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Do Canadian planners have the tools to deal with "gated communities"?

> *"In many regions, developers are marketing larger subdivisions as gated or fenced communities. With guards posted at the gates, and surveillance cameras watching strangers' movements, these communities resurrect images of the medieval fortified town. Probably the most popular and lucrative development form [in America] today ... (Egan 1995), ... [i]t is safe and separate, managed by a residents' association. ... Parks, schools, and high quality recreational facilities or ecological reserves are for the exclusive use of residents. ... [S]uch communities are exclusionary: neighbourhoods for winners."* (Grant 1997:125)

Since I wrote that passage in 1996, gated or walled communities have continued to proliferate in America, and appear increasingly in regions such as the Middle East, Australia, South Africa, and Central and South America. Blakely and Snyder (1997) found some 20,000 gated communities in the US accommodating over three million units (with seven to eight million residents). Developers estimate that eight out of ten new residential projects in the US involve gates, walls, or guards (Blakely and Snyder 1997). Some 12% of the population of Metro Phoenix were in gated communities by 1999 (Webster *et al*. 2002). New gated communities are also on the increase in Canada (Anthony 1997; Haysom 1996; Liebner 2003; Yelaja 2003).

The trend to surround and barricade private space, to try to use design strategies to keep strangers out of neighbourhoods, is strengthening (Blakely 1999). Even older neighbourhoods in US cities are closing off streets to reduce through traffic and enhance the local environment (Blakely and Snyder 1997; Newman 1995). Some small towns have put up their own walls, while a few gated projects have achieved urban status (Grunwald 1997; Tessler and Reyes 1999). Public space has been enclosed and privatized. The implications are already spilling over into Canadian settlements (Anthony 1997; Dinka 1997). Such developments "*challenge the spatial, organisational, and institutional order that has shaped modern cities*" (Webster *et al*. 2002: 315)

Walls and gates have a long heritage in urban form (Judd 1995; Morris 1994). Many early towns repelled invaders with thick, high walls. As towns grew, people extended the walls. Such enclosures defined and separated urban from non-urban uses. In other contexts, walls around palaces and sacred precincts separated the powerful from the rest of society. More recently, the ornate central squares of affluent residential districts in cities like London or New York stand fenced and locked, denying public admission (Kleinfield 2001). While walls have both inclusionary and exclusionary functions, history shows that many more community members are left outside the walls than are protected within them.

People who choose to close themselves off from the larger city do so in search of community and privacy, and in flight from fear (Dillon 1994; Hubert and Delsohn 1996; Low 2001; Marcuse 1997; Wilson-Doenges 2000). 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. Gated communities respond to the same underlying root issues that generate NIMBYism: concerns about property values, personal safety, and neighbourhood amenities (Dear 1992; Helsley and Strange 1999; Hornblower 1988; Rural and Small Town Research 1992; Shouse and Silverman 1999). These factors similarly motivate those who consider homes in gated communities. 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 (Byers n.d.).

Gated enclaves represent the hope of security; they appeal to consumers searching for a sense of community and identity; they offer an important niche marketing strategy for developers in a competitive environment; they keep out the unwelcome; they often come associated with attractive amenities; they increase property values (Baron 1998; Bible and Hsieh 2001; Blakely 1999; Townshend 2002). The implications of the growth of this phenomenon are, however, deeply troubling. Gated communities increase housing costs; they enhance class and ethnic segregation; they privatize elements

of the public realm (like streets, parks, and even schools); they may promote rather than reduce the fear of crime. Are gated communities appropriate in cities seeking to enhance integration and livability? Gating is clearly profitable, but can it be "smart" or "sustainable"?

People want safety in the home environment. Fear of crime drives residents away from certain neighbourhoods towards areas that are perceived as having lesser risk (Darian-Smith 1993; Logan and Collver 1983). Residential satisfaction and attachment are strongly correlated with feelings of safety; people feel most comfortable and secure when they are around people similar to themselves, whose behaviour they understand and can predict (Carvalho *et al* 1997; Fried 1982; Miller *et al.* 1980). A study by Greenberg and Rohe (1984) demonstrated that communities with well-defined boundaries and less permeable road networks had lower crime rates than did neighbourhoods with an open street system; thus home-buyers may be correct in believing gated communities safer (Atlas and LeBlanc 1994). In gated projects*, "Safety becomes 'security' and is commodified"* (Hillier and McManus 1994: 92). "*[H]ome is a cocoon protected by a wall and a guard house*" (Egan 1995: 22). Gated communities sell hope.

The growth in gated communities also reflects the continuing quest for community and identity in Western society (Talen 1999; Wilson-Doenges 2000). The nostalgia for a lost sense of community assumed to have been enjoyed in simpler times (Nasar and Julian 1995; Perez 1996), and for a physically defined community perimeter (Greinacher 1995; Hillier and McManus 1994; Knack 1995) makes many people seek neighbours like themselves in order to feel comfortable (Byers n.d.). Developers cater to this search with master-planned strategies like new urbanism and gated communities (Canin 1998; Knox 1992; Talen 1999). *"For many buyers, a home is now the realization of a dream, a sheltering environment, and a way to put small-town neighborliness back into their lives.*" (Martin 1996: 56). As Hull (1992) explains, people create strong links between the meanings they attach to the spaces in which they live and their image of self; they "wear" their neighbourhood as a marker of their status and place in society. Fried (1982) advises that the local residential environment is meaningful for many people, although not all choose to interact intensively with their neighbours. While the advocates of new urbanism believe that creating convivial urban environments will enhance social interaction, the students of gated communities note that a substantial component of the population prefers privacy and self-containment (Blakely and Snyder 1997; Fried 1982; Talen 1999). In the gated community, as in the suburbs generally, people may choose to be neighbourly, or decide to keep to themselves. The success of gated enclaves in the US and other nations show how strong their allure proves.

The residents of gated communities want to control the residential environment (Marcuse 1995; Shouse and Silverman 1999). While the same basic premise provides the root motivation for community planning, the underlying philosophy associated with gated communities carries negative connotations as well. Gated communities separate those within the wall from those outside. Typically, those inside the walls are economically privileged, sometimes ethnically or age-segregated (Blakely and Snyder 1997; Maharidge 1994). Some communities appeal to those with particular recreational interests, such as golfers or RV enthusiasts. Homogeneity is thus enforced as developments target specific niche markets. While the suburbs increasingly replicate the diversity once associated with the city, the residents of gated communities are more often characterized by uniformity of means and lifestyles.

Having taken responsibility for meeting the costs of the amenities provided in their developments, the residents of gated communities may prove reluctant to support public services and amenities for others in the larger community (Blakely and Snyder 1997; Egan 1995; Templin 1999). Gated communities in the US are typically planned under a special district provision (eg, planned unit development) or a condominium project. They have their own management, first under the project developer and later under a homeowners' association. The association takes care of duties that in cities would be the responsibility of public servants (such as police, street maintenance). Distrust of government feeds commitment to the private community (Egan 1995; McKenzie 1994; Nasser 2000). Thus the residents of private communities may resent municipal officials and resist efforts to apply regulations. In many American jurisdictions, projects that provide their own local services seem attractive to governments that lack the resources to provide adequate urban infrastructure. The divide between private governance and the public realm grows wider and wider (Drummond 1998).

Urban revitalization projects that barricade public streets in older parts of cities may restrict access of non-residents to some community amenities, yet they have received extensive local support (Blakely and Snyder 1997; Newman 1995). Even people in central city areas may find enclosure and

exclusion reassuring (Blakely 1999). Barricading streets and even whole towns to keep non-residents out is yet another example of the trend that Gottdiener (1997) describes: privatizing the public realm. Some large gated communities have received local government status in the US (Egan 1995; Grunwald 1997; Tessler and Reyes 1999) and may refuse admittance to non-residents. Thus urban spaces become compartmentalized, and mobility between parts of the city are restricted.

Are gated communities an issue in Canada?

"*When Kelowna, B.C., gets gated communities, you know it's a trend*" said housing analyst, Frank Clayton (cited in Carey 1997: A1). Although fully gated communities remain relatively rare in Canada, the phenomenon is beginning to affect the development industry here, especially in the fringe districts of the largest urban areas and in regions popular for retirement. We have identified over 100 gated projects in our preliminary inventory of Canadian gated communities (begun in late 2002).

A search of real estate listings on the internet reveals some of the appeals that Canadian developers make in their marketing:

$ *Tapadera Estates*: "The carefree lifestyle with the permanent address! ... security gates"
$ *Westsyde Park Estates*: "security gate and recreational vehicle parking are an added bonus in this low density development"

$ "The Clubhouse also has a complete kitchen area to allow for private functions. Other features in *Lakeshore Green* will be state-of-the-art security as well as peaceful waterscapes near every home."
$ *Mallard's Landing* "is an adult oriented community in the highly desirable Mission area of Kelowna. This exclusive gated community offers carefree living in a secure, planned neighbourhood, located within walking distance of shopping, beaches, hiking trails and golf courses."

Gated projects are appearing in provinces from coast to coast. Developers recognize that they can sell safety and security, especially to retirees. "*In the post 9/11-era and with the perception that crime is on the rise, living behind walls and knowing your neighbours creates a safety zone for many.*" (Yelaja 2003: 1). Many gated projects in Canada provide seasonal homes for "snowbirds". Realtors for vacation homes in gated projects in Nova Scotia sometimes list lot prices in American dollars, clearly targeting product at the foreign market (Mittelsteadt 2003).

In US cities where gating has become commonplace and market growth is strong, the appeal extends further, with middle-class suburbs now erecting barriers. As real estate surveys find a 6% premium for homes in gated communities (Bible and Hsieh 2001), consumers are readily persuaded that gating is a good investment. Are such communities likely to increase in Canada?

Blakely and Snyder (1997) indicate that the public debate about the social implications of gated communities has barely begun in the US. The discussion is even more limited in Canada, except perhaps in southern BC and southern Ontario where we find the largest number of projects. However, if Canadian trends parallel those in the US, pressures to gate communities may well increase. Are policy-makers and planners ready to respond? Blakely (2001) says that professional planners have to take an ethical stand on this issue: silence, however, implies acceptance of a built realm in which a growing portion of the most affluent among us wall themselves off.

Gated communities raise significant questions related to affordability, segregation, and discrimination. They present physical barriers within the community, limiting access to formerly open landscapes and to public space in coastal areas. As we try to plan sustainable communities with a place for everyone, we must ask whether gated areas represent an innocuous form of protected suburban development or a worrisome precedent for a divided urban realm.

"*The effects that gates have on the people and places around them – symbolic and manifest, social and physical – are reasons for serious debate. Political representatives, civil servants, and the public need to consider both the narrow and the broad consequences of this new residential pattern. Among city officials and planners, most ... take gated communities for granted, limiting their concerns to practical issues of traffic flow, aesthetics, and emergency vehicle access.*" (Blakely and Snyder 1997: 156)

Private communities also force us to consider normative issues. Are planners and policy makers

looking beyond the technical questions of how to regulate and process requests for gated communities to examine the values involved in the built form? A team of researchers is currently conducting research to probe these and other questions about how Canadian planning practice is responding to the challenges posed by gated communities. We are looking at planning policies and documents, and will soon begin interviewing planners to understand the strategies they are using to cope. We hope to discover how extensive the demand for gated communities is, and how planners are preparing for them or responding to them.

What have we found thus far?

Our initial review has not revealed extensive discussions of gated communities in the Canadian planning literature. One graduate thesis describes a gated project in Winnipeg in limited detail (Golby 1999), and another (part of the research reported here) is recently completed on cases in Nova Scotia (Mittelsteadt 2003). While the Canadian media has reported on many gated projects (eg, Anthony 1997; Carey 1997; Liebner 2003; Yelaja 2003), we find little evidence that planners have raised flags about the issue in conferences or workshops.

Some Canadian scholars have taken an interest in gated projects. A recent paper on age-segregated housing (Townshend 2002) describes "self actualization" in retirement communities in Canada, some of which are gated. Helsley and Strange (1999) consider the effect of gating on crime, but not necessarily in a Canadian context. Byers (n.d.) explores the way in which gating reveals the fear of the "other" in our society. None of these scholars have, however, considered planning issues.

The first phase of our work involved beginning an inventory of gated communities and documenting the policies and tools planners have available for managing requests for gated projects. We discovered very quickly that planners do not share consensus on the meaning of "gated". The definition we used did not fully resolve the problem. In our notes to planners requesting information, we explained that "Gated communities are multi-unit housing developments surrounded by fences, walls or other barriers, and with streets that are not open to general traffic." We still found, though, that planners differed in their interpretations of the term. This recognition has led us to determine that a typology or continuum of gated communities may be warranted (see Table 1).

Table 1 : *A typology or continuum of "gated" communities*

Type	Boundary	Road access	Notes
A. Ornamental gating	no marked boundary	landmark gates at entry	Feature gates showing the subdivision name are placed at the major entries to give identity to a neighbourhood.
B. Walled subdivisions	opaque fence or wall	open	Fully walled subdivisions are a common suburban feature in Western cities. Cars and pedestrians can enter.
C. Barricaded streets	no marked boundary	public streets closed by fence or concrete barriers	Many cities barricade streets creating cul-de-sacs within the grid as a form of traffic control. Pedestrian access is open.
D. "Faux"-gated entries[1]	opaque wall or fence	narrowed entry, removable chains, guard house	Some subdivisions have physical features that look like guard houses or private entries to discourage unwanted vehicles from entering.

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[1] Oliver (2002) reports that faux gates are on the increase in California. They send the message of exclusivity without requiring complex technologies.

E. Partially-gated roads	no marked boundary	lift or swing arm	Rural cottage subdivisions may feature gates that are only closed for part of the year. Communities on reserves may have gates but no walls. Pedestrian access is open.
F. Fully-gated roads	natural features like water or ravines	lift or swing arm	Prestige communities on islands, peninsulas, or remote areas may limit access through combined natural and man-made features.
G. Restricted entry bounded areas	fence or wall	gate with limited control access	Suburban communities may completely restrict public access; video or telephone systems may allow visitors to be vetted by residents.
H. Restricted entry, guarded areas	fence or wall	gate with limited control access; security guards	Suburban communities may completely restrict public access; video or telephone systems allow visitors to be vetted by residents. American-style gated communities have guards at the gates or patrolling the premises.

As we complete our inventory, we hope to use this schema to categorize Canadian gated communities. We recognize that Canada has relatively few neighbourhoods that fit in the latter categories of this schema, but many that fit other categories.

What tools are planners using?

In late 2002 and early 2003, we conducted an email survey of planning departments in most of the larger communities in Canada. From 117 contacts, we had replies from 73 planners (62% response rate). We discovered that nine municipalities, five in British Columbia (Burnaby, Coquitlam, Nanaimo, Kelowna, and Qualicum Beach) and four in Ontario (Ottawa, Orangeville, Brockville, and Ajax), reported policies to regulate or limit gated communities. Most planners said their communities had no gated projects, and no policy.

As Table 2 illustrates, we find municipalities using a range of tools to manage gated communities. British Columbia municipalities with several gated projects have the strongest policy in their plans. Even in the absence of targeted policy, however, council members and planners are finding ways to control built form. Policies that limit fence heights, restrict walls or screens along public roads, or require permeable street networks can prevent enclosure. Increased use of negotiated development agreements or permits provides planners with mechanisms to discourage developers from gating. In some cases, councils have passed resolutions to limit fortification or the locking of gates.

Table 2: *Municipal tools for controlling gated communities*

1. plan policies and land use / zoning bylaws		
	adopt plan policies to limit or discourage gating	Burnaby, Coquitlam, Nanaimo, Kelowna, Qualicum Beach BC Ottawa Region (1999)[2]

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[2] A council member amended the Ottawa Regional Official Plan in March 1999 to prevent developers from gating subdivisions: it required that "public access through the road and pedestrian access unimpeded by security gates or similar barriers" (Ottawa Region 1999, policy 3.2.13). Respondents advised us that the draft plan for Ottawa-Carleton (which will replace the earlier plan) does not include the policy.

	restrict use of "reverse frontage" lots, or require front-loaded lots on all road types	Ajax ON
	limit fence heights	Nanaimo BC
	employ design guidelines (character, heritage, integration of housing)	North Vancouver District
	require or encourage transportation network integration and permeability (may specify grid streets)	Burnaby, Ajax, Orangeville
	require public access	Surrey BC
	set landscaping or setback regulations	Regina SK

2. engineering and emergency access policies	
restrict closing of roads	Halifax Regional Municipality NS
require emergency access	Canmore , Edmonton AB

3. development agreements and negotiated permitting process adjustments*:*	
use development permit process to refuse requests	North Vancouver District, Saanich, Nanaimo Regional District BC
use urban design and landscape guidelines to limit undesirable features	Toronto, North Vancouver District
impose deed restrictions or covenants on bare land strata condominiums	Coquitlam
exact public use easements over private roads or trails	Oakville ON

4. Council by-laws and resolutions	
prohibit fortification of buildings and land	Brockville ON
prohibit locking of gates across roads	Burnaby 1986[3]

5. Staff persuasion	
persuade developers to consider other options	Airdrie AB, Bridgewater NS
tell developers gates are not permitted	York Region, North Vancouver City
tell developers staff does not support gating	Cochrane AB, Oakville

Many planners report that they rely on the powers of persuasion to convince developers that

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[3] Burnaby Council passed a resolution in 1986 limiting the locking of gates after a developer constructed a gate. Plan policy later obviated the need for the resolution.

proposals for gating are not in the public interest and may slow down their applications. As one planner noted,

> "*There are general policies regarding the preservation of the heritage / culture of the town, which can be raised as a point of discussion with an applicant and identified as a characteristic valued enough by Council to be included in the [plan]. Add to that the persuasion of a good argument, and an applicant can be convinced that the easiest route to achieving smooth planning approval is to concede on certain issues.*"

Several planners said that their communities experienced little pressure for growth and therefore local developers showed no interest in gated projects. Similarly, planners for older inner-city municipalities said there was little demand for gating in infill projects. Our preliminary inventory findings do show more of the larger gated communities in the rural and suburban fringe of rapidly-growing urban regions in BC and Ontario.

The planners we contacted noted several issues that may arise from gated projects. Emergency access is clearly an issue. Areas that have gated projects insist that provisions are made for emergency vehicles to gain access. Planners also want to see transportation and pedestrian links maintained wherever possible. In rural parts of Nova Scotia, planners note that gating is limiting public access to the coastal zone and to areas traditionally used for recreational activities.

Some planners worry that gating can lead to social isolation, segregation, and fear. As one said, "*Gated communities are the result of social decay. ...In summary, they defeat the purpose of community planning.*"

Others, though, can see the benefits of gated projects. One planner told us that her mother lives in a gated seniors community with a good network of friends who look out for her welfare. "*Jane Jacobs would be proud,*" she told us.

Provincial governments have taken little evident interest in gating. Most provinces have no policies on gating of private roads in condominium projects. Only New Brunswick, with its 1969 *Condominium Property Act,* prevents gating: because the Act does not enable bare land condominiums, it does not allow types of development form that developers may wish to enclose.

For the most part, planners do not see a great need to regulate gated communities. Given the press of current issues, planners have not taken a proactive approach to preventing a phenomenon many have not witnessed in their municipalities. Gated communities have not made it to the "front burner". For now, the tools available are suiting the purpose; others can be added should the need arise.

Perhaps because the culture of fear which drives gating in the US has not proven as strong in Canada, developers may not perceive as ready a market for enclosing new developments. Nonetheless, the preliminary findings from our inventory do indicate that Canada has its share of gated projects,, and that developers see such developments as an effective marketing tool. As our research continues this summer, we hope to increase our understanding of the current state of gated communities and the character of planning responses to them.

Note

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