

# **Beyond the Greenbelt: Extended Urbanization on the Shores of Lake Simcoe**

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Date Submitted: July 29, 2016

A Major Paper submitted to the Faculty of Environmental Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Environmental Studies

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## **ABSTRACT**

Building off existing scholarship on extended urbanization and Urban Political Ecology this paper looks at the neoliberal urban development processes shaping Lake Simcoe and the communities within the watershed. With Friday Harbour Resort, a 600 acres mega-development currently under construction on the protected shoreline of Lake Simcoe, as my case study, I examine the contradictory and conflicting processes of sub/urbanization extending across the Greater Golden Horseshoe Region. This involves research into policies, forms of governance as well as other socio-spatial, ecological and economic processes that are contributing to the ongoing proliferation of exclusionary and fragmented geographies that typify this rapidly sub/urbanizing region. In addition, I examine alternative forms of opposition and new possibilities for resistance.

## FOREWORD

My parents raised us in the City of Calgary but our weekends were spent deep in the Rocky Mountains, at a remote cabin built with four other families. In the mountains, and ‘off the grid’, conservation and living efficiently were natural parts of day-to-day life. Power sources were propane and solar; human waste was composted; glacier-fed creeks doubled as bathing facilities and drinking water. Life in Amiskwi Pass taught me a respect for ecology and an appreciation for socially, economically and environmentally alternative ways of living. These values were not nurtured in Calgary, where my parents worked for big oil.

As I grew older, the tension between our life in the city and the mountains was manifest – my family’s ability to afford to spend time in British Columbia’s wilderness was contingent on the exploitation of Alberta’s natural resources. This exposed me to the complex divide between urban/suburban living and the natural world and has driven me to bridge that divide both personally and academically.

My Plan of Study in the MES program has been geared towards reconciling these contradictions—an on-going project that may never fully be realized. This paper fits into my POS by addressing the three learning components I pursued while at York: Environmental Planning, (Sub)urbanization, Leisure and Tourism.

Through research and critical analysis of policies, scholarship and theories relevant to the sub/urbanization processes shaping Lake Simcoe and the Greater Golden Horseshoe Region this major paper has met the following learning objectives set out in my POS:

**Objective 1.3** To obtain knowledge of the implications of environmental policies and practices on land use and development.

**Objective 1.4** To obtain comparative knowledge of planning issues and practices in Southern Ontario.

**Objective 2.2** To obtain a grasp of the social, political and economic ways in which urban and suburban space is produced and the implications and material effects of (sub)urbanization processes.

**Objective 3.2** To gain a broad understanding of the environmental and social implications of tourism in rural towns in Southern Ontario.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and thank my partner Chris for six years of love and friendship, for encouraging me to pursue my MES degree, for supporting me throughout this process, for editing all my papers—including this one—and for listening to all my complaints and epiphanies as I have grown over the last two years. I would also like to thank my family for reminding me that home is never too far away.

To my advisor Roger Keil, who has been instrumental in my education, thank you. The opportunities and guidance you have provided has set me on a new path that I am excited to pursue. To Sara Macdonald, my supervisor at CITY Institute, I am forever grateful to you. You listened intently on the worst of days, providing much needed comic relief and an endless supply of candy. I owe many thanks to CITY Institute and all its staff and scholars. The opportunities to learn and collaborate, in workshops in Toronto and abroad in Belo Horizonte, were more than I could have asked for. To my MES peers, thank you for walking in circles during the 2015 strike and for always pushing me to think and live more critically. Congratulations and I look forward to seeing what our futures hold.

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## INTRODUCTION

This research paper will investigate the rapidly urbanizing Simcoe County—an area that has become known as the ‘wild west’ of planning and development in Southern Ontario due to unprecedented sprawl. I will address the ways in which the neoliberal urbanism that is continually shaping the City of Toronto has extended beyond the conceptual boundaries of the city to the broader Greater Golden Horseshoe Region (the ‘GGH’). I will look at the ways in which sub/urbanization pressures from the City of Toronto have leapfrogged the GGH Greenbelt (the ‘Greenbelt’) and are transforming Simcoe County. These pressures are reshaping a traditionally ‘rural’ landscape and are resulting in uneven and exclusive forms of development and new sites of enclosure. Moreover, increased development in the region poses new threats to Lake Simcoe’s already threatened watershed, resulting in the privatization and commodification of this socio-natural landscape.

I will use Friday Harbour Resort as a case study in examining the development processes and planning policies shaping what lies north of the Greenbelt. Friday Harbour is a 600-acre New Urbanist ‘cottage-condo’ mega-development that sits on Lake Simcoe’s protected shoreline in the Town of Innisfil. Innisfil is a traditionally rural town facing a particular host of growth pressures. It is a long-time cottaging community experiencing increasing demands for development due to its natural amenities, quiet rural character and proximity to Toronto. In addition, in the decades long fight against annexation pressures coming from the neighbouring Municipality of Barrie, the Town of Innisfil has advanced a growth agenda as a means to assert autonomy and maintain its existing tax base. There was much local opposition to the proposal for

Friday Harbour Resort and the approval process was lengthy. The development is currently under construction, sales are well underway and the developer is preparing to open in 2017. By examining the development and situating it within the uneven sub/urban development processes shaping Simcoe County, this research will contribute to a broader understanding of the contested and contradictory geographies that make up the GGH.

At the core of this research is a simple curiosity guided by three basic questions: why, how and for whom? I am seeking to understand why growth is occurring at such a rapid rate in the GGH, how this growth is being facilitated through policy and through the planning approval process, and who this growth benefits. Underlying this provocation of growth, is the question of how Lake Simcoe is negotiated within these urbanization processes, where does the Lake and its watershed fit within the land use planning framework and what are the socio-ecological implications of urbanization on the Lake and its human and non-human inhabitants?

My first chapter will provide a theoretical grounding in Urban Political Ecology, which will guide my paper and inform my understanding of Lake Simcoe as a social and political geography, shaping and shaped by histories of colonialism and capital. Chapter two will provide an overview of the GGH. Here I will look at why the policies that govern land use in the GGH function to facilitate growth and development. This will include analysis of the land use, policies, demographics and growth projections in Simcoe County and the Town of Innisfil. Chapter three will address the effect of tourism on the extended urbanization of the GGH and will examine the changing political economy of Ontario's 'cottage country'. I will then examine the Friday Harbour development in two parts, first as Big Bay Point Resort, and then as the re-

branded Friday Harbour. This will begin with chapter four, where I tell the story of the Big Bay Point Resort proposal, a highly controversial approval process which culminated in over \$100 million dollars in Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation ('SLAPP') being filed against nine of the developments opponents. I will then lay out the planning and environmental policy framework within which the development achieved approval. This section will explain how the development received the go-ahead and seeks to answer the broader question of how the Ontario planning process functions in favor of capitalist urbanization and growth. When the development was finally approved, it was re-branded as Friday Harbour Resort, an all-seasons resort boldly claiming to 'improve' the Lake Simcoe watershed. Through examination of the Friday Harbour development as it is being realized, chapter five will ask what the approval of this development means for Lake Simcoe and the community. The aim here is to answer the question of: for whom is Friday Harbour being developed? I will explain the ways in which the development employs the language of ecosystem services and green infrastructure in order to legitimize the development and facilitate future growth that benefits upper middle-class elites. My final and concluding chapter looks at potential opportunities for resistance to colonial histories and current growth trends that are paving over geographies north of the protected Greenbelt. I will use the example of the Anishnaabe and the women-led Mother Earth Water Walks to demonstrate ways in which First Nations communities in the region are invoking spiritual practice to protest the ongoing and historic impacts of growth and development. All of this begs the question, within the current context can community have voice in the public planning process or are we better left seeking alternatives? And what kinds of possibilities do these alternative forms of resistance open up?

This research is qualitative and based on a mix of methods including a review of literature and theory, archival research, content analysis and semi-structured interviews. It builds off existing literatures on extended urbanization, suburbanization, urban political ecology as well as other urban and land use scholarship, and it anchors this work around Lake Simcoe and within the GGH. My archival research consists of analysis of land use planning documents, court documents from appeals at the Ontario Municipal Board, including affidavits and depositions, local and regional policy documents, zoning by-laws, site plans and municipal planning staff reports. My research is further supported by analysis of local news, advertising content and other media.

I conducted a total of 10 semi-structured interviews, four individual interviews and three conducted in groups of two, all of which were in person or on the telephone. Participants included environmental experts, policy and planning experts, officials and local politicians (see Appendix). All interviewees will remain anonymous and are identified by general reference to their position or expertise. The purpose of these interviews was to gain an understanding of the policies, processes and tensions shaping land use in Simcoe County, and to gain a deeper understanding of the Friday Harbour development as it relates to other sub/urbanization pressures occurring within the Lake Simcoe watershed. The semi-structured style of these interviews were based on “interactive and reflexive exchange” which allowed for “more of a collaboration than an interrogation” (McDowell, 2010, np). Interviews were conducted with an understanding that this information will be utilized for academic purposes, including publication.

Borrowing from Haraway's 'situated knowledges', I reject the "common epistemological claim of a 'view from nowhere'" (Jenson & Glaesmeir 2010, p. 83). Necessary in situating my own knowledge is an awareness and recognition of the limitations of my positionality relative to my research problem and requires engaging in an ongoing process of reflexivity that, as Rose describes: "looks both 'inward' to the identity of the researcher, and 'outward' to her relation to her research and what is described as 'the wider world'" (1997, p. 309). This is important as I am writing from downtown Toronto on Innisfil and Lake Simcoe, areas that are often considered 'other' to Toronto's urban center and areas in which I am an outsider. My research involved travelling to Innisfil and to the Friday Harbour sales center and development site, and my observations of the area are based on a guided tour through the municipality and development with one of my interviewees. Moreover, this research borrows from indigenous theories and scholars and involves research on colonial histories of the region. As a person of white settler descent I have directly benefited from these histories and acknowledge the limits of my positionality in this respect.

# CHAPTER 1

## LAKE SIMCOE

Lake Simcoe is an important component in the geographic morphology of Toronto and its surrounding region. It is directly implicated by the the urbanization pressures emanating from Toronto, yet is often underrepresented in discussions about the socio-spatial dynamics and urban political ecology of the GGH. In order to examine the social and ecological implications of sub/urbanization pressures occurring in Simcoe County it is necessary to direct inquiry towards Lake Simcoe, the processes shaping it, and in turn, the ways in which the Lake and the forms of governance attached to it shape urban development occurring in its surroundings. This chapter will build on existing Toronto and GGH specific sub/urbanization and Urban Political Ecology ('UPE') scholarship by focusing on Lake Simcoe as a primary unit for analysis. This will begin with a brief overview Lake Simcoe, situating it within the broader GGH, will follow with an overview of relevant theories, and will finish with an examination of the lake through the lens of UPE.

### *"BEAUTIFUL WATER"*

The world is becoming increasingly urbanized and rural geographies are appearing more urban and suburban in character and by design. In North America, this is predominantly typified by homogeneity: big box stores, chain restaurants, and vertical and horizontal repetitions of housing. The day-to-day lives of individuals who populate the 'countryside' have become, in many cases, synonymous with the day-to-day lives of those living within the traditional boundaries of the city. Moreover, regionalization and mobility have resulted in a more fluid (albeit highly differentiated) existence within and across landscapes and we are seeing the urban,

as both a social and material process, extend across the landscape into what were traditionally considered 'rural' areas.

This is playing out in Toronto and in the GGH, which is one of the fastest growing regions in North America (MOI, 2013). In the name of economic growth, urban development, and creating "complete communities" (MOI, 2013) the GGH is undergoing massive land use changes. It is a diverse region that "ranges from the American border at the Niagara Peninsula in the south, along the Niagara Escarpment and beyond to the high-tech boom and agricultural regions around Kitchener-Waterloo-Cambridge in the west, beyond the Oak Ridges Moraine into the Muskoka region to the north, to the industrial municipality of Oshawa to the east" (Addie and Keil, 2015, p. 41). The area is "home to two-thirds of the population of Ontario and nearly one-third of the total Canadian population" (Allen and Campsie, 2013, p. 5), and over the next twenty-five years another 4 million people will be added to the 9 million residents who presently call the GGH home (MOI, 2013). The City of Toronto, Canada's largest municipality and the fourth largest city in North America, is considered the economic engine of the region and the financial capital of Canada and the GGH economy "generates approximately two-thirds of Ontario's and one-fifth of Canada's GDP" (Allen and Campsie, 2013, p. 5). The region is home to many important ecological sites and natural heritage systems and the urbanized settlements are complemented with some of the top grade farmland in all of Canada, much of which is protected by the 1.8 million-acre Greenbelt.



**PLACES TO GROW**  
GROWTH PLAN FOR  
THE GREATER GOLDEN HORSESHOE 2006

**SCHEDULE 1**

**Greater Golden Horseshoe Growth Plan Area**

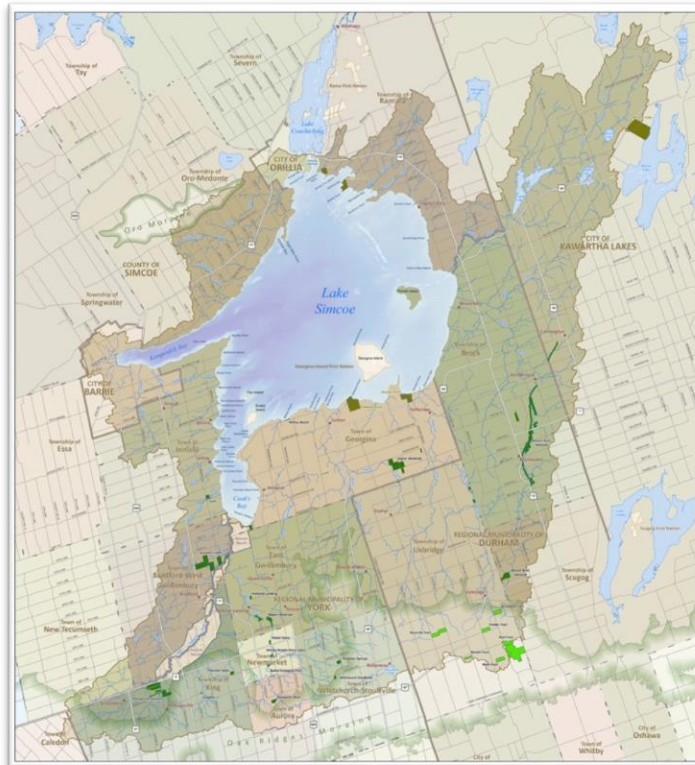
Note: The information displayed on this map is not to scale, does not accurately reflect approved land-use and planning boundaries, and may be out of date. For more information on precise boundaries, the appropriate municipality should be consulted. For more information on Greenbelt Area boundaries, the Greenbelt Plan 2005 should be consulted. The Province of Ontario assumes no responsibility or liability for any consequences of any use made of this map.

**Figure 1. The Greater Golden Horseshoe Region, Ontario, Canada**

Source: Copyright, Queen's Printer for Ontario: Places to Grow Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2006.

Lake Simcoe is situated within this broader landscape, just north of the Greenbelt. The northern tip of the lake is reachable from the City of Toronto in just over an hour by vehicle. It is a socio-ecological geography that is undergoing transformation due to the extended urbanization of Toronto. Historically Lake Simcoe has played an important role in shaping land use in the region. The lake and its neighbouring county were named in 1793 for the father of colonizer John Graves Simcoe, the first Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada. However, the Huron had long been referring to the lake as “Ouentironk” meaning “beautiful water” (LSRCA, n/p) and they called the northern tip of the lake “Tkaronto”, an Iroquoian term meant to refer to “a place where trees are in the water” (Methot, 2012, n/p). “Tkaronto” eventually made its way down the Humber River and was attached to the area we now know as the City of Toronto.

Lake Simcoe and its watershed cover 3,400 square kilometers and includes 18 major rivers and over 4,000 kilometres of streams (LSRCA, n/p). Aside from the Great Lakes, Simcoe is the largest lake in Southern Ontario and it is part of the historic Trent Severn Waterway, a 386-kilometer



**Figure 2. Lake Simcoe Watershed**

Source: Copyright, Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority, 2016

series of locks, canals, lakes and

rivers that connects Lake Ontario to the more northern Great Lake Huron. The Trent Severn

Waterway was for military and commercial use and is now in operation by Parks Canada as a tourist attraction. Land in Lake Simcoe's watershed is primarily agricultural and urban, and it includes the Oak Ridges Moraine and the Greenbelt, as well as provincially significant wetlands, woodlands, and the Holland Marsh, a specialty crop area. Some of Canada's fastest growing urban centres are situated within Lake Simcoe's watershed (Palmer et al., 2011, p. 1). In addition to these rapidly growing populations, the Lake Simcoe watershed population grows by 50,000 during the summer cottaging months (LSRCA, 2009, p. 67). While agriculture does have negative impacts on the health of the watershed, a local environmental expert explains: "[i]t's also really significant that it's not a growing source of pollution at Lake Simcoe. Whereas, the population of the watershed is set to double by 2041" (Interview with Roger Keil and Sara Macdonald, 10/22/2014). The lake is an important infrastructural asset and it provides wastewater assimilation for 15 municipal water pollution control plants and it is a clean water drinking source for eight of the municipalities that fall within the watershed (Palmer et al., 2011). Lake Simcoe is considered an anchor for tourism and recreation activities generate over \$200 million per year for the area (LSRCA, 2009, p. 67), with fishing being a popular activity year round.

The quality of Lake Simcoe's watershed has been a notable issue since the 1970s. However, degradation dates back far beyond that. High phosphorus loads from anthropogenic sources "promoted algal production" and "limited the availability of suitable coldwater fish habitat" (Palmer et al., 2011, p. 1). In the 1980s, the "Lake Simcoe Environmental Management Strategy" was initiated to reduce phosphorus loads in Lake Simcoe (*ibid.*). This was a partnership that came to include the regional conservation authority, multiple provincial ministries, the Federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans, local municipalities, and the

Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation (*ibid.* pp. 1-2). In addition, “pressures including invasive species, climate change, and metal and organic pollutants” prompted the Liberal provincial government to establish the *Lake Simcoe Protection Act*, 2008, S.O. 2008, c. 23 “making Lake Simcoe the only lake in Canada with its own legislative act” (*ibid.*, 2011, p. 2). The corresponding Lake Simcoe Protection Plan was enacted in 2009 and is a policy document that is science based and that is implemented under the directive of the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority. In addition, the southern part of the lake’s shoreline and watershed falls within the Greenbelt boundaries. Thus, the watershed is both governed by Greenbelt policies on the south end and exacerbated by the development pressures that have leapfrogged north of the Greenbelt (Macdonald and Keil, 2012). There are numerous environmentalist and watchdog organizations, neighbourhood and ratepayer associations, and First Nations that contribute to the monitoring of land use and water quality of Lake Simcoe and that have been raising alarms about the increasing sub/urbanization pressures over the years.

Lake Simcoe is a dynamic socio-spatial landscape that has multiple and contradictory forms of governance shaping water quality and usage. It has an enduring indigenous history, has been shaped by colonial and neo-colonial forces and is undergoing rapid material and ecological transformation under current neoliberal and capitalist conditions. Despite being the only lake in Canada with a legislative act increasing pressures due to the ‘extended urbanization’ emanating from the City of Toronto are resulting in the privatization, commodification and degradation of this “beautiful water” (Methot, 2012, np).

## *EXTENDED SUB/URBANIZATION*

We live in what has popularly been deemed the ‘age of urbanity’ (Brenner & Schmid, 2014). However, this is not just a matter of growing mega-cities and mass migrations of ‘rural’ inhabitants into urban areas. While fluctuating densities is certainly a function of the era, rather the ‘urban age’ denotes a socio-spatial restructuring of the world’s populations towards an ‘urban’ way of life, or perhaps more accurately in this current era: ‘suburban’. Harvey (1978) has long argued that the urban is a process composed of social relations, and under the current capitalist system, accumulation and labour. As Monte-Mór would have it, the urban “is a synthesis of the old city-countryside dichotomy, a third element in the city-countryside dialectic opposition, the material and socio-spatial manifestation of contemporary urban-industrial society extended virtually throughout the social space” (2005, p. 745). The ‘suburban’—which Ekers, Hamel and Keil argue is the “defining urban-regional arrangement for at least a generation to come”—can be understood as the social-spatial process of peripheral expansion, raising important questions of “social segregation and justice, “sustainable” forms of land use, and uneven development” (2015, p. 19). And ‘suburbanisms’—that is, ‘suburban’ ways of life—“have become the dominant mode of urban existence” (Walks, 2012, p. 1). However, ‘suburbanisms’ are not exclusive to the urban periphery, but rather exist across different locales and borders, susceptible to changing ideologies and socio-political contexts (Walks, 2012, p. 15).

Brenner and Schmid argue that “the urban age thesis *divides the indivisible* in so far as it treats urban and rural zones as fundamentally distinct” (2014, p. 17) and instead they propose looking at the contemporary urban condition as a process they call ‘planetary urbanization’. These scholars are not the first to speak in these terms and they borrow from Lefebvre’s *La*

*révolution urbaine*, from over four decades ago, who argued, even then, that “society has been completely urbanized” (Brenner, 2014, pp.16-17). Moreover, the theory of planetary urbanization employs Monte-Mór’s notion of ‘extended urbanization’ as a means to identify the ways in which urban processes “produc[e] a variegated urban fabric that, rather than being simply concentrated within nodal points or confined within bounded regions, is now woven unevenly and yet ever more densely across vast stretches of the entire world” (Brenner 2013, p. 90). Monte-Mór defines ‘extended urbanization’ as a the “socio-temporal materialization of the processes of production and reproduction resulting from the confrontation between the industrial and the urban, plus the socio-political and cultural issues intrinsic to the *polis* and the *civitas* that have extended beyond urban agglomerations to social space as a whole” (2005, pp. 945-946).

Under this new paradigm of thinking, the urban is decoupled from the notion of the ‘city’, and instead spaces long understood as non-urban— suburbs, exurbs, rural, countryside, wilderness, hinterland—are freed from the polarizing discourses of center-periphery (Brenner 2014). This is not to suggest that all geographies are “dissolving into a placeless society of global flows, borderless connectivity or haphazard spatial dispersal” (*ibid.*, pp.18-19). Rather it involves shifting away from accepting cities as distinctly bounded and contained units of analysis, ultimately allowing us to “supersede the urban/non-urban divide” (*ibid.*, p.15).

Moreover, Fiedler and Addie have called for “the need to reconsider, reinvigorate and/or reinvent how suburbs are conceptualized, analyzed and represented in contemporary urban scholarship” (2008, p. 2). This requires breaking away from traditional and hegemonic narratives of north American low-density single family housing suburbs and accepting various forms of

peripheral expansion, including industrial landscapes, high-rise neighbourhoods, post-suburban growth centres, slums and squats. In the particular context of southern Ontario, low density housing is a dominant form of new suburban development however, it is important to recognize that this is one of many forms of overlapping peripheral expansion shaping the GGH. Paying particular attention to suburbanization unmask the changing nature of “center and periphery” (Hamel and Keil, 2015, p. 3) and reveals the ongoing processes of implosion-explosion that constitute new post-suburban landscapes.

Much in the same way Harvey employs ‘creative-destruction’, ‘implosion-explosion’—a Lefebvrian notion that refers to “the production and continual transformation of an industrial urban fabric in which centers of agglomeration and their operational landscapes are woven together in mutually transformative ways while being co-articulate into a worldwide capitalist system” (Brenner 2014, pp. 17-18)—refers to the necessary destruction of one socio-natural spatial order (i.e. implosion) required so that a new system can emerge (i.e. explosion). Implosion-explosion is the basis of the “extended urbanization” of capitalist space and hold very real and spatial implications that underlie the fragmented, segregated, and privileged landscapes characteristic of present day sub/urban society.

### *URBAN POLITICAL ECOLOGY (‘UPE’)*

Sub/urbanization is driven by capitalist accumulation and holds significant socio-ecological implications on various scales. UPE provides a framework through which we can understand the ways in which physical landscapes and natural ecologies are produced, negotiated, exploited and leveraged in the urbanization process. UPE is concerned with the

“physical-environmental foundations on which the urbanization process rests,” and recognizes that there is “an intricate and ultimately vulnerable dependence of capital accumulation on nature” (Heynen, Kaika & Swyngedouw, 2006, p. 2). While space is perhaps more variegated, nuanced and dynamic than ever, the sub/urban appears to be extended everywhere, blurring the line between what is rural and what is urban and renegotiating our relationship to nature within these contexts. The nature/culture divide that exists between the city and the hinterland has long been broken down, and we now understand cities to be made up of rich and diverse socio-ecological geographies. Similarly, we now understand the areas outside of the spatial boundaries of the city to be made up of rich and diverse socio-ecological geographies that are also made up of urban and suburban infrastructures, social relations, and ways of life. However, despite a breakdown between the urban and its “counterparts” (Brenner, 2014) and a more nuanced understanding of nature/culture, these designations still have material and ideological value and hold particular importance when we examine the ways in which ecologies are metabolized within and across different geographies.

### *Metabolism & “Sustainability Fix”*

UPE is concerned with the ways in which the powers, phenomena and physicality of the natural environment are “socially mobilised to serve particular purposes” and “invariably associated with strategies of achieving or maintaining particular positionalities of social power and express shifting geometries of social power” (Swyngedouw & Heynen, 2003, p. 902). Two concepts central to UPE are “urban metabolism”, used to define the ways in which urban processes take up, transform, store, and discharge certain natures (Keil, 2005, p. 643), and “sustainability fix”, which is in line with ecological modernization policies that, in effect, justify

urbanization through green washing tactics (*ibid.*, 2005, p. 645). According to Swyngedouw and Heynen, it is “those ‘natural’ metabolisms and transformations that become discursively, politically and economically mobilised and socially appropriated to produce environments that embody and reflect positions of social power” (2003, p. 902).

As UPE would have it, “cities are built out of natural resources through socially mediated natural processes” (Swyngedouw & Heynen, 2003, p. 909) and Lake Simcoe is an invaluable natural resource within the extended urbanization of the GGH. Perhaps most importantly here is to note that development does not impact social and physical environments equally (Swyngedouw & Heynen, 2003). Just as sub/urbanization processes are uneven, so too are the ways in which ecologies are metabolized through the political and social relations that make up the sub/urban. Lake Simcoe is metabolized through the growth shaping the region in ways that serve the interests of certain groups over others and impact its socio-natural ecologies in asymmetrical ways. Similarly, as I will demonstrate through the case study of Friday Harbour, the lake functions as a “sustainability fix” for development in Simcoe County. The ailing health of the lake is leveraged as a *reason* for development because in this era of sustainability and Green Infrastructure, technology and development are seen as necessary cures to histories of degradation caused by industrial capitalist growth.

### *Scale*

Scale is important in UPE as it “welds together processes operating at a variety of nested and articulated geographical scales” (*ibid.*, p. 904). Following this, we must assume that the urbanization occurring in Lake Simcoe’s watershed has broader implications than just what falls

within the geographical boundaries of the 'watershed'. This provokes the 'watershed' concept altogether, a hydrological and scientific concept commonly accepted as the imperative unit for measurement when discussing bodies of water. Under the effects of climate change and rapidly responding technological and infrastructural changes, this scalar concept is called into question. As bodies of water dry up, shorelines erode and washout, rivers are daylighted, ecologically restored or expanded through development initiatives claiming 'ecological modernization', we are confronted with new and fluctuating units for measuring water and watersheds. This forces us to ask what might the boundaries of a watershed look like in social, cultural and economic terms? What are the socio-political implications of understanding 'ecologies' in these ways? And how might these contribute to a new "scalar geometry"?

### *Conclusion*

Lake Simcoe is all at once a rural and urban space, shaped by indigenous and colonial histories, industrial capitalism, agriculture, recreation, tourism, and perceptions of 'nature'. It is a dynamic socio-spatial geography and its scale and metabolism transcend multiple jurisdictions, political boundaries and forms of governance. However, as I will demonstrate in this paper, the 'natural' and 'rural' character of the lake is being leveraged by developers and local municipalities, resulting in private and exclusive shoreline development and thereby enclosing and commodifying of the lake. As Heynen et al. (2006) have pointed out, under processes of capitalist urbanization 'nature' becomes commodified, reinforcing and further entrenching the urban/non-urban dichotomy into society. Thus, in order to unhinge the polarizing divide between urban and rural that is being reinforced through the extension of neoliberal urbanization, it is necessary to examine the contradictory forces behind the processes of creative-destruction and implosion-explosion shaping Lake Simcoe and the broader GGH. The remainder of my paper

will build off the theories of extended urbanization and UPE, which combined with other scholarship centered on urban development processes, will contribute to and inform my analysis of the urbanization processes occurring in the GGH and shaping Simcoe Country. The following chapters will demonstrate the ways in which neoliberal policies, tourist economies, and a history of cottaging and uneven planning practices are resulting in Toronto extending northwards, settling back onto the shores of Lake Simcoe where “Tkaronto” long-ago originated.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE WILD WEST AND THE GOLDEN HORSESHOE

Toronto is a neoliberal city, growing and extending into surrounding geographies. While the ‘Common-Sense Revolution’ of Mike Harris’ provincial conservatives are often cited as the beginning of neoliberal politics and ideology shaping Toronto’s urban form, Keil reminds us: “[i]t is not plausible and not possible to reduce urban neoliberalism to the agenda of a specific provincial government” (2002, p. 594). In order to adequately understand the ‘actually existing neoliberalisms’ of Toronto, we must take into account the various histories of land use and governance that have shaped and given way to the ‘spatial imaginary’ of the GGH (Keil and Addie, 2015), instituted just over a decade ago. In order to understand the ways in which the GGH and corresponding policies codify and facilitate neoliberal capitalist urban development it is necessary to go back to the conditions prior to the establishment of such policies.

#### *NEOLIBERAL TORONTO: FROM CITY TO REGION*

Prior to the establishment of the GGH, provincial land use planning was under the control of Mike Harris’ provincial Conservatives. As mentioned earlier, while neoliberalism in Toronto is commonly dated back to the ‘Common-Sense Revolution’ of the 1990s, it actually goes back as far as the “entrepreneurial” planning that emerged in the 1980s (Desfor, Keil, Kipfer & Wekerle, 2006, p.135-136). At this time “planners became preoccupied with making deals with developers and extracting some small public benefits, such as childcare or open space, in exchange for higher densities in the ensuing downtown office boom” (*ibid.*, p. 135). In 1998, in a refusal “to integrate the city into an effective regional governance system,” the Harris

government amalgamated Metropolitan Toronto including “only the core city of Toronto and its postwar suburbs, rather than the Greater Toronto Area as a whole” (*ibid.*, p. 136-137). This left municipalities outside of the newly amalgamated Toronto to rely on “expand[ing] their property tax base by granting approvals for low-density sprawl development” resulting in “inter-city competition between the City of Toronto and surrounding exurbs” (*ibid.*, p. 137). In addition to the downloading of social service costs and the deregulation of environmental protections, the Harris’ Conservatives abolished recently initiated planning reforms under the NDP, making sprawl ever more feasible (Boudreau, Keil & Young, 2006, p. 63). The Harris years resulted in “the loosening of planning restrictions and the pursuit of an aggressive (sub)urban growth strategy” (Keil, 2002, p.589). In reconciling sprawl, the City of Toronto employed the language of ecological modernization by “link[ing] its growth strategies to pressures on the exurban fringe” (Boudreau *et al.* 2006, p. 63). New inner-city and “green” exurban development and policy strategies resulted in the “marketization and privatization of land, services and resources” (Keil, 2002, p. 593). Intensification became about ‘smart growth,’ justifying the gentrification and displacement occurring from downtown development strategies that facilitated “real estate reinvestment” and promoted “bourgeois utopias of waterfront revitalization” (Boudreau *et al.* 2006, p. 63). Exurban strategies resulted in “the continued colonization of the rural countryside through wealthy urban fugitives in their pursuit for gated communities and proximity to luxury “rural” entertainment such as golf courses” (Keil, 2002, p. 592). This “fundamentally affected the societal relationships with nature in the province” (Keil, 2002, p. 593) and can specifically be linked to the continued neoliberalization of nature we see occurring on the shoreline of Lake Simcoe. However, as Friday Harbour demonstrates, extended urbanization in Innisfil is occurring

in a hybridized form of these downtown and exurban strategies, all at once densifying and exploiting this traditionally ‘rural’ town.

In addition to the Harris years, it is necessary to note that suburbanization in North America has largely been facilitated through the federal state (Ekers, Hamel and Keil, 2015, p. 31). As Ekers, Hamel and Keil point out, housing and infrastructure funded by the federal government in Canada incentivized growth (*ibid.*). The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation came to “bolster suburban home ownership” by providing housing and mortgages to, namely, white, middle-class families with heteronormative appearances (*ibid.*). Moreover, the provincial state has fueled peripheral expansion through infrastructure development, in particular through highway expansions (*ibid.*). In Toronto, an increase in car ownership and growth in population contributed to the suburban expansion and ‘Urban Renewal’ led to policies that encouraged economic expansion, urban growth and investment in modern highway infrastructure (Klemek, 2011, p. 40). The *laissez faire* and ‘pro-growth’ nature of these policies laid the groundwork for the sprawling metropolis that Toronto has become today (*ibid.*, p. 18).

Under Harris, and through the peripheral expansion of Toronto, the claim for “global prominence, or at least competitiveness” was built on the larger region (Keil, 2002, p. 592). Following Harris, under the Liberals, the sprawling metropolis of Toronto was reconfigured within our ‘spatial imaginaries’ as the GGH - re-scaling the region as the new unit for land management and measurement. While “the Harris government ha[d] deliberately resisted any attempts to regulate development in Ontario” (*ibid.*), the Liberals “embraced the role of

‘regionalizing state’” and institutionalized regionality by establishing the *Places to Grow*, a regional Greenbelt and regional transportation policies (Keil & Addie, 2015, p. 898).

### *The Greenbelt as Regional ‘Sustainability Fix’*

*Places to Grow* aims to contain and regulate growth and development pressures extended outwards from Toronto. This includes the Growth Plan for the GGH, which dictates where growth can occur in the region, and is complemented by the Greenbelt, which protects agricultural and natural heritage lands and dictates no-growth areas. Regionalization in Toronto has emerged at a time when “regions are seen as powerful driving forces in themselves, energizing regional worlds of production, consumption and creativity, while at the same time shaping the globalization of capital, labor and culture” (Soja, 2015, p. 373). With the lessening of the state’s role we now see “the emergence of urban-regions as the prime space of social, cultural, political and economic life” (Ekers *et al.*, 2015, p. 32).

The regional scale is the new lens through which Toronto is projected onto the world stage (Keil and Addie, 2015, p. 898). And the “prevailing discourse” in the GGH growth policy “is that of the competitive region responding to pressures of globalization” (Wekerle, 2013, p. 150). The GGH provides the “connectivity” required for the efficient flow of goods, services and people necessary for continued capitalist growth of Toronto on a global scale (Keil and Addie, 2014, p. 898) and the *Places to Grow* policies codify this. Accordingly, “the real existing’ regionalism” of the *Places to Grow* and greenbelt legislation introduces “a dialectics of unity and diversity” (Keil and Addie, 2015, p. 411). Within this new framework the Greenbelt appears as a radical vision of spatial and environmental justice. However, as Macdonald and Keil point out,

the Greenbelt is a “sustainability fix” that functions as an “instrument of extended metropolitanization, that is, it orders a large urban region in a traditional and path-dependent fashion that extends the logic of metropolitanism (infrastructure, etc.) to traditionally rural areas” (Macdonald and Keil 2012, p. 141).

The Greenbelt is meant to protect Ontario’s prime agricultural soils, however, it does little to protect the prime farmland that exist outside of its politically constructed boundaries. As predicted by Macdonald and Keil (2012), development pressures have leapfrogged the Greenbelt. According to farmer, activist and scholar, Ella Haley, “we are losing 350 acres a day of prime farmland in Ontario,” the equivalent of “264 football fields disappearing every day at the hands of developers.” (2015, np). Moreover, while the province’s ‘Co-ordinated Land Use Planning Review’ of the Growth Plan and Greenbelt policies calls for growing the Greenbelt to include urban river valleys and wetlands, the lines that demarcate where growth can and cannot occur are still very much driven by politics and private interests.

### *Extended Memories of Sprawl*

The planning practices instituted by the Conservatives have been remembered for contributing to sprawl, which if continued would “lead to worsening traffic congestion, a widening infrastructure deficit, increasing environmental degradation, the loss of high-quality farmland, and other negative consequences” (Allen and Campsie, 2013, p. i). In 2004, the Liberal government “raised the alarm” about the direction of development, stating that “Business-as-usual development will consume 1,000-sq km of primarily agricultural land by 2031, an area twice the size of Toronto” (*ibid.*). However, despite regionalization the tentacles of

neoliberalization have continued to spread outwards from Toronto and across the region. Under the conditions set by *Places to Grow*, we are still seeing sprawling urban development and the marketization, privatization and degradation of local ecologies. Regardless of the Growth Plan, there is still a rapid rate of land consumption in Southern Ontario with studies showing that land consumption rates have not actually slowed down (Allen and Campsie, 2013). Before these growth policies were implemented, approximately 88,000 hectares of land were designated for urbanization and have subsequently been grandfathered into approval (*ibid.*, p.ii). In addition to the 19,100 hectares designated for growth under the regional policies, the province has designated a total of 107,100 (or 1,071 square kilometers) of land for development (*ibid.*). The result is that business-as-usual land use rates have not only been met, but have been exceeded, despite *Places to Grow* and the Greenbelt legislation (*ibid.*). In effect, “what was considered an unacceptable level of urbanization for the region in 2004 has now become entrenched in municipal official plans” (*ibid.*, p. 76). In many ways the Liberals will also be remembered for their contributions to continued sprawl—a memory that bears increasingly pressing material and ecological implications related to growing food insecurity, failing infrastructures and increasing threats of climate change.

### *Inter-City Competition*

The inter-city competition between Toronto and surrounding exurbs that resulted from amalgamation has not been eliminated through regionalization. Regionalization has done little to curb the fragmented and extended processes of growth that have characterized Toronto and its surrounding geographies for decades. Presently, “real existing ‘lived’ regionalisms” in the GGH “are primarily embedded in and express neoliberal values and objectives” (Addie & Keil, 2015,

p. 409). This is resulting in greater “interurban and interregional competition” and shifting responsibilities among different scales of governance regarding “post-welfare state issues of social, economic, cultural and environmental regulation” (Keil, Hamel, Chou and Williams, 2015, p.102).

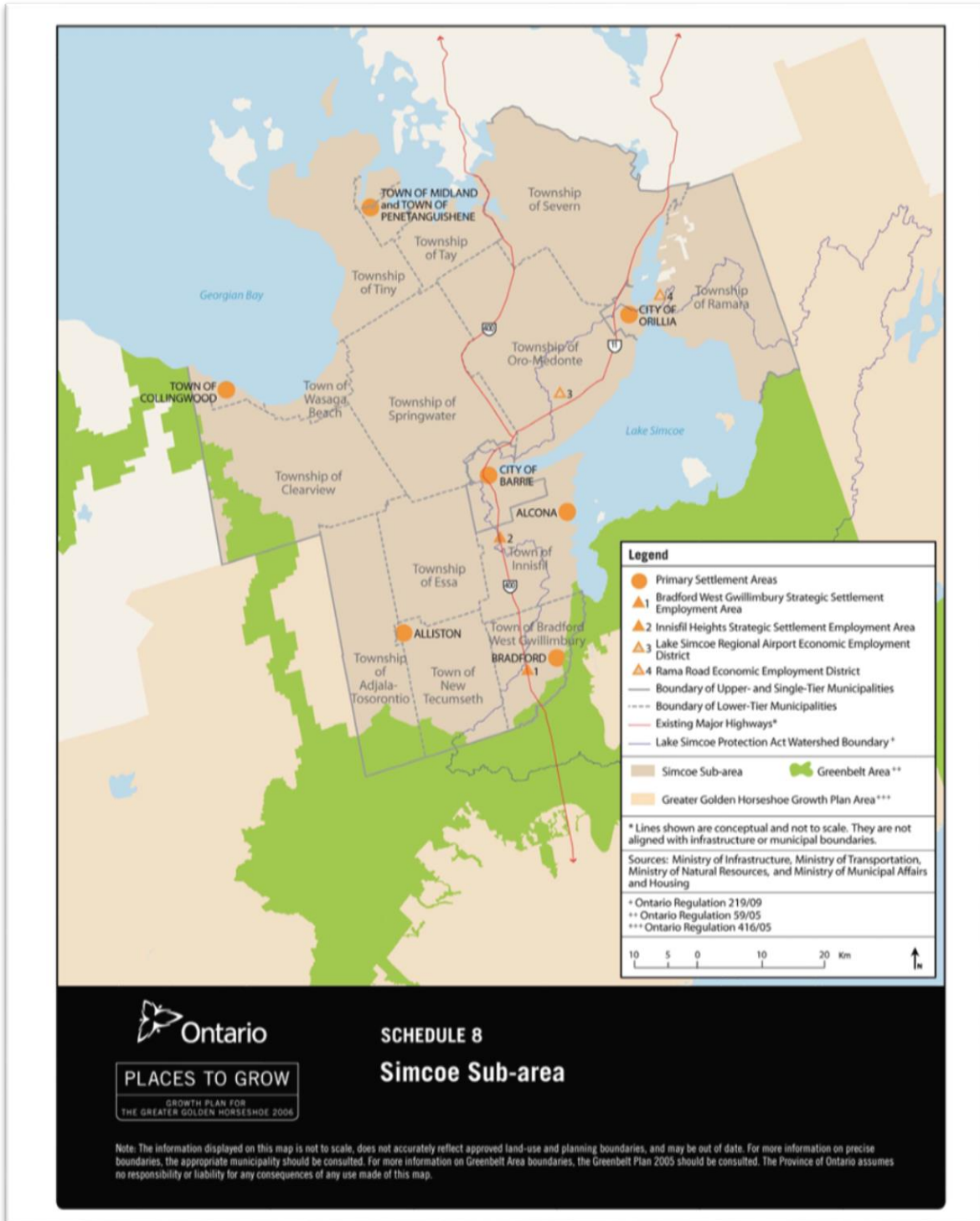
The regional growth plan does not necessarily function in a regional manner, but rather in true neoliberal fashion, downloads responsibilities for growth management onto municipalities, many of whom have “designated *almost the same amount of land* under the Growth Plan as they might have without the Growth Plan” (Allen and Campsie, 2013, p. 78). Municipalities are responsible for bringing their policies into line with the Growth Plan policies, they are provided a projected population forecast, and they are required to designate that forecasted number to particular settlement areas. The plan sets minimum targets for allocating population density but leaves it up to the municipality to determine their own targets. Because “most municipalities *and the Province itself* are treating the “minimum” targets as maximum requirements,” municipalities are getting away with setting their targets below the minimum (*ibid.*, p. ii; emphasis in original). And because the Growth Plan “does not directly allocate land for growth, but allocates population and employment forecasts to municipalities, which then translate those forecasts into land needs” growth is continuing to occur “outwards, at low densities, to the less urbanized parts of the region beyond the Greenbelt” (*ibid.* p. iii).

The Growth Plan fails to scale up the responsibilities for managing infrastructures necessary for the day-to-day functioning of municipalities and municipalities still largely depends on a growing property tax base to ensure that local social and technological needs are

met. Competition continues among municipalities outside of Toronto and the approval of development ensures both local and regional economic growth, all of which is directed towards the prosperity of the City of Toronto. The fact that municipalities have found ways to conform local policies in order to facilitate increases in tax and development revenue seems fitting in such a competitive environment. Competition has been further entrenched and codified through GGH urban and environmental land use policies. As one policy expert explained to me, the suburban sprawl and seemingly endless peripheral expansion occurring in the GGH is the result of a “systemic issue” (Personal Communication, 06/22/2016). Until the current system is changed, it is likely we will see more of the same.

#### *SIMCOE COUNTY: THE WILD WEST OF SPRAWL*

Within the GGH, Simcoe County functions as both a counterpart and an extension of the City of Toronto, undergoing intense growth pressures and land use transformation, appearing most often in the form of low-density sprawl. The county is one of the 21 upper and single-tier municipalities that comprise the GGH, and Innisfil is one of the 89 lower-tier municipalities of the region (Campsie & Allen, 2013). Despite being a historically agricultural area with prime farmland the County falls just north of the protective boundaries of the Greenbelt. The history of Simcoe dates back further than typically perceived ‘beginnings’ of settlement in Canada. Simcoe County was occupied for many centuries prior to the arrival of European colonialists, initially by the Hurons, the Haudenosaunee and eventually the Mississauga (Methot, 2012, np). However, like the rest of Canada, much of Simcoe County’s indigenous past has been erased through dispossession and displacement.



**Figure 3. Simcoe Sub-area, Greater Golden Horseshoe Region, Canada**

Source: Copyright, Queen's Printer for Ontario: Places to Grow Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2006.

The Hurons were an agricultural people and agriculture remains, to this day, an important economic industry for Simcoe County. Since colonization, the area has been shaped by forestry and resource extraction, and it has also historically been a tourist destination. The area's unique natural geography and seemingly 'non-urban', rural character has been a huge draw for settlement for both permanent residents and tourists. Wealthy urbanites have vacationed in Simcoe County dating back as far as 1895 (Craig, 1977, p. 20). Year-round tourism remains, to this day, an important and growing economy. As the City of Toronto has grown so has recreation and tourism in Simcoe County, with cottages and resort developments shaping land use along the shorelines of Lake Simcoe and Georgian Bay. The opening of the Highway 400 led to an increase in growth in Simcoe County and in 2002 the Ministry of Transportation produced a report which determined that "the popularity of tourism among the GTA's aging population and greater disposable income to spend on vacationing will result in travel increases of approximately 60% over the next 30 years, to Simcoe County and Muskoka" (Birnbaum, Nicolet & Taylor, 2004, p. 14). Moreover, the southern part of the county has seen an influx of full-time residents because of its proximity to the GTA. In 2004, the Neptis Foundation, an independent nonpartisan Canadian urban research institute, reported that "[m]any developers and planners promote South Simcoe as the most obvious location for urban expansion" and many of South Simcoe municipalities were being labelled as "GTA North" in real estate listings (Birnbaum et al., 2002, p. 42).

Almost half of the land designated for growth in the GGH is north of the Greenbelt; however, these northern areas are only expected to attract "one-third as many new residents and one-quarter as many jobs" as what lies south of the Greenbelt (Allen and Campsie, 2013, p.iii).

The Growth Plans' ratio for population growth to land use consumption is a recipe for sprawl and Simcoe County is undergoing changes that reflect highly uneven and weak planning policies. In response to the rapid rate of sprawl and development, local activists and environmentalists have nicknamed Simcoe County the 'wild west' of planning in Southern Ontario. Development approvals reveal that large-scale low-density development is indeed occurring at an unprecedented rate (Birnbaum et al., 2002), often with support from municipalities.

### *Growth Projections*

According to the Growth Plan, the Simcoe County is projected to grow by 50%—from 446, 063 in 2011 to 667,000 by 2031 (MOI, 2013). While 667,000 makes up a relatively small number of the 11.5 million inhabitants projected to live in the GGH region by 2031, it is significant when we consider that the county's growth rate is double that of the Province (MMAH, 2006, p.ii). Prior to the Growth Plan, Simcoe County was a "development hot spot" (Birnbaum *et al.*, 2004, p. 8) and it is still considered one despite regional policies. In addition to proposed highway expansions, changing demographics, and the cheaper cost of land, growth in Simcoe has been fueled by "[t]he perception of limited land supply south of the Oak Ridges Moraine" (Birnbaum *et al.*, 2004, p. 1). A misguided perception, this theory of 'limited land supply' has persisted over the years only to be blown out of proportion with the implementation of the Greenbelt. As mentioned earlier, while the establishment of the Greenbelt in 2005 was supposed to curb and contain growth in Toronto, leapfrogging is placing increasing pressures on rural Simcoe County. Despite perceived reasons for development and growth, the true reasons for extended sprawl can best be understood by looking at local town councils, the county structure and the provincial policies that govern the region.

## *County System*

The disproportionately large-scale developments occurring in Simcoe can be attributed to the way in which the County System and lower-tier municipalities in Simcoe County negotiate infrastructure development, a system which is unique to Simcoe County. This system has given way to the privatization of public infrastructures within the County and, as I will demonstrate further in this chapter, has also led to the the marketization of wastewater and sewage in Innisfil.

The county system is not the same across Ontario, and “[t]here is no legislated division of authority that applies to all counties: the package of services delivered by counties varies from one county to the next” (Birnbaum *et al.*, 2004, p. 16). In Simcoe County water, sewer and stormwater servicing is under the jurisdiction of the lower-tier municipalities. Because of this, there is questionable decision making, uneven allocations, and a lack of coherence across the county regarding infrastructure decision-making. Many local councils do not have the resources to understand the decisions being made and consequently approve developments that require infrastructures which cannot be adequately financed by the municipality (Policy Expert, Personal Communication, 06/22/2016). Because of a lack of financing, it is common within Simcoe County for developers to front-end infrastructure costs with the caveat of proposing large-scale developments in order to recoup costs (Birnbaum *et al.*, 2002). Often the case is that these large scale developments “cannot be accommodated within designated settlement areas” (*ibid.*, p.50), yet they still end up receiving approval from the local council.

### *“Simcoe Sub-Area” Growth Plan Amendment*

The province amended the Growth Plan policies to facilitate further growth and development in Simcoe County. This amendment was made in 2012 and applies to the “Simcoe Sub-Area” which includes Barrie and Orillia. The amendment was seen as a response to intense development pressures occurring in the region and the county’s failure to align their Official Plan with the province’s direction for growth (Malcolmson, 2012a). It followed the province’s 2009 “Simcoe Area: A Strategic Vision for Growth”, which was criticized by environmentalists for its pro-development tendencies. In the province’s Vision for Growth document, the guiding principles for growth in Simcoe were coded with language that combined growth and preservation in contradictory ways, facilitating further development while re-scripting the environment in economic terms.

While the amendment was considered a slight improvement to the Vision for Growth document, it still seemed to echo the “naturalized growth discourse” that exists within *Places to Grow* and the Greenbelt Plan (Macdonald and Keil, 2012, p. 128; Wekerle, Sandberg, Gilbert, Binstock, 2007). The aim of the amendment is said to create complete communities, “revitalize” urban centres, increase transit options, and “[b]uild better suburbs, curb urban sprawl and protect farmlands and greenspace.” (MOI, 2013). If by ‘build better suburbs’ the province meant ‘build more suburbs’ then the amendments can be seen as a success, because along with the already forecasted population increase of 50% the “Simcoe Sub-Area” amendment added an additional 20,000 people to the existing growth forecast for the area “on a first-come, first-serve basis” (ECO, 2012). The Environmental Commissioner of Ontario points to the troubling nature of this allocation, namely because it occurred before transportation and infrastructure studies were

completed (ECO, 2012). The Environmental Commissioner of Ontario criticizes the “Simcoe Sub-Area” amendment for failing to rectify the fact that the Growth Plan already “contains some policies of concern, such as directing growth to communities currently grappling with water supply and wastewater treatment issues” and continues to “[assign] population and employment growth to some smaller communities in the Simcoe Sub-area with limited water and wastewater capacity due to local groundwater or stream conditions” (ECO, 2012).

The amendment was considered a “win” for both developers and the County. (Malcolmson, 2012a). It established employment areas away from existing settlements in municipalities with no public transit infrastructure and situated within the already stressed Lake Simcoe watershed (ECO, 2012) and it grandfathered projects which exceeded projected population growth for the area (Malcolmson, 2012a). Environmentalist groups were outspoken in their criticism of the amendments for fueling sprawl and increasing vehicle dependency. Moreover, the Neptis Foundation warned that “[b]y treating Simcoe County as a special case, the Province may have set a precedent for other municipalities wanting special policies to be added to the Growth Plan. This approach could undermine the effectiveness of regional planning in the GGH” (Allen and Campsie, 2013, p. 73).

Evidently the cost of cheaper land and weak planning policies have come at a heavy price to the local ecologies and rural character of the communities in Simcoe County. Lake Simcoe is facing increasing stresses due to growth occurring in Simcoe County and across the GGH and the Simcoe Sub-Area growth plan amendments do little to remedy the pressures that urbanization is placing on a lake that suffers from high phosphorus levels, eroding shorelines, and depleted

fish populations. The rapid rate of sub/urbanization in Simcoe County not only threatens the habitats of many important species and endangers the ecological health of the region, but it also erodes the cultural and recreational value of Lake Simcoe, putting the economies that the lake supports and the livelihoods of many communities and individuals at risk. Innisfil is one example of where a municipality's economic dependency on the lake and the pro-development policies of the Growth Plan play out in uneven and contradictory ways.

### *INNISFIL: A GROWING RURAL SUBURB*



**Figure 4. Innisfil, Simcoe County, Ontario**

Source: Personal Photograph, June 2016

Innisfil is a small municipality in Simcoe County. The population is expected to grow by 69%, from 33,079 in 2011 (Statistics Canada), to 56,000 in 2031 (MOI, 2013). It situated on the western shore of Lake Simcoe and has been a cottaging destination since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Over

the years many of the cottages have transitioned into permanently occupied exurban homes, and the town has transformed into “full-blown, full municipal services, subdivisions and supporting retail” (Planning Expert, Personal Communication, 06/09/2016). The municipality’s geography is made up of approximately 30 kilometers of shoreline—very little of which is undeveloped and all of which is now protected by the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan—wooded areas, wetlands, and farmland. The built up areas are primarily low-density suburban, comprised of large scale single family homes, townhouse developments and shopping plazas. As of 2011, 93% of housing in Innisfil was detached homes, this is slightly higher than in Simcoe County, where 83% of dwellings are detached homes (Neptis GeoWeb, n/d).

There is a range of material circumstances and socio-economic pressures fueling development in Innisfil creating a unique and conflicting growth dynamic. Developers are taking advantage of cheaper land and the perceived demand for single family housing with close proximity to the City of Toronto. Simultaneously, as the case of Friday Harbour demonstrates, developers are looking to meet the supposed demands for secondary recreation homes for GTA residents seeking an ‘escape’ from the urban. In addition, the town of Innisfil is pushing for development as a way to grow the town’s tax base and assert the autonomy of Innisfil in the fight against potential annexation by Barrie (all in the name of preserving the ‘rural’ character of Innisfil). As a town politician put it when asked what was at risk in the event of annexation: “We’ve lost our identity. City of Barrie, Town of Innisfil. [We need to] keep our rural areas” (Personal Communication, 06/27/2016).

### *Urban or Rural?*

Planetary urbanization tells us that the designations, such as city, town, rural, urban, no longer accurately capture the breadth of socio-spatial processes at play in these geographies. Yet, these designations continue to exist in planning policy and they determine important differences in management and regulation of such spaces. While an outsider might find it difficult to distinguish between a subdivision in Barrie in comparison to a subdivision in Innisfil, there is a marked difference in the way in which planning policies regulate the subdivisions in the ‘City of Barrie’ versus those in the ‘Town of Innisfil’. The differences have real material, social, political and economic implications as they continue to define cultural, ideological and day-to-day realities of residents who produce and exist within these spaces. These differences are a central contradiction of land use planning in Southern Ontario as there is little cohesion between the ways in which local, county and provincial policies interpret and designate settlement areas, leaving many opportunities for open interpretation.

The Growth Plan distinguishes land for development based on local character and determines the intensity of development to occur by designating land as either ‘urban’ or ‘rural’. Unlike urban areas, rural areas are not serviced in the same way, lacking “transportation alternatives to the private automobile or well-developed water, sewer and other infrastructure” (GeoWeb, 2016, np). Within an ‘urban settlement’ there is a “Built Boundary” that determines where intensification and expansion can occur, while a ‘rural settlement’ does not have a definitive “Built Boundary” and is not meant to designate land for expansion (*ibid.*). Despite these limitations for ‘rural settlements’ there have been a few permitted to designate land for expansion (*ibid.*). This includes areas in Innisfil and in many ways contradicts the intention to

maintain the ‘rural’ character of these areas. This is further complicated by upper- and lower-tier policies, and “in some cases, local official plans identify some villages and hamlets as ‘urban settlements’”(ibid.). Meanwhile, Simcoe County’s Official Plan does not distinguish between urban and rural and instead refers to the same areas as “settlement areas” a vague designation that allows for an open interpretation, depending on which government you ask (ibid.).

### *Designating Settlement*

These vague and inconsistent designations are guiding land use planning decisions in Innisfil and undermining the Growth Plan’s aim to “direct growth to built-up areas where the capacity exists to accommodate the expected population and employment growth.” (MOI, 2013). With cottage developments having filled out Innisfil’s shoreline, growth is being directed to agricultural and low-density areas, creating new subdivisions and employment lands in areas that are relatively undeveloped and underserved.

The Growth Plan’s Simcoe Sub-Area amendment designates lands for residential and commercial development towards Alcona, Innisfil’s “Primary Settlement Area”. The *Town of Innisfil Official Plan, 2006* designates Alcona as an “Urban Settlement,” while to *Simcoe County Official Plan, 2008* designates Alcona as a “Settlement Area”. Alcona is a low-density suburban area that sits adjacent to Lake Simcoe. Single-family homes and townhouses are complemented with shopping plazas and big box stores. According to a local town official, “Alconca is going to explode in the next year in terms of development” (Personal Communication, 06/27/2016). However, this explosion will continue to occur in a sprawling and low-density fashion, and will not so much build-up the area as it will build it out.

The town of Innisfil has no public transportation and the automobile is the primary form of transit comprising 92% of transit use in 2011 (Netpis GeoWeb, nd). Recently, the province announced a GO Transit station in the area of Alcona as part of the the transportation agency's Metrolinx GO Regional Express Rail (MOT, 2016). This is necessary regional transit relief for an area that is growing rapidly. Most notably, it will relieve Alcona's 'Sleeping Lion' subdivision that was approved in 2014 to accommodate 1,758 homes. The Sleeping Lion subdivision was approved years before there was any certainty regarding the approval of the GO. The fact that adequate and regional transit plans were not necessary for the approval of such a large-scale development points to the loose servicing requirements that development approvals in a "Primary Settlement Area" must meet. Moreover, it will do nothing to relieve local transit dependency on the automobile.

#### *Corporatizing Services to Facilitate Growth*

'Innisfil Heights' is agricultural land that has been designated as a "Strategic Settlement Employment Area" in the Growth Plan (MOI, 2013). The growth of Innisfil Heights is considered an opportunity for the town to transform from bedroom community to "more vibrant and sustainable municipality" (Town of Innisfil, n/p). The area is situated on Highway 400, connecting Innisfil south to the GTA and north to the City of Barrie. The area is meant to accommodate 13,000 jobs yet it remains undeveloped because there is not adequate wastewater and sewage services. Moreover, there are no alternative transportation services.

In efforts to address the ongoing issue of water and wastewater in regards to development, the town recently created InnServices Utilities Inc. ('InnServices'), a municipal corporation that has been set up to deliver water and wastewater across Innisfil and to other municipalities through financing and building (Town of Innisfil, n/p). InnServices owns “water and wastewater assets, including two water pollution control plants, one surface water treatment plant, municipal wells and the associated collection and distribution systems to InnServices” (*ibid.*).

InnServices represents the corporatization of local public services, following global trends in the shift towards privatization and representing an “organizational and/or institutional shift” away from the state and towards the market (Bakker, 2003, p. 40). In Innisfil, this is a result of the county structure, where it is the lower-tier municipality’s responsibility to manage and finance wastewater and sewage infrastructure, despite a lack resources and expertise at the local level. As one policy expert put it:

I think the biggest thing is that the local municipalities have no real resources to understand the fiscal implications of these big investments around water and wastewater. Long term investments around water and wastewater. And the local municipalities ability to pay them off. I think that’s the biggest issue up there, is the issue of capacity at the local level to really get their head around, and their financial accounting around these developments [...] Not to mention that you don’t understand the impact of all of these water and wastewater projects on the local environment up there. That’s the other thing that county is able to do that the local municipalities can’t, is really get a cumulative understanding of the larger – the development as a whole across the area. (Personal Communication, 07/22/2016)

Corporatization works around the existing legislation. Because it is a municipal services corporation, InnServices can borrow more debt than the Town of Innisfil, which is limited in its borrowing capabilities according to regulations in the *Ontario Municipal Act*. Through public

and private cooperation, InnServices provides financing necessary for infrastructures necessary for growth and development. A local town official explained that “we are partnering with the County of Simcoe who are providing short-term financing to kick-start our infrastructure needs and we are working with the development community to find ways to fund the rest through development charges or front-end financing” (Personal Communication, 06/272016).

Corporatization is perceived as a necessary method to secure the financing required in order to extend water and wastewater services out to Innisfil Heights, which many believe to be necessary for the overall growth of Innisfil. In addition, it is considered an important shield against annexation by the City of Barrie (Vanderlinde, 2015). The downloading of wastewater and infrastructure responsibilities onto lower-tier municipalities in Simcoe County has led to the corporatization of public services, which will enable further expansion of capitalist sub/urbanization across this rural community.

### *Annexation Wars*

The annexation ‘battle’ between Innisfil and Barrie has been going on since the 1970s and is a significant factor in shaping the pro-growth mentality that exists within Innisfil. As Barrie continues to grow so does the threat of annexation. Barrie is recognized as “an anchor node of the Simcoe area” in the Growth Plan (MOI, 2013). In order to accommodate growth forecasts, Barrie will require new lands for further development and it has previously undergone boundary adjustments that have implicated Innisfil. Between 1954 and 1987 land was annexed from Barrie’s surrounding municipalities nine times, four of which involved Innisfil (MAH, 2009, p. 28). There was a *Barrie-Innisfil Annexation Act* signed in 1981 which stated that

“Barrie wouldn’t pursue future annexations until 2012 unless Innisfil agreed” (Gombu, 2007, np). Despite this, in 2010 Barrie annexed land from Innisfil. As a result, some have characterized the current development patterns in the area as a ‘race’ between the municipalities (Vanderlinde, 2015). This neoliberal inter-city competition has been codified through the ways in which growth plan policies provide for growth in these underserviced areas. The threat of losing more lands to Barrie propels a ‘use it or lose it’ mentality in regards to developing lands in Innisfil. As mentioned earlier, the threat of annexation is a threat of losing the ‘rural’ character of Innisfil to the ‘urban’ character of Barrie. Ironically, the response has been to approve large-scale developments and infrastructure in Innisfil, projects which propel paving over rural and agricultural lands.

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter I have demonstrated how extended urbanization from Toronto has renegotiated the city and its surrounding geographies into a regional ‘spatial imaginary’ that functions to encase the uneven sub/urban development processes into a unified and regulated land mass, as if somehow containing the rapid growth that has been in effect in the region for over a decade. The neoliberal economic and political order that is enabled by local and provincial policies and exploited by speculators and developers has resulted in the rampant sub/urbanization of Simcoe County. This has devastating and far-reaching social and ecological impacts. This is codified through the policies that regulate planning in Simcoe County, or rather, in the case of the Greenbelt: policies that do not regulate Simcoe County. The following chapter will look at the role that tourism and the local cottage economy has played in shaping land use patterns and the sub/urban character of Innisfil.

## CHAPTER 3

### 'MUSKOKA-CHAIR' THEORIZING

Innisfil is an area where land use has been shaped by cottaging. In order to understand the socio-spatial relations of this area, it is helpful to understand the changing nature of secondary, or recreational, property ownership in Southern Ontario. This requires inquiry into the ways in which the tourism industry shapes land use, as well as an understanding of the political economy of the Ontario's cottage industry.

#### *TOURIST URBANIZATION*

Tourism is a growing industry locally and globally and is widely accepted as a form of economic development for urban and rural areas alike. Tourism is an industry that is compatible with competitive city rhetoric, attracting investment and projecting cities onto the 'world stage'. This is resulting in exclusive forms of development that cater to leisure desires of outsiders and wealthy elites and is exacerbated by the growing divide between socio-economic classes and the increasingly precarious state of work.

Across the GGH tourism is considered a form of economic development that attracts global capital and increases local economic competition. Subsequently, 'tourism' and 'recreation' have been scripted into land use planning policies in the GGH. This is playing out in various ways. It is occurring on Toronto's downtown waterfront, where the "tradition of the mega-project" is being repurposed as a re-development strategy catering to locals as the "ultimate in mixed-use" and to outsiders for its tourist amenities and investment potential (Lehrer & Laidley, 2009, p. 786). It is also occurring in the more rural parts of the GGH where

the shift from “a productivist to a consumptionist landscape” is resulting in the gentrification of Ontario’s countryside (Sandberg & Wekerle, 2009, p. 43).

As Darling points out: “nature became a potential place for play when it ceased to be a necessary place to work for large portions of the population” (Darling, 2006, p.86). However, present day socio-cultural and technological changes are transforming the nature of work and leisure. Among the privileged classes labour and productivity is no longer an entirely fixed spatial reality. Free time, which has long been distributed unequally (Wilson, 1980, p. 22), is increasingly being administered in uneven ways. Neoliberal urbanism is resulting in the privatization and stratification of space in the form of ‘live/work/play’ developments aimed at meeting the new blurred and overlapping demands of work and leisure. Richard Florida’s ‘creative classes’ are haunted by their work, which follows them everywhere “thanks to smart phones and laptops” (2012, np). These ‘creative classes’ are the benefactors of exclusive ‘live/work/play’ spaces, which are now extending across the GGH region where we find “nature as a source of leisure” (Gandy, 2006, p. 64).

This is resulting in new land use conflicts and has significant socio-ecological implications. The tourist economy is an important factor in the extended urbanization of the GGH and it is leveraging local ecologies in the name of capitalist accumulation. This is resulting in new consumer subjectivities emerging in traditionally rural areas with ecological value. As such, conceptions of ‘nature,’ are being renegotiated to align with tourist and recreation goals of the local municipalities. This is resulting in the erosion of the very natural landscapes that are being sought. As a local planning expert pointed out in Innisfil: “we do have a huge demand for boat storage, which is becoming a major political issue in town...and a planning issue of course. People trying to re-zone agricultural lands for boats” (Personal Communication, 06/09/2016).

## *THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ONTARIO'S COTTAGE COUNTRY*

The political economy of the cottage industry is driven by property ownership, the shifting value of the dollar, and changing demographics and is resulting in uneven urban development within the Lake Simcoe watershed. We are often directed further north to the Muskokas and further east to the Kawarthas when we envision Ontario's idyllic 'cottage country'. Yet, Simcoe County has historically been considered a cottager's destination and for many it still is. As Luka points out, 'cottage country' is "an extensive if ambiguously defined territory," it is a "collage of natural landforms, settlement patterns, social practice, and cultural narratives of 'nature'" and it links the Canadian hinterland to "its contemporary urban realities and as such is part of the rural-urban fringe" (2010, p. 199). While cottage areas may evoke a sense of dislocation from city life projecting cultural representations of 'nature' and the Canadian wild—today almost instantly through technologies and social media—the reality for many cottagers is that day-to-day (or weekend-to-weekend/holiday-to-holiday) life in these places differs little from suburbanisms experienced elsewhere in the GGH.

Ontario's cottage economy has fluctuated over the years, with new growth occurring in the postwar years followed by a dip in the 1970s "with the energy crisis and a lack of waterfront land within easy traveling distance of major urban centres" (Luka, 2010, pp. 202-204). With highway extensions and the possibility of 'winterizing' what were traditionally used as summer homes, many of these secondary homes became permanent residences (*ibid.* p. 204). As Luka points out: "in areas close to Toronto, notably Lake Simcoe and the westernmost Kawartha Lakes, corporate developer-built and evocatively-named 'suburban' subdivisions of permanent housing began to appear" and there was a "renaissance of cottage life" in the 1980s, which was in effect an 'echo' of the real estate boom occurring in Toronto (*ibid.*), a process which we are seeing again today.

The 1980s and 1990s saw an increased demand for large year-round housing in exurban regions, as middle classes began “to ‘move to the country’ as they approached retirement” (*ibid.*).

Architecturally, this era is identifiable as the “McMansion phenomenon” characterized by large oversized villas “made to dominate the landscape instead of blending into it” (*ibid.*). As a result, in 2004 second home real estate exceeded the cost of an average home in Toronto (*ibid.*) and current analysis of national trends suggests that recreational housing sales are still growing, with approximately ten percent of investment coming from foreign buyers (LePage, 2016, p. 4).

Cottage country is now, like other real estate economies, a place for global capital investment and a recent real estate report states that there is an increased global interest in Canadas recreation property market driven by the dropping loonie (Siekierska, 2016).

### *COTTAGE CONDO-COUNTRY*

It appears safe to assume that “growth in year-round dwellings undermines the appeal of the second-home (leisure) setting” (Luka, 2010, p. 212), however this is not the case.

Despite the increase in

permanent residents in traditional cottaging areas, there remains a considerable increase in second home and recreation developments in Southern Ontario. Because of a ‘fixed supply’ of waterfront, the ‘McMansion’ era has been replaced with new forms of secondary and recreational housing. These new cottages are not like the rustic and remote cottages of past eras



**Figure 5. ‘Cottage-Condo’ Development, Friday Harbour Resort Rendering**  
Source: Copyright Friday Harbour Inc., 2016

but rather they are more akin to large-scale condo, subdivision and townhouse developments—the primary difference being that they are intended for fractional or temporary residence.

These are often high-end dwellings with all the comforts of an urban home. Many are approved on the basis that they are not permanent settlements and they do not require the same servicing as a full-year settlement, such is the case of Friday Harbour. Developers contend that the demand for these smaller, more compact ‘cottage’ developments which are occupied on a fractional or timeshare basis is driven by an aging and retiring baby boomer population seeking to escape the city and looking to downsize.

#### *A New Summer Rite?*

Condominiums “contribut[e] to a political and cultural environment that is propagating home ownership” (Lehrer, Keil & Kipfer, 2010 p. 88). Consequently, condos “are used, without any alternatives, as a response to the increased need for housing” (*ibid.*, p. 88). This appears to be what is happening in Ontario’s ‘cottage country’ where growing densities and sprawling landscapes appear to be fueling middle and upper-class desires to retreat to decidedly less-urban geographies. Friday Harbour is

not the only example of these new cottage-condo

developments. In 2014, the

Toronto Star published an

article entitled: “Cottage

condos north a new summer



**Figure 6. Golf Course Billboard, Friday Harbour Development Site**

Source: Personal Photograph, February 2016

rite” (Hanes, 2014). The subheading reads: “Rural escape takes an urban twist” and the article profiles a day in the life of ‘cottage-condo’ owners in three new northern developments including Friday Harbour, TreeTops, in the municipality of Huntsville, and Wyldewood Cove, in the municipality of Collingwood. The article goes on to say: “Owners of condos and townhouses at Friday Harbour will be able to grab a latte, shop for clothes, gifts and gourmet foods, or meet friends for dinner or drinks within steps of their homes, as well as enjoy swimming, boating, canoeing and hiking” (Hanes, 2014). Visitors to TreeTops will find a “woody setting” which “is peaceful and private for those who relish gaining some distance from a busy world—but not getting too far away” (*ibid.*).

Notably, all of these developments offer some kind of ecological benefit: TreeTops operates on Geothermal heat, Wyldewood has a protected nature preserve (*ibid.*), and one among many of Friday



**Figure 7. Golf Course Billboard, Friday Harbour Development Site**  
Source: Personal Photograph, February 2016

Harbour’s claims to sustainability is

that that golf course will clean up Lake Simcoe by using stormwater as irrigation. These ecological modernization strategies are an important function of this emerging ‘cottage-condo’ industry and this is something I will examine in more detail in chapter five.

In some respects, these large-scale developments bear a striking resemblance to new mega-projects, which Lehrer and Laidley argue are developed to appeal to “those who are most desired” in support of “inter-urban global competitiveness” (2009, pp. 800-801). Mega-projects

were traditionally “used for encouraging major capital investment in the built environment” historically occurring in the form of hydro-electric damns or freeways (2009, p. 787). Now they more commonly occur as large-scale and contained master planned developments “with space for housing, retail, cultural institutions, recreation and a plethora of other features” (*ibid.*, p. 799). These new cottage-condo mega-resorts meet competitive city agendas on a local and global scale. By appealing to the ‘live/work/play’ demands of the new urban bourgeoisie and providing new opportunities for global investment, these cottage-condo mega-resorts operate as investment in the built environment in these otherwise rural areas. This fits neatly into the neoliberal urbanism shaping the broader GGH. The province of Ontario recently proposed to issue “a tender to study the possibility of setting up “vacation villages” across Ontario” (Spurr, 2016), which suggests that there may be more of these large-scale ‘cottage-condo’ resort developments in the future.

### *Conclusion*

At its present state, ‘cottage-country’ across the GGH is shifting towards ‘cottage-condo-country’. These developments are not occurring without consequence. Meeting these new leisure desires is increasingly resulting in “issues of sustainability pertaining to water quality, habitat loss, biodiversity and carrying capacity” and new sites of “privilege, exclusivity, and perhaps misallocated resources” (Luka, 2010, p. 212-213). The following two chapters will examine the case of Friday Harbour more closely in order to reveal the ways in which these new trends in tourism and cottage development are re-defining the socio-spatial dynamics of the GGH in increasingly privatized, commodified and uneven ways.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **BIG BAY POINT**

Despite the establishment of provincial policies intended to curb sprawl and protect the natural environment, the suburbanization of Ontario's countryside continues. Friday Harbour presents an extreme example of just how 'wild' planning is in Simcoe County. What makes this development such a provocative case study is the controversial story of its approval and the struggle undergone by environmentalists, local ratepayers, and First Nations in opposing it. In telling this story this chapter aims to demonstrate how land use planning decisions are made in Southern Ontario.

Through an overview of the appeals at the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB), I will demonstrate the highly uneven and political nature of development processes shaping the GGH. This chapter will begin with an overview of the development proposal, public opposition, the ensuing SLAPP suits, the appeals made to the OMB, other attempts at opposition, and the ultimate approval of the development. I will finish with an analysis of where the development fits into the local, county and provincial policies now that it has been approved. During this period the development was called Big Bay Point Resort and, for the purpose of clarity, I will refer to it as Big Bay Point in this chapter. The developer is Geranium Corporation, which the court documents also refer as Kimvar. I will refer to the developer as Kimvar and Geranium interchangeably.

## *THE BATTLE OF BIG BAY POINT*



**Figure 8. Aerial View of Big Bay Point/Friday Harbour Development Site**

Source: Copyright Friday Harbour Inc., 2016

Big Bay Point Resort—now rebranded as Friday Harbour Resort—is an all-seasons luxury resort that is being marketed as the ‘Hamptons of Toronto’ with the bold claim that it will actually improve the water quality of Lake Simcoe. It is a \$1.5 billion, 600-acre mega-resort on a site comprised of agricultural land, greenfields, including woodlands and a wetland, and a small abandoned 375-slip marina. In its approved state this new development includes 1600 condos, 400 hotel rooms, an 18-hole golf course, 200 acres of preserved woodlands, a boardwalk, a 1000-slip marina, and a private lakeside club. The development is an enormous undertaking and is unlike anything else in the small suburban-rural town of Innisfil. In order to accommodate what will be one of the biggest inland marinas in North America, the developers have expanded the abandoned marina by digging a 30-acres hole in the shoreline. The development is lauded by Geranium developer, Earl Rumm, a self-identified ‘long-time cottager’ in the area, as an opportunity to “put Innisfil on the map” (Vanderlinde, 2012). Moreover, it has been welcomed by the town as an economic opportunity for Innisfil, as well as a new walkable neighbourhood in this otherwise rural town where families can go get ice cream or see a movie (Local Official,

Personal Communication, 06/27/2016). Of course, in order to get there many residents will have to drive.

The road to approval was long and contentious. Big Bay Point resort was originally proposed in 1999, revised by the developer in 2002, 2005 and 2007 (OMB, 2007b, p. 7). Initially it was proposed to include “between 3,200 and 3,500 residential units, an 18-hole golf course, three theatres, and a Venice-inspired marina” and it was estimated that the development would bring between 6,400 to 8,750 residents to the area (Birnbaum et al., 2004, p. 32). Amendments were made to the proposal over the course of almost a decade through consultation and negotiation with the town, county, province and local residents. It was initially marketed as a “world-class adult-lifestyle resort” and the development was seen as a response to market demands for master-planned communities catering to a small but growing contingent of baby boomers looking to retire and spend their senior years as snowbirds (Birnbaum et al., 2004, p. 31). It has since been altered to appear as a more family-friendly resort, however still appears to exclusively cater to an older, wealthier crowd with recreation facilities such as the ‘lakeside club’ or the private beach admissible only through membership.

The development was controversial from the beginning and the application, approval, and ongoing construction process have been highly publicized. The county and the province were not initially on board with the development and there were some very vocal opponents in the public realm. Media attention from the *Toronto Star*, the *Globe and Mail*, the *Barrie Examiner* and other local news outlets has picked up on the polarizing views of the development, depicting it, on one hand, as a boon to the economy and, on the other, a threat to the ecology of the lake and

character of the community. A town planning and development consultation meeting held in Innisfil in May of 2003 was reported in nearby Huntsville local paper the *Huntsville Forester* as having a “significant police presence” including “[s]everal uniformed officers, and private security,” where “[m]ore than 100 other hopeful attendees were turned away when the permitted occupancy of the hall was reached,” with many of those inside wearing “green caps, or hats emblazoned with the slogan, “Yes! I support the Big Bay Point!” (2003).

The opposition to the development consisted of a neighbourhood association and environmentalists concerned about impacts of such a large scale development on Lake Simcoe and the nearby communities and they fought in appealing the development at the OMB. Some of the earliest opponents were a ratepayers group called Innisfil District Association (IDA). The IDA is comprised of residents of Big Bay Point, a predominately wealthy and middle-class shoreline neighbourhood. This is a historic cottage community with a mix of old cottages and new mansions, many occupied on a year-round basis with some still acting as secondary homes. Environmental groups who became involved in opposing Big Bay Point included Environmental Defence, Ontario Nature and the Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition. These groups formed together with approximately forty other local groups to form “Campaign Lake Simcoe” with the aim of raising awareness about development occurring all around Lake Simcoe and they were active in the push towards enacting the *Lake Simcoe Protection Act*. The Huron-Wendat Nation were also stakeholders in the development area where there were reported archeological findings of interest to their Nation. The Huron-Wendat Nation’s opposition to the development was an opposition to the process of consultation, or rather, lack thereof. Their status of interest was never acknowledged by the the developer, the OMB, the province, county or the town.

### *The OMB Appeals*

The OMB is an administrative tribunal that hears land use planning appeals, providing decisions on development matters by ensuring that land use legislation and policy requirements are met. The OMB has been described as a “bureaucratic apparatus at arm’s length from the government,” that “monitors and sanctions the compliance of lower-level jurisdictions with the provincial plans” and “creates a structured coherence of accumulation objectives, state action and neoliberal governmentalities at the level of societal actors” (Keil and Addie, 2015, pp. 411-412). It does so, in part, by weighing the opinions of experts, a system that proves to be inequitable (Moore, 2013).

Appeals at the OMB can be lengthy and costly, and these costs impact parties in disproportionate ways. In regards to the City of Toronto, Moore (2013) discusses the way in which OMB appeals often work in favor of developers over that of neighbourhood associations. Lack of resources among neighbourhood associations typically pales in comparison to a developer’s ability to hire experts, or to a municipality’s existing staff experts. This inequity in the system extends across Ontario and is heightened when municipalities are in support of development. Moore (2013) stresses the role of the municipality in determining outcomes of an appeal. In the case of Toronto, “[w]ithout the support of council, neighbourhood associations must fight with limited resources against the City (and often City Planning) and wealthy developers” (2013, p. 179). The same dynamics hold true in municipalities across the GGH, providing opportunities to shift the balance of powers at OMB hearings in favour of advancing an agenda of growth and unimpeded capital accumulation.

The parties present at the Big Bay Point OMB proceedings, referred to in the decision as the “opponents”, consisted of the Innisfil District Association (‘IDA’), and two companies which own property in Big Bay Point: Nextnine Limited (‘Nextnine’) and 2025890 Ontario Inc. (the ‘company’). The ‘proponents’ included the developer Kimvar, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Town of Innisfil, the County of Simcoe, Sandycove Acres Home Owners Association, and the Residents of Innisfil Association. There were three important hearings at the OMB in relation to the controversial story of Big Bay Point’s approval. Firstly, the opponents filed a motion to adjourn the hearing and a notice of constitutional question. Following this was the hearing to approve official plan amendments, a comprehensive zoning-by-law amendment and approval of the project draft plan of subdivision, all of which were necessary in order for the development to proceed. The final hearing of relevance was in regards to costs sought on behalf of Kimvar against the opponents of the development. Prehearings for the initial decision started in 2005, and the final decision was not made until 2009. Initially, the province and the county were opposed to the development. However, on the eve of the OMB hearings, a Memorandum of Agreement was signed by all parties, except for the three opposing parties, the IDA, Nextnine and the company. Due to the memorandum, the proponents coordinated efforts in favor of the development’s approval.

#### *A Motion to Adjourn*

Prior to the Big Bay Point appeal hearing, the IDA, Nextnine and the company brought a motion to adjourn the proceedings as well as a notice of constitutional question to the OMB. The motion to adjourn was ultimately denied. The OMB also refused to consider the constitutional issue on the basis of a procedural defect in the provision of the notice.

### *Anticipating Lake Simcoe Protections*

There were several reasons why the opponents were requesting a motion to adjourn. Firstly, they argued that the proceedings were premature because there were significant environmental approvals required at the provincial and federal level, as well as forthcoming provincial legislation and policy for Lake Simcoe, all of which could potentially deny approval for the development. The protection of Lake Simcoe had become an election issue for the upcoming 2007 provincial election in the fall. This had both Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty and Conservative Opposition leader John Tory vying for support from Lake Simcoe advocates, and each candidate had announced that they would enact protections for Lake Simcoe (Mckim & Cruickshank, 2007). Many of the opponents to the development were active in pushing for advancing the protection of the lake and their hope was that if the Ontario Liberals were re-elected they would enact policies and legislation that would nullify the Big Bay Point Resort.

The OMB determined that they could not grant an adjournment of the appeal proceedings on the basis that future policies and legislation might impact the development. Moreover, because the Province, a party present in the hearings, made no comment on pending legislation or policies but instead had recently signed a Memorandum of Agreement, the OMB determined there was reason to believe that the Big Bay Point development would be grandfathered in under any new policies that would govern Lake Simcoe. Which turned out to be the case.

As it were, there were multiple opportunities for the province to step in, yet they remained silent. Not only does this call into question the role of the province in this process, but it also raises questions around the practice of ‘grandfathering’. Namely, why is grandfathering

development admissible by the province when it so clearly undermines the aims and principles of the policies being established in efforts to curb the uneven and destructive forms of development shaping the GGH?

### *SLAPped*

The second argument advanced for granting the adjournment was the ongoing SLAPP litigation. During the consultation process Geranium filed nine lawsuits against individuals opposed to the development and many agreed these lawsuits were SLAPP. The Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General defines SLAPP as “a lawsuit started against one or more people or groups who speak out or take a position on an issue of public interest” (MAG, 2016). The purpose of these lawsuits “is to silence critics by redirecting their energy and finances into defending a lawsuit and away from their original public criticism” as well as to “act as a warning to other potential critics” thereby discouraging public debate and criticism (MAG, 2016).

The cost of damages against Big Bay Point opponents equated to approximately \$100 million dollars. After the development received approval all the cases were either dismissed or withdrawn (ED 2012, p. 3). The developer maintained that the lawsuits were not SLAPP in nature but instead a legitimate response to libelous speech (*ibid.*). The opponents of the development argued that community members associated with the opposition were intimidated by the developer and fearful of speaking out in opposition. The OMB rejected this argument on the basis that it lacked evidence to support it, finding that it is not enough to just say you are intimidated (2007a). Surprisingly, the fact that nine vocal and opposing individuals were being sued by the developer was not considered evidence in the eyes of the OMB. The reasons

provided by the OMB ignore the purposes of the *Planning Act, 1990*, set out in section 1.1, which include “to provide for planning processes that are fair by making them open, accessible, timely and efficient” and the “to encourage co-operation and co-ordination among various interests.” While the province has since enacted anti-SLAPP legislation—with Ontario Bill 52 *Protection of Public Participation Act* receiving royal assent in 2015—,at the time of the Big Bay Point appeals the OMB did not consider the SLAPPs in question to be a barrier to the public participation process, nor did they consider the impacts of these lawsuits on the appeal process to be of any significance. Nevertheless, upon speaking to those implicated in these lawsuits it is obvious that the developer’s actions have left deep scars, so much so that one individual who I reached out to for an interview accused me of being a ‘spy’ for Geranium developer Earl Rumm.

### *Archaeological Findings*

The final argument advanced was that there was an ongoing archeological study in the proposed development area during which First Nations cultural artifacts were found, although there was no contact or consultation by the developer or by the public agencies with First Nations. Despite consulting with “a broad range of stakeholders about the development, including Canada Post and Rogers Cable” the Huron-Wendat Nation had received no notification of this development or the findings on the site (ED, 2007). The OMB dismissed this and argued that all relevant First Nations communities were consulted according to the *Planning Act* Regulations (O.Reg 543/06) which state that consultation must occur with:

The chief of every First Nation council, if the First Nation is located on a reserve any part of which is within one kilometres of the area to which the proposed official plan or plan amendment would apply.

The Huron-Wendat Nation are former residents of the Big Bay Point area and are now located in Wendake Quebec, outside of the one kilometre radius. However, “thousands of ancestral Huron cultural heritage and sacred sites lie in the path of development” (ED, 2007). The OMB contended that relevant archaeological studies had been publicized since 2004 but that “no First Nation [had] ever expressed an interest with respect to the development lands in particular” (2007a, p. 13). The fact that Huron-Wendat representative Luc-Lainé was there on behalf of the Nation did not qualify as an “expression” of interest to the OMB. Moreover, while it is well known that reserve borders do “not necessarily encompass all of the First Nations’ traditional territory, and so their Aboriginal rights [are] extended beyond the borders of reserves,” (Fraser & Viswanathan, 2013, p. 4), planning regulations do not reflect this and instead operate in contravention of Aboriginal rights.

#### *Notice of Constitutional Question*

The Notice of Constitutional Question was raised in relation to the duty to consult. The opponents brought a challenge to the constitutionality of the regulations as they relate to the duty to consult, pointing to the prohibitive nature of O.Reg 543/06 in the *Planning Act*. The constitutionality of these regulations was never addressed because the notice was not effected according to the OMB’s guidelines. As such, the question remains as to whether the regulation is constitutionally compliant. The opponents alternatively argued that the OMB had the legal jurisdiction to read the regulations more broadly, in a way that would include the interests of First Nations who fell outside of the 1 kilometre radius. The OMB rejected this invitation, and instead employed a strict ‘plain language’ interpretation of the regulations (OMB, August 2007, p. 15).

The outdated and colonial nature of this regulation is demonstrative of an exclusionary land use planning process. As Fraser & Viswanathan state, while “the court maintains that a duty to consult does not extend to municipalities...there are voices within the legal field arguing that the situation is far from clear” (2013, p. 9). In maintaining a very narrow interpretation of the regulation, the OMB continues the function of the colonial state, perpetuating violent histories of dispossession and displacement and contributing to the erasure of indigenous interests from land use decision-making processes.

### *THE APPROVAL OF BIG BAY POINT*

Four months later, in December 2007, the OMB reconvened to hear appeals regarding zoning by-laws and planning policy changes necessary for the approval of Big Bay Point Resort. There were five issues brought to the OMB in regards to the approval of Big Bay Point: whether or not Big Bay Point constituted a resort or a settlement, if the development met public transit requirements, potential environmental impacts of the development, was approval premature and did the development represent “good planning”. In its decision, the OMB largely accepted the developer’s evidence and found the opponents did not have sufficient or accurate evidence and that their expert witnesses were not qualified (OMB, 2007). As Moore (2013) has pointed out, this is not unexpected when the costs of expert witnesses are taken into consideration. The opposition was outnumbered by the province, county, town, and developer and it does not come as a surprise that they were unsuccessful.

Perhaps the most contentious issue was whether or not the development was a resort or settlement, which presents potential future issues in regards to regulating resorts. The opposition argued that the development was not a resort but rather, a residential settlement with ‘resort

characteristics' and because it fell outside of a designated 'settlement area' it could not be approved without conducting adequate growth management studies. Moreover, they argued that the Official Plans of the town and county did not provide for recreational resorts and the population of the resort had not been accounted for in the provincial Growth Plan. The proponents responded by arguing that by instituting a 300-day per year limit on occupancy, the development would remain a resort. Because of this 300-day occupancy limit, a number that no local town official or planning expert seem to know the origin of (Personal Communications, 05/18/2016; 06/09/2016; 06/27/2016,), the proponents argued that meeting provincial growth plan population forecasts was not necessary. In effect, they argued that the development was not considered 'growth'. The OMB agreed with this rationale and determined that "land requirements for resorts cannot be calculated in the way that permanent residential development can be forecast...simply because a resort is not a permanent settlement and merely because the two uses share common characteristics, they are not the same land use" (2007b, p. 12). Accordingly, it is this occupancy limit that provided a loophole in the growth plan policies necessary for the approval of Big Bay Point Resort.

The Board determined that the public transit needs of the development were met through the developments proposed New Urbanist design, which contained "an element of public transit within its boundaries and encourages walking, hiking and golfing, not driving" (2007b, p.14). Moreover, the Board agreed with the developer's argument that because resorts typically rely on private motor vehicle they do not have the same public transit requirements as a full-time settlement. This ruling does not come entirely as a surprise in a rural town that has no public transit and heavily relies on private automobile for transportation. As the earlier example of the Sleeping Lion subdivision in Alcona demonstrates, a lack of transit is not an impediment to large

scale development Innisfil. To sweeten the pot, and representing yet another example of the privatization of public services in a neoliberal sub/urban context, Big Bay Point developers proposed the possibility of private shuttles, which was to the satisfaction of the OMB. These private shuttles are now incorporated in the marketing scheme of the development and the developer boasts a 90-minute GO train ride from downtown Toronto's Union Station to the City of Barrie, where a private shuttle service will pick up visitors for free.

Despite the fact that 2000 units were proposed for lands outside of the designated settlement area, or that digging a 30-acre hole was proposed in order to accommodate a 1000-slip boat marina, the OMB determined that the environment would not face further hardship by the Big Bay Point development. The Board accepted the developer's evidence over the opponents in regards to the ecological value of the existing geographies and sided with the developer's claims that Big Bay Point Resort would actually improve the health of the lake. Guided by a normative perception of what constitutes nature and what qualifies as ecologies worth protecting, the proponents evidence argued that while the golf course will be located on agricultural lands, these are not *prime* agricultural lands. In addition, the woodlands and the wetlands are not considered *provincially* significant, the 'environmental protection area' would suffice in protecting forest cover and no adequate evidence existed that supported the idea that local species might be affected by the necessary removal of forest cover. Despite the growth and naturalization that had occurred over the years, the abandoned marina that sat on the site was considered a blight to the shoreline, allowing the developer to argue that by dredging up and expanding the old marina they would be able to increase fish habitat, reduce phosphorus loadings and improve the overall water quality and amenity value of the Lake (OMB, 2007b, p. 18).

A notable argument made by the OMB was that there were no “additional conditions of approval offered by the Opponents as alternative relief” (OMB, 2007b, p. 20) in regards to the environmental impact of the development. This suggests that in the eyes of the Board, proposing *some* form of development would be more convincing than no development at all. This adoption of a growth mentality at the level of the OMB demonstrates the pervasiveness of the capitalist growth discourse at all levels of decision-making in regards to land use planning in Southern Ontario.

### *Other Attempts at Opposition*

Appealing the development at the OMB level was not the only avenue for opposition. However, in a novel move, the developer pursued the lawyers of the opponents for \$3.2 million dollars in costs associated with the OMB hearings, thereby greatly impacted the oppositions ability to appeal the development at other levels. Because the IDA and their lawyers were being pursued for costs *after* the approval of the development this does not immediately appear to be a SLAPP. However, the developer’s message was clear and a chill effect was felt across the county. In particular, a group of citizens opposing a development proposed by a subsidiary of Geranium Corporation in another Simcoe municipality reportedly softened their position against the development after they found out that Geranium was seeking costs from the Big Bay Point opponents (Watt, 2008). This particular development was approved.

Nevertheless, the opponents continued to look for alternative ways to stop the development. With the *Lake Simcoe Protection Plan* in the proposal phase, opponents participated in public consultations regarding these new policies and pushed for stringent

regulations that would restrict Big Bay Point Resort from being developed. However, as previously mentioned, the development was grandfathered in and was able to evade the policies of the *Lake Simcoe Protection Plan*.

In addition, Environmental Defence, the IDA and other supporters of Campaign Lake Simcoe vocally opposed the developer in seeking necessary permits from the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority (LSRCA). The permits in question were required in order to clear trees and prepare for the shoreline excavation necessary in order to accommodate a 30-acre hole for the expanded marina. This boiled down to a semantic argument about the meaning of ‘conservation’ which had the developer arguing that conservation means “wise use of land” and opponents, represented by Environmental Defence, arguing that conservation “means the protection, management or restoration of lands” (Smith, 2010, np). The Town of Innisfil’s interpretation was in line with the developer’s position and argued that Environmental Defence’s characterization of “conservation of land” is one that promotes “preservation of land in its existing state” and therefore is not accurate (Annibale, 2010, np). This raises important questions about how the environment and ‘nature’ is perceived and valued. These polarizing interpretations of ‘conservation’ point to a limited understanding of nature as either a resource to be extracted and exchanged or a pristine wilderness to be preserved and revered. Both interpretations function in advancing a capitalist agenda and do little to



**Figure 9. Friday Harbour Development Site**  
Source: Personal Photograph, June 2016

get us away from the commodifying and privatizing effects of neoliberalism on nature (Katz, 1998).

### *New Policy Context*

Despite agreeing on the approval of the development, the ways in which the province, the county and the town conceive of Big Bay Point Resort in a policy context differs. The OMB provided for zoning-by-law changes from “Rural and Agricultural” and “Greenlands” to “Special Development Area” in Simcoe County’s Official Plan (OMB, 2007b). The same lands were designated by the Town of Innisfil as “Agricultural” and “Shoreline” and have been changed to “Resort Residential” according to the Innisfil Zoning By-law (*ibid.*). When examined through the lens of the Province’s Growth Plan, there is no mention of ‘resorts’ and because unit owners will agree to live there less than 300-days per year the development appears invisible in terms of growth impact. This demonstrates inconsistencies and misalignments between jurisdictions, which inevitably have not been rectified through the establishment of the GGH. A policy expert explained the consequences of these inconsistencies, stating that:

There is all these different designations and they all just morph into sprawl...and policy codifies the whole thing. But it doesn’t have to. But you can’t blame policy because it’s policy. It doesn’t have to codify these things (Personal Communication, 06/22/2016)

While the Growth Plan does not include resorts, the Greenbelt Plan (which does not cover the area in question) does. This was put forth at the OMB by the Town of Innisfil’s planning expert who argued that if the Greenbelt were to be extended into Simcoe County, the development would be permitted (Ostler, 2007, p. 4). Policy 4.1 of the Greenbelt Plan states that: “The rural areas of the Protected Countryside are intended to continue to accommodate a range of commercial, industrial and institutional uses serving the rural resource and agricultural

sectors. They are also intended to support a range of recreation and tourism uses such as trails, parks, golf courses, bed and breakfasts and other tourism based accommodation, serviced playing fields and campgrounds, ski hills and resorts.” (MMAH, 2016). Moreover, under the Greenbelt’s “Shoreline Area Policies” (4.1.3), resort development is permitted so long as it meets relevant policy requirements and does not pose further degradation to the shoreline.

Under the recent provincial land use planning review, the planning loophole through which Big Bay Point was approved is addressed in a way that appears to sanction future developments of a similar type. In proposed policies for the Growth Plan, there is a clause which states that resort developments next to key hydrologic and key natural heritage features would be permitted outside of settlement areas if these developments ‘add to’, ‘improve’, or ‘enhance’ the local ecology (see section 4.2.4 of the *Proposed Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2016*). The conditions for approval of a resort set in this policy reads similarly to the environmental benefits that Big Bay Point Resort claims it will be providing Lake Simcoe. According to a local planning expert “today, with the [Lake Simcoe Protection Plan] in place and with the Provincial Growth Plan in place it would likely not be that you would see a development [this] large, especially outside of a development area” (Personal Communication, 06/09/2016). However, if these revised policies are passed they present a situation wherein ecological modernization would be further scripted into provincial land use practices and policies. Codified at the policy level this would open up opportunities for the approval of more developments like Friday Harbour, so long as these new developments also promise to ‘improve’ the local ecology.

### *ADVERSITY HELPS!*

The headline “Adversity helped design better resort, Rumm says” was published in Innisfil’s local newspaper on October 1, 2012, symbolizing a change of tune by Geranium developer Earl Rumm when speaking about the opposition to the Big Bay Point development. This appropriation of the long battle as a ‘win’ for everyone was a tactful move on the part of the developer. The article states:

Standing in the basin of what will become a 40-acre marina with 1,000 boat slips, Rumm told reporters those who opposed the project helped to create a resort that will actually enhance its surrounding environment. “They helped us get to where we are today,” Rumm said. “The pushing and pulling and trying to get things through helped us make it better. These natural areas are assets. It’s good business. (Vanderlinde, 2012, np)

As if the \$100 million dollars in lawsuits were in fact just part of what the OMB deemed “good planning,” Rumm attempts to re-script a story of the struggle and injustice as a triumphant example of the democratic process. This is yet another example of the imbalance of power that exists in the land use planning process in Ontario and it points to the role of the media in framing public perception in favour of growth and development.

### *Growth Coalition*

Moreover, it brings to light the question of a growth coalition, which according to Harvey Molotch’s 1976 theory, are “[c]oalitions of land-based elites, tied to the economic possibilities of places, [that] drive urban politics in their quest to expand the local economy and accumulate wealth” (Jonas & Wilson, 1999, p. 3). Molotch’s theory makes “the bold claim that growth policy is not just one of many important facets of local politics, but rather, the guiding concern around which governments are constructed” (Logan, Whaley & Crowder, 1997, p. 604). In testing this theory, Logan *et al.*, suggest that “the principal effect of growth machines is to bend

the policy priorities of localities toward developmental, rather than redistributive goals” (1997, p. 605). This is relevant in Canada, where municipalities often have “a strong bias towards private development interests” and “municipal politics in Canada has been defined by nonpartisan, business-friendly, weak local socialism, and an orientation towards property and homeowner interests” (Kipfer and Keil, 2002, p. 231). Furthermore, a recent report conducted by Ontario not-for-profit Campaign Fairness analyzes funding sources of municipal campaigns, revealing a positive relationship between elected council and developer contributions in Ontario. The report found that elected officials who reported receiving contributions from the development industry were “twice as likely to be elected as those who did not report such contributions” and that the development industry “spends more on elections where there is more development taking place” (MacDermid, Lugar and Malcomson, 2016, np).

While the opponents to the development were local ratepayers and environmentalists, the developer had support from two residents groups, as well as from the Town of Innisfil, the County of Simcoe and the province. In addition, in seeking \$3.2 million dollars in costs at the OMB, the two residents groups and the Town of Innisfil supported the developer. With Innisfil’s support, it becomes difficult to delineate between the interests of town council and the interests of the developer, suggesting a coalition and an alignment of municipal and private interests in favor of capitalist gain. Not only does the \$1.5 billion-dollar resort propose to contribute a considerable amount in building permit fees, development charges, and taxes to the municipality (Vanderlinde, 2012), but Geranium has also financed and extended hard wastewater and sewage infrastructure to the resort, with the promise of providing potential hook up for nearby residences currently relying on septic systems. Marketed as an ‘improvement’ to the water quality of the

Lake, this is a sunk infrastructure for the town which, in the event of provincial policy changes, could open up possibilities for future development and expansion. A planning expert put it bluntly:

I don't want to sound dramatic, but it sets off some alarm bells, is this meant to be something more? [...] It's sunk infrastructure. Fast forward, then you look at the [Provincial Policy Statement]: "Highest and best use of land and efficient use." It's already serviced. Can't let this land lay to waste (Personal Communication, 05/18/2016)

It should also be noted that Geranium's leases office space inside Innisfil's Town Hall. This proximate relationship between the town's public administration and private development interests is normalized in a culture that celebrates small, unregulated governments over public interests and transparency.

### *Conclusion*

In telling the story of Big Bay Point's approval, this chapter has highlighted the pro-growth framework through which land use planning decisions are made. The uneven sub/urbanization we are seeing occur in Innisfil is the result of a land use planning process guided by colonial and capitalist agendas and the approval of Big Bay Point Resort was the result of a long, contentious and exclusionary approval process. This process works in favour of entrenching already vague and contradictory land use planning designations into the policy framework and the potentiality new provincial policy changes presents the possibility of similar forms of development appearing in other parts of the GGH. The silver lining is that new SLAPP legislation now exists in order to protect those who speak out in opposition going forward.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **FRIDAY HABOUR**

Tourism and recreation are driving forces in land use change in Simcoe, an area long sought after for its lake access and decidedly ‘non-urban’ character. While population growth drives development in the region, there are also pressures coming in the forms of tourism and recreation. Cottage-country in Ontario has historically developed alongside the growing and intensifying City of Toronto and tourism presents new opportunities for economic development in the growing municipalities of the GGH. As a result, resorts appear as necessary infrastructures in the growth of the tourist sector. The political economy of secondary home ownership is changing and giving way to a new sub/urbanized form of cottaging, where one escapes the urban, in effect, for the urban.

While the idea of purchasing a secondary home in Ontario cottage country is nothing new, approval for a 1600-unit cottage-condo resort development on 600 acres surrounded by farmland and an ecologically protected shoreline on land not designated for settlement raises questions. Along with asking why and how this development was approved, who it is being constructed for is central to understanding the socio-political processes that have given way to this 1.5 billion-dollar resort.

The following chapter will answer the question of development for whom? It will provoke inquiry into who benefits from this socio-spatial restructuring of rural Ontario. I will begin with an analysis of the developers claim that Friday Harbour is the “Hamptons of Toronto”

and will follow with an examination of the way in which this gated development functions to exclude certain individuals over others, while also giving rise to authoritative forms of governance. Finally, I will look at the socio-ecological consequences of the development by demonstrating the way in which green infrastructure and ecosystem services discourses are being employed by the developer to support the bold claim that Friday Harbour will in fact *improve* the water quality of Lake Simcoe.

### *THE 'HAMPTONS OF TORONTO'*



**Figure 10. Friday Harbour Rendering**

Source: Copyright, Friday Harbour Inc., 2016

The ‘Manhattanization’ of Toronto’s downtown has been ongoing within media, political and planning-related discourses since the downtown building boom got underway. Comparing the number of cranes in Toronto’s skyline to those in New York City has become a popular soundbite for politicians and city officials. When we consider this number in addition to the amount of development permits that dress Toronto’s city streets, it is difficult to deny that the city is well on its way to being a centre of dense and vertical real estate investment reminiscent

of New York City. While the vertical colonization of the city's sightlines and airspace is undeniable, so too is the extended urbanization of Toronto's boundaries onto the surrounding hinterland. Picking up on 'Manhattanization' discourses, Friday Harbour is being marketed as the "Hamptons of Toronto". Along with Muskoka, which has recently been deemed the "Hamptons of the North" (Pigg, 2015), this attempt at marketing a 'Hamptonization' of the GGH is resulting in uneven and exclusive forms of development that entrench social divisions across the region's landscapes and preserve access to public outdoor ecologies for elite classes.

Yet, Friday Harbour appears nothing like the Hamptons. The 'Hamptons' brand is only relevant in that the Hamptons are also conceptually and traditionally considered 'rural' which, due to proximity to a global urban centre, have also become a destination for global capital and extreme urbanization pressures (Rutenberg, 2015). Instead, Friday Harbour is an example of neoliberal inter-city competition and wealth and re-investment in Toronto implemented on a regional scale. The effect of the regionalization of the GGH is "to obfuscate socio-spatial differentiation—especially in the ubiquitous suburban spaces between the hyper-valorized central city, exurbs and ascendant regional hubs" (Keil and Addie, 2015, p. 892). And as Desfor *et al.* state, "[c]ompetitive city politics treat cities as homogeneous entities that compete with each other for investment and mobile segments of new urban middle classes" (2006, p. 137). This has given way to developments such as Friday Harbour, which is another iteration of waterfront revitalization developed for the benefit of Toronto's downtown bourgeoisie (Boudreau *et al.* 2006, p. 63). By asserting Friday Harbour as the 'Hamptons of Toronto' the often-neglected, racialized and diverse "in-between" everyday suburban spaces of the GGH (Young and Keil, 2011) are overshadowed and erased from the socio-spatial morphology of the

region. The result is the extended urbanization of downtown and exurban Toronto onto the shores of Lake Simcoe, perpetuating the perception of bourgeoisie ownership over Ontario's rural countryside. That this is occurring through a loophole within the Growth Plan policies further points to the inconsistencies and injustices inherent in the land use planning policies and urban development processes that shape the GGH.

### *GATED COMMUNITIES FOR THE COTTAGE-CONDO ELITE*

Friday Harbour operates similarly to a gated community. While it markets itself as a resort open to the public, the space is enclosed in every way. The development will be accessible only by gated access on a private road. While the public is invited to visit the development, I have been assured by the sales representatives that there will be



**Figure 11. Friday Harbour Development Site**

Source: Personal Photograph, June 2016

security measures in place. As Keil, Hamel, Chou and Williams (2015) point out, in the Canadian context “gated communities are perceived as a marker of difference rather than a security feature” (p. 97). This becomes more apparent as one begins to examine the design of the development. Calling upon Rosen and Grant (2011), Keil *et al.* (2015) point to the fact that the

aim of gated communities is to enhance property value and to establish an exclusive enclave representative of “privacy and lifestyle choice...rather than segregation” (p. 97).

The establishment of privacy and lifestyle choice is further emphasized once inside the development, where the only real publicly accessible area is the boardwalk which will be lined with carefully selected luxury retail and restaurants. At one end of the boardwalk is a private lakeside club and at the other end, near the marina’s entry point to the lake, is a private beach. Everything inside Friday Harbour is catered to meet the demands of a luxury lifestyle, and property ownership is the ticket to enjoying the amenities that the development has on offer. Membership for certain amenities is available to the public, such as the golf course, however the enlisting of an ‘award-winning’ golf course designer will likely ensure prohibitive membership costs. There are two private islands constructed at the centre of the marina where the most expensive units will be located. These islands will have gated entry points and have their own private recreation facilities situated in direct opposition to the boardwalk, creating a very visual class distinction even within this high-end luxury resort.

### *Private Authoritarianism*

This privatized and exclusive environment, populated with wealthy and mobile populations, breeds new authoritative structures of governance. In their assessment of the different modalities of suburban governance Ekers, Hamel and Keil identify the state, capital and “forms of authoritarian action” by which they mean “non-democratic forms such as homeowners associations (2015, p. 29). These various forms of governance contribute to decisions regarding land use and spatial production, and in this current era of sub/urban neoliberalism are becoming

“increasingly authoritarian”, including “[n]on-governmental organizations, public-private partnerships, development corporations, and various stakeholder-based associations” (Ekers et al., 2015, p. 37).

Hall examines governance, planning and policy in relation to secondary residences, pointing out that the irony “in the application of the concept of governance to tourism and second homes is that despite the concept of governance emerging in reaction, at least in part, to the emergence of contemporary globalisation, the governance of mobility is arguably even more chaotic than ever” (2015, p. 3). Hall explains that “[g]overnance, policies and regulatory structures are much better geared to the stationery and immobile than they are to the movement of people (and capital) between jurisdictions” (Hall, 2015, p 3). Thus, secondary residences undermine the state in that “taxation and personal identification systems are geared to the notion of a single permanent residence and do not readily account for the spatial mobility of contemporary life that many people experience for work and play” (Hall, 2015, p. 5). While tourism and recreation are considered attractive forms of development for municipalities, governing mobile bodies is not always scripted into policies and regulations at the relevant scales of jurisdiction (Hall, 2015, p. 4). Moreover, gated communities are “strongly associated with the rise of privatized authoritarian forms of governance” reflecting broader changes in the culture of governance and leading to more exclusive and economically segregated land uses (Ekers et al., 2015, pp 37-38). Thus, as tourist and secondary residences are commonly unrestrained by state governance, gated resort communities present fertile ground for establishing governance models that are increasingly authoritarian and private.

This is evident at Friday Harbour, where the development's approval was contingent on a 300-day occupancy limit. This contingency demands oversight and enforcement to ensure compliance, yet as a local environmental activist has pointed out, if the authority on this matter is going to fall to the local residents association, this begs the question as to how this condition will be upheld (Malcolmson, 2012). Moreover, when inquiring about the issue of monitoring occupancy with a sales representative I was told that there is a rental management service that the development will provide where, for a certain percentage of the rental fee, Friday Harbour will rent out your property while you are away. This service effectively ensures that the units could be occupied year round, undermining the limit through which the development was approved in the first place. Moreover, without adequate regulation and monitoring there is nothing stopping condo-owners from posting units on Airbnb or other online rental services.

According to Ekers *et al.*, the institution of a homeowner's association, is typically enacted through developers "rather than elected governments" and "until the properties are sold, the developer tends to hold the balance of power on the association and can thus initially decide on the board of governors and host of covenants and restrictions that regulate the development" (2015, p. 39). This presents an opportunity for the developer to consolidate power within the resort in order to support the private and exclusive upkeep of this space.

### *CASHING IN ON THE 'GREEN'*

Friday Harbour uses the language of ecosystem services and Green Infrastructure (GI) in order to justify development and as a means to privatize and lay claim to the local ecologies of Lake Simcoe. Broadly speaking, 'ecosystem services' are the human benefits derived from the natural environment (MA, 2003). This can be anything from clean water or air that a wetland

provides, to the recreational and spiritual value derived from a walk in the park. The concept, while not neoliberal in inception (Dempsey and Robertson, 2012), has become synonymous with the neoliberalization of nature and presents opportunities for measuring and valuing ecologies on the basis of exchangeability (Gómez-Baggethun *et al.*, 2010).

GI, while a somewhat elusive concept (Lennon, 2015), refers to anything from a naturally occurring habitat or environment to a manufactured ecological landscape, such as engineered wetlands. For those who advocate for GI – they believe that the environment has specific and quantifiable benefits to be provided that must be harnessed through intervention with the land (Lennon, 2015, p. 958). At the core of this is the “[p]lanning, designing, constructing and managing nature” (*ibid.*). In reality, GI is highly susceptible to neoliberal political agendas and I would argue irrevocably intertwined with capitalism, falling more in line with ecological modernization, which according to Desfor & Keil (2004) appears to “overcome perceived environment-economy contradictions” (p. 56), however in reality is “about the sustainability of nature under capitalism” (p. 57).

GI is becoming more prevalent within into policy discourses in Ontario and it appears often within mainstream discussions regarding what constitutes a healthy, sustainable and functioning urban society. As ‘infrastructure’, GI is tied to prospects of modernity, the future and development (Lennon, 2015). Infrastructure is integral to development and is the foundation of a modern city (Larkin, 2013). In a post-modern era of sustainable urbanism, green infrastructure has become the new symbol of progress and development. The social implications of infrastructures are well known. As many scholars have demonstrated, there are many inequities

revealed when we examine infrastructures more closely (Tonkiss, 2014; Amin, 2014; Wolch, Byrne and Newell, 2014; Hertel, Keil & Collens, 2015). Studying infrastructures reveals uneven and discriminatory realities of sub/urbanization and unpacking the way in which the language of GI is being employed at Friday Harbour is demonstrative of the ways in which neoliberalization is contributing to the enclosure and the privatization of Lake Simcoe

### *Grabbing 'Green'*

At Friday Harbour the process of 'green grabbing'—or rather 'blue grabbing'—is at play. Green grabbing is “[t]he commodification of nature, and its appropriation by a wide group of players, for a range of uses—current, future and speculative – in the name of ‘sustainability’, ‘conservation’ or ‘green’ values”

(Fairhead et al., 2012, p. 238). They result in a “transfer of ownership, use rights and control over resources that were once publicly or privately owned [...] from the poor (or everyone including the poor) into the hands of the powerful.” (Fairhead et al., 2012, p. 238). Development and commercial



**Figure 12. Flooded Marina, Friday Harbour Development Site**

Source: Personal Photograph, June 2016

use of green lands is “intended to serve ‘green’ ends—whether through biodiversity conservation, biocarbon sequestration, the protection of ecosystem services, ecotourism or ‘offsets’ related to any and all of these” (Fairhead et al., 2012, p. 239).

At Friday Harbour, Lake Simcoe's ailing watershed is leveraged as a way to meet 'green' and 'capitalist' ends and to ensure continued capital accumulation. By promising a cleaner, 'bluer' watershed through innovative building technologies and new infrastructures, Geranium secures approval for development both through necessary policy and planning means, as well as in the eyes of the general public. This is not to suggest that the developer will not follow through. After all, the resort's success depends on a healthy watershed. It is in the best interest of the developer to create a 'nature' that is controlled and 'clean'. Thus, it is not at all surprising to hear that, as a local planning expert explained: "You know they haven't tried to shirk the responsibilities in terms of what the [environmental] requirements are as a result of the board's decisions. It's amazing the amount of work and effort that they've put in to implement this the way it was intended [...] A lot of other developers may have tried to get out of a lot of those responsibilities, but this hasn't been one of those cases." (Personal Communication, 06/09/2016)

Such as is the case in Friday Harbour, "[w]hile grabbing for green ends does not always involve the wholesale alienation of land from existing claimants, it does involve the restructuring of rules and authority over the access, use and management of resources, in related labour relations, and in human-ecological relationships, that may have profoundly alienating effects" (Fairhead et al., 2012, p. 239). This is enacted through the exclusionary design of the development, through property ownership or membership requirements for access to amenities, and through the restrictive nature of 'luxury' of retail and restaurants. Moreover, green grabbing is very much aligned with colonial histories of displacement, dispossession and "resource alienation in the name of the environment" (*ibid.*). While "today there are many more players

implicated, who are deeply embedded in capitalist networks and operating across scale” (*ibid.*), this process disproportionately impacts certain groups over others. At Friday Harbour the Huron-Wendat First Nations were quickly erased from view through both institutionalized processes and policies, as well as by the failure of decision-makers at various levels to take their claims of interest seriously. Moreover, as I will demonstrate in the following chapter, the local Anishabe inhabitants of the lake are also directly and unfairly implicated by the urban development processes occurring on the shores of Lake Simcoe.

### *Claiming ‘Green’*

Friday Harbour makes many claims to ‘sustainability’, all which appear to hold the promises of ecosystem services and green infrastructure and which fit into the ecological modernization policies justifying development in the GGH. The “sustainability fix” offered by Friday Harbour promises that the high levels of phosphorus in Lake Simcoe will be decreased because of the development. To accomplish this Geranium has financed new and necessary wastewater sewage infrastructure and offered to extend sewage treatment service to 1,700 homes in the area, providing the opportunity—however, not the individual financing—for local households to get off septic systems which are notably bad for the watershed (Hanes, 2015). A replanting program was established to replace all the endangered butternut trees cut down in the construction process and the extended shoreline that was dug in order to accommodate the new mega-marina is applauded for providing fish with “an underwater habitat four times its size” (Hanes, 2015). In addition, the development is approximately a five-minute drive to the GO-train station, providing Torontonians with public and environmentally-friendly access to this otherwise highly exclusive resort.

Moreover, the development's limited occupancy combined with a New Urbanist condo design allows the Friday Harbour to appear as something other than the 'sprawl' that typifies development in Simcoe County, thereby conveying it as an environmentally friendly contribution to an area marred by low-density single family housing. The fact that this development falls outside of a settlement zone is justified by the New Urbanist promise of 'walkable' communities and a balance of density and green space. The designers of Friday Harbour are New Urbanism pioneers Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company. While the aim of New Urbanism is to redesign society at "the neighbourhood level" (Lehrer and Milgrom, 1996, p. 50) in reality it functions to



**Figure 13. New Urbanism meets 'Cottage-Condo', Friday Harbour Rendering**

Source: Copyright, Friday Harbour Inc, 2016

“replace the lack of community in traditional suburbs with an idea of community that is exclusionary and does not leave space for the unfamiliar” (Lehrer and Milgrom, 1996, p. 51). The effect of which is “an architecture that is tailored toward an upper-middle class clientele” (*ibid.*). While New Urbanism is considered by its proponents to be the ‘antithesis of sprawl’ the “approach does not discourage the continuation of ex-urban development leap-frogging from the

city to the surrounding countryside” and in the case of Friday Harbour “provide[s] an attractive mask behind which developers may continue suburbanization, rather than intensifying the existing urban fabric.” (*ibid.*, p. 63). Aldana Cohen states “the density fetish is being used to greenwash the return of mostly white professional to inner cities” (2014, np) and in the case of Friday Harbour, we are seeing this density fetish extend exclusive leisure markets onto the amenity-rich shoreline of Lake Simcoe.

### *Conclusion*

Geranium’s use of GI and ecosystem services and their claims to ‘sustainability’ ensure that the “extended metropolitanization” of Toronto appears not only neutral, but necessary for the metabolic balance of local and regional ecologies. Meanwhile, the Greenbelt functions to delineate a conceptual boundary between the City of Toronto and Simcoe County, masking this “extended metropolitanization” as something other than entirely sub/urban development. This provides visitors to Friday Harbour with the promised experience of an escape from *urban* Toronto to the more *rural* ‘Hamptons of Toronto’ and the tandem efforts of ‘Manhattanizing’ and ‘Hamptonizing’ project Toronto onto a global stage.

While this appears to reaffirm that “sustainable urban lives are primarily the privilege of the rich, and [are] sustained by deteriorating socio-ecological conditions elsewhere” (Swyngedouw and Kaika 2014, p.469), it does not have to ensure that the commodification, colonization and privatization of natural landscapes and ecologies continues in this way. As Aldana Cohen would have it, it is time to “democratize and decarbonize urban life” so that we can meet our indulgent “yearnings to escape, but without burning fossil fuels” (2014, np). This

would involve densifying built up areas and “buttressing our ecosystems” so that “they’ll be able to withstand leisurely intrusions”—because “[t]he more we restrict sprawl and densify suburbs, the more space we’ll have to play” (Aldana Cohen, 2014, np).

In an eloquent call to action Aldana Cohen (2014) states “If we can’t see the stars every now and then, it’s not our revolution,” however, the cynic in me cannot help but notice that it appears as though developer Earl Rumm has picked up on this tagline, promising the quintessential “Dark Sky Night” at Friday Harbour which “will be the result of intentionally directing outdoor lighting downward, and focussing lights along the pier only, to allow the sky to retain its inky blackness and the stars to stand out like diamonds” (Friday Harbour Blog, n/p).

## CHAPTER 6

### LAKE WAAWAASE’AAGAMING



**Figure 14. Residential road leading to Lake Simcoe, Innisfil, Simcoe County**

Source: Personal Photograph, June 2016

Lake Simcoe is known to the Anishnaabe people as Lake Waawaase’ aagaming or “Asunying, which translates as “silver” or “shiny water”” a word that “also came to mean money, or silver coin,” confirming for Georgina Island First Nation activist Becky Big Canoe that “this lake is very valuable, beyond estimation” (2014a, p. 23). However, the value in reference here is not the same value that Friday Harbour developers, the local Innisfil council or the Lake Simcoe Conservation Authority apply to Lake Simcoe. Nor is it entirely in line with the value that shoreline property owners refer to when speaking of protecting the quality of the lake. This is a historical, spiritual and ecological value that has been under attack by colonial and neo-

colonial forces for generations and that is being exploited under present day neoliberal urban expansion.

In re-claiming the value of this shiny lake, Anishnaabe activists have taken to the shoreline, streets and highways that surround Lake Simcoe in a struggle over water and environmental justice.

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight other modes for intervention in the extended urbanization processes shaping Simcoe County and impacting Lake Simcoe. It does so by examining the Anishnaabe-led Mother Earth Water Walks (the “Water Walks”) as an alternative form of protest to the histories of degradation on Lake Simcoe. Water Walkers resist extended capitalist urbanization, colonial and neo-colonial histories and they assert Anishnaabe spiritual values of the sacrality of water as a new narrative of emancipation. This chapter concludes with a brief synopsis of alternative efforts being made to establish a ‘commons’ narrative of the Great Lakes, and questions what a combined Anishnaabe and ‘commons’ narrative might mean for Lake Simcoe.

#### *ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES OF RESISTANCE: THE MOTHER EARTH WATER WALKS*

In June of 2014 and August of 2015, residents and activists began multi-day walks around the perimeter of Lake Simcoe and neighbouring Lake Couchiching. These walks were inspired by, and done in solidarity with, the Mother Earth Water Walks led by Josephine Madamin around the Great Lakes, which have been ongoing since 2003. Becky Big Canoe from the Chippewas First nations of Georgina Island was a primary organizer of the Lake Waawaa’sagaming Water Walk and attendees included Chippewas men, women and children,

and other residents of the lake and watershed. In the spirit of the Mother Earth Water Walks, the Waawaase'aagaming Water Walks promoted awareness of the spiritual and cultural significance of Lake Simcoe to the Chippewas of Georgina Island, Rama and Christian Island, and drew attention to the declining health of the watershed due to various and compounding anthropogenic factors.

The importance of the Mother Earth Water Walks is best understood through an understanding of the value of water to the Anishnaabe people and recognition of aboriginal perspectives of environmental justice. To the Anishnaabe, water is a “living entity” and a “giver of life” (McGregor, 2009, p.38). The importance of water to the Anishnaabe goes beyond western conceptions of water as a resource. Instead, water is to be treated “as a relative, not a resource” (*ibid.*, p. 37). The Water Walks, as Anishnaabe scholar Deborah McGregor points out, “raise awareness about water and try to change the perception of water as a resource to that as a sacred entity which must be treated as such” (2008, p. 29). As life-givers themselves, it is the responsibility for women to “speak for the water” (McGregor, 2009, p. 37) and Anishnaabe women have taken on the responsibility of honouring water and drawing attention to the ailing state of these vital life sources through the Mother Earth Water Walks.

To the Anishnaabe, environmental justice is “much broader than “impacts on people” (*ibid.*, p. 27). As McGregor points out, this involves “justice for all beings of Creation, not only because threats to their existence threatens ours but because from an Aboriginal perspective justice among beings of Creation is life-affirming” (*ibid.*). This perspective of environmental justice does not separate the environment from people but rather addresses the “responsibilities

and duties” of all beings of Creation to “ensure justice” (*ibid.*). Moreover, “[i]n the Anishnaabe world view, all beings of Creation have spirit, with duties and responsibilities to each other to ensure the continuation of Creation” (*ibid.*, pp. 27-28). Accordingly, all of Creation, as well as “the ancestors of current beings and those yet to come” have “agency and entitlement” to environmental justice (*ibid.*, p.30). Even “[w]ater has a role and a responsibility to fulfill, just as people do” (*ibid.*, p. 37-38). From this perspective, justice involves understanding and accepting that humans “do not have the right to interfere with water’s duties to the rest of Creation” (*ibid.*).

It is from this view of environmental justice and with this belief in the sacrality of water that Water Walkers set out on a journey around the periphery of Lake Simcoe. The walks were led by a core group, both women and men with their distinctive roles, “carrying a copper pail and an eagle staff around the lake in a ten-day journey of prayer, ceremony, education and community building” (Big Canoe *et al.*, 2015). There have been many factors that have contributed to an unhealthy watershed. In the eyes of those who have lived in the region for centuries, the rapid increase of development has noticeably transformed the water they rely on. On their traverse around Lake Simcoe, the Water Walkers were confronted with development and the private property laws that enforce an artificial and material barrier enclosing the lake. At the screening of the documentary film *Waawaase’aagaming (Shining Lake)*, Big Canoe noted that private property rights posed some challenges for the walkers, restricting them to walking on main roads and busy highways. The ritual of walking begins and ends by touching down at the water and so the Water Walkers plan their routes around public access points, or they arrange with property owners in order use their property to access the shoreline. This highlights the effects of enclosure that have long been a symptom of colonial and capitalist urbanism and that have been exacerbated under the current era of neoliberalism. Yet, despite the exclusionary

nature of private property and restrictions enacted through development, the Anishnaabe people resiliently adapted their walk, showing a commitment to environmental justice and the right to a clean and healthy watershed.

The struggles over Lake Simcoe led by Anishnaabe women are important in that they not only challenge the environmental, social and cultural destruction caused by the current and ongoing extension of capitalist urbanization but they force us to confront the impact that a history of exploitation and expropriation caused by colonial and neocolonial rule has had on Lake Simcoe, the Great Lakes, and indigenous inhabitants of these lands. Kipfer points out that “anti-urban and non-urban articulations of struggle” (2016, p. 10) have much to teach us about the consequences of and possible alternatives to extended urbanization. Kipfer goes on to discuss the indigenous struggles against pipelines, calling on Awâsîs Sâkîhîtowîn to point out that “the neocolonial impacts of the tar sands disproportionately impact Indigenous communities” stating that:

Resisting pipelines that span the continent and link extraction sites to ports, major metropolises and variegated social spaces in between thus offers the strategic advantage of connecting a multiplicity of issues and struggles. Thus inter-connected, pipeline struggles effectively, if not always intentionally, ‘scale-up’ the scope and visibility of each site of protest; together they produce a geographically stretched convergence of efforts (2016, p. 12)

Similar to the struggles against oil extraction and industrial expansion (and in many cases, as a direct consequence of), indigenous populations are disproportionately impacted when it comes to accessing clean and healthy water. Health Canada reports that “[a]s of May 31, 2016, there were 126 Drinking Water Advisories in effect in 84 First Nation communities across Canada, excluding British Columbia” (2016). Moreover, “[c]ompared to other Canadians, First Nations homes are 90 times more likely to be without running water” (Barlow, 2011, p. 30). From mercury dumping at Grassy Narrows First Nations to a boil water advisory that has lasted

over 20 years in Neskantage First Nation (Levaseur & Marcoux, 2015), indigenous populations across Ontario and Canada experience incommensurate and ongoing forms of violence against their bodies, culture and land due to continuously unfolding forces of imperialism and capitalism. Thus, the struggles on Lake Simcoe are not only linked to other Mother Earth Water Walks around the Great Lakes, but in their call for a recognition of the sacred and ‘life-giving’ force of water, they are connected to the other water-related injustices indigenous groups in North America face.

Just as pipeline activism is “an urban question in the Lefebvrian sense,” indigenous struggles over water are “also and all at the same time a question of international relations: not only struggle against capital and state, but also a struggle to establish nation-to-nation relations between indigenous peoples and settler states” (Kipfer, 2016, p.12). We can thus see these struggles enacted through the Mother Earth Water Walks, and the spiritual honouring of water, as “hav[ing] universal implications for struggles to liberate the world from the ravages of capitalist development” (*ibid.*, p. 17).

#### *EXTENDING A ‘COMMONS’ NARRATIVE TO LAKE SIMCOE*

A ‘commons’ narrative regarding the Great Lakes is being advanced by various groups. This narrative “asserts that no one owns water” but “[r]ather it is a common heritage that belongs to the Earth, other species and future generations as well as our own” (Barlow, 2011, p. 24). This is based on the understanding that “we all have rights to certain common heritages, be they the atmosphere and oceans, freshwater and genetic diversity, or culture, language and wisdom” (*ibid.*). This narrative emerges from a recognition that “[p]rivate control of water cannot address

itself to the issues of conservation, justice and democracy” (*ibid.*). This involves recognizing all of the Great Lakes as part of a larger bioregion and it incorporates a ‘Public Trust Doctrine’ as a legal and political framework, which recognizes in law “the universal notion of the Commons that certain natural resources, particularly air, water and the oceans, are central to our very existence and considered to be the property of the public, which cannot be denied access” (*ibid.* p. 25). It operates in such a way that it would redistribute the power over access and decision making regarding the Great Lakes back to the people.

As a geography and landscape that is also subject to overlapping jurisdictions and competing and contradictory forms of governance, Lake Simcoe could benefit from application of a ‘commons’ narrative. This narrative presents the opportunity to open up space for new voices in the planning process and it could emancipate the Lake from the privatizing effects of neoliberal urban development processes. Applied to Lake Simcoe, a ‘Public Trust Doctrine’ could establish legislation that, unlike the *Lake Simcoe Protection Act*, would have an agreed up and democratically enforced understanding of what constitutes conservation and ‘best use’. The ‘Public Trust Doctrine’ would provide “a body of principles that combine public good, public control and public oversight with the long-term protection of the watershed” and would establish “an agreed upon “hierarchy of use,” whereby some uses of the water, such as the human right to water and water for ecosystem protection will take precedence over others” (*ibid.* p. 26). The potential to combine a ‘commons’ narrative with the Anishnaabe belief that water is “a relative, not a resource” could open up new possibilities for establishing a more inclusive and just body of principles that determine public good and hierarchy of use.

## *Conclusion*

The Water Walkers and an advanced ‘commons’ narrative present alternative avenues for resisting land use practices that have resulted in generations of degradation to Lake Simcoe. These combined narrative could reframe the valuation of Lake Waawaase’aagaming not just in monetary terms, but as a sacred and living entity, while the legislation of a ‘Public Trust Doctrine’ could “mount material pressures to reorganize already urbanized social spaces in a radical socioecological fashion” (Kipfer, 2016, p. 17). This could not only liberate Lake Simcoe from ongoing processes of ecological devastation caused by development and extended urbanization, but open up new possibilities to establish “the bases for a non-imperial, non-colonial world. (*ibid.*).

## CONCLUSION

This purpose of this research paper is to contribute to a greater understanding of the historic and ongoing urbanization processes shaping the GGH. Indigenous histories, colonialism and neo-colonialism, industrial capitalism and neoliberal sub/urban expansion have shaped and continue to shape the relatively new ‘spatial imaginary’ of the GGH. These processes hold specific socio-spatial, material, ecological, ideological, political, economic and cultural implications for the region’s landscapes, impacting geographies and communities in uneven ways and resulting in the exclusive and fragmented production of space.

With a focus on Friday Harbour and the town of Innisfil, I have examined the ways in which these urbanization processes are playing out on the shores of Lake Simcoe. The provincial and local land use and environmental policies that exist within the GGH and that govern Innisfil and Lake Simcoe have in many ways codified growth and are facilitating unimpeded and unprecedented rates of sub/urbanization extending across traditionally rural landscapes. These policies are coupled with a growth dynamic unique to Innisfil, characterized by neoliberal inter-city competition, a county system that has resulted in the downloading of public services onto lower-tier municipalities, the corporatization of public infrastructures, and what appears to be a budding growth coalition. All of this, combined with a ‘cottage country’ tradition and tourist and recreation appeal is fueling development in the area, particularly along Lake Simcoe’s protected shoreline.

Friday Harbour Resort is an example of development that has emerged out of these conditions, and with the controversial story of its approval and the way in which it

operationalizes the language of green infrastructure and ecosystem services, it presents a fertile case study for understanding ‘the why, how and for whom’ of present day neoliberal urbanization shaping the GGH.

Under current socio-spatial conditions and due to the fragmentary and uneven urban development processes shaping the GGH, Lake Simcoe is being privatized, commodified and enclosed. This has given rise to new forms of opposition that seek to break away from the present day system and that redefine our relations to surrounding geographies. On the shorelines of Lake Simcoe we are seeing resistance in the form of healing and connection through an acknowledgement of the sacrality of water by the Lake Waawaase’aagaming Water Walkers, a protest that is linked to other Anishnaabe Water Walks around the Great Lakes. We are also seeing a ‘commons’ narrative emerge in relation to governing the Great Lakes in the United States and Canada, a narrative that could potentially extend to Lake Simcoe, opening up new opportunities for extending a more inclusive and just form of sub/urbanization across Innisfil, Simcoe County and the GGH.

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*Appendix A*

*Interview List*

Interview with planning expert; personal communication, Toronto, Ontario, May 18, 2016

Interview with environmental expert; personal communication, Innisfil, Ontario, May 26, 2016

Interview with party to OMB case; personal communication, Toronto, Ontario, May 31, 2016

Interview with local expert; personal communication, Toronto, Ontario, June 9, 2016

Interview with planning expert # 1; personal communication, Innisfil, Ontario, June 9, 2016

Interview with planning expert # 2; personal communication, Innisfil, Ontario, June 9, 2016

Interview with policy expert # 1; personal communication, Toronto, Ontario, June 22, 2016

Interview with policy expert # 2; personal communication, Toronto, Ontario, June 22, 2016

Interview with local official # 1; personal communication, Innisfil, Ontario, June 27, 2016

Interview with local official # 2; personal communication, Innisfil, Ontario, June 27, 2016

