

Slum Clearance in Halifax: the Role of Gordon Stephenson

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Plan 6000

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Cover Images

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- 1 - Image of downtown Halifax from Professor Gordon Stephenson's *1957 Redevelopment Study*
- 2 - The title page of the *1957 Redevelopment Study*
- 3 - Professor Gordon Stephenson from "Habitat", March-April 1959
- 4 - Northern Slope redevelopment proposal from the *1945 Master Plan for the City of Halifax*
- 5 - Map from the *1945 Master Plan for the City of Halifax*

Make no little plans. They have no magic to stir men's blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die, but long after we are gone will be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistency. Remember that our sons and grandsons are going to do things that would stagger us. Let your watchword be order and your beacon beauty. Think big.

Daniel Burnham, Chicago architect. (1864-1912)

Acknowledgement

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Abstract

Professor Gordon Stephenson was commissioned by the City of Halifax, in July of 1956, to prepare an urban renewal plan (Stephenson, 1957, p. vii). The completed Redevelopment Study of Halifax, Nova Scotia was published by the summer of 1957 (Stephenson, 1957, p. vii). Professor Stephenson's report is often viewed as a critical turning point in Halifax's planning history. The City's decisions to act on many of the recommendations from his report would dramatically alter the physical appearance of Halifax in the years to follow.

While much is written about the urban development and public debate that occurred in Halifax beginning in the early 1960s (Pacey, 1979; Collier, 1974; et al.), very little has been produced that looks at the planning context in Halifax prior to the publication of Professor Stephenson's study. This project explores the events, debates, and thinking that set the stage for City Council to commission Professor Gordon Stephenson to prepare his report, receive his report, and act on his recommendations.

Discussions surrounding slum clearance in Halifax commenced more than a decade before Professor Gordon Stephenson arrived in Canada to teach at the University of Toronto. The City of Halifax had been aware of Federal funding available since 1944 to aid in slum clearance programs but had failed to engage in an agreement with the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation to secure funds.

Public hearings and City Council debates on slum clearance and housing surveys occurred throughout the early 1950s. Citizens, and I would argue, politicians, were confused and uncertain about how the City would utilize the great deal of Federal funding that was available at the time to help improve housing conditions. Council members felt pressure from the federal government to implement programs (Grant, 1994, p. 142) to take advantage of funding.

The hiring of Professor Gordon Stephenson effectively forced the City of Halifax into action on a topic it had debated for more than a decade. The political, social, and economic mindset of the time supported significant change to the urban fabric of the City, change that Professor Stephenson helped stimulate through his 1957 Redevelopment Study.

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Introduction

Professor Gordon Stephenson was commissioned by the City of Halifax, in July of 1956, to prepare an urban renewal plan (Stephenson, 1957, p. vii). The completed Redevelopment Study of Halifax, Nova Scotia was published by the summer of 1957 (Stephenson, 1957, p. vii). The final report suggested redevelopment of significant areas of the urban core as well as recommendations on priorities for future development (Stephenson, 1957, p. 28).

Professor Stephenson's report is often viewed as a critical turning point in Halifax's planning history. The City's decisions to act on many of the recommendations from his report would dramatically alter the physical appearance of Halifax in the years to follow. Author Elizabeth Pacey is quick to suggest, "with the Stephenson report, urban renewal and the 'myth of progress' became entrenched for years to come" (Pacey, 1979, p. 24). Others believe Professor Stephenson's 1957 study "was the catalyst for change that occurred in the urban core over the next three decades" (Parsons Doehler, 2001, p. 93).

While much is written about the urban development and public debate that occurred in Halifax beginning in the early 1960s (Pacey, 1979; Collier, 1974; et al.), very little has been produced that looks at the planning context in Halifax prior to the publication of Professor Stephenson's study. This project explores the events, debates, and thinking that set the stage for City Council to commission Professor Gordon Stephenson to prepare his report, receive his report, and act on his recommendations. I aim to identify the political, social and economic theories and beliefs of the time that led to the creation and utilization of Professor Gordon Stephenson's 1957 Redevelopment Study in Halifax.

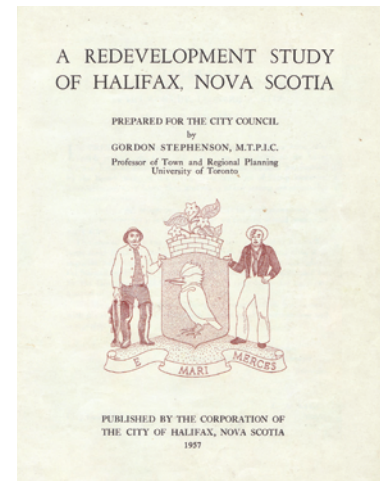


Figure 1.1
The 1957 Redevelopment Study title page

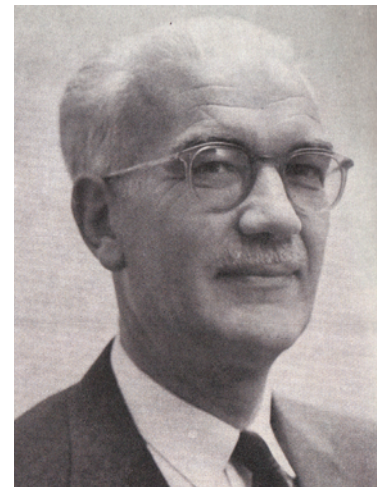


Figure 1.2
Professor Gordon Stephenson, from "Habitat", March-April 1959 issue

Methods and Approach

This project is divided into three distinct sections. Part one begins by exploring the ideas and thinking behind urban renewal in the 1940s and 1950s. Professor Gordon Stephenson spent time in Great Britain, France, the United States, Australia and Canada. Literature from this time period and retrospective commentary on the era provides a framework to better understand how these countries handled urban renewal. Included in this section is an important timeline of Professor Stephenson's education and experiences leading up to his involvement with the City of Halifax and insight into his approach to urban renewal.

The second, most substantial section of this project explores the evolution of urban renewal and slum clearance projects in Halifax. This section is based around archival material sourced from the Halifax Regional Municipality Archives. A wide variety of committee and council meeting minutes are used to convey the evolution of thinking in Halifax on urban renewal issues. Media coverage from local newspapers is used to supplement archival material. Planning documents produced by the City of Halifax are included in this section as well. In an effort to maintain a consistent flow and ensure this section remains easily readable, referencing of this section is done by footnotes, differing from other sections of the project. Appendix A lists further information on accessing archival material used in the project.

The third and final section of the paper provides an analysis of how the theory and thinking of the time, the outside planning expertise of Professor Gordon Stephenson, and the actions and desires of City Council converged by the summer of 1956. Professor Stephenson plays a critical role in Halifax's history. It is important to understand why he was selected by City Council to prepare his Redevelopment Study.

PART 1

Urban Renewal Theory and the Experiences of Professor Gordon Stephenson

The British and American Urban Renewal Experiences

“Renewing cities is as old as the city itself; it is characteristic of the organic nature of cities that building and rebuilding are a continuous aspect of the urban environment” (Cross and Collier, 1967, p. ii). While the term “urban renewal” was first officially used in the United States Housing Act of 1954 (Cross and Collier, 1967, p. 1), the origins of urban renewal can be traced back to the public health movement in Britain from the 1840s onwards and the desire of government to improve housing conditions (English, Madigan, and Norman, 1976, p. 16).

Slum clearance in Britain grew to include both the clearance of an area and subsequent rebuilding (English, Madigan, and Norman, 1976, p. 17). In the post-World War II period in Britain, slum clearance was simply not possible; “there was a desperate shortage of accommodation and even a slum house was better than being homeless” (English, Madigan, and Norman, 1976, p. 23). The challenges faced in post-war Britain were significantly different than those in post-war North America.

Urban renewal and the movement to clear the slums in the United States originated during the Great Depression of the 1930s (Greer, 1965, p. 13). Slums grew as cities grew. Poor neighborhoods developed and were defined as problem areas based on poverty, crime, disease, and other characteristics that were linked to certain geographical locations of a city; these neighborhoods were coined slums (Greer, 1965, p. 14). Slum areas were viewed as threats to the rest of the city and it was feared their contagious conditions would infect other parts of the city (Greer, 1965, p. 14). Redeveloping or clearing blighted, slum housing was the key to eliminating slums (Greer, 1965, p. 15).

The slum clearance programs of the Depression era evolved into urban renewal programs in the 1950s. “The program was now focused upon much more than the redevelopment of deteriorated neighborhoods; it was assigned the task of conserving the existing stock of housing, rehabilitating that which was beginning to deteriorate, and planning that which was to be built” (Greer, 1965, p. 19). Urban renewal in the United States often connected the value of property with concern for social objectives resulting in “an alliance between those seeking reform and those seeking profit” (Cross and Collier, 1967, p. 2).

John T. Howard, in writing about urban renewal in Cleveland, Ohio for the Journal of the American Institute of Planners in 1944, conveys the thinking of the time eloquently:

“In general, the proposal being advanced by planners and related interests all over the country is that our run-down residential areas be cleared out where necessary, and rebuilt or remodeled to provide attractive in-town living conditions, with sound, decent dwellings, with adequate playgrounds, schools and public facilities, and with convenient local services. The social justification for such a program is the urgent need for these things, their widespread lack at present, and the right of American citizens to a chance to live and bring up their children in health and comfort. The economic justification is that, without offering decent living conditions, we cannot hope to preserve the value of private investments, or maintain the tax income to support public services” (Howard, 1944, p. 18).

Although support for urban renewal and slum clearance projects was wide spread, concerns were raised. Critics of urban renewal in the United States raised concerns about the social impacts of the projects and new problems replacing the old. Lewis Mumford called attention to Post-World War II development and new problems it generated (Mumford, 1956, p. 108). As New York worked to remove blighted areas and increase the availability of post-war housing stock, changes in density changed the functions of communities. “Almost all these projects are solemn reminders of how different the post-war world is from what most people hoped it would be” (Mumford, 1956, p. 108). Mumford notes the cold, mechanical nature of the new buildings and the destruction of community functions, as schools are destroyed and streets eliminated as superblocks take over. Those driven from their homes as land was cleared became casualties. “Only in the Looking-Glass World of Lewis Carroll does any of this make sense” (Mumford, 1956, p. 110). Mumford is critical of the inhuman scale of the architecture and deems such forms of redevelopment housing suitable “for people who have no identity but the serial numbers of their Social Security cards” (Mumford, 1956, p. 111).

The Canadian Context

Albert Rose suggests that the Halifax explosion of 1917 “may mark the beginning of concerted public intervention and assumption of responsibility in the field of housing” (Rose, 1980, p. 1). The explosion destroyed a large volume of housing and as a consequence, homes were built to house those who had lost their homes (Rose, 1980, p. 1). One of the outcomes of this event was a demonstrated need for government intervention to assist those impacted by the explosion, leading to the creation of the first provincial housing authority, the Nova Scotia Housing Commission (Rose, 1980, p. 1). Aside from this significant event, there was relatively little government participation in housing until the late 1930s (Rose, 1980, p. 2).

Economic conditions in Canada prior to the outbreak of World War II discouraged people from building homes. Canadian housing policy developed as a consequence of the Great Depression of the 1930s and the onset of the Second World War (Rose, 1980, p. 27). With peace and stability in place following World War II, a pent-up demand for housing was aggravated by a shortage of skilled tradesmen (Carver, 1948, p. 5). To encourage and activate housing production following the war, the Federal government introduced the National Housing Act of 1944 (Carver, 1948, p. 5).

In Canada, Federal housing policy and urban renewal policy were frequently linked (Cross and Collier, 1967, p. 6). Following World-War II, the National Housing Act of 1944 provided Federal funding for municipalities to aid in slum clearance and encourage private housing development; “the emphasis shifted from housing to slum clearance and from relief to encouragement (Cross and Collier, 1967, p. 7). The 1949 revisions to the National Housing Act provided direct federal involvement in slum clearance and urban redevelopment projects (Cross and Collier, 1967, p. 7). Amendments that came in 1956 would prove critical to the City of Halifax hiring Professor Gordon Stephenson. “The 1956 amendment, besides providing dollar for dollar for ‘clearance, replanning, rehabilitation, and modernization of blighted ... areas,’ extended the provision for re-use of cleared land and re-housing of displaced persons from those lands, and also encouraged urban renewal studies of communities across Canada” (Cross and Collier, 1967, p. 7).

The Regent Park (North) Project in Toronto, Ontario, approved by voters in 1947, stood as the best-known slum clearance and housing project in Canada in the early 1950s (Rose, 1956, p. 3). Prior to the 1956 National Housing Act revisions, there had been no “evident rush on the part of Canadian cities to duplicate the Regent Park experience” (Rose, 1956, p. 3). Albert Rose, writing in 1956, notes how successful the Regent Park project had been in terms of municipal finance and the far greater tax revenue the City was able to collect than from the original area (Rose, 1956, p. 5). Measures of crime, delinquency, health, schooling, all similar to measures frequently referenced in American and British slum clearance programs, were noted to have improved (Rose, 1956, p. 6). “In short, a relatively normal healthful environment has been substituted for one of the acknowledged slum areas in an older section of the city with consequent social effects of profound significance” (Rose, 1956, p. 6).

Habitat, published by the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, provides valuable insight into the mindset of the time from a Canadian perspective. Even as late as the 1950s, urban renewal remained a solution to blight and slum conditions. The following excerpt captures thinking on urban renewal clearly:

“The greatest motive for urban renewal is when a slum condition is recognized for what it is – one of disease where people are suffering from a city canker which affects not only their own individual lives but the corporate life of the city. When a wide enough sense of shame is reached, when the more fortunate inhabitants are moved by the conditions under which their fellow citizens are living, the force of righteous indignation gathers sufficient momentum to ensure that major surgery will, in fact, be performed and the grafting of new dwellings will subsequently take place. Once this is done, convalescence, in the form of proper dwelling maintenance, ensures that the disease, if not eradicated, is retarded for at least a generation”
(“Training for Urban Renewal,” 1958, p. 12)

The Views of Professor Gordon Stephenson

Professor Gordon Stephenson wrote an article for Habitat's March-April 1959 edition titled "The Design of Cities" (Stephenson, 1959, p. 2). He emphasized the need for regional planning and a more active involvement from Provincial governments in land development (Stephenson, 1959, p. 5). His views on regional planning were integrated with his thinking on blight removal and slum clearance. "Now, nearly all parent cities are faced with the serious spread of blight and slums. The problems arising can only be solved on a regional basis" (Stephenson, 1959, p. 8) He went on to state that slum clearance and redevelopment were essential if cities are to remain "healthy in social and financial terms" (Stephenson, 1959, p. 8).

In an earlier 1957 speech on urban renewal presented to the Planning Institute of Canada, Professor Stephenson draws parallels between the growing blight conditions experienced in older urban areas of Canadian cities to those experienced in cities all over the world (Stephenson, 1957(b), p. 3). Professor Stephenson suggests that urban renewal planning efforts should take a regional view and remain focused on the residents living in the community (Stephenson, 1957(b), p. 5). Regional planning would allow the construction of new homes on new, suburban land at a reduced cost, but could only be accomplished through government participation at all levels (Stephenson, 1957(b), p. 5).

It is reasonable to assume the approach Professor Gordon Stephenson used to tackle urban renewal and slum clearance projects was shaped by the wide variety of educational opportunities, cities, and individuals he came in contact with before arriving in Canada. The following section provides some insight as to what some of these influencing factors may have been.

The Experiences of Professor Gordon Stephenson

“Gordon Stephenson’s life straddled almost the entire history of modern multi-disciplinary planning; a period which both shaped him and which, in turn, was shaped by him in England, Canada, Australia and New Zealand” (Webb, 1997, p. 69).

Gordon Stephenson, born in Liverpool, England in 1908, was educated as an architect at Liverpool University’s School of Architecture and trained under le Corbusier from 1930 – 32 in Paris (Webb, 1997, p. 69). He returned from Paris to England by the middle of 1932 to teach at the Liverpool University School of Architecture (Stephenson, 1992, p. 44). In 1936 he was awarded a Commonwealth Fellowship, which enabled him to complete a master’s degree in City Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology School of Architecture in the United States (Stephenson, 1992, p. 50). Stephenson described the Planning Department of MIT at the time as in its “pioneering infancy” (Stephenson, 1992, p. 50) and noted the handful of students selected from a wide variety of disciplines (Stephenson, 1992, p. 50). Gordon Stephenson married a fellow MIT City Planning student, Flora Crockett, in 1938 before leaving Boston to return to England to resume teaching (Stephenson, 1992, p. 51).

1932

After two years working on wartime building projects, Gordon Stephenson transitioned from architect to planner and civil servant in 1942 to aid in post-World War II reconstruction planning in Britain (Stephenson, 1992, p. 58). Post-World War II reconstruction in Great Britain exposed Stephenson to planning on a national scale. This environment helped develop his beliefs about the public purposes of planning and the need for strong government involvement in planning (Webb, 1997, p. 70). Stephenson’s involvement in post-World War II planning began before the close of the war (Stephenson, 1992, p. 82). His involvement with *The Greater London Plan*, started in 1943, introduced him to the ability of Professor Patrick Abercrombie to “reduce complex matters to relatively simple propositions, which accounts for the wide public and political understanding and acceptance he was able to achieve” (Stephenson, 1992, p. 83).

1942

In the mid 1940s Stephenson developed ideas about population densities in cities and their relation to slum conditions (Stephenson, 1992, p. 59). His work with the Ministry of Town and Country Planning lasted until 1947 where he was deeply involved in the creation of planning techniques used by the government (Stephenson, 1992, p. 63).

Planning techniques developed by Stephenson and his colleagues used technical, straightforward, research-focused approaches to gathering and conveying information to aid in redevelopment of war-damaged communities in Britain (Stephenson, 1992, p. 65). Building conditions were surveyed, more control was granted to planning authorities, new population density ratios were established, and access to natural light and ventilation was stressed (Stephenson, 1992, p. 73).

1948

Stephenson returned to the University of Liverpool to become the fourth Lever Professor of Civic Design starting January 1, 1948 (Stephenson, 1992, p. 108). He quickly noted the growing importance of the planning profession in Britain following the post-war *New Towns Act* of 1946 and the *Town and Country Planning Act* of 1947 and the accompanying increased power of government (Stephenson, 1992, p. 108). “Having been a cinderella for many years, planning became of prime importance” (Stephenson, 1992, p. 108). He believed drastic changes were needed in planning, for both the professional and educational sides (Stephenson, 1992, p. 108).

Professor Stephenson continued to develop his own personal approach to planning, focusing on human needs (Stephenson, 1992, p. 111). He believed pre-fabricated, standardized homes were detrimental to society and that physical surroundings had a direct impact on a family’s outlook; “a slum environment creates a slum mentality” (Stephenson, 1992, p. 113). Good town planning was to be focused on people. Town planning, in Professor Stephenson’s mind, “begins and ends with people; their needs, likes and dislikes; the development of their ability to work and play together” (Stephenson, 1992, p. 120). Professor Stephenson developed an approach to planning that was calculated and fact focused yet strived to include a human element.

During his time at the University of Liverpool in the later 1940s and early 1950s, Professor Stephenson served as the editor of the *Town Planning Review* for six years (Webb, 1997, p. 70). Involvement in this position would have exposed him to a great variety of thoughts and opinions on planning from around the world.

1953

Prior to moving to Canada in 1955, Professor Stephenson spent two years in Western Australia beginning in 1953 (Stephenson, 1992, p. 134). His time in Australia was dedicated to the development of a regional plan, encompassing the growing cities of Perth and Fremantle (Stephenson, 1992, p. 135). He was hired to work on the regional plan for a set period of time while permanent staff members would ensure the plan was put implemented after his departure

(Stephenson, 1992, p. 136). The regional plan was in fact a series of connected, smaller, related plans modeled after the *Greater London Plan* of 1944 (Stephenson, 1992, p. 138). Professor Stephenson speaks of some of the political challenges involved with a regional plan so large in scale and points out how important it was to stay involved with local groups involved with planning (Stephenson, 1992, p. 150). It is reasonable to think that his experiences in Australia, which would be a different set of challenges than those faced in post-war Britain, would serve him well in a growing, post-war Canada.

Professor Stephenson's original intent was not to come to Canada in 1955. He had accepted a permanent appointment as Professor of City and Regional Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology but was denied permanent residency in the United States (Stephenson, 1992, p. 154). Stephenson states, "our plan to return permanently to MIT and New England had gone sadly awry. After living through World War II in England my wife was to return home, and I was to be head of the most important planning school in the English-speaking world. It was not to be" (Stephenson, 1992, p. 154). Professor Stephenson accepted a position as the Foundation Professor of Town and Regional Planning with the University of Toronto beginning in 1955 (Stephenson, 1992, p. 157).

1955

The University of Toronto position allowed Professor Stephenson time to work professionally in a variety of Canadian cities. Thanks to the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), Professor Stephenson was invited by the cities of Halifax, Ottawa, London, and Kingston to prepare or work on urban renewal projects during four-month summer breaks from the University of Toronto (Stephenson, 1992, p. 158). An urban renewal study for Toronto was undertaken first, directed by Matt Lawson, a former student and later instructor in planning at the University of Toronto (Stephenson, 1992, p. 158). The final report was published by the City of Toronto in 1956, only one year earlier than the Halifax Redevelopment Study (Stephenson, 1992, p. 159). Professor Stephenson noted about the Toronto project, "it started out as a slum-clearance project, but Lawson was able to persuade Humphrey Carver and the CMHC that it should be an urban renewal study, with proposals including a mixture of renovation and redevelopment" (Stephenson, 1992, p. 159).

Professor Stephenson undertook his Halifax study beginning in 1956, with final publication in 1957 (Stephenson, 1992, p. 159). With the help of a small team that included his wife, two high school teachers, and a member from the City of Toronto Planning Board, Professor Stephenson prepared a report that he stated was “the most satisfactory of those with which I have been associated” (Stephenson, 1992, p. 159).

1960

Following his work in Halifax, Professor Stephenson remained in Canada working at the University of Toronto until 1960 and was involved in the initial planning stages of the Eaton Center in Toronto and the redevelopment of the Kingston, Ontario waterfront (Stephenson, 1992, p. 161, 165). Returning to Western Australia in 1960 provided relief from the challenges and frustrations of crossing the United States border, which Professor Stephenson felt curbed his “freedom of thought and speech” (Stephenson, 1992, p. 171). Professor Gordon Stephenson remained in Australia until his death in 1997 (Webb, 1997, p. 69).

PART 2

Chronological Development of Slum Clearance in Halifax: 1916-1956

The Roots of Town Planning in Halifax

1916

The City of Halifax established a Town Planning Board in 1916¹. The organizational structure of the Board would evolve slightly over time, but the basic member arrangement of ratepayers, Council members, and the Mayor remained.

Soon after the creation of the Town Planning Board an outside expert from Ottawa was invited to help the City of Halifax prepare a planning scheme. Mr. Thomas Adams introduced the option of handling planning in Halifax either by a Town Planning Scheme or through Town Planning Bylaws². The City did not have any dedicated planning staff at the time. The City Engineer would hold the closest position to the role now played by city planners. The City's need for planning expertise to establish a Town Planning Scheme required an outside expert.

The Halifax explosion of December 6, 1917 accelerated the need for the creation of a Town Planning Scheme. The Town Planning Board resolved the following on December 17, 1917:

In view of the recent disaster, RESOLVED that this Board proceed as rapidly as possible with the collection of data for the preparation of a Town Planning scheme for the City of Halifax, and that the Commission of Conservation be asked to permit Mr. Thos. Adams to give his undivided attention to this matter³.

Mr. Adams was appointed consultant to the Board to aid in efforts to prepare a scheme for development⁴. Although no plan was produced for Halifax at this time, the relative newness of the planning profession in Canada required municipalities to continue to rely on outside experts to act as consultants or advisors.

1920

A review of the Town Planning Board minutes from the 1920s and 1930s highlights the routine nature of tasks and debates presented to the Board. Planning in Halifax at this time involved little consideration for future growth. Not until the close of World-War II was planning in Halifax challenged by emerging post-war growth pressures.

¹ Town Planning Board Meeting - January 21, 1916

² Town Planning Board Meeting - May 10, 1916

³ Town Planning Board Meeting - December 17, 1917

⁴ Town Planning Board Meeting - March 1, 1918

The 1945 Halifax Master Plan and Post-World War II Growth

1943

The development of *the 1945 Halifax Master Plan* began with the acceptance of terms of reference dated December 20, 1943⁵. The City was preparing to transition to peacetime conditions and recognized the need for development to accommodate post-war growth. Two critical items from the terms of reference related to urban renewal include:

2. That the Committee should:

(c) (I) Study the matter of slum clearance and the construction of low cost housing with a view of recommending definite sites to be dealt with and the manner of accomplishing the project or projects⁶.

(II) Study the advisability of a Federal housing plan to encourage the construction of dwelling houses by assisting the owners or builders with loans bearing a low interest rate⁶.

Prior to the creation of *the 1945 Master Plan*, the Town Planning Board mentions slum clearance on October 3, 1944. The Chairman of that meeting suggests the Board consider forming “a limited dividend Company to assist in slum clearance under the National Housing Act”⁷. The 1944 Housing Act would allow municipalities access to Federal funding to aid in slum clearance schemes⁸.

1945

The City’s ability to develop a Master Plan arose from amendments to the Nova Scotia Town Planning Act⁹. With authority to prepare a plan to promote orderly growth, numerous community groups representing a wide range of interests were invited to participate¹⁰. A comprehensive list of planning issues were included with *the 1945 Master Plan*. Appendix B contains *the 1945 Master Plan* table of contents illustrating the variety of topics covered. November 16, 1945 marked the submission of *the Master Plan* to City Council¹¹.

⁵ Finance and Executive Committee Meeting - December 20, 1943

⁶ Finance and Executive Committee Meeting - December 20, 1943

⁷ Town Planning Board Meeting - October 3, 1944

⁸ Carver, 1948, p. 6

⁹ Chapter 8 of the Nova Scotia Acts of 1939 as proclaimed on December 1, 1943

¹⁰ City of Halifax, 1945, p. 5

¹¹ City Council Meeting - November 16, 1945

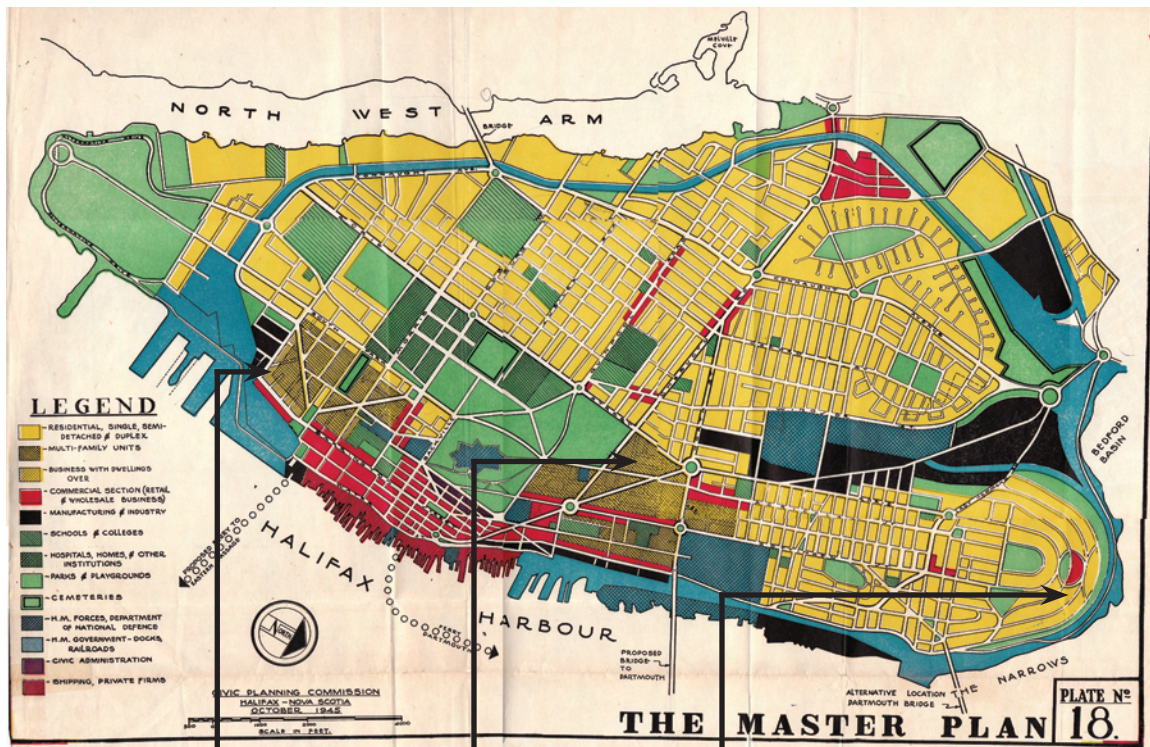


Figure 2.3

The 1945 Master Plan with areas in need of slum clearance highlighted

Inglis Street and the southern end of Barrington Street

The area between the Citadel and North Street

Africville and the Northern Slope

sanitary conditions of certain sections of the city. Street widening and bridge construction were highlighted along with twenty-two major recommendations. Slum conditions were to be attacked using zoning, long range planning of public works, and effective utilization of land¹⁷. Slum clearance was strongly associated with public health concerns. Slums could be eliminated through effective, large-scale planning efforts.

A review of newspapers from the time of *the 1945 Master Plan* indicates limited public response. With little public input, *the Master Plan of 1945* became the Official Plan of the City in June of 1946¹⁸ and the guide for the Town Planning Board by early 1947¹⁹.

1947

¹⁷ The Halifax Herald - December 7, 1945

¹⁸ City Council Meeting - June 11, 1946

¹⁹ Town Planning Board Meeting - February 12, 1947

As the 1940s closed, City Council and the Town Planning Board shifted their attention to Federal slum clearance programs and potential funding opportunities. The City Assessor noted an opportunity for the Housing Accommodation Committee to explore:

1949

Under the provisions of the National Housing Act, the Federal Government will contribute fifty percent of the cost of acquisition and clearing of land in connection with a slum clearance program. It may be possible to get some further assistance in this work from the Provincial Government, which would mean that the cost to the City would be reduced accordingly²⁰.

The Official Town Plan and Justification for Slum Clearance

1950

The City of Halifax enacted its first zoning by-law on May 11, 1950²¹. This was the first comprehensive zoning by-law to cover the entire City:

The welfare of the municipality required sooner or later some public interference and control over the private use of land, and an important duty of any local government must obviously be the adoption and administration of a sound municipal land policy²².

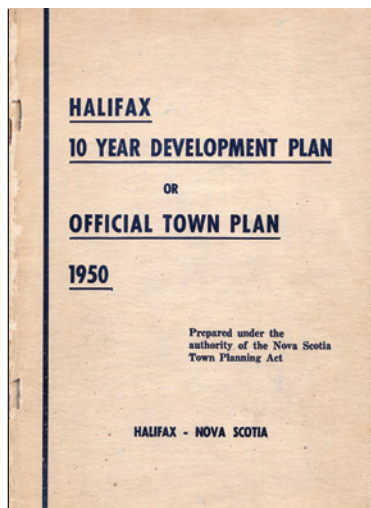


Figure 2.4

The 1950 10 Year Development Plan or Official Town Plan cover

A companion to the first zoning by-law was *the 10 Year Development or Official Town Plan* introduced at the same time and prepared by the Town Planning Board and the Town Planning Engineer. *The Master Plan of 1945* remained the “overall planning guide”²³ with *the 10 Year Development Plan* containing the projects City Council planned to undertake in the immediate future. This *Official Town Plan* was effectively a method for the City of Halifax to implement prioritized projects originating from *the 1945 Master Plan*.

²⁰ Town Planning Board Meeting - May 17, 1949

²¹ City of Halifax, 1950 Zoning By-Law

²² City of Halifax, 1950 Zoning By-Law, p. ii

²³ City of Halifax, 1950 Official Town Plan, p. 1

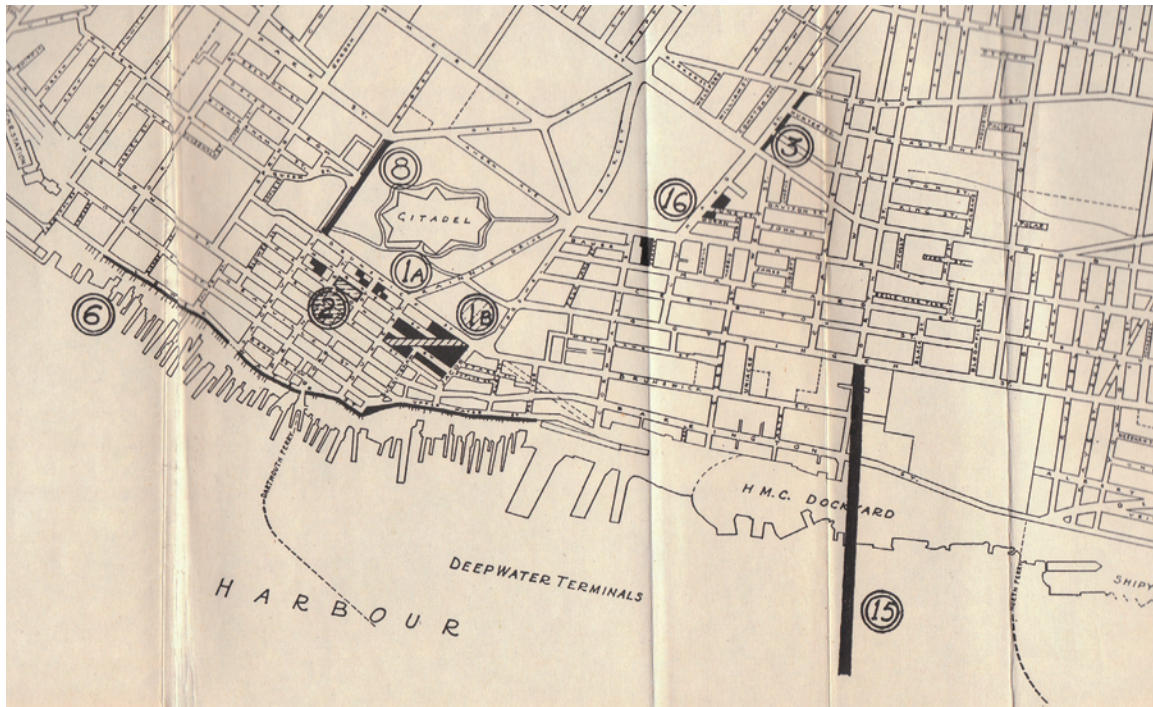


Figure 2.5
The 1950 Official Town Plan
with 1A highlighting the slum
clearance of Market Street

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13. Completion of Westmount development	14
14. Filling in Basin	15
15. Halifax-Dartmouth Bridge	16
16. Low Cost Housing under the Halifax Housing authority	16

Figure 2.6
Contents of the 1950
Official Town Plan

Of the sixteen projects listed in *the 1950 Official Town Plan*, the “Slum Clearance of Market Street”²⁴ Area is the first. This section of Halifax, generally recognized as “one of the worse slum districts in the City of Halifax”²⁵, was to be cleared and redeveloped. Rather than clearing the residential properties and redeveloping new low-income residential accommodations or other forms of residential housing, the City was of the opinion that the land should be resold for commercial purposes after clearance.

²⁴ City of Halifax, 1950 Official Town Plan, p. 6

²⁵ City of Halifax, 1950 Official Town Plan, p. 7

Justification for this came from two points:

1) We do not feel that this is the proper location for living units, due to its proximity to the main business section of the City. In our opinion, any housing scheme put forward by the City should be carried out in the vicinity of the North Common in order to use this open space to the best advantage²⁶.

2) The area to be cleared is immediately adjacent to the main downtown business section of the City of Halifax which is continuously expanding. This business area is hemmed in on the east by the Harbor waterfront, on the north by steep slopes at Jacob, Hurd and Proctor Streets, and on the south by Grafton Park, the Court House and the Nova Scotia Technical College. It therefore can only expand in a westerly direction and we therefore feel that any blocks which are cleared of slums in the Market Street area should be resold for commercial purposes so that the main business area may expand in this direction²⁶.

As part of this clearance project, the City proposed the development of a diagonal street running from City Hall to Brunswick Street at Jacob Street²⁷. Item 1B on *the Official Town Plan* map of the previous page highlights the location of this proposed diagonal street. “We have grouped these two items together because if the black areas in the vicinity of Market Street are to be purchased and cleared, then the way will be open for construction of the diagonal street”²⁸.

A diagonal street would eliminate steep slopes that hindered automobile movement in the winter. The City also viewed potential benefits from increased vehicular accessibility to and from the downtown business area and improved parking availability for the increased automobile traffic²⁹. The link between slum clearance and economic benefits to the City was clear. Slums that stood in the way of growth and progress would be removed.

²⁶ City of Halifax, 1950 Official Town Plan, p. 7

²⁷ City of Halifax, 1950 Official Town Plan, p. 8

²⁸ City of Halifax, 1950 Official Town Plan, p. 8

²⁹ City of Halifax, 1950 Official Town Plan, p. 8

Slum clearance is also discussed in *the Official Town Plan* under the last point titled “Low Cost Housing Under The Halifax Housing Authority”³⁰. The Halifax Housing Authority sought a low-cost housing development near the Commons:

*Very little open ground is available in the area adjacent to the North Common and it is generally conceded that such a housing scheme must be preceded by a sizable slum clearance program. Some of Halifax’s most overcrowded and dilapidated dwellings are contained in the areas immediately east and north of the North Common, and we feel very strongly that this is the proper location for any low cost housing scheme*³¹.

Media coverage and public response to slum clearance projects at this time was limited. It is difficult to gauge how aware and involved citizens were with projects that remained speculative.

The Slum Clearance Debate and Mounting Uncertainty

Growing public awareness and interest in slum clearance became apparent as the City of Halifax held public hearings on the matter, over a year after the publication of *the Official Town Plan*. In late October of 1951 a meeting of the Slum Clearance and Public Housing Committee was held “as a public hearing for the purpose of receiving briefs and presentations on the matter of Slum Clearance”³². Numerous organizations and individuals spoke in support of slum clearance:

*The Halifax Board of Trade unanimously endorses the policy of Slum Clearance and considers that the method suggested in the brief of the Halifax Branch of the Community Planning Association of Canada warrants very careful study and implementation wherever economically possible*³³.

*The Welfare Council of Halifax believe that it is essential some steps be taken immediately to carry out some slum clearance plan and equally essential that at least one Housing Project must be undertaken so that some part of the population will be re-housed, leaving room for those whose homes will be torn down*³⁴.

³⁰ City of Halifax, 1950 Official Town Plan, p. 8

³¹ City of Halifax, 1950 Official Town Plan, p. 31

³² Slum Clearance and Public Housing Committee Meeting - October 24, 1951

³³ Letter From the Halifax Board of Trade - October 24, 1951

³⁴ Miss Gwendolyn Shad who read a brief from the Welfare Council of Halifax - October 24, 1951

Community support for slum clearance was strong, often framed by economic and social concerns. In a brief prepared by the Halifax Branch of the Community Planning Association of Canada for the City's public hearing, the existence of slums was viewed as "a costly annual burden to taxpayers in Halifax"³⁵. Local politicians presented similar thinking. Alderman Hatfield stated "that many buildings are in terrible condition and falling down and that we need a progressive Halifax to prevent the spread of these areas"³⁶.

While the City of Halifax, through its *Official Development Plan of 1950*, viewed complete clearance and redevelopment as the most effective solution to blight removal, other options were presented. The Halifax Branch of the Community Planning Association of Canada suggested rehabilitation of older buildings:

... while some cities were eliminating their slums by physical demolition and building new housing, in other cities where the housing shortage was comparable to Halifax, many of the slum areas were being improved by repairing the buildings to meet a minimum standard of structural and sanitary conditions³⁷.

Rehabilitation presented a cost-effective alternative to demolition and new construction. In order to implement an effective program based on repair, minimum building standards would have to be established. The Halifax Branch of the Community Planning Association put forward minimum standards used by the City of Baltimore as an example and suggested "that such a minimum standard is essential before any such improvement program can be commenced"³⁸. Reference to the City of Baltimore's approach suggests an awareness in Halifax of other communities dealing with similar redevelopment concerns.

The Halifax Branch of the Community Planning Association suggested the use of Federal funding under Section 35 of the National Housing Act to conduct a "detailed survey of slum areas in Halifax. Such a survey would facilitate the grading of various buildings preparatory to carrying out such a scheme"³⁹.

^{35, 36, 37, 38, 39} Slum Clearance and Public Housing Committee Meeting - October 24, 1951

A representative from the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Mr. J. E. Dudley, stated that funds would be available for a slum clearance survey with the Federal government paying up to 75% of the cost⁴⁰. This funding would come as a grant with no requirement to be paid back. Mr. Dudley went on to say “the only solution is to build in open land and move the families so the slums may be cleaned up”⁴¹. The City of Halifax Town Planning Engineer stated, “the city should consider using section 35 of the Housing Act as a solution to the slum clearance problem”⁴².

Response from committee members was limited with the Mayor stating that “the briefs and submissions were excellent and to the point”⁴³.

Subsequent Slum Clearance and Public Housing Committee meetings continued discussions on establishing minimum standards but no action was taken to secure Federal funding to complete a slum clearance survey. By February of 1952, minimum housing standards for the City of Halifax were drafted, but prepared by the Halifax Branch of the Community Planning Association of Canada rather than by the City of Halifax⁴⁴. The involvement of the Community Planning Association in drafting these standards may suggest limited planning experience or limited availability of municipal staff to complete the task.

With minimum housing standards being developed, the City of Halifax looked to other cities in Canada for advice on slum clearance programs. In September of 1952, the City of Halifax sent a letter to the City of Montreal, Quebec requesting any information on the procedure Montreal had followed in conducting a housing survey as a preliminary step toward a slum clearance program⁴⁵.

^{40, 41, 42, 43} Slum Clearance and Public Housing Committee Meeting - October 24, 1951

⁴⁴ Halifax Branch, Community Planning Association of Canada - February 26, 1952

⁴⁵ City of Halifax Letter to City of Montreal - September 30, 1952

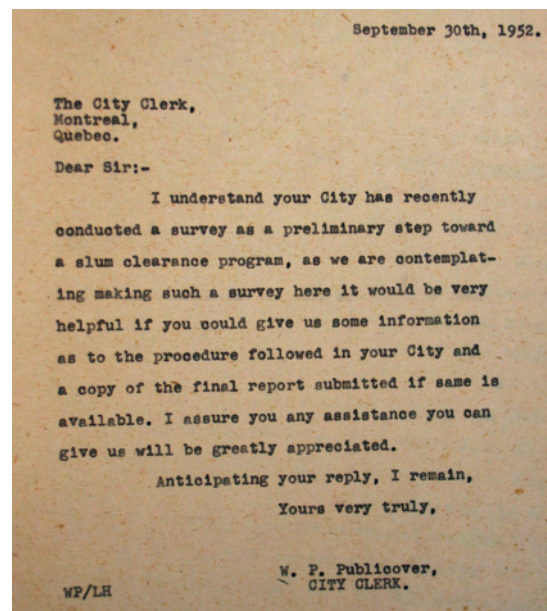


Figure 2.6
1952 letter to the
City of Montreal

By the end of 1952 it was clear the City of Halifax wished to commence a slum survey using Federal funding. It remained unclear who would conduct the survey and if funding could be secured. In an October 8, 1952 letter from the Nova Scotia Division of the Community Planning Association of Canada, a local candidate to “supervise and co-ordinate the findings of such a survey”⁴⁶ was suggested. Mr. Orval Troy, a Dalhousie graduate with experience conducting a number of surveys in Halifax, was endorsed by the Community Planning Association of Canada⁴⁷ for a position that had not yet been officially created. Following this recommendation from the Community Planning Association of Canada, the decision of personnel selection for the survey was referred to the City Manager without any decision made⁴⁸. The matter of securing survey funding remained outstanding:

It was also agreed that a request be directed to the Provincial Government asking them to forward a letter to the Federal Government stating their willingness to participate in an agreement in order that the City may proceed with the survey of the area designated at the last meeting; namely that area bounded by the rear lines of lots fronting on Gottingen Street to Charles Street to Robie Street to Cunard Street to North Park Street and to Cogswell Street with the exception of the blocks occupied by Cousins Limited, Trainor’s Garage and The Armories⁴⁹.

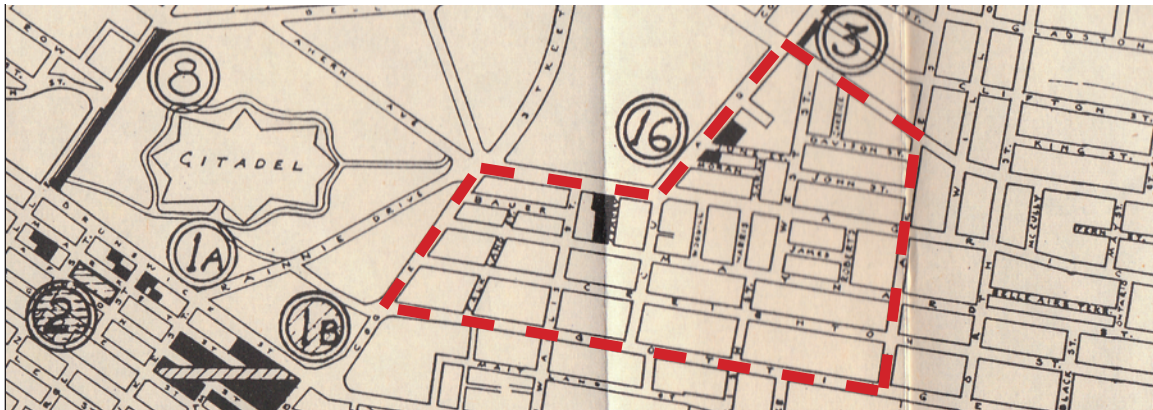


Figure 2.7
1952 proposed survey area shown using
1950 Official Town Plan map

^{46, 47} Letter From the Nova Scotia Division of the Community Planning Association of Canada - October 8, 1952

^{48, 49} Letter From the City Clerk - October 21, 1952

The debate over funding a slum clearance survey continued in 1953. \$2500 was included in 1953 City budget estimates so that “if Council decided to carry out the slum survey, the money would be already provided”⁵⁰. Concerns over revisions to the National Housing Act and uncertainty of the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation’s commitment to fund such a survey remained barriers to approving any survey project.

In a March 1953 meeting of the Slum Clearance and Public Housing Committee, Alderman Hatfield raised concerns about the progress of signing an agreement with the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation to ensure survey funding and the need for outside expertise:

\$2,500 was put in the estimates and it is now a matter of working up a contract with Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation. We want to submit it to Council and tell them a survey is necessary. There has been no area definitely designated as yet and I want to get expert opinion on the area to be surveyed. The purpose of the survey is to find out the density of the population and the condition of the buildings⁵¹.

The City Manager and the Mayor made it clear at this same meeting that the City was only committing \$2,500 if they received assurance from the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation for \$7,500 in funding to undertake the survey⁵². The Mayor goes on to state:

We are not committing ourselves to a project by undertaking a survey. That should be made clear. I am objecting to embarking on a survey that commits us to a project. We cannot afford to do it and we must not do it. I want to make my position clear. Within the limit of our means we have an intent to do a job but to embark on any specific project is an entirely different matter. This is far different from a commitment. We are free to proceed or not proceed as we see fit⁵³.

No commitment to undertake a slum survey was made between the City of Halifax and the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation following the Slum Clearance and Public Housing Committee discussions of early 1953. Attention shifted to other projects related to slum clearance in Halifax and discussions of a survey would resume in time.

⁵⁰ Slum Clearance and Public Housing Committee Meeting - January 22, 1953

^{51, 52, 53} Slum Clearance and Public Housing Committee Meeting - March 4, 1953

The Proposed Use of Rezoning to Enable Slum Clearance

At a September 11, 1953 meeting of the Slum Clearance and Public Housing Committee, the Town Planning Engineer outlined details of the proposed diagonal street from City Hall to the corner of Brunswick and Jacob Street and stated that “the purpose of the project was to clear the area and make the land available for business purposes”⁵⁴. The City’s intentions to clear this area and redevelop were becoming clear to local residents. Decisions occurred based on financial motivators. The City Manager “stated that building permits have been held up in the area and the property owners are becoming anxious and feel that the City should stop stalling and make up its mind. He felt that the Diagonal Street could be built and the City could get its money back on a resale of the unused property to business concerns”⁵⁵. Little consideration was given to local residents who would be displaced through this process. Alderman Vaughan stated “the city should use its powers to tear down more of the old buildings in the area before any land was purchased”⁵⁶.

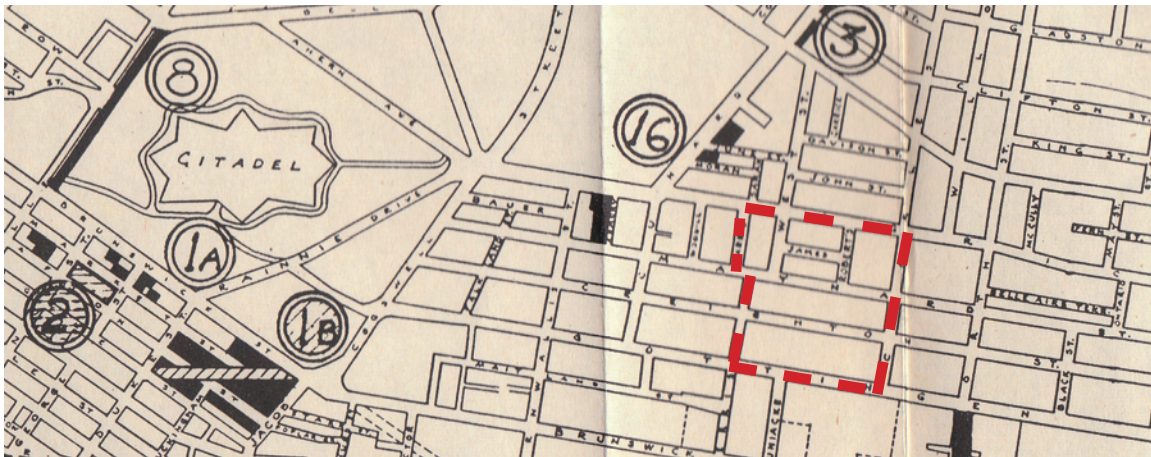
During the same September 11 meeting a report was presented by the Town Planning Engineer “outlining details of a proposed slum clearance project in the West Street – Maynard Street area”⁵⁷. In order to secure Federal funding to aid in clearance and development of the project, the Town Planning Engineer stated that a fairly large area would need to be cleared and redeveloped over a longer period of time⁵⁸. To avoid public outcry of such a large-scale clearance project, the City Manager noted “as the area had to be rezoned the only information that had to be made public was the rezoning. He stated the Minister could be informed privately that the large area is being changed for future developments”⁵⁹. Increased tax returns and achieving “the maximum use from the land without overcrowding”⁶⁰ were again justification to move ahead with clearance in the area.

The area proposed for clearance was now defined as:

Beginning at the rear of the lots facing on Agricola Street at the south east corner of Charles and Agricola Street; Thence easterly along the official southern street line of Charles Street to the rear of the lots fronting on Gottingen Street; Thence southerly

^{54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60} Slum Clearance and Public Housing Committee Meeting - September 11, 1953

along the said rear lot line of the lots facing Gottingen Street to the northern official street line of Gerrish Street; Thence westerly along the northern official street line of Gerrish Street to the eastern official street line of Maynard Street; Thence continuing in a westerly direction from the western official street line of Maynard Street and along the rear lot lines of the lots facing on Harris Street to the point where the rear lot lines of Harris Street meets with the rear lot line of the lots facing on Agricola Street; Thence northerly along the rear lot lines of the lots facing on Agricola Street to the southern official street line of Charles Street or to the point of beginning⁶¹.



*Figure 2.8
Proposed 1953 Creighton – Maynard Street rezoning
area shown using 1950 Official Town Plan map*

The Acting Town Plan Engineer at the time recommended the area be changed from a General Business Zone to Third Density Residential Zone⁶². This change in zoning would accommodate slum clearance plans, as the National Housing Act required rezoning for residential use⁶³. Alderman Vaughan again advised that the area was selected because it contained “the largest number of dilapidated dwellings in Halifax and the tax return is very small”⁶⁴. Discussions continued at Town Planning Board meetings and the matter was referred to City Council to set a date for public hearing on rezoning⁶⁵.

^{61, 62, 63, 64} Town Planning Board Meeting - October 15, 1953

⁶⁵ Town Planning Board Meeting - November 26, 1953

1954

The City Council Meeting held January 21, 1954 to discuss rezoning of the Creighton – Maynard Street area elicited strong public response. A variety of associations and individuals presented their views on the proposed rezoning. This section of the City had been discussed in both *the 1945 Master Plan* and *the 1950 Official Development Plan* as an area suitable for some form of redevelopment.

Mrs. Silvia Hudson of the Community Planning Association submitted and read a brief to Council in support of the rezoning proposal:

The purpose of this brief from the Halifax Branch of the Community Planning Association is to urge the members of the City council to take prompt action in approving the rezoning of the Creighton-Maynard St. area from Commercial to Third Density Residential. This would facilitate an early start on an absolutely necessary slum clearance program... ...The report of slum conditions, which was presented before the Slum Clearance Committee on October 24, 1951, has not altered – and it was stated at that time that a report to the Civic Planning Commission in 1944 designated this same area as one in most need of elimination⁶⁶.

Her presentation stressed the great social and financial costs of slum areas to the City as a whole⁶⁷. Miss G. V. Shand, on behalf of Rev. A. G. Campbell, urged the City to act on rezoning with the hope that it would lead to a slum clearance program⁶⁸. “We don’t have to go into the dangers of overcrowding and ill health. We urge for a re-housing in this area and that some study be given to the replacing of people who may live in that area now. We do urge against any policy of race discrimination”⁶⁹.

Other residents presented similar societal welfare-oriented thinking. Mr. Gordon Black suggested “that in the long run the welfare of the citizens of Halifax and the City of Halifax will be greatly advanced by rezoning and rehabilitating some of the worse slums we have. Anything the Council can do towards this blighted area the citizens will approve regardless whether it will cost a little more money in taxes”⁷⁰. He went on to suggest securing assistance from the Federal Government⁷¹, suggesting an awareness of Federal programs to aid in urban renewal.

^{66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71} City Council Meeting - January 21, 1954

Alderman Vaughan, a strong proponent of the rezoning, suggested that the proposed redevelopment would benefit the community as a whole and should not be stopped by a few existing property owners⁷². “Should a handful of people who own some property be allowed to stand in the way of a development such as this would be, for two or three hundred families? Their wishes should not stand in the way for us to redevelop this area. The area is a blighted area. This is the cancer which will spread throughout the entire city”⁷³.

While support for the rezoning and potential redevelopment proposal was strong, some residents voiced their concerns and opposition. Mr. Oliver, a City resident, stated:

*I would not like the City to lead us into anything that would cause us to shed tears in the years to come. I am opposed to taking people out of their own homes and compelling them to live in apartments. God gave us the privilege of living as families. Men and women who have had the spirit of citizenship and spunk to save and build a home should be allowed to live as first class citizens*⁷⁴.

Alderman Ahern questioned the rezoning and the potential of a redevelopment project displacing residents. “I don’t see how the City Plan can justify the removal of all the buildings. I can say this that the people resent that part of the City being called ‘slums’. I don’t think it would be fair to ask them to move out of their homes and get into a rented home. The point brought out by Alderman Lane is a very fine question... ‘where will they live?’ That is a vital question”⁷⁵. Alderman O’Malley voiced similar concerns and stated the idea was not a sound one⁷⁶.

The meeting closed with no firm decisions or direction. Alderman Lloyd indicated that the City was still hoping to utilize Federal funding to move redevelopment in Halifax forward. “Until this Council examines plans for houses and decides the types of houses to be erected, how they will be arranged, and costs, I therefore feel that we are merely putting ourselves in the position to examine fully what the Federal Government has to offer to us by way of assistance”⁷⁷.

^{72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77} City Council Meeting - January 21, 1954

The Need for a Housing Survey

A follow-up public hearing was held by the Slum Clearance and Public Housing Committee on March 18, 1954 to discuss rezoning of the Creighton-Maynard Street area⁷⁸. Prior to the meeting, letters of opposition from local residents were submitted to the Committee. A letter from a resident of Creighton Street voiced opinions shared by many residents:

I am satisfied with my home as it is and I don't want the City to take over my house. I have not the money to live in a more expensive house and even if the City gave me good money for my home where could I go? My children have their friends here and I have mine. My house is kept up as good as I can and we are happy here. Why should we move⁷⁹?

This follow-up public hearing presented many similar arguments to previous meetings. More public input was heard opposing the rezoning but the most significant comment related to a slum clearance program came from Mr. Lloyd Shaw of the Community Planning Association:

Mr. Lloyd Shaw of the Community Planning Association addressed the Committee and urged that before anything was done that a proper survey be carried out in the area to determine all the facts respecting housing, income of the people and what rent they could pay. He said in Toronto the project known as Regent Park was not started without a survey giving the necessary details and the same in St. John's Nfld. And St. John, N.B.⁸⁰.

Committee members responded enthusiastically to Mr. Shaw's comments. Alderman Dunlop stated, "I am in favor of the survey. That is the first thing to do"⁸¹. Mr. Shaw went on to state, "The Community Planning Association recommend that the area be as large as possible and if something is started it should start in the area of greatest need. If it could extend between Agricola, Gottingen, North and Cogswell Sts."⁸¹. The meeting closed with the Committee recommending to City Council that a survey be undertaken to cover Charles, Cunard, Agricola and Gottingen Streets as well as Gerrish, Brunswick, Artz and Barrington Streets⁸².

^{78, 79, 80, 81, 82} Slum Clearance and Public Housing Committee Meeting - March 18, 1954

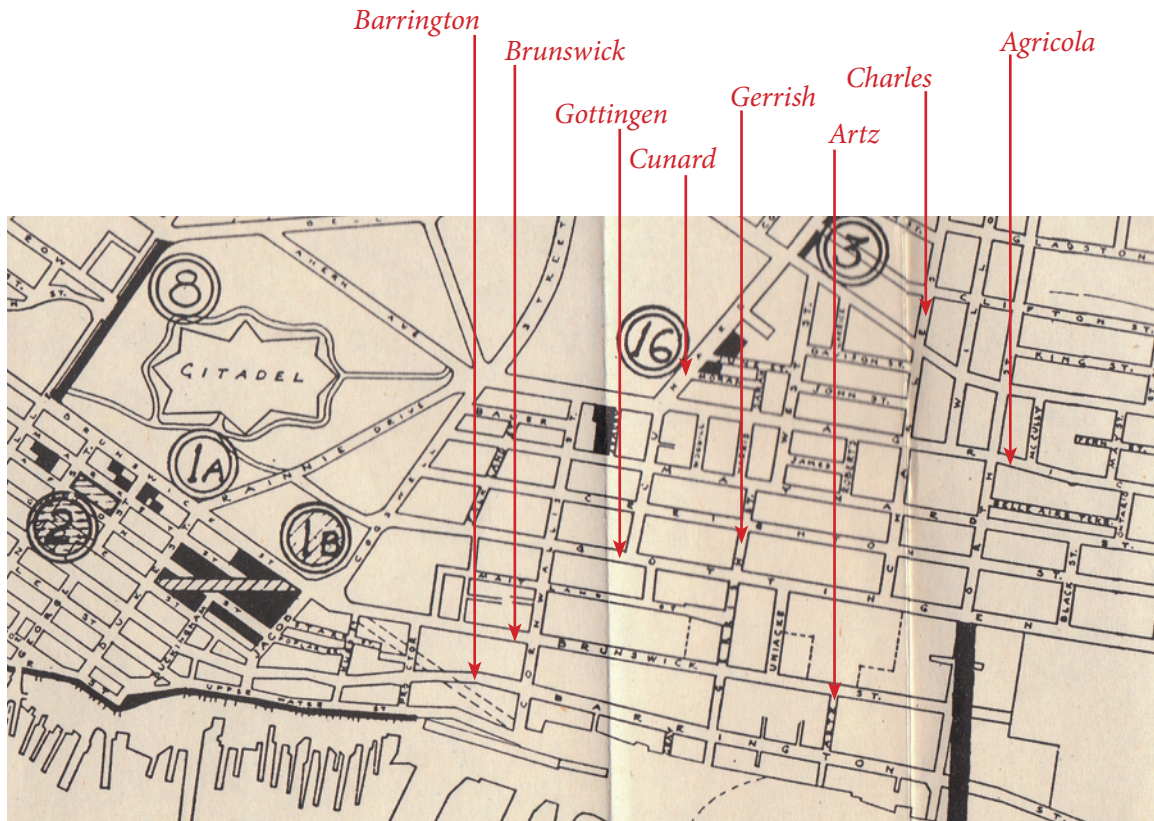


Figure 2.9
Proposed 1954 housing survey streets shown
using 1950 Official Town Plan map

The Halifax Mail-Star provided a comprehensive review of the March 18, 1954 public hearing the following day⁸³. The headline of the front page article on the hearing read “Council action is sought in plan for redevelopment”⁸⁴ and the article defined the survey area:

A survey involving all the factors for redevelopment will be sought on two North end housing areas, one bounded by Agricola, Gottingen, Charles, and Cunard Streets with includes the proposed Maynard-Creighton Street redevelopment and the second bounded by Artz, Brunswick, Gerrish and Barrington Streets.⁸⁵

Reported details of the hearing were extensive but limited attention was paid to opposition from residents⁸⁶. The media coverage suggests a growing public awareness of slum clearance issues.

^{83, 84, 85, 86} The Halifax Mail-Star - March 19, 1954

1954 closed with no action taken to develop a housing survey. In January of 1955 the Town Planning Engineer presented information to the Town Planning Board on future development options for the land bounded by Gottingen Street, North Street, Brunswick Street and Uniacke Street⁸⁷. He felt the land was not suitable for any land assembly or clearance program because the buildings were in a condition that “vigorous enforcement of building regulations and a reduction in the occupancy factor”⁸⁸ could improve the area significantly at a reduced cost to the City and residents. He went on to suggest that a shopping center would be undesirable in the area and that business, if left to their own devices, would gradually fill in the area as an extension of the existing shopping district⁸⁹.

In an August 1955 City Council Meeting, Alderman Vaughan requested that the City Manager “make a report on the matter of a qualified person or firm to study the redevelopment of the downtown area”⁹⁰.

Interest in conducting a redevelopment or housing survey was finally revived by the end of 1955. Alderman Ferguson, seconded by Alderman Ahern, propose that the City of Halifax “go on record as being in favor of slum clearance in general, urge further investigation by the appropriate Government authority, and recommend that a public hearing be held as soon as possible to give those wishing to express their views an opportunity to do so”⁹¹. At the same City Council meeting the Mayor suggests that a slum clearance project in the City could be undertaken without specifying an exact location⁹². Mr. Grant, a representative from the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation in attendance, refutes the Mayor’s comment and suggests that any project proposed would need to be specific and fairly well defined to receive funding⁹³. Interest exists in a slum clearance program funded in part by the Federal government, but the City is still unable to clearly define a location.

^{87, 88, 89} Town Planning Board Meeting - January 27, 1955

⁹⁰ City Council Meeting - August 11, 1955

^{91, 92, 93} City Council Meeting - December 15, 1955

The Hiring of Professor Gordon Stephenson

1956

1956's first City Council Meeting in January highlighted the ongoing uncertainty surrounding slum clearance projects. A public hearing was held as part of City Council's January 5th meeting to discuss the proposed housing project for "the area bounded by Cogswell Street, North Park Street, Cornwallis Street, and rear of properties on the west side of Gottingen Street"⁹⁴.

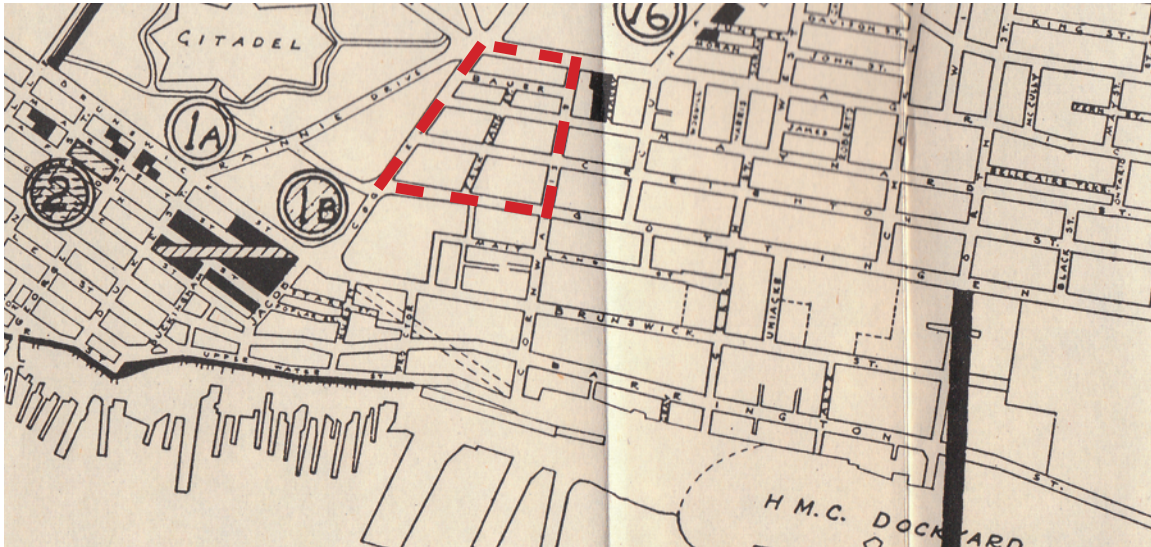


Figure 2.10
Proposed 1956 housing project location
shown using 1950 Official Town Plan map

Alderman Vaughan, concerned with the magnitude of the proposed project both to residents and as a cost to the city, suggested the matter be deferred for further consideration⁹⁵. Alderman Ferguson wanted to see a "factual survey of the people in the area for or against it"⁹⁶ and noted strong public opposition. Alderman Ahern noted that people were confused and he was amazed no plan had been developed by the Public Housing Committee⁹⁷. He went on to state, "I think we should meet privately and devise a plan and present it to the Council and permit the people to again be heard. We are all for new housing and I don't think we should insinuate that any member is not in favor of re-developing that area of the City"⁹⁸.

^{94, 95, 96, 97, 98} City Council Meeting - January 5, 1956

At the following week's City Council meeting the Mayor's upcoming visit to Ottawa was discussed:

...it was decided that the Mayor while in Ottawa should discuss with the proper authority the thought of erecting housing units on some part of Citadel Hill so as to take care of those temporarily displaced by slum clearance so as to be able to more readily make progress in slum clearance and rehabilitation whether it be the area recently discussed or some other area⁹⁹.

The Mayor's discussions while in Ottawa in the early part of 1956 were not documented in any Halifax archival materials. It remains unclear exactly who the Mayor met with and what was discussed. With City Council's awareness of Federal funding available for slum clearance programs, an on-going desire to take advantage of such funding, and revisions to the 1956 National Housing Act designed to help communities remove blighted areas and encourage new growth (Grant, 1994, p. 57), it is reasonable to assume meetings with the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation occurred.

Following the Mayor's visit to Ottawa, City Council moved quickly to secure Federal slum clearance funding. At a February 16, 1956 City Council Meeting, Council moved to request "the Minister of Public Works of the Government of Canada for a grant of \$12,000 under Part V of the National Housing Act 1954, to undertake a survey of the housing conditions of the City of Halifax to establish areas of redevelopment and priorities according to where redevelopment should take place and request approval of the Government of the Province of Nova Scotia for such survey"¹⁰⁰. Alderman Hatfield pointed out that this request was simply for a grant that would allow facts to be determined and did not require the City to commit to any specific area or project at this stage¹⁰¹.

March 15, 1956 marks the first appearance of Professor Gordon Stephenson's name in any meeting minutes of committees discussed. In a City Council meeting, the Mayor states:

The Minister of Public Works has recommended that Professor Stevenson (sic) would be a logical person to undertake the survey. I want it understood that the matter is by no means dead¹⁰².

⁹⁹ City Council Meeting - January 12, 1956

^{100, 101} City Council Meeting - February 16, 1956

¹⁰² City Council Meeting - March 15, 1956

No other names are suggested for the position, no public hearing is held to discuss the matter, and not one committee raises any question or concern over the suggestion of Professor Stephenson for the position.

Less than one month later, on April 4, 1956, Professor Stephenson addressed City Council in a special session¹⁰³. *The Halifax Mail-Star*, on the front page of the April 3rd edition, announced Professor Stephenson's upcoming meeting with City Council using the headline "Special Session On City Housing Situation: Expert to Discuss Difficulties With Halifax Aldermen"¹⁰⁴:

Dr. Gordon Stephenson, a figure well-known and experienced in studies of slum clearance problems in major Canadian cities, will arrive here tomorrow afternoon and meet with City Council in a special session tomorrow night to discuss the local problem.

Dr. Stephenson is a professor of architecture and planning at the University of Toronto. He comes highly recommended by Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation who are participants in all Canadian projects. They say he is a man noted for his common sense approach to the problem. Alderman will discuss with Dr. Stephenson, in general terms, the problems of slum clearance and the relationship of those general problems to the specific ones in Halifax.

It is likely that Dr. Stephenson's discussions tomorrow night will assist aldermen in consideration of the minimum standard regulations. Most housing authorities consider the standards an essential step towards alleviation of slum conditions¹⁰⁵.

The same article stated that the Mayor hoped to have a team assembled by late spring to assess the housing situation in the City and Professor Stephenson was a potential candidate to lead the team¹⁰⁶.

At the April 4th special session, prior to Professor Stephenson's presentation, the Mayor stated:

...the Housing Committee had held several meetings on the matter of the redevelopment of the area under consideration and that C.M.H.C. had been contacted. The question arose as to who should carry out a survey and they indicated that Prof. Gordon Stephenson was well experienced in that type of work¹⁰⁷.

^{103, 107} City Council Meeting - April 4, 1956

^{104, 105, 106} *The Halifax Mail-Star* - April 3, 1956

Chronological Development of Slum Clearance in Halifax: 1916-1956

Following Professor Stephenson's presentation, the advisory committee of the Public Housing Committee of City Council recommended "in closed meeting that Dr. Stephenson be hired to undertake supervision of the survey which would embrace local help where possible"¹⁰⁸. Final approval to hire Professor Stephenson would come shortly from City Council. The meeting adjourned late in the evening on April 4th ¹⁰⁹.

Media coverage of the April 4th meeting was substantial. The April 5th edition of *the Halifax Mail-Star* used the title "Problems Outlined By Expert"¹¹⁰ on its front page to explain in detail the information presented by Professor Stephenson to City Council:

A comprehensive study of older sections of Halifax with a view to redevelopment and planning would take about six months and cost approximately \$15,000, Dr. Gordon Stephenson of Toronto told City Council Wednesday night.

Dr Stephenson, considered one of the country's foremost authorities on housing, has been recommended by Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation to carry out a proposed survey of the city's housing areas. Following the meeting, the advisory committee of the Public Housing Committee of City Council recommended in closed meeting that Dr. Stephenson be hired to undertake supervision of the survey which would embrace local help where possible.

The survey would include compilation of structural, habitation and sanitation details of over one-third of the city's residential areas with recommendations as to site and planning and traffic problems related to changes in the area recommended¹¹¹.

The survey area was not finalized, but suggested by Professor Stephenson to be the area north, south, and east of Citadel Hill with areas of recognizable blight¹¹². Professor Stephenson went on to describe slum clearance experiences in Toronto and noted the need to look at more than just housing¹¹³. Other services such as fire and police protection, education, traffic and other factors needed to be included¹¹⁴.

¹⁰⁸ The Halifax Mail-Star - April 5, 1956

¹⁰⁹ City Council Meeting - April 4, 1956

^{110, 111, 112, 113, 114} The Halifax Mail-Star - April 5, 1956

The involvement of the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation was evident. Alderman Vaughan noted, the “impression which has always been left with us by officials of Central Mortgage and Housing is that they want a clean sweep of a whole block and not a piecemeal program”¹¹⁵. Mr. Borland, of the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, outlined the organization’s position stating the economic factor was of significant importance in implementing a policy of complete clearance of slum areas¹¹⁶. “The Corporation felt it was better to completely ‘clean house’ when a job was undertaken”¹¹⁷. Professor Stephenson noted that a clean sweep in Halifax might be more economical but “he did not particularly agree with it”¹¹⁸.

City Council reconvened two days after the April 4th presentation and Professor Gordon Stephenson was selected to conduct a housing study for Halifax on Friday, April 6, 1956¹¹⁹:

APPOINTMENT OF PROFESSOR GORDON STEPHENSON RE: HOUSING SURVEY RESOLVED that the City of Halifax engage the services of Professor Gordon Stephenson of Toronto University to conduct a study of the housing conditions in Halifax with particular reference to redevelopment and zoning when, as and if the grant applied for under Part 5 of the National Housing Act is made available; that a further sum of \$2,000.00 be authorized toward the City’s share of the cost; and that the Mayor and City Clerk be authorized to enter into an agreement with Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation with respect to the grant¹²⁰.

The Halifax Mail-Star announced City Council’s decision 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”¹²¹ on the front page of its April 7, 1956 issue. Contracts with the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation to have Professor Gordon Stephenson conduct a housing survey were drafted by the City Solicitor in July of 1956¹²².

^{115, 116, 117, 118} The Halifax Mail-Star - April 5, 1956

^{119, 120} City Council Meeting - April 4, 1956

¹²¹ The Halifax Mail-Star - April 7, 1956

¹²² Finance and Executive Committee Meeting - July 5, 1956

As Alderman DeWolf sought clarification on the timing of payment to Professor Stephenson, the Chairman of the meeting was quick to point out how fortunate the City was to have Professor Stephenson:

*We have asked for this. He is recommended by National Housing and we are very fortunate to get him. I would suggest that we approve of the agreement and recommend it to Council. The other matters are routine*¹²³.

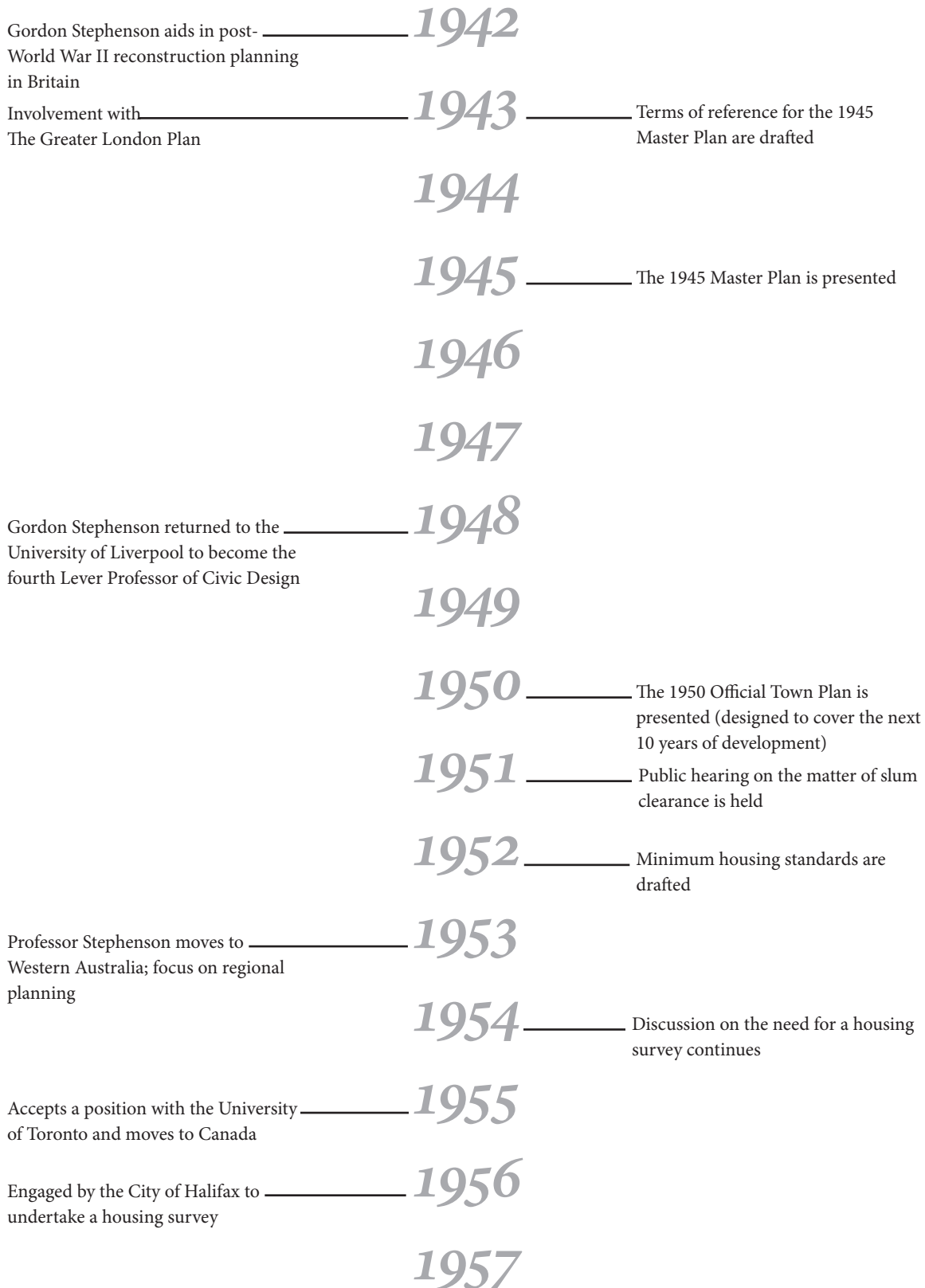
The Agreement between the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Professor Gordon Stephenson and the City of Halifax to conduct a housing survey was approved by City Council on July 12, 1956¹²⁴.

¹²³ Finance and Executive Committee Meeting - July 5, 1956

¹²⁴ City Council Meeting - July 12, 1956

PART 3

The Selection of an Outside Expert



Slum Clearance in Halifax: the Role of Gordon Stephenson

Discussions surrounding slum clearance in Halifax commenced more than a decade before Professor Gordon Stephenson arrived in Canada to teach at the University of Toronto. The City of Halifax had been aware of Federal funding available since 1944 to aid in slum clearance programs but had failed to engage in an agreement with the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation to secure funds.

The Halifax Master Plan of 1945 listed areas in need of slum clearance but demonstrated limited methods for implementation. Public response to slum clearance ideas was strong, but the City failed to take action on its plans. The 1950 Official Town Plan was created to serve as a more useful method for the City to determine which projects to undertake over a ten-year time frame, but failed to advance slum clearance projects in the City.

Public hearings and City Council debates on slum clearance and housing surveys occurred throughout the early 1950s. Citizens, and I would argue, politicians, were confused and uncertain about how the City would utilize the great deal of Federal funding that was available at the time to help improve housing conditions. Council members felt pressure from the federal government to implement programs (Grant, 1994, p. 142) to take advantage of funding.

The short courtship between the City of Halifax and Professor Gordon Stephenson was an unexpected finding. In a matter of a few short months, Professor Stephenson had gone from a passing suggestion to the final candidate. Although it is difficult to say conclusively based on the archival material reviewed, the power of the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation and their previous work and connections with Professor Stephenson likely played a significant role.

A review of the archival material indicates just how graciously accepted Professor Stephenson was by City Council. In many respects, the City of Halifax very fortunate to have someone with his knowledge and experiences working to prepare a survey for them.

In an era when urban renewal efforts were strongly promoted by the federal government through sizable grants and incentives, the City of Halifax was able to secure a globally respected expert in town planning. Professor Gordon Stephenson was crucial in advancing slum clearance in Halifax through the development of his survey and list of recommendations published in his 1957 Redevelopment Plan.

It is difficult to envision the hiring of an outside expert like Professor Stephenson occurring at a different point in time. Had the City of Halifax sought an outside expert prior to the 1956 National Housing Act revisions, it is likely that the scale of the project undertaken would have been smaller. Just a few years later and Professor Stephenson would be back in Western Australia.

The hiring of Professor Gordon Stephenson effectively launched the City of Halifax to action on a topic it had debated for more than a decade. Whether or not the final outcome of Stephenson's report was what Council had expected is unclear at this juncture. The political, social, and economic mindset of the time was in support of significant change to the urban fabric of the City, change that Professor Stephenson helped stimulate through the creation of his 1957 Redevelopment Study.

Suggestions For Future Study

Detailed information on Professor Stephenson's years in Canada is difficult to uncover. Efforts to track down personal journals or notes belonging to Professor Gordon Stephenson led to the University of Western Australia. At my request, an archivist at the University went through their holdings looking for any notes Professor Stephenson may have retained about his time spent in Halifax to no avail. While my study focused on archival material found locally in Halifax, it may be of interest to see if any records or more detailed information was kept on Stephenson's relationship with the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Much of his time in Canada included working closely with the CMHC, which may provide further insight as to why he was strongly recommended or endorsed by the organization.

My project is very much the tip of an iceberg when it comes to exploring planning issues in Halifax in the 1950s leading up to the publication of Professor Stephenson's Redevelopment Study. While my project concludes with the appointment of Professor Stephenson to undertake a housing study in 1956, the period of time from when he is appointed to the final submission of his report to Halifax City Council remains a grey area. The original terms of reference from 1956 leave room for interpretation that may have allowed Professor Stephenson to modify the direction of his study to suit his own personal interests. It would be a useful exercise to see if it is at all possible to explore the time frame where Professor Stephenson was assembling and drafting the 1957 Redevelopment Study.

Lessons for Current Day Planners

While the role of the professional planner has changed, the political context in which planning operates has not. The strong, top-down push from the federal government evidenced in the era of slum clearance and urban renewal could easily occur again. Acceptance of federal funding ensures a degree of control and supervision on the part of the federal government over any project that utilizes such funding.

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Appendix A - A Note on Locating Archival Information Used in This Report

The Halifax Regional Municipality Archives contain all of the information used in Part 2 of this report with the exception newspaper references (which were sourced from the Halifax public library). The Halifax Archives are located at 81 Ilesley Ave, Unit 11 in the Burnside Industrial Park in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. The telephone number is 902-490-4643. Public access hours are very limited.

The material used in this project consists heavily of materials related to City Council and other committee meeting minutes. City Council meeting minutes are easily accessible at all times the archives are open and are well indexed. Town Planning Board meeting minutes are also easily accessed by request. Other material related to slum clearance and redevelopment from the 1950s is more difficult to locate. Much of the material is stored in folders accessible only with the assistance of staff. Alerting staff to your upcoming visit and general topic allows them time to locate materials in advance. Material used for this project was often misplaced and had to be located by staff.

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