

***SCIENTIFIC CLOAK / ROMANTIC HEART:
GORDON STEPHENSON AND THE REDEVELOPMENT STUDY OF HALIFAX,
1957***

JILL L GRANT AND MARCUS PATERSON

Jill.Grant@dal.ca

ABSTRACT

In 1957 Gordon Stephenson prepared an urban renewal study for the city of Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. An English architect-planner newly arrived at the University of Toronto via Australia, Stephenson epitomized the professional expert hired to diagnose urban ills and prescribe solutions. The paper examines the tension between humanistic moral values and rational scientific approaches in Stephenson's study, and seeks to identify some of the influences on his thinking and methods.

Gordon Stephenson enjoyed an illustrious career on three continents. After studying architecture in Britain and planning in the United States, Stephenson practiced as a planner and scholar in Britain, Australia, and Canada. This paper examines Gordon Stephenson's 1957 urban renewal study for Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. Stephenson's report represented a milestone in several ways. As one of the early comprehensive studies conducted in Canada it offered a template for those that followed. As Stephenson's first major project of the sort it cemented his reputation as an authority in urban renewal. As an exhaustive compilation of slum conditions in Halifax it served as an indictment of neglect and as a rallying call for clearance: the moral judgements rendered in the report continue to tug at the social fabric of the city six decades later.

Through conducting his study, Stephenson became the vehicle for achieving Halifax's long desired 'house-cleaning' to recapture the centre of the city for modern uses (Paterson, 2009). By delineating areas that required attention Stephenson facilitated local government's access to federal funding to expropriate and clear land for commercial redevelopment. In his analyses Stephenson used empirical approaches that applied quasi-scientific methods to substantiate expert moral judgements about the needs, health, and well-being of disadvantaged community members. As such, the Halifax study epitomised the modernist perspective: combining technical expertise with a discourse of moral improvement and humanism. Stephenson cloaked romantic Victorian notions about the requirements of the family and the welfare of women and children within a technical discourse that relied on data, formulas, and maps to itemise and spatially delimit blight.

Given that Stephenson provided few sources in his writings to indicate where he obtained his ideas¹, scholars may find it challenging to trace the origins of the concepts and methods he used. Some of Stephenson's articles (e.g., Stephenson, 1958a, 1958b) and

¹ Stephenson is not alone in this deficiency. Planning journal articles in the 1940s and 1950s often prove depressingly short on citations. Even authors mentioned in text may not merit complete citations.

books (Stephenson, 1992, 1994) revealed his interest in planning history and philosophy but they generally lacked the discipline and rigour to fully illuminate his approach or explain his methods. At times his major works frustrate the reader by reporting curious vignettes and lists of pet ideas. In reviewing Stephenson's biography Rodwin (1995, 524) complained that the book proved 'terse and often uninformative' with 'no vigorous analyses of ideas'. In introducing Stephenson's 1994 monograph, noted historian Gordon Cherry (1994, i) wrote that the work 'is a compelling read – for its insights as well as its biases'. Several scholars offered substantive evaluations of Stephenson's work the year he died. Alexander and Greive (1997, 225) described Stephenson as 'an icon of modernism' who saw planning as inherently having social purpose. Dix (1997, iii) suggested that Stephenson's 'influence on architecture and planning ... has been significant, beneficial and soundly based, yet ... frequently underestimated'. In a more critical recent paper, Gregory (2010) noted that in his efforts to establish himself as a 'compassionate planner' Stephenson took a typically modernist, top-down approach that neglected engaging those who might be affected by his projects. Little has been written about Stephenson's work in Canada aside from occasional acknowledgement of his role in redevelopment studies (e.g., Collier, 1974).

This paper evaluates the ideas and approaches Stephenson used in conducting the redevelopment study of Halifax and seeks to situate his study in the context of its time and place². It begins by reviewing the interest in urban renewal in the post-war period before discussing conditions in Halifax leading up to Stephenson's appointment. Following a brief introduction to Gordon Stephenson's ideas and professional history the paper proceeds to review the Halifax study. The analysis sections discuss the ideas and methods embodied in the Halifax redevelopment study to relate them to the professional and national context of the time. The paper concludes by reflecting on Stephenson's legacy in Halifax and his approach to the profession. Stephenson's Halifax study revealed the continuing tension between his moral perspective that 'town planning was ... a humanitarian corrective to the urban degradation of yester-year' (Cherry, 1994, i) and his professional efforts to establish his technical credentials as an expert town planner who offered recommendations based on sound evidence and rational logic. Like many planners of his era, Stephenson struggled to bridge the moral and the physical: investigating his work provides useful insight into how planners in the post-war period developed methods and theory as they negotiated the tensions in their work.

URBAN RENEWAL IN CANADA IN THE POST WAR PERIOD

'...our cities must be renewed; for if they are not, the blight spreading at the centre will slowly and insidiously strangle the efficiency of the city and may eventually render it unable to carry out its functions.' (Pickett, 1957: 131)

When Stephenson arrived to take up a chair in planning at the University of Toronto in 1955, urban renewal was already underway in Canada. In its report on housing and

² Archival sources provided many original materials examined for this study. Those included Halifax City Council minutes and reports.

community planning, the Advisory Committee on Reconstruction (1944) had highlighted the need for extensive slum clearance to address urban problems and provide appropriate housing to meet Canadian needs. In the summer of 1955, the City of Toronto was conducting its own urban renewal study (Advisory Committee on the Urban Renewal Study, 1956). The city had gained prominence for beginning to tackle slum housing with large scale clearance at Regent Park North in the 1940s (Rose, 1958). After seeking voter approval to borrow the funds to clear slum lands, the City of Toronto obtained federal funding to build modernist style public housing on the site. By 1951 over 1000 units were available in new buildings (Rose, 1958).

Toronto commissioned the renewal study for the second phase of Regent Park South in 1955. In the *Community Planning Review*, Albert Rose praised the 24 page redevelopment report, the first of its kind in Canada.

‘One is immediately struck by the excellent format of the printed Report. It is a handsome document, well arranged, well documented, replete with maps, diagrams and photographs. ... The Report is a very real contribution to the scant Canadian literature on housing and redevelopment.’ (Rose, 1955, 113)

As Regent Park took shape, and pictures of its happy residents in their sparkling new kitchens hit the news stands, planners across Canada saw the redevelopment as a success. Rose (1958, 181) argued that Regent Park housed people in good units at high density but with abundant open space. He lauded the creation of a community with a diversity of ages and incomes and no signs of overcrowding.

Stephenson arrived in Toronto as the government of Canada was revising the National Housing Act provisions on slum clearance. Initially the legislation provided funding to local governments to build public housing to replace cleared slums. The revisions discussed in 1955 and passed in June 1956 permitted wider possible uses in redeveloping cleared lands. The Minister of Public Works, speaking to the bill on second reading, said that

‘Canadian cities have inherited a stock of housing which is caught in the relentless process of deterioration and obsolescence. ... In most cities there are areas where deterioration has reached a condition that can only be rectified by complete redevelopment.’ (Winters, 1956, 79)

Noting that providing housing in central areas proved costly, and that Canadian families generally preferred detached housing, the Minister indicated that the amendments to the Act would begin to facilitate urban redevelopment to achieve the ‘highest and best use’ and the ‘most effective function’ of cleared land (Winters, 1956, 80). The changes encouraged wide-scale re-planning of central city areas and permitted private interests to participate in redevelopment. Local authorities needed to ensure they provided adequate housing to accommodate those displaced, but that could be outside central areas. To further assist local governments, the federal government’s housing agency, the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), would provide funds for housing studies to build the case for redevelopment. These changes to the legislation provided the legal and

financial framework for Halifax's encounter with Gordon Stephenson and the city's foray into slum clearance.

The 1950s proved a pivotal time for community planning in Canada as it gained in importance and credibility (Wolfe, 1994). The Community Planning Association of Canada (CPAC), a citizens' association funded by CMHC, organised conferences and published its journal, *Community Planning Review*, to promote planning to the lay public and political leaders. Slum clearance and urban renewal became popular themes in the journal, alongside ideas such as comprehensive planning and neighbourhood units. The *Review* reprinted many conference addresses and speeches by political, business, and academic leaders affirming the need for planning. Senator David Croll crystallised the fear of blight: 'The slum, like its blood brother cancer, is a national plague and must be dealt with at the national level with local cooperation' (Croll, 1956, 144). Croll argued that local governments needed to follow the lead of Toronto in Regent Park to tackle 'the decaying and drying-up areas which breed disease, crime and social maladjustment' (1956, 145). In the public discourse of the 1950s cleaning up the slums reflected significant efforts to modernise the city.

Allen (2008) argued that slum clearance became the centrepiece of British housing reform policies in the late 19th century. In the post Second World War period, American cities coast to coast had jumped on the slum clearance bandwagon. Carl Feiss, a Washington-based planning consultant and professor who advised the US government, addressed CPAC's national conference in 1956 to talk about 'the desperate plight of our worn-out cities' (Feiss, 1956, 147). Feiss suggested that Congress saw slum clearance as part of a strategy to enable 'the realization as soon as feasible of the goal of a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family' (1956, 147). Science and technology, Feiss suggested, could improve the urban environment and allow planners to design 'the city of the future' (1956, 156). Because the residents of slum areas sometimes resist leaving their homes, Feiss argued that strong citizens' associations (like CPAC) should lobby local governments to engage in planning and redevelopment.

THE HALIFAX CONTEXT

With its huge military infrastructure, Halifax experienced boom-bust cycles through most of its history. In war time the city grew rapidly, only to languish during times of peace. By 1943, Halifax city council had appointed a citizen committee to plan for peace time growth: the Civic Planning Commission (1945) produced the 1945 Master Plan recommending slum clearance for several run down neighbourhoods (Pacey, 1979). In 1950 the city adopted an official plan and zoning by-law (Halifax, 1950) to identify the projects -- including slum clearance ideas from the 1945 plan -- that it would carry out over a ten-year period (Paterson, 2009).

Paterson (2009) documented several efforts by council members in the early 1950s to designate areas for clearance: uncertainty about strategies for moving slum clearance forward and political repercussions to announcements about areas proposed stalled

implementation. In December 1955, knowing that changes were coming to national legislation that would facilitate redevelopment of the city centre, Halifax council passed a motion indicating its intent to initiate slum clearance (Paterson, 2009). Early in 1956 the mayor visited Ottawa to meet with federal officials about how to proceed. Shortly after his return, Council passed a motion to request \$12,000 from the federal government for a survey of housing conditions to determine where redevelopment should occur. On 15 March 1956 the mayor told Council that the Minister of Public Works recommended Professor Stephenson for the job. Council minutes indicated that Council appeared to have considered no other candidates.

On 4 April 1956 Gordon Stephenson made his first appearance before Council to discuss the requirements for a housing survey (Paterson, 2009). Stephenson advised council to broaden the scope of the survey to a redevelopment study that would cost about \$15,000 and take six months. The local paper, the *Halifax Mail-Star*, announced on its front page on 7 April 1956 that council had decided ‘to engage Dr. Gordon Stephenson, one of the country’s foremost authorities on housing, to conduct a study of housing conditions in Halifax with particular reference to redevelopment and zoning’ (Paterson, 2009, 37). With funding agreements in place, council approved Stephenson’s contract in July 1956 (Paterson, 2009).

GORDON STEPHENSON: BIOGRAPHY OF AN EXPERT

Stephenson joined the cohort of experts in town planning recruited to Canada in the period after the Second World War. Educated in architecture at the University of Liverpool, trained in planning at MIT, apprenticed in the atelier of Le Corbusier in Paris, schooled in hard knocks in the reconstruction group within the Ministry of Town and Country Planning during and after the war years, and respected as Lever Chair of Civic Design at the University of Liverpool, Stephenson enjoyed an exemplary reputation when he arrived to take his professorship in Toronto. His writings and designs revealed his adherence to a mix of values and theories popular in his time, and especially point to the influence on his thinking of people like Patrick Geddes, Lewis Mumford, and Clarence Stein.

In articulating his approach to town planning Stephenson (1949a) described 19th century towns as chaotic. As developers responded to industrialisation and the influence of the railroad in shaping spaces, Stephenson suggested that they ignored the needs of families. In Stephenson’s view ‘Town Planning or Civic Design is the science of ascertaining human needs and the ability to meet them’ (1949a, 143). Following Mumford (1949), whose paper appeared three months earlier in *Town Planning Review*, the journal that Stephenson edited, Stephenson argued that the purpose of planning is meeting people’s needs in varying phases of their lives. In Britain, he says, ‘We have recognised that every family has the right to a decent home and that those in greatest need come first’ (Stephenson, 1949a, 127). The planner must provide good living conditions because ‘A slum environment creates a slum mentality. A family may fight its surroundings for a generation, but they will eventually reduce some members to a hopeless and helpless

state' (Stephenson, 1949a, 132). This commitment to meeting family needs became a central theme in Stephenson's work, and led him to cite Mumford (1938, 1949) on many occasions.

Writing about design and economics, Stephenson suggested that 'Civic Design should express the purpose, aim, or intention of citizens. It is a means to an end and not an end in itself' (1953, 280). Like many other planners of his time, Stephenson saw planning and design as civilising influences overcoming the chaos of the industrial age: 'one of the main objectives of Civic Design [is] the provision of a civilised, efficient, and economically sound environment for human activities' (1953, 283).

In an address to the national conference of CPAC in Vancouver in 1957, as he was conducting the Halifax study, Stephenson reaffirmed his commitment to planning as a transformative tool to impose order on cities. If we want great cities, Stephenson said, we need to give up the focus on machines: 'We shall be talking of children instead of cars, of the good life rather than dollars, of the city as a symbol of our civilization' (1958, 4). Stephenson (1958) articulated a view of the city that had bachelors and childless couples living in apartments in the city, but families with children safely inhabiting planned suburbs with appropriate amenities. Previewing a conclusion in his Halifax study, Stephenson (1958, 10) linked crowding with specific concerns for youth: 'Overcrowding and life in rooms induces mental ill-health. Juvenile delinquency is a form of mental ill-health. It seems to be most intractable in areas of inadequate housing and congestion'. His rationale for clearing slums was simple: 'Slum areas, even though they are the only places in which some people can afford to live, must be cleared because they are slum areas – and a drain on the public purse as such. The worst slums, more often than not, will be where there are pressures for change of land use' (Stephenson, 1958, 9). Stephenson would plan affordable housing in new suburban areas where land costs and densities are lower and reuse the vital central cities to enable commerce to grow.

THE HALIFAX STUDY

Stephenson completed several redevelopment studies during his years in Canada, including ones for Ottawa, London, and Kingston. The study for Halifax was his first major undertaking in the country: as such it had quite an impact on him and on Canadian planning. In his biography, Stephenson (1992, 159) explained: 'It broke new ground as it was a voyage of discovery leading to the determination of related problems. ... The work was rewarding; the report the most satisfactory of those with which I have been associated.'

Hand-written note in the University of Liverpool Archives' copy of Stephenson's 1957 Halifax study [likely to Gerald Dix]:

'Gerald,

This is probably the most effective job I ever did (I believe the fee was \$5000 and the job occupied two summer vacations). It was effective if only because government and local government took effective action on nearly all the projects on p. 56 & p. 57 (Map 14). The manner of the presentation resulted from considerable thought and the close cooperation of the University of Toronto Press.

Gordon 27 / 7 / 82'

[University of Liverpool Archives, item D.307 / 3 / 1 – on lined paper about 5 inches by 7.5 inches]

The report won kudos in Canada at the time of its release. In a review of the work, Thrift (1957, 182) wrote, 'This study will probably be regarded as one of the more distinguished of its kind and a model for many others to follow.'

Local authorities welcomed the report and committed themselves to implement it. In his Foreword to the report Mayor LA Kitz wrote,

'Two centuries of living... have worn our City fabric thin, and many of our streets are unsuitable for modern needs. ... We have been fortunate in having Professor Gordon Stephenson, with his skill and broad experience, to give us this outstanding and comprehensive report.' (Stephenson, 1957, v)

Mayor Kitz picked up on metaphors and messages that pervaded Stephenson's report: of a frayed historic city worn down by the years and in danger of falling behind modern times. Stephenson's Preface pointed to the National Housing Act's interest in seeing cleared land redeveloped to its highest and best use to facilitate 'healthy growth and transformation' (Stephenson, 1957, vii). Throughout the report Stephenson described good planning as providing the tools to diagnose Halifax's problems and identify potential remedies. Strategies of separating land uses and replacing blighted areas with new development promised to deliver efficiency, health, and amenity to the city.

The report began with a historical review of the growth of the city that identified the early suburban extensions of the city (from the early 19th century) as the areas designated for the redevelopment study. A pictorial study provided an overview of conditions in the study area highlighting buildings that warranted rehabilitation or removal. In Section III of the report Stephenson mixed theory and evidence from his survey to identify problems and proposals. One paragraph effectively summed up his case.

'The survey has shown that the central fringe areas are not only obsolescent but are also the most costly for the City to service and administer. Although it is impossible accurately to estimate costs in relation to revenue, and the considerable losses which must occur, a series of maps illustrate the point. A great deal of the police and fire department work is concentrated in the older residential districts. The City is involved in the heavy costs of dealing with the mental and physical ill-health of young and old, which can to a considerable degree be attributed to bad housing conditions. There is an amazing concentration of

juvenile delinquency and welfare cases immediately to the north of the central area.' (Stephenson, 1957, 21)

Stephenson outlined projected needs for housing and described a range of improvements suggested for the city. The worst areas of the central city were identified for redevelopment. While advocating renewal, Stephenson showed appreciation for Halifax's assets.

'It is of importance to the City of Halifax, and to the inhabitants of the metropolitan region, that the City Centre, which is a symbol as well as a main meeting place and focal point, should expand and grow in an orderly way. History has given the present generation a City Centre of great character. Despite complaints to the contrary, its compactness and intimate scale is of considerable advantage.' (Stephenson, 1957, 24-25)

Solutions Stephenson proposed to the problems identified proved fairly consistent through the report: clear slum housing, re-house people away from the city centre or sites needed for industrial use, improve zoning to clarify and differentiate uses, build parking lots near commercial areas, and design modernist structures on new sites.

The survey and recommendations occupied the second half of the 62 page report. Stephenson presented his detailed findings with a series of maps, tables, and illustrations. While not as succinct as the Toronto study completed in 1956, the Halifax report certainly looked professional and comprehensive, and provided the answers that city council sought.

IDEAS EMBEDDED IN THE REPORT

Stephenson's Halifax report, as with his body of work generally, reflected the pervasive influence of several related ideas about urban conditions and human experience that dominated the discourse of planning in the 1950s.³ Rather than explicitly frame a position based on theory, Stephenson presented his views as assertions: the expert understanding of the way that cities and people operate. Although the report included a section titled 'some references' Stephenson included only background studies on the Halifax situation. In the body of his report he named only two scholarly sources: M Allen Pond on the relationship between housing and health and Sir Cyril Burt on the effect of home conditions on mental health. Elsewhere the reader had to depend on Stephenson's expert judgement and interpretation.

What theory and ideas inspired Stephenson's work? Throughout his writings Stephenson often alluded to the importance of **humanism**, even titling his 1992 biography '*On a Human Scale*'. For Stephenson, humanism in planning involved a commitment to the principles developed and promoted by Ebenezer Howard, Patrick Geddes, William Lever,

³ Given that the academic style of the 1940s and 1950s often dispensed with citations it proved frustratingly difficult to trace Stephenson's intellectual lineage. His 1992 biography is barely more helpful, as it lacks probing analysis or insightful detail.

Raymond Unwin, Patrick Abercrombie, Thomas Adams, Clarence Stein, Lewis Mumford and others in the garden city and regional planning movements. These thinkers and planners sought to promote improved housing conditions for working people and wrote about managing the urban problems created by mechanisation and industrialisation. Stephenson (1958b, 1994) described such thinkers as philosophical radicals or practical Eutopists. Although some of the thinkers Stephenson admired linked their planning theories explicitly to their religious views, Stephenson appeared to take a pragmatic approach in adopting humanism as his philosophy. Modern town planning offered tools to redesign cities to accommodate healthy family life and ‘human values’: that became Stephenson’s mission.

Stephenson (1949a) revealed his commitment to planning for human needs – his interpretation of humanism – in a paper in *Town Planning Review* shortly after he became editor of the journal. His view of civic design had morality and human dignity at its core; he pointed to Mumford’s (1949) argument for addressing the needs of the family within a five minute walk of the home. In his editorial notes to the next issue of *TPR* Stephenson praised Clarence Stein and Henry Wright as ‘humanists who were both skilled and practical’ (Stephenson, 1949b, 185).

In the years leading up to Stephenson’s arrival in Canada other planners wrote about human needs as a central theme in planning. Toronto planner Eugene Faludi (1950, 71) asked a rhetorical question in the *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*: ‘Shall we plan on a human scale for individualism, or on a de-humanized scale for collectivism?’ Writing on humanism in community planning, Aronovici (1951, 23) said, ‘The movement has been directed towards bringing about some kind of symmetry between the accelerated and mechanized tempo of life and the unyielding and antiquated pattern of the physical plan.’ While some voices (e.g., Ravitz, 1955) cautioned that cities needed to overcome problems of racism and insufficient attention to enforcing standards, the professional consensus held that planners who understand human needs could improve family life as well as urban revenues through physical improvements to the city (Alonso, 1966). Urban renewal would be both an ordering and a civilising process.

For Stephenson, reforming housing conditions took priority. In a paper published in the 1956-1957 report of the Town Planning Institute of Canada, Stephenson (1956/1957, 3) highlighted the contributions of Geddes, Howard, Unwin, Adams, Abercrombie, Stein, and Mumford:

‘These are men who have enriched our minds but not themselves, who have had faith in people and their essential goodness. In short, they were humanists. They gained understanding of the industrial revolution and its tremendous effect on urban life. They inherited the legacy of the great Victorian thinkers to whom we owe so much. They have agreed with Charles Dickens that “the reform of habitations must precede all other reforms, and without it all other reforms must fail”, and they have broadened the concept.’

The worry that poor housing harmed people pervaded Stephenson’s report on Halifax.

‘Poor accommodation, food, clothing, and heating make for a miserable family life, ill-health, juvenile delinquency; all are costly to the community. ... Preventive medicine is now generally accepted as more effective and less costly than remedial. Clearance and redevelopment in the City will undoubtedly increase the efficiency of the hub of the metropolitan region, and remove some of the worst slums in the older parts. It will also provide new accommodation for a proportion of families now housed in bad conditions. It will not remove the causes which bring slums into being. Amongst these, and without doubt most important, is overcrowding of dwellings through a shortage of housing accommodation whose cost, in terms of purchase price or rent, must be within reach of the lower and lower-middle income groups.’ (Stephenson, 1957, 22)

His discussion of overcrowding, disease, and crime revealed the links that Stephenson saw between these problems. The high costs of overcrowding, he wrote, ‘can be measured in human terms in a study of records of juvenile delinquency, the public health services, and the fire and police records’ (Stephenson 1957: 34). Stephenson often presented pathetic anecdotes to make points: for instance, in one case he described a family of father, mother, grandfather and 10 children living in four rooms (one a kitchen) sharing a toilet with nine other families and experiencing a high incidence of tuberculosis. He made clear that lack of sanitation, insufficient privacy, and crowding undermined the quality of family life. Such circumstances contributed to problems that could be averted by good planning.

‘Juvenile delinquency is a sign of mental ill health, at an early age. Although it is not confined to one section of a community, it is more readily curable where home conditions are good and the physical environment provides outlets for the enormous amount of energy generated by youth.’ (Stephenson, 1957, 38)

Stephenson did not let empirical evidence temper his theory, which can be characterised as environmentally deterministic. For instance, he wrote:

‘On the whole children on the streets near the city centre are very cheerful. They play well together, seemingly without any sign of racial, social or religious intolerance. But their homes are crowded and inhospitable and, as may be judged from Section 6, they are exposed to sights and examples which must badly affect some of them. ... In improved and new neighbourhoods, arranged with as much thought for the needs of children as those of automobiles, children will not so easily get into trouble.’ (Stephenson, 1957, 38)

The target of attack in the renewal process was **blight**: a term applied with great regularity but less commonly defined. To situate Stephenson’s work in his time it proved helpful to examine some of the key planning journals that he may have read in the years before and as he conducted the Halifax study. From 1949 to 1954 Stephenson served as editor of the *Town Planning Review*. He would likely also have been familiar with the *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, as it had already gained prominence and regularly published papers on approaches to urban renewal. When he came to Canada, Stephenson would have encountered the *Community Planning Review*, the journal of the

Community Planning Association of Canada⁴. These journals thus offer useful insights into the thinking that governed planning in the period and provided contextual material to illuminate Stephenson's contribution.

In presenting the American Institute of Planners' position to a Senate committee, Alfred Bettman (1945, 5) said, 'The disease which we call blight must be something less visible, more subtle, deeper, than the mere age or structural obsolescence of the existing buildings'. Metaphors of disease and decrepitude commonly accompanied discussions of blight in the literature of the period. Planners described blighted areas as containing jumbled uses that made them inefficient in light of modern technologies and poor sanitary standards that undermined the health of those living in them. Stephenson (1949a, 1953) added to this list of problems the notion that in good civic design, areas near important civic functions should present the best face of the city and offer a lasting legacy. Thus he wrote in the Halifax report: 'Within a stone's throw of the factory and City Hall is to be found derelict land and bad housing' (Stephenson, 1957, 12). 'The buildings along Brunswick Street, below the Clock, are also unworthy of their position' (Stephenson, 1957, 14). Removing blight would restore hierarchy, order, and beauty in the city centre.

In Stephenson's view, the passage of many decades and inappropriate mixing of uses in the core created blight. Dealing with blight would open opportunities for commerce to expand and for the city to modernise.

'The need is to forecast the growth of the non-residential elements, and their land requirements, and through planning to make a clear cut distinction between land for residential and non-residential uses. Uncertainty leads to confusion and further deterioration.' (Stephenson 1957: 18)

The recommendations for improvements in the busy and successful shopping district on Gottingen Street affirmed 'it will be important to have clear-cut zoning to distinguish the shopping and commercial development from the residential, educational, and ecclesiastical' (Stephenson, 1957, 26-27). Referring to the mixing of uses near Gottingen the report noted, 'An intermixture of this kind always presents severe obstacles to healthy growth' (Stephenson, 1957, 27). The recommended solution involved replacing residential uses with parking lots for shoppers.⁵

While blight could affect areas of varying uses, blighted districts inhabited by people earned the designation of **slum**. For planners who saw themselves as humanists, slums were places of human misery generated by overcrowding and blighted conditions. As Faludi (1947, 11) wrote,

⁴ Although the Town Planning Institute of Canada was meeting during Stephenson's years in Canada, it didn't begin to publish *Plan Canada* until 1959, after the Halifax study.

⁵ One of the early clearance projects developed parking lots for Gottingen Street as Stephenson recommended. A vibrant shopping district in a mixed income neighbourhood when Stephenson saw it, by the 1980s Gottingen Street had lost many of its premier shops; by the 1990s it had more vacancies than occupants and social services dominated its tenant profile. In recent years gentrification is producing new condominium projects on the street as residential uses displace commercial uses.

‘Nearly all the towns and cities of Canada now have problems of over-crowding and housing shortages. Residential districts almost everywhere have been gradually declining in recent years, and neighborhoods degenerate faster than the houses in them, once deterioration has set in.’

While Stephenson’s primary worry was that letting residents live in slum conditions undermined the moral character of inhabitants, his case for Council also stressed the cost to city coffers.

‘A great deal of the police and fire department work is concentrated in the older residential districts. The City is involved in the heavy costs of dealing with the mental and physical ill-health of young and old, which can to a considerable degree be attributed to bad housing conditions. There is an amazing concentration of juvenile delinquency and welfare cases immediately to the north of the central area.’ (Stephenson, 1957, 21)

Like other planning experts of his time, Stephenson gave little attention to the possibility that slum residents may wish to remain in their homes or that they may have formed place-based communities. For instance, his analysis of Africville, an African-Nova Scotian settlement of about 70 homes at the north end of the peninsula outside the municipal service district, described deplorable living conditions and sanitation standards. Stephenson (1957, 27) wrote that the residents needed to be re-housed: ‘The land which they now occupy will be required for the further development of the City.’ Although Stephenson (1957, 27-28) suggested that ‘Africville stands as an indictment of society and not of its inhabitants,’ he advocated displacing inhabitants of a community that had occupied the site for over a century.⁶ Moral improvement required improved housing.

Modernising the city in the 1950s demanded attending to economic conditions and called for applying new strategies.

‘With nearly all the land of the City now in urban use, there can be some stocktaking. The time is ripe for urban redevelopment and improvement, in which many of the bad results of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century vicissitudes may be removed. New healthy growth in place of the old which has decayed, will add economic strength, give far better living conditions, and increase both the efficiency and the beauty of the City.’ (Stephenson, 1957, 6)

The language of ‘healthy growth’ provided a euphemism for planned development⁷: growth in desired ways with separation of uses and appropriate amenities. The AIP

⁶ In light of Stephenson’s report and consultation with other planning experts in the 1960s, the city evicted residents and razed Africville. Years of controversy and dissention followed. The Africville Genealogy Society finally reached an agreement with the city and federal government in 2010 to accept a financial settlement that would permit the rebuilding of the community church and an interpretation centre at the former site of Africville.

⁷ As Halifax began to develop a regional planning strategy in the early 2000s it returned to the language of ‘healthy growth’ in branding its public consultation process.

(1954, 53) statement of policy on urban redevelopment published the year before Stephenson arrived in Canada explained:

‘The spread of blight from the outmoded and run-down central areas of cities, with its wake of excessive crime and fire rates and falling real estate values, must be stopped. New and healthy growth must be encouraged if our cities and their citizens are to have a wholesome future.’

Thus Stephenson’s prescriptions for the health of families in crowded and blighted conditions in the city centre involved relocating them either to the suburbs or to new affordable housing projects outside the core, while his plans for healthy growth in the city proposed room for commerce to expand in the city centre and envisioned new industrial districts on the periphery. The future Halifax would have space for parking and easy automobile access from the peripheries to the city centre while its residential areas would protect pedestrians from having to deal with street traffic.

METHODS FOR THE REDEVELOPMENT STUDY

Given the relative paucity of redevelopment reports conducted in Canada prior to the Halifax study, Stephenson had few models to emulate. While he had prepared plans for new towns in the UK, he had not previously done a redevelopment study. The studies previously completed for Toronto in 1956 and already underway in Saint John, New Brunswick, in 1956 as he began his work likely influenced his approach in some ways. As Stephenson (1992) claimed and Dix (1997) confirmed, however, the Halifax study broke new ground. Stephenson likely also drew extensively on approaches to urban renewal being discussed in the planning literature of the period as he developed methods not previously seen in Canada.

American cities carried out many urban redevelopment studies in the 1940s and 1950s: the pages of the *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* reported on the results as planners developed their methods and described their positive results. McHugh (1946) employed statistical methods to determine desirable densities in New York: his elaborate charts and analyses led him to conclude that ‘urban rebuilding standards for better city living in almost every town are likely to call for lower than existing densities’ (McHugh, 1946, 30).

A symposium organised by AIP (1950) paid special attention to articulating the criteria planners used in delimiting redevelopment areas. AIP asked nine prominent city planners to describe the specific statistical indices of blight or slum conditions they used. Among the luminaries responding were Charles Bennett (Los Angeles), Edmund Bacon (Philadelphia) and Harland Bartholomew (St Louis). The planners pointed to a range of statistical analyses they employed. The measures used by one or more of the cities included age of dwelling, condition/ need of major repairs, no bathroom, poorly constructed buildings, inadequate ventilation or light, value of dwelling, assessed values (low or decreasing), tax delinquencies, ownership diversity (proportion of tenants), obsolete platting (e.g., short lots), average monthly rents, average population density,

more than one person per room, pulmonary tuberculosis (cases or deaths), juvenile delinquency, crime, fires, welfare cases, infant mortality, transmission of disease, cost of providing services, availability of public services, vacancies in buildings or lots, conversion of use, population trends (racial trends), traffic conditions, street patterns or conditions, and scattered development. Some cities used some combination of a specific number of these factors to designate areas of blight. Bacon wrote, 'the more factors are present, the more nearly certain blight has advanced to the point requiring corrective public action' (API, 1950, 117).

In response to the question, 'What are the relative stresses placed upon statistical criteria and upon judgment of intimate first hand knowledge', Harland Bartholomew answered 'Both are indispensable' (AIP, 1950, 119). Herman Berkman from Chicago said, 'In the standards used, although there are elements of subjectivity, an attempt has been made to quantify the elements of blight in terms of percentages and penalty points' (AIP, 1950, 114). Charles Bennett cautioned readers, however:

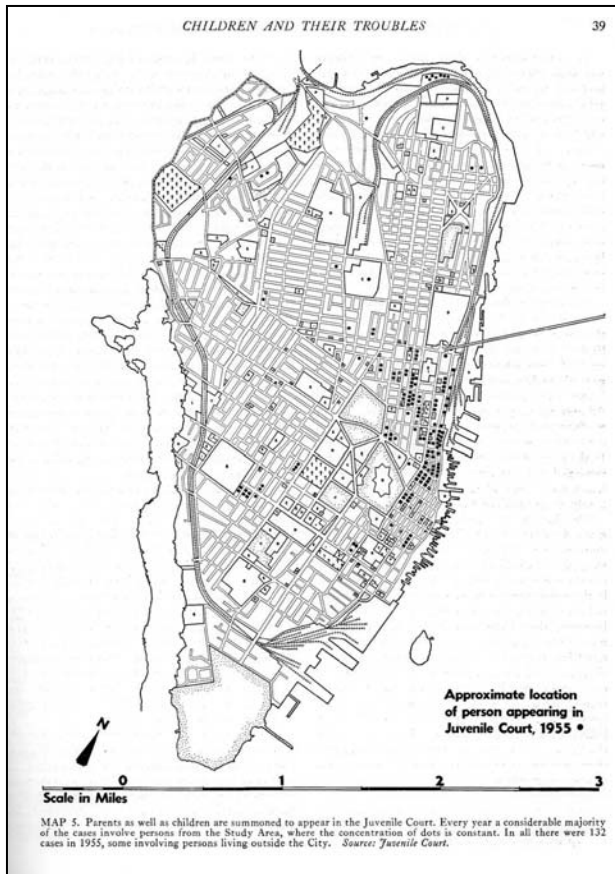
'even though it may usually be relatively simple to make determinations as to the location of blight through judgment and field inspection alone, that in itself is insufficient to convince the courts that condemnation under this expanded power of eminent domain is legally justifiable. Supporting evidence in the form of statistical criteria is an indispensable medium in establishing the existence and amount of blight in any given area.' (AIP, 1950, 115)

Bartholomew set out a rating system with weights whereby homes surveyed earned penalty points: no running water = 25, age of buildings = 20, no private bath = 20, needing major repair = 20, tenant occupied = 10, overcrowding = 5. George Duggar and William Ludlow from San Francisco developed a penalty score-sheet for evaluating areas that totalled to 100 points. Higher penalty scores identified candidate areas for clearance. Numbers evidently provided rhetorical power.

Several of the American cities used procedures from the field survey set out by Committee on the Hygiene of Housing of the American Public Health Association. The field assessment allowed planners to confirm conditions on the ground as assessors looked for signs of blight such as dirty areas, unpainted houses, littered yards, broken windows, and insufficient open space. The correspondent planners indicated that they assembled and mapped the data to show blighted areas. Charts, tables, and score sheets permitted them to show at a glance which areas were blighted.

Planners in the 1950s had a keen interest in developing tools for displaying data and informing decision making. While Stephenson was editor of *TPR* the journal published a paper discussing techniques for representing density on urban population maps (Hunt 1952). A few years later in *JAIP*, Creighton (1956: 33) argued that planners should use the latest technology to 'develop large-scale visual methods of presentation such as were used in solving the problems of invasion and aerial combat during the last war.'

Stephenson would have been quite familiar with the other slum clearance studies completed or underway in Canada. In conducting its study of Toronto the Advisory



Committee on the Urban Renewal Study (1956) developed a series of maps documenting population and housing characteristics such as dwellings in need of major repair, crowded dwellings, earnings of family heads, and net densities: the report, however, did not include these maps. The report provided relatively few illustrations apart from photographs of housing conditions and maps of redevelopment areas, leaving readers with limited ability to evaluate the recommendations. Georges Potvin's (1957) renewal study of Saint John acknowledged that Gordon Stephenson visited the city twice to assist with the project. Potvin pointed to the original survey methods that his team had pioneered in conducting its research: the small scale of the city enabled them to document housing conditions in detail and to use toned maps extensively to illustrate some of the

features described. Stephenson built on these examples in doing his work in Halifax.

Stephenson's methods show that he was well aware of the strategies the field was developing. Stephenson used and elaborated many of the methods described in the literature of the day and in the Canadian precursors. His 'pictorial description of the city' (Stephenson, 1957, 6) began with an idyllic view of bathers at a city beach before continuing to document dreadful conditions in the city's slums. The section included 27 images taken from a variety of perspectives; captions presented a combination of philosophical positions, evidence of blight, and proposals for change.

The analytic section of the report, 'The survey and recommendations', contained three parts: Part IV set out data on the city as a whole; Part V described the study area; Part VI provided development proposals. The survey presented 14 maps (plus a fold-out key map to block numbers identified in tables), eight tables, three formulas, and five figures illustrating redevelopment potential for key sites.

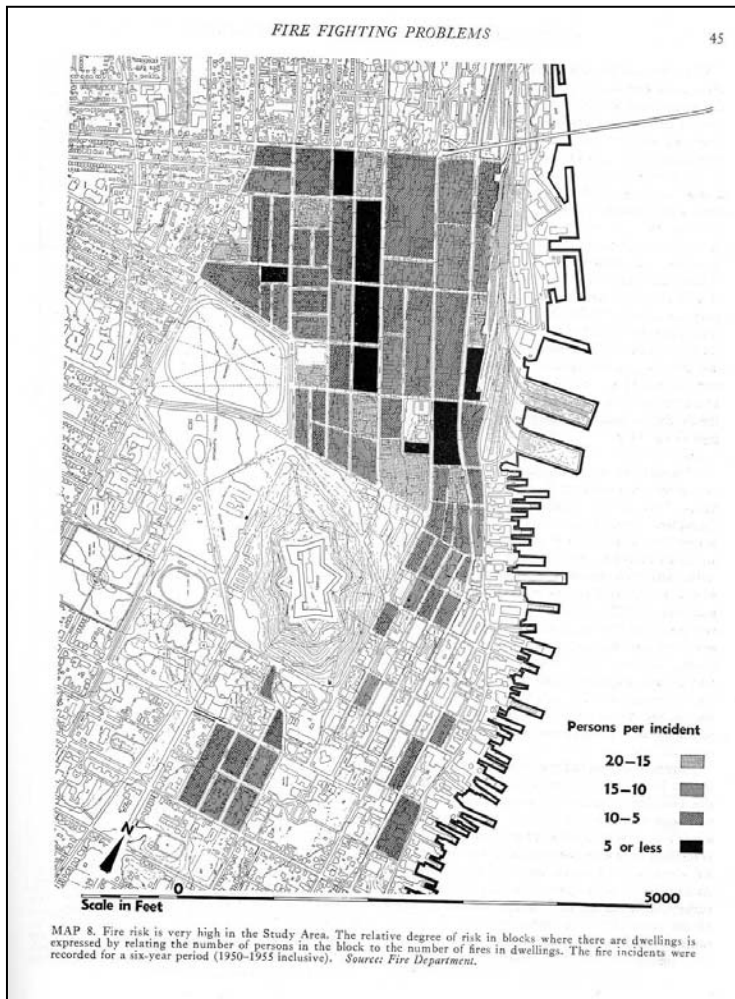
The maps proved striking (see Figure above): Stephenson used tones and dots to draw readers' attention to the inadequacies of parts of the study area. Each map took an entire 8.5 by 11 inch page on the right side of the report. Ten of the maps illustrated features used to delimit blight (see Table 1) while others identified land uses in the area and sites for remedial action.

Stephenson's choice of using one dot to represent 100 persons may have reflected his familiarity with Hunt's (1952) work on mapping conventions. The themes he chose to investigate and display – for instance, fire and police calls, tuberculosis cases, and unsanitary conditions -- clearly corresponded to the priorities appearing in the American literature, but the earlier Canadian studies had not documented these issues in the same way. The decision to use tones on the maps probably followed common practice, but the variations in tonal saturation Stephenson presented were less than crystal clear in the printed report (and certainly less effective than those Potvin used in the Saint John study).

Table 1: Content of the feature maps in Stephenson's 1957 report

Map number (and page)	Feature described	Display strategy
Map 2 (33)	Distribution of population in city by block, 1951 census	One dot = 100 persons
Map 3 (35)	Location of school children in the city testing positive for tuberculosis	One dot = one person
Map 4 (37)	Location of relief case (welfare recipient) in the city August 1956	One dot = one case
Map 5 (39)	Approximate location of person appearing in Juvenile Court in the city 1955	One dot = one person
Map 6 (41)	Density of criminal Code incidents per acre in the city	Six saturations of tone indicating density of incidents per acre (from 0.00 to 12.00)
Map 8 (45)	Fire risk indicating persons per incident in study area (1950-55)	Four saturations of tone indicating numbers of persons (from 5 or less to 20-15)
Map 9 (47)	Overcrowding as percentage of all dwellings in block in study area	Seven saturations of tone indicating percent (from no overcrowding to 75% or more)
Map 10 (49)	Unwholesome sanitary conditions percentage deficiency in study area	Five saturations of tone showing percent (from under 5% to 30% or more)
Map 11 (51)	Condition of residential buildings percent inadequacy in study area	Five saturations of tone showing percent (from 15-29% to 75% or more)
Map 12 (53)	Property values in study area in dollars per square foot	Seven saturations of tone showing value per sq ft (from 0-3 to 50 or more)

In representing some data, Stephenson muddied the analysis. Two maps suffered from showing categories that were not mutually exclusive or exhaustive (see Figure below). The map of fire risk may have constituted a compromise, as in text Stephenson talked about the preponderance of fire calls coming from the study area and indicated that fires there claimed heavy loss of life. His Map 8 in the volume, however, showed neither the total calls nor deaths but rather 'persons per incident' (Stephenson, 1957, 45): in so doing, the map essentially linked housing density with fire responses over a six year period to support the argument that slums increase costs to the city.



Most tables that Stephenson included offered simple counts: the data tables demonstrated conditions in each of the 119 blocks in the study area. Three tables presented calculations derived from formulas that Stephenson developed (see Table 2). The first formula calculated a percentage of overcrowding in dwellings in a block (Stephenson, 1957, 46). It reflected the common view at the time that one person per room was an appropriate standard for avoiding crowding. The second formula developed a complicated calculation that required assessing the availability of three sanitary fittings for each household in each building in a block to issue penalty points that could then be rendered into a ‘percentage deficiency’ (Stephenson, 1957, 48-49).

Wholesome conditions in this perspective required that each family have private access to sanitary facilities. In introducing his third formula, Stephenson (1957, 50) acknowledged ‘in this section judgement is, in part, subjective.’ He provided a scoring system that evaluated each dwelling on his list of possible infractions: the worst score possible for a building was 3 while the best was 0. Scores were multiplied by the number of occupants and then the block ‘percentage inadequacy’ could be calculated. While the formulas may have added a scientific aura to Stephenson’s presentation, they depended on problematic premises and calculations.

Table 2: Formulas Stephenson used in the Halifax report

Reference in report	Purpose of formula	Formula
Pages 46-47, <i>Overcrowded families</i>	To determine percent of homes in block that have more people than rooms	$\frac{\text{Number of persons} - \text{number of rooms} \times 100}{\text{Number of persons}}$
Page 48-49. <i>Unwholesome sanitary conditions</i>	To determine deficiency in provision of sanitary facilities within blocks; penalty points given for deficiency in each of three elements (toilet, sink, bath)	$\frac{\text{Number of points against} \times 100}{\text{Number of persons in block} \times 3}$
Pages 50-51 <i>Condition of residential buildings</i>	To determine the percentage of buildings in poor condition by block (including use, size, windows, vermin, dampness, running water, heating)	$\frac{\text{Number of points against} \times 100}{\text{Number of persons in block} \times 3}$

The survey section of the report reflected the tensions that Stephenson negotiated in preparing the report. On the one hand, he needed to play the role of expert professional, offering up scientific facts and prescribing remedies. On the other hand, he could not completely avoid pronouncing value judgements. In his discussion of police problems and crime, for instance, Stephenson accompanied detailed counts by type of crime and police beat with intense speculation based on the mores of his humanistic position.

‘Does bad housing have a direct bearing on the work of the police and add to the cost of policing the City? It is not possible to make an evaluation without more evidence than is likely to be available. It is, however, reasonable to surmise that there is a direct, if complicated, relationship. Certainly, most of the young who get into trouble come from the bad housing areas ... They are forced on to the streets from overcrowded, objectionable homes. The same conditions break the parents. The man stays away from home. The woman gets into squabbles with neighbours who by the nature of the dwelling invade her privacy.’ (Stephenson, 1957, 40)

Although Stephenson had the mandate of assessing conditions within a particular study area he insisted that Council understand the city’s problems within a wider context. His choice of presenting several maps at city-wide scale reinforced that search for a comprehensive perspective. In identifying areas for redevelopment he mapped outside the defined study area to point to the need to prepare locations for replacement housing and to plan for the requirements of the larger metropolitan region.

STEPHENSON'S LEGACY IN HALIFAX

Halifax city fathers enthusiastically accepted Stephenson's study and promptly obtained resources to implement his recommendations. As Pacey (1979) noted, the city exceeded the scale of renewal that Stephenson suggested. Where the 1957 report recommended clearing nine acres, eventually Halifax cleared 18 acres. Where Stephenson had envisioned redevelopment scaled appropriately to the Halifax context, the 1960s brought high-rise modernist towers to the city, obstructing some of the views from the Citadel that Stephenson had praised (Pacey, 1979). Much of the central redevelopment area that Stephenson saw as ripe for redevelopment sat vacant for a decade waiting for developers to take an interest in investing in growth in Halifax (Collier, 1974). By the time the projects finally welcomed occupants the momentum for urban renewal had dissipated in Halifax, as it had in many other cities (Grant, 1994).

For planners of Stephenson's era, tackling blight and renewing the urban core provided the critical justification for establishing professional planning as a function of local government. The concerns about the effects of blighted districts and slum housing provided planners with arguments that zoning alone was not sufficient to protect the quality and efficiency of the modern city: comprehensive planning by competent professionals was essential (AIP, 1954). Ample provision of statistics, charts, maps, and tables in their redevelopment studies provided important rhetorical devices for planners in the post-war period to substantiate their arguments and cloak their advice in the authority of science. Yet underneath Stephenson's jacket beat the heart of a Victorian romantic. Like Ebenezer Howard before him, Gordon Stephenson fundamentally saw planning as a tool to protect the family and to enhance individual development. His prescriptions for redesigning the city had at their root the desire to safeguard women and children.⁸ Like so many of his contemporaries, Stephenson sought through his career to marry the technical and the moral.

Although it appeared in 1957, the Halifax redevelopment study remained a social product of the late Victorian age and a technical artefact of the post-war modernist era. It represented the epitome of modernist planning in prescribing strategies to instil order on a disorderly and blighted city. Its author acknowledged the city's social and economic inequities without offering fundamental solutions to them. In preparing the report Stephenson essentially spoke to and for power.

In his biography, Stephenson (1992, 161) revealed great pride in his Halifax work, claiming that 'All those who worked on the study must be proud that action was taken on all twelve proposals.' He reported that slum dwellers had relocated to new housing near the city centre: he included the plan and a photograph of Mulgrave Park public housing. The biography offered few insights on or regrets about the troubling consequences of urban renewal planning in cities like Halifax. Firmly committed to his moral stance that

⁸ Stephenson's humanism may not have extended to recognising fully the contribution of his wife, Flora, who like him had a master's degree in planning from MIT. He thanked her for 'encouragement and continuous help' in his preface and noted that she contributed to the survey in 1956, yet Stephenson earned the glory.

his planning work improved local conditions, Stephenson permitted little reconsideration of these early projects. While he acknowledged that in his redevelopment projects he may not have had enough concern about historic preservation and may have been overly eager to accommodate the car, Stephenson remained committed to the paradigms that infused the 1957 Halifax study.

The Halifax study launched Stephenson as an expert in conducting such surveys. It permitted him to develop a suite of techniques that served him well. As he noted (Stephenson, 1992, 162), 'Using the survey techniques tested in Halifax we soon discovered that Kingston was indeed "not quite as slummy as Halifax".' Halifax became a standard of decrepitude against which Stephenson evaluated other cities while Stephenson's report became the indictment against which authorities in Halifax evaluated their city's quality and prospects for decades to come.

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