

Canadian Gated Communities

Research Highlights: January 2004

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Our research project explores the municipal planning response to the phenomenon of gated communities in Canada. We are investigating the ways in which local planning authorities implement policies and regulations to deal with developers' requests to gate new development projects. Although gating is not as common in Canada as it is in the US, the number of gated subdivisions is increasing. The issue has not yet generated significant social debate regarding the social, economic or political implications of this residential form. While planners in some communities have developed policy to regulate gating, for the most part local planners do not have the tools to respond effectively to the challenges that gating may create. We hope that this research brief will provide you with information and access to resources that may help you and your community in working with gated communities.

Left: Gates in British Columbia
Right: A Barricaded Street in Halifax, NS



WHY GATES?

Is living in gated communities in Canada about security? Yes and no. The gate is advertised as a security feature, but our observations indicate that gates mostly function to keep casual visitors and sight-seers out. In Canadian gated projects, privacy, enclosure, identity, lifestyle, and community seem to be the most important issues both to those selling and those buying homes in gated projects. Gating, and private roads more generally, also offer significant strategies for traffic calming. Gates and barriers reflect a reaction to urban problems that have shown no sign of easing; they also indicate the depth of the problems contemporary cities must address. When people feel they cannot rely on public regulations and political processes to protect their neighbourhoods from unwanted uses (or people), then some find the option of voluntarily entering an exclusive community quite desirable.

RESEARCH RESULTS: INVENTORY

- The average size of Canadian gated projects is estimated at about 80 units.
- Canadian gated communities are much smaller and less security-conscious than their American counterparts.
- Gated projects invariably involve private roads and condominium (strata) development.
- Net residential densities are higher than in conventional development on public roads.
- Most earlier projects have common amenities like lavish landscaping, club houses, fountains, RV parking, tennis courts or swimming pools.
- Some of the most recent projects, aimed at delivering a lower cost product, have few amenities.
- Larger projects are more likely to have common amenities.
- Canadian gated communities tend to focus on the retiree market, although not exclusively.

Province	Total	500 Units or More	Guards	Video Surveillance
BC	212	1	5	6
AB	17	2	1	2
SASK	1	1		
MAN	1			1
ONT	42	9	7	5
NS	8			2
TOTAL	281	13	13	16

Part of our research has involved creating an inventory of gated communities in Canada. We believe that at the current time, the inventory underestimates the number of gated communities in Canada by 1/2 to 1/3. If you know of any gated communities in your area, we would love to hear from you. Please help us make the inventory as complete as possible! Email us at: gated@dal.ca

We have created a definition for "gated community" for the purpose of this study. Because walled subdivisions are common, we chose to focus on communities with gates across streets carrying homes. It is important to note that planners do not share consensus on the meaning of "gated", and many planners may use the term "gated community" to include walled projects with open street access. Further, most gated projects in Canada are too small to be complete "communities." Often these "communities" are gated subdivisions or neighbourhoods.

"Gated communities are housing developments on private roads that are closed to general traffic by a gate across the primary access. These developments may be surrounded by fences, walls, or other natural barriers that further limit public access."

- For planners, emergency access is clearly a concern.
- Planners want to maintain transportation and pedestrian access wherever possible.
- Planners prefer smaller gated projects (under 20 acres) over large ones.
- Planners want to ensure that fences around projects are attractive and allow lines of sight in and out of the project.
- In rural areas, planners note that gating may be limiting public access to the coastal zone, lake fronts, trails, and other areas traditionally used for recreational activities.
- Some planners and municipal politicians are concerned about conflicts over public services in private gated developments.
- Residents pay full municipal taxes and unless specifically negotiated receive no municipal services within the development.
- Some gated communities are asking for either tax rebates or increased municipal services (e.g., waste collection, snow removal).
- Some planners worry that gating can lead to social isolation, segregation, and fear.
- Other planners see benefits in gated projects. One planner told us that her mother lives in a gated seniors community with

PLANS, POLICIES, LAND USE ZONING BYLAWS

- adopt plan policies to limit or discourage gating
- restrict use of "reverse frontage" lots, or require front-loaded lots on all road types
- limit fence heights
- employ design guidelines (character, heritage, integration of housing)
- require or encourage transportation network integration and permeability
- require public access
- set landscaping or setback regulations

ENGINEERING STANDARDS AND EMERGENCY ACCESS

- restrict closing of roads
- temporary moratorium on private roads
- require emergency access

DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENTS NEGOTIATED PERMITTING

- use development permit process to refuse requests
- use urban design and landscape guidelines to limit undesirable features
- impose deed restrictions or covenants on bare land strata

COUNCIL BY-LAWS AND RESOLUTIONS

- prohibit fortification of buildings and land
- prohibit locking of gates across road

STAFF RESOLUTIONS

- persuade developers to consider other options
- tell developers gates are not permitted
- impose deed restrictions or covenants on bare land strata condominiums

For the most part, planners who responded to our survey do not see a great need to regulate gated communities. Given the press of current issues, planners have not yet taken a proactive approach to preventing a phenomenon many have yet to witness in their municipalities. Gated communities have not made it to the 'front burner'. For now the tools available suit the purpose. Others can be added should the need arise. Perhaps the culture of fear which drives gating in the US has not proven as strong in Canada. Developers may not perceive a ready market for enclosing markets here, except in a few competitive environments. Nonetheless, the preliminary findings from our research do indicate that Canada has its share of gated projects; moreover developers see such developments as an effective marketing tool, especially for seniors housing. We are currently expanding our research to look at private roads in more detail. The proliferation of developments on private roads opens up opportunities for gated projects.

Left: Fenced in Communities, ON
Right: Gated Road, NS



Come visit our website! The website provides details of the study, details of the inventory, a comprehensive bibliography, a typology of gated communities and a list of tools used by planners. It also allows you to keep abreast of our research findings and latest papers. Visit us at www.dal.ca/~gated