of liveability planning and nature making in the city of Toronto.

1.3 Organization of Paper

Informed by this methodological approach, my Paper ultimately presents an analysis of the Park and the City's approach to liveability. In the next chapter, I officially begin this Paper with a literature review focused on unpacking the emerging discourse of liveability and the associated emerging art of creating "liveable urban natures", like Rail Deck Park. As part of this literature review, I explore the theoretical foundations and nuances of liveability planning and "liveable nature" making and highlight how these modes of city-building came into popularity on urban

governance agendas during a time that paralleled a number of structural political and economic shifts towards neoliberalism and the rise of the symbolic economy.

Using this historical and theoretical context as a point of departure, in Chapter 3 I critically examine the unique character of Toronto's approach to liveability planning and nature making. Situating the broader global shift towards neoliberal governance in the context of Toronto, through this Chapter, I demonstrate how the adoption of liveability here largely coincided with the desire to create a more competitive, creative city – which is a popular form of city-building present under the doctrine of neoliberalism. In demonstrating the link between the two, that being the rise of the liveability discourse and the doctrine of neoliberalism, in Chapter 3 I begin to establish my major claim in this Paper which posits Rail Deck Park as a political mechanism that is being used to transform Toronto into a more competitive and creative city.

Following my exploration of liveability planning in Toronto, in Chapter 4 I move into an overview of the planning process behind Rail Deck Park and summarize some of the key documents that fed into the making of this project. Tracing its conceptual history back to the 1970s, when the impetus to transform the Rail Lands was catalyzed, I highlight some of the symmetries between the competitive, creative city vision and the desire to redevelop inside the Rails. In concluding this Chapter, I begin to ask and answer questions of *who* related to the planning process – such as, *who* controlled the narrative of the debate on what should be done within the rail corridor; *whose* voices and visions were represented in the process; and *whose* were thrown to the wayside?

With these considerations in mind, in Chapter 5 I then move into the final analysis of the planning and politics behind the redevelopment process and the conceptualization of the Park. As a rather extensive analysis, Chapter 5 is broken down into three separate sections – each of which is guided by questions of *how*. The first section explores the question of *how* the history of redevelopment was influenced by the wave of neoliberalism and the rise of the symbolic economy.

The second section discusses *how* the Park represents the longstanding imperative to transform Toronto into a competitive and creative city. Lastly, the third section looks at *how* this development will lend to the material manifestation of unequal power and benefits within the city. With the likeliness of tumultuous urban outcomes establishing apropos of Rail Deck Park, this Paper raises important questions about the authenticity of this development and the liveable city vision it seeks to extend.

In reflecting on these questions, I conclude with this argument: that liveability and nature in the context of the Park can best be understood as mechanisms that are being used *not* to enhance the overall quality of urban life for all Torontonians, as promised. Instead, as I will argue, they should more accurately be understood as mechanisms that are *cleverly* being used to wield an elite community in the city and, on a wider-scale, are being used to forge Toronto into an alluring competitive and creative urban form.

2. The Art and Politics of “Liveable Nature” Making

To meaningfully examine and draw conclusions about Rail Deck Park and the discourse in which it is situated, it is necessary that I begin by unpacking what it means to produce “liveable natures”, like Rail Deck Park, from a theoretical and practical perspective. This I see as an appropriate point of departure given this form of nature making, while being rapidly adopted by urban decision-makers and city-builders in recent decades, is still quite new conceptually speaking.

As noted in the Introduction, the concept of “liveable nature” is a working one that I use throughout this Paper to reference projects like Rail Deck Park – which represent a distinct form of urban nature produced under the discourse of liveability planning. Instantly identifiable by their staggering “image power”, “liveable natures” have landmark and prestigious qualities that make them catalytic in placemaking and city-marketing. They are developments which, beyond their aesthetic characteristics, are underpinned by nuances and unique sociopolitical complexities, and serve a purpose in the city that is often distinct from other forms of urban nature. It is these distinctive qualities, I discuss in the following sections, which necessitate the need to understand these “natures” as a unique breed of urban transformations. Given that the concept is not yet a formalized one in academia (but, perhaps, should be), this Chapter serves to both

build an understanding of the term to give it legitimacy and to build a theoretical foundation on which to depart my analysis of the Park.⁶

2.1 Understanding the Discourse of Liveability

As a concept that embodies two distinct theoretical components, to establish a working definition of “liveable nature” making, this section is dedicated to unpacking each component of the term by: first examining the discourse of liveability; and second, by examining the types of urban natures typically produced within it.

As I have learned through this research, “liveability” as a concept, discourse, vision, notion, and claim are highly malleable and thus are difficult to pin down conceptually speaking. Yet, where planners have capitalized on liveability rhetoric, as they have in Toronto, such projects have been cited as ones that will catalyze and put into action a new vision for the future of their city. Moreover, they have been posited as developments that will do away with the many urban ills – such as the rising conditions of pollution and congestion (Blanco *et al.*, 2009), lack of civic pride and engagement (Prytherch, 2002), and lack of public green space – that are top points of concerns for many cities.

Since emerging as this end-all solution to these post-industrial problems, liveability planning seems to have become an inevitable part of city-building – as noted in the Introduction. On the global scale, urban planning has taken on an explicit “liveable” orientation, as evidenced within

⁶ I would be remiss if I did not give credit to this idea to establish the term “liveable nature” being largely inspired by Williams Cronon’s work, *The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature* (1996). In this article, Cronon frames “wilderness” as a distinctly human construct and explores the paradoxes, contradictions, and complexities of our collective understanding of what wilderness is. In delving into the concept of “wilderness”, Cronon reveals how it, and nature for that matter, is nothing more than “a product of [...] civilization” and a “reflection of our own unexamined longing and desires” (1996, pg. 7). As he argues, though it is often imagined to be a transcendent, moral, and untouched place, wilderness is a human construct and a concept that can be deeply corrupted by political-economic imperatives and human desires. “Liveable natures”, are too, at their crux, human constructs that are also incredibly problematic at times and subject to the same human imperatives and desires – desires which need to be explored and exposed further in academia.

cities like Toronto, Vancouver (Ley; 1980; Ley, 1990; Holden and Scerri, 2013), Portland (Hagerman, 2006), Philadelphia (Leapman, 1971), and Paris (Uitermark, 2009; Foster, 2010). As evidenced by these cities, it would appear that in this era the production of bold projects like Rail Deck Park and the creation of the idealistic “liveable city” has become the new rite of passage for remaining attractive and competitive on a global stage. Even for cities that otherwise could not afford to be concerned with producing the dramatic and expensive projects and landscapes associated with liveability, sacrifices have often been made in order to create a more desired *liveable* urban form (Hagerman, 2006; Sleeth, 2006). Especially for cities wishing to engage more intensely with entrepreneurial activities, liveability appears to have become “the elusive characterization that [pushes] a city’s reputation ahead of its peers” and “a perquisite for enticing people to stay in the central city or return to it” (Hall and Hubbard, 1996; Hagerman, 2006, pg. 289).

As a concept, the “liveable city” has thus gained tremendous traction and largely apropos of the fact that it appeals to a diverse number of groups. Thought to be a more tangible concept than sustainability, liveability largely appeals to public perception. It has emerged as a buzzword even within the public discourse (Ruth and Franklin, 2013) where it is largely understood in terms of creating a “sense of place”. In equal measure, liveability has also proven to be attractive from the perspective of city-makers and investors (Ruth and Franklin, 2013, pg. 21). As Hagerman (2006, pg. 288) notes, being a highly flexible and malleable term, it has lent to both “conservative and progressive impulses” within planning networks and is, therefore, appealing to a wide scale of professionals as well. So, what precisely is a liveable city? And what kinds of nature does it produce and who is it meant to appeal to?

As Hagerman (2006) notes within his own foray into the subject, liveability is a dynamic – and at that, a normative – concept that has been changed over time and shaped by the condition of society. Historically, when it was first popularized in the 1960s, urban liveability was largely

understood in reference to materialism (Grandos and Kulasingam, 2017, pg. 24). It was, at its core, a concept premised on the assumption that the “fulfillment of materials needs (such as security, sustenance, and shelter)” and consumerist “material luxuries” were indices of a higher quality-of-life (Grandos and Kulasingam, 2017, pg. 24). As reflected in the wide-spread popularity and obsession with liveability rankings like GNP (Gross National Product), consumption and production habits were among the first determinants used to measure liveability or quality-of-life (Veenhoven, 1996).

However, this growth-centered way of understanding liveability was quickly short-lived, as it became backdropped by wide contestation. Scholars and, in particular, urban geographers, saw this materialistic approach to liveability as the linchpin of gentrification and the urban crises.⁷ And so, inspired largely by the arguments of these scholars, such as Jane Jacobs and Hans Blumenfeld (1969), the concept of liveability was reoriented in the 1970s to include a composite of social indicators, such as quality-of-life, mental health, and community well-being. With this shift to a less developmental and more subjective evaluation of the concept, planners began to associate the “*quality of urban life space, including the availability of parking spaces, [access to greenspace,] the number of sheltered walkways, and the general walkability of neighborhoods*” as stronger determinants for assessing liveability (Teo, 2014, pg. 916). It was essentially a new

⁷ Top of their concern was the urban policies surrounding large-scale redevelopment plans taking place at the time within so-called ‘unviable’ inner cities. In their analysis on the impact of gentrification on ethnic neighborhoods in Little Portugal, scholars Murdie and Teixeira (2009), depict the late 60s and 70s in Toronto as a time in which liveability rhetoric and the idea of creating an urban utopia was used as mere window dressing for what was essentially wide-sweeping gentrification. In particular, the gentrification and displacement of Toronto’s immigrants who failed to meet the “reasonable standards” of living set out by the urban elites. For urban geographers, cases like Toronto’s Little Portugal (South Parkdale) precisely demonstrated how planning regimes and the discourse of liveability were contributing to spreading tensions throughout cities. Designed to be both places to live but also a “locus for accumulation” (Evans, 2002, pg. 9), through this discourse it was the latter that was often favoured in urban policy. From South Parkdale (2004) to Amsterdam (Kaal, 2011), London (Ruth, 1964) to Berlin (Siemer and Matthews-Hunter, 2017) and Vancouver (Ley and Dobson, 2008), the late 1960s showcases a time where liveability rhetoric initiated policy changes that would inevitable allow a city to better participate in capital circulation – regardless of its impact on the social fabric of a city (Hagerman, 2006).

way of understanding the concept that inspired more holistic and inclusive approaches to building liveable cities and communities that are still practiced today in more progressive planning circles.

While this approach continued (and in some cases, continues) to permeate within the planning profession for some time, the 1980s brought a distinct and regressive shift in how liveability was conceptualized. It was a shift which mirrored the political and economic transformations taking place, most notably, the transformation of the urban economic structure in post-industrial cities.

To provide some context on these transformations, with the decay of the more traditional industry-based economy, otherwise known as the Fordist-Keynesian regime of capital accumulation, a new economic approach began to emerge within this decade. Described by Harvey (1989) as the post-Fordist “symbolic economy”, this renewed approach to capitalism quickly gained traction across globalized cities. Characterized by more “flexible” regimes of accumulation, the “symbolic economy”, as Chao (2014, pg. 4) describes, is “oriented toward [the production and consumption of] abstract goods and services: financial products such as stocks and bonds, real estate, and *experiences*”. It is a much different approach to capitalism than the former regime, which was dependent on the industrial and manufacturing sectors for the production of material products (Harvey, 1989; Chao, 2014). It is also a regime which produced, and continues to produce, changes in the dominant political narrative – as it inspires uniquely aggressive approaches to urban governance.

Catalyzing what Swyngedouw *et al.* (2002) call the neoliberal “New Urban Policy”, under the “symbolic economy” and under neoliberalism, urban governance has taken on an explicit “entrepreneurial” approach.⁸ In contrast to some scholars who posit that there is a distinct absence of the state within capitalism, more convincing are the arguments from the likes of

⁸ This shift from ‘managerial’ to ‘entrepreneurial’ modes of urban governance is well documented across the world (see MacLaran and Williams, 2003; Bartley, 2007).

Swyngedouw *et al.* (2002) as well as David Harvey (1989) who suggest that under the new economy, state intervention is part and parcel of the regime. Particularly so amidst interurban competition, under this economy municipal governance bodies have repositioned their political priorities to focus on creating conditions and opportunities for economic growth (Harvey, 1989). They have, for instance, taken on a direct and untraditional role in attracting multinational business and foreign investors to the city (Verdelli, 2013), reinvigorating economic stagnation, attracting talent, and building community cohesion (Chao, 2014). For these urban policymakers, “constrained by a policy context marked by austerity” and limited government spending (Chao, 2014, pg. 5), liveability policy and planning interventions have emerged as remarkably seductive approaches to meaningfully take on these untraditional, entrepreneurial imperatives within the city (Peck, 2005).

While this may appear to be a win-win, based on the assumption that by creating a more liveable city, it will also guarantee improved quality-of-life and economic success, it is important to identify that liveability has, in this era of neoliberalism and the wake of the symbolic economy, taken on an entirely new meaning. While it was once a concept that embodied Jane Jacob’s inspiring ways of thinking about city making, in this era, entrepreneurial policymakers have transformed the concept into nothing more than a political apparatus that is used to build what Richard Florida (2002) calls the “creative city”.

As Teo (2014) argues, amidst “interurban competition [...], states have [increasingly promulgated and implemented] carefully calculated images of urban liveability” that reflect a desire (not to enhance quality-of-life *but*) to attract and retain the members of the creative class. This line of thinking follows Richard Florida’s thesis of creative city-building – which states that for a city to be successful within this era they must possess the qualities of urban life that attract and retain the main drivers of economic development. To be precise, they must ostensibly cater to these creative professionals – knowledge-based workers such as those working in healthcare,

the legal sector, business, etc. – as well as those in the super-creative core – those in jobs such as science, engineering, computer programming, research, etc. (Florida, 2002). Central to this thesis is the production of a particular geographical imaginary (Harvey, 1973, 1996; McCann, 2008) and the building of an urban form rich in consumption-based amenities “(sidewalks with dining tables, musicians, vendors, and performers)” (Florida, 2002, pg. 183). Second, is the production of cities rich in amenities that serve the general well-being of this class “such as access to green space, diverse food sources, culture, and arts” (Ling and Dale, 2011, pg. 240).⁹ And third, is the production of cities which are full of the “intense, high-quality, and multidimensional experiences” that these creative professionals crave (Teo, 2014, pg. 917).¹⁰

While conceptually simplistic, Florida’s urban imaginary has taken a stronghold in many urban contexts and has quickly become well adored by entrepreneurial policymakers (Peck, 2005; Markusen, 2006)¹¹; but as scholar Jamie Peck has argued, while Florida’s thesis has many policy proponents it has an “equal number of academic detractors” (Peck, 2005; Chao, 2014, pg. 9). Particularly for scholars, like Peck, who have studied how the robustness of liveability has been regressed by the creative city discourse, attention has been spotlighted on the fact that policymakers are now building cities specifically with this elite circle of creative professionals in mind. And moreover, they are doing so under the guise of liveability – whereby, policymakers, to requote Teo’s arguments above (2014, pg. 917), are marketing carefully calculated images of

⁹ Emphasis added.

¹⁰ For Florida, the production of this specific urban form allows the creative class to coalesce in the city in such a way where it activates their “innate entrepreneurial energies” (Scott, 2006, pg. 11; Chao, 2014).

¹¹ As evidenced in cities around the world, building this urban form for creatives has become the new urban imperative and is perhaps the “most conspicuously successful innovation in the recent history of [urban policymaking]” (2011, pg. 41)” (Chao, 2014, pg. 9). See Dublin (Lawton, 2010), Singapore (Teo, 2014), Paris (Foster, 2010), Vancouver, (Ley 1990), and Oregon (Hagerman, 2006) for examples where considerable energy has and continues to be poured into producing spaces that the “creative class”, in particular, can enjoy and will consider liveable.

urban liveability that reflect the creative city narrative. Thus, in contrast to the 1970s, when creating a “liveable city” meant creating conditions that would benefit the whole of urban society, today, the concept often translates into building cities that benefit the few (aka these creative professionals). Moreover, it has come to mean building cities that disseminate and embed key ideas of the doctrine of neoliberalism, that being entrepreneurialism and competitiveness, into the spirit of a city (McAuthor and Robin, 2019).

Such points raise important questions about how urban natures (and other urban developments/infrastructures, for that matter) are being built and articulated through the discourse of liveability planning and perhaps used to reinforce these ideas of neoliberalism and creative city-building. Specifically, for Rail Deck Park, these points on liveability also raise more case-specific questions about the authenticity of the discourse in Toronto and the City’s vision of creating the ideal “liveable” urban form through the construction of the Park. Most notably, they raise important questions regarding the asymmetries between the City’s “liveable city” vision and the trajectory of using “liveability” as a guise for creative city-building.

2.2 Understanding Nature’s Role in the Liveable City

Now that I have successfully unpacked the concept of “liveability”, for the remainder of this Chapter, I unpack the second component of my working concept of “liveable nature” making. I speak specifically to the role that nature or the greening of urban space plays in planning for today’s idealistic city. Drawing from scholarship within the disciplines of political ecology and urban planning that have sharply investigated the production of nature through this discourse, in this section I demonstrate how, under the umbrella of liveability planning, nature is routinely transformed into a superficial ideological terrain for the expansion of market-based neoliberal hegemony.

To begin, as evidenced by the particular nature aesthetic that it often produces, liveability planning mobilizes natures that 1) exemplify marketable qualities and 2) are linked to creative city-building and the desire to attract and retain creative professionals in the city.¹² Distinct from other forms of metropolitan natures (like urban gardens, small parkettes, or restoration projects) that may go unnoticed within cities, “liveable nature” projects can be easily identified by the unique quality of “imageability” that they possess (Lynch, 1960). Characterized by their sheer scale and unique and breath-taking designs, “liveable natures” often effectively work to transform the spaces in which they occupy into creative theme parks (to borrow Sorkin’s, 1992 metaphor). Moreover, with their staggering “image power”, they often serve to become “icons” in the city that are instantly recognizable both on a local and global scale. Resembling what those in cultural studies call “flagship developments”, “liveable natures” can best be understood as massive imagining projects which play into the symbolic construction of place and city marketing (Chao, 2014, pg. 7).

Often used in city-building to promulgate a particular urban vision, “liveable natures”, akin to flagship developments (like museums, sports stadia, or spectacular public or private infrastructures), I would argue, are used to “assume the role of brands” that help to *sell* a city (as a product) within the “hyper-consumption based world” (Evans, 2003; Chao, 2014, pg. 7). As Prytherch explains in his article *Selling the Eco-Entrepreneurial City* (2002, pg. 775), under the symbolic economy, local governance bodies often face the need to *sell* or *brand* their cities as places that are “uniquely attractive vis à vis its competitors”. Urban nature, from this promotional perspective, has thus emerged as a powerful means of creating an alluring brand for a city – and should therefore, be understood as a booster mechanism, under neoliberalism, that is routinely used to secure a competitive advantage on the global market.

¹² Rather than seeing the production of urban nature and park space as an “outcome of broader physical, economic, and social changes within the city”, I follow the arguments made by Lawton (2010, pg. 138) who positions liveable developments as being “central to, and drivers of, contemporary urban transformations.

As evidenced in Singapore, for example, spectacular nature projects are routinely produced specifically with the intent to engender an urban imaginary that sells/reinforces its claim as the most economically vibrant and liveable city in Asia. Reinforcing Prytherch's (2002) arguments of entrepreneurial city-building, "liveable nature" projects, in particular, are produced throughout this city-state to forge "a distinctive image" that not only serves to 1) establish a globally recognized urban identity as the "best Asian city" but 2) to forge a consensual spatial imagination and sense-of-place which "acts as a lure to capital and the right sort of people" (Harvey, 1989, pg. 295). Which according to Teo (2014, pg. 919), in the contemporary context, are foreign investors and the talent belonging to the "hyper mobile" creative core (as discussed above).

With the example of Singapore's world-renowned Marina Bay development in mind, nature in this example was used to establish a "signature image" aimed at attracting investors and members of the creative class to the city's newest financial capital and business district. As part of this development (and the larger Marina Bay Master Plan), Singapore created a 250-acre urban nature oasis that features a highly *cultivated* display of flora and fauna as well as a *imposed* canopy of artificial trees that tower 50 metres above the urban landscape (Said-Moorhouse, 2015). Known as the Gardens by the Bay, according to the State's Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), this development capitalized on the 'green is sexy' model to "attract more relevant business and talent to invest and grow in Singapore" (quoted in Li, 2005). Moreover, it capitalized on nature's powerful ability to establish a sense-of-place, proven to not only attract but "root" talent and investment within a city or particular area of a city (Teo, 2014, pg. 919).

Beyond this example, comparable nature projects have emerged elsewhere throughout this city-state and, for that matter, in other urban contexts across the globe. In particular, they have become increasingly popular within cities wanting to sell their urban forms as equally distinctive,

equally appealing places to live, work, play, and invest in.¹³ But similar to Singapore, where “liveable natures” have been built, cities are not aiming to sell these urban forms to just anyone – *but rather*, “liveable natures” are used to sell the city to the “right sort of people” that can drive and contribute value to the new economy.

So, what precisely is the problem with marketing and producing cities that are liveable for the drivers of this economy? And what precisely is the problem with producing these spectacular natures often associated with building “liveable cities” according to the ideals of the creative class? Aren’t all urban nature projects beneficial?

In the following chapters I unpack these research questions as well as the overarching question: what does Rail Deck Park represent in the context of Toronto’s increasingly neoliberalizing urban landscape. As I have sought to argue throughout this Chapter, under neoliberalism, liveability has transformed from a powerful planning apparatus to a clever political mechanism. Whereas it once inspired progressive approaches to enhancing quality-of-life, liveability, in today’s context, has been used to promote and embed ideas of entrepreneurialism and competitiveness into the spirit of a city (McAuthor and Robin, 2019). Moreover, it has been used as a legitimizing mechanism to enforce urban plans and policies that ostensibly cater to the valorized drivers of the economy. By extension, under the discourse urban nature has been equally regressed, emerging as a discursive ally in creative city-building. These conclusions raise important questions about the authenticity of liveability planning in Toronto and, moreover, the art of making “liveable nature” in the city.

¹³ As noted in the Introduction, the production of such developments is evidenced now in Portland, Oregon with their waterfront transformations (Hagerman, 2006) but also Boston with the Big Dig development, Melbourne with Federation Square (Wetzstein, 2013), and soon to be Toronto with the proposed Rail Deck Park.

3. The Entanglements of Liveability and Urban Nature in Toronto

To understand the liveability discourse and the art of making “liveable nature” in the city of Toronto, it is important to first identify the *contextually-specific* factors, complexities, and nuances that uniquely influence Toronto’s policy-making and city-building landscape. As noted by scholars, such as Peck, Brenner, and Theodore (2013; 2011; Chao, 2014, pg. 11), examining these context-specific factors is incredibly necessary given that “the processes of neoliberalisation are far from uniform across different urban contexts” and, by extension, the discourse of liveability planning is equally unique city to city. As such, the following section expands on the arguments made in Chapter 2 but further examines the unique character and trajectory of contemporary urban development and policy interventions as they relate to liveability planning and urban nature making in the city.

3.1 Liveability Planning in Toronto: A Discourse of Branding, Entrepreneurialism, and Creative City-Building

Different from the general history of the liveability discourse as outlined in Chapter 2, I would start by arguing that what is most unique about Toronto’s approach to liveability is that it has almost exclusively been focused on promoting entrepreneurial urbanism and, more contemporaneously, Floridian-style creative city planning and policymaking in the city. Whereas in other urban contexts, liveability was, at least at one time, used to encourage progressive modes of city-building (as discussed in Chapter 2), the trajectory of liveability in Toronto has largely represented the regressive side of this discourse. Whereby, policymakers have used liveability rhetoric and planning interventions (such as “liveable natures”) as a means of discursively pedaling forward and legitimizing their neoliberal urban agendas. This, I believe, is largely apropos of the fact that the concept was popularized in Toronto at a time that paralleled the broader concretization of the global economic and political shift towards neoliberalism and the

wave of New Urban Policy that took over cities during the 1980s. Whereas other Canadian cities, such as Vancouver, had begun co-opting ideas of liveability in earlier decades, as cited by Kipfer and Keil (2002), the institutionalization of the liveability planning regime in Toronto came after the fact and largely in light of the “neoliberal restructuring [of the City’s urban agenda that occurred] under [Mel Lastman’s] mayoralty” (pg. 595). Containing aggressively “explicit goals [for creating a more] competitive city”, given the parallels between the wave of New Urban Policy and the emergence of liveability planning in Toronto, the City’s liveable vision has largely taken on an explicit entrepreneurial perspective.¹⁴ And moreover, it has essentially become an appendage of the City’s longstanding vision to create a more competitive Toronto (Kipfer and Keil, 2002).

Typical of the entrepreneurial perspective and the doctrine of neoliberalism, from the moment liveability was institutionalized and brought into grey literature, it has been used by Toronto’s policymakers as a mechanism to market the city at the global scale of interurban competition. First written into the Official Plan in the early 2000s, the notion of building a “more beautiful, comfortable, and *liveable*” Toronto (City of Toronto, 2000, pg. 88)¹⁵, is seen to be used as a way to establish what Harvey (1989) denotes as a “structured coherence”.¹⁶ Otherwise known in more contemporary literature as establishing an urban *brand* or *identity*, a structured coherence, which

¹⁴ Interestingly, while this neoliberalized approach to liveability has resulted in problematic consumption-focused planning and policymaking regimes in the city, I would ironically note that it is what has made the city a “privileged urban reference point” in terms of quality-of-life (Balibrea, 2001). Since striving to enhance the liveableness of the city, Toronto has appeared on global liveability rankings year to year. Frequently coming within the top ten of these rankings, Toronto has appeared on liveability scales since the early 2000s in competition with cities like Copenhagen, Vancouver, Vienna, and Melbourne and has been routinely given a high liveability score according to institutions such as the Economist, Business Insider, and CNBC.

¹⁵ Emphasis added.

¹⁶ To quote Pavlínek and Pickles (2000) definition of structured coherence: “Harvey’s notion of structured coherence is related to his understanding of a “spatial fix”, which describes the social attempts to control social and economic processes associated with the “creative destruction” of capitalistic development and to achieve temporary geographic stability (Duncan, Goodwin, and Halford, 1998).”

Toronto's "liveable city" brand represents, is something which is often used by cities under capitalist urbanization to 1) better *sell* and *brand* a city on the global market and 2) to establish a certain order to the multiform reality of the urban landscape (Evans, 2003). It is something which can allow one to better read an urban landscape as a place and, ultimately, as a *product* that has a sense of "continuity and collectivity" and distinctive qualities that allow it to be identifiable on the global scale (Evans, 2002; Evans, 2003). Drawing from this idea that liveability has served to establish a structured coherence in Toronto, the City's notion of liveability, at the very least, can be understood as an entrepreneurial imperative. Which, since institutionalization, has been used to *brand* Toronto as an alluring *product* on the global market. At most, however, I would go so far as to adding that, as a structured coherence, liveability might also be understood as a mechanism that has been used to buttress the political hegemony of the City and used to forge a new spatial imagination for Toronto.

Apropos of the fact that the liveable city vision was introduced at a time that paralleled amalgamation (as well as the wave of neoliberalism), liveability, I believe, has also served to play a vital role in establishing a "certain order" in the newly expanded community of Toronto (Evans, 2003). Helping to forge a sense of "continuity and collectivity" among the amalgamated municipalities – of East York, Etobicoke, North York, Scarborough, York, and Toronto – liveability, upon amalgamation, was used to justify the homogenization of a particular lifestyle ideology and urban planning strategy that fed into the making of a unified urban identity. More specifically, it fed into the making of an entrepreneurial-like urban quality which both city-makers and urban citizens of the amalgamated municipality have since been expected to uphold. For city-makers, in particular, embracing Toronto's entrepreneurial identity has meant building urban forms and supporting developments focused on maximizing capital accumulation. Similarly, for Torontonians, this identity or notion of liveability put forward is one that has enacted the

embodiment of their role, commitment, and sacrifice to ensuring the prosperity of Toronto in the global economy.

While the City's approach to liveability has changed somewhat since its institutionalization, I would argue that it continues to be used as a mechanism "for distinguishing the city at the global scale of interurban competition [... and used as a mechanism to reinforce ...] a "structured coherence" to its identity" (Chao, 2014, pg. 18).¹⁷ More contemporaneously, however, Toronto's notion of liveability has further expanded to include Floridian-style ideas of creative city-building. Demonstrated by the plans and policies that urban decision-makers have begun pedaling forward, strategies to make Toronto a more "liveable" place have become subsumed within a broader rubric of city-building that targets the creative class. This is very much in line with the discourse of liveability as seen in other urban contexts, and as discussed in Chapter 2, where policymakers use liveability rhetoric as a political apparatus to *build* and *brand* cities as places that are attractive to the members of the creative core. Reflected prominently in the City's recent planning strategies, the liveable city narrative in Toronto upholds many of Florida's checkbox points for building a city that will serve to both attract and retain creative professionals. For example, the *TOcore: Building for Liveability – Recommendations Report* (2018), emphasizes that Toronto should continue to uphold planning strategies focused on building a "vibrant", "diverse", and "amenity-rich" city. Which to restate the arguments from Chapter 2, are city qualities that are highly sought after by the creatives (Teo, 2014). As noted, in the *Tocore: Building for Liveability* report (2018):

"Toronto is recognized the world over as a *liveable city* and a global centre of *talent, commerce, culture, diversity and vibrancy*. This is particularly true of Downtown where liveability has been a magnet for growth. Downtown is increasingly seen as a desirable place to live, work, learn, play, visit, and *invest*." (pg. 5).

¹⁷ In Chao's (2014) example, she is discussing liveability in the context of Vancouver. Her Master's Paper, which focuses on the subject of "liveability" but in the city of Vancouver, was an incredibly useful resource for my own research. It is particularly interesting to see the similarities in the conclusions she draws about liveability in that city to the conclusions I draw about Toronto. In both cases, it is seen that "liveability" rhetoric was and continues to be used as a mechanism for competitive city-building.

“One of the important aspects of Downtown that makes it liveable is convenient access to daily needs, including shops, entertainment and *services*” (pg. 31).

“As a result of the increasing number of people both living and working Downtown, there is an increased demand on the *parks* and open spaces as well as other *amenities*, such as recreation facilities. Given this demand, there is a need to *provide high-quality* and functional *amenity spaces* in both residential and non-residential developments. These spaces are vital to *improving people’s overall quality-of-life*.” (pg. 24).

From these points, it can be concluded that when it comes to building “a more liveable Toronto”, improving quality-of-life for everyone is *not* part and parcel of the City’s vision. Though it is often argued as such by City planners – who want to gain public support for policies and the financing of developments, like Rail Deck Park – when “confronted with the logic of the market” Toronto’s notion of liveability is “fundamentally premised on [the] ability [in which] it can be consumed” or bought into (Chao 2014, pg. 18). Moreover, it is premised on: the City’s entrepreneurial imperative to better position Toronto in the context of interurban competition; it is premised on the ability it can attract and retain the creative class; forward political hegemony; and *lastly*, it is premised on the imperative to establish an entrepreneurial-like identity or structured coherence in Toronto – that city planners, policymakers, and Torontonians are *all* expected to uphold.

These arguments prompt even more important questions, which I address in the next chapters, about the liveability discourse in the context of Rail Deck Park and nature’s role in meeting Toronto’s entrepreneurial goals. Yet before delivering into these questions, I first unpack how the City’s entrepreneurial approach to liveability has changed nature’s role in the city since the time of amalgamation – when the discourse first emerged. As doing so provides a more historically significant foundation on which to depart my following analysis of the Park. Moreover, I would also note that such an analysis is needed as it demonstrates the degree to which nature’s purpose and value has been regressed in Toronto apropos of this discourse.

3.2 “Liveable Nature” Making in the City

Not dissimilar to the trajectory of liveability planning as seen in other cities, like Singapore, since the time of its adoption in Toronto, nature has been harnessed as an ally in branding the urban form and serving as a booster mechanism to secure a competitive advantage on the global market. In this sense, it can be said that: if liveability is used as the *mechanism* to forward the City’s entrepreneurial imperatives, urban nature should be understood as the *canvas* onto which these imperatives are most powerfully and routinely inscribed.

As is evidenced by the number of spectacular green projects/proposals (like Rail Deck Park) that have emerged in the city since the birth of the liveability planning era, Toronto has routinely used urban nature to achieve its “liveable (or, more contemporaneously, creative) city” vision. While, for the City’s policymakers, nature has become this convenient *canvas* for rebranding the city, the consequence of using nature in this regard has been twofold. As foreshadowed, Toronto’s approach to liveability planning has undermined nature’s value significantly and secondly, has led to the production of natures that prioritize economic imperatives over others (such as ecological and social goals).

With respect to the latter, it is important to note that since the adoption of liveability there has been a describable shift in the approach to planning for nature in Toronto.¹⁸ Whereas in the former era of ecosystem planning, the imperative was to create a city where there was a “symbiosis between environmental, social, and economic needs” (to paraphrase Kipfer and Keil, 2002, pg. 240), the emergence of liveability planning has brought the domineering imperative to achieve a more competitive urban form. This has meant that developments, notably green infrastructures, have suddenly needed to produce positive economic spin-offs in order to be deemed of value to City policymakers. Essentially, whereas in the former era of planning nature’s value hinged on its ability to contribute positive ecological, economic, and social benefits, under the era of liveability, nature’s value has regressed into: its ability to contribute value to the local economy; its ability to play into the symbolic construction of place and city marketing; and its ability to successfully position Toronto as a uniquely attractive city vis à vis its urban competitors. With this economic perspective leading the impetus of development, since the emergence of the liveability discourse there has been a discernible shift in the *types* of natures that have been built.

¹⁸ Prior to the adoption of the liveability discourse, it is important Toronto had taken on an approach to city-building, known as ecosystem planning, which was characteristically robust. At its core, it was a means of city-building focused on achieving a “[...] symbioses of economic, environmental, and social goals” (Desfor and Keil, 1999; Hartmann, 1999; Keil and Graham, 1998; Royal Commission on the Future of the Toronto Waterfront, 1992; Kipfer and Keil, 2002, pg. 240). It was a remarkably progressive approach and, particularly so when placed in contrast to today’s means of planning for the idealistic liveable city. Whereas liveability planning and city-building in Toronto has, more recently, become almost exclusively governed by entrepreneurial imperatives and the imperative to attract and produce creatives, planning strategies provisioned during the earlier era of ecosystem planning took into consideration the importance of achieving improvements to social and environmental wellbeing *as well as* economic conditions. With entrepreneurial imperatives being at the backburner, the plans and policies that were provisioned in this era led to important and *meaningful* developments and policies that involved such things as the reintroduction of native flora and fauna in the city, the remediation of soils, improvements to floodplain protection, and the protection of natural habitats. The legacies, of which, continue to benefit the city (both ecologically and socially) to this day. From the restoration of the mouth of the Don River to the revitalization of the Port Lands and other areas along the waterfront, these are just some of the prominent post-industrial developments signaling the legacy of this short-lived progressive ecosystem planning approach.

Akin to the trajectory of liveability as seen in other urban contexts, over the years, green infrastructures developed/proposed for Toronto have increasingly featured distinctive marketable qualities and have boasted designs with staggering “image power”. Additionally, liveability planning has brought an emergence in green developments (or “liveable natures”) that have been designed to serve as “icons” to forge a new globally identifiable brand for the city. Take for instance, how the Waterfront revitalization and redevelopment strategy, arguably Toronto’s first “liveable nature”, was used as a branding mechanism by policymakers.

Slated, at the time of its conception, as the most important plan for achieving a more *liveable Toronto* (Keil, 1998), the Waterfront revitalization detailed plans to connect the city’s approved or recently built consumption spaces (i.e. sports stadia, entertainment venues, etc.) to the Central Business District (Kipfer and Keil, 2002, pg. 245) and detailed designs to aestheticize the city’s natural features. It was a staggering proposal and, given its scope, is one that is still underway in the city even today.

Conceptualized during the writing of the official plan following amalgamation and the lead up to Toronto’s bid to host the 2008 Summer Olympic Games, the Waterfront project played an important role in establishing a sense of identity. To be more specific, it was a “liveable nature” that played an important role in establishing an urban brand and “structured coherence” in the city. Though it was, at times, referred to as an ecological revitalization project, in the historical context in which it is situated, the revitalization strategy can best be understood as a *beautification strategy* intended to be harnessed as a “lubricant” for marketing and branding the city during the Olympic bid and used post-amalgamation to reinforce the sense of “continuity and collectivity” the Municipality was trying to establish in the mega-city. Such points are reinforced in former Mayor Mel Lastman’s announcement in 1999, when he noted: “First item on the speech is a commitment to revitalize the waterfront and I love it. Also, for the 2008 Olympic bid. I think that’s great” (Lastman, 1999). Indeed, through his statement it is clear that this “liveable nature”, like others of

its kind, was designed with the purpose of rebranding Toronto and selling it amidst those competing for the Olympic Games. Yet, to be even more clear, it was a development, again like other “liveable natures”, designed with the added intent of rebranding Toronto as an *alluring city* that “looked good” especially to the hyper mobile creative core. As noted in a response by the City two years following Mel Lastman’s speech:

“The importance of [public renewal and private redevelopment with good urban design] goes far beyond the aesthetic delight of creating a more beautiful, comfortable, and liveable city – as important as that is. In the new knowledge-based economy, a city has to *look good* to attract the flexible and mobile information economy entrepreneurs and workers who can locate anywhere in the world” (City of Toronto, 2000: 88).¹⁹

In the next chapters, I will be uncovering how Rail Deck Park, as another “liveable nature”, might also serve as an important steppingstone in building Toronto into a place that “[attracts these] flexible and mobile” entrepreneurs and workers of the creative economy.

¹⁹ Paraphrased quote taken from Kipfer and Keil (2002).

4. The Planning and Politics Behind Rail Deck Park

To effectively understand the Park's *contemporary* role in competitive and creative city-building, it is necessary I discuss and analyze the planning and politics of the Rail Lands redevelopment beginning at a time *predating* the Park's conceptualization. This is necessary apropos of the fact that one of the longest-standing debates in the city has been centered around this question of, "what should be done within the Rail Lands". In other words, while the Park development was only recently introduced, plans to redevelop inside the corridor have been long in the making. This Chapter, therefore, provides an overview of the broader history of this debate and traces the various voices and urban visions that have emerged in the process. As noted in the Introduction, it looks specifically at the question of *who* – that is, *who* has controlled the narrative of the redevelopment debate; *whose* voices and visions have been represented in the process; *whose* were thrown to the wayside; and *whose* urban vision does Rail Deck Park represent? Essentially, while there were many competing voices and visions, throughout the redevelopment process it has been a small circle of creative professionals that have most effectively controlled the narrative of the debate on the Rail Lands. Moreover, it is these individuals who have laid the groundwork for a redevelopment that will ostensibly serve other creatives and creative capital within the city.

4.1 Derailing Toronto's Industrial Legacy

Though it is now commonly cited as the foil of the downtown, Toronto's Rail Lands was, at one time, the lifeblood of urban growth and economic development in the city. Heralded as an "economic necessity [...] during the era of industrialization", the establishment of the rails in the mid-1800s served as an important conduit for trading and productive activity (De Wet, 2017 pg. 15). Allowing for the more rapid movement of both people and goods, Toronto's Rail Lands replaced the much slower port and horse-drawn modes of transportation that stunted growth and

economic development in the city (De Wet, 2017; Flack, 2019). Ultimately enabling Toronto to become the “economic engine” that it is today (Boles, n.d.), the rail effectively moved Toronto, economically speaking, beyond competing Canadian cities like Montreal – which, prior to the establishment of the railway, was a commercial headwater in comparison.

Apropos of its importance in shaping the economic and, ergo, the political and social aspects of the city, by the turn of the 1800s rail-to-port infrastructure dominated and defined the urban landscape – as evidenced by the sheer size of land in Toronto it, at one time, occupied (Boles, n.d.; Flack, 2019). Spanning nearly the entire area south of Front Street to the industrial waterfront (Flack, 2019), the Grand Trunk Railway and Canadian Pacific Railway companies transformed this vast tract of land into a grey ribbon of rail and rail servicing facilities – see **Figure 4** and **Figure 5**). Now referred to as the city’s “grey ribbon of disconnect” (De Wet, 2017, pg. 13), it is this legacy of the railway that is both responsible for transforming Toronto into the economically dominant city it is today but is, “in large part, [also] responsible for one of the most feuded debates currently [underway in the city]: the revitalization of the Toronto waterfront [and the redevelopment of the rail corridor]” (Boles, n.d.).



Figure 5. Old Union Station, June 18th, 1926. Source: The Toronto Archives



Figure 6. Toronto's Railway Lands in the 1940s. Source: Toronto Public Library

No longer serving as the city's lynchpin of urban growth, with the demise of industrial capitalism and the introduction of sweeping technological change, by as early as the 1960s new configurations for the corridor began to take shape. Left with a wide stretch of now mostly redundant rail, the city was forced to reconcile with the need to redevelop this expansive track or "ribbon of disconnect" (De Wet, 2017, pg. 13). Which, by the end of the rail era, had effectively severed Toronto and Torontonians from the waterfront and left the urban fabric with an unsightly at-grade visual impact (Boles, n.d.; Flack, 2019). While the challenge to remedy these industrial lands posed as a significant and fiscally burgeoning urban problem – and one that the city continues to reconcile – it also presented a tabula rasa for the "projection of [an entirely new urban future and urban identity]" (Hagerman, 2006, pg. 290). Which, to be exact, from the onset of the redevelopment of the Rail Lands, was imagined to be an urban future dominated and defined by the creative economy and an urban identity which supported the production and prioritization of creative class citizens in the city.

In recognizing that the growth of Toronto was no longer dependent on industry, the rise of the creative economy demanded that a renewal of spatial prioritization take place. Specifically, the prioritization of this "creative class". Who, to refer again to Richard Florida's (2002) arguments,

require cities that embody a “work hard, play hard” mentality and demonstrate an amenity-rich and “people rich” culture. Following his rubric for creative city-building, through the redevelopment of the rails, Toronto began materially and conceptually transforming the industrial city in such a way that would better serve to produce and attract this new elite class.

The first document to be released by the city that ostensibly targeted creative citizens was the 1962 report, *The Core of the Central Waterfront*. Prepared by Toronto Planning Staff, the central waterfront document focused on remaking the Rail Lands by first addressing the site between Bathurst and Leslie Street. Deeming this space as undesirable for the construction of further industrial uses, Toronto proposed that this portion of corridor be transformed into a mixed-use vicinity with public space. Through none other than the development of a “rail deck” overtop of the active corridor, it was proposed that a platform be built behind Union Station to support the construction of overhead corporation office towers as well as pedestrian pathways that would form a north-to-south connection from the core to the lakeshore. This proposal, designed with elaborate water features, trees, and functional pathways, focused on bringing more vibrancy and amenities to the urban fabric and in doing so, met Florida’s criteria for creative city-building – see **Figure 7** and **Appendix B** for a more detailed overview of this development. Moreover, it followed the wider trajectory of development taking place in other budding creative cities across the globe. Whereby urban decision-makers, eager to deny their socially and historically significant industrial pasts, began rebranding the look and feel of their cities to the creative taste – and with that, constructing them in such a way that no longer served industrial uses and workers.

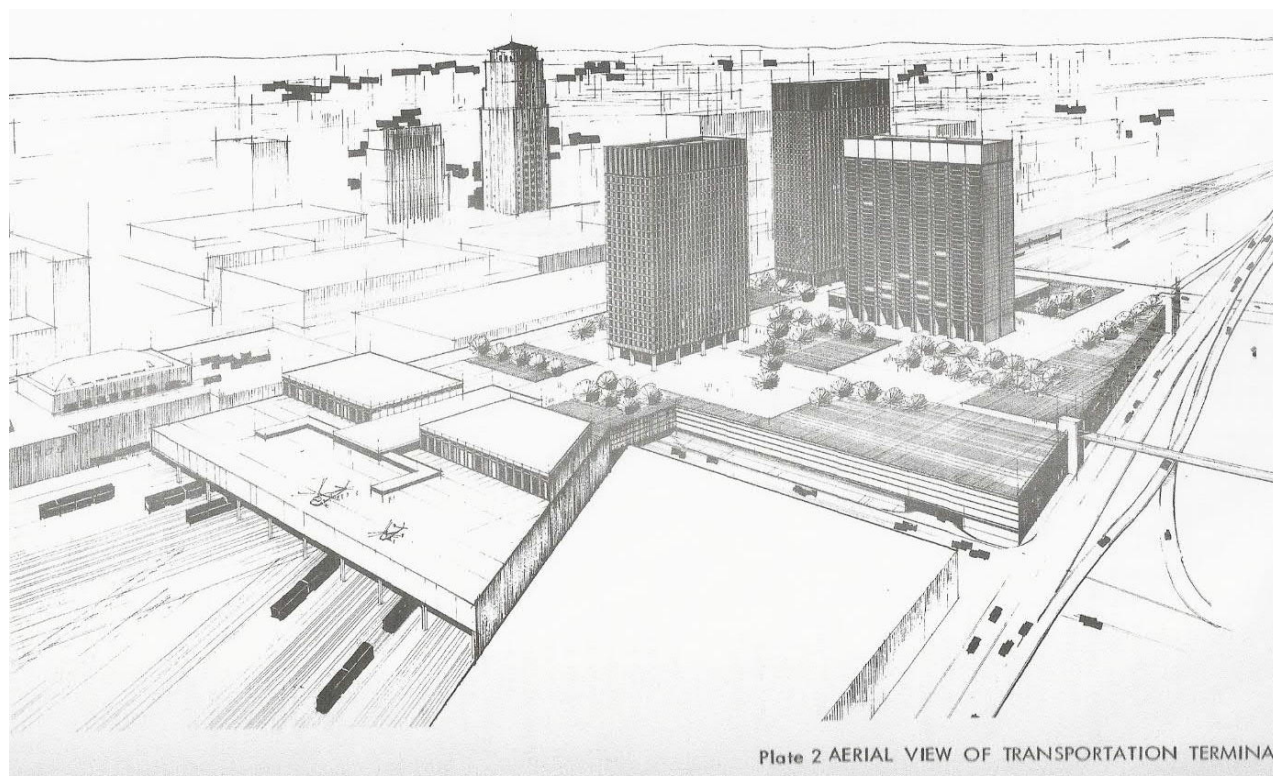


Figure 7. Aerial View of the Initial Rail Deck Park. Source: *The Core of the Central Waterfront* (1962)

While this central waterfront development never came to fruition, it marked an important point in the history of the redevelopment of the Rail Lands. Setting the tone for the planning regime to come, the City's central waterfront Report inspired a planning regime whereby the remaking of the rails was continuously conceptualized and reconceptualized by and for a small circle of creative professionals. Following the imputes of this Report, for instance, the second proposal to be introduced regarding redevelopment was the Metro Centre – known as the brainchild of the Canadian Pacific and Canadian National railway companies. Slated to create “a city-within-a-city” between Gardiner, Bathurst, Front, and Young, the Metro Centre development proposed to add millions of square feet of office and commercial space as well residential units to accommodate the influx of white-collar professionals in the city – see **Figure 8**. Despite it grossly under providing for other urban actors – such as the growing number of diverse students, homeless, key workers, and low- and moderate-income households – Council and Toronto planners feverously gave the

approval for this development. However, their decision was not made without controversy and tremendous public outrage.



Figure 8. Metro Centre. Source: City of Toronto Archives

Backed by a group of concerned local citizens, left wing politician and former Toronto Mayor, John Sewell, appeared in front of City Council in opposition to the decision to support the Metro Centre. Pointing out the significant gaps in the plan, such as the failure to accommodate for all forms of urban dwellers, Sewell and members of the public voiced their desire to see affordable units and public space be incorporated into the design of the project. Council, however, was

unwilling to consider such changes – reinforcing again the earlier narrative that the redevelopment of the Rail Lands was being conceptualized by and for a small circle of individuals.

In his memoir, *How We Changed Toronto* (2015), Sewell reflects on Council's decision and his meetings in Council Chambers in bad taste. Stating that the Metro Centre, for him, raised important questions regarding the planning approval system in Toronto. According to Sewell, any planning regarding the redevelopment of the railway “seemed to involve many secret meetings, many Staff reports that were cast by the wayside, and much public protest” (Sewell, 2015, pg. 76). Having the sense that a “decision had already been made in a back room” prior to public meetings, Sewell further goes on to question the meaningfulness of the public participation process (Sewell, 2015, pg. 76).

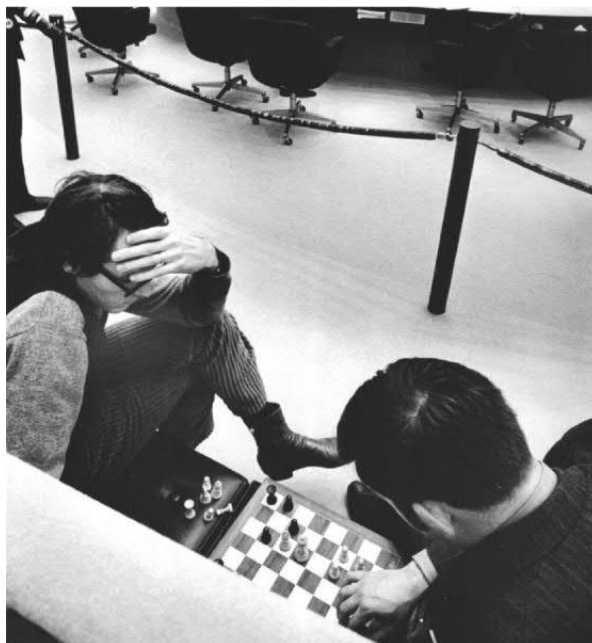


Figure 9. Karl Jaffary and John Sewell playing chess in Toronto Council Chambers to theatrically demonstrate how these meetings were a “sham”, 1970. Source: *How We Changed Toronto* (2015)

Recognizing that these Council meetings were ineffective in effecting change, Sewell, and the growing brigade of concerned citizens he led, brought the debate on the of the Rail Lands to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB). It was at the OMB hearings that Sewell highlighted to the committee additional issues “[...] such as the lack of provisions for low-cost housing, the needy citizens of Toronto, recreation facilities, [and other concerns of the like]” associated with the project (Rohmer, 2004, pg. 336). Though their appeal failed to result in the complete abolishment of the Metro Centre proposal, significant changes to the plan were made in light of their arguments. Initially aimed to create a “city-with-a-city”, the Metro Centre was significantly reduced

following the hearings to just a few core pieces, namely the: “CN Tower, Roy Thomson Hall, and the Metro Toronto Convention Centre” (Bateman, 2014, January).

In the decade following this controversial proposal, the City of Toronto began conceptualizing alternative configurations for the Rail Lands. Perhaps in an attempt to soften the former concerns held by Sewell and members of the public, a recommendations report was published by Planning Staff that sharply contrasted the Metro Centre design narrative – suggesting possible alternatives for development that were seemingly more inclusive to a diverse number of urban dwellers. Entitled, *The Railway Lands Proposed Goals and Objectives* (1978), this document was intended to be used by Council to lead or serve as “the bias for public discussion” on redevelopment (City of Toronto, 1978, pg. 3). Outlining a series of broad visions for the Rail Lands, Planning Staff took on the responsibility of outlining, for the city, acceptable urban futures in this document. All of which, embodied design characteristics that supported the making of the Rail Lands into a marketable and vibrant urban form. Of the several design narratives that were recommended by Toronto Planning Staff, the development of indoor and outdoor recreational facilities (such as a major park, swimming pool, or national aquarium) on the Rail Lands was continuously restated as the ideal development for the urban context. The development of a major parkland, in particular, was cited as the most strategic of these prospects as it would serve to provide increased leisure opportunities for nearby professionals and would act as an attractive feature for tourism:

“[...] it would provide much-needed open space adjacent to the largest concentration of office workers in the region, [and would also] serve to be a valuable resource for Toronto residents for generations to come, [and] a major tourist attraction” (City of Toronto, 1978, pg. 16).

While this document outlined a clear path forward with regards to how the City could approach the redevelopment of the rails, there was little movement that took place in the preceding decades. Notwithstanding the build-out of the legacy structures of the Metro Centre and CityPlace, no short-

term resolve on how to develop inside the rail corridor was made. That was, until the announcement to develop Rail Deck Park.

4.2 The Introduction of Rail Deck Park

Breaking the near forty-year silence on the matter, Mayor Tory reignited the longstanding debate on what should be done in the Rail Lands when he announced, in August of 2016, that the City was to build a twenty-one acre park – see **Figure 10**.



Figure 10. Visual Rendering of Rail Deck Park. Rendering: [City of Toronto](#)

Proposed in a matter-of-fact way, this project came as a “surprise” to most, as noted in the Introduction, but was propositioned by Tory as an inevitability (CBC, 2017). It was a project that was going to happen, according to the Toronto Mayor:

“I believe this is a bold idea, and I’m going to tell you with every ounce of determination I have, it will be built” Mayor Tory stated at the announcement. “It is the last opportunity we have to secure a major park for the entire city of Toronto located in downtown Toronto” (Breakfast Television, August 4).

Despite coming as this “surprise”, different from the proposals of the past, Tory’s inevitable Rail Deck Park became quickly embraced by the community, apropos of that fact that the Mayor sold the Park as a development that will create a more “liveable city for everyone”. Additionally, he positioned the project as an inherently good and moral city-building opportunity. As noted on multiple occasions throughout the planning process, “[...] creating a new downtown park is the

best thing we can do for future generations” (Breakfast Television, August 4), continuing this thought at the *ULI Toronto’s Electric Cities Spring 2017 Symposium*, Tory added that “[...] Rail Deck Park is not just the good thing to do; it is the right thing to do” (ULI Toronto and City of Toronto, April 24).

Marketized to young “families, residents, workers, students, and visitors”, the City has argued that, once built, the Park will provide a host of benefits to a diverse range of urban actors (City of Toronto and Urban Strategies Inc., 2017 1.0 Introduction). As noted in the *Rail Corridor Planning Study* (2017), it has been argued that the Park will “contribute to a high quality-of-life, [and will help improve] physical and mental health, and [the overall] wellbeing” of those experiencing Toronto. For families, in particular, the City has promised that Rail Deck Park will provide a place of play for young children; for students, it will serve as a “gathering place” (City of Toronto and Urban Strategies Inc., 2017, pg. 67); for residents living within this area of the city, the Park will serve as a “much needed public space” (City of Toronto and Urban Strategies Inc., 2017, pg. 53); and for tourists, the City has promised that it will serve as a “major attraction” that will allow Toronto to compete with other mega-public infrastructures such as the Chicago Millennium Park (City of Toronto and Urban Strategies Inc., 2017, pg. 143).

Given the multitude of positive spin-offs that have been promised with the development of Rail Deck, the Park has been supported by a range of urban actors – including the public, architects, planners, as well as notable and trusted local community groups and institutions such as Parks People, the Urban Land Institute (ULI) Toronto, and the Ryerson City Building Institute. All of whom have vocalized their support for the project during key moments throughout the planning process.

4.3 Competing Urban Visions

While the project, to date, has received tremendous support, even from such notable organizations, there have been several competing urban visions that have been presented for this space. Yet, Tory's strong commitment to develop the mega-park continues to hold its weight four years later. Overturning several development schemes that have been presented to Council, proposals that have been brought to the City since the 2016 announcement have been ruled as "outlandish" – by both the City and by project supporters. Take, for example, the case of the ORCA project which was deemed as not only an "outlandish scheme" but one that was "dead upon arrival", according to Ward Council Joe Cressy, for failing to uphold *forthcoming* "formal city policies [that were to designate] the air above the rail corridor as park-land" (2017, September).

Not dissimilar to the design of the proposed Rail Deck Park, the ORCA project, conceptualized by the consortium known as P.I.T.S. Developments Inc., proposed to deck over the Rail Lands and build a top seven residential towers and a commercial office building (City of Toronto and Urban Strategies Inc., 2017).²⁰ Running alongside what would be a mixed-use community, the Consortium, acknowledging the city's need for green space, proposed to build a publicly accessible park along the south side of its towers that would be approximately half of the land area (12.8 acres) in size to that of Rail Deck Park (City of Toronto and Urban Strategies Inc., 2017). This green space would have been significantly smaller in scale in comparison to the City's park. Yet, as Craft chief executive officer Peter Griffis explained, it would have cost a fraction to be built:

"We've taken care of a bunch of the infrastructure and made it economically viable for the city for the rest of the park. It's not going to be all put on their backs or the tax-payers back or my grandchildren's grandchildren's backs," he said.

²⁰ In total, ORCA would have added 208,300 square meters of residential space (2750 units), 60,700 square meters of retail, and 79,800 square meters of office space to the core (City of Toronto and Urban Strategies Inc., 2017).



Figure 11. Aerial View of ORCA Project. Source: P.I.T.S. Developments Inc.

Though the project did present a more affordable solution for the city and was, in fact, very conceptually similar to former proposals by the City, ORCA ultimately fell to the wayside. Notably, in light of the formal city policies referenced by Joe Cressy. With the release of the 2017 Official Plan Amendment (OPA), to be specific, Council re-designated this portion of the corridor as Park Land. Effectively limiting development opportunities through the new Official policies, Council was able to cleverly control precisely what could and could not be done within this section of the corridor. Thus, making their vision to create a central park an inevitability. This was a frustration for the Consortium who had purchased the air rights over this portion of the corridor with the intent of developing park space as well as commercial, retail, and residential units – which are now no longer a possibility.

Marking the second time the City's redevelopment scheme was brought to the OMB, the first by Sewell with the Metro Centre, the Consortium did attempt to appeal the OPA to the OMB. Now known as the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal (LPAT), after spending several years in LPAT, in 2019, the Tribunal dismissed the Consortium's request to overturn the OPA noting, "the

importance of creating new parkland in this parkland-deficient area” (White, 2019). With this decision now made, in the Summer of 2019, Council was officially able to proceed with the further development of Rail Deck Park.

4.4 Gaps in the Planning Process

Reflecting on this history of redeveloping the rails, it is evident there has been tremendous effort put forth by the City, at multiple times throughout history, to develop the corridor according to their specific urban vision. From the 1962 proposal to the Metro Centre, the 1978 redevelopment plans, and now with the City's fight against the ORCA project, the City has effectively controlled the debate on “what should be done within the Rail Lands”. Reinforcing Sewell's earlier conclusion that the redevelopment of the rails has been conceptualized by and for a small circle of individuals. Even within the context of the so-called “moral project” that is Rail Deck Park, there is evidence to suggest that this project has ultimately been conceptualized by and for this same circle of individuals as well.

Despite being analyzed much more uncritically, at multiple times throughout the planning process, the City has undoubtedly tactically used their unique political clout to develop this space according to their vision. Their fight against the ORCA project is but one example where they are seen using their power as a means of projecting onto the city a specific urban vision and controlling the reality of the development outcome. However, the City's effort to project its vision extends far beyond the more obvious political tactics they used – such as limiting development opportunities and intervening with the P.I.T.S. Consortium's air rights. Instead, via more discursive means, it can be argued that the City also influenced the development outcome by using subtle political tactics to manage and manipulate the making of consent and common sense in the planning process. The first tactic was through limiting public consultation opportunities.

While the consultation process was certainly not absent, it was by no means robust in nature. At best, it can be argued that Toronto met the minimum requirements of the systemic consultation process as laid out in Ontario planning legislation. Consisting of two public meetings – the first held on June 13, 2017 (which garnered 200 attendees) and the second on September 25, 2017 (with over 300 attendees present) – the City presented to the community “an overview of [the *Rail Deck Park Planning Study*, and other] preliminary findings” and discussed “draft policy directions [...] and directions for the planning framework” during these meetings (City of Toronto and Urban Strategies Inc., 2017, pg. 8). Information on the project during the consultation process was also provided online (on the City’s webpage) and community members were given the ability to complete an online survey on the proposed park in June of that year (City of Toronto and Urban Strategies Inc., 2017). Through either of these meetings, the City’s webpage, or the Jane’s Walk they hosted with their supporter Parks People, the public was undoubtedly given opportunities to *learn* more about the project. Nonetheless, they were not given opportunities to *meaningfully participate* in the planning process apropos of the fact that consultation served more as information sessions. Whereby, the public could *learn* about the City’s interpretations of planning for liveability and nature but *not influence* them.²¹ Thus, akin to the narrative of the past, just as Sewell and the former Toronto community *learned* about the Metro Centre, during meetings, the public was unable to do more than *listen* and *learn* about Rail Deck Park and liveability planning in Toronto.

Whereas in a truly democratic process, these meetings would have been posited as opportunities for the public to provide their input and give consent to the project, it can be argued

²¹ Having attended planning meetings for similar projects throughout the research process – see **Appendix A** for the list – this approach, whereby meetings are used as information sessions versus engagement sessions, appeared to be a common trend. For the majority of meetings which I attended, final project designs were presented through visual renderings and display boards. The public was given opportunities to review, comment, and ask questions about these display boards during meetings. However, as was the case with Rail Deck Park, there was far less opportunity given to the public to meaningfully provide input on development designs.

that events were instead taken as moments to create “common sense” about nature and liveability and to garner legitimacy for a project that was an “inevitability”, as Tory had stated *more than a year prior* to public consultations.

With no meaningful opportunity to *influence* the decision-making process, it can be concluded that the City’s urban vision was not up for negotiation. In fact, since the 1960s, its vision has never been open to much public negotiation or community input. By extension, without the ability to influence the development outcome, it can be added that throughout the planning process and since the 1960s the public has been unable to effectively articulate what liveability, liveable city-building, and urban nature making means to them. This holds true even within the context of the benevolent Park where there was little meaningful public engagement. Reflecting on what this means for the future of the city, what be built atop the rail corridor will not be a reflection, a *true reflection* that is, of the community. Instead, Rail Deck Park will likely be a representation of the City’s vision and their desire to mold Toronto according to a specific urban vision.²²

With these considerations in mind, in the following Chapter I seek to uncover what precisely this vision is in the context of Toronto’s increasingly neoliberalized landscape and discuss what Rail Deck Park represents in the context of furthering the City’s desired urban future.

²² Moreover, it is a reflection of liveability as understood by the intellectuals the City hired to educate the community throughout the planning process, that being Urban Strategies Inc., as well as a reflection of liveability as understood by the intellects at Parks People, ULI Toronto, and the Ryerson City Building Institute.

5. Critical Reflections

In order to critically understand the planning and politics of Rail Deck Park and its role in forwarding a certain urban future, it is necessary to first unpack the history of the corridor in the years predating its conceptualization. More specifically, it is necessary to reflect on this history in the context of neoliberal urbanism and the rise of the symbolic economy. As such, this Chapter begins with a reflection on the history of development by looking at how the redevelopment process was influenced by changes in urban governance and the emergence of the knowledge-based industry. I then move into a conversation on the planning and politics behind Rail Deck Park and close with some predictions relating to the urban outcomes I believe this Park may produce. As it will be seen, while in each epoch of planning (notably, the past and present) there are distinct urban imperatives leading the impetus to redevelop the Rail Lands, in each of these time periods, the planning process has always and continues to be most significantly influenced by entrepreneurial motives and an urban agenda to transform Toronto into a competitive and creative landscape.

5.1 Reflecting on the Past

Though more development took place on paper than on the ground in the time predating Rail Deck Park, the commitment to develop inside the Rail Lands can be read as a response to the restructuring of the urban landscape under neoliberalism. With the decay of the traditional industry-based economy to the rise of the “symbolic” mode of capital, like other cities facing restructuring under neoliberalism, the history of the Rail Lands redevelopment reveals a discernible shift in the City’s interest in building for industry to building and planning for the valorized drivers of the new economy (aka the creative professionals). Indicated by the plans introduced for redevelopment within the Rail Lands, in the years between 1960-2000 there was an increased uncritical adoption of Floridian-style creative city-building. As I alluded to in Chapter

4, built into each of the plans introduced by the City throughout this time period, are carefully calculated images of urban liveability that were inserted into the design narrative, such as amenities, leisure spaces, commercial buildings, cafes, parkland, and other features that are part and parcel of Florida's design.

Ultimately, it is through reflecting on the political-economic significance of these features that it becomes clear the desire to transform Toronto into a creative playground or, at the very least, to transform the railway into an economic corridor "committed to nurturing [the] creative field of urban actors" (Foster, 2010, pg. 39). Thus, not dissimilar to the planning trajectory as evidenced within other neoliberalizing landscapes, the redevelopment of the Rail Lands signifies the abandonment of the city's industrial history and the birth of a new elite class. Yet, what the history of the Rail Lands also articulates is the evolution of the City's urban governance regime under neoliberalism.

Again, not dissimilar to the narrative of other increasingly neoliberalizing cities, over the years of redevelopment, Toronto City planners and decision-makers shift from managerial to more direct and untraditional management styles to ensure the articulation of a Floridian-style landscape. Markedly so within *The Railway Lands Proposed Goals and Objectives* (1978) report – a report intended to "guide the opportunities for redevelopment"²³ – City planners take a previously unseen, direct, and entrepreneurial position in articulating this Floridian, creative urban outcome.

While untraditional for its time, this entrepreneurial-style and creative city-building narrative continued and remains to characterize the planning discourse in Toronto. As evidenced with the Waterfront revitalization strategy, for instance, since the redevelopment of the rails, City planners have continued to look for "public renewal and private redevelopment" opportunities in which they

²³ Emphasis Added.

can transform Toronto into a place that will attract “the flexible and mobile [...] entrepreneurs and workers [...]” (City of Toronto, 2000: 88). Given the permanence of this discourse, it is important to consider the potential role that this style of city-building has played in the context of Rail Deck Park. To assume that the Park, and its role in the city, does not to some extent play into the longstanding creative vision and the narrative of entrepreneurialism is to overlook the significance of this planning discourse and the history of the redevelopment process that predates it.

Departing from this understanding, for the remainder of this Chapter, I highlight Rail Deck’s role in furthering the City’s creative city vision. I highlight other entrepreneurial imperatives held by the City, and their intentions of using Rail Deck Park as a mechanism to create conditions that will allow success amidst interurban competition. As it will argue, pinnacle arguments made throughout the planning process by the City signify their true entrepreneurial motives. The primary signifier being the City’s discussions surrounding the importance of developing a mega or iconic park as a means of extending Toronto’s brand as a modern, liveable city. Second, are the justifications surrounding the need for a mega-park in playing a pivotal role in attracting footloose capital in the form of tourism, investment, and creative talent. It is these arguments, in particular, that unravel the promise made by urban decision-makers that Rail Deck Park will create a “more liveable [future] for everyone”. Yet, masked behind the smokescreen of this promise is the intention to make the city “liveable” but for the creative and elite class and for the global consumers willing to “buy into” the product that is the city of Toronto.

5.2 Understanding the Present

Amidst the many arguments made by the City throughout the planning processes, the *need* for developing Rail Deck Park into a *mega-park* is perhaps the most prominent subject that was featured within discussions. Framed as an uncompromisable aspect of the proposal, the necessity of developing a “signature park” foregrounded the City’s arguments quite literally from the moment

it was introduced in 2016. As Mayor Tory boasted in that very first announcement, ovetop of the Rail Lands he and the City are to build, “not just any park but a signature park, a big park, [...] a landmark park” (Breakfast Television, August 4). The justification for which has hinged on three arguments: the need for a large, contiguous park space to serve the growing number of families living within the city; the need for large park to to serve as a “signifier” on the global stage; and the need for a large park to generate positive economic spin-offs. While, at first glance, these justifications appear to represent a healthy balance between social and economic motives, as I will argue, when critically reflecting on their legitimacy, it becomes clear that the desire to build an iconic park hinges more so on capitalistic intentions over others.

Reflecting on the legitimacy of the first argument, for instance – being the most seemingly out of place – the City has framed the need for a large, contiguous park as something that will ostensibly serve the interest of the community. It will serve to “connect neighbourhoods locally”, as Mayor Tory noted during that 2016 announcement and, further, it will provide acceptable park space for the “growing number of [families, children, and people] living in this area of the city” (Breakfast Television, August 4). Particularly for families, who have been framed as primary beneficiaries of Rail Deck Park, it has also been argued that a large park will provide a place where “kids could learn to ride a bike” in the city, as noted by Chief Planner Jennifer Keesmat. Moreover, it will become a place that will enhance the liveableness of Toronto – making the city a healthy and desirable place to live and raise a family.²⁴ It is these justifications, in particular,

²⁴ While not inherently problematic, it is important to note that even this objective of creating “liveable” urban conditions which will entice families to stay in the central city is, in fact, part and parcel of the competitive city building narrative that has been evidenced throughout the history redevelopment. Whereas in the early redevelopment process, decision-makers failed to accommodate for children, in the competitive era of planning, the City recognizes the value of creating an urban landscape which will both attract and *retain* the drivers of the economy – this includes those working mothers and fathers to the growing number of children living in the core. To echo an earlier reference to Hagerman’s argument which reinforces this theorization, liveability appears to have become “the elusive characterization [...] and perquisite for enticing people to stay in the central city or return to it” (Hagerman, 2006, pg. 289).

which played a critical role in selling the mega-park to the public – as they fed into the framing of the Park as being this “moral project” that is to have city-wide and generational value.

Envisioned both as a place that will contribute to the overall quality-of-life and as a place that will serve families in the city, the public gained excitement and attachment to the idea of developing this iconic feature, as cited in Chapter 4, despite it coming with a considerable price tag to tax-payers. But, while these justifications played significantly into the selling and legitimizing of the mega-project, the authenticity of these claims are problematic and wavering in the face of contradicting scholarly evidence. Most conspicuous, are the claims that were made by City politicians surrounding the importance of developing a mega-structure to enhance the overall quality of urban life for families and others living in the city.

As scholars have argued, to enhance the quality of urban life, nature must be incorporated *throughout* a cityscape *in contrast* to the approach of culminating it in one area via the development of a large, central park, for example (Sandifer, 2014; Wolch *et al.*, 2014). This argument stems from the idea that: in order to experience the physical and psychological benefits associated with being in nature, urban dwellers must have frequent exposure to natural amenities throughout their day-to-day lives (Barnett, 2011; Bedimo-Rung *et al.*, 2005; Groenewgen *et al.*, 2006; Hartig, 2008; Barton and Pretty, 2010). In the context of city-building, this demands that nature be incorporated into the urban form in such a way where it is highly accessible regardless of where one is in the city (Cerbu, 2019). Without this type of strategic urban planning, the associated benefits to quality-of-life are less likely to be achieved.

As such, with respect to Rail Deck, while the Park may enhance liveability for the adjacent community, as this theory postulates, the development of a large, central park *will not* lend to the enhanced quality-of-life for all Torontonians and families – as it has been promised by the Mayor. This was a popular argument made against the Park by those who questioned the City’s

justification for a mega-development. Pointing to the importance of highly accessible nature, several researchers in the city also further questioned the outcomes of inequality that a mega-park would produce given that the primary beneficiaries of an “improved quality-of-life ” would be the elites living in the adjacent area who will have frequent exposure to the Park once built (Garrett, 2017; Cerbu, 2019).

Apropos of the capriciousness of this justification, I would argue that the impetus to develop a “signature park” likely hinges more so on the City’s aforementioned economic motives than it does on these social ones. Particularly so when analyzed in the context of neoliberal urbanism, over any other imperative, the reasonings for developing a “signature park” reflect the Municipality’s longstanding approach to city-building that has been consumed with producing landscapes that contribute value to the local economy. Moreover, their motives reflect the entrepreneurial approach to liveability planning that has been undertaken by the City in the past – whereby policymakers and planners have capitalized on “liveability” rhetoric to *sell* and *brand* Toronto at the global scale and have used nature, such as the Toronto Waterfront, as a *canvas* in which to exemplify this “liveable” brand. In line with this trajectory, I would argue that the motivations behind developing Rail Deck Park into a *mega-park* are equally entrepreneurial and likely hinge on how this iconic feature will make Toronto more competitive, attractive, and brandable amidst other cities.

As argued in Chapter 2, amidst interurban competition, entrepreneurial policymakers have increasingly sought to produce these iconic features, like Rail Deck Park, for the purpose of better positioning their cities as being in some way *distinct* or *different* from others. Creating what Lawton (2010) refers to as features of “iconographic distinction” (which broadly refers to spectacular buildings, sculptures, museums, and architectural landmarks), or what I more specifically refer to as “liveable natures” in this Paper, the production of these types of projects signifies the defining imperative held by entrepreneurial policymakers to establish a “signature image” or urban brand

for a city. Which, as seen in the earlier example of Singapore, is ultimately used to act as a lure to footloose capital – that being investment and tourism – as well as to attract creative talent to the city (Chao, 2014, pg. 30). Given the parallels in the entrepreneurial manner of city-building shared between Toronto and cities like Singapore, and when considering the history of planning in Toronto, I would argue that the desire to develop Rail Deck Park likely hinges on a similar motive. That is, to create a feature in the city that can act as a *branding tool* and *lure* to capital. Substantiating this claim are the many arguments made by policymakers which emphasized the benefits that will follow suit from building an iconic structure, such as Rail Deck Park, to *establish* and *promote* Toronto's *distinct* identity on the global stage.

First argued by Mayor Tory during the 2016 announcement, Rail Deck Park being “not just any park [...] but a landmark park” was routinely framed as a project that will play a *significant* role in the maturation and the evolution identity of the city. Which, according to the Official Plan, is a “21st Century liveable city” that is both “attractive and safe” and full of “beautiful architecture [...], natural amenities, [...] and cultural facilities” (1-2). Narrated as well in the *Rail Corridor Planning Study* (2017), this document also articulates that the creation of a large-scale mega-park represents a significant place-making initiative. As stated, Rail Deck Park:

“[...] represents a significant city-building initiative and distinct opportunity to contribute to the vision for Toronto as a 21st Century city” (City of Toronto and Urban Strategies Inc., 2017, pg. 92).

Moreover, it “[...] provides an opportunity to contribute to the quality-of-life in Downtown for workers and residents, further supporting the Official Plan’s vision for Toronto as safe and attractive city in the 21st Century” (City of Toronto and Urban Strategies Inc., 2017, pg. 95).

Indeed, in many instances throughout the planning process, City policymakers and planners justified the development of mega-park based on this idea that it will play into the making of

Toronto becoming this idealized safe, attractive, “21st Century city”.²⁵ Which, to be clear, is a city that narrates Floridian design characteristics and a creative taste. Furthermore, being a feature of “iconographic distinction”, it has also been posited as a development that will promote this modern, Floridian identity on the global stage. As Tory noted, for Toronto, the Park will both enhance the “liveable city” reputation at the local level while “sending a signal internationally about the *kind* of city we want to build” (Breakfast Television, August 4). Further articulating his claim, the City’s webpage notes how this development will become a *globally* identifiable feature:

“Rail Deck Park also has the potential to strengthen Toronto’s *global image* and *competitive* position by creating an *iconic* new public space that *exemplifies liveability, cultural vibrancy, social inclusiveness, environmental resiliency, and civic pride*” (City of Toronto, 2017, November 17).²⁶

What is significant about this focus paid to the global perspective and Rail Deck’s role in enhancing the city’s *global* reputation, is what it reveals about certain aspects of the redevelopment process. For example, when reflecting on the ORCA proposal, this development was likely considered “outlandish” and “dead upon arrival” by Council for failing to demonstrate the same landmark qualities that will be characteristic of Rail Deck Park. Thus, while the development did “[garner] positive feedback” from the community (Yousif, 2019) and while it did present an opportunity to develop park space at a fraction of the cost, its failure to materialize likely hinged on the fact that it will not serve to “strengthen Toronto’s *global image* and *competitive position*” amidst other cities like this mega-park. Beyond what it reveals about the ORCA project,

²⁵ These arguments were also narrated in a recent statement by Ward Councilor Joe Cressy who further spoke on the importance of Rail Deck as an “investment” for the city: “Great cities invest in their future. Rail Deck Park is bold, ambitious, and necessary if we aspire to build a 21st Century city. With [this development], we can take one big step closer to getting it built” (2020, January 16).

²⁶ Emphasis added.

this focus paid to the global perspective also reveals a lot about *why* and for *whom* Rail Deck Park is being built.

With regards to the *why*, the prominent imperatives behind developing Rail Deck are seemingly economic and centered around how it will serve as an important “investment” in the future economic growth and prosperity of Toronto. Being a symbolic marker of the city’s “21st Century liveable” identity, policymakers have argued that this development or branding mechanism will act as a lure to capital, much like other “liveable natures”, as it is anticipated to attract investment, tourism, and talent to the city. This lends to the *who* Rail Deck Park is being built for – which, I would argue, are investors, tourists, and creative professionals, and ultimately anyone able to contribute to or buy into the local economy. Supporting this argument, are the very direct statements made by the City which narrate this precise importance of developing Rail Deck Park.

Beginning with the argument that the Park is being built for creative professionals, within a number of official planning reports, the City routinely indicates how this park is an “investment” apropos of the fact that it lends to competitive and creative city-building. As cited, for instance, in an OPA Report:

“The *investment* in Rail Deck Park can put Toronto at an economic advantage by strengthening the City's ability to compete with major cities in North America and globally for *talent* and *companies*. Parks and the recreational, cultural, and civic opportunities they present, are being recognized as key to *developing* and *attracting talent* and must be part of the equation in supporting the city's long-term economic prosperity” (City of Toronto, 2017, October 30).²⁷

Also narrating this importance of attracting creatives through Rail Deck Park, referred to as *talent* by the City, the *Rail Corridor Planning Study* (2017) indicates that:

“A park in this location will enhance the environment for investment in Downtown and Ontario more broadly and will strengthen the Greater Golden Horseshoe’s (GGH’s) ability

²⁷ Emphasis added.

to compete with other global cities for talent” (City of Toronto and Urban Strategies Inc., pg. 87).

Beyond these instances, throughout the planning process, there was a discernible excitement around this imperative of attracting creatives. In this way, for the City’s entrepreneurial policymakers, Rail Deck Park ultimately stands to serve the same purpose as its previous urban nature projects, such as the Waterfront revitalization strategy. Which, as discussed in Chapter 3, was intended to play into the symbolic construction of place and city marketing and act as lubricant for attracting the hyper-mobile creative core. In the context of this history, the Park can be understood as an important steppingstone in the further maturation of this vision to build Toronto into a place that attracts and valorizes the drivers of the new economy. Yet, as it will be seen, it can also be understood as an important steppingstone in the further maturation of the establishment of a *creative order* or “structured coherence” in the city.

Also noted in Chapter 3, since the time of amalgamation, the City has sought to use urban nature and public renewal projects as opportunities to establish a particular order in Toronto by homogenizing a collective creative identity among dwellers and professionals. Rail Deck Park represents yet another one of these opportunities. As is evidenced through the above quote, “parks [...] are being recognized as key to developing and attracting talent [...],” there is a discernible sense that Rail Deck Park will promote the embodiment of the creative lifestyle ideology and urban identity (City of Toronto, 2017, October 30). Especially noted through the word “developing” in the quote, the Park is framed as a *social regulating tool* that will not only *attract* but *produce* creative citizens in the city. In this sense, much like other “liveable nature” projects, Rail Deck Park can be understood as a mechanism that is being used to construct and reinforce people’s sense of themselves and their identity in the context of the symbolic economy. In other words, or rather in Michel Foucault (2000) words, the Park can ultimately be understood as a development that will serve as a form of the City’s capillary power in articulating and

manipulating "the conduct of conduct" or the "conduct of individuals" within the city. Liveability then, in this context, is being used to reproduce power relations in Toronto by way of regulating public consciousness.

This finding on Rail Deck Park supports the work of Brand (2007) and Lawton (2010), who caution how, under neoliberalism, nature and liveability projects are routinely used by policymakers "to construct citizens' sense of themselves and their obligations" (Brand, 2007, pg. 628). Take the earlier example of Singapore, for instance, where nature is routinely mechanized to produce what Teo calls "specialized creative citizens" who "are [obligated] to enact and [embody] roles of commitment and sacrifice to ensure the continued [prosperity of the city in the] global economy" (2014, pg. 917). Also evidenced in the city of Dublin, nature is similarly used by planners and policymakers here as a canvas to inscribe state-led notions of liveability onto the landscape characterized by "material consumption, modernity, prestige, and conviviality", in which its citizens are expected to embody (Teo, 2014, pg. 917).²⁸ In the context of Toronto, the Park can similarly be understood as a development that is being constructed to promote this obligation to identify with the creative identity. Secondly, it can be understood as a development that will promote the obligation to align one's experiences and understandings of liveability and urban life with the City's to ensure the success of the economy.

Yet, in addition to serving as this tool for *attracting* and *creating* talent within the city, I postulate that the Park is also being built to attract the footloose capital generated from tourism and investment. This argument is supported by the number of statements made by the City which point to this importance of developing an iconic feature. Frequently making reference to similar

²⁸ In both of these examples, urban nature projects can be understood as social regulating tools used to influence the "day-to-day" life of residents and used to encourage participation or "inward investment" in the local economy (Lawton, 2010, pg. 143). Often, as argued by both Lawton (2010, pg. 139) and Teo (2014), in reference to producing public space and public amenities like parks, this promotion of the local economy is often held above "use value".

large-scale projects, such as the Central Park in New York or the Chicago Millennium Park, throughout the planning process policymakers routinely point how these “signature amenity spaces contribute to the economic development and competitiveness of cities [... by attracting] workers and visitors” to central areas of the downtown (City of Toronto and Urban Strategies Inc., 2017, pg. 76). Indeed, in many instances, the City highlights the significant economic spin-offs that are generated from these major amenity spaces/tourist attractions to sell Rail Deck Park as an important development for the community.

Yet, what is significant about their arguments on these economic benefits of Rail Deck Park is the focus paid to local businesses. Exceptionally so in the *Rail Corridor Planning Study* (2017), the City unevenly spotlights how it will be *local businesses*, specifically, which will benefit from the footloose capital generated from increased tourism and investment. As noted:

“Signature parks, like Chicago’s Millennium Park are major tourist attractions, and generate spin-off activity for nearby cultural and tourist destinations. In Toronto, the Site is adjacent to major entertainment and tourist attractions that generate millions of visitors annually. The proposed park will improve connections to surrounding communities, employment districts, and adjacent attractions and institutions.

A signature park in this location has the capability of providing beneficial symbiotic effects, elevating economic activity in the area and through the city” (City of Toronto and Urban Strategies Inc., 2017, pg. 143).

Similar arguments to these are found throughout the planning study which reinforce this idea that Rail Deck Park will significantly benefit “nearby cultural and tourist destinations” – which is incredibly problematic for two reasons. Firstly, it is problematic when considering that these “destinations” are Toronto’s existing economic and business elites – such as the Air Canada Centre, Metro Toronto Convention Centre, Rogers Stadium, the CN Tower, and Ripley’s Aquarium. Secondly, when considering that it will be these elites, over any other urban actor, who will benefit from the building of the Park *in spite of the fact* that the City sold it to the entire community with the notion that Rail Deck will benefit “everyone”.

While Rail Deck Park boasts many of these contradictory aspects, the public's perception of the Park has continued to remain largely enthusiastic and almost blind to these negatives. This is likely apropos of the fact that negative elements of the project, such as these, were effectively masked by the claims made by prominent and trusted local media sources and planning institutions. Who, throughout the planning process, supported the arguments made by the City regarding the importance of the mega-project for generating *city-wide* positive social and economic spin-offs.

Helping to garner additional community support, the Urban Land Institute (ULI) Toronto and the Ryerson City Building Institute, for instance, were pedagogically crucial to the function of the making of common sense and consent about the Park and its significance in generating city-wide benefits from tourism and investment. As noted throughout the development process, through the publishing of reports and articles, these institutions played a significant role in both building community excitement about the project and disseminating and producing "expert knowledge" on its city-wide significance. The Urban Land Institute, for example, reinforces the City's illusion that the Park will, economically speaking, "benefit everyone" when they write that:

"While the city grows, Toronto should also invest in the city-building agenda that provides for more vibrant, [liveable] and accessible public space that will benefit the economic and social wellbeing of all Torontonians." (Wong, 2017).

Also reinforcing the Municipality's claims surrounding the city-wide benefits of tourism, investment, and liveability, the Toronto Star emphasizes that:

"As the Star has argued before, green space isn't a luxury in a city of nearly 3 million people. It's a necessity. Without it Toronto isn't viable, never mind liveable.

And Rail Deck Park could be transformational. It promises to create a destination space for residents and tourists alike, similar to Chicago's Millennium Park and New York's High Line" (Star Editorial Board, 2020, January 20).

While unintentional, the support demonstrated by these local institutions and media sources helped to legitimize the City's promise that the Park will "benefit everyone". Moreover, their support helped to mask the more problematic aspects of the proposal from the public – such as the distributional issues related to the benefits of its footloose capital and the prioritization of elite businesses in the city.

Aside from the role that these institutions played in smokescreening such problems, it is important to point out that the benevolence associated with Rail Deck Park is likely also attributed to the fact that parks, in general, are just seemingly uncontroversial urban developments. As noted in the Introduction, they are often perceived as "moral" places by the public. Especially "when considered vis-à-vis other urban development strategies" that aim to improve liveability, "[...] like those taken to combat homelessness, drug use, or other pressing social problems," parks are relatively uncontentious from the public's view (Chao, 2014, pg. 44). This is what makes these developments, like Rail Deck Park, so appealing to policymakers. They are typically well received developments by communities and thus serve as strategic opportunities to enhance the quality of urban life while also *conveniently* gaining consent for more competitive and creative city-building. Yet I would also add that these developments are appealing apropos of the fact that they serve as additional opportunities for policymakers to leave their "political legacies" on the urban landscape (Chao, 2014).

This lends to an explanation as to why these types of nature projects have been taken up with a dramatic alacrity in cities all across the globe – notably so, in Asian, American, and European cities – and are being widely accepted by urban decision-makers and urban communities without much critical thought. For Toronto, for instance, it also lends to an explanation as to why this costly, iconic development has been pursued with the same political alacrity as seen in other cities. As for policymakers here, Rail Deck Park represents a strategic opportunity to establish *not only* consent over competitive and creative city-building and the establishment of a creative

order *but additionally*, it represents an opportunity for policymakers to leave a lasting imprint of their legacy on the landscape (Kipfer and Keil, 2002; Chao, 2014). In this sense, in the same way that former Mayor Mel Lastman will be remembered for his work in catalyzing the redevelopment of the Waterfront, Tory's political legacy will be remembered through the development of this iconic feature. But, while these features do offer political benefits and while they are undoubtedly appealing from the public's perspective, as I have sought to demonstrate throughout this Chapter, there is reason to question the benevolence associated with these "liveable nature" projects.

Exceptionally so in the context of Rail Deck Park, there is also reason to question both the authenticity of this project as well as reason to question the intentions behind *why* this park is being built and *who* it is intended to benefit. More broadly, however, as I have argued, I believe there is also reason to critically reflect on the wider discourse of liveability planning in the city, nature's role within this discourse, and the City's vision of transforming Toronto into an idealistic and globally identifiable "21st Century liveable city".

5.3 Looking Ahead

With this critical perspective in mind, looking ahead at what is to come, it is my conclusion that Rail Deck Park will be a development that will most greatly serve the elites living in the nearby area, those nearby businesses, the creative class, the hyper-mobile creative core, and investors. As evidenced through the claims made by the City, it is these individuals, more so than others, who will experience the benefits associated with the Park – be it the physical or psychological benefits or the financial benefits from its footloose capital. It is this which unravels the promise made by the City that Rail Deck Park will make Toronto a more liveable place for everyone; when, in reality, it will be a park that most greatly benefits those that can contribute to the local economy.

Liveability then, in the context of the Park, can thus be understood as a *privilege*. Whereby, to experience the benefits associated with Rail Deck and its associated improvements to quality-of-

life, one must be part of this elite class. Moreover, liveability, in this context, can be understood as an *expectation*. Whereby, the city's urban dwellers and workers are expected to demonstrate their value, commitment, and sacrifice to the urban economy as well as their commitment to Toronto's competitive city aspirations and urban brand in order to be entitled to the better quality-of-life the Park will offer.

Following this logic, for those that do not deliver on these *expectations* or for those who do not identify as being a person of *privilege* in this context, Rail Deck Park, by extension, will not serve to their benefit. Apropos of this fact, the Park will undoubtedly create issues of distribution, given that it will be privileged groups who will experience the improvements to quality-of-life more so than those non-privileged. With such an imbalance occurring in the city, the Park will likely represent a fault line or point of contention between communities. Evidence of which can already be felt through comments like the following:

“Sounds great, but what about Scarborough? Don't tell me there's not enough money to provide a rail park in Scarborough. People on the right are tired of seeing large parks being planned only for the downtown elites.”²⁹

Or, as one Twitter user noted, “they are turning this city into Chicago. A ring of violence around a core of champagne socialist elites that fight for rail deck parks for their dogs.”³⁰

Yet, looking ahead, I speculate that the park will do more than exacerbate tensions and issues related to the distribution of benefits. Based on the City's logic of liveability, I would further speculate that this park will go so far as creating circumstances of *dramatic* socioeconomic polarization. In other words, beyond failing to benefit these non-elites, Rail Deck Park will lead to their disenfranchisement and the deterioration of their experiences of urban life and liveability in

²⁹Forum comment on [Urban Toronto](#).

³⁰[Twitter post](#).

the city. This speculation stems from the outcomes witnessed in other urban forms that have developed similar “liveable nature” projects to Rail Deck Park.

Using Portland, Oregon’s waterfront transformations as an example, researchers have argued that liveability planning and the regreening and beautification of the waterfront in this context lead to circumstances of social polarization and gentrification. On paper, the waterfront project was similarly posited as one that was going to enhance liveability for all; yet, in practice, it was used as an opportunity to wield a new elite landscape of consumption in the city that prioritized the creative class. In consequence to this design, the project enhanced liveability for some but naturally led to the disenfranchisement and displacement of others – in particular, the working class as well as mid- and lower-income communities. As scholar Chris Hagerman observed in his study (2006), via the relocation of social services and through the creation of an “unaffordable housing market and retail infrastructure”, the project led to conditions of exclusion for those aforementioned populations. Yet, conversely, for the “wealthy in-migrants” – who were the “focus of [the city’s] liveability discourse” – the regreening of the waterfront served as a benefit (2006, pg. 293). This reality lead researchers, like Hagerman, to posit nature and liveability in the context of this project – and similar “liveable nature” projects, for that matter – as “mere window dressings” for creating conditions such as “gentrification”, “deindustrialization”, and “displacement” (2006, pg. 287).

Beyond Portland, the New York High-Line is another clear example where similar conditions of gentrification prove to be part and parcel of these types of nature projects. As Wolch and Bryne *et al.* (2014) note in their review of the High Line, this green development unintentionally “set off rounds of gentrification” (pg. 239). Initially intended to re-energize what was once the viaduct used to transport industrial goods, the natural revitalization of the railway was set to make the space more usable and the surrounding area more *liveable* in the modern economic era. Recognizing the need to accommodate for the new economic system and the elite drives of the economy, the

“city enabled the construction of this High Line with uncharacteristic alacrity”. Developing a space which directly, as Foster (2010) argues, “[nurtured] the creative [...] actors” (pg. 328). The High Line – packed with interesting architecture, paths, tree-lined boulevards, and a floating garden – much like the Portland project, created circumstances of gentrification for the working class who could no longer afford to *live* in the area following the beautification of the viaduct – see **Figure 12**. This was apropos of fact that prices of surrounding housing and commercial/retail infrastructures soared following this revitalization. According to Cataldi *et al.* (2011) in the short time period of October 2008 to June 2009, “real estate prices [rose from] a median cost of \$970,000 to \$1,300,000” along the railway.



Figure 12. New York High Line. Source: BDC Network

In both cases, although policymakers and planners promised that these developments would benefit the entire community; they ultimately created *new ones*. They displaced the working class and transformed the neighbouring landscapes into vast gated communities made particularly for the rich and for the valorized drivers of the economy (Harvey, 2008). Such outcomes naturally raise important questions about Rail Deck Park and what the future will look like in this city. Will the Park produce the same conditions of gentrification and social change evidenced in these

examples? And, will the City's "liveable nature" project also serve to produce a new urban community in the city?

While it is difficult to concretely determine the likeliness of these outcomes, there are signs which indicate that Rail Deck Park will follow in a similar trajectory to that of Portland and New York. More specifically, there are signs to suggest that, apropos of this development, a new *extreme elite* community will emerge in the surrounding area. As seen with the example of the New York High Line, scholars have anticipated that the beautification of the railway in Toronto will dramatically increase surrounding local land values and real estate prices. To quote the Ryerson City Building Institute in their paper, *The Opportunity of Rail Deck Park*:

"Major park investments in other cities have shown that such projects can result in *significant spin-off benefits*, including *increased local land values and property taxes*, additional commercial activity in the direct vicinity of the investment, and a boost to tourism. These benefits could help the City recapture value from the investment in Rail Deck Park over time.

Millennium Park, a 24.5-acre park in Downtown Chicago is a useful comparison through which to understand the potential of these spin-off benefits [...]. [Completed] in 2004, [...] the Park catalyzed additional development and economic benefits in the area, *including an estimated \$1.4 billion increase in the value of adjacent properties*. The Park also helped draw new customers to local businesses and attracted tourists to the city" (Haines and Claire, 2017, pg. 8).³¹

In this sense, as seen with the development of Chicago's Millennium Park, the aestheticization of the landscape will more than likely lend to an increase in what are *already* extremely unaffordable housing and property prices. While the Institute does frame this as a *good thing* – which it may be for the affluent and business elites who will benefit from an increase in their property values – a further inflation of the market in this area may mean that the mid- and lower- income communities as well the working class (Zukin *et al*, 2009) will face subsequent displacement.

³¹ Emphasis added.

Yet, beyond such scholarly speculation, this argument that the Park will result in displacement and the production of a new elite community in Toronto is further solidified by the luxury condominiums and developments that have been recently planned adjacent to the corridor. In particular, is The Well development, a new mixed-use community to be situated in direct view of the Park on Front Street – see **Figure 13** and **Figure 14**.

The brainchild of RioCan Real Estate Investment Trust, The Well has been marketed as not just any mixed-use community but as a luxurious space to “live, work, and play” in the city (RioCan, 2019). Capitalizing on its proximity to the Park, the Investment Trust has reinforced the luxury quality of the community based on an image of “liveability” and have used the Park to narrate this image. As referenced on the RioCan website:

“The Well is located at the epicentre of Toronto’s west downtown core and flanked by ample green space including Clarence Square, Victoria Memorial Park, and the proposed twenty-one acre *Rail Deck Park*. Proximity to these outdoor spaces and the vibrant energy of King Street West means that *future occupants of this mixed-use development will want for nothing*” (RioCan, 2019, para. 2).³²

At The Well, *the idea of liveability is real*, with easy access to everything that Toronto demands, expects, and deserves: transit, culture, wellness, sustainability, diverse food options, inspiring workplaces, and curated entertainment” (RioCan, 2019, para. 4).³³

Indeed, on many occasions, RioCan reminds potential buyers of the proximity to the Park to reinforce the appeal of owning one of its 1,800 residential units based on this idea of it being in a “vibrant” and “liveable” setting (2019). Yet, while this development will unarguably be vibrant and luxurious and largely apropos of its location, it will by no means be a “liveable” community (RioCan, 2019). That is, however, unless you can afford to live in one of its one- or two-bedroom units, ranging from \$1.23 – \$1.8 million CAD, or one of its three-bedroom units, priced at \$1.3 –

³² Emphasis added.

³³ Emphasis added.

\$2.45 million CAD. But for the average Torontonian, who earns a median household income of \$72,830 CAD, The Well is not a *feasible* nor *liveable* place to live (Subramaniam, 2017).



Figure 13. Visual Rendering of The Well. Source: [The Well Toronto](#)

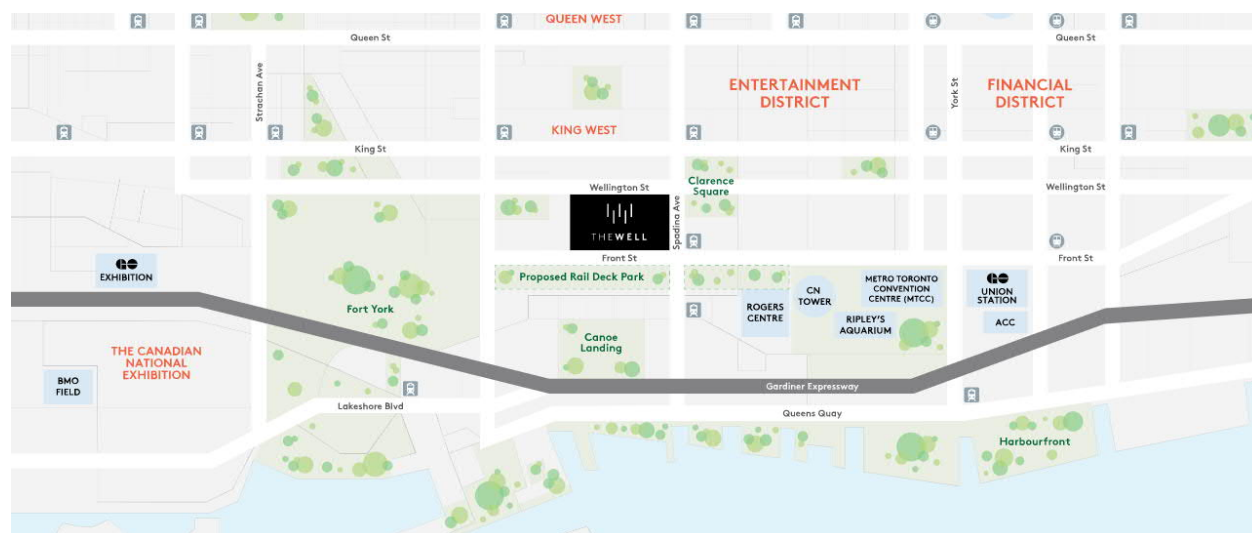


Figure 14. The Well and its proximity to Rail Deck Park. Source: [The Well Toronto](#)

In the face of these numbers, it becomes clear that what the Park will create, or is *already creating*, is an elite landscape. That is, similar to what was established in Portland and New York, a fortified gated community made up of developments, like The Well, that wholly benefit the one per cent but disenfranchise anyone unable to buy into a luxurious standard of urban life. In light of this, the spuriousness of the idea that The Well, and the surrounding Park community for that matter, are “liveable” is made sharply visible. And thus, on a smaller scale, The Well development

can articulate the broader issues with the concept of liveability as seen in the context of Rail Deck Park and liveability planning in the City.

The Well and its notion of “liveability” articulates, for instance, how: it is *not* something that is a *right* in this city but, instead, it is something that *only* the rich can buy in to. It articulates how: under neoliberalism, entrepreneurs (be it the RioCan developers or the City’s policymakers) now use liveability and nature as apparatuses to sell either a development, an idea, the city, or an urban vision at *all* costs. Moreover, it articulates how: the aspiration for liveability and park space is capitalized on in the modern city to normalize and reproduce power relations. And, *lastly*, on a *smaller* scale, it articulates how: the notion of liveability and nature now serve as novel terrains for the expansion of the hegemony of Toronto’s urban elites.

Such points reinforce the dramatic extent to which the robustness of these concepts has been regressed by the malice of entrepreneurial greed, neoliberalism, and the ethic of creative city-building and as such, they reinforce the argument I have attempted to make throughout this Paper. That argument being: the need to rethink our collective naivety about the benevolence of liveability planning and the making of “liveable urban natures”.

6. Conclusion/Epilogue

This reflection on Rail Deck Park – its past, present, and future – has attempted to showcase the potential dark side of the popularizing discourse of liveability and the art of making what I have called the politics of “liveable urban natures”.

In concluding this Paper, I hoped to have demonstrated how the pursuit for the “liveable city” has become subsumed within the landscape of creative and competitive city building in Toronto. As narrated through the City’s planning evolution, and as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, with the encroachment and entrenchment of neoliberal urbanism and the symbolic economy, the progressiveness of the discourse has fallen to the wayside. What has emerged is a discourse of planning that now serves as nothing more than a political apparatus to build and brand a city, in this case the city of Toronto, according to a particular urban vision.

Rail Deck Park, being a product of this discourse and ergo a product of neoliberalism, is by extension a political apparatus. In particular, as I argued in Chapter 5, it is an apparatus that is being used by entrepreneurial decision-makers to forge “consent over competitive and creative city-building and planning” (Kipfer and Keil, 2002, pg. 229) and is being used to serve as a branding mechanism to marketize Toronto as the ideal city for talent and investment.

Despite being sold on the promise that it will enhance liveability *for all*, being nothing more than a political mechanism or steppingstone in creative city-building, Rail Deck Park will likely create urban outcomes that only benefit the creatives. This development is thus far from idyllic. Particularly when backdropped against similar problematic developments that have been used as a vehicle in creative city-building, like the New York High Line or Portland’s Waterfront project, it becomes clear that the Park will likely lend to already documented outcomes of gentrification and socioeconomic polarization rather than outcomes of “liveability”. It is this inner contradiction which dismantles the smokescreen surrounding the promise of this project. Yet, more importantly, it is

what "breaks down [the coherence of Toronto's broader liveable vision and urban brand]" (Chao, 2014, pg. 54) and illuminates an opportunity to resist the hegemonic power of the City and rethink the approach to liveability planning and nature making before it is too late. That is, before the City indelibly transforms park space into privatized playgrounds for the creative class and the front yards of the urban elites.

This effectively lends to the role that I believe engaged academics/researchers now play in helping to champion this critical work of resisting and rethinking the neoliberal narrative of liveability.

6.1 Future Research

While it would seem tempting to suggest to engaged researchers and onlookers that we abandon rather than rethink conceptions of liveability in the city, I do not believe that this is the most effective approach we can take as champions of resistance. Rather, I believe that the inherent value of liveability *should not* be disdained as we *should continue* to aspire for this urban vision in a way where it is freed from the malice of neoliberalism. As it is the malice of neoliberalism and the City's ethic of creative city-building which, as I have argued, has dampened the robustness and spirit of this discourse in this city.

Especially in the context of increasingly neoliberalizing urban landscapes, like the city of Toronto, all good ideas such as liveability and urban nature making can become co-opted by power. "The question we must begin asking [ourselves] then," as Schafran (2014, pg. 232) writes, "is how [we can] become powerful enough to co-opt whatever concept [we can...]" . Reflecting on this optimistic thought but in the context of liveability research, even despite the rather bleak trajectory I have painted, I believe there is still an opportunity for society to "co-opt" or reclaim the inherent value of this concept. As Teo (2014, pg. 933) similarly emphasises:

"[...] "the right to the city is not merely a right of access to what already exists, but a right to change it after our heart's desire" (Harvey , 2003, pg. 939). In all [...] cities, there are those

who may not view urban living primarily as progress and prosperity (Crace, 1992) but rather as a common ground for communication, play, and relaxation (Carr, 1992) — to enjoy the “pure sociability” of city life (Peattie, 1998, pg. 248). [...].”

From this argument, liveability and “liveable nature” making do not need to be completely abandoned in the context of Toronto. Rather, engaged academics must collectively work with urban dwellers and decision-makers to invite meaning and robustness back into these taken-for-granted terms by redefining and “resurrecting [them] from [their] current political [deathbeds]” (Wetzstein, 2016, May 5). In other words, academics must work towards the goal of establishing counter-narratives for these concepts which do not simply reflect the selective and neoliberal worldviews of Toronto’s entrepreneurial decision-makers but also the worldviews and the desires, hopes, and dreams of the urban society.

As Teo (2014) concludes, not all urban dwellers share the same neoliberal dreams and aspirations as the decision-makers leading our entrepreneurial cities. In the context of Toronto, this is equally true, as, from the perspective of urban dwellers, conceptions of liveability are far more clearly rooted in the aspiration to achieve a *better quality* of urban life. While I was unable to discuss my findings on this subject matter in greater detail, apropos of the limited scope of this research, it is important for me to note here that during the planning meetings I attended, there was a sharp contrast in the City’s versus the public’s understanding of these concepts. As I observed, city dwellers more commonly viewed urban liveability and nature not as mechanisms to achieve “progress” but saw them as mechanisms for achieving moments of joy and relaxation in the city (Teo, 2014, pg. 933). In line with this thinking, at the public meetings I attended, the community demonstrated greater enthusiasm for green infrastructures and policies, like the Ravine Strategy, for instance, that aim to enhance liveability by restoring nature rather than

creating it through the development of “flashy parks” – like Rail Deck.³⁴ This narrates an important juxtaposition in the public’s versus the City’s operational understanding of liveability and “liveable nature’s” which is something that academics need to further explore and expose in critical research.

Yet, beyond this work of exploring and exposing alternative urban knowledges, what is needed from researchers is their involvement in reconciling the juxtaposing understandings of such concepts. As noted from the meetings I attended, it is clear that this work is needed to build new understandings and imaginaries of liveable urban futures that better reflect the desires of *both* the City and city dwellers. And lastly, to move towards a brighter urban future, what is most paramount is the work that should be done by academics to help mobilize “[...] and put to work these alternative visions and imaginaries in (urban) political arenas [...]” (Wetzstein, 2016, May 5). As Wertzstein (2016, May 5) boldly writes, “it is high [for academics] to challenge, head-on, totalizing and thus empty political aspirational rhetoric” in order to make the “liveable city” vision robust once again (Wetzstein, 2016, May 5).

While this work of reconciling and recomposing juxtaposing understandings of liveability will be messy and challenging, paradoxically this work presents a powerful opportunity to create

³⁴ This was another major critique of the project coming from those in the city who wished to see more robust green developments, such as the Ravine Strategy, be built with the 2 billion dollars promised for the Park. As columnist Matt Elliott of the Toronto Star notes in his article, *Rail Deck may be flashy, but if you like green, think Ravine*: “[Rail Deck Park is a costly and complex project]. The Ravine Strategy, in comparison, is simple. It offers Council a chance to improve already existing assets. And if you’ve ever taken a walk or bike ride through Toronto’s ravines, you would know the ravines are one hell of an asset.” Despite the clear public interest in these more ecologically-minded green infrastructures, Rail Deck Park showcases how mega-natures are pursued and will continue to be pursued following this trajectory of contemporary city-building by the Municipality. As argued earlier in this Paper, in the context of the City’s neoliberal planning regime, the domineering city-building imperative is to achieve a more competitive urban form. With this economic perspective leading the impetus of all urban development, green infrastructures/plans/policies such as the Ravines Strategy, appear almost superfluous despite their social and ecological significance. Thus, while the Strategy and projects of the like would bring about tremendous social and ecological benefits, from an economic perspective, they are far less valuable – especially when compared to “flashy” projects like Rail Deck.

something transformational in city-building. As it is only when we, as academics, society, and urban leaders, work through these juxtapositions to establish collaborative, counter-narratives that we begin to build cities that are truly and holistically liveable in *every sense of the word* and *for every person*. By extension, it is only through remaking these concepts that we can begin to build urban natures that equally bestow upon all members of the community an enhanced quality of urban life.

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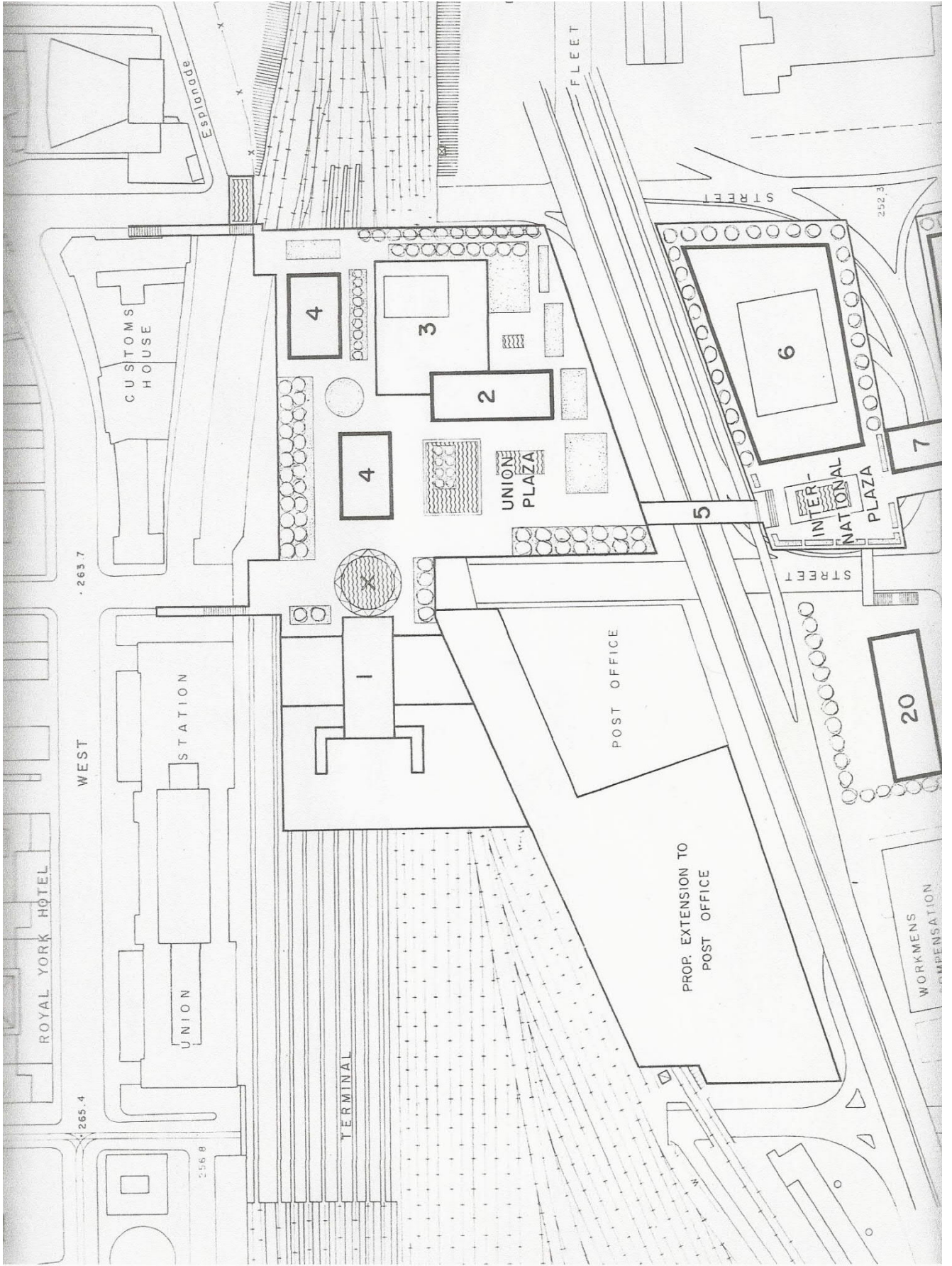
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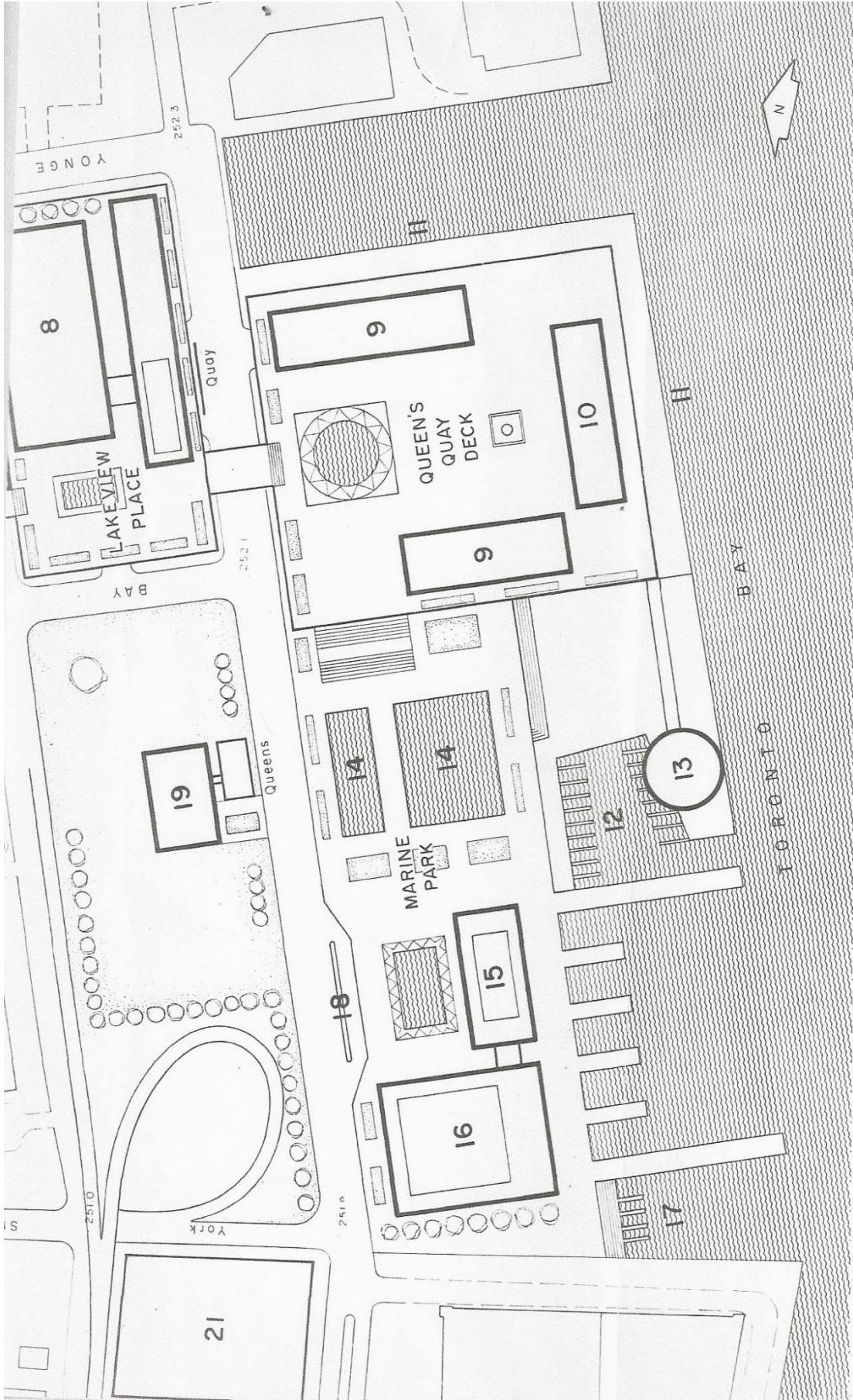
Appendix A
Public Meetings and Public Presentations
(which I attended to conduct participant observation)

Date and Location	Location	Consultation or Public Event	Details
September 28, 2017	Site of the Unilever Precinct Project (near Corktown Commons)	Unilever Precinct Open House	Open house focused on the Public Realm and Heritage aspects of the project (conducted by way of a walking tour).
October 21, 2017	Isabel Bader Theatre, 93 Charles Street West	<i>Public Space for Public Life: Re-Imagining Downtown Parks & Streets</i> – Presentation with Gregg Lintern and Jan Gehl	A conversation on the future of parks and streets in Toronto's urban core. Moderated by Acting Chief Planner Gregg Lintern, this event was organized by the City of Toronto in partnership with Parks People and the University of Toronto. During this event, Chief Planner addressed the questions of: How is the City of Toronto planning to transform our public spaces to support a growing and intensifying Downtown over the next 25 years? What are the essential ingredients for fostering public life? Why is investment in a high-quality public realm so important to quality-of-life?
March 21, 2018	Queen Alexandra Middle School, Gymnasium, 181 Broadview Avenue	Unilever Precinct Open House	Following a presentation on the planning framework, the participants were invited to provide their input on key elements
March 27, 2018	21 The Don Roadway at Lake Shore Boulevard East	Unilever Precinct Open House	Drop-in style open house that gave community members an opportunity to see the inside of the former Unilever industrial building before its next incarnation as part of the East Harbour development. During the drop-in, the public was given the opportunity to learn more about the evolution of development plans for the massive employment district proposed for the Site.
May 15, 2018	Queen Alexandra Middle School 181 Broadview Avenue, Gymnasium	Unilever Precinct Open House	Public was invited to review the findings of the project's study and ask any final questions of City Planners and First Gulf.
May 16, 2017	Metro Toronto Convention Centre	ULI Toronto's Electric Cities Spring 2017 Symposium	The Symposium's Day Two lunch panel brought together experts involved in large-scale public realm projects. The panel included the following:

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesse Brackenbury, Executive Director, <u>Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway Conservancy</u> (Boston's Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway) • Daniel Jongtien, Architect, <u>Bentham Crouwel Architects</u> (Amsterdam Central Station) • Matt Nielson, Deputy Commissioner at the <u>Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events</u> (Chicago's Millennium Park) • Jamie Torres Spring, Senior Principal, <u>HR&A Advisors Inc.</u> (New York City's High Line) <p>These panelists spoke with Jennifer Keesmat, Toronto's Chief Planner (at the time), on the building, funding, and maintenance involved in building a large-scale public project, notably, Rail Deck Park.</p>
March 2019	South Bond Building, Ryerson University	<i>Sustainable City Building</i> – Presentation hosted by the School of Urban and Regional Planning	Conversation on building an inclusive and sustainable Toronto. Featured panellists from Bare Market and other NGOs in the city.
April 24, 2019	Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO)	<i>The Liveable City? Leisure</i> – Presentation with Jay Pitter	Jay Pitter, MES, led a conversation on the urgent issues facing Toronto today: work, affordable housing, transportation, and the cost of leisure. She discussed how cities are building nature and liveability into the urban narrative and focused on how cities could democratize urbanism through transit equity, safe streets, healing freight sites, and narrative-based engagement.
June 20, 2019	Royal Ontario Museum	Fact-B Conference: Biodiversity in the City	Discussion on biodiversity in Toronto and how it could be improved.

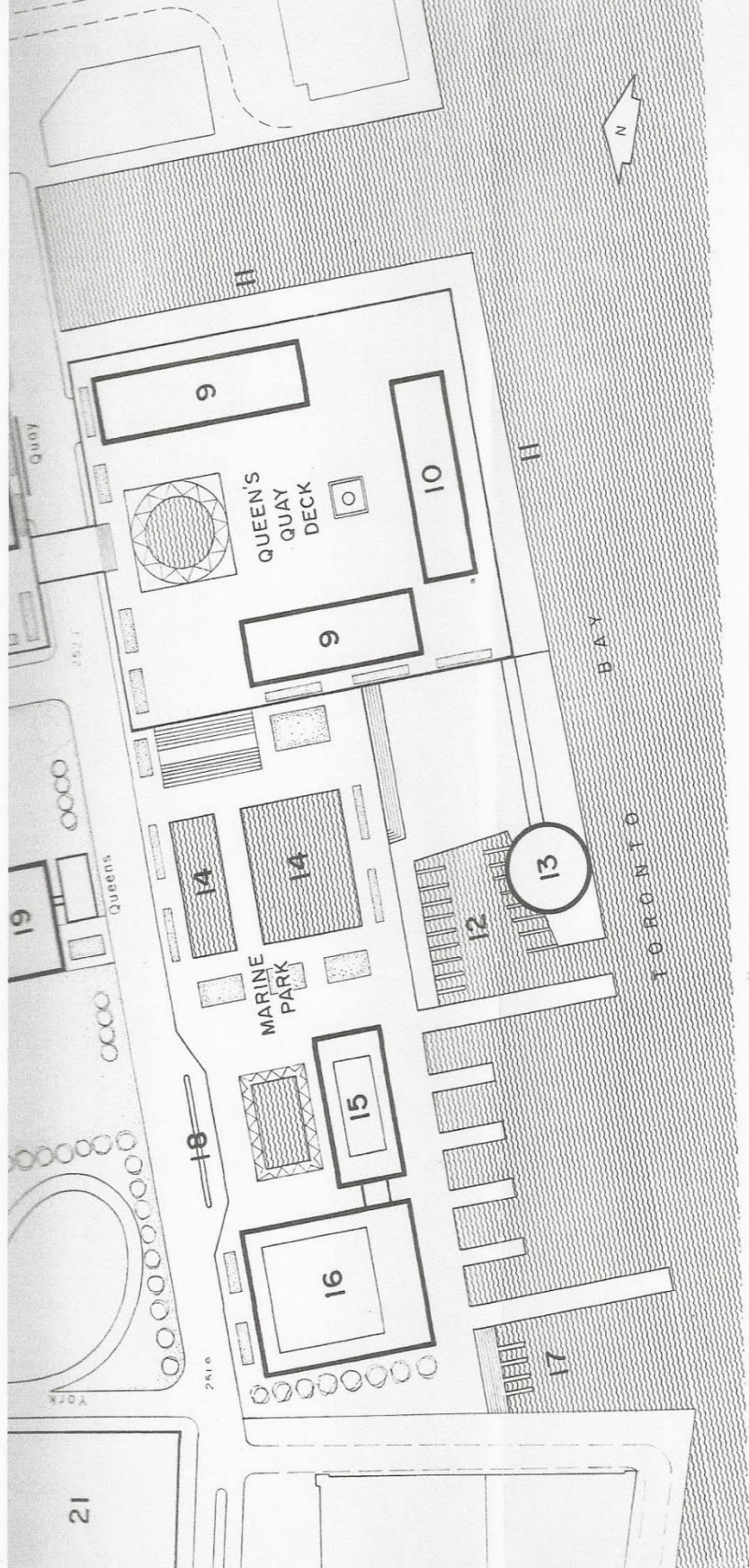
Appendix B
Plan of Proposed Development for
Toronto's Initial Rail Deck Park





PLAN OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

1. HELIPORT & TRANSPORTATION TERMINAL OFFICES R MOTOR BUSSES



PLAN OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 1. HELIPORT & TRANSPORTATION TERMINAL OFFICES
- 2. MOTOR HOTEL
- 3. CONVENTION FACILITIES
- 4. OFFICES
- 5. PEDESTRIAN LINK
- 6. EXHIBITION HALL & ASSOCIATED OFFICES
- 7. PEDESTRIAN LINK WITH SHOPS
- 8. MOTOR HOTEL
- 9. CORPORATION OFFICES
- 10. OFFICES
- 11. BERTHING SPACES FOR CARGO VESSELS
- 12. SHORT TERM MOORING SLIPS
- 13. RESTAURANT
- 14. BOAT DISPLAY BASINS
- 15. FERRY TERMINAL & MARINE MUSEUM
- 16. AQUARIUM
- 17. WATER TAXIS & ISLAND YACHT CLUB FERRIES
- 18. VEHICLE ACCESS LANE
- 19. SAILORS' RECREATIONAL CENTRE
- 20. NEW TORONTO HARBOUR COMMISSIONER'S BUILDING
- 21. PARKING GARAGE

SCALE 1" = 200'

CITY OF TORONTO PLANNING BOARD