



research highlights:

private streets in the canadian context

In the course of investigating gated communities in Canada, we came to realize that a large proportion of new development is occurring on private streets. Almost all of the gated projects in Canada are on private streets. (This contrasts with the American situation where municipal authorities sometimes permit public roads to be gated at the requests of residents.)

Some of the private roads in Canadian suburbs are in condominium or strata developments. They are shared access ways for the use of those who own units in the private development. Although they look like streets and function like streets, some municipalities treat them as shared driveways or common right-of-way easements. With some 9% of housing units in Canada now in condominium projects, the effect of these kinds of developments is becoming more significant. Many of the projects are high-end housing with access to attractive shared amenities like golf courses, pools, or green spaces. They pose the risk of an exclusive and segregated urban realm.

In rural areas private roads have proven an inexpensive way of accessing unserviced developments. Rural private lanes are often unpaved and poorly maintained. While some of the units on them may be expensive summer homes, others may be modest houses or mobile homes. These private streets often suffer from poor maintenance.

Key findings:

- Several Canadian communities report that as many as one-quarter of their housing units are on private roads.
- Some communities indicate that as much as one-quarter of their total extent of streets is privately owned.
- Most municipalities have lower standards (or no standards) for private streets than for public roads. Excessive public requirements encourage developers to go private.
- Private streets reduce the cost of street maintenance, snow plowing and garbage collection to local government. They prove a lucrative tax benefit to government.
- Residents enjoy the privacy, reduced traffic, and enhanced sense of character of communities with private roads. They accept higher densities in return for privacy.
- Planners worry about the loss of street connectivity with private streets, as pedestrians, cyclists and motorists can no longer pass through the neighbourhood.
- Planners worry about the greater social segregation implied by private community development.

