Suburban Condominium Development,

Private Interests, and the Role of Image Production

in the Reorientation of Urban Form in the GTA

By

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Abstract

For the better part of their modern existence, the municipalities comprising the Greater Toronto Area ("GTA") have been characterized by low-density, auto-centric development and single-detached homes. For more than the past decade, however, the development of urban form in the GTA has shifted from a focus on horizontal sprawl to vertical growth, predicated by the introduction of protected greenbelt areas and planning policies dramatically restricting the amount of available greenfield land for development and shaping future land consumption. Coinciding with the policy push towards intensification was the emergence of a condominium boom in the City of Toronto that has permeated outwards Toronto's neighbouring suburban municipalities. The urban forms of Mississauga, Vaughan and Markham have begun to undergo significant change guided by the notion that mid- and high-rise condominium towers are no longer solely a central-city building typology. Mid-rise and high-rise towers have been introduced as a new suburban built form typology integral to support suburban strategies of intensification. These 'suburban' municipalities have utilized different approaches with respect to the physical appearance of the built environment to support neoliberal urban development agendas to shift from once classical bedroom communities or towns into intensified, competitive major players in the metropolitan landscape both locally and globally.

How have the policies of current land-use planning regimes, the actions of the local development industry and the perceptions of users of suburban space played a role in this shift in the built environment? Further, what do the city-building processes and image production practices employed reflect about the political, economic and social systems controlling development in the Toronto city-region? To answer these questions, this paper explores how changes in suburban form have been influenced by socially constructed imagery and values as communicated by planning policy and place-marketing strategies. It investigates why this imagery is created, how it is used by condominium developers to proliferate suburban built form, and how this imagery is received and consumed by individuals. Focusing on the commodification of housing form, this research explores the motivating factors exploited by the development industry to promote new built form typologies in the suburbs.

Foreword

This Major Research Paper is the final document to satisfy the requirements of my Plan of Study (POS) in the Master of Environmental Studies Planning Program in the York University Faculty of Environmental Studies. This paper assembles a case study on the private interests and the creation and use of image production practices in the GTA which draws on the three components of my Plan of Study: (i) Urban planning: theory and practice; (ii) Urban Form: Land-use patterns of Sprawl and intensification; and, (iii) Urban design: human-environment interaction and the image of the urban landscape.

Component 1, 'Urban planning: theory and practice', is concerned with the theoretical basis of contemporary urban planning and its practical implications. My major paper fulfills each of the learning objectives for Component 1 of my POS in that it has (i) assisted in my development of critical thinking skills with respect to planning theory, urban development processes, (ii) strengthened my understanding of planning practice in Ontario, and (iii) enhanced my understanding of planning policy in the GTA.

Component 2, 'Urban Form: Land-use patterns of sprawl and intensification', focuses on the physical composition of urban landscapes and their factors of influence, and the influence of urban form on daily life. My major paper contributes to each of the learning objectives for Component 2 of my POS in that it has (i) further developed my comprehension of the theoretical and practical underpinnings and urban development processes that inform sprawl, (ii) formed the basis of my understanding of urban development processes informing intensification, and (iii) created linkages between urban planning policy and design guidelines and their influence on the built environment.

Component 3, 'Urban design: human-environment interaction and the image of the urban landscape', concentrates on the reflexive relationship between the built environment and its inhabitants. My major paper satisfies each of the learning objectives for Component 3 of my POS in that it has (i) furthered my understanding of the practical applications of urban design principles and their effect on place-making, and (ii) founded my comprehension of the reflexive relationship between people and the built environment, paying specific attention to the influence of unbuilt cultural products and image production practices on urban planning and city-building.

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1.0 Introduction

For the better part of their modern existence, the municipalities comprising the Greater Toronto Area ("GTA") have been characterized by low-density, auto-centric development and single-detached homes. For more than the past decade, however, the development of urban form in the GTA has shifted from a focus on horizontal sprawl to vertical growth, predicated by the introduction of protected greenbelt areas and planning policies dramatically restricting the amount of available greenfield land for development and shaping future land consumption. Coinciding with the policy push towards intensification was the emergence of a condominium boom in the City of Toronto that has permeated outwards from the downtown shores of Lake Ontario and the derelict warehouse neighbourhoods of the downtown core to Toronto's neighbouring suburban municipalities. The urban forms of places like Mississauga, Vaughan and Markham have begun to undergo significant change guided by the notion that mid- and high-rise condominium towers are no longer solely a central-city building typology. Mid-rise and high-rise towers have been introduced as a new suburban built form typology integral to support suburban strategies of intensification. It is believed that three interrelated factors inform this reorientation process taking place in the built environment: (i) prevailing planning regimes (referring to both the Provincial and Municipal planning legislative structures to which municipalities are bound and the governments associated with them), (ii) practices of the development industry (referring to the private interests and actions of developers that influence the suburban built environment through the design and supply of new residential/domestic space), and (iii) individual users of suburban space (referring

to individuals' reception, perception, and acceptance of the built environment and its potential for reorientation).

Focusing on the commodification of housing form, this research explores the motivating factors exploited by the development industry to promote new built form typologies in the suburbs, such as the mid- or high-rise condominium. This paper explores how changes in suburban form have been influenced by socially constructed imagery and values as communicated by planning policy and place-marketing strategies. It investigates why this imagery is created and how it is used by private developers to proliferate suburban built form, and reciprocally, the paper questions how this imagery is received and consumed by individuals. Through the study of city-building processes and the practice of producing, presenting and interpreting images, this paper explores the ways in which changes to the traditional suburban built environment assist in supporting or reorienting the notion of the 'suburban'.

With respect to the Toronto city-region, investigating this topic will assist in developing a greater understanding of the reasons why and how new urban forms take shape under certain political economic agendas and through different image production practices. This study of private interests and image production in Toronto's suburban municipalities will help to uncover the causal role of and societal reflection inherent in this shift in housing typology.

1.1   Research Background

> *Architecture is a conversation between the generations, carried out across time.*
> - Vincent Scully (quoted in Goldberger, 2009, p. xi)

Architecture is the will of an epoch translated into space.
- Mies van de Rohe (quoted in Goldberger, 2009, p. xii)

Referencing architecture specifically, Vincent Scully and Mies van de Rohe both identify that the ways in which buildings and spaces are grouped together symbolize a generation's ideologies. Implicitly, buildings and physical landscapes convey messages of what we are and perhaps what we want to be as a society; this notion of 'we', however, is not always universally accepted or entirely inclusive. Buildings can be political statements, and sometimes it is the average ones that state the most about ourselves. Paul Goldberger maintains "architecture begins to matter when it goes beyond protecting us from the elements and when it begins to say something about the world" (2009, p. x). However, in modern society, buildings and spaces have become a special type of commodity (Schwarzer, 2005). Like other products, they are advertised, bought, and sold within the consumer marketplace. Seen as reflecting the *zeitgeist* of the prevailing political economy, designed and built landscapes serve as the dominant setting for commodity manufacture, display, exchange, and use (Knox, 2011). William Saunders (2005) contends that along with many other forms of cultural production, the design of the built environment has become increasingly preoccupied by and made subservient to the goals of the capitalist economy, and more specifically, attracting consumers for the purpose of gaining their money. Congruently, using the phrase "Symbol in Space before Form in Space" and the terms "duck" and "decorated shed", Venturi, Brown, and Izenour (1972) argue that it is not the form of architecture that has become the most important in attracting these consumers, but rather its iconography and what this architecture communicates. As such, the multiple roles of the built environment have implications for the ways in which buildings act as symbols, communicate various meanings and

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participate in the practice of image production. Whether it be intentional or not, buildings and the cities they comprise are a visual representation of social ideals (often those of powerful decision makers), political struggles, economic values and cultural histories.

Dolores Hayden (2003) speaks to the symbolism of the urban landscape by making specific reference to the lifestyle marketing strategies employed by developers in the building of post-war suburbia (see Section 2.6 of this paper). With this historical use of image production associated with wealth, social status, independence, consumerism, and family values, the image of the suburban way of life was created and sold to families in the post-war period. Considering contemporary image production practices, how do the architecture and urban form of current times translate our political will, our economic ideals, and our social desires into suburban space? There are many parallels to the ways in which the condominium tower is currently being positioned commercially to how the single detached home was marketed in post-war times. However, according to Lehrer (2012), unlike the initial post-war suburban homes being mass produced to house the families of men returning from war, the condominium tower itself is insufficient in selling a physical product with which individuals have had limited familiarity. The social construction of a lifestyle unique to condominium living has, thus, become an explicit necessity in marketing this present-day commodity. Drawing on personal preference or taste, contemporary promotional marketing materials for urban and suburban condominiums alike exploit lifestyle factors such as exclusivity, prestige, privacy, privilege, luxury, beauty, and youth. These social constructs, presenting a specific lifestyle or ideology linked to this particular housing typology, are communicated

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through textual language and suggestive imagery, with the intention to convince or persuade consumers to buy into the way of life being sold. Considering the notion that the condominium lifestyle has historically been considered fundamentally urban, of interest to this research are the types and influence of the images communicated through cultural products and their supporting role in the reorientation of the physical shape of the suburban landscape.

With this paper, it is my intention to explore and understand the urban development pattern arising in the Toronto city-region as derived from political, economic, and social forces. Further, my intent is to analyze how private interests have influenced the emerging shift in urban form through image production, and how this imagery has impacted consumption practices and lifestyle perception of the residents of suburban communities in question.

1.2   Research Approach

In June 2015, BuzzBuzzHome.com, an up-to-date online real estate database for new residential developments in the GTA, approximated that 41 condominium development projects are either recently completed, under construction or under registration in Mississauga, while 34 and 35 projects exist in Vaughan and Markham respectively. All of these numbers reflect increases in condominium tower development each municipality.

Why has the residential condominium tower emerged as a prominent built form in Toronto's periphery? How have prevailing land-use planning regimes, the actions of the local development industry, and the perceptions of users of suburbanites been driving forces behind this shift in the built environment? Answering these questions and developing an understanding of the city-building processes and image production

practices employed will allow for reflection about the political, economic and social systems controlling urban development in the GTA. While other influences may affect the reorientation of the suburban built environment (and in turn impact planning and politics accordingly), this case study based research is solely concerned with prevailing planning regimes, practices of the development industry, and individual users of suburban space because of their direct, interrelated relationship to city-building processes and image production practices.

Three of the four municipalities by which the City of Toronto is physically bound demonstrate experiencing an insurgence of condominium tower building and are the basis for this investigation; Mississauga on the west located in Peel Region, Vaughan to the northwest and Markham to the northeast, both situated in York Region (see Figure 1). Mississauga, Toronto's original bedroom community, has taken steps to infill and intensify the constrained land supply of its existing downtown core. Vaughan, operating as the terminus to the forthcoming Toronto Transit Commission ("TTC") subway extension, has positioned itself as a commercial heavyweight with the rebranding efforts of its new downtown area, Vaughan Metropolitan Centre ("VMC"). Markham, home to a number of Canadian headquarters for multinational companies, has sights to situate itself globally as an important corporate centre to attract new labour and creative talent. Once considered *sub*-urban in comparison to Toronto, these municipalities have grown to populations far exceeding those of small suburban communities, with Mississauga at 713 443, Vaughan at 288 301, and Markham at 301 709 according to 2011 Census Canada figures (Statistics Canada, 2011).
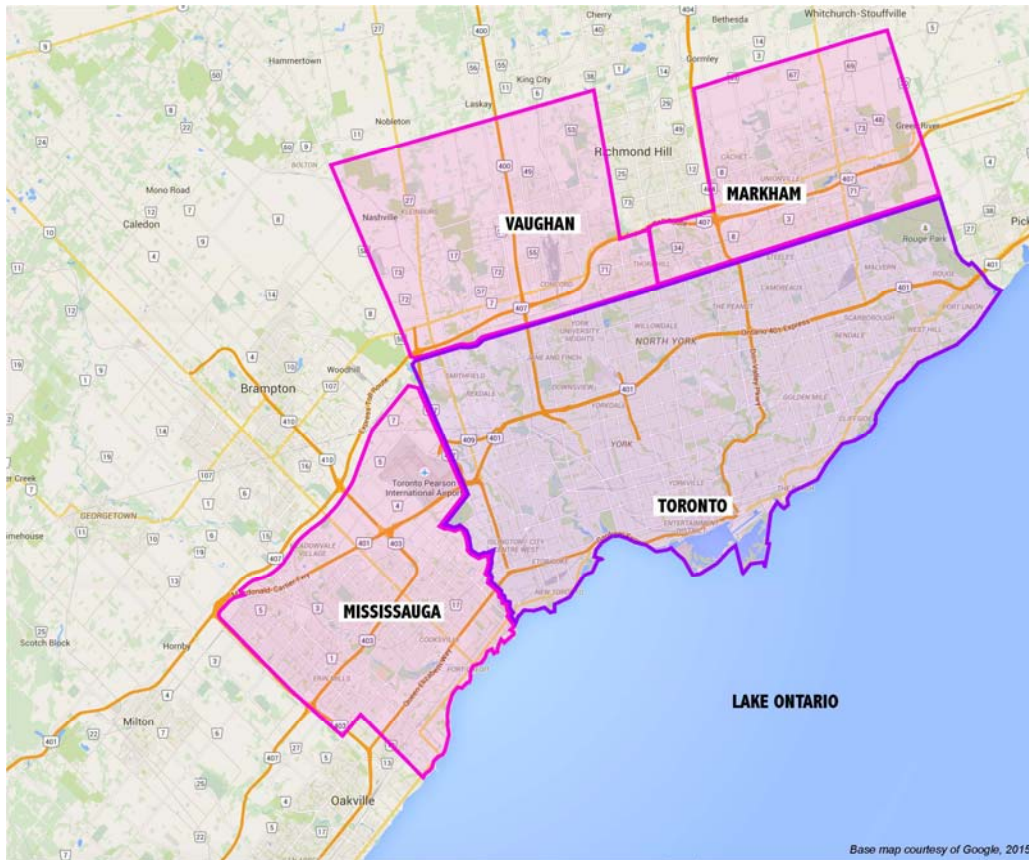
Figure 1 – Location of Mississauga, Vaughan and Markham in relationship to the City of Toronto. Map by author

With respect to the physical appearance of the built environment to support urban development agendas, each municipality has made strategic moves to shape distinct new identities as once classical bedroom communities or towns to competitive players both in Canada and around the globe. The processes by which this has taken place are explored through this research.

The primary objective of this study is to analyze and draw relationships between the socio-political influences that land-use planning legislation, lifestyle marketing, governance agendas, and the perceptions of individual condo dwellers have had on urban development and the spatial changes being observed in the Greater Toronto Area's traditional suburban communities. This requires the examination of how city-building processes are related to different forms of image production. Of particular interest are

socially constructed images linked to planning policy documents and condominium development marketing materials.

Salter, Wilks, and Stewart (forthcoming) posit that there is discrepancy as to how things are said and how well things are communicated. Words and images are not neutral. Statements never say just what they purport to say; things are often more complicated than they seem. Always, there is something underlying the obvious: preoccupations, assumptions, and values are at play, and are instrumental in promoting particular actions and decisions. Understanding the discursive practices of image production is key in uncovering the supposed intentions and motivations for the reorientation of urban form taking place in suburban municipalities.

From the social constructivist perspective, the generalizations of this study's research findings have been based on the premise that meanings – which are varied and multiple, highlighting the complexity of individual views – are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting. Developing an understanding of these meanings has required significant qualitative inquiry, the research methods and characteristics of which are best suited to address the above-outlined research objectives.

The importance of condominium research lies in the project's timely reflection on a topic that, within the Toronto city-region, has taken over modern day national media. This research contributes to existing condominium development literature by expanding the scope of inquiry beyond the central city, out to its growing suburban hinterlands. Looking at both historical and modern perspectives of suburban growth, the strength and relevance of the findings discussed herein rely on taking a case study approach to compare and contrast happenings across the GTA region.

2.0   Factors Informing Urban Form Processes and Outcomes

Scholars have long been debating 'good' urban form (Lynch, 1981; Breheny, 1996; Talen and Ellis, 2002; Grant, 2006) and discussing the shape of cities (Caulfield, 1994, 2005; Garreau, 1992; Hall, 1996; Hillman, 1996; Gordon and Richardson, 1997; Filion, 2000, 2010; Bruegmann, 2005). Research and analysis on aestheticization processes, image production, and consumption practices as related to urban development processes in both Canada and Europe has been done by Ute Lehrer as part of her doctoral dissertation (2002) and in her role as principal investigator for the research project entitled *Urban Images, Public Space and the Growth of Private Interests in Toronto*. The debate surrounding the rapid and continuous condominium development taking place in the city of Toronto, is a topic that has been critically examined by Lehrer (2003, 2006a, 2006b, 2012) and Walks (2006, and with Rosen, 2013) for over a decade. Other areas of deep scholarly discussion relevant to this study include the processes of city-building and the impact neoliberal control of urban development, discussed below.

Currently missing from this research, however, is the study of condominium development in *suburban* areas and the factors influencing it. As such, this study is complementary to the work of the abovementioned scholars through its focus on suburban locales bordering Toronto rather than in the central city. Although specifically related to the study of the Toronto city-region, this literature review is relevant to the study of other typical Canadian or American suburban regions intensifying under Smart Growth principles[1].

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[1] These principles include creating a range of affordable, quality housing choices; fostering development that creates vibrant, unique, walkable complete communities; encouraging building designs that contribute to the context of a pedestrian-oriented neighbourhood and use green building technologies; directing development away from unsettled areas and encouraging growth and renewal in existing communities;

2.1   Decentralized Urban Development

The latter half of the 20th century brought about pressing demand for housing and urban infrastructure that had been initially postponed due to the Great Depression and World War II. Due to post-war industrialization and the baby boom, cities grew in population and expanded their boundaries, increasing in both density and area. Mass automobile use and home ownership fuelled urban expansion into the outskirts of cities where housing needs could be met. In these suburban areas, land uses were separated and lined curved, disconnected street systems. Private automobiles replaced public transit as the preferred way mode of transportation, and trucks replaced trains for moving goods and materials. Department stores and movie theatres made their way from downtown main streets into regional shopping malls. These trends and their impact on urban form were fuelled by the rise of a new cultural force: pursuit of the 'suburban dream.' This was the desire to move away from the crowded, polluted city into one's own detached house, complete with backyard and car port, all in close proximity to the new 'superhighway' system and entertaining local amenities. While this dream was not unique to Toronto, it has permanently influenced the shape of the city and its outskirts.

Robert Fishman (1987, p. 3) states that "every civilization gets the monuments it deserves" and that suburbia reveals more about the culture that built factories and skyscrapers than those buildings themselves can. Founded on family and domestic life,

utilizing green infrastructure for environmental protection and economic savings; preserving and enhancing green spaces, farmland and environmentally sensitive areas; undertaking broad-scale planning for cities and towns in adjacent regions in a way that integrates land use and transportation planning for the entire region; providing varied transportation options and infrastructure for walking, cycling, car pooling, car sharing, public transit and others; encouraging effective community involvement early in the process to find unique solutions that fit with the community`s vision of itself; and utilizing planning processes, tools and incentives to facilitate private sector investment and ease of navigation in achieving smart growth solutions (Smart Growth Canada Network, 2007).

suburbia is a physical representation of a collective assertion of class, wealth, and privilege. From its origins, the suburban world of leisure, family life, and unity with nature was based on the principle of exclusion and reflects the alienation of the middle class from the urban, industrial world they themselves were creating (Fishman, 1987). Fishman's consideration that the suburban built environment is a direct reflection of the values of the society creating it is an important basis for this study in searching to discover how the reorientation of the contemporary suburban form is a reflection of new societal goals and objectives.

Post-war suburban development was celebrated as a sign of progress and newfound sources of economic development meant new lifestyles for millions of families (Rosen and Walks, 2013). Characterized by low-density development of single detached homes, reliance on automobile transportation and highway infrastructure, and highly segregated land uses, post-war suburbia is synonymous with social homogeneity and widespread consumptive practices (Zukin, 1991; Hayden, 2003; Harris, 2004; Sewell, 2009). The suburbs signified a different type of urbanism, distinct from that in the city centre, produced by a new dynamism at the urban edge (Fishman, 1987; Garreau, 1992; Lehrer, 1994; Soja, 2000).

According to Garreau (1992), this urban edge grew into newfangled 'Edge Cities' that represent the third wave of our lives pushing into new frontiers in the second half of the 20th century. First, homes were moved out beyond the traditional border that constituted the city, resulting in post-war suburbanization. Second was the 'malling of America' in the 1960s and 70s, when, weary of returning back to the central city for the necessities of life, marketplaces were transported out to the suburbs. Lastly, business

places, jobs, and means of creating wealth were finally moved out to where, for two generations, suburbanites had lived and shopped, giving rise to the Edge City. Without anyone planning or foreseeing it, the simultaneous movement of housing, industry, business, and commercial development to the outskirts created perimeter cities that became functionally independent of the urban core (Fishman, 1987). Identifying the growth patterns of these 'in-between cities' as notably different from traditional suburbs, others developed terms such as 'technoburbs' (Fishman, 1987), 'FlexSpace' (Lehrer, 1994), and 'exopolis' (Soja, 2000).

Significant to the decentralized development of post-war suburbia and the evolution of edge cities was the popular notion of home ownership. Private housing on the urban fringe was seen as the ultimate setting for middle-class consumption, and consumption was the route to economic and social prosperity – a view not only shared by new homeowners, but one promoted by manufacturers and developers as well. According to Dolores Hayden (2003, p. 18), housing was directly tied to the political economy:

> Excessive private consumption was not inevitable. It was the result
> of sustained pressure from real estate interests and their allies in
> government to marginalize the alternatives to unlimited private
> suburban growth. As the production of built space came to dominate
> the economy, replacing the production of manufactured goods, the
> pressure increased.

The success of North American suburban developers between the 1920s and 1960s, and the subsequent drive for homeownership, relied on the use of government loans and subsidies to help them exploit undeveloped land (Blais, 2010). Without widespread regional or national planning for the careful use of land or the strategic provision of infrastructure, minimal public gain was achieved in exchange for the vast government

support that grew suburbs into sprawling landscapes of houses and the shopping malls, corporate office areas, and industrial parks (Hayden, 2003).

According to Harris (2004) and Blais (2010), Canadian housing policy has always favoured private home ownership, which has been socially positioned as a norm to the extent that "the culture of homeownership is integral to the North American way of life" (Choko and Harris, 1990, as cited in Kern, 2007, p. 660). Such policy and positioning has prompted citizens' attempts to attain this tenure through a variety of financial incentives and entitlements, generally resulting in the promotion of sprawling development. These included offering government-backed mortgage insurance to protect lenders or granting subsidies and tax breaks. In contemporary times, popular discourse and new marketing strategies for suburban condo developments, such as Great Gulf's Mississauga project H.O.T. (Home Ownership Today), reproduce this promotion of homeownership, particularly through the message that renting is an inferior and undesirable form of tenure. According to Kern (2007), this culture of property presumes that private ownership constitutes the highest and best use of urban space. In the context of entrepreneurial governance strategies, it contributes to the increased commodification of space and shapes housing options through the widespread assumption that middle class consumers will be drawn wherever home ownership opportunities are presented. This social creation of value linked home ownership is a form of image production central to understanding city-building processes.

Addressing the interface between public policy and urban form with respect to concentrated and dispersed urbanization in Toronto, Filion (2000) identifies the essential conditions with which planning policy will have the capacity to influence urban structure.

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With "loud calls for a shift in the trajectory of urban development and the rigidity of present growth patterns," Filion (2010, p. 16) investigates reasons for the disparity between the two. After setting up structural frameworks within which urban development has the potential to reproduce or transform itself, Filion (2010) argues that urban dispersion, like that of typical suburban development, appears to be losing ground from the perspective of legitimacy and inefficiency. In outlining the difficulties in making radical change to urban form, Filion attests that decentralized suburban development is in conflict with ascending environmental values and efficiency problems due to its inability to prevent traffic congestion. According to Filion (2010), jeopardizing the possibility of implementing an alternative form of urban development is insufficient financial support, a lack of institutional capacity, and an absence of a broadly accepted, cohesive model for change. While factors cited by Filion here are not under investigation in this study, they are noted as potentially limiting to the reorientation of suburban form.

2.2   History of Condominium Development

The necessity to incorporate a review of the history of condominium development in this study is twofold. First, exploring literature on the origin of the condominium concept assists in illustrating its continued increase in popularity as a housing typology. Second, critically examining scholarly literature on condominium development and its prevalence in Toronto helps to clarify the socio-political influence that this development typology has had in recent history.

Douglas Harris (2011) traces the legal concept of condominium before chronicling its introduction to and spread across Canada, revealing what condominium development has grown to represent since its inception. Legally, Harris describes condominium as "a form

of land ownership that combines private ownership of an individual unit in a multi-unit building with an undivided share of the common property in the building and a right to participate in the collective governance of the private and common property," (Harris, 2011, p. 694). Condominium was introduced by statute in the 1960s across North America, facilitating the vertical subdivision of land and enabling a significant increase in the density of private development and private ownership. Over the course of the decade during which it was introduced, the legal form of condominium that was once almost unknown became available almost anywhere, with legislation for its development created across the United States and Canada. The condominium legislation introduced in Canada in the 1960s has, and will continue to have, a major long-term impact on the spatial and social structure of growing cities.

Harris (2011) considers the justifications offered for this type of rearrangement of property, in general and then in Vancouver, Canada. What Harris posits Vancouver achieved through statutory condominium, the legal innovation to increase the density of private ownership in land, can be paralleled to the remaking of downtown Toronto and subsequently its neighbouring suburban communities. The resulting city that has emerged, in both the Vancouver and the Toronto example, "is a city that is more accessible to some, less accessible to others, and increasingly dense in private interests in land" (Harris, 2011, p. 695). Some believe that the vertical gated communities of a condominium allow for "a return to the ancient concept of a city fortress, in which society's haves huddle to defend their lives and possessions against the have-nots outside the gates," (McKenzie, 1994, as cited in Harris, 2011, p. 702).

Alvin Rosenberg, author of the first text on Canadian condominium law, shares an optimistic view of the transformative potential of the legal form of condominium to effect positive social change:

> In future years, condominium may well be instrumental in effecting major changes. Large parts of the urban populations may be shifted to the city cores where the costs of servicing, public facilities, and transportation are at a minimum. *A new class of responsible citizens may be created* with a larger stake in the community because of their private ownership of their homes and working premises. *The trend toward tenant living may be reversed. If the democratic, capitalistic society is to remain vital and vibrant, there is a need for the type of citizen who takes pride in owning his own home or business premises.* In this period of rising land, servicing and construction costs *the condominium may be the only way to fulfill this need.* The condominium concept, if it is successful, will have reflected, or have been a response to, a need for social change and, in turn, will have promoted that change or at least made it possible. (Rosenberg, 1969, as quoted in Harris, 2011, p. 703, emphasis added)

The perception of the city's state of decline gave rise to a legal form that could potentially support and ultimately transform the city (Harris, 2011). Rosenberg's optimism, shared by Harris, was based on the ability of condominium to facilitate the subdivision of land, provide the opportunity for ownership to a greater number of people, and increase the density of private interests, all the while fostering more "responsible citizens" and increasing population density. Condominium was the legal tool to make these goals possible and to develop more efficient cities.

In the case of Toronto, condominium living is not entirely a new occurrence. Since apartment ownership was made possible through the *Ontario Condominium Act* in 1967, this dwelling typology has formed part of Toronto's diversified housing stock. A notable increase in condo development occurred in the early 1980s, but was brought to a halt

when the high proportion of speculator-driven sales caused a market crash. Between the late 1980s and early 1990s, most new housing came in the form of low-rise single-detached homes, but since the late 1990s, new condo construction and sales in the city of Toronto have reached record-breaking figures almost every year until recently (Kern, 2007).

The changing ownership status associated with condominium was one among a larger set of economic and social forces. Condominium was part of a process that embedded a city and its land in increasingly global markets to attract prospective immigrants and foreign investors, most crucially allowing real estate development to become the centerpiece of a city's productive economy (Smith, 2002). Condominium development supported gentrification shaped by neoliberal policy that weaved

> global financial markets together with large- and medium-sized real estate developers, local merchants, and property agents with brand-name retailers, all lubricated by city and local governments for whom beneficent social outcomes are now assumed to arrive from the market rather than from its regulation. (Smith, 2002, p. 443)

As Harris (2011) demonstrates, condominium as a form of ownership can take many shapes and forms, and vary in size, use, features, and price. Despite the potential diversity, the prominent image of the condominium in cities like Toronto, and now its neighbouring suburban municipalities, remains the high-density, apartment-style tower (Kern, 2007). By virtue of this form of land ownership, condominium living produces a shift in the way that public and private spaces are understood and experienced, changing the ways in which condo-dwellers and others in the community interact with one another. While seemingly solely a form of residential tenure, condominium has taken on a multi-faceted set of meanings in mainstream North American culture, suggesting not only a

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certain kind of property ownership, but also of physical design, social governance, personal security and social status. According to Rosen and Walks (2013), the '*condo'*, referring often to both a housing unit in condominium tenure and the physical building containing these units, is emerging as an economic and cultural driver for urban change. In the case of Vancouver, Ley (1996, p. 48-49) argued that, "condominium joined the renovated property as the landscape face of *embourgeoisement*"; not only was condominium a legal form, but also a built form and social space. The 'condo' was a social space of gentrification, brought about by an economic restructuring that increased the affluence of some while displacing others (Harris, 2011). Lehrer and Wieditz (2009) explain how, due to a lack of commitment or support regarding housing from senior levels of government, the City of Toronto was forced to rely on the private sector to intensify its downtown core. Aiming to maximize profits, private developers almost exclusively prefer the high-rise condominium building to its less profitable mid-rise counterpart. The vested private interests of Toronto developers underscore why the tall condo tower is increasingly popular in the redevelopment of the city centre. Concurrently, the socio-economic upgrade of its neighbourhoods assists the City of Toronto in its effort to transform into a global city (Lehrer and Wieditz, 2009).

A number of factors, including population growth, demographic changes, regressive rental housing policy, changing consumer preference, and immigration have contributed to the rise of high-density condo living in large metropolitan areas (Rosen and Walks, 2013). The process by which cities are gentrified through upscale condominium development has been referred to as 'condofication' (Lehrer and Wieditz, 2009; Lehrer, Keil, and Kipfer, 2010; Lehrer 2012). Condo development is argued to be a distinct

property regime with its own logic, representing a new "structured coherence" of political, economic, and socio-cultural interests (Harvey, 1989) in which planning policies, development programs, financial strategies, and lifestyles all converge and maintain dependence on "the continued spatial restructuring of the city through real estate interest, urban development and intensification," (Rosen and Walks, 2013, p. 161). More plainly, Lehrer and Wieditz (2009) suggest condofication is the latest phase of gentrification taking place in Toronto. Sold as a 'Smart Growth' strategy to assist in reducing sprawl and improving Toronto's environmental sustainability, growth and intensification via private sector investment has brought about unintended consequences, such as exposure to immense development pressures that result in demolition of affordable housing stock, resident displacement, and significantly increased real estate values (Lehrer and Wieditz, 2009).

As demonstrated by numerous scholars, condominium development is redefining traditional boundaries of public and private space, facilitating the creation of new exclusive residential clubs, and assisting in catalyzing processes of gentrification and privatization in a context of intensifying neoliberalism (Kern, 2007). With condominium legislation, housing has been reconceptualized away from its original use value in the form of dwelling or shelter and toward its exchange value related to property, lifestyle and consumption (Ronald and Hirayama, 2006).

2.3   Lifestyle and Consumptive Practices

The broad notion of lifestyle or 'way of life' is examined through various lenses. Here, it is considered to be a mode of existence, relating to its physically and socially

constructed factors of influence, which emerges through the medium of shared symbolic codes of stylized behavior and preference.

Looking specifically at the concept of suburbanism as a way of life, Walks (2013) posits that historically it has not been adequately theorized. A very distinct view of the suburbs, and by implication of suburbanism, has been developed, and the suburban way of life has become associated with individualism, consumerism, middle class homogeneity, lack of diversity, and conformism (ie. the valuing of *Gesellschaft* over *Gemeinschaft* – neighbourliness and community – as theorized by German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies). Further, prevailing suburban forms characterized by dependence on the private automobile, coupled with the reliance on personal modes of entertainment and social information are said to have reinforced withdrawal from public life and the decline of social cohesion associated with suburbanism as a way of life.

Making valuable use of Henri Lefebvre's (1970/2003, 1991) dialectical approach to the production of urban space, Walks (2013) conceptualizes suburbanism as a way of life inherent to urbanism that is both distinct yet inseparable from it. Further, it is argued that suburban space is too a dialectical product "in that it exists as both a localized physical expression and an abstract concept reproduced through systems of social processes and practices," (Walks, 2013, p. 1474). Thus, according to Walks, suburbanism should not be approached as a static trait of place or space, but rather as a "multidimensional evolving process within urbanism" that is constantly changing in relation to urban space (Walks, 2013, p. 1472). It must be understood that different places with varying levels and shifting forms of suburbanism maintain the suburbs to be conceptually distinct from processes of suburbanism or suburbanism as a way of life.

Other critics of the suburban way of life (Gans, 1967; Bourne, 1996; Lupi and Musterd, 2006) have pointed out that the designation of 'suburban' is deeply laden with socially constructed assumptions, images, and meanings that do not necessarily reflect its reality, and that this designation can be easily abused as a result. These scholars note suburban populations hold the potential to be highly diverse, often demonstrating characteristics similar to inhabitants of urban places. Before the existence of post-war suburbs, many of the characteristics often associated with suburbanism, including individualism, consumerism, superficiality, lack of community and alienation, were closely associated with the urban way of life in general and large central cities in particular (Wirth, 1938; Simmel, 1903/1967). To come to this understanding of urbanism, Wirth (1938) studied three variables including population size/number, density of settlement, and degree of heterogeneity, noting that the social characteristics and influences of different cities vary widely. Wirth conceptualized urbanism to be more closely related to a way of life rather than to particular urban structures:

> As long as we identify urbanism with the physical entity of the city,
> viewing it merely as rigidly delineated space, and proceed as if urban
> attributes abruptly ceased to be manifested beyond an arbitrary
> boundary line, we are not likely to arrive at any adequate conception
> of urbanism as a mode of life. (Wirth, 1938, p. 4)

Thus, a theory of urbanism, according to Wirth, should be formulated with an understanding of existing social groups and should "avoid identifying [it] as a way of life with any specific, locally or historically conditioned cultural influences" (Wirth, 1938, p. 7). As a characteristic mode of life, urbanism must be understood from a perspective that interrelates physical structure, social organization, and a set of attitudes (Wirth, 1938).

More contemporary theory proposed by Paul Knox (2011) contends that the design of cities is directly linked to lifestyle perception and the consumptive practices of a city's inhabitants. Design is seen to contribute to the functionality and aesthetic appeal of things, while allowing individuals to feel as though they are able to construct their own identities and class distinction through their environment and patterns of consumption. It holds the ability to challenge, modify, or reinforce economic, social, and cultural change, and plays a key role in social reproduction and in the legitimation of authority. Because design can signal values and embody ideals, Knox perceives it as a powerful element of the dynamics of the political economy of places. With the current dominance of consumerism in modern society, Knox asserts "design is critical to the marketing of all sorts of products or objects – both real and imaginary," (Knox, 2011, p. 3).

According to Sharon Zukin (1998), since the late 1960s, the meaning of the 'urban lifestyle' has shifted from a stable social status of privilege to an aggressive pursuit of cultural capital. At that point in time, cities were no longer landscapes of production, but rather became landscapes of consumption (Zukin, 1991, 1995, 1998). The commodification of space, as associated with social and cultural consumptive practices in general, lead to what Zukin (1995) refers to as a symbolic economy. Based on the interrelated production of cultural symbols, like images and information and the spaces in which they are created and consumed, this symbolic economy has established landscapes of power that work in favour for some and marginalize others (Zukin, 1991, 1995). Zukin's attention to urban lifestyles reflects the increased consumptive practices upon which the urban 'way of life' is based, including: the introduction of industries to contribute to a city's economic growth founded on designing and producing goods for

specific lifestyles; the rise of new, highly visible consumption spaces such as restaurants, boutiques, galleries, cafes, etc.; the generation of new, complex retail strategies that combine advertising, sales, real estate development and entertainment; and the encouragement by municipal governments to develop strategies that aestheticize or focus on the visual consumption of public space.

Relating urban lifestyles to models of modernity, strategies of urban development and urban politics and cultures, Zukin (1989) contends that the combination of suburban mass consumption and family-oriented lifestyle provided a strong cultural context for rapid suburbanization. This period of the mid-twentieth century shifted growth of consumer society from the dense, diverse, and socially heterogeneous consumption spaces of the inner city to the decentered, auto-centric, homogenous suburban landscape, where the archetypal space of consumption at the time was the shopping centre. The exclusivity and social appeal of the suburban lifestyle was reinforced by the concept of the suburban shopping centre due to its remote location and the necessity to access these consumptive spaces by car.

Economic historians point to the 1920s as the moment when consumers' purchasing power began to match their aspirations through socio-cultural phenomenon of competitive consumption brought about by Fordist logic – thanks to the successes of Fordism, consumers' dreams could be fulfilled more quickly and easily (Knox, 2011). The spirit of modern consumerism lead to people's lives becoming infused with illusions and fantasies about consumer objects (Campbell, 1987). This was supported by the notion of the single-family home as a privileged consumer product, acting as the stage for materialistic lifestyles and the containers for an extended range of material possessions

(Knox, 2011). By the late 1960s, Guy Debord (1983) had identified the emergence in Western culture of a *Society of the Spectacle*, defined as the moment when commodity had attained total occupation of social life (see Section 2.6 of this chapter for further discussion on Debord). By the 1980s, traditional identity groups based on class, ethnicity, and age had begun to blur as people found themselves increasingly free to construct their identities and lifestyles through their patterns of consumption (Knox, 2011). By the end of the 1990s, consumption had become overwhelmingly accepted as both a means and a mode of social change. The result has been the aestheticization of everyday life, with design implicated in production and consumption at every level, and with consumptive practices now playing a key role in the construction of distinct personal lifestyles and fashionable identities.

2.4   City-building Processes

The *city-building approach* (Fainstein, 1994; Beauregard, 1990; Lehrer, 2002, 2003, 2006a) is a concept that accounts for the historical legitimization of planning at a particular place. According to Cuff (1989), the production of built form involves not the occupants, but a cast of bureaucrats, committees, and entrepreneurs who place a product on the market. The marketplace drives production of the built environment, in the complex context of private interests, public agencies, and regulations. Beauregard (1990) asserts that bureaucracy, specialization, and politics have caused a drift away from the physical city as core object of city building, replaced by reformist political activity taken up by civic boosters and real estate developers.

Fainstein asserts, "although government agencies play an important role in affecting the physical environment, the main progenitor of changes in physical form […] is the

private real-estate development industry" (Fainstein, 1994, p. 4). Real estate developers participate in a dynamic process in which they sell themselves to governments and financial institutions and anticipate their competitors' intentions. They do not merely react to an objective situation but operate within a subjective environment partly of their own creation (Fainstein, 1994). Local authorities have become willing partners in development schemes, with political leaders showing encouragement and expecting new development to generate employment and tax revenue. As such, there is significant pressure on the developer to build the type of project on a site that will most likely produce the greatest return. Further, even though many high-rise towers, shopping malls, and downtown plazas produced by commercial developers have changed the landscapes within which people live their daily lives, the provision of said amenities has been only a secondary purpose of redevelopment efforts (Fainstein, 1994). Within the United States, business groups, usually in collaboration with political leaders, have promoted growth while trying to impose their objectives within the context of elite partnerships. In the early 1990s, Fainstein purports that deal making on an ad-hoc project-by-project basis, rather than comprehensive planning, had been the main vehicle for determining the uses of space.

Without the term *processes* appended to the concept of *city-building*, the link between specific local planning processes of influence are not emphasized. With the understanding that the city-building process is an integrative concept, the built environment must be analyzed along both physical and aesthetical terms, while also attending to societal, economic, cultural and political forces and paying particular attention to the role of different public and private actors and institutions.

Beauregard (1990) proposes that in order to adequately link city-building to its specific influences, a city-centred theory that rejects reliance on generic processes in favour of an object-based approach is necessary. There is a need for planners and practitioners to make the city-building process their focus and practice, rather than the built environment alone. This would encompass the actions and decisions made by investors, developers and others who contribute to the creation of built environment, but would incorporate the practical side relevant to the work of planners when producing and reproducing different types of development patterns in the built environment. By focusing on the dynamism of city-building practices, rather than the final physical outcome only, attention is drawn to the individuals and organizations that assist in shaping the process (Beauregard, 1990).

2.5   Neoliberal Urbanism

Since the 1970s, suburbia has become a significant, but perhaps underappreciated, spatial expression of neoliberalism's deregulatory reign (Peck, 2011). Consequently, the political, economic and socio-spatial characteristics of neoliberal urbanism have received much attention in scholarly literature (Harvey, 1989; Keil, 2002, 2009; Peck and Tickell, 2002; Logan and Molotch, 1987/2007; Peck, 2001). For example, the "growth machine" ideology (Logan and Molotch, 1987/2007) recognizes local government to approach cities not as places where people live, work, and have social relationships, but as places where private interests and commercial viability are essential for local prosperity, citing real estate investors, banks, private developers, and political officials as key players in the development of the urban environment. Here, the increase in value of saleable property is prioritized over community values, neighbourhood needs or a livable city.

Using the growth machine concept, Phelps and Wood (2011) write on how structural changes in capitalism become apparent in different settlement types over time. They speak to the prominence of private-sector interests and more particularly business interests in urban politics, highlighting that state intervention has played a significant role in the shaping of real estate markets, and as a result, urban politics. According to Peck and Tickell, neoliberalism is unique from other regulatory regimes in that it shapes "the contexts and frameworks within which political-economic and socio-institutional restructuring takes place" (Peck and Tickell, 2002, p. 400). They express that the neoliberal project has demonstrated a widespread ability to "absorb or displace crisis tendencies, to ride – and capitalize upon – the very economic cycles and localized policy failures that it was complicit in creating" (Peck and Tickell, 2002, p. 400).

Conversely, the socio-cultural aspects of neoliberalism and the resultant physical landscapes have until relatively recently been less interrogated. This has begun to change as urban scholars show a growing interest in questioning the cultural politics of contemporary urban development processes and their impact on urban (and suburban) form (Walks, 2006; Peck, 2011). Walks argues the aestheticization of politics – that is, "the emergence of a politics driven by aesthetic motivations, delineated by aesthetic concerns and/or masked by aesthetic appeals" (Walks, 2006, p. 466) – would appear to be an important facet of the neoliberal project. Walks posits that neoliberalization and aestheticization appear to be discursively intertwined, emerging as a result of, as well as a strategy for, social exclusion and the management of class and other social and cultural identities. While evolving partly as a response to the contradictions of contemporary

neoliberal urbanity, aestheticization processes produce new contradictions, amplifying and exacerbating existing ones.

In her discussion on condominium development and the neoliberalization of urban living, Kern (2007) asserts that the reliance on private-sector financing, building, and management of residential projects is representative of a major shift in housing strategy in Ontario and Canada as a whole. Housing, viewed as a commodity in the capitalist economy, is increasingly seen as a vehicle for capital accumulation under neoliberal economic regimes (Lewis, 1996; Blomley, 2004). Condominiums are well suited to exchange on the housing market because their relatively low purchase price and low maintenance make them attractive as investments to sell or rent. Caulfield (2005) describes condominiums as a predominant feature of corporatized urban space, defined by geographer Edward Relph as "a potential commodity to be exploited, managed or manipulated in whatever ways will ensure…profitability" (Relph, 1987, p. 188). The massive number of condominium units proposed and under construction constructed in Toronto and the GTA creates a network for the increased and more rapid circulation of capital through the housing market, heightening the potential for capital accumulation by both global investors and local individual homeowners (Kern, 2007). As discussed by Kern (2007), the city-building processes and residential condominium development in Toronto are largely informed by neoliberal policy imperatives such as growth and competition. With the objective of creating a competitive, deregulated, and privatized city, Kern further asserts that property development is a key component of a suite of "neoliberal policy experiments" (as described by Brenner and Theodore, 2002, p. 368) taking place in Toronto.

Under the neoliberal governance structure designed to leave residential intensification to the private sector while supporting large-scale private redevelopment projects, municipalities have seemingly been allowed to decrease their role in providing public spaces and public services (Kern, 2007). Troublesome as it may be due to the private and exclusionary nature of the residential condominium, many municipalities' official plans note that private developers are expected to include 'community services' within their projects. Condominiums typically incorporate some form of indoor and outdoor amenity, including security services or physical facilities for leisure. Often times, these facilities in condominium projects are not publicly accessible. If the community needs of new urban residents are met through privatized development, the city has a decreased demand to fund or expand the public realm or public services. Correspondingly, private development is then considered to be an effective way to manage costs associated with residential intensification. Kern (2007) posits that there are in actuality numerous hidden costs associated with increasing densities, both in terms of hard and soft infrastructure, that end up being absorbed by various levels of government and taxpayers. With her discussion highlighting some of the many ways in which condominiums have been positioned as a natural solution to a variety of urban ills, Kern's critique illustrates how the neoliberal economic ideals of privatization, especially of public services and housing, are not likely to be effectively met through condominium development and increased density.

Peck and Tickell criticize the normalization of entrepreneurial city governance related to neoliberalism, noting "despite its language of innovation, learning and openness, neoliberalism is associated with an extremely narrow urban policy repertoire

based on subsidies, place promotion, supply-side intervention, central-city makeovers, and local boosterism," (Peck and Tickell, 2002, p. 394). Today it has become common for cities to actively look for investment and promotional opportunities so as to not get left behind by their competitors. This preoccupation with "growth-chasing economic development" intensifies the already-competitive struggle for the kinds of public and private resources that neoliberal governance has assisted in mobilizing (Peck and Tickell, 2002, p. 394). Peck conceptualizes the ability of the neoliberal state to naturalize its strategies as "a form of high politics represented as non-political," (Peck, 2001, p. 448). That is, neoliberal solutions are represented as imperatives of intercity global competition, rather than as politically constructed situations in which the state exercises choice. The effect of this is "a rather large silence around how condominium development, and the experience of condominium living, might be reshaping the social, economic and political landscapes of the city" (Kern, 2007, p. 665).

2.6   Image Production

According to Greenberg, "the space of the city is produced not only materially and geographically, but also in the social imagination and through changing modes of cultural representation," (Greenberg, 2000, p. 228). Parallel to and in dialectical relationship with the physical built city exists what Greenberg refers to as the *urban imaginary*:

> A coherent, historically based ensemble of representations drawn
> from the architecture and street plans of the city, the art produced by
> its residents, and the images of and discourse on the city as seen,
> heard, or read in movies, on television, in magazines, and other
> forms of mass media. (Greenberg, 2000, p. 228)

Jones (2009) reiterates Greenberg's position when expressing that corporate and state actors, as well as institutions, mobilize architecture, built form, and design as a way of

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making political-economic strategies socially "meaningful". As such, one must contemplate the built environment in both physical and aesthetic terms, but with a particular awareness of urban and suburban places as an outcome of socio-economic relations and discursive, reflexive practices. Along with the production process of the physical built environment, there is a production process of the imaginary and symbolic; a social construction of a particular image and meaning that is intended to be consumed by the public (Lehrer, 2006a, 2006b).

Similar to Lehrer, Zukin *et al.* (1998) purport that this discursive analysis of cultural images, social practice, and space adds a new level of social critique to the usual explanations of urban growth and decline. Instead of centering one's attention on subjective or objective factors, a discursive analysis of culturally built imagery and aestheticization practices "assumes a coherence between social and spatial arrangements that is derived in and through cultural meaning attached to specific places and has a material effect on their growth and decline" (Zukin *et al.*, 1998, p. 627).

Both the conscious manipulation and continued accumulation of images are important as they are diffused by mass media and interpreted by ordinary individuals (Zukin *et al.*, 1998). Dolores Hayden discusses the significance of the social construct of the suburban lifestyle diffused through symbolic imagery to boost development support in post-war suburbia. Hayden speaks to the symbolism of the urban landscape by making specific reference to the marketing tactics and lifestyle imagery employed by developers in the building of post-war suburbia, stating:

> *New forms for model houses never solve major urban problems, but*
> *they may be sold as if they can.* New real estate developments may
> demonstrate local solutions to physical problems, but in themselves,

they cannot change the national economic and political conditions

that underlie sprawl. (Hayden, 2003, p. 202, emphasis added)

According to Hayden, better architectural design or built space packaged with heightened aesthetic concerns cannot, in themselves, change existing perpetuating patterns of social and economic exploitation by "growth machines which profit from round after round of fringe development," (Hayden, 2003, p. 229).

Tying the ideology of female domesticity, male home ownership, family values and the ideal town to embellished religious imagery, Hayden (2003, p. 6) invokes two examples: the first from 1921 when an editorial writer for the *National Real Estate Journal* expressed to readers that the 'Garden of Eden' was the very first suburban subdivision, and the other a 1946 *New Yorker* cover, showing a new house floating on pink clouds, above a husband, wife and child ascending into the sky holding their blueprints to happiness in suburban heaven (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 - 1946 *New Yorker* magazine cover, showing a new house floating on pink clouds, above a husband, wife and child ascending into the sky holding their blueprints to happiness in suburban heaven. Source: www.condenaststore.com

Both examples demonstrate historical image production strategies that influence an individual's perception and values in favour of certain lifestyles, built forms, or development patterns, a practice that is stronger than ever today.

According to Greenberg (2000), through branding and image production, there is the intention to forge emotional linkages between the commodified, aestheticized city and its increasingly "footloose" middle- and upper-class consumers (i.e. new potential residents, investors, corporate partners, tourists, etc.). Those responsible for city branding and image production practices ultimately hope their city's identity will

> merge with its commercialized image as produced by advertising, media and cultural industries and *be repurchased as if it were real*. In the process, the "real" material city is altered to conform to the idealized image of the brand-name city and to facilitate its further commodification. (Greenberg, 2000, p. 230, emphasis added)

Closely linked to this idea is research and analysis prepared by Guy Julier (2005), which sets up a framework with which one can interpret the aesthetic content, marketing, and branding ascribed to the built environment. Using the example of Barcelona, Julier illustrates how urban regeneration activities are performed through the participation in the production and consumption of symbolic imagery using the hegemonic power held by urban elites and politicians alike. Julier's attribution of taste patterns and everyday practice as attitudinal markers explaining social, political, and cultural identities creates a useful basis for understanding how and why pervasive image production practices and symbolic capital have proliferated urban and suburban development processes.

Foundational to the study of image production practices is the seminal work *The Society of the Spectacle* written by Guy Debord (1983). As a recognized commentary on the modern human condition, the title alone is now used as shorthand to describe the

image-saturated, meticulously mediated way of life akin to postmodern society. Exploring the changing relationship between direct experience and mediated representation, Debord asserts in his first thesis "Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation"; an accumulation of spectacles. However, "the spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images" (Debord, 1983, thesis 4). The image is far more than something we see – it increasingly defines our perceptions of life and the ways in which we relate to others. A significant notation made by Debord is "the obvious degradation of *being* into *having*…and from *having* to *appearing*" (1983, thesis 17). With appearances, one becomes a consumer of images and illusions (Debord, 1983, thesis 47). The rapid replacement of images or cultural products reveals the illusionary or imaginary nature of the society of the spectacle. Debord describes this process of falsification, or the "fraud of satisfaction," by illustrating how a new product holds the promise of the ultimate satisfaction, but by the time one realizes that it is not, it has been replaced by a new product or image to consume – "Every new lie of advertising is also an avowal of the previous lie" (1983, thesis 70). The production and consumption of socially constructed falsifications and replaceable imagery, along with the commodification of almost every facet of life, results in alienation and isolation:

> The society which rests on modern industry is not accidentally or superficially spectacular, it is fundamentally *spectaclist*. In the spectacle, which is the image of the ruling economy, the goal is nothing, development everything. The spectacle aims at nothing other than itself. (Debord, 1983, thesis 14)

In its expression that society is fundamentally spectaclist, Debord's profound manifesto lays the groundwork for understanding the image production practices upon which many contemporary city-building processes are founded.

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The scholarly literature explored herein highlights suburbia as the city of an entrepreneurial "new urban middle class," for whom identity and politics are defined and constructed around consumer activities and lifestyles; a place where image production aligned with local political interests, corporate development, and popular media has not only become increasingly possible, but a crucial instrument for urban economic growth. The literature reviewed also highlights the fact that minimal research has been done looking at the permeation of the condominium tower into traditionally low-density, sprawling areas. Of importance to filling the void of this absent research is the key relationship uncovered in this chapter: lifestyle-centered suburban development, private-sector led condominium development, consumptive activities and commodification of the built environment, and governance agendas linked to deregulation and privatization are all mediated through image production practices. The necessity to appear to be a certain way, as presented by material or non-material imagery, links these various factors together and will prove to be influential in understanding the ways in which condominium development is reorienting the form of GTA suburban municipalities.

3.0   Land Use Planning Regulatory Context

Land use planning and development in Ontario's municipalities is directly influenced by senior levels of government. While Federal government influence on municipal planning is less direct, Provincial and Regional government do have a reasonable stake in municipal planning matters. Until recently, the Province's policy-led planning system placed particular emphasis on residential growth and appeared to promote sprawling, leapfrog development away from the urban core. This type of urban development is now better understood to have had an adverse impact on Ontario's health, environment, and economy, among other things.

In the mid-1990s, in an effort to change the fate of the province's future, the Smart Growth Secretariat (now referred to as the Ontario Growth Secretariat) was established to "manage and co-ordinate the province's efforts to develop and implement a made-in-Ontario Smart Growth agenda," (Smart Growth Secretariat, 2001, p. 4). At the time though, many basic Smart Growth goals, such as building livable communities, creating transportation choices, protecting and enhancing the environment, and making better decisions about infrastructure were already in place in local plans around the GTA (Central Ontario Smart Growth Panel, 2003). The Smart Growth program's standard planning principles became the basic way for the government to address the urban growth issues being experienced in the region (White, 2007). This eventually led to the development and implementation of key pieces of legislation, such as the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2006* ("*Growth Plan*"), the current centerpiece of the Province's regional growth management strategy.

As part of the Places to Grow growth planning regime, the *Growth Plan* provides a framework for implementing the Ontario's vision for building "strong, prosperous communities" within the Greater Golden Horseshoe ("GGH") to 2031. It is intended to guide decisions on a wide range of issues related to growth management "in the interest or promoting economic prosperity" (City of Markham, 2010b). To provide the basis for guiding decisions on how land is developed, resources are managed, and public dollars are invested is the overall intent of the *Growth Plan*.

The *Growth Plan* projects that an additional 3.7 million people will live in the GGH by 2031, totaling a population of 11.5 million people, accompanied by the creation of 1.8 million new jobs (Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure, 2006). Premised on the principles of building "compact, vibrant communities", developing a strong and competitive economy, protection and wise use of natural resources, and optimizing use of existing and new infrastructure to support growth in a compact, efficient form, the *Growth Plan* promotes intensification within the built-up area, focusing on "Urban Growth Centres" ("UGC"). The potential for development at transit-supportive densities is greatest here in order to encourage the development of complete communities, which are defined as:

> …meeting people's needs for daily living throughout an entire lifetime by providing convenient access to an appropriate mix of jobs, local services, a full range of housing, and community infrastructure including affordable housing, schools, recreation and open space for their residents. Convenient access to public transportation and options for safe, non-motorized travel is also provided. (Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure, 2006, p. 48)

Municipalities within the GGH are required to bring their official plans into conformity with the *Growth Plan*. With respect to the subject municipalities, it is the responsibility of York and Peel Regions to ensure that requirements of the *Growth Plan* are met by

local municipalities, including intensification within currently developed areas, minimum density targets, protection of land for employment, efficient use of municipal services and preservation of the natural environment (City of Markham, 2010b). As such, the regional municipalities of York and Peel have created the *York Region Official Plan, 2010* ("YROP") and the *Region of Peel Official Plan, 1996* ("ROP") whose main purposes are to interpret and apply the intent of Provincial legislation and polices within a Regional context, while providing guidance to develop local official plans, such as those of Markham, Vaughan and Mississauga (See Chapter 4 for individual descriptions of each municipality's Official Plan).

The *Growth Plan* has designated Downtown Mississauga, Vaughan Corporate Centre (now renamed Vaughan Metropolitan Centre), and Markham Centre as UGCs intended to support high-density development for a variety of uses. Further, the *Growth Plan* establishes policies and targets for these UGCs to promote intensive development and provide a focus for transit and infrastructure investments to support future growth. This is important to note as new downtowns for each municipality are being proposed in these locations and have been devised according to new secondary plans (for further detail, see Chapter 4).

The *Growth Plan* is considered to be a significant step toward managing Ontario's future growth and supporting its continued prosperity. However, from an implementation perspective, this planning tool has been accepted with heightened criticism and concern (Allen and Campsie, 2013). Primarily sharing concerns of regarding its actual application, the Greater Toronto Home Builders' Association ("GTHBA") expressed in response to the draft *Growth Plan* issued in 2005, that "the *Growth Plan* does not provide

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sufficient 'sticks' to ensure that it will be implemented by municipalities, whose compliance is essential to its success" (2005, p. 2). The GTHBA expressed further concern that "the *Growth Plan* does not proved sufficient 'carrots' to encourage municipalities and homebuilders to embrace the *Plan*" (GTHBA, 2005, p. 2). According to the GTHBA, for the *Growth Plan* to succeed, the Province must take one step past authoring the planning document and accept responsibility for its implementation, rather than making it solely a municipal concern (GTHBA, 2005, p. 4). According to one industry veteran, architect-planner-urban designer Robert Glover, it is necessary to be critical of the Growth Plan implementation:

> This suburban condo market will only continue to grow with new official plans citing prescribed density targets, even though these targets are actually the minimums listed in the Growth Plan. We will be artificially fulfilling the Growth Plan's intentions through ill-minded municipal implementation… Some municipalities are continuing business as usual under the pretense of 'Smart Growth' using Growth Plan targets, forgetting that prescriptive planning doesn't always work. While strength in policy and rigidity in vision is necessary by municipal planners for success, knowing when to make bold moves is also important. That seems to be happening less often now.
>   - Robert Glover (personal communication, April 23, 2014)

Upon critically reviewing its content, the concerns outlined above are bolstered by fact that the content of the *Growth Plan* is riddled with ambiguities. As a guiding document, the *Growth Plan* is intended to directly influence the contents of municipal official plans. However, the document makes habitual use of the adjectives 'vibrant', 'healthy', 'valuable', 'balanced', 'wise' and 'strong' in reference to land use, the growth of communities and residents' 'quality of life'. These words have multiple meanings to multiple individuals, and thus complicate rather than clarify the intent of this *Plan* and other plans reliant on its policies.

What the introduction does state clearly is that the *Plan* guides decisions "in the interest of promoting economic prosperity", to "create a clearer environment for investment decisions", and to "help secure the future prosperity of the GGH" (Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure, p. 6, 2006). Using discourses of apprehension to emphasize the significance of fostering value and economic prosperity, the *Growth Plan* (and official plans of all three municipalities in question) apply tactics of fear mongering to indorse each policy's validity and credibility. Even printed on every other page, the Places to Grow slogan, "Better Choices. Brighter Future" further imbues the document with a level of unwavering truth, staunch authority and unyielding integrity. Common to the Provincial policy documents is the frequent use of language illustrating their criticality and essentiality, prompting the reader to accept its declarations without hesitation or question.

In the *Growth Plan*, an entire section of the document is dedicated to "Protecting What's Valuable" (Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure, 2006, p. 30-33), placing emphasis on what is value laden but without specifically discerning to whom:

> The GGH is *blessed* with a broad array of unique natural heritage features and areas, *irreplaceable* cultural heritage sites, and *valuable* renewable and non-renewable that are *essential* for the long-term economic prosperity, quality of life, and environmental health of the region. These valuable assets must be *wisely* protected and managed as part of planning for future growth. (Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure, 2006, p. 30, emphasis added)

Although this excerpt is general in its description, it is important to note that what is valuable to one group may not hold similar value to another, or may conflict with what they believe should be protected in the face of urban growth. While the presumption taken by the Provincial government in this document to protect environmental features is

of legitimate concern to many, the way in which concern is expressed seems forceful, coming from a position of knowing what is best for all. Following this persuasive discourse is a list of policies for the supposed protection of areas of 'value', all of which are broadly suggestive, encouraging or guiding without delineating or defining specific means or methods of protection. Rather than establishing that this protection is the concern of Places to Grow and the *Growth Plan*, this document frequently downloads responsibility to municipalities in conjunction with other advisory committees or authorities.

Further linguistic fuzziness and imprecision demonstrate the non-committal tone of the *Plan*'s policies, especially in the descriptions for where and how to grow in Section 2 and how to protect what is valuable in Section 4. Through the language of the *Plan*, municipalities are repeatedly guided to 'encouraged to identify', 'encourage to establish' and 'encourage to maintain' without much explanation as to how these actions should be carried out to ensure regional consistency or optimal efficacy. As a document that guide's municipal action or inaction, the *Growth Plan* has and will continue to cause implementation challenges across regions and between cities and towns due to its own authoritarian character coupled with its ambiguous disposition.

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Municipal land use planning is highly influenced, although loosely guided, by senior levels of government through Provincial and Regional policy documents. While for the most part this prevailing Provincial regulation supports intensification, much of the responsibility and decision-making is left up to local municipalities to decide through the development and implementation of official and secondary plans. According to the *Growth Plan*, it is "essential to the economic prosperity, quality of life and environmental

health of the region" that our "valuable assets" must be "wisely protected and managed" through the suite of tools presented by the province (Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure, 2006, p. 30). Although the *Growth Plan* and other documents related to Ontario's growth management support and build on this initiative, they do so using such broad, suggestive language that municipalities are only *encouraged* to establish, maintain or develop *reasonable* strategies and *appropriate* responses to the legislation with few means by which to measure their overall success.

The following case studies take a closer look at the existing municipal context within which Provincial planning documents have been introduced and how each municipality has interpreted and adapted the underlying objectives of Ontario's planning legislation to suit growth management plans within each jurisdiction.

4.0   The Case of the Suburban Condominium

The unique qualities of urban and suburban places are tied to topography, social and economic history, and vernacular architecture.   Knowledge of how their cultural landscapes have evolved can help to establish priorities for current interventions and plays a significant role in a city's visioning of how it should grow in the future.   Though municipalities are required to conform to prevailing planning policy, the action taken by Mississauga, Vaughan and Markham demonstrate the ways in which each prioritize and organize their growth management.   For each municipality, the creation of a new vision and a renewed reputation is equally as important as urbanizing their lands by intensifying development.   Along with urbanity and "quality of life", it is illustrated through official and secondary plans, as well as through news media discourse, that each city highly values the economic potential associated with forecasted growth.

In the following case studies, planning context, growth management strategies, urban development, and image production practices are explored to uncover the ways in which Toronto's neighbours are attempting to influence the physical shape of the suburban landscape all the while shedding their suburban title for a more prominent status on the national and global stage.   Recognizing that this practice is a challenge, it is increasingly clear that:

> Defining [a place's] urbanism is challenging because municipalities don't even know what their identity is.   It is difficult to speak to city status because, these days, municipalities seem to be approaching new identities and branding in ways that aren't necessarily representative of their existing residents, but rather those they are looking to attract.
> - Robert Glover (personal communication, April 23, 2014)

4.1   *Leading Today for Tomorrow*: The City of Mississauga

Mississauga is situated in the Regional Municipality of Peel, in the western part of the GTA. Accounting for 55% of the population of the Region of Peel, Mississauga has a population of 713 443, positioning it as Canada's sixth largest city. Mississauga's initial growth is largely attributed to its development as a bedroom suburb of Toronto. Landlocked and lacking vacant greenfield lands for further growth, present-day Mississauga has had to shift its focus with respect to city-building. Former Mayor Hazel McCallion, who served twelve terms in office, has stated that Mississauga is "...a city of small communities...trying to grow from the outside in," illustrating two of the City's principal characteristics and challenges at the time of its incorporation in 1974: its origins as a city of communities and the type and pace of its growth (City of Mississauga Planning and Building Department, 2004). Striving to be a more sustainable municipality with a diversified economy, Mississauga has committed to building out a full-fledged downtown core through infill and redevelopment, while shaping a new identity for itself as a city distinct from Toronto.

Throughout much of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, most of present-day Mississauga, except for small villages, was agricultural land that included fruit-growing orchards. By the 1880s, the affluent developed an interest in selected communities in the area as vacation destinations and as a prime location for summer homes and cottages. Weekend getaway houses for city dwellers were constructed along Lake Ontario and after World War I, these became year-round residences from which to commute (City of Mississauga, 2013a).

The population in the area nearly doubled in the first three decades of the 20th century. Growth slowed during the economic depression, but picked up again at the end of the Second World War (WWII). By 1951, the population had reached 33 310, and transformed from rural to urban and from distinct communities to one city. Over the next 20 years, the population increased fivefold (City of Mississauga Planning and Building Department, 2004). Transportation improvements intensified from the mid-20th century onward, spurring the majority of growth in Mississauga with the establishment of an extensive regional highway network, including the Queen Elizabeth Way and Highways 401, 427, and 403. These major transportation projects significantly improved access to different settlements and markets within the region.

In addition to meeting the needs of workers in local industry, residential development in the early part of the century was linked to interest from middle-income households working in neighbouring commercial centres. Reasonably priced housing attracted families to homes on generous lots in the vicinity of schools, shopping and entertainment, prompting a demand for larger scale housing development and taking on a form that would come to characterize growth in Mississauga. Lands were no longer developed in piecemeal increments but were planned in the form of large-scale residential subdivisions and industrial developments, with uses generally separated throughout town. At the time, commercial development mushroomed including Square One Shopping Centre, which set a new benchmark for consumerism in the region. When built, Square One was the largest shopping centre in Canada.

As cars became the dominant mode of transportation, the function of main streets as the hub of commercial and social interaction was diminished. The primary function of

major roads became the rapid movement of cars and trucks, resulting in higher traffic volumes and increased driving speeds. Many of Mississauga's primary corridors became unfriendly environments for pedestrians and cyclists. Gradually, community designs focused on the separation of cars and noise from people, resulting in the existing network of curvilinear local roads (City of Mississauga, 2013a).

New industry, office complexes and commercial opportunities attracted a greater resident base and expanded the live-work resident population. Subdivisions that may have initially developed as bedroom communities were offering housing alternatives to employees of local industry and commerce. In 1974, when the Town of Mississauga was incorporated as the City of Mississauga, the population was approximately 250 000 (City of Mississauga Planning and Building Department, 2004). From that point in time to 2011, the number of dwellings in the City more than tripled to almost 243 000 dwellings (City of Mississauga Planning and Building Department, 2012). The City's dominant dwelling structures, detached homes followed by apartments, are akin to those dominant in the Region and Province overall.

Of great importance to the City of Mississauga is its diverse economy; after Toronto, Mississauga prides itself as a "leading player" in the GGH office market. Over 60 of Fortune 500 companies, such as Microsoft Canada and Walmart Canada, base their global or Canadian head offices in Mississauga, with strong representation in pharmaceuticals, banking and finance, and information technology industries (City of Mississauga, 2013a). Economic development and planning is a key element of the City's new Official Plan.

The *Mississauga Official Plan* ("MOP"), approved in September 2010 with parts of appealed to the Ontario Municipal Board ("OMB"), is a policy document prepared under the *Planning Act* to guide the city's growth and development to the year 2031, and in conjunction with the City's Zoning By-law, guides land use planning and urban development. The MOP implements the *Planning Act* at the local level, providing a framework for long-term planning that reflects its principles and requirements. The policy framework of the MOP is intended to manage and direct the next stage of the city's redevelopment and intensification.

The goal of the Official Plan is to "protect what is valuable and shape change responsibly" (City of Mississauga, 2013b). All change within the urban environment will be considered "for its capacity to create successful places where people, businesses and the natural environment will collectively thrive" (City of Mississauga, 2013a, p. 1-1). According to the MOP, "Mississauga will inspire the world as a dynamic and beautiful global city for creativity and innovation, with vibrant, safe, and connected communities…*a place where people choose to be*" (City of Mississauga, 2013a, p. 1-3; emphasis added).

As Canada's sixth largest city, Mississauga has been one of the fastest growing cities in the country. By 2031, Mississauga's population and employment is expected to increase to approximately 805 000 people and 510 000 jobs (City of Mississauga, 2013a). As per the direction of the *Growth Plan*, and under the guidance of the Secondary Plan *Downtown21 Master Plan: Creating an Urban Place in the Heart of Mississauga* ("*Downtown21*") (Glatting Jackson Kercher Anglin, 2010) the bulk of this growth is being directed to a new downtown area (see Figure 3).
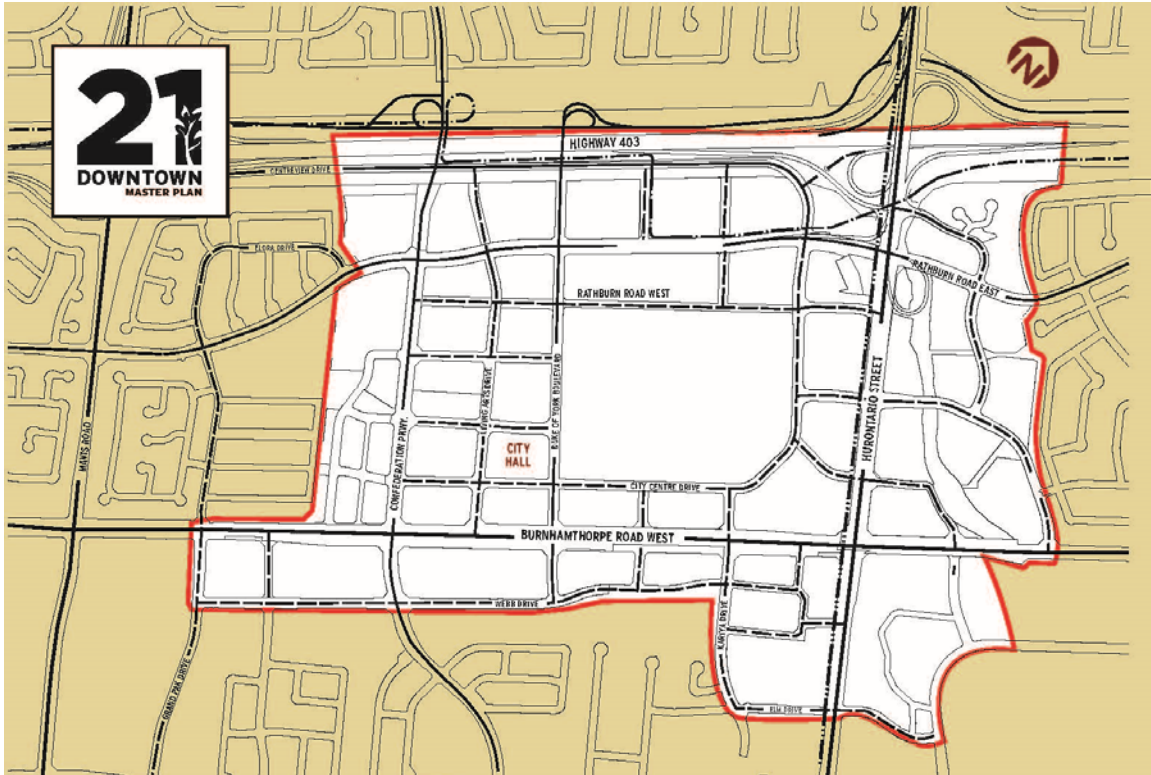
Figure 3 – *Downtown21* Master Plan Boundary Map. Source: www.mississauga.ca/onlinemaps/planbldg/images/DT21

Creating a 'vibrant downtown' is one of the key goals if the City's strategic plan to transform "from suburban to urban" into "the place we want to be" (Glatting Jackson Kercher Anglin, 2010, p. 4). The implementation of *Downtown21* is centered on the six core principles of catalyzing employment, building multi-modal, creating an urban place, living green, establishing a focus, and creating a development framework with predictability.

To follow these principles, *Downtown21* intends to do the following:

- introduce a revised street framework to which new streets increase connectivity;
- illustrate ways in which high-order transit can be implemented into street designs;
- outline details for nine districts of which the downtown is comprised; and
- present urban design guidelines for the downtown area.

Design guidelines and district outlines pay particular focus to the Main Street district – referred to as "*The Place*" (Glatting Jackson Kercher Anglin, 2010, p. 39). Envisioned as the "catalytic example of Downtown's potential to create a vibrant, walkable, mixed-use place," this area is forecast to incorporate high-density residential condo development among other types of housing (Glatting Jackson Kercher Anglin, 2010 p. 35).

Like Mississauga's Official Plan, the *Downtown21* Plan makes superior use incorporating mapping, urban design sketches, precedent imagery and 3-D digital modeling into its plan to demonstrate in detail its goals and objectives for the eight districts comprising the MCC. The language used is not complicated which makes the document accessible to individuals other than planners, urban designers and city officials. Where the document lacks textual clarity, supplementary images assist in conveying messages. It is clear from this document however that priority has been given to certain districts over others based simply on the amount of detail incorporated for each. The mixed-use heart of the MCC, the Main Street District (Glatting Jackson Kercher Anglin, 2010, p. 29-32), receives a much higher level of focus than the future urban neighbourhood planned for Cleary Park District (Glatting Jackson Kercher Anglin, 2010, p. 36). Culminating in a collection of thorough urban design guidelines, the strength and legitimacy of this directive document comes from its comprehensiveness. The detailed framework presented, including built form standards and street design requirements, demonstrates that the group responsible for the document's preparation tried to anticipate a multitude of scenarios and provide direction accordingly.

As referenced in the *Downtown21* Plan, Mississauga has reached the end of its greenfield growth phase and is now approaching growth by accommodating residential

development with high-density built form typologies in already built up areas. With its evolving urban form, Mississauga is aiming to showcase a new image of itself to Toronto and the rest of the world. The City has an increased interest in the appearance of its global image as compared to that of Toronto. Such is evident in the City's planning efforts to develop an urbanized, downtown core guided by *Downtown21* (Glatting Jackson Kercher Anglin, 2010), whose goals, objectives, and principles are directed by those outlined in the MOP. According to *Downtown21*, the Secondary Plan is designed to "promote the continued evolution of a livable, compact, accessible, sustainable downtown centre for the entire city which will enhance Mississauga's competitive advantage and reputation as a forward looking community," (Glatting Jackson Kercher Anglin, 2010, p. 3). Traditionally, mid-rise office buildings, large format retail malls, and seas of surface parking characterized the City's "downtown", whose skyline was generally utilitarian and lacking character.

Typically, for a city struggling to build an identity through its architecture, public projects, such as a museum or opera house, are widely promoted to attract attention. Mississauga's first major foray into hosting a national architectural competition resulted in its architecturally distinguished City Hall, which opened in 1987. However, more recent endeavours, such as Fernbrook Homes and Cityzen Development Group's Absolute World project, have been uncommon according to former Mayor McCallion, who said it was unusual for a city to look to a privately developed residential condominium to help define its civic identity (Korducki, 2012).

In 2006, former Mayor McCallion announced the international design competition for a new downtown residential development, believing it would take something

ambitious to bring Mississauga and its new image into the limelight. Yansong Ma, founder of the MAD Architectural Design Studio in Beijing, admitted that he'd never heard of Mississauga when he discovered the design competition online in 2005. "I was imagining Mississauga as a city aiming to become Chicago or Toronto, with a lot of big towers, in the future," said Ma (Gregor, 2011). In terms of architecture, Ma believed that North American cities needed "something more organic, more natural, more human." His design matched the City's vision and the two "Marilyns" were born. Visible from Highway 401 leading to Mississauga from Toronto, the two buildings standing 50 and 56 storeys each are tall, winding, and curvaceous. As part of a five-building Absolute World development, the towers' curves have become almost as celebrated as those of their namesake. Sheldon Leiba, President and CEO of the Mississauga Board of Trade has stated, "it is amazing how much the architectural design of a building can become an iconic symbol for a city…[It] is such an example of what a higher standard of creativity can do to make your city globally identifiable" (Hauch, 2012). Current Mississauga Mayor Bonnie Crombie says the Marilyn Monroe towers make a statement: "The Marilyn Monroe buildings have said to the world that Mississauga is not afraid to try something different and daring. I think that says a lot about our city. Buildings like these add character and depth to a city'' (Hauch, 2012).

Sharon Florian, the director of sales and marketing for the developer Fernbrook Cityzen, said the Marilyn building largely sold out in June 2006 in about 24 hours, and its companion tower largely sold out in a matter of weeks one month later. Florian said that the developer initially held the international design competition to "bring some excitement to the Mississauga skyline," but that the towers have done much more,

particularly in terms of international exposure (Gregor, 2011). According to Fernbrook high-rise sales representative, Stacey Stewart, buyers have come from around the world, particularly Dubai. They have a taste for "eye-catching high-rises", she says, and they "appreciate" the building's style (Dunn, 2012). Pleased with the physical outcome coupled with the international exposure, McCallion said, "What we've clearly demonstrated to all the developers that want to build in our city core, and throughout the city, is we want, if possible, architectural competition, because this is just a leading example of what can be accomplished" (Gregor, 2011). Through city-building processes based on competition, exclusivity, and image production, Mississauga has managed to transform its local skyline and its worldwide reputation simultaneously.

4.1.1 *Selling Mississauga's Condominium Boom*

According to Buzzbuzzhome.com, in June 2015, 41 condominium development projects are either recently completed, under construction or under registration in Mississauga. This number does not include the number of condominium buildings that already exist, nor does it include the ones being devised that have yet to be introduced to the public.

Developments such as Posh Style Vibe at Parkside Village (Amacon), Grand Park (Pinnacle International), LimeLight (Phase 2) (Daniels Corporation) and HOT Condos (Great Gulf) have each made substantial use of image production practices as reviewed in Chapter 2 in appealing to individual's preferences and marketing the lifestyle 'distinct' to each development (see Figures 5 through 8).
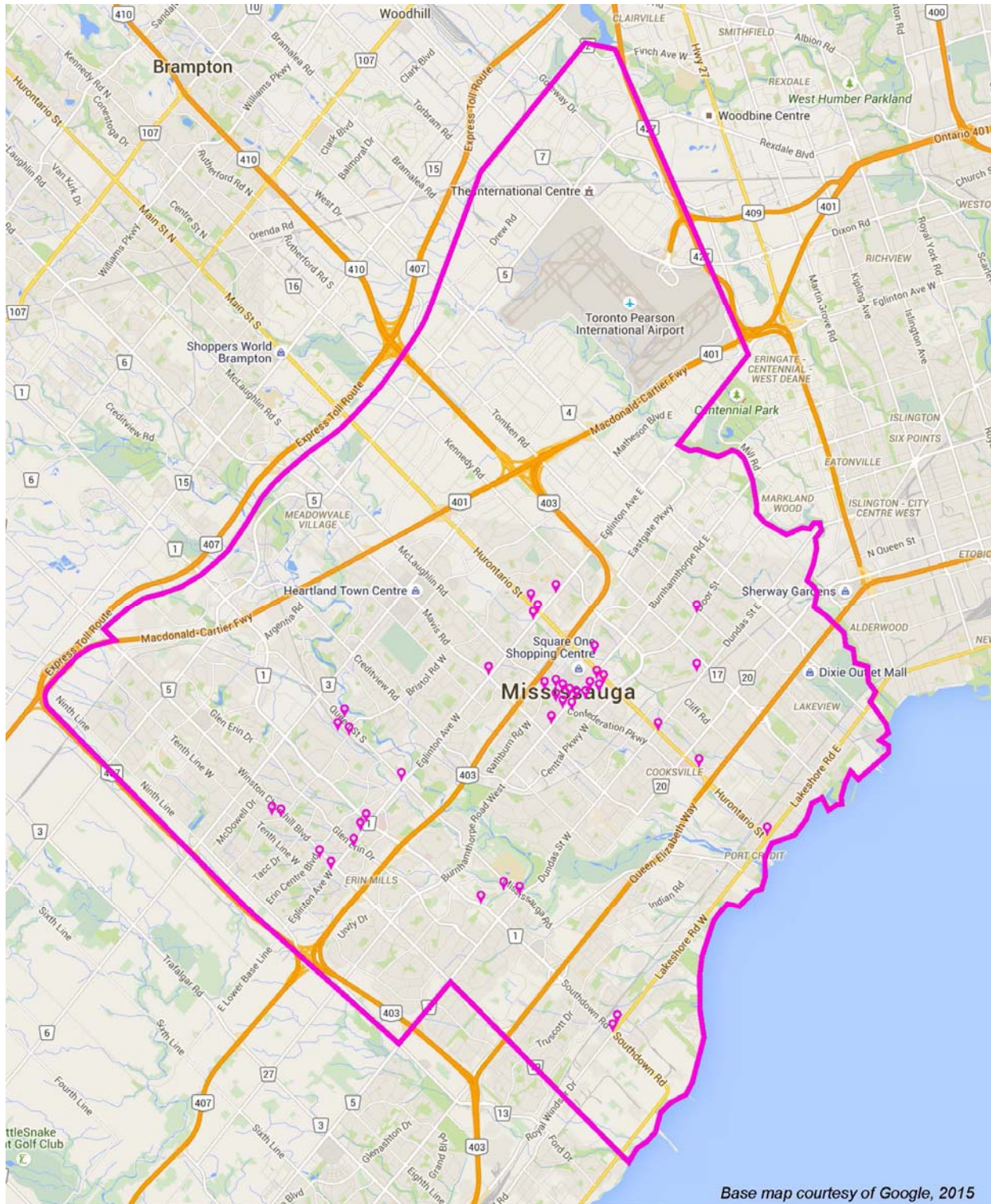
Figure 4 – Mississauga Condominium development as of June 2015. Map by author
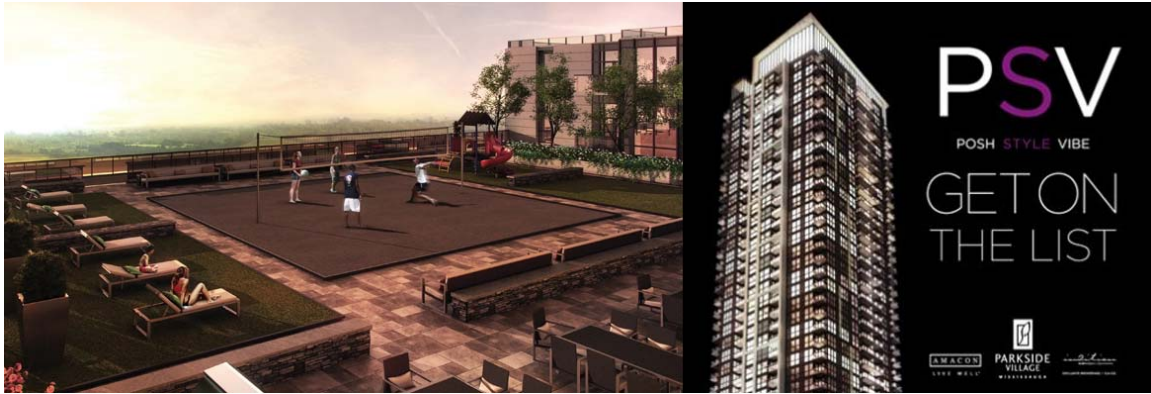
Posh Style Vibe

Figure 5 – PSV artist's rendering and online advertisement. Source: www.lifeatparkside.com/communities/view/psv

Posh Style Vibe ("PSV") is a 42-storey condominium with 423 units, and is one of 15 high-rise buildings in the Parkside Village community master plan. Unit offerings include one, two and three bedroom suites, some with dens, ranging in size from approximately 530 to 1,320 square feet. Pricing starts at $260,000. Located in what has been named the Confederation District in Mississauga's *Downtown21 Master Plan*, PSV's marketing materials locates the project in the heart of Mississauga's City Centre. Claiming to "redefine the way you live, work and play," marketing discourse states that living at PSV will help one discover "the wonderful lifestyle that a true urban village has to offer" (Amacon Inc., 2014). Shopping and entertainment are highlighted throughout PSV's marketing imagery and textual discourse, with young women most strongly portrayed as shoppers/consumers, claiming that "with so much to do, you may decide to never leave Mississauga's city centre" (Amacon Inc., 2014). The marketing for this project is further directed towards young adults, women in particular, through the play on the project name acronym PSV. Beginning with the same letters as *P*ark*S*ide *Vi*llage, the name *P*osh *S*tyle *Vi*be presents a distinctly upscale, female-geared appearance. Matched

with the utilization of imagery of young adults living, playing and having fun using the building's amenities, the impression of youth is reiterated.

Grand Park

Figure 6 – Grand Park artist's renderings and online advertising imagery. Source: www.pinnacleinternational.ca/GrandPark2

Grand Park is a 48-storey, high-rise condominium with 469 units, and is one of two towers in the Grand Park development complex. Unit offerings include one, two and three bedroom suites, some with dens, ranging in size from approximately 590 to 1,050 square feet. Pricing starts at approximately $262,000. While claiming to be part of the Grand Park community that "caters both to the growing family and the Fortune 500 company alike", branded suite names and glossy marketing campaigns for this project demonstrate that a high end, more discerning clientele is the target market. Suite names include 'Downtown Chic', 'Midtown Couture', 'Country Glamour', 'Urban Delight', and 'Uptown Classic', continuing the common theme of luxury and appealing to the tastes or perceptions of potential consumers. With project amenities boasting a caterer's kitchen, a yoga and pilates studio, an exclusive movie theatre, guest suites and a 24-hour concierge, the online marketing discourse promotes for one to "become the centre of your social

circle while entertaining family and friends in the true spacious conveniences of the lush amenities," playing on one's desire for validation through the consumption of goods (Pinnacle International, 2014). The emphasis on youth is reiterated here as lifestyle imagery illustrates only young women or young couples enjoying the development's amenities or neighbourhood attractions like restaurants and shopping centres.

LimeLight (Phase 2)

Figure 7 – LimeLight artist's renderings and online advertising imagery. Source: www.limelightcondos.com/main.html

LimeLight Phase 2 is a 32-storey high-rise condominium with 355 units, and is one of two high-rise condominium towers in Daniels' LimeLight building complex. Unit offerings include studios, one, two and three bedroom suites, some with dens, ranging in

size from approximately 525 to 1,085 square feet. Pricing starts at approximately $200,000 for studios and $400,000 for two bedroom units. The marketing campaign used for this specific project also makes use of the notion of luxury, modernity and exclusivity, stating that LimeLight is "light years ahead" with a new take on condominium living, claiming that "it's time to put yourself in the LimeLight!" (Daniels Corporation, 2014). Going beyond the development name and the shining green beacons of light radiating from each of the two towers, marketing materials focus on the concept 'being green'. Web materials claim that this project offers purchasers Mississauga's "most environmentally responsible residence to date" (Daniels Corporation, 2014). "LimeLight is shedding new light on green living" by including amenities like a car share program, bicycle parking (required by the City) and LimeLight's rooftop terrace, which features a greenhouse and gardening terrace where residents can "show off their green thumbs" (Daniels Corporation, 2014). Making further use of the 'green' theme, suites are branded with synonyms for the colour green, including 'The Kelly', 'The Olive', and 'The Teal'.

HOT Condominium

Figure 8 – HOT artist's rendering and advertising imagery. Source: www.hotcondominiums.com/

Great Gulf's HOT Condominium, the acronym for 'Home Ownership Today', is a 4-storey low-rise residential condominium complex with units that range in price from approximately $230,000 to just shy of $500,000. The unit mix includes studios, one, and two bedroom suites, some with dens, ranging in size from approximately 520 to 1,250 square feet. This is the only low-rise condominium reviewed in this study, and although it does not fit the high-rise typology most common to condominium development in Mississauga, the marketing of this specific project is inexplicably tied to image production practices taking place today. This marketing campaign emphasizes the home ownership ideal, purporting that "Great Gulf is able to create truly superior designs that reflect the pride of home ownership" (Great Gulf Homes, 2014). The development website claims "HOT has everything you'll ever want at a price you've never thought possible" (Great Gulf Homes, 2014), even though HOT condo units are priced similarly to many other condominium units of the same size in nearby locations. Potential purchasers are incentivized to buy into HOT when offered a $1,500 discount on furnishings from BoConcept, a Danish designer and retailer. Further, applying a sense of urgency, consumers are advised, "don't wait, get one while they're HOT" (Great Gulf Homes, 2014).

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Debbie Cosic, CEO of In2ition Reality, a Mississauga-based real estate brokerage that specializes in the marketing, merchandising and selling of new home communities and condominiums, asserts that this type of marketing described above relates directly to the anticipated end user:

> With suburban projects, [marketing] is very focused on the end user.
> There will be some investors, but for the most part its primarily end
> users – a healthy dose of new buyers and a healthy dose of move-

down users. You have to skew your building design and demographics to that. And it's a longer sell…. In the Mississauga marketplace that [new condo residents] are residents of the area. We do have some overseas representation, like 20% of our buildings, but again they are people who are familiar with Mississauga, so they either have family here or their children are going to school here. Education is a huge driver.

- Debbie Cosic (personal communication, May 14, 2014)

Cosic contends that there has been an effort to introduce a market for family units in Mississauga, but cites that they're cost prohibitive and usually they just don't work from an economic standpoint for developers. There is however a shift towards smaller suits in the city's new downtown:

but not necessarily the 400 square foot suites because those are still part of an isolated investor market that are very downtown-centric and are very difficult to sell.
- Debbie Cosic (personal communication, May 14, 2014)

From this perspective, there appears to be a disconnect between the intention of the planning policies prepared by the City, the types of spaces being built, the supposed end users intended to inhabit those spaces, and the types of lifestyle marketing taking place in Mississauga's condominium market. This division between identity and reality mirror Glover's sentiment highlighting the challenge for cities to understand their own identities versus branding in ways that do not represent their current population, but rather those they are looking to attract to the city.

4.2   *A Plan for Transformation*: The City of Vaughan

Situated in York Region, in the north-central portion of the GTA, Vaughan is the eighth largest city in Ontario, and the 17th largest city in Canada (City of Vaughan Economic Development Department, 2013). It is bound by Toronto to the south, and like

most Ontario municipalities, Vaughan began as an agricultural community with a variety of villages and hamlets developing around mills and small businesses. Similar to Mississauga, Vaughan's growth is largely attributed to its proximity to its neighbour to the south; historically, Vaughan was known for its slogan "The City Above Toronto" which was originally helpful in locating the city physically. Coupled with the 2011 construction of a state-of-the-art City Hall facility was a major rebranding effort by the City, which removed this slogan from its logo. Ex-city manager Clayton Harris said, "Vaughan is a large urban centre in the GTA in its own right…the original purpose of the tagline is not there anymore," (Gombu, 2010).

Vaughan changed relatively little in its early history, from the 1840s to the 1930s where the population remained constant below 5 000 people. As an agriculture-based local economy, Vaughan was not quite as hard hit as the nation's urban areas during the Great Depression of the 1930s. For residents who were unable to support themselves, particularly families with children, Vaughan Council's innovative response to the needs of the community came in the form of various large-scale make-work projects from the federal government. Highway 7 was one such project, constructed in the early 1930s, providing much needed local employment and resulting in a new transportation route (City of Vaughan Archives, 2010b).

World War II sparked an influx of immigration, and by 1960 the population grew to almost 16 000. The new arrivals to Vaughan were for the most part displaced Eastern and Southern Europeans seeking to build new lives in Canada. From the 1960s, immigration patterns again reflected the national experience with a diverse ethno-cultural mix of emigrants joining Vaughan's major population groups: British, Italian and Jewish.

Most of the post-war immigrants ultimately settling in Vaughan first lived and worked for some time in Toronto (City of Vaughan Archives, 2010a).

In 1991, the Town of Vaughan achieved City status due to population growth (City of Vaughan Archives, 2010b). With significant growth and change again on the horizon for Vaughan, the City made the decision to upgrade its civic centre to match its future ambitions. The winning scheme in a national design competition came from renowned Toronto architectural firm KPMB. The design intent for Vaughan's new City Hall was to set the tone for environmentally responsible and civic-minded local development in the 21st century. According to Vaughan Ward 4 Councillor Sandra Yeung Racco, the new building represents the "strong sense of identity within City Hall", as well as demonstrates to residents and other municipalities that Vaughan is "serious about its future" (personal communication, April 30, 2014).

Vaughan is one of the fastest-growing municipalities in Canada, achieving a population growth rate of 20.7% between 2006 and 2011 (City of Vaughan Economic Development Department, 2012a). Strong population growth has been a driving force behind the Vaughan's economic progress. Compared with the twenty largest municipalities in Canada, Vaughan ranks second in terms of population growth. Immigration plays a key role in the growth of the City and its economy as 45% of the population is comprised of immigrants, compared with the Provincial average of 28%. Provincial and Regional forecasts predict a population of 416 600 people and 266 100 jobs by 2031 (City of Vaughan, 2011). The housing stock for the city of Vaughan is comprised primarily of single detached houses (68.9%), and represented in smaller numerations are apartments (13.2%) (Hemson Consulting Ltd., 2008). The number of

apartments is expected to increase dramatically as the City of Vaughan implements its new growth management strategies as outlined by *Vaughan Tomorrow*, the City's growth management program,

Vaughan Tomorrow consists of four linked elements that address the ongoing challenges and opportunities anticipated to shape the future of the City of Vaughan. Of these elements, the City's new Official Plan, *A Plan for Transformation* (2010), has the greatest impact on land use planning. Guiding planning and development in Vaughan, the City's Official Plan shares an express commitment to build on the City's current strengths, address existing challenges, and most importantly, build a "vibrant and sustainable City for the 21st century" (City of Vaughan, 2010, p. 8), oriented towards a handful of goals[2].

The Province's *Growth Plan* locates one Urban Growth Centre within Vaughan – Vaughan Corporate Centre ("VCC"), now renamed Vaughan Metropolitan Centre ("VMC"). It is also identified as a Regional Centre in the YROP. Conforming to current Provincial and Regional land use policy direction, Vaughan's Official Plan designates the VMC as a distinct *Intensification Area*. As the subject of a detailed Secondary Plan, *The VMC Plan: Secondary Plan for the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre* ("the VMC Plan"), prepared by private Toronto-based urban planning firm Urban Strategies Inc. (2013), this area is being planned as the City's downtown and will host the widest range of uses and the tallest buildings in the City (City of Vaughan, 2010). An earlier Secondary Plan for the VCC, which comprised of much of the same area, was previously approved in 1998,

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[2] These goals include strong and diverse communities, a robust and prominent countryside, a diverse economy, a vibrant and thriving downtown, moving around without a car, design excellence and memorable places, a green and sustainable city, and directing growth to appropriate locations.

where the area was envisioned to be a focal point for business and commercial activity rather than a highly mixed-use community.

Figure 9 – Conceptual rendering of proposed full build-out of VMC by 2051. Source: VMC Secondary Plan, 2010

The VMC project is a priority strategic initiative for Vaughan City Council and is intended to attract and support private development (City of Vaughan, 2012c). According to the Official Plan, the VMC will be a place of regional importance; a "strategic location for the concentration of the highest densities and widest mix of uses in the City, allowing it to become a multi-faceted and dynamic place to live, work, shop and play, attracting activity throughout the day" (City of Vaughan, 2010, p. 38). Since much of the VMC is undeveloped currently, the City sees an excellent opportunity to require that a pedestrian-friendly and transit-oriented approach to its development take place, with a focus on providing diverse employment opportunities and housing options, including the high-rise condominium tower. The VMC Plan is considered to be the

primary tool used in the review of development proposals and application in the district. Its principles and objectives describing the long-term vision for the VMC echo the principles of Vaughan's Official Plan. By achieving its objectives, it is anticipated that "the VMC will set a new standard for smart growth" (City of Vaughan, 2012c, p. 3) that will "redefine the model of Canadian downtowns for the 21st century" (City of Vaughan, 2012c, p. 5).

With approximately 179 hectares for development opportunity, the VMC is considered the largest and most ambitious project in the City's history (City of Vaughan, n.d.). The vision that is described in promotional material is for "a vibrant, modern urban centre for residents and businesses that encompasses all amenities of urban lifestyle" (Urban Strategies Inc., 2013); a city centre where commuters can pass through a state-of-the-art subway terminal and exit into a hub of office buildings, take a short walk to their condo, catch a bus from the rapid transit hub, and enjoy pockets of green space along the way (Javed, 2012a). Intended to attract and support private development, Vaughan's goal for the VMC is that it is "sustainable, investment ready, and connected" (City of Vaughan Economic Development Department, 2012b). The aim is that, by 2031, the new downtown will accommodate 25 000 residents and provide employment for more than 11,000 people (Urban Strategies Inc., 2013).

The *VMC Plan* is structured much like Vaughan's new Official Plan and makes higher use of text to communicate its goals and objectives, not relying on imagery to help illustrate meaning. Only in the appendices of the document does the reader have the opportunity to explore the urban design and planning intentions through the use of maps and graphics. Nonetheless, the document's intent is clear due to the uncomplicated

language used and the formatting that guides readers to co-related sections of the Plan for supporting policies (see Urban Strategies Inc., 2013, p. 19 for example).

Transformation of the remainder of Vaughan is visible in other plans and initiatives being developed by the City, but driving the accelerated urbanization of this downtown portion of Vaughan is the $2.4 billion Toronto-York Spadina Subway Extension Project (TYSSE). In 2006, the Ontario government announced that it would extend the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) Spadina subway line north to take pressure off the overburdened Yonge subway line (Javed, 2012a). The six-station, 8.6-kilometer expansion would provide a critical extension for the existing TTC subway system, terminating at the VMC near Highway 7 west of Jane Street. This extension is the first TTC rapid transit line to cross the City of Toronto boundary (Toronto Transit Commission, n.d.). In a Globe and Mail interview (Perkins, 2013), Donald Schmitt, principal with Diamond Schmitt Architects who is involved in select VMC projects, said

> It must be one of the most unusual projects in the country in that there is this enormous tract of undeveloped land with a subway coming up right in the middle of it…You're really designing a piece of the city from first principles, from scratch.

Vaughan Mayor Maurizio Bevilacqua has welcomed the decision by the TTC to name the final stop on the TYSSE 'Vaughan Metropolitan Centre.' "This is good news for the City of Vaughan," said Mayor Bevilacqua:

> The name of this station has significant meaning for our City. In addition to being consistent with the marketing and branding of the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, it's significant in that the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre Station is a cornerstone project at the heart of Vaughan's new downtown. Adopting this name is another positive step for the City as it continues to *transform itself from a suburban environment to a world-class city*. (Toronto Transit Commission, n.d.; emphasis added).

To encourage high architectural standards, the City created an Urban Design Review Panel — the first in York Region — made up of 14 architects and land use planners from around the GTA who review all of the development applications for the downtown and offer design-related recommendations (Javed, 2012a).

Bevilacqua has been pushing developers and landowners to fast-track their projects, giving the public an earlier look at the future and help build support. The response so far has been primarily from condominium developers such as Cortel Group, which is creating the five-building Expo City on the eastern side of Highway 7 near Creditstone Road (Javed, 2012a; for more detail see following subsection). The first Expo tower, a 37-storey condominium development, sold faster than anticipated with 90% of units purchased after only three months (Newmarket Era, 2012). Andrew Brethour, whose firm PMA Brethour Realty Group handled sales and marketing for Expo City, said the project was designed to be "very Yorkville-like," referencing the high-end downtown Toronto shopping district. "What was sort of a classic suburban community will now have an urban core and a connectivity that will take it directly to downtown Toronto," Mr. Brethour said (O'Toole, 2011).

4.2.1   Selling Vaughan's Condominium Boom

According to Buzzbuzzhome.com, in June 2015, 34 condominium development projects are either recently completed, under construction or under registration in Vaughan. This number does not include the number of condominium buildings that already exist, nor does it include the ones being devised that have yet to be introduced to the public. Developments such as Posh Condos (Kantium Developments), Centro Square (Liberty Development), Expo Condos (Cortel Group) and Bellaria (Solmar Development

Corporation) have each made significant use of image production practices to illustrate each their 'unique' lifestyle offering (see Figures 11 through 14).
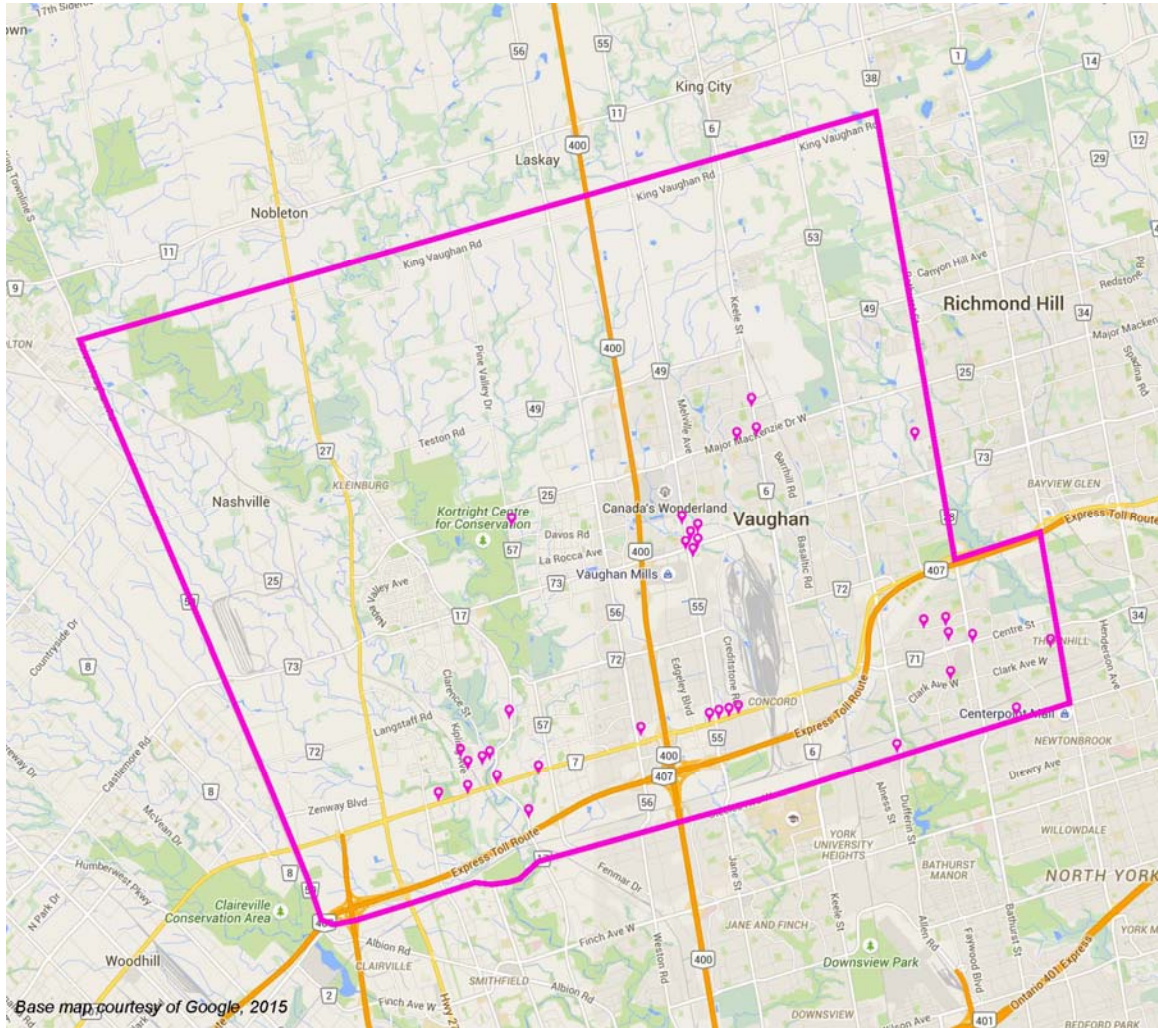

Figure 10 – Vaughan Condominium development as of June 2015. Map by author

Posh Condominium

Posh Condominium is a 13-storey high-rise condominium with 184 suites, built along side an "exclusive" collection of 'executive townhomes'. Unit offerings include one, two and three bedroom suites, some with dens, ranging in size from approximately 620 to 905 square feet, with the townhomes reaching almost 1,950 square feet. Pricing starts at approximately $260,000. Like condominiums being built in the city of Toronto's

Figure 11 – **Posh Condos online location map and marketing logo. Source: www.kantium.ca/poshcondos**

shopping and entertainment districts, Posh Condo uses the lure of luxury and fashion to appeal to potential purchasers. The marketing campaign for this project makes use of semi-precious stones to brand the different suites offered to potential purchasers (ie. 'The Sapphire', 'The Emerald', and 'The Ruby'), while also noting that the building features recreational amenities with "real sparkle" (Kantium Developments, 2014). With a seductive female silhouette draped with diamonds gracing the development's website, the act of high-end consumption and luxury is front and centre. This theme is echoed through the project marketing discourse:

> The cut of your jacket. The line of your dress. The sparkle of you diamond bracelet. The polish chrome of your sport car. What we wear and what we drive can express a lot about who we are. Yet nothing expresses your personality, your desire for finer things in life, more eloquently than your choice of home. With POSH, you have a condominium that can graciously accommodate all your acquisitions in life. (Kantium Developments, 2014)

Optimizing further the upscale association with its namesake, the context map describes the ways in which "the glittering city surrounds you" (Kantium Developments, 2014). Locating schools, shopping centres and golf courses, this map also explicitly lists nearby

establishments like Jaguar, BMW and Mercedes dealerships, as well as high-end restaurants like The Octagon and Terra Restaurant.

Centro Square

Figure 12 – Centro Square artist's renderings. Source: www.libertydevelopment.ca/centrosquare/index

Centro Square is a 33-storey high-rise commercial and residential condominium with 447 residential units, and is one of three high-rise towers in the Centro Square development project. Unit offerings include one, and two bedroom suites, some with dens, ranging in size from approximately 470 to 1,100 square feet. Pricing starts at approximately $250,000. Promoted as "a dramatic new addition to the Woodbridge

skyline and an exciting gateway to the emerging new City of Vaughan" (Liberty Development Corporation, 2014a), Centro Square "aims to redefine the way people live, shop, work, play and entertain in Vaughan," allowing one to be at the *centro* (ie. centre) of it all (Liberty Development Corporation, 2014a). Boasting 200,000 square feet of shopping and commercial space, the vision illustrated for this mixed-use development by the marketing campaign is for it to be a "complete upscale destination for the entire region, a hub of life, luxury, shopping, work and leisure for all its residents" (Liberty Development Corporation, 2014a). Regarding the region, Vaughan is reputably known as being home to some of the highest concentrations of Italians in Southern Ontario. From its name 'Centro' to utilizing Italian phrases throughout the project website (ie. benvenuti, etc.), this development project and its marketing appear to have been tailored to suit such a demographic, even offering amenities including a designated area for playing the Italian ball sport bocce, exclusively for residents.

Expo Condos

Figure 13 – Expo Condos artist's renderings. Source: www.expocity.ca

Expo Condos is a 37-storey high-rise condominium building with 337 units and is part of the larger Expo City development project. Unit offerings include one, two and three bedroom suites, some with dens, ranging in size from approximately 786 to 1,390 square feet. Pricing starts at approximately $392,000. Cortel Group's master planned community, Expo City, at the crossroads of Highway 7 and Highway 400 is located at the center of the new Vaughan Metropolitan Centre. Potential purchasers are advised for fear of missing out, that this is a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for you," (Cortel Group, 2014). According to the promotional materials for this project, living in an Expo condo will bring you "the good life. Where designer labels, luxury spas and gourmet eateries are right outside your door. Where everything converges in an unforgettable fusion of design, culture and life," (Cortel Group, 2014). Like with many other condo marketing campaigns, luxury plays a large role, with high-end vehicles illustrated circling the building's driveway. Similarly, the target demographic of Expo's marketing appears to be young women, with imagery of building amenities being enjoyed by young, attractive women. Online marketing materials for this development project, like that of Centro Square, make subtle reference to Italian culture, tugging at the heartstrings and pocketbooks of Italian parents:

> Your bambino is older than you think. You didn't notice, but your kids aren't kids anymore. So we're cutting our down payment to just 5%. So now your hairy bambino can live in the heart of Vaughan's New Downtown. It's a nice place to live. With a new subway, VIVA station, shops, parks, restaurants and most importantly, it's still really, really close to you. (Cortel Group, 2014)

The website links to an external video that promotes Expo Condos and Expo City as an "intelligent approach towards city-building," as endorsed by Mayor Maurizio Bevilacqua (CitylifeTV, 2012). Emphasizing the supposed uniqueness of the Expo City and the

VMC, Expo Condo architect A.J. Tregebov states "there will be no need to compare [the VMC] to other downtowns or other urban centres. It will be its own place," (CitylifeTV, 2012). The video host, a young female, closes out the short clip reaffirming that "with a diverse blend of entertainment, accommodation, retail, and more, Expo City will put Vaughan on the map as the ultimate destination for urban lifestyle," (CitylifeTV, 2012).

Bellaria Residences

Figure 14 – Bellaria Residences artist's renderings. Source: www. solmar.ca/community/bellaria-tower-4/

Bellaria Residences is a 17-storey high-rise residential condominium building with 220 units, and is part of a four-tower development by Solmar. Unit offerings include one, two and three bedroom suites, some with dens, ranging in size from approximately 635 to 2,400 square feet. Pricing starts at approximately $325,000. Like two of the other condominium developments in Vaughan reviewed in this report, Solmar's Bellaria project makes reference to Italian culture through its name, as well as through its distinctly southern European aesthetic – according to the developer, "renaissance design themes with an added touch of artistry create a sublime presence" (Solmar Development Corporation, 2014). Similar to many other condominium marketing campaigns,

promotional material for Bellaria Residences markets it "a community that will redefine the scale of grand living," (Solmar Development Corporation, 2014). According to the developer's website, "every feature has been carefully chosen to reflect luxury and sophistication." Resonating the significance of exclusivity that is often associated with condominium living, "residents are spoiled with 24 hour gate house security and the 24 hour concierge service," (Solmar Development Corporation, 2014). As noted with the Posh Condos, Bellaria also brands the suite types using semi-precious stones (ie. 'The Topaz', 'The Diamond', and 'The Ruby'). Although the Bellaria claims to be the height of luxury, many of its amenities are common among other suburban and urban condominiums. These include an exercise room, a steam room, a private dining and party room, as well as a games room.

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In a National Post interview (O'Toole, 2011), Myer Siemiatycki, municipal politics professor at Ryerson University, noted many suburban municipalities have begun to realize that in order to attract business and investment, the "one-dimensional" model of the traditional, sprawling suburb cannot be maintained. Siemiatycki posited,

> Suburban subdivisions and malls alone do not make a thriving urban centre. There does need to be more of a dynamism and vitality in the mix… I think there really is a recognition that *without something resembling the feel of downtown, you're not a real city.* (O'Toole, 2011; emphasis added).

With that realization, Vaughan is putting forth its best effort to be considered an urban force to reckoned with, both regionally and nationally. "We want to attract people from beyond our city boundaries," Bevilacqua said in an interview. "We want to make it a place to be," (Perkins, 2013), something that the Mayor describes as "a uniquely

Vaughan experience" (Newmarket Era, 2012). A similar sentiment is shared amongst other elected officials:

> To be world class, that's our aim; that's definitely our goal!...I think we have a fantastic city that really has potential. I will say that we will never be Toronto, but we shouldn't want to be Toronto. We should be an alternative to that – a kinder, gentler lifestyle that is more affordable…We're so close, we have the best of both worlds."
>
> - Vaughan Ward 4 Councillor Sandra Yeung Racco
> (personal communication, April 30, 2014)

Although Vaughan Vision 2020 and the VMC Secondary Plan outline a vision for Vaughan's future growth and development, how that distinct experience will be *characteristically* Vaughan has yet to be materialized on the ground.

4.3   *Towards a Sustainable Community*: The City of Markham

The fourth largest community in the GTA, Markham is situated in the Regional Municipality of York, bound by Toronto to the south. Similar to Vaughan and Mississauga, Markham's initial growth is largely attributed to its proximity to Toronto, acting as a bedroom suburb since the 1980s to its southerly neighbour.

Going into 2014, the City of Markham was among the top ten high-rise construction locations in North America. While Toronto leads the roster with a total of 130 projects, the City of Markham, tied with Burnaby, British Columbia, rounds out the bottom of the top ten list with 12 high-rise construction projects recorded. The majority of the high-rises under construction are residential buildings, and in Toronto and Markham, the proportion is 92% (Emporis, 2014).

Considered to have a relative abundance of land, low tax rates, easy access to regional transportation routes, and the reputation of a pro-business environment, Markham has become the headquarters to more than 400 companies. With close to 900

high-technology and life-sciences companies situated within the municipality, Markham has become known as Canada's High-Technology Capital (City of Markham Economic Development Department, n.d.). Striving to maintain this strong economic and business status, Markham has committed to growing "sustainably" through a variety of policy initiatives. As the municipality's motto "Leading while Remembering" suggests, Markham's overall focus is to remain an economic leader within the GTA and Canada while having regard for its heritage, both natural and cultural.

The modern history of the Town of Markham began in 1790s marked by the first European settlement in the area. The first few years proved difficult for the German settlers as a result of harsh winters and crop failures. The early 1800s in Markham were characterized by the rigors of homesteading and the development of agricultural industries. The township's many rivers and streams soon supported water-powered saw, grist and woolen mills and small hamlets such as German Mills, Almira, Buttonville, and Unionville began to spring up at the mill sites.

By the 1850s, the Township of Markham and its villages had reached a stable population of about 10,000 inhabitants. The villages with their stores, wagon makers, blacksmiths, shoemakers, dressmakers and tanners were the service centres for the surrounding agricultural communities (City of Markham, 2010a). In 1853 and 1871, Markham was changed forever with the introduction of the railroad from Toronto through Richmond Hill, and through Milliken, Unionville and Markham to Stouffville and beyond. The communities now had access to new markets for their products and could receive goods from Toronto. The train stations became the hub of the community. The railway brought renewed prosperity and rapid development. The Village of Markham

incorporated in 1873, and grew to a population of 11,000 by 1891 (City of Markham, 2012).

Early in the 20th century, transportation and roads in Markham improved, and the population remained relatively stable until after WWII when Markham began to see an influx of more European immigrants from war-torn Europe. At the same time, Markham began to feel the effects of urban encroachment from Toronto. Heavily industrialized by the war effort and experiencing a post-war baby boom, the Township not only became a magnet for waves of new immigrants from all over the world, but also for young families from the City of Toronto in search of a more suburban lifestyle and Markham's population grew significantly (City of Markham, 2012). In 1971, the Regional Municipality of York was established by the Province of Ontario and a large portion of the land was incorporated into the Town of Markham. The opening of the north-south Highway 404 in the mid-1970s further accelerated the urban development of the town. Since then, Markham has lured global businesses such as IBM, Hewlett Packard, Motorola, and Phillips, all taking advantage of Markham's diverse and educated workforce.

Markham is one of the fastest growing municipalities in Ontario, with a 2011 Canadian census population of 301 709 (City of Markham Economic Development Department, 2011). Between 2000 and 2006 alone, the population of Markham grew by 22%, while other areas of Ontario grew by only 6.6% (City of Markham, 2010a). While the average annual household income in Markham is $108,520, over 21% of Markham households have an annual income over $150,000 (City of Markham Economic Development Department, 2011).

With respect to residential development, 43% of new residential units in the first quarter of 2013 were still detached houses, 32% apartments, 15% townhouse blocks, and 6% semi-detached houses. Real estate company Royal LePage reported that, for the second quarter of 2013, the average "standard" condo apartment price was $340,000; "luxury" condo apartment price was $460,000; "standard" townhouse price was $500,000; "standard" detached 2-storey price was $625,000; and "executive" detached 2-storey price was $740,000 (City of Markham Economic Development Department, n.d.).

As part of its economic competitiveness strategy, Markham continues efforts to attract highly-educated and skilled immigrants; build on its current position in the high-tech and life sciences sectors; and reach out to global markets, both to bring investments into Markham as well as to provide Markham-based businesses with more widespread opportunities (City of Markham Economic Development Department, n.d.). Bolstering the municipality's economic competitiveness strategy, in May 2015, it was announced that a joint York University-Seneca College campus would be built in Markham. The new campus is to be built north of Highway 407, between Kennedy Road and Warden Avenue, providing easy access to transit, major employers, research centres and the Markham Pan Am Centre. The chosen development site will be part of the growing urban centre and is intended to provide many amenities to students. The decision to build a post-secondary institution in Markham also leverages infrastructure investments already made by government and will draw on private and public sector partnerships (Javed, 2015). "This new campus will help us advance Markham as an innovative knowledge hub building on its existing partnership in areas of science, health engineering,

technology and social services," said York University president and vice-chancellor Mamdouh Shoukri (Finney, 2015).

Growth management and planning in Markham is directly influenced by senior levels of government in that both the Province of Ontario and York Region provide legislation-based direction for municipal planning. However, in the hierarchy of local government authority, the City of Markham has been given power by the Region to prepare its own Official Plan so long as it is in accordance with the goals and objectives outlined in the YROP. Under the Ontario Planning Act, Markham's Official Plan is a statutory document that sets out land use policy to guide future development and to manage growth.

Regarding the use of land, the provision of the municipal services required to support growth and the phasing of development, the content of the Official Plan provide a framework for decision-making by Council. Markham's current Official Plan was originally adopted in 1976 and approved in 1978. A partial update of the Plan was adopted in 1987 and approved in 1993, and numerous amendments to the Plan have been adopted since 1993. Markham's new Official Plan was adopted by Council in December 2013 and has yet to be approved by the Region of York. For the sake of this study, only the new Official Plan will be discussed due to its relevance in and direct connection to the prevailing 'smart growth' planning regime.

Markham's new Official Plan is one part of the City's strategy for future planning action, entitled "Building Markham's Future Together – Towards a Sustainable Community." In 2007, Markham Council identified six strategic priorities for the City to ensure its continued vibrancy, success and sustainability as a community (City of

Markham, 2010b). These priorities include managing growth, improving transportation, protecting the natural environment, providing municipal services, providing for recreational and cultural services and facilities, and celebrating diversity. Along with *Markham's Greenprint* (Sustainability Plan), *Markham 2020* (Economic Plan), the *Integrated Leisure Master Plan*, and the City's *Diversity Plan*, the new Official Plan rounds out the suite of strategic documents being used to implement the priorities of *Building Markham's Future Together*. Markham Council has endorsed Built Form, Massing and Height Guidelines to assist in regulating built form within intensifying areas and provide input into the urban design policies of the new Official Plan.

In May 2010, Markham Council endorsed an alternative for growth to 2031, consistent with the Provincial *Growth Plan* and the YROP. The alternative addresses provincial legislation, regional growth requirements and Markham's planning intentions and forms the basis for the new Official Plan. The endorsed growth alternative incorporates intensification within the built up area to optimize the use of land and existing and planned infrastructure and create higher density mixed use communities. According to the City of Markham, the current vision for managing sustainable growth to 2031 "reflects a community vision that is based on a planning philosophy of building more compact complete communities that address the environmental, economic and social needs of the community" (2010b, p. 2-3). Markham's intensification strategy provides direction on where residential and employment intensification should occur relative to the delivery of services and transit improvements. The planning and design intent behind intensified communities is to reduce reliance on the automobile by providing transit supportive densities; provide a variety of housing choices to meet the

needs of a growing and diverse population; and provide for a more diverse and compatible mix of land uses that accommodate employment opportunities for local residents (City of Markham, 2011).

While a revised Secondary Plan for Markham Centre has yet to be produced under the guidance of the new Official Plan, Markham does recognize its future downtown area's *Growth Plan* designation as an Urban Growth Centre and the YROP's designation as a Regional Centre.
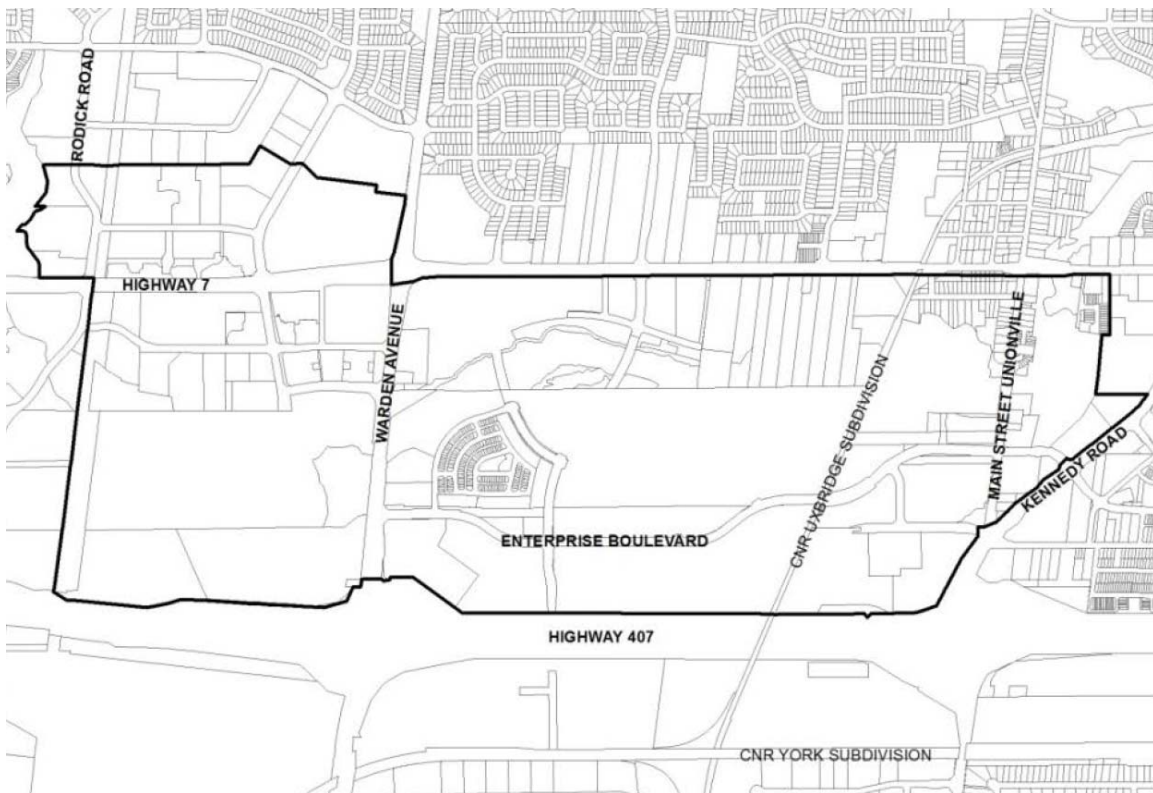

Figure 15 – Regional Centre - Markham Centre. Source: Markham Official Plan, 2013

As such, the new Official Plan highlights that Markham Centre will be planned to contain the highest concentration and greatest mix and intensity of uses and activities in Markham, supported by a range of housing, employment, investment, cultural, sports and entertainment and government functions and serviced by a range of mobility choices:

> "Markham Centre is being planned and developed as Markham's downtown, based on the principles of balanced live-work opportunities, compact urban form, natural heritage protection, and transit-supportive development. With a distinctly urban character, in the form of higher density, mixed-use built form, and high-quality parks and public amenities, it will provide a central location for arts, cultural sports and entertainment and social activities on a year-round basis" (City of Markham, 2010b, p. 2-14).

The York Region Official Plan identifies an intensification target for Markham of 31,590 residential units, over a period from 2006 to 2031 in order to meet the *Growth Plan* density target of a minimum 40% of all residential development occurring annually within York Region's built-up area. According to the new Official Plan, Markham's endorsed growth alternative to 2031 is more aggressive than the YROP and incorporates an intensification strategy that targets 60% or greater of all residential development and approximately two-thirds of new jobs added to Markham before 2031 being located within the built-up area (City of Markham, 2010b, p. 2-12). A significant proportion of this intensification will occur in Markham Centre, whose population and employment density targets are outlined in Section 2.5.1 of the new Official Plan, however a Secondary Plan under this new document for Markham Centre has yet to be created.

4.2.1 *Selling Markham's Condominium Boom*

According to Buzzbuzzhome.com, in June 2015, 35 condominium development projects are either recently completed, under construction or under registration in Markham. This number does not include the number of condominium buildings that already exist, nor does it include the ones being devised that have yet to be introduced to the public. Developments such as World Condos (Liberty Developments), UV2 (Greenpark Homes), ArtHouse Condos (Flato Developments) and Eden Park II (Times

Group) have each made extensive use of image production practices as outlined in Chapter 2 to demonstrate each their distinctive condominium lifestyle (see Figures 17 through 20).
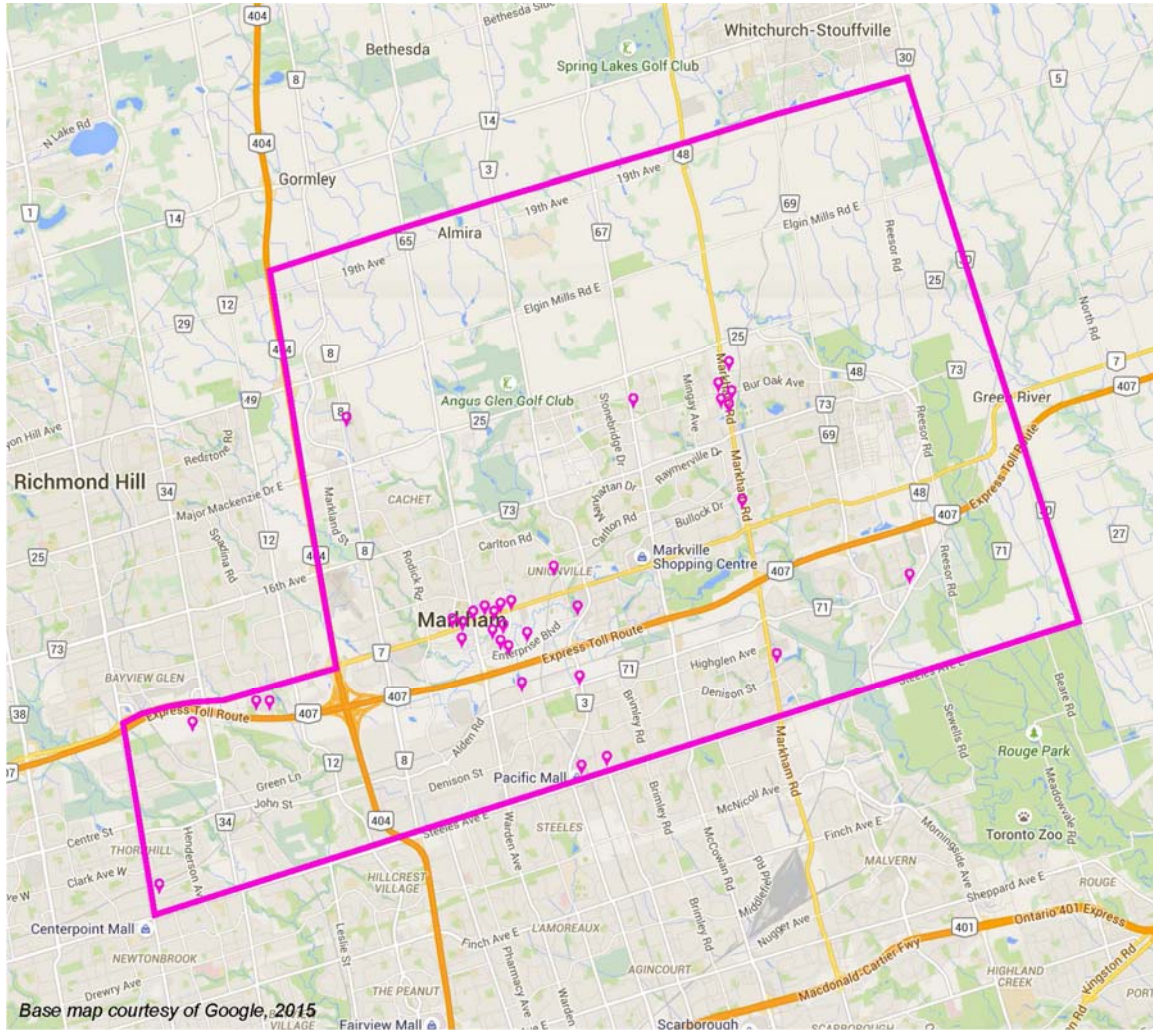

Figure 16 – Markham Condominium development as of June 2015. Map by author

World Condos

World Condos is a 31-storey, dual tower, mixed-use development with commercial, office, retail, and residential condominium units. The 710-unit condo building is part of the World on Yonge master development project by Liberty Developments, which comprises of two more residential towers, an office tower, and various site amenities.

Figure 17 – World Condos artist's renderings. Source: www.libertydevelopments.ca

Unit offerings include one, two and three bedroom suites, some with dens, ranging in size from approximately 560 to 1,355 square feet. Pricing starts at approximately $284,000. Promoted as offering a "total lifestyle package" (Liberty Developments, 2014b), the marketing campaign for this development again capitalizes on the notion of luxury and elegance. Promotional materials boast that "this is a residence that truly has it all," citing the "luxurious suites with breathtaking views, a new urban park, landscaped green roof terraces, and the convenience of shopping and modern public transportation at your door" (Liberty Developments, 2014b). Common areas and suites alike are "sumptuously finished with materials gleaned from around the world," with discourse going so far as to label the lobby "a true beacon of elegance; a place where you will be proud to welcome your guests" (Liberty Developments, 2014b). Optimizing on the project branding, suites are named after world cities around the globe (ie. 'The Paris', 'The Hong Kong', 'The Tokyo', and 'The Johannesburg'). Not entirely distinct from other condominiums in both urban and suburban settings, the amenities included in the World Condos project include a private theatre, a party room, a billiards room, a fitness studio and guest suites.

Although marketing images depict people of all ages, young men and most commonly young women are illustrated as the users of the building's amenities.

<u>UV2</u>

UV2 is the 18-storey, 220 unit second phase high-rise residential condominium tower at the Upper Village Markham development by Greenpark Homes. Unit offerings include one and two bedroom suites, ranging in size from approximately 615 to 1,445 square feet. Pricing starts at approximately $258,000. The project website uses marketing strategies that change over time, offering round-trip airfare to Hong Kong or $3,000 cash back as incentive to purchase units. The efficacy of these tactics is unknown at this time. While the suites in the first phase of this development were named after high-end streets in Forest Hill and Rosedale, such as 'The Dunvegan', 'The Lonsdale', 'The Roxborough' and 'The Balmoral', the suites in UV2 are branded after semi-precious gemstones, such as 'The Opal' and 'The Topaz', similar condos described in Vaughan. In terms of discourse and aesthetics, the developer describes this building as "a dazzling new landmark. A visionary design realized," (Greenpark Homes, 2014a). Emphasizing themes of ownership pride, sophistication, and glamour, the marketing imagery presented in promotional materials make strong use of young females. Buzzbuzzhome.com shares a links to a video (Greenpark Homes, 2014b) prepared by the developer that presents a young woman who finds value in her condo's proximity to shopping, as well as its convenient fitness studio, 24-hour concierge, exclusive theatre room, and fun party room and rooftop terrace. Each time she highlights a new amenity, the young woman disappears out of frame and reappears in a different outfit, ending the video by stating, "UV2 really has it all, like it was made for me, and you too" (Greenpark Homes, 2014b).

Figure 18 – UV2 artist's renderings and online marketing imagery. Source: www.libertydevelopments.ca

ArtHouse Condos

Figure 19 – ArtHouse Condos unit layouts and artist's rendering. Source: www.arthousemarkham.com

ArtHouse Condos is a stand-alone 14-storey high-rise condominium with 200 suites. Unit offerings include one and two bedroom suites, some with dens, ranging in size from approximately 550 to 1,000 square feet. Pricing starts at approximately $250,000. According to promotional materials, ArtHouse is "a building dramatic from every angle," and is said to be "the perfect place to live artistically" (Flato Developments, 2014). Complete with "inspiring" lobby, "dramatic" suites and "beautiful" upgrades, Flato purports that one's "love of the arts can live here" (Flato Developments, 2014). Different suites bear the names of famous musicians, artists, composers and writers (ie. 'The Shakespeare', 'The Warhol, 'The Monet', 'The Mozart', and 'The Hemmingway'), and are described as "full of features and finishes to help you live the most inspiring life" (Flato Developments, 2014). To support this 'inspiring life', building amenities include a

digital arts and culinary studio, a luxurious whirlpool, guest suites, 24-hour concierge service, and gallery-style lobby – much like many of the amenities found in other condominiums. The project website highlights a promotional video, narrated by a female voice with an Australian accent further insinuating that "this is where art lovers live," Flato Developments, 2014). The video also includes endorsements of Flato and the Arthouse project by Mayor Frank Scarpitti and Councillor Carolina Moretti. Sadly, however, the video overall is neither artistic nor inspiring, and does not live up to the expectations formed by the rest of the marketing campaign.
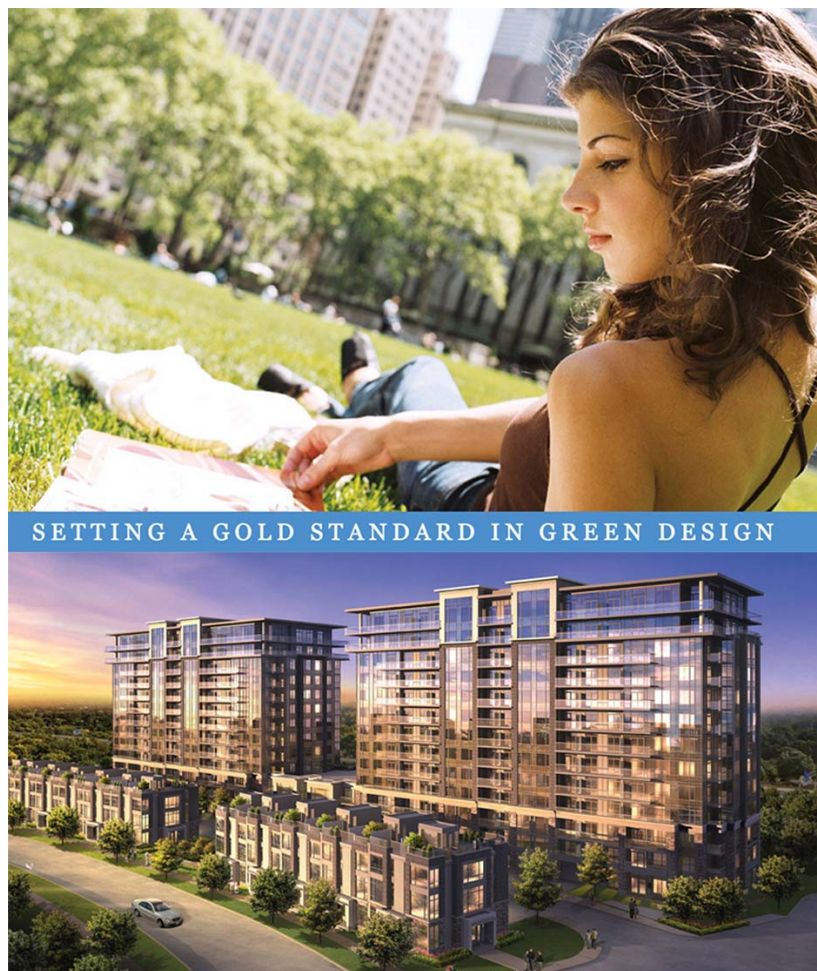
Eden Park II

Figure 20 – Eden Park II online marketing imagery and artist's rendering. Source: www.edenparktowers.com

Eden Park II is a 13-storey high-rise residential condominium with 101 suites. This building makes up the second and final phase of the Eden Park Towers development project in the Galleria master-planned community of Thornhill. Unit offerings include one, two, and three bedroom suites ranging in size from approximately 540 to 1,420 square feet. Pricing starts at approximately $284,000. Marketing materials for the project make use of common themes of elegance, luxury and exclusivity, noting that the development is "luxuriously appointed in its every facet." When one comes home from a stressful day, "stepping into Eden Park Towers is like arriving at a splendid 5-star hotel," (Times Group Corporation, 2014). Frequently referring to the lifestyle one would have by living in this condominium development, Times Group claims, "here you'll lead the ideal lifestyle – a perfect balance of leisure and activity, of rest and relaxation, of elegance and exclusivity." Further, potential purchasers are enticed with the idea that "with none of the chores of traditional home ownership, you'll have more leisure time to spend with friends and family," (Times Group Corporation, 2014). To pass this newfound leisure time, the proposed amenity areas include an indoor pool, a private movie screening room, a party room and rooftop terrace. Marketing renderings of these spaces feature men and women of varied ethnicity, but mainly of young or middle-age.

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Coupled with their efforts to become more "urban" locally through the implementation of planning policy pushing intensification, Markham has taken steps to appear more urban globally, asking the self-reflexive question, "what's in a name?" Not dissimilar from other growing municipalities, Markham appeared to be under the assumption that the terms "town" and "city" carry different associations that can influence how a place perceives itself, and in turn, how it believes others perceive it. In early 2012, local

Councilors voted unanimously to change the name of the Town of Markham to the City of Markham. With Markham flaunting itself as a new, denser urban centre once considered large enough to potentially lure an NHL team, the municipality had outgrown its small-town personality. According to Markham Councilor Alex Chiu, who brought forward the motion to council to make the name change, Markham was a "town" in name only, and that the "town" moniker didn't accurately reflect the kind of growth the municipality was experiencing or forecasting for the near future (Kupferman, 2012). Further, other municipalities such as Vaughan, Barrie and Brampton already held "city" status; Chiu and other Markham Councilor felt the competitive need to match these GTA communities without costing taxpayers very much money (Kupferman, 2012).

For Markham the change was for the most part about marketing. The name is but one small piece of its development strategy, but it is perceived as a key tool when delegates travel abroad on business. City-status advocates, like Chiu, believe that a simple name change could open the door to foreign investment and encourage a sense of sophistication (Bascaramurty, 2013). Regional Councilor Joe Li recalled with some embarrassment a mission to India in 2012, before the status change where he felt the "town" designation held him back:

> People were wondering: If it's a town, *is it worthwhile to do business with*? In their mind, a town is, like, 20 000 to 30 000 people. When we told them it's 300 000, they said, 'Why don't you use the title *city*? (Bascaramurty, 2013; emphasis added).

Several business leaders such as Leo McArthur, president and CEO of The Miller Group, Rob Kadlovski of Nicholby's, the Old Firehall Confectionery and the Unionville BIA, and Daniel Atlin from Seneca College all said city status would elevate Markham to a different level in attracting potential international investments (Markham Economist &

Sun, 2012). News interviews illustrate the enthusiasm, among other things, of local

residents in support of Markham's branding upgrade:

> Why would you call yourself a little boy when you're a man? It
> does affect how people see you. It does affect businesses coming in.
> It does affect investors.
> > - Local businesswoman Daisy Wai (CBC News, 2012)
>
> It's like calling a 62-year-old man a boy.
> > - Markham resident Amanda Collucci (Markham Economist & Sun, 2012)
>
> It's a little like watching your kids grow up...you turn around and
> they have changed and they are adults.
> > - Mayor Frank Scarpitti (Markham Economist & Sun, 2012)

In the 1990s, there was significant opposition to the name change from town to city

as people feared it would influence the rural feel of their community (Javed, 2012b).

Although a handful of residents expressed concerns to do with tangible benefits, costs

associated with the status change and the process town council undertook to engage the

public, the name change took effect on July 1, 2012. The change is a simple process with

no population or size requirements; all that is required is the enactment of a by-law based

on Council agreement, and the transmission a copy to the Minister of Municipal Affairs

and Housing (MMAH). Other than the so-called prestige that comes with the title,

however, the name change affords no other privilege, according to the MMAH (Javed,

2012b). Town of Richmond Hill Mayor Dave Barrow stated, "in our community, people

say they like that we're a town, because it implies that we are *neighbourly* and *friendly*"

(emphasis added). Recognizing that a municipality doesn't get much else out of the

moniker change, "it comes down to […] how a town perceives itself or wants to be

perceived," said Barrow (Javed, 2012b). Markham resident and Sherwood-Amber Glen

Ratepayers Association representative Gordon Walter is of the belief that Markham's

name upgrade is "really about trying to establish a corporate identity" (Javed, 2012c).

5.0   Discussion

Although the practice of strategically commodifying urban imaginaries is not new (Zukin, 1991, 1995, 1998; Hayden, 2003), the cycles of capital accumulation and cultural production in which city-building practice is embedded have changed dramatically over the past 30 years (Debord, 1983; Harvey, 1989; Greenberg, 2000; Lehrer and Wieditz, 2009; Knox, 2011; Lehrer, 2012). According to Greenberg (2000, p. 230-231), they influence a restructured city in which:

> economies of scale based in manufacturing have shifted to economies of scope geared toward high- and low-end services; an amorphous city that has been decentralized and rescaled around globally networked, exurban residential and commercial zones; a divided city increasingly fractured by lines of class, education, race, and ethnicity; a privatized city forced to revamp and sell its image and amenities to tourists, corporations, affluent homeowners and lifestyle shoppers.

The cases explored for each municipality demonstrate Greenberg's position is no exaggeration. Keeping the city-building processes and image production practices explored in mind, the following is a discursive analysis of socially constructed images and products, commodity consumption and space to determine their meaning and influence on the reorientation of suburban form in Mississauga, Vaughan and Markham.

5.1   The Influence of Policy and Regulation

Intensification policy and regulation has influenced the ways in which cities are physically formed, directly impacting the housing types and built forms being developed. The influence has been encouraging in that there is now formal government recognition that sprawling suburban development is, and has been, an 'unsustainable', 'unhealthy' practice that must be curbed. Further, it has given rise to increased housing type choice

for buyers in communities where this choice was formerly lacking. Through the guidance to develop detailed official and secondary plans, it has brought focus back to community design within municipalities where planning may have otherwise been taking place in piecemeal patterns. Although the *Growth Plan* clearly states that it guides decisions "in the interest of promoting economic prosperity", the intent of intensification policies to curb sprawl seem honorable.

However, with all land development subject to some form of government regulation, the influence of policy ultimately contributing to changing urban environments is inevitable. The condominium growth discernable over the past decade in the city of Toronto and now its outskirts is undoubtedly a result of the reigning policy regime (Places to Grow) with two sets of motives: land conservation and economic prosperity.

> Virtually every project that we get involved with…deals with addressing Places to Grow…Whenever we apply for more density, it is linking to official plan policies, transit initiatives and the Province's position on Places to Grow…Because of Provincial legislation, there are real limits to the amount of sprawl that will be allowed. That is putting pressure on land values and lot availabilities. There is a huge shortage of low-rise land, so more and more of our developers… are being pushed because of economics into the high-rise market.
> - Peter Turner (personal communication, April 30, 2014)

Intensification policies have not only affected the physical shape of suburban condo development, they are affecting the ways in which developers do business.

> As distinct from in the city centre, in suburban municipalities, part of selling these projects must include community benefits and amenities in order to even attract people to these projects. In Toronto, Section 37 agreements contribute to the community as required by planning staff, but this is far less common in places like Vaughan where developers must include amenities like green space and pools as part of the project design so that it is attractive and profitable.
> - Sheldon Levitt (personal communication, May 6, 2014)

With the implementation of the *Greenbelt Plan* and the *Growth Plan* limiting the amount of developable land outside of Toronto in the GTA, traditionally low-rise builders are moving into the high-rise business in order to stay competitive and profitable. Adverse influence of intensification policies emerges when developers taking queues from traditionally urban city-building practices, rather than necessarily devising specifically contextual responses, and begin introducing high-rise towers in otherwise low-rise communities. Furthermore, the legislative push to intensify in growing communities like Mississauga, Vaughan and Markham has become reliant on image production practices unique to the suburban condominium.

Common amongst the official plans of all three municipalities is their cohesive aesthetic presentation and the perceived authority and validity that come along with such a representation. Each official plan document uses visual queues like colour, photographic images, illustrations and graphic design to guide the reader through the document and emphasize areas of professed significance. Rather than creating a policy document that relies solely on the clarity and power of its words, each municipality (and many other municipalities, too) made the decision to transform the official plan policy document into a graphic display of their intentions. Some of the official plan documents make better use of their graphic representations than others, even though the visual branding does make them more accessible and user-friendly. For example, to support the written discourse in explaining the difference between functional areas (ie. nodes, community nodes, corporate centres, etc.), Mississauga's Official Plan utilizes a series of hand drawn sketches of similar styles and orientations (City of Mississauga, 2013a, p. 5-7 thru 5-12). Further, the MOP couples precedent images with the textual descriptions

when describing future urban design strategies for implementation (for example, City of Mississauga, 2013a, p. 9-5 or 9-9). Compared to that of Mississauga, the Official Plans of both Vaughan and Markham make less frequent use of illustrations and imagery, inserting general photographs at the beginning of each new section of the document, primarily using text to define goals and objectives.

The language used describing policies in the official plan documents of all three municipalities demonstrates a greater level of detail than the Provincial and Regional documents with which they are required to comply. Complete with Implementation sections buttressing the end portion of each document, the municipalities appear to put forth effort to maintain transparency by outlining the land use planning process. Further, with designated Definition sections, each municipality's official plan document appears to uphold clarity by highlighting or italicizing words or terms that have explicit meaning as pertaining to the specific policy. However, taking queues from the *Growth Plan*, the official plans of Mississauga, Vaughan and Markham all continue the use of ambiguities and words with multiple meanings when outlining their urban planning strategies. Terms like 'vibrant', 'healthy', 'strong', 'successful', 'desirable', etc. all bring about the opportunity for miscommunication as they hold subjective value and personal association. Somehow, however, these words make numerous appearances throughout each document, while only at times being paired with ways in which to measure their accuracy or validity.

Since the secondary plans for both Mississauga and Vaughan take policy directive from each municipality's official plan, it is not surprising that the persistent use of fuzzy and imprecise language trickles down from the *Growth Plan* all the way to these more

detailed documents. For example, the *VMC Plan* lists principles describing the long-term vision for the VMC using the words 'diverse', 'vibrant', 'green' and 'beautiful' (Urban Strategies Inc., 2013, p. 17). However, because of the more comprehensive nature of this Secondary Plan, which supports these principles with following descriptions, the issue here seems to be less problematic. Overall, unlike with the official plans reviewed above, the legitimacy of the secondary plans reviewed is not compromised by the sporadic use of ambiguous planning buzzwords.

Overall, the policies of the *Growth Plan* were meant to mitigate land consumption for urban development at rates that were once accepted practice, to change the "status quo" (Allen and Campsie, 2013). However, questions about the *Plan*'s consistent and full implementation across municipal borders have sparked growing criticism of the once-innovative, award-winning plan. Architects and planners showed concern for the ways in which urban development has responded to new planning policy regimes.

> What I worry about is these big buildings that are like islands in a messy, non-urban situation…I'm not quite sure what the future holds, but 10 years from now, there will be a lot of big buildings, I fear somewhat disconnected from each other so that they're not really an urban community.
> - Robert Glover (personal communication, April 23, 2014)

Acting as guiding documents, the Provincial (and Municipal) planning policies influence through both their implicit and explicit communication. The language contained in these government documents is expressed with a certain level of authority using choice words, and is coupled with colour and imagery to give weight and credibility to their basic and/or hidden meaning. However, common linguistic strategies that carry through Provincial and Municipal documents include providing open-ended direction and guidance through the use of imprecise or fuzzy buzzwords. The vague, guiding nature of

the *Growth Plan* downloads much of the responsibility outlined onto the municipalities, who in turn are left to devise and have approved complimentary implementation strategies in the form of official and/or secondary plans. A subsequent lag in implementation takes places across regions, revealing the affects of the *Growth Plan* lacking uniformity and comprehensiveness. This relates directly to the concern expressed by some architects and planners where the supposed urban identity expressed in policy documents does not translate on the ground, in and between master planned communities.

5.2 The Influence of Industry Marketing and Cultural Products

In our postmodern society, one cannot discount the impact of all sorts of media on consumers. The goal of media is not always to inform; it is often to entertain, to dazzle or to sell. This can lead to deceptive presentations that focus on small portions of big-picture issues. Spectacularization of everyday life through socially constructed imagery and cultural products (ie. marketing strategies, condominium sales centres, developer websites, etc.) is a sales tactic in many industries, and a long-standing one at that. The act of convincing consumers to purchase specific products is now even a product in its own right. Today, the commercially motivated sales strategies and the commodification of things have taken control of the way we live and interact with one another. Mediated through images, our relationships and lifestyles have become reliant on the way things appear to be, rather than the way they actually are.

Looking at condominium marketing campaigns, one is inadvertently subject to consuming the images created for lifestyle advertising. Oversized billboards emphasize the importance of one's time (ie. "If you lived here, you'd be home by now."); stylish development project websites highlight the luxury of exclusivity (ie. "Its your world.

Enjoy the view."); trendy sales centres give a glimpse and feel into the supposed high-end, chic life one could lead in a similar space; fashionable events and project launch parties give potential purchasers the chance to rub elbows with their future hip neighbours. Through the generation of intense, relentless marketing strategies similar to those used in selling traditional urban projects, developers have had to create and market a lifestyle that speaks to both one's urban and suburban self; the parts that appreciate the 'serenity' of nature outside of the city and the 'indulgence' of having multiple amenities at one's doorstep. Although the instinct to manipulate socially constructed imagery still persists, this has become a drastically different practice that formerly drew on images of family, seclusion and nature (Hayden, 2003; Lehrer, 2012).

The commercially motivated spectacle created surrounding condo living and the condominium lifestyle, be it in urban or suburban locations, has alienated society from the notion of dwelling as shelter. Although an essential human right, "shelter has become commodified in such a way that it is no longer about the necessity of housing people, or even of owning a dwelling, but of buying into a lifestyle," (Lehrer, 2012). This 'superior' lifestyle, grounded in consumptive activity upon which economic prosperity is based, is identified as one of glamour and exclusivity, giving increased status to the already popular notion of home ownership. Further, the material images used to promote many suburban condominium developments (not just those studied in detail in this report) often exploit themes of youth and beauty. Frequently depicting attractive, seemingly healthy, young, active white women, these images illustrate their enjoyment the spaces in and around these new condominium developments, engaging in leisure or consumptive activities. Many commonalities existed between condominium development marketing

campaigns reviewed, emphasizing concepts of luxury and exclusivity. Promotional materials for some Mississauga projects exemplified different traits like the goal of home ownership or the use of green building practices, but even these projects still fell back on the common themes of exclusiveness and indulgence.

With more and more suburban condominium developments completed and becoming filled with residents, it is safe to assume that the imagery presented in the selling of these condos and the supposed associated lifestyle do not accurately reflect the lives playing out inside these buildings. Even those involved in the design of suburban condominium towers show skepticism over the marketing tactics:

> The names of these developments, and even the suite names, are often clever, but I wonder if they really influence individuals into buying units. Would I think that one unit was superior to another because it was called 'The Mirage' rather than "Unit Type A', I'm not too sure.
> - Peter Turner (personal communication, April 30, 2014)

It is fair to assume that the young women living in UV2 do not spend their days changing outfits and shopping endlessly. Ascertaining whether those living in the ArtHouse Condo are living more artfully than they could be elsewhere is difficult to prove. It is highly unlikely that the residents of Posh Condominium grace their "sparkling" building amenities or their gemstone-titled units draped in diamonds.

The primary influence of this socially constructed imagery and other cultural products is founded by commercial motivation. While the imagery presented to consumers is perceived as pleasant or inspirational for some, its capacity to mislead is intrinsic. If purchasers rely heavily on this imagery, with which the physical outcome will inevitably be different, there is potential for disappointment and dissatisfaction ensue.

> On the surface, the luxurious amenities being presented may appear
> different, better than the next, but no matter what the developers say,
> they are all the same, no matter where the building is located. Toronto,
> Vaughan, Milton, Peterborough – all the same.
>   - Clifford Korman (personal communication, May 4, 2014)

But then, one must question why the lifestyles that aren't being glossed up in marketing campaigns are not good enough for consumption. Is reality too boring, the truth too mundane to illustrate in the hopes of bringing potential purchasers to the table? The commodification of shelter and the fantasy of lifestyles of luxury is a regression that our society has committedly taken on, for better or for worse.

5.3   The Perspective of Actual Suburban Condominium Residents

After speaking candidly with four residents of suburban condominium developments, common themes began to emerge that were not dissimilar to the various attitudes shared by industry insiders and professionals. These suburban condo residents (herein referred to as respondents) acknowledged that there is an increased desire to lead more 'urban' lifestyles, enhanced by a convenient synthesis of leisure and consumptive activity. However, none of the respondents admitted to their lifestyle being drastically different after having moved into their condo unit or building.

> Even though I live in a high-rise condo, my lifestyle is very much
> similar to what it was when I lived in a single family home on a regular
> street a few blocks north of here.
>   - Alon Shell (personal communication, April 29, 2014)

From the perspective of the respondents, closeness to family or existing place of residence was of recurring importance. Some industry professionals also recognized that, through their experience, existing neighbourhood residents transitioned into these condominium buildings once built in order to upgrade or downsize their place of

residence while conveniently maintaining their existing lifestyle and the ability to enjoy the places to which they were already accustomed.

All four respondents commented that, since they continue to live in or nearby their previous neighbourhood of residence, they continue to frequent the shops, restaurants, parks and other establishments with which they were already familiar.

> My day-to-day hasn't really changed. Aside from having a toddler, our lifestyle is still the same. I drive to work and we still go to the stores and places that we used to when we lived in a house since it is in the same area of town. I guess, since our place is smaller now and we have less room, we have less stuff than before.
> - Ashley Somer (personal communication, May 4, 2014)

There was little admission as to whether the condo building's amenities influenced respondents' decision-making to purchase in one building or another, but many found it attractive that the amenities existed nonetheless, and although attractive from a sales standpoint, many said that they made less frequent use of the building amenities than initially anticipated.

> Before I bought this place, I looked at pre-construction condos. I loved the idea of them, brand new and pristine, but I was too intimidated to make the decision to buy something I couldn't walk around in or touch or feel. The sales centres were interesting though. I could see why some people would be swayed by the fancy pictures and beautiful models presented there.
> - Jane Fisher (personal communication, April 28, 2014)

> To be honest, the only thing I miss about living in a house is having a backyard. I barely even have a patio here, so having usable outdoor space of my own is something I wish I still had access to. But, my condo has a gym that I use often, a theatre, a library, and 24-hour security. Coming from a house, having these things at my doorstep is a luxury that I can definitely get used to!
> - Dani Kirsch (personal communication, May 10, 2014)

We were 'sold' on the nearness to shops and the gym that we were used
to. Having underground parking in the winter is great. There's an
indoor pool that I've never used though. I've never seen anyone in it.
    - Alon Shell (personal communication, April 29, 2014)

Another thread of commonality that appeared throughout the interview process was the

notion of 'urban identity'. Respondents, similar to architects and planners representing

their professional positions, showed concern that the transformation of suburban

neighbourhoods to urban landscapes will take time, during which the experience of living

in 'urban' places without 'urban' services and infrastructure will challenging.

When I think of the term suburban, I think of long commutes and
lots of time spent in cars, but when I think of the term urban, small
and cramped living areas come to mind. To be honest, I'm not sure
which is worse.
    - Jane Fisher (personal communication, April 28, 2014)

Architects and planners showed skepticism regarding the 'in between' spaces that will

emerge when different master planned communities are being built out within the same

municipalities. Common questions, spurred from criticism of current intensification

policy, related to implementation; how will these different 'urban' communities relate to

one another? Will there be harmony or discord, both aesthetically and physically? What

will the urban identities of these places be? Respondents seemed indifferent to the

overall shape with which the condos built around them would take, although they were in

agreement that the action of intensification began before adequate infrastructure was in

place, upset by the amount of traffic in their neighbourhoods.

With these new condos, our communities are becoming more
crowded than before, especially the roads. There's noticeably more
traffic to deal with now. I've lived in Thornhill a while, and the
traffic has never been worse.
    - Alon Shell (personal communication, April 29, 2014)

Two optimistic respondents were positive about the shape that their community will take

in the future:

> I'm hopeful about the increase in condo buildings in my neighbourhood.
> I am happy with my decision to live here and I know others will be, too.
> It is still the early stages of development in these new communities, but I
> believe in what is trying to be achieved here.
> - Dani Kirsch (personal communication, May 10, 2014)

> There are all sorts of new retail and amenity areas popping up close by
> which is exciting in terms of having more things to do. I drive to most
> of them though because it is still more convenient to get there by car,
> and I'm used to it.
> - Ashley Somer (personal communication, May 4, 2014)

Others arrived with some doubt.

> To me, somewhere urban has lots of stuff going on, action on the street
> and things to see and do. It is exciting and dynamic. The pace of
> somewhere suburban is slower, more relaxed, laid back, maybe even
> boring. I feel like I am living in a hybrid place – somewhere that is
> striving to be urban, but is still suburban at heart. I feel like Vaughan
> will be suburban for a long time still.
> - Jane Fisher (personal communication, April 28, 2014)

Nonetheless, all showed satisfaction in their decisions to make the switch from suburban

home or urban condo to suburban condo.

> Since moving into the condo, I seem to spend a lot less time at home.
> It's not easy to entertain in 700 square feet. Before, I used to have
> friends over to my parent's backyard, but my patio here is pretty small
> and my space is limited. I guess I just go out more now, which isn't so
> bad actually. Also, since I'm still in Vaughan, I have quite a long drive
> to and from my office in downtown Toronto.
> - Jane Fisher (personal communication, April 28, 2014)

I have lived in a condo before downtown, and we looked at townhouses in this area, too – there were quite a number available. We decided on our condo though because it had great views, nice big windows and was close to our family nearby. I guess the shorter commute to work downtown is my trade off for being close to our families.

- Ashley Somer (personal communication, May 4, 2014)

Personally, for years, I would only buy and live in older buildings and renovate the condos. In the last few years, I've started to buy new because I'm just so busy. My lifestyle – I just don't have time for that anymore, so I just pay the extra premium and move into a perfectly completed suite for myself. It has worked out better for me in the end.

- Dani Kirsch (personal communication, May 10, 2014)

6.0   Conclusions

An emerging market for high-rise residential condominiums has materialized in Toronto's peripheral municipalities of Mississauga, Vaughan and Markham. Even though, for the better part of their existence, these municipalities have been characterized by low-density, auto-centric development and single-detached homes, their urban forms have begun to undergo significant change largely thanks to provincial intensification policies. With the intent to control land use and guide future growth, the Province has limited the amount of developable land in the GTA which has resulted in a shift in the type of housing being built and offered to purchasers. This shift has brought about a reorientation in suburban form, transforming towns from once sprawling, wasteful, isolating landscapes into new future downtowns and compact centres complete with spectacular entertainment and amenity. To complement this reorientation under the guise of 'Smart Growth', city officials and decision makers are championing intensification through compact (ie. condominium) development for its potential to boost economic prosperity. Traditional low-rise tract developers using traditional urban condo marketing strategies are hopping on the bandwagon by beginning to think and build "high-rise" to follow suit with legislation and maximize their land values.

This paper has explored how place-marketing strategies are reliant upon socially constructed values and availability for choice as communicated by image production practices. It has also investigated the ways in which urban imaginaries are utilized and communicated by condominium developers to proliferate urban development forms in the suburban built environment, and how in turn these images are received and consumed by residents of suburban areas.

Although news media representation of the condominium boom paints a tumultuous picture, I am of the perspective that the future for the condominium is particularly optimistic. With Provincial intensification policies and an economically inclined development industry that won't give up on this lucrative concept too easily, suburban condominium development is a city-building strategy that doesn't appear to be waning any time soon. Condominium developers promote themselves and their projects by portraying a lifestyle to which consumers have, thus far, respond willingly be it consciously or not. While the marketing focus has primarily been geared towards young and middle-aged entertainment-seeking professionals with a taste for exclusivity and luxury, soon broader lifestyle sales will unquestionably need to be explored; those for tenants, seniors, empty nesters, young families, and/or divorcés. For these people, the condominium will possibly be the answer to future housing issues, and it is likely that image production practices will have to follow suit.

However, the condominium need not necessarily take the form of a high-rise tower, but rather a mid-rise building with, for example, 20 to 30 units. As expressed by Vaughan Ward Councillor Sandra Yeung Racco, perhaps mid-rise development could be a way to warm people up to the idea of neighbourhood change. According to Yeung Racco, "transitional spaces and projects are key to decrease NIMBY-ism and increase successful implementation of intensification policies." Such is evidenced by the marketing and development of Great Gulf Homes' HOT Condos project in Mississauga, building at a mid-rise scale and targeting aspiring home owners with a taste for high-end design (Great Gulf Homes, 2014). As Harris (2011) points out, condominium can take all sorts of forms, and it should in order to respond contextually to the needs of residents

and communities throughout the GTA. While high-rise might be the most economical option for a developer to maximize value, it may not be socially responsible or physically optimal for a neighbourhood and should be considered as such.

Although the affects of condominium development in Toronto have become abundantly clear, great lengths have been taken in each Mississauga, Vaughan and Markham to utilize high-rise residential development to represent themselves as unique, important, and most of all, urban. Portraying new types of suburban living environments, new lifestyles for suburban residents, and a new kind of (sub)urbanism has become key, whether it be accurate or not. While the suburban condominium is still growing in popularity, it appears to be too soon to fully determine how their development will directly impact the discursive image politics associated with each of the subject municipalities as urban and distinct from Toronto. There are still too many significant missing factors, such as transportation improvements and transitional zones between master planned communities, to impact the success of these growing compact, vertical communities.

What is clear, however, is that it is essential to accept that the spaces we occupy as individuals and as a society are a direct reflection of the political, economic and social systems controlling urban development. With planning policies guiding intensification in the GTA, branding strategies marketing condominium development, key players developing condominium towers, and willing residents purchasing condo units out of desire or necessity, those responsible for city-building processes in the GTA and beyond must maintain a critical perspective of the influences informing the physical changes taking place across the suburban landscape. When contemplating the influence of

socially constructed imagery and the processes by which urban development occurs, one must too contemplate the notion that modern commodification of the built environment has transformed housing from a right to a privilege; one associated with status and prestige when it comes to the condominium. This revised approach to housing has prioritized economic prosperity by spectacularizing the basic right of shelter. Both consciously and unconsciously, our consumer culture has shifted its spatial practices, becoming one of appropriated tastes and aesthetic dispositions fed to us through standards and ideals illustrated in socially constructed imagery and media.

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