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Who lives downtown? Neighbourhood change in central Halifax, 1951 to 2011

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Abstract

The paper traces neighbourhood change in central Halifax, Canada, from 1951 to 2011 to consider how urban renewal policies and other factors may have influenced who lives downtown. In the 1950s planners advocated slum clearance and modernization to permit commercial expansion in the city centre. Subsequent decades saw central neighbourhoods decline. By the 1980s population began to rebound as planning policy increasingly promoted residential uses downtown. Over the 60 years central Halifax transitioned in character: three of the central tracts became increasingly affluent, while the fourth went from close to the city average to a low-income tract. The trajectories that neighbourhoods follow depend on several factors including social trends, economic conditions, public policy interventions, and decisions made by other significant institutions (such as universities).

Introduction

Concerns about conditions in the central city have dominated planning since the beginning of modern town planning. In the early years of the twentieth century planners focussed on providing adequate sanitation, adopting building regulations, and creating options for suburban living (Creese, 1966). By the 1950s planners turned to promoting urban renewal, often with extensive government funding for clearing slums and facilitating redevelopment (Bruegmann, 2005; Grant, 1994). By the late twentieth century governments increasingly encouraged urban revitalization, with the explicit aim to bring the middle classes and talented young people to live, work, and play in the central city (Atkinson, 2004; Hackworth and Smith, 2001). In short, the central city has seen continuous policy intervention and frequent financial incentives explicitly designed to engender transformation. Not surprisingly, then, the central districts in many cities have changed in character and composition over time. This paper traces the nature of change in central neighbourhoods Halifax from 1951 to 2011 to consider how the transformation of central districts reflects the influence of planning policies and other significant factors at work in contemporary cities. Over 60 years, neighbourhoods in Halifax, Canada, varied in the extent to which they came to embody the transformations desired and predicted by planning policy.

As cities age, neighbourhoods change. Wei and Knox (2014) found that between 1990 and 2010 most neighbourhoods in US cities seemed relatively stable. Rosenthal (2005) argued, though, that neighbourhoods continually change, and that over the long term transitions between low and high socioeconomic status prove commonplace: after 50 years, two-thirds of neighbourhoods will be quite different than their original status. Lupton and Power (2004) noted that neighbourhoods change in

different ways, with some declining and others rising. Many recent studies have suggested that inequality and social polarization are increasing. Galster and Booza (2007) found many 'bipolar' neighbourhoods: districts where affluence and poverty were both growing in intensity within areas with a higher share of foreign-born residents, greater racial and ethnic diversity, and higher average incomes than US cities overall. Canadian research also flagged the rise in urban inequality (MacLachlan and Sawada, 1997; Townshend and Walker, 2002), with the greatest income disparities found in neighbourhoods near city centres (Walks, 2001).

Recent investigations reveal growing disparities in Canada's major cities. Census data showed that central parts of Toronto showed significant improvement in average individual income from 1970 to 2005, compared to the average individual income for the city overall (Hulchanski, 2010). Inner suburban areas experienced declines in average income. Hulchanski (2010) described 'three cities' within Toronto. City #1 neighbourhoods (20% of all census tracts) improved more than 20% against the city average over the period. City #2 areas (40% of tracts) remained relatively stable: within plus or minus 20% of the city average. City #3 included the 40% of neighbourhoods that declined more than 20% against the city average over 35 years. Ley and Lynch (2012) completed a similar study for Vancouver, while D Rose and Twigge-Molecey (2013) conducted one for Montreal, and Prouse, Grant *et al.* (2014) investigated Halifax. Using different cut-offs for identifying the 'three cities', these studies also found evidence of upwardly mobile neighbourhoods nearer the city centre.

As Table 1 illustrates, the prevalence and character of change from 1980 to 2010 varied among Canadian cities. In Toronto, Calgary, and Vancouver, over 20% of census tracts increased 20% or more against the average individual income in their Census Metropolitan Area (CMA): by contrast, only 8% of tracts improved in Hamilton and Winnipeg. Both Toronto and Calgary experienced significant increases in areas declining relative to the CMA average. Winnipeg showed the least relative change over time: Halifax and Hamilton also remained remarkably stable. By contrast, Calgary, Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver changed significantly. Calgary revealed the strongest indication of increasing polarization by income: fewer than half its census tracts remained relatively stable in average income over 30 years. Canada's largest and fast-growing cities experienced a decline in stable, middle-income tracts.

Table 1 : City-wide neighbourhood change in 8 Canadian cities 1980 to 2010: Percent of census tracts in City #1, City #2, and City #3. (Census tract average individual income relative to CMA average individual income).

City [number of census tracts included]	**City #1-** Increased 20% or more relative to CMA average income	**City #2 –** Changed less than 20% relative to CMA average	**City #3—** Decreased 20% or more relative to CMA average
Halifax [62]	13	76	11
Montreal [657]	17	67	16
Ottawa [173]	13	72	16
Toronto [607]	25	52	23
Hamilton [142]	8	76	16
Winnipeg [134]	8	84	7
Calgary [115]	21	49	30
Vancouver [242]	20	68	12

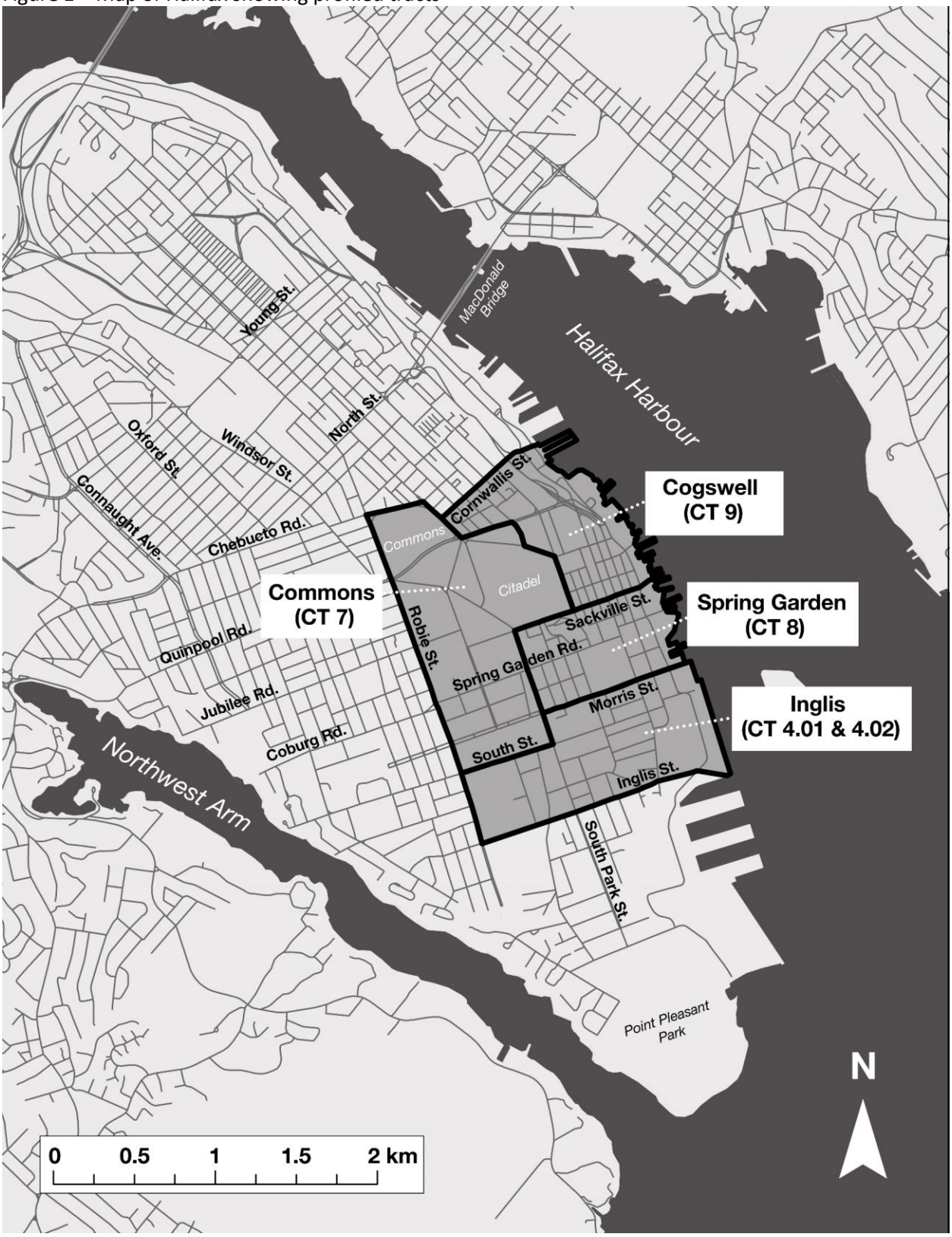
Source: Compiled by Richard Maaranen, Neighbourhood Change Research Partnership, University of Toronto

Central neighbourhoods, the oldest parts of Canadian cities, have changed dramatically. In the early twentieth century, town planners worried about over-crowding, poor sanitation, and chronic diseases in neighbourhoods they characterized as slums (Wolfe, 1994). Incomes were low in the city centre, households large, and houses mixed with industry. After World War 2, the federal, provincial, and local governments cooperated to implement extensive programs of slum clearance and urban renewal aimed at improving central city neighbourhoods (Grant and Paterson, 2012; A Rose, 1955). During the 1970s planners expressed concerns about the loss of population and employment in central areas: they promoted urban redevelopment and investment even as they facilitated suburban expansion (Harris, 2004). Bourne (1989) found decentralization of population and employment occurring. Despite a degree of gentrification and talk about a potential 'return to the city' in the 1970s and 1980s, Bourne (1989, 322) wrote, 'These tendencies have not, at least to 1981, been sufficient to counteract the main currents of suburbanization among the middle class and family-oriented households in urban Canada. Only in two urban centres, Vancouver and Halifax, does the evidence suggest that a reverse status gradient could emerge in the near future.'

We know relatively little about who lives downtown in smaller Canadian cities. Although neighbourhood change has been well documented in large cities (Ley, 1996; Lupton and Power, 2004; Zukin, 1989), less has been written about change in smaller cities (Bunting *et al.,* 2007; Figueroa, 1995). Bunting *et al.* (2007) described mid-sized Canadian cities as generally dispersed with low density cores, arguing that initiatives such as smart growth may not succeed well in them. Filion and Hoernig (2003) wrote that most Canadian cities with populations between 50,000 and 500,000 showed signs of decline, but pointed to several success stories, including Halifax. Birch (2006) documented who lived downtown in the US based on a detailed analysis of the 2000 census. She noted that US cities lost population from the centre from 1970 on. Central areas experienced modest growth (8%) by 2000: by then only 10% of households were families with children. Birch (2005) described downtown living as a niche market. In a study of small cities in the US, Robertson (1995) found growth in many central areas during the 1990s. Various processes such as incumbent upgrading, infill development, gentrification, or changing land uses may contribute to the transformation (Owens, 2012). A robust analysis of how the population living downtown changed over time can help illuminate the influence of changing planning policies: from urban renewal in the 1950s to smart growth in the 2000s.

In the next sections we describe and explain some of the ways that the population living downtown in the central part of Halifax changed since the 1951 census. We follow four central census tracts lining the harbour and surrounding the Citadel fortress (Figure 1). Halifax offers a useful case study for several reasons. First, we can examine Bourne's (1989) prediction that the central city in Halifax could become more affluent than the suburbs over time. Second, Filion and Hoernig (2003) identified Halifax as one of a few successful downtowns in Canadian mid-sized cities. Third, the city is a provincial capital and regional economic hub, seen as drawing talented and creative workers in higher than typical numbers (Brender and LeFebvre, 2010; Grant and Kronstal, 2010). A detailed analysis of census data from 1951 to 2011--supplemented with reviews of city documents (minutes, reports, plans, and maps), newspaper coverage, and scholarly articles—permitted us to build a picture of who lived downtown, and to identify factors that influenced urban patterns over time. We show that those living downtown in 2011 differed significantly from those there in 1951. In part the shifts reflect the influence of planning policies and interventions, but other factors played important roles.

Figure 1 – Map of Halifax showing profiled tracts



Halifax: History of change

Settled in 1749 as a military port for the British, Halifax grew along the harbour and around the Citadel fortress. By the early twentieth century its residential neighbourhoods along the narrow streets of the old city were congested and worn. City officials were anxious to replace densely populated working class housing with modern businesses. In the postwar period Halifax, like many Canadian cities, took advantage of federal funding programs to clear and redevelop some central neighbourhoods. Areas closest to the city centre emptied out with urban renewal and have only slowly repopulated, with different population characteristics. Between 1951 and 2011 areas further from the city centre changed, too, but in different ways.

Through the years many planning policies and infrastructure interventions influenced change downtown. In 1945 the city commissioned a master plan (Civic Commission, 1945), which articulated concerns about downtown deterioration.

> Areas of blight and decay drag down adjacent neighbourhood values, reduce rentals, destroy tax paying ability and require a disproportionate amount of those community services which could be employed so much better in other ways. In this sense slums are a drain on the resources of the community and are detrimental to the welfare of the entire city. (Civic Commission, 1945, 53.)

Using federal funds designed to help the city define areas requiring urban renewal, Gordon Stephenson documented the state of downtown districts in 1956: 'Here many of the worst dwellings are to be found, and with them social and economic difficulties. … [I]n all cities decay takes place most rapidly on the fringe of the centre. Halifax is no exception' (Stephenson, 1957, 20). Stephenson (1957, 27) recommended clearing parts of the central city to enable 'healthy growth'. With further federal and provincial funding the city expropriated and cleared 7.3 hectares, displacing thousands of residents and dozens of businesses from central neighbourhoods, and making spaces for new civic and commercial facilities. A few years later another federally funded study confirmed decline in central Halifax and identified areas for suburban expansion (Coblentz, 1963). During the 1960s, central city districts lost residents and changed from a tight-grained mix of housing, industry, and commerce to a coarser-grained pattern dominated by large-scale commerce.

Plans for a downtown expressway accompanied urban renewal in Halifax, but ran into protests when bulldozers threatened historic warehouses along the harbour (Grant, 1994). Council backed off further demolition plans in the 1970s. Planning policies then encouraged heritage protection and housing, especially in high-rise form, as accepted uses in the downtown core (Halifax, 1971). By 1973 the city was concerned about the loss of people living downtown: Halifax's Downtown Committee (1973) produced a report identifying the need to keep people downtown after dark. The 1975 regional plan sought to contain and intensify the city's central business district: it supported housing as a permitted use, but set no targets (MAPC, 1975). Population projections during this era generally forecasted suburban growth with continuing population decline for central districts (Halifax, 1976).

After experiencing the devastating disruptions engendered by urban renewal in the 1960s, in the 1970s the Canadian government shifted gears and developed funding programs to help improve threatened older districts. Halifax qualified for Neighbourhood Improvement Program funds to give three neighbourhoods—one (NIP # 2) straddling two central census tracts—resources to plan and implement improvements (Goddard *et al*., 1979). Subsequent city plans promoted neighbourhood stability with 'retention, rehabilitation, and infill' to preserve the character of existing neighbourhoods (Halifax, 1984,

II-3). By the 1990s, as concerns about sustainability and smart growth influenced the profession, planners advocated higher density development on the peninsula (Dickey, 1992). Following amalgamation of Halifax with its neighbouring municipalities in 1996, the focus on intensifying development in the central city became increasingly embedded in planning policies. The 2006 regional plan 'supports more people living in downtown Halifax and establishes population targets to support this growth. Residential growth will be encouraged by removing previous density limitations and encouraging a broad mix of unit types, housing affordability, and amenities to support downtown living' (HRM, 2009, 16). Planners anticipated 16,000 more people living downtown over a 15-year period, encouraged by means such as streamlined development processes and density bonuses for affordable housing (HRM, 2009). While planning policy early in the period focussed on removing housing from the central city, by 2011 repopulating the downtown had become high priority for planners.

Population characteristics 1951 to 2011

For purposes of this investigation we focused on four central census tracts, loosely defined as downtown neighbourhoods. In smaller cities, census tracts, which contain 2500 to 8000 persons (Statistics Canada, 2012), may prove relatively poor proxies for neighbourhoods (Prouse, Ramos *et al.,* 2014). For purposes of tracking changes to population and housing stock in the central area, however, the census tract provides useful data. We used census results for each decade from 1951 to present. Since the government of Canada conducted a voluntary National Housing Survey instead of a mandatory census in 2011, we turned to the more reliable 2006 census results for some data. Not all census variables are available for the entire period, and definitions sometimes changed between census periods, limiting the ability to plot changes in some variables.

We followed change in four census tracts (CT), which we named after major streets or geographic features in the areas. Cogswell is CT9[1] in the central north downtown. It extends from Cornwallis Street in the north to Sackville Street in the south, and from the Citadel to the waterfront. It includes the northern part of the Central Business District (CBD) and extensive areas cleared during urban renewal in the late 1950s and 1960s. The district accommodates apartment towers, townhouses, and some restored homes. The Spring Garden area, CT8, includes the central downtown. It extends from Sackville Street in north to Morris Street, and from South Park Street to the waterfront. Spring Garden Road and Barrington Street are significant commercial spines in the district. It includes parts of the CBD as well as the Spring Garden Road commercial area. Housing types include apartment towers and 19th Century heritage homes.

The Inglis tract, CT4, covers the south downtown. It goes from Inglis Street in the south to Morris Street in the north, and from Robie Street on the west to the waterfront. It includes some industrial uses along the waterfront and pockets of commercial uses, but is primarily residential. It accommodates some low density homes but also considerable apartment tower infill. The largest portion of NIP area 2 in the 1970s was in this tract. The Commons area, CT7, includes the western centre. It extends from Oakland Road in south to the North Commons, and from Robie Street on the west to South Park on the east. This part of the centre has a significant amount of public open space and institutional uses (such as hospitals and university campuses). Multi-family residential structures dominate the housing types.

The census tracts range in population size (Table 2). At the beginning of the study period, Cogswell was the largest, with over 6000 people, and the Commons the smallest. The Commons remained the smallest in population by 2011, but otherwise the rankings shifted. Cogswell lost the bulk of its

population in the 1950s and 1960s, while Spring Garden was hit hard during the 1970s. By contrast, the Inglis tract increased in every period except 1981-1991, leading Statistics Canada to split it into two tracts for the 1991 census. Halifax grew in population from 113,000 to over 390,000 people between 1951 and 2011.

Table 2 – Population, 1951 to 2011

	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Cogswell - CT9	6,267	4,380	2,215	1,540	1,617	1,738	1,984
Spring Garden - CT8	4,238	3,384	2,920	1,675	1,838	2,266	2,763
Inglis - CT4	5,855	7,047	7,105	7,781	6,762	7,632	8,067
Commons - CT7	2,385	2,217	1,875	1,676	1,629	1,644	1,716
Central CTs combined	18,745	17,028	14,115	12,672	11,846	13,280	14,530
CMA overall	**112,931**	**183,931**	**222,635**	**277,727**	**320,501**	**359,183**	**390,328**

Table 3 shows that the proportion of females living downtown declined over time, although in the Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) overall the proportion of females increased. While the central part of the city had almost 20% more women than men in 1951, by 2011 the ratio had shifted, and there were 5% more men than women living in the area. The proportion of female residents decreased markedly in tracts nearer the city core. We noted significant differences across tracts, with the north end tract hinting that perceived safety concerns may have deterred potential female residents.

Table 3 - Male-female ratio in central Halifax and CMA (Number of females for every 100 males)

	1951	1981	2011
Cogswell - CT9	96.2	96.2	69.7
Spring Garden - CT8	126.4	100.0	95.4
Inglis - CT 4	125.3	101.9	97.8
Commons - CT7	176.4	131.0	114.4
CMA overall	**102.3**	**104.3**	**106.9**

Female workforce participation increased in the CMA from 29.9% of women working in 1951 to 64.7% in 2006. In the Commons tract in 1951, 62.8% of women worked: this likely reflected the number of female residents living in residences associated with the hospitals. Almost half of women in the Inglis and Spring Garden tracts worked, but only 27.1% in the Cogswell tract. By 2006 only 44.5% of women in the Commons tract worked. Proportions in Inglis and Spring Garden were within a few percent of the CMA average. Cogswell, however, had the highest engagement: 78.8% of women worked.

The central part of Halifax always had a lower proportion of children than the city overall, but its relative share decreased over time (Table 4). The percentage of children under 15 years declined from 34% to 15% in the CMA from 1951 to 2011. By 2011 only 530 children lived downtown (compared with 3941 in 1951). The number of families declined over 36% in the period. The number and proportion of married people downtown decreased from 49.7% in 1951 to 18.7% in 2011. Marriage rates were higher in the CMA, but also declined from 52.2% in 1951 to 38.9% in 2011. The central city tracts had a higher proportion of foreign-born residents for most of the period than the CMA overall (Table 5). Two tracts contain almost twice the regional proportion of immigrants. The proportion of visible minorities decreased in the Cogswell tract following clearance, but increased in the other tracts (Table 6).

Table 4 – Percentage of population under 15 years of age

	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Cogswell - CT9	30	35	23	29	4	4	4
Spring Garden - CT8	20	21	13	14	4	4	4
Inglis - CT4	16	19	12	6	6	5	4
Commons - CT7	12	11	5	5	2	2	2
CMA overall	**34**	**32**	**29**	**23**	**20**	**18**	**15**

*Table 5 - Foreign-born, 1961, 1981, 2006 as percentage of total**

	1961	1981	2006
Cogswell - CT9	6.4	12.0	7.7
Spring Garden - CT8	10.9	13.2	18.1
Inglis - CT4	10.0	9.6	14.9
Commons - CT7	7.5	14.5	12.9
CMA overall	**7.5**	**7.3**	**7.5**

Note: *Information on place of birth was not available for 1951. The 2006 data are more reliable than the 2011 NHS results for this variable.

Table 6 - Visible minorities, 1961 and 2006 as percentage of total

	1961	2006
Cogswell - CT9	14.7	11.3
Spring Garden - CT8	2.8	15.9
Inglis - CT4	2.6	16.5
Commons - CT7	3.2	6.2
CMA overall	3.7	7.4

In 1951, only the Inglis tract was slightly above the CMA average in individual income: other tracts showed indications of income disadvantage (Table 7). By 1981, however, the Inglis tract trailed the other areas, likely as greater numbers of students began to move into the south end neighbourhood as local universities expanded enrolment. Inglis CT4.01 had the third highest prevalence (28.8%) of economic families with low income in the CMA, while the Commons tract was just above the CMA level (10%). By 2011, the Cogswell tract to the north and the Commons tract to the west showed significant income growth relative to the CMA average, likely associated with new condominium and apartment development.

Table 7- Income indexed to CMA average (where CMA average income is = 1.00 for each period)

	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Cogswell - CT9	.78	.67	.97	.95	.96	.83	1.57
Spring Garden - CT8	.79	.88	.93	.97	1.15	.90	1.18
Inglis - CT4	1.04	.90	1.13	.92	.91	.70	.86
Commons - CT7	.82	1.13	1.03	1.47	1.39	1.31	1.63
CMA overall* = 1.00	**$12,580**	**$22,795**	**$28,082**	**$30,798**	**$31,287**	**$33,063**	**$33,945**

Note: *Income given in constant 2002 dollars for the previous year. 1951-2001 from Census; 2011 from Canada Revenue Agency Tax Filer Data.

In 1951 the Cogswell and Spring Garden tracts had higher proportions of residents with low educational achievement than the CMA overall. The Inglis and Commons tracts had higher achievement than the CMA average. The proportion of those without high school dropped considerably in the Commons tract by 1981 (Table 8), while the proportion of those with university degrees increased in all tracts (Table 9). The Spring Garden tract added many university degrees by 1981, as young professionals restored

heritage homes in the area. By 2006 three of the four tracts had more than twice the proportion of university grads as was typical in the city.

*Table 8– Percentage with low education**

	1951	1981	2006
Cogswell - CT9	51.3	43.2	5.9
Spring Garden - CT8	37.4	20.6	5.3
Inglis - CT 4	26.8	27.3	7.5
Commons - CT7	31.9	17.0	4.2
CMA overall	**33.8**	**33.2**	16.2

Note: * 1951= under 8 years; 1981= less than grade 9; 2006 = no certificate, diploma or degree

*Table 9 – Percentage with highest level of education**

	1951	1981	2006
Cogswell - CT9	1.1	29.9	44.3
Spring Garden - CT8	7.8	46.6	56.8
Inglis - CT 4	12.4	40.2	49.2
Commons - CT7	13.0	43.9	52.8
CMA overall	**8.4**	**17.8**	**23.6**

Note: * 1951 = more than 13 years; 1981 = attended university or college; 2006 = university diploma.

The number of occupied dwelling units in the central area more than doubled between 1951 and 2011: from 4031 to 8644 units. Households changed markedly over the years. In 1951 many residents in the Commons tract appear to have lived in shared dwellings, such as nurses' residences or boarding houses. Consequently, the reported household size was very large. In all central tracts the average household size was higher than the CMA average in 1951 (Table 10). By 1971, however, all the central tracts had household sizes lower than the CMA average. In 2011, the average household in central Halifax was significantly smaller than typical in the CMA. Families had been largely replaced by singles (Table 11). Although few people lived alone in 1951, by 2011 over half the households in central Halifax contained only one person. The stock of detached houses declined during the period. Apartments dominated the housing stock in the central tracts (Table 12). Homeownership rates were well below city levels throughout. Owned units increased in the central area over the period, from 740 units in 1951 to 1240 by 2006 (after significant declines in 1961 and 1971).

Table 10– Average household size, 1951, 1981, 2011

	1951	1981	2011
Cogswell - CT9	4.3	2.3	1.7
Spring Garden - CT8	4.7	2.2	1.8
Inglis - CT4	4.1	2.0	1.7
Commons - CT7	9.7	2.2	1.7
CMA overall	**3.8**	**3.0**	**2.4**

Table 11– Single person-dwelling as percentage of total dwellings

	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Cogswell - CT9	10	13	25	43	47	52	55
Spring Garden - CT8	10	18	28	38	48	54	46
Inglis - CT4	14	25	28	57	58	56	56
Commons - CT7	7	17	47	65	66	66	66
CMA overall	**5**	**6**	**10**	**20**	**21**	**26**	**29**

Table 12– Percentage of dwelling units in apartments

	1951	1981	2006
Cogswell - CT9	76.3	73.5	83.4
Spring Garden - CT8	75.0	81.3	97.4
Inglis - CT 4	70.3	90.3	96.9
Commons - CT7	69.1	96.2	99.5
CMA overall	**34.2**	**31.9**	**35.8**

Patterns of change

Central Halifax changed in many ways during the 60 years to 2011. In 1951 the central city housed larger than average households earning less than the CMA average individual income. Women outnumbered men, and participated in the labour force at higher rates than their counterparts elsewhere in the city. Relatively few people lived alone, although more than typical in the city; fewer children lived downtown than in suburban neighbourhoods. Residents had low levels of education, rented rather than owned, and more commonly lived in apartments than in detached houses.

Some changes in downtown neighbourhoods paralleled changes in the city over the next decades. Educational achievement levels increased and marriage rates declined. Female labour participation increased. Households became significantly smaller as single-person households increased, especially after 1970. Marriages and births declined. Population densities dropped as planning efforts to achieve intensification were thwarted by declining household sizes and the addition of non-residential uses.

Central tracts changed in some ways that diverged from typical patterns in the city. Except for the southernmost tract, the central area lost population while the city grew. Central Halifax's population changed in unusual ways. For instance, in 1951 downtown had a surfeit of women, but by 2011 it had extra men. Household size slipped from an extreme well above the average in 1951 to significantly below the CMA average in 2011. In 1951 the typical downtown resident was married, female, poorly educated, living in a larger than average household, and earning an income below the regional average. By 2011, the average household downtown was 0.7 persons smaller than in the city overall, more likely to rent than own, and living in an apartment. The typical downtown resident in 2011 was university educated, affluent, childless, single, born in Canada, living alone, and somewhat more likely to be male than female.

Although we can make generalizations about downtown, we also find distinctions among the tracts. The Cogswell tract in the north downtown experienced the greatest decline in population over the period. Cogswell suffered most from urban renewal, with extensive areas cleared and thousands of dwellings lost. Its poorly educated, mixed race, low-income population was displaced as a result of government programs. Office towers, civic facilities, and commercial projects begun during the late 1960s influenced employment prospects in the area. Since 1981, Cogswell experienced the highest population growth rate of central tracts. In the aftermath of urban renewal, Cogswell transitioned quickly from a low income neighbourhood to an affluent one. The tract had the lowest average income in 1951 but stood second only to the Commons in the downtown in 2011. While Cogswell may be perceived as riskier – both by developers and by potential residents – it found a niche in attracting young, affluent, single males to its apartments.

The Spring Garden tract in central Halifax changed from an area of primarily low-rise dwellings to one with many high-rise apartment towers. After losing population until 1981, it grew 65% between 1981

and 2011. In the 1960s the city cleared several blocks of older housing to create parking areas. During the 1980s and again in the 2010s some of those lots were developed for mixed uses, including housing. Many older homes in the Schmidtville neighbourhood (constructed in late 18th and early 19th century) underwent heritage restoration during and after the NIP program of the 1970s. During the 1990s Spring Garden Road became an increasingly upscale shopping district and added office developments; retail in the CBD falling within the tract struggled as commercial development increased in the suburbs. By the 2000s, luxury condominiums were appearing near Spring Garden Road and the waterfront, and office buildings were being renewed and expanded. Considerable construction over the last decade is likely to increase the number of units significantly by the next census. Spring Garden had the smallest number of single-person households: perhaps an indication of the high cost of housing in the area and the area's attraction to university students. Individual incomes in Spring Garden in 2011 were 18% above the CMA average, reflecting the luxury units dotting the tract.

The Inglis tract in the southern downtown experienced the greatest population and dwelling unit growth. Coblentz (1963, 35) described it as including 'a significant mixing of what would appear to be conflicting land uses' and predicted that the area would transition over time to more multi-family dwellings: it did. Inglis changed from an average neighbourhood in 1951 to an area with a significant stock of apartments, an income 14% below the CMA average, and a higher proportion of immigrants and visible minorities than typical. In 2011 Inglis had the most normal male-to-female ratio of the tracts. Inglis experienced an influx of students by the 1990s as nearby universities increased enrolments and property owners subdivided the housing stock to accommodate demand. In 2011, some 62.2% of residents were aged 20 to 34, and 18% of the population attended school full time. Given that the census may under-count university students, the real impact may be even greater. Inglis transitioned from a family neighbourhood in 1951 to an area accommodating a high proportion of well-educated, low-income students seeking rental housing near universities and hospitals.

The Commons tract west of downtown showed the greatest change on many variables. The area had four times as many dwelling units in 2011 than in 1951, although its population dropped 28%. In 1951 its average household size was twice the city average: it was a predominantly female enclave. Nurses living in residences and boarding houses near the hospitals likely accounted for the imbalance and for the large reported household size. The area still has a higher proportion of females than other downtown tracts: it is perceived as safe and conveniently located to hospitals and universities. The area has the smallest proportion of children and the lowest proportion of 20 to 34 year olds of the tracts. Over 34% of residents in the tract were over the age of 70 years, indicating that the area appealed to retirees. The Commons hosts mature, affluent residents. Home ownership increased dramatically in the Commons over the period, although most residents still lived in apartments.

A city transformed

Like most downtown cores, Halifax's central neighbourhoods changed dramatically over the last 60 years. In 2011 it housed almost 78% of its 1951 population, and was again experiencing growth. Halifax's losses are not as significant as the declines seen in cities such as Winnipeg or Hamilton. Neither does its growth compare with rapid rates in Toronto or Vancouver. Typologies of downtown change, such as Birch's (2005), might qualify Halifax as an emerging twenty-first century downtown, given that its population is rebounding and its residents predominantly well educated, affluent, and childless. As the analysis illustrated, however, tracts in the city's centre changed in varying ways, reflecting the differential impact of public policy choices, locational attributes, and investment decisions.

Different trajectories reflect key forces at work in shaping neighbourhood change. First, we note that broad societal changes led to higher educational achievement levels, greater female workforce participation rates, and smaller household sizes. Rather than simply following national or local rates, however, central neighbourhoods exceeded changes seen elsewhere. As cultural priorities and preferences shifted, central districts in Halifax attracted smaller households with few children and high labour force participation rates.

Second, economic changes over the period influenced outcomes. Education and health care sectors expanded considerably in Halifax, with many jobs located in or near the city centre. Halifax's importance as a regional hub, and its dynamic entertainment sector, contributed to its ability to attract university students and young workers downtown (Grant and Kronstal, 2010). Developers took advantage of investment opportunities to replace or adapt aging building stock with housing options in walking distance of white-collar jobs and universities. Easier financing options in the 2000s encouraged young consumers to enter the housing market in areas of new construction. Much of the central city's recent population growth thus reflected the expansion in infill housing and the transformation of urban sites from non-residential uses.

Because consumer preference for urban living and investor choice of location for new construction collaborated to make the city centre increasingly attractive, the relative affluence of downtown residents shifted over time. In 1951 the tracts near the centre contained older housing with concentrated poverty; only the southernmost Inglis tract paralleled the city average, with the other three tracts 20% below average. Bourne (1993) reported that despite gentrification central city households got poorer from 1960 to 1985. However, over time the income pattern shifted dramatically, with three of the census tracts well above the CMA average income by 2011. Although Bourne's (1989) prediction that a reverse income gradient—with higher incomes near the centre—seems partially fulfilled, not all central tracts followed the trend. The Commons tract resolutely transitioned to high-income, but other central tracts retained low-income populations. Bucking the trend, with its high proportion of university students the Inglis tract became more disadvantaged than it was in 1951.

Third, the interventions of major institutions and the application of planning policies influenced who lived where downtown. The decision of city officials to clear central neighbourhoods during urban renewal had the greatest impact on removing large, low-income households from the centre. The neighbourhood improvement program of the 1970s influenced the turn-around for the Spring Garden tract. All four tracts benefitted from expansion of the hospitals and universities during the 1990s: the Inglis tract attracted the concentration of students in its mid-rise apartment buildings, while other areas scored the professionals. The tracts nearer the Commons and waterfront—where public investment during and after the 1990s enhanced open space—attracted more affluent residents. Planning policy in the 2000s supported downtown intensification and infill development, enhancing the pace of change in central districts. By the 2010s many construction projects were underway in several of the tracts, and inflation in housing prices generated fears of gentrification in the north end districts.

History shows that the process of change is uneven both in time and in geography. Between 1951 and 2011 the most disadvantaged area in Halifax transitioned to the most privileged part of the centre, while the sole middle-income tract dropped precipitously in socio-economic status. Public policy and public investment facilitated significant change. Somewhere in the 1990s the tide began to shift for central districts as urban living gained cachet and investors found alluring opportunities for transformation. Understanding the trajectory of downtown change can inform public policy by providing information on

who lives in what parts of the city and documenting how, where, and why change occurred. The transformation of central Halifax from a zone of poverty and disadvantage was hardly accidental. Those who planned urban renewal during the 1950s would likely be delighted to witness the transition in the city centre. They might argue with contemporary planners' preference for mixed use and intensification, but the comfortable, affluent, and uncrowded Halifax of their dreams became the reality for at least three of the city's central census tracts.

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Notes

[1] The Census Tracts received the numbers used here for the 1971 and subsequent censuses. Statistics Canada split the Inglis tract CT4 in 1991: we combined CTs 4.01 and 4.02 to facilitate long-term comparison. In 1951 and 1961 Metropolitan Halifax was the label used for the Census Metropolitan Area. All census data derive from the Canadian Census of Population 1951 to 2011, with exceptions as noted.