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Article abstract

Between the 1830s and 2010s Gottingen Street in Halifax, Canada, transitioned from a residential street, to a commercial corridor, to an area of community services, to a revitalizing “hip” area. Its story reflects the influence of changing regulatory regimes, transportation modes, commercial practices, and cultural values. The article follows uses in selected properties on the street to tell the story of an area shifting in use and character as a result of major infrastructure investments and changing economic conditions between 1910 and 2015.

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Entre les années 1830 et 2010, la rue Gottingen à Halifax, au Canada, s’est transformée d’une rue résidentielle en une artère commerciale, puis en un espace de services communautaires et enfin en une zone de revitalisation à la mode. Son histoire reflète ainsi l’influence des changements des régimes de réglementation, des modes de circulation, des pratiques commerciales et des valeurs culturelles. Cet article examine une sélection de caractéristiques de cette rue afin de narrer l’histoire d’une zone en perpétuelle transition, suite à d’importants investissements dans l’infrastructure et aux changements des conditions économiques ayant marqué la période 1910-2014.

History of a Commercial Street

To be sure, the older city has been replaced by the one that uses many of the same bricks and much of the same asphalt, along with nearly all of the old names for streets and neighborhoods. These material and cultural fossils invite an illusion of continuity: these same streets were here a century ago. But only in the most superficial sense is that so, for the streets have changed utterly—in their functions, their social meaning, even their moral standing—for those who use them.¹

Cities are sites of perpetual transition, changing with political decisions, economic conditions, and residents’ choices. Neighbourhood change occurs in an economic context that influences which parts of cities experience growth and prosperity and which find themselves losing jobs and value. Urban regulatory and policy environments affect the kinds of buildings, infrastructure, and services that appear in cities; they enable or constrain the uses a street can support. Within the cultural context of any city, people tell stories about which

areas are “nice” and which may be “dangerous” as they make pragmatic choices about where to live, where to shop, where to invest. The trajectory of any particular street in any given city thus reflects decisions made by multiple levels of governments, international corporations and local businesses, and individual residents and consumers. Understanding the history of significant streets provides insight into the local implications of macro and micro processes that drive urban change.

This article examines the history of uses on Gottingen Street in Halifax, Nova Scotia (figure 1). Settled in 1749 as a British military foothold within traditional Mi’kmaq Indigenous territory on Canada’s east coast, Halifax expanded northward in the nineteenth century with the migration of German Protestants, who inscribed Germanic names on many streets, including Gottingen. Elegant large homes appeared on Gottingen and nearby Brunswick Street, while small clapboard houses flanked relatively narrow side streets. By the end of the nineteenth century Gottingen Street—which ran northward from the Citadel fortress overlooking Halifax harbour—had developed a cluster of commercial uses serving local, predominantly working-class residents: many of its early homes were adapted for reuse or demolished, as affluent residents relocated to the south and west. During the early to mid-twentieth century, Gottingen became the major commercial street of the North End neighbourhood. While more affluent parts of the city were predominantly white, the North End was integrated, with working-class blacks and whites sharing the streets. Postwar suburban residential and economic growth and mid-century large-scale urban renewal projects greatly affected Gottingen Street, leading to lower property values, a smaller customer base, and a weakened commercial base on the street. By the end of the twentieth century, Gottingen Street was described as Halifax’s “most feared neighbourhood.”² Yet in the early twenty-first century, the street’s relative affordability and proximity to downtown supported gentrification, characterized by an increase in bohemian uses. The complex trajectory of Gottingen Street—from a site of commercial prowess until the 1960s, to a poor and stigmatized neighbourhood through the 1990s, to a gentrifying district in the 2000s—is hardly unique. Such transitions have been well documented in larger cities such as New York, Toronto, and Vancouver.³ Less, however, has been written about processes in smaller Canadian cities.

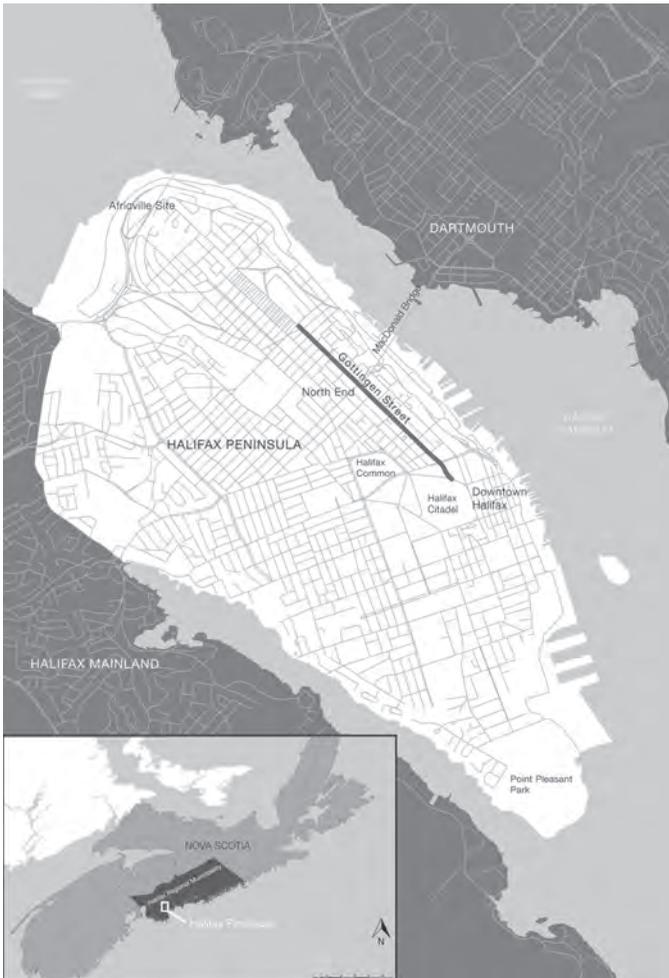


Figure 1: Halifax, Nova Scotia. Authors.

What can a case study of a street offer? It presents a thick description of transformation at work⁴ and allows researchers to link physical changes with policy interventions, technological shifts, and cultural practices. Changes on commercial streets such as Gottingen reflect some of the ways in which government policy and infrastructure investments, commercial practices and corporate decisions, and consumers' and residents' choices shape urban change. This research followed properties on Gottingen Street in Halifax from 1910 to 2015, drawing on a range of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources scrutinized include city directories,⁵ insurance maps,⁶ telephone directories,⁷ city council and committee minutes, newspaper stories, city reports, historic photographs, assessment records, plans, and field surveys. Interviews with eleven experts and business operators in the fall of 2012 provided qualitative data about the recent history of the street. Secondary sources included scholarly studies and histories of the city. The changing uses of ten example properties—selected for a cross-section of uses in 1910 and representing different segments on the street—illustrate the transformation



Figure 2: Location of properties profiled. Source: Authors, based on Halifax Regional Municipality.

of commerce and help to reveal transition points in the fate of the neighbourhood (see table 1, figure 2). In 1910 the properties in table 1 included a hospital, residence, church, and various shops. At the height of the street's economic prowess in 1950, some lots housed a theatre, a bank, or prestigious stores. By 2000, social services and vacant properties abounded, as the area reached its nadir; however, by 2010 upscale uses had begun to appear.

Commercial streets in older inner city neighbourhoods offer important stories about the dynamic nature of urban form and function: telling their stories helps explain how and why cities change. The article begins by briefly discussing the context of change in commercial districts before proceeding to review the chronology of transformation on Gottingen Street. The final section considers key insights from the case study. Changing retail on the street reflects the combined influences of changing corporate practices, transportation modes, political priorities, and consumer preferences.

Growth of the Retail Street

Cities are dynamic spaces. Retail districts prove especially fluid, responding to changing population patterns, consumer tastes, transportation patterns, and economic conditions.⁸ In early twentieth-century North America, small-scale retail uses—in the form of grocers, butchers, and others providing daily necessities—were widely distributed through residential districts.

The Story of a Commercial Street

Table 1: History of selected properties on Gottingen Street.

Locator Number	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2015
Current address											
1											
2037 Gottingen	Halifax Military Hospital	Halifax Military Hospital	Halifax Military Hospital	Halifax Military Hospital	Vacant lot	Derby Tavern & Grill	Derby Tavern & Grill	Derby Tavern & Grill	Derby Tavern & Grill	The Marquee Club (Paragon mid-decade)	The Marquee Ballroom
2											
2053 Gottingen	Residence	Dry goods store	Residence	Barber shop and residence (vacant)	Reliable Cleaners & Tailors	Vacant and residence	Saveway Cleaners	Saveway Cleaners	Wendy's Reliable Dry Cleaners	Vacant	EDNA Restaurant
3											
2110/2112 Gottingen	North Baptist Church	North Baptist Church	Community Theatre	Community Theatre	Vogue Theatre	Vogue Theatre	Vogue Theatre	Cove Cinema (Flamingo Club mid-decade)	Rumours Club	Vacant (Palooka's Boxing Club mid-decade)	Global News Television Studios
4											
2116 Gottingen	Grove House	Casino Theatre	Casino Theatre	Casino Theatre	Casino Theatre	Casino Theatre	Casino Theatre	Casino Theatre	Empire Casino Theatre	Vacant	Theatre Lofts (condominiums)
5											
2158 Gottingen	Freeman Department Store	Max's Department Store	Kay's Ltd. Ladies' & Men's Wear	Kline's Ladies' & Men's Wear	Kline's Ltd. Apparel	Kline's Ltd. Apparel	Kline's Ltd. Clothing	Open Circle Cabaret	Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre	Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre	Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre
6											
2161 Gottingen	Vineberg Goodman Co. Dry Goods	Tapp's Tots Toggerie	F.W. Woolworth Co. (department store)	F.W. Woolworth Co.	F.W. Woolworth Co.	F.W. Woolworth Co.	Discount Shoeland	Buckley's Music Centre	Buckley's Music Centre	Mi'kmaq Child Development Centre	Mi'kmaq Child Development Centre
7											
2165 Gottingen	Shane & Campbell Grocery	Borne E.K. Confectionery	Rubin's Men's Wear	Rubin's Men's Wear	Rubin's Men's & Boys' Wear	Rubin's Men's & Boys' Wear	Lord's Super Value Pharmacy	North End Community Health Centre	North End Community Health Centre	North End Community Health Centre	North End Community Health Centre
8											
2203 Gottingen	Bigney Crockery	Bigney Crockery	Vernon J. Worth Druggist	Vernon Worth Druggist	J.A. Withrow Druggist	J.A. Withrow Druggist	J.A. Withrow Druggist	Withrow Rexall Drug Store	Guardian Drug Store	Withrow Pharmasave	Bus Stop Theatre
9											
2209 Gottingen	Linton Meat Dealer	Royal Bank of Canada	Royal Bank of Canada	Royal Bank of Canada	Royal Bank of Canada	Royal Bank of Canada	Royal Bank of Canada	Royal Bank of Canada	Royal Bank of Canada	Dalhousie University Legal Aid	Dalhousie University Legal Aid
10											
2286/2288 Gottingen	Shoe repair, doctor's office	Shoe repair, doctor's office	Shoe repair, residence	Residence	Residence	Sobey's Supermarket	Sobey's Supermarket	Foodland (vacant mid-decade)	Vacant lot	Vacant lot	[Mixed-income housing development proposed]

Sources: Data drawn from city directories for the years 1910–2000, and updated from telephone directories and field surveys for recent years.

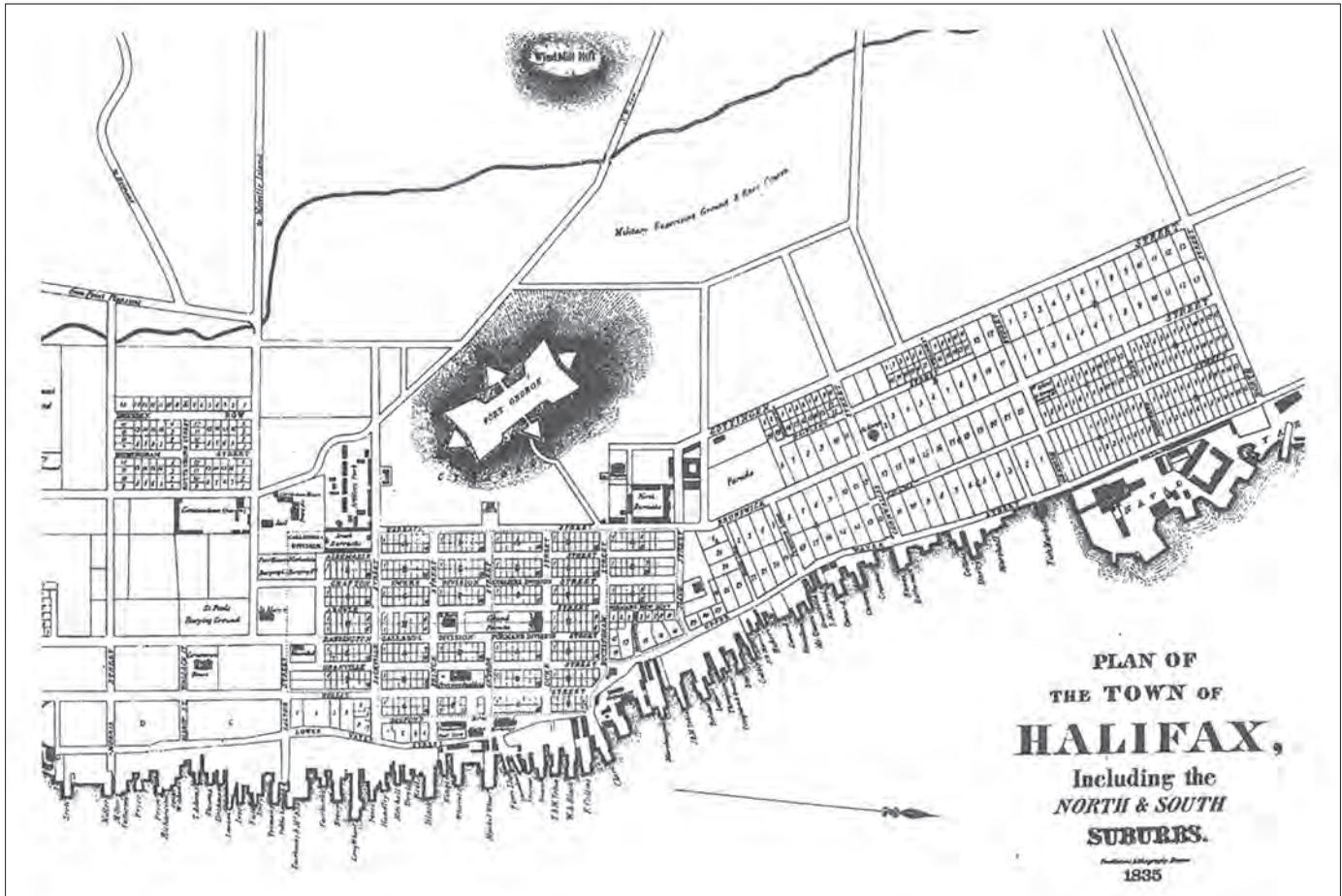


Figure 3: Halifax 1835. Public domain.

Concentrations of retailers providing other goods developed in central districts along particular streets. As omnibus and streetcar services improved, some streets became important shopping streets, attracting higher-end and large retailers.⁹ Subsequently, widespread access to private automobiles began to reconfigure the hierarchy of urban commercial streets in the mid-twentieth century, as businesses increasingly moved to suburban malls, and chain retailers replaced independents. Although governments implemented urban renewal projects and often set policies to try to protect or revitalize older retail districts, the fate of formerly powerful commercial streets varied.¹⁰ Older retail streets in central cities often lost major retailers: some developed niche markets, but others faced severe decline. Cities increasingly became places of uneven geographic development.¹¹

By the late twentieth century, some central areas previously marginalized by suburban growth had become sites of reinvestment and gentrification.¹² A second round of urban renewal began to draw people to older districts and created new opportunities for retailers.¹³ Policy-maker interest in attracting talented and creative workers to fuel investment and growth—based on the ideas of

Jane Jacobs and Richard Florida—encouraged redevelopment of older areas with “edgy” new uses.¹⁴ In the United States, programs such as HOPE VI provided federal funding to demolish public housing and replace it with mixed-income and mixed-use neighbourhoods: with over 130,000 units destroyed, the program fundamentally reorganized large areas and displaced poor African-American tenants.¹⁵ Recent urban redevelopment in Canada is driving gentrification in major cities, but local governments that are renewing public housing have committed to replacing demolished units while adding market housing.¹⁶ Shifting investment strategies in the city affect not only who lives where but also the trajectory of commercial districts.¹⁷ If people abandon a neighbourhood, stores close and investors shy away. As wealthier people move into an area, investors see opportunities. The types of local retail may change: upscale shops and services often displace those that met the needs of previous residents through commercial gentrification.¹⁸ Examining uses on commercial streets thus offers insights into urban processes at work.

Halifax is a port city on Canada’s Atlantic coast. In 1911 it housed around 46,600 people, with a blue-collar economy based on the

military, waterfront industries, and port activities. By 2011 it had a population of almost 400,000, with a workforce typically engaged in white-collar work for government, health care, education, and logistics. While in 1911 the city was confined to a small peninsula, by 2011 the amalgamated Halifax Regional Municipality covered 5500 square kilometres. Although Halifax is not growing as quickly as larger Canadian cities, its centre shows signs of gentrification as young professionals and retired couples move in. Planning policy since the 1970s has encouraged revitalization and intensification of the centre. On the northern edge of the downtown, running north from the Citadel fortress overlooking the city, Gottingen Street is strategically placed to feel the effects of downtown development. Gottingen Street and the North End neighbourhood developed in the nineteenth century as one of Halifax's first residential extensions of its original seventeen-block settlement grid (figure 3).¹⁹ The area grew as part of an industrial northern suburb, with a mix of working-class and manager occupants of a labour-intensive manufacturing, military, and resource economy along the harbour.²⁰ Shops and services for workers and their families gradually opened along Gottingen Street, easily accessed by horse-drawn streetcar lines. Neighbourhood-scale retailers first emerged along the southern portions of the street, closer to the city centre.

By 1896, electric streetcars replaced the horse-drawn carriage lines.²¹ A portion of a streetcar line travelled the southern end of Gottingen Street before turning west. Small businesses dominated in the residentially dense, pedestrian, and mixed-use neighbourhood.²² A vibrant commercial strip developed along Gottingen Street between Cunard and Cornwallis Streets in the early decades of the 1900s. This retail cluster became the main service point for the densely populated North End.²³ Table 1 highlights the early mix of uses as identified in McAlpine's city directory for 1910 for sample properties. Residences, a military hospital, and a Baptist Church along the most southern stretches of the street coexisted with small-scale retailers providing daily necessities. Commercial uses in 1910 included a department store, dry goods store, grocer, crockery shop, and butcher. The number of retail uses north of Cunard grew after the streetcar line extended in 1913.²⁴ Not surprisingly, the diversity of commercial uses on Gottingen increased from 1913 to 1920 as the wartime economy brought growth to the port, the east coast base of Canada's military.²⁵

The North End suffered great destruction in 1917, with the explosion of a munitions ship in Halifax harbour: 2000 perished and waterfront industry was hard hit, with the loss of many jobs.²⁶ Some specialty goods and services stores began to appear by 1920 among the profiled properties.²⁷ For instance, table 1 shows that Casino Theatre, one of Halifax's first cinemas, replaced a former residence; a small local grocery changed hands to become a specialized confectionery. The new Royal Bank of Canada branch underlined the commercial strength of the neighbourhood. While the growing retail strip on the Gottingen streetcar line increased rents and provided comparison shopping competition for some micro-retailers, many small grocers

and food providers (the dominant retailers in Halifax) survived on the strip or just off the corridor.²⁸ Although Gottingen Street remained a primarily working-class area, the growth in retailing along with the expansion of the streetcar system responded to the needs of a generally more prosperous populace.²⁹ The early twentieth century involved what Douglas Rae called a self-regulating urbanism: various levels of government interfered little in legal uses, allowing a complex web of activities to thrive.³⁰

Height of the Commercial Street

The Halifax streetcar system suffered from competition from the private automobile and the vicissitudes of a depression that began in the Maritimes with the end of the First World War and worsened through the 1930s.³¹ Businesses on Gottingen struggled. Table 1 indicates that some buildings that housed commercial or office uses in 1920 became residences again by 1930. Shifting transportation modes, corporate consolidation, and government policies had significant impacts in the decades following 1930. As an established commercial street, Gottingen Street and its retail services adapted to the times.³² Like other commercial corridors radiating from the city centre, Gottingen Street competed with the central business district.³³ Between 1930 and 1940, many landmark retail businesses opened. Some, such as Worth Druggist, provided necessities. Others, such as Kline's and Rubin's, sold clothing. A few offered high-end consumer goods. Of greatest importance, however, was F.W. Woolworth, Gottingen Street's first modern department store. Investment by an international retailer marked Gottingen Street as a successful commercial corridor and reflected the growing influence of international corporations on local retail.³⁴ Such inner city department stores provided "a destination for mass transit, an anchor for other commerce, a provider of jobs, an icon for the city."³⁵

With Halifax a crucial launching point for Canadian soldiers and goods heading to Europe, the Second World War stimulated economic and population growth (figure 4). Many workers for the nearby naval shipyards resided in the North End, increasing population densities around Gottingen Street.³⁶ Halifax faced a critical housing shortage in the postwar years as veterans returned home and started families. Housing conditions deteriorated in the residential streets nearby. Large homes were subdivided to accommodate demand,³⁷ leading city officials to worry about growing slums. In order to deal with the perceived crises of rapid economic growth and housing demand, the City of Halifax adopted its first plan in 1945.³⁸ The Master Plan focused on improving transportation connections (by car) and reducing congestion: it laid out a blueprint for modernizing the city. One illustration showed the proposed bridge to Dartmouth with high-density modern structures built along Gottingen.³⁹ In 1950 the city implemented elements of the plan by adopting an official development plan and zoning bylaw.⁴⁰

Halifax's streetcars stopped running in 1949. With increasing automobile use and lack of transit coverage to new suburban neighbourhoods, municipal authorities decided that a bus system better suited local needs.⁴¹ The end of the streetcar



Figure 4: Gottingen and Cornwallis in 1949. Public Archives of Nova Scotia, used with permission.

system dealt a heavy blow to local commercial streets such as Gottingen. The impact was not yet felt in the early 1950s, when only the higher-income Spring Garden Road district in the South End outperformed Gottingen Street as a commercial strip.⁴² Some 130 retail and commercial uses lined the main shopping corridor on Gottingen Street (between Gerrish and Cogswell): only three buildings on the strip sat empty in 1950.⁴³ One of the ten properties profiled in table 1 stood vacant where the military hospital had been demolished: plans were announced to build a tavern on the site. A barber, bank, and pharmacist operated alongside F.W. Woolworth, clothing stores, and two large movie theatres.⁴⁴ One community service worker and former area resident interviewed in 2012 nostalgically recalled Gottingen Street in the 1950s: “At Christmastime, the whole street was lit up. It looked like downtown New York. It really did ... It was amazing. It was very, very busy. It was a constantly crowded street.”⁴⁵

Despite the vibrancy of Gottingen in the 1950s, urban prospects were changing. The School for the Deaf closed around 1953, leaving the city with a large parcel of land for redevelopment. Suburban residential and commercial growth increased in Halifax by the mid-1950s. Suburban expansion reflected several factors: the postwar economic boom, a national and local housing crisis, increased prosperity and resulting prevalence of the private car, and the lack of “green-field” development sites on the peninsula.⁴⁶ Government officials and planning experts focused their efforts on how to simultaneously connect and protect inner-city neighbourhoods as the suburbs developed.

In 1955, the first car bridge across Halifax Harbour linked the urban cores of Halifax and Dartmouth from North Street, near its intersection with Gottingen. Gottingen Street became an important artery for downtown-bound traffic, raising new concerns about the availability of parking for shoppers.

The 1950s intensified discussions about deteriorating neighbourhoods, including parts of the North End.⁴⁷ During the war, the federal Advisory Committee on Reconstruction (the Curtis Committee) had “recommended broad-scale housing programs to accommodate the backlog of housing demands caused by the Depression and the war.”⁴⁸ In Halifax the Slum Clearance and Public Housing Committee worked at council’s behest through the early 1950s to identify problem areas and consider options for action.⁴⁹ Residential areas abutting Gottingen Street were identified as among the worst in the city, with terrible overcrowding and unsanitary conditions. In 1954, residents mobilized to fight rezoning that would have facilitated slum clearance of the residential area just west of Gottingen, arguing that the mixed-race area of affordable housing should be left alone.⁵⁰ Although the Maynard and Creighton residents avoided clearance, the city’s combined desire to modernize, to address housing needs, and to facilitate automobile travel would have devastating effects on the Gottingen Street commercial corridor in the decades to come.

Urban Renewal: The Decline Begins

Canada experienced simultaneous crises in the postwar period: a national housing shortage and deteriorating inner cities.⁵¹ The



Figure 5: Gottingen Street, Vogue Theatre, 1957. Public Archives of Nova Scotia, used with permission.

federal government moved first to solve the former by updating the National Housing Act (NHA) in 1944 and then forming the Central (now Canada) Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) a year later to provide “federal assistance for home-ownership housing and rental projects” via mortgage funds, direct loans, and eventually mortgage insurance.⁵² Canadian home ownership and suburban development consequently boomed over the next decade.⁵³ CMHC not only stimulated suburban residential and commercial growth, it established a comprehensive urban renewal program through various amendments to the NHA.⁵⁴ Prior to the NHA amendments, private developers had little incentive to “divert energies and capital from the buoyant suburban housing boom to the high risks of replacing pockets of substandard housing set in a dubious environment,” the inner city.⁵⁵ The 1954 NHA amendment provided federal and provincial cost-sharing for the clearance of “slum” housing replaced by new affordable or public housing.⁵⁶ The wide-ranging urban renewal policies enacted in the 1956 and 1964 NHA amendments provided financial incentives for municipalities to “preserve and protect” central business districts through land assembly.⁵⁷ The 1956 NHA enabled municipalities

to clear land that was predominantly residential either before or after redevelopment: municipalities could establish the “highest and best use for the area.”⁵⁸ Consequently, “it became possible to clear slum housing and dispose of the land for whatever use was indicated in the municipal plan for the area.”⁵⁹ The federal government also provided funding for municipalities to conduct urban renewal studies and slum identification surveys.⁶⁰ With the introduction of federal grants covering as much as 75 per cent of program costs, almost all Canadian cities enacted some sort of urban renewal over the next decade, Halifax included.⁶¹

Canadian cities rarely adopted planning regulations and land-use policies prior to the 1950s. The federally driven urban renewal program, with its financial inducements, normalized planning functions as part of municipal governance.⁶² In Halifax, politicians remained skeptical of planning but valued it as a tool to gain access to federal funds: they were anxious not to see the city left behind in the dash for modernization.⁶³ Following the 1956 revisions to federal legislation, city officials recognized that in identifying the city’s plans for redevelopment the 1945 Master Plan and the zoning by-law of 1950 provided policies that

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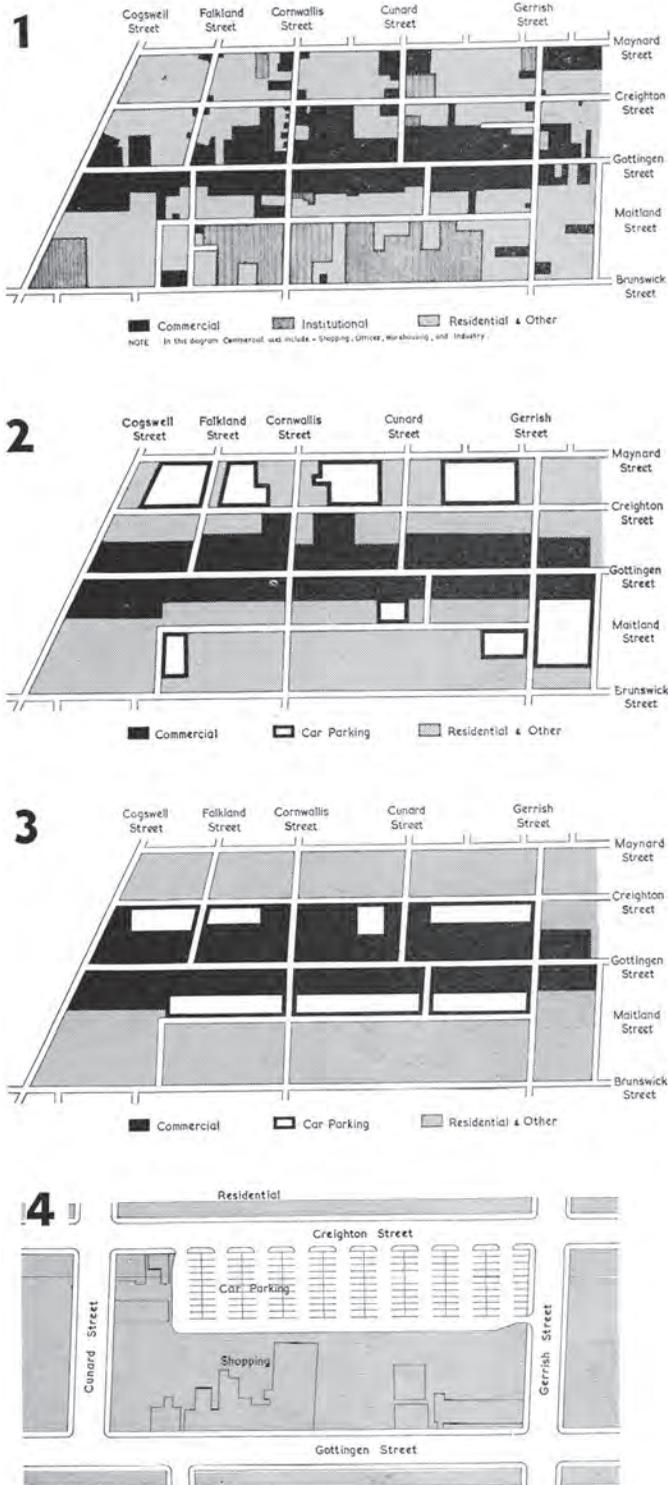


Figure 6: Stephenson's Gottingen recommendation site plan, 1957. Stephenson, 59.

qualified the city for urban renewal funding, but required expert opinion to identify areas for clearance.⁶⁴ Utilizing federal grants in 1956, City Council hired Gordon Stephenson, professor of planning from the University of Toronto, to conduct a housing and redevelopment study of Halifax's inner urban neighbourhoods.⁶⁵ Stephenson described some of Halifax's older, tight-knit, built form—much in the inner North End—as a slum and a hazard: “The time is ripe for urban redevelopment and improvement, in which many of the bad results of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century vicissitudes may be removed.”⁶⁶ Some houses west of Gottingen, however, Stephenson suggested could be rehabilitated with private investment.⁶⁷

Stephenson, like most modernist planning experts of the era, employed demographic descriptors and social measures to evaluate the physical environment. He gave easy solutions to restoring physical, social, and moral order: clear blight and separate land uses.⁶⁸ Stephenson recommended radical change for the northern downtown.⁶⁹ Although he praised the commercial vitality of Gottingen Street (see figure 5), he proposed replacing mixed-use areas with zones for defined uses. Stephenson associated physical age and deterioration not only with fire and safety concerns but with social and moral decay.⁷⁰ The areas of greatest worry were near the urban centre: southern portions of the North End (east of Gottingen) and the north part of the downtown. Stephenson recommended clearing 8.8 acres.⁷¹ Recommended redevelopment projects for the cleared areas included large commercial uses, high-density residential complexes, and parking lots.⁷² Stephenson made specific recommendations for Gottingen Street. He described Gottingen's commercial corridor as an asset to strengthen through zoning, suburban-style shopping centre building forms, and better access and parking for cars (figure 6).⁷³

Many of Halifax's political leaders and residents saw urban renewal as a way to obliterate “an obnoxious and embarrassing slum.”⁷⁴ Widespread faith in the solutions Stephenson put forward is evidenced by the speed with which council and staff moved on urban renewal. Between 1958 and 1963 the city acquired and cleared almost seventeen acres of land in the northern downtown, dubbed the Central Redevelopment Area (CRA). The vast tract, just south of the Gottingen Street commercial corridor, remained vacant until 1967, when construction began on Scotia Square, a superbloc shopping and office complex development.⁷⁵ In downtown Halifax, large development projects covered several city blocks, replacing street grid patterns that had changed little since the eighteenth century. Large downtown redevelopment projects, oriented towards the automobile and suburban-style shopping, competed directly with Gottingen Street retail uses in subsequent decades. Clearance and redevelopment of the CRA had significant implications for the vitality of the Gottingen neighbourhood.⁷⁶

Residents displaced by downtown clearing generally moved far from Gottingen Street, but Halifax used federal funds to build new public housing complexes to house some of those displaced. Mulgrave Park opened well north of Gottingen's

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commercial corridor in 1962. The city cleared thirty-one acres of old housing and the School for the Deaf to build Uniacke Square and associated facilities (library, post office, community centre, and school).⁷⁷ With 250 social housing units developed in 1966, Uniacke Square abutted Gottingen's commercial strip at its northeast.⁷⁸ A significant portion of Uniacke Square's original tenants came from Africville, an African Nova Scotian community cleared by the City of Halifax in the late 1960s.⁷⁹ Urban renewal funding provided the means for transforming the area: in the political context of the times, the North End was identified as an appropriate location for housing lower income (and often African Nova Scotian) residents at higher densities.

As Stephenson tabled his report before council in 1957, Gottingen Street's commercial corridor thrived. The 1960s started well for some of Gottingen Street's premiere commercial uses: table 1 shows that many businesses from 1950 were still strong, and a new tavern had opened. In 1960, anchored by F.W. Woolworth, Kline's, and Rubin's, 138 commercial uses operated on Gottingen, 8 more than in 1950.⁸⁰ "Necessity" uses still operated on the street, including the Royal Bank and three other financial institutions that opened by 1960. In 1965, a Sobeys's supermarket opened directly across from the North End Library, near the public housing complex.

After its "amputation from the CBD" through the urban renewal program, however, Gottingen Street began a precipitous decline.⁸¹ Following clearance of dense residential neighbourhoods between the downtown and Gottingen Street, population—and, therefore, customer base—declined rapidly. In a single decade, the neighbourhood lost approximately 5200 residents, or 42 per cent of its 1950 total population. The downtown overall dropped almost half of its 1950 population.⁸² The number of retail and commercial uses on Gottingen's commercial corridor diminished to ninety-five in 1970, with thirty-five fewer retailers than a decade earlier.⁸³ F.W. Woolworth, the venerable department store, closed and was replaced by a discount shoe store. Rubin's shut its doors, replaced by a pharmacy. The 1970s marked a transition in Gottingen Street's trajectory: this was the first in a series of decades in which the number of community / social services increased, while commercial and retail activity decreased.

The 1960s and 1970s represented a remarkable period of suburban and residential and commercial growth in the Halifax region. Rapid suburban expansion depended on several factors: the 1963 Regional Housing Survey's recommendations for infrastructure expansion to accommodate projected population growth;⁸⁴ inexpensive and accessible land; the 1975 Regional Development Plan proposals for satellite communities; few development controls or restrictions on suburban development; construction of a second harbour bridge; and new provincial highways and ring roads to facilitate vehicular traffic flow throughout the region.⁸⁵ Eighty per cent of residential and commercial development occurred in the periphery of the metropolitan region during the 1970s.⁸⁶ Many shopping malls appeared in suburban areas between 1956 and 1980.⁸⁷ Council advocated

commercial, office, and hotel development downtown with the "naïve assumption that it was possible to simultaneously restore the downtown to its former dominant position ... while unquestioningly promoting the construction of large regional malls in the suburbs."⁸⁸ Areas such as Gottingen paid the price of suburban commercial growth and modernization.

The final project executed during Halifax's urban renewal era—major traffic improvements—completed Gottingen Street's isolation. To increase traffic flow through the downtown, traffic engineers proposed a multi-lane freeway, Harbour Drive, along Halifax's waterfront to run the length of the peninsula. The Cogswell Interchange, completed in 1973 to control traffic in and out of downtown, was the first phase of freeway implementation. Located south east of Gottingen Street, the interchange covered ten acres and dramatically altered street patterns that previously connected the North End with downtown.⁸⁹ Public concerns about heritage destruction and the effects of urban renewal eventually halted progress on Harbour Drive: council cancelled the freeway.⁹⁰ The interchange became an obtrusive reminder of Halifax's urban renewal era. Meanwhile, improvements to Barrington Street rerouted downtown traffic to and from the bridges, bypassing Gottingen Street.

Gottingen's days as a fine-grained commercial corridor serving a dense working-class urban neighbourhood came to an end after the 1960s. By the 1970s, the neighbourhood was a low-rent district with a concentration of public housing, a growing number of affordable cooperative and non-profit housing projects, and a smattering of rooming houses. Storefronts increasingly housed pawn shops or low-end retailers, or stood empty.⁹¹ A local planning and design professional interviewed recalled the significant transformation of the Gottingen Street corridor and the impact it had on residents: "What was evident was that the place had become insulated from the rest of the city. Very one-dimensional in terms of who lived there. I mean there was diversity within it, but economically speaking, it was one-dimensional. And more or less it was cast adrift."⁹²

Significant national and local criticism of slum clearance and large-scale public housing projects from community groups, activists, and scholars led the provincial government to provide a greater role for public participation in planning through the 1969 Planning Act.⁹³ Federal authorities also noted the backlash against urban renewal. The amended National Housing Act of 1973 refocused legislation to support affordable housing schemes while reducing commitments to urban renewal and public housing.⁹⁴ With a new emphasis on rehabilitating distressed areas, the Neighbourhood Improvement Program and the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program spent almost \$3.5 million in the Gottingen Street area.⁹⁵ Despite improvements to some of the housing stock and street beautification measures, which contributed to a wave of gentrification, the programs had little effect on the declining commercial status of the street.

By 1980, the city directory showed that Gottingen had twenty fewer retail uses than in 1970 and the next year's census

indicated 1500 fewer residents in the neighbourhood: by contrast, Gottingen had more than doubled the number of community services (including transient shelters and legal aid services).⁹⁶ For the first time in the twentieth century, the increase in the number of vacant buildings and lots outperformed commercial growth on Gottingen's corridor.⁹⁷ A long-time Gottingen Street resident interviewed in 2012 recalled the decline: "Basically from about 1980 on was this absolute deterioration ... [Before] I mean everything was there. It was a completely organic intact economic unit: a poor one but completely organic. So just slowly everything started disappearing. The banks left, and this and that, and the Sobey's left. You know, there were empty lots. And I mean it was just horrific."⁹⁸

Another of Gottingen Street's primary clothing goods stores, Kline's, closed by 1980. The Vogue Theatre shut in the 1970s, became the Cove Cinema by 1980, and a nightclub by mid-decade. The North End Community Health Centre opened on the site of Rubin's Men's Wear, to become a landmark community service. Perhaps the biggest loss to the community was the closure of the supermarket in 1985.⁹⁹

The presence of the large low-income population housed in Uniacke Square and nearby co-op and non-profit housing affected the perception of Gottingen Street throughout the 1970s and 1980s. A growing drug culture and associated criminality left impoverished neighbourhoods increasingly stigmatized. The 1980s brought neoliberal policies to federal and provincial governments, leading to straightened circumstances for those living with poverty. Community and church groups struggled to fill the gaps in social services, while politicians turned to other issues. The concentration of affordable housing projects near Gottingen's commercial corridor facilitated clustering of community services that may have been unwelcome in other neighbourhoods in the city but proved essential in the North End.¹⁰⁰ A predominantly visible minority and low-income population increased fears amongst would-be shoppers on Gottingen Street. The social stigma of public housing, mixed with a documented history of prejudice against African Nova Scotians and Aboriginals, marked Gottingen Street as a dangerous, low-income service street.¹⁰¹ Those interviewed for the research, especially people involved in the social service sector, noted that local business owners often blamed the community service clientele and residents of Uniacke Square for driving customers away.¹⁰² Local media also highlighted the perception of a commercial street in decline: "Some local businesses blame Uniacke Square for the area's decline. Many white Haligonians see it as a ghetto ... 'the black eye that's hurting the rest of the community.'"¹⁰³

In an apparent about-face from the urban renewal era twenty years prior—when it completed major surgery to transform Gottingen Street—the municipality took a wait-and-see approach to North End Halifax by the 1980s. Planners initiated a community plan for the northern portion of the Halifax peninsula in 1979 but never completed it.¹⁰⁴ Politicians often distanced themselves from neighbourhood issues. Some gentrification

occurred during the 1970s and 1980s, as young professionals and cultural workers bought architecturally interesting older homes on nearby streets.¹⁰⁵ With large numbers of low-income residents, sensational media coverage of local crime, and the perception that community services undermined private business success, Gottingen suffered from negative perceptions from the 1980s through the 2000s. Consequently, financial institutions seemed unwilling to provide loans for Gottingen Street developments, and developers lacked confidence to invest.¹⁰⁶

The Gottingen Street of the 1990s continued on the trajectory of the previous two decades. More uses on Gottingen's commercial corridor reoriented from providing consumer goods to community services. Describing commercial degradation on Gottingen Street, geographers Hugh Millward and Lorna Winsor found "aging buildings and a lack of major 'anchor' stores contributed to a downward spiral of retail decay."¹⁰⁷ The remaining retailers generally offered convenience goods. While the number of residents in and around Gottingen Street increased modestly by the 1990s, retail and commercial uses on the corridor dropped again by sixteen to a total of fifty-four.¹⁰⁸ Retail uses decreased to thirty-six, while thirteen community services operated on Gottingen Street.¹⁰⁹ The former site of Kline's clothing store, which held a cabaret in the 1980s, became another community service on the street as the Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre moved in to serve the growing urban Aboriginal population. The pharmacy owned by the Withrow family transferred through national pharmacy chains, from Rexall to Guardian to Pharmasave. The 1990s was the last decade for Gottingen Street's first landmark cinema, the Casino Theatre. When the Royal Bank closed in the early 1990s, the final "essential" commercial service left the corridor.

Urban Revitalization and the Resurgence in Urban Living

The Gottingen Street commercial corridor experienced the nadir of its commercial strength at the turn of the twenty-first century. In 2000, the number of retail and commercial uses was the lowest in a century, while vacant uses and lots proliferated.¹¹⁰ Community services peaked with over twenty.¹¹¹ Table 1 shows that the only commercial uses in the profiled properties by the twenty-first century were the longstanding Withrow Pharmacy and the Marquee Club. Both theatres and the drycleaners became vacant. Community services had displaced department stores, supermarkets, and theatres as landmark uses on the street. In the era of neoliberal governance and the downshifting of social welfare responsibility, health, legal, and community services became "necessity" uses for an increasingly marginalized local population.

By mid-decade, however, census data began to hint at a resurgence in both population and income in the Gottingen Street area. Population growth from 2001 to 2011 outpaced that of the urban Halifax peninsula, bringing the total number of residents in the Gottingen area to its highest levels since 1980.¹¹² The Gottingen Street area's median household income grew

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faster between 2001 and 2011 than elsewhere in Halifax, while the prevalence of low-income residents, which remained the highest of census tracts on the Halifax peninsula, has rapidly decreased after 2000. Although public and non-profit housing anchored the most disadvantaged in the neighbourhood, the working-class population that once dominated the Gottingen Street area was increasingly pushed to suburban and rural neighbourhoods. North End housing became less affordable for those without high incomes or those who did not qualify for subsidized housing.¹¹³ Data from assessed property valuations of Gottingen Street commercial uses indicated a brisk rise in property values, especially since 2009.¹¹⁴ These socioeconomic indicators portray a community undergoing rapid change.

Although most commercial and residential development still occurs in Halifax's suburban areas, the apparent beginnings of a "return to the city" movement of people and capital had its roots in regional planning policy (promoting intensification and revitalization) and wider cultural and consumer preferences (defining city amenities as attractive). Given the large stock of affordable space available on Gottingen Street at the start of the twenty-first century, the commercial corridor—and the North End in general—received an influx of artists, university students, and young professionals looking for cheap, diverse, and historically rich alternatives to suburban living.¹¹⁵ Early condominium developments produced affordable ownership options within easy walking distance of the city centre. The uses on the Gottingen commercial corridor began to reflect "bohemian" or alternative cultural tastes starting in the early 2000s, with the opening of art galleries, a hostel and café, and several iterations of LGBT-inclusive bars and clubs. Gottingen Street began attracting new capital investment.

Those following the "first wave" of new residents to gentrifying areas are generally educated and affluent individuals with similar lifestyles but greater economic capital than early pioneers.¹¹⁶ The increasing popularity of inner-city living in North End Halifax follows a common redevelopment trend. The increasing prevalence of theories promoting the strengths of central cities in the "new knowledge economy"—postulated by Jane Jacobs and Richard Florida—provided the foundation for Halifax to "boost an urban agenda not previously feasible."¹¹⁷ Halifax promotes inner-city redevelopment through a "creative city" approach, highlighting its highly skilled workers and "bohemian" index rating, alongside a framework allowing increased density and mixed-use development on the Halifax peninsula.¹¹⁸ The new era of urban renewal seeks revitalization not through clearing "blight,"¹¹⁹ but by including Gottingen Street and other inner-city areas in economic growth and development. Gottingen finds itself redefined from a problem to an opportunity, from peripheral to central. Once again, the trajectory of Gottingen's commercial corridor is being altered, this time through the confluence of economic and consumer trends, and municipal policies encouraging redevelopment and greater densities.

A century after Gottingen's streetcar commercial corridor began, the street is once again developing a prominent retail strip, albeit

of a different character. With almost sixty retail and commercial uses in 2014, the Gottingen corridor showed its strongest commercial performance since the 1970s. The retail areas with the most rapid growth were food services, cafés, and fine dining. The number of specialized uses on Gottingen's commercial corridor was at its highest since the 1950s and 1960s.¹²⁰ Arts and entertainment uses were also prominent. As suburban commercial development increasingly dominated the consumer goods market, inner-city commercial districts had to specialize to remain relevant.¹²¹ On Gottingen Street in 2014, most specialized retail uses and services—especially cafés and food services—catered to those with alternative tastes.¹²² Interviews with local business owners showed that the current characterization of Gottingen Street as a unique emerging area played a significant role in decisions to operate on the corridor: "This was literally an ideal spot for us to open. Our business is geared a little more to the sort of twenty-, thirty-year-old set. We also appeal more to the arts crowd. And this is sort of like ground zero for that. I call it the centre of 'hipdom' in Halifax. And we're right in the middle of it. It's the gateway to the North End, this end of Gottingen Street."¹²³

Imagining Gottingen Street as a trendy commercial street¹²⁴ highlights the transition the street experienced over recent years. Several interview participants with long-standing connections to Gottingen Street—especially those involved in the community service sector—were cautious in categorizing the street as in transition. One explained, "You know, even twenty years ago, nobody wanted to walk up and down Gottingen Street. Nobody wanted to be here. And now it seems to be the cool place to be—or the in place. I don't know, I'm not quite sure what it is yet."¹²⁵

The unique, locally owned businesses moving to populate the corridor involve the type of commerce seen by officials as generating active street life and neighbourhood vibrancy. Table 1 illustrates dramatic changes among profiled sites on Gottingen Street since its period of commercial decline; new commercial landmarks have replaced those which once signalled the prosperity of the commercial corridor. A television studio and chic, well-designed condominiums rise on sites formerly occupied by Gottingen's movie theatres (figure 7). Among the many food and fine-dining services, EDNA Restaurant opened to replace a dry-cleaner. A non-profit theatre group took on a property that housed a pharmacy since the 1930s. Some structures remain unoccupied, while others are renovated for new uses. Despite the addition of new high-end uses, however, community services remain firmly embedded on Gottingen Street, anchored along with their clients in nearby social housing. Agencies that own the structures they occupy have no plans to relocate as the area gentrifies. Those that rent space, however, may find themselves priced off the street. Although Gottingen is once again vibrant, it has few vendors of daily necessities. In 2015 Gottingen Street has a polarized character: a cluster of low-income and largely African-Canadian residents between Cunard Street and North Street but more affluent (and predominantly white) residents in other areas; high-end food services



Figure 7: Theatre Lofts, 2014. Authors.

interspersed with social services for the area's disadvantaged residents. Several interview participants described extreme contrasts along Gottingen Street. For instance, a resident noted, "My sense is that Gottingen Street from Cornwallis to North is different than Gottingen Street from North to Young [Street]. And Gottingen Street from Cornwallis [south] is different. So there are three Gottingen Streets. Right? And that's really important. It is not a single community and it's not a single identifiable demographic."¹²⁶

The resurgence of commercial and residential development on Gottingen Street has occurred primarily on the corridor's southern portion towards downtown, away from the large public housing development. Because community services had decades to become embedded on the street, gentrification began later, moved more slowly, and is producing greater mixing than in some cities. As one interview participant observed, "All of the poverty and homelessness-related stuff is still there. It hasn't dispersed. All of the [public] housing is still there. Many of the slum rooming houses are still there. At the same time, there is this sort of gradual introduction into the neighbourhood of more upscale housing and small businesses."¹²⁷

Interview participants who worked with community services suggested that low-income and public housing residents spent little time along the Gottingen Street Commercial Corridor south of Cornwallis Street, where higher-end businesses and condominiums are sited. Conversely, several local business owners and community service operators said higher income residents and visitors hesitate to travel north of Cornwallis Street. As bohemian uses move northward, however, conditions are changing. A local owner/operator of a bohemian use spoke of the diversity of communities accommodated through the mix. "In the last five years, a lot of businesses have opened up. The Company House [bar] was another step forward, I think, in there being a cemented sense in which there's a gay community

and there's a black community and there's also now this arts community."¹²⁸

Some long-time residents spoke warily of the changing clientele and demographic makeup of Gottingen Street. One interview participant worried the shifting retail and service landscape of the Gottingen commercial corridor displaced historically rooted—and generally economically disadvantaged—residents in favour of new ones with more income to spend and new cultural tastes to satisfy. "There's nothing the matter with those places and institutions, it's just that they bear absolutely no relationship to the community. There's no organic relationship to the community. The community there ... now is not the community that was thrown out."¹²⁹

Perpetual Transitions

To what extent can the history of particular properties on specific streets help tell the story of neighbourhood transition and urban change? Gottingen's perpetual transitions reflect broader urban trends. Profiling the changing use of properties gives a sense of how, through the last century and a half, one street in a small city transitioned from a quiet residential lane, to the commercial corridor for a working-class district, to a vibrant shopping area for the northern part of downtown, to a place linked with poverty and crime, to an "edgy" arts district, and now to a gentrifying neighbourhood. Land-use history provides an intimate account of shifts in economic conditions, government interests, and residents' needs and values. Gottingen's fate reflected changing commercial activities and strategies, government interests and political priorities, transportation modes, and consumer preferences and practices.

The factors that produced vibrant commercial streets in the 1910s differed from those at play in the 1950s and from those important in the 2010s. The uses on Gottingen thus reflect wider changes in the scale, organization, and commitment of commerce. Small local vendors of 1910 eventually disappeared as national and international companies prevailed in the market. Rapid suburban growth in the late twentieth century reorganized commercial activities, leaving poorer neighbourhoods like Gottingen with diminishing opportunities. By the early twenty-first century, however, property investors identified "risky" areas such as the North End as potentially profitable, thereby facilitating retail gentrification. By 2015, Gottingen developed a commercial niche in trendy food and entertainment establishments to serve hip young residents moving into the North End. Aside from the period from the late 1920s to the mid-1980s, large enterprises rarely expressed interest in Gottingen: the street principally hosted locally based entrepreneurs.

The history of Gottingen also reveals changing political priorities and government approaches. In the early years, government's laissez-faire attitude allowed high density and permitted a wide mix of uses on the street. Investments in facilities such as the dockyards provided jobs for the working class. Later decisions to clear "slums" and to build large-scale social housing projects cemented the reputation of the area as disadvantaged.

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Government attended to the Gottingen area when funds were available for slum clearance or building public housing, but otherwise often left its needs unmet. The failure of various levels of government to provide adequate supports for disadvantaged populations brought many social services providers to a street where rents were among the lowest in the city. Today, public policies promoting revitalization and intensification provide incentives to developers to re-colonize Gottingen.

Gottingen's role in the local transportation network has consistently affected its trajectory. In its early years it was a quiet residential road with large lots occupied by affluent residents. The arrival of streetcars changed its function and character: homes were subdivided or converted. In the 1920s Gottingen benefitted from the centralizing effects of the streetcar system and bustled with a robust mix of retailers serving working-class families. In the 1950s the street was the commercial heart of the North End, although it struggled to accommodate the growing number of cars bringing shoppers to its retailers. The city adopted Gordon Stephenson's plans to provide more parking for the area, but consumers drifted away nonetheless. Urban renewal and highway development sapped Gottingen's retail pull. By the late twentieth century it was a busy bus and car route, but few passengers stopped to shop on the street.

Consumer preferences and practices invariably shape neighbourhoods and retail environments. In its early days, Gottingen relied on local residents shopping on foot for their daily needs. Growing affluence and streetcar access allowed residents to patronize department stores and specialty shops on Gottingen in the early to mid-twentieth century. As consumers increasingly chose to drive to suburban shopping centres, Gottingen's storefronts shut or accommodated lower-rent occupants: Gottingen was the place to buy used furniture or pawn goods. In the 1990s and 2000s artists moved in to set up studios, galleries, and small theatre spaces. In 2015 new wave entrepreneurs were serving lattes and haute cuisine to a new clientele looking for exotic retail locations. Gottingen's new retailers turn stigma into a proud badge of diversity and edginess.

Contemporary city planning philosophy idealizes the vibrant, mixed-use, mixed-income districts of the early twentieth century: the kind Jane Jacobs described in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.¹³⁰ Examining the trajectory of Gottingen Street reveals the commercial street as a product of its time, responding to wider trends. Revitalizing in the twenty-first century, Gottingen Street is very different from what it was a century earlier. Unlike the streets of Soho in New York or Liberty Village in Toronto, however, its gentrification is likely to remain partial: impeded by the lingering stock of public and non-profit housing that anchors a substantial low-income population in the area.¹³¹

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- 88 Bunting and Millward, “Tale of Two CBDs,” 31.
- 89 Grant, *Drama of Democracy*, 63.
- 90 Sandalack and Nicolai, *Urban Structure Halifax*, 22; Erickson, *Historic North End Halifax*, 167–8.
- 91 Might, *Halifax*, 1970, 1980.
- 92 Interview participant G02E.
- 93 Grant, *Drama of Democracy*, 52.
- 94 Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, *CMHC and the National Housing Act*, 6.
- 95 Melles, “Policy, Planning, and Neighbourhood Change,” 54.
- 96 *Ibid.*, 93, 95.
- 97 *Ibid.*, 95. Believing that one large project could act as a catalyst for redevelopment on the street, the federal government provided funds to the City of Halifax to find land to construct a new government office building on Gottingen. The city assembled several suitable tracts on Gottingen Street and cleared the lots for potential construction. The lots sat vacant for nine years until one site was finally selected. The building failed to increase business activity substantially on Gottingen Street. *Ibid.*, 81–4.
- 98 Interview participant G08E.
- 99 Might, *Halifax*, 1980, 1990.
- 100 Stephen Kimber, “Inside the Square,” *Coast*, 1 March 2007, <http://www.thecoast.ca/halifax/inside-the-square/Content?oid=960417>.
- 101 See Silver, *Uniacke Square*, 8. See also Adrienne Lucas Sehatzadeh, “A Retrospective on the Strengths of African Nova Scotian Communities: Closing Ranks to Survive,” *Journal of Black Studies* 38, no. 3 (2008): 407–12.
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- 105 David Ley, *The New Middle Class and the Remaking of the Central City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Hugh Millward and Donna Davis, “Housing Renovation in Halifax: ‘Gentrification’ or ‘Incumbent Upgrading’?” *Plan Canada* 26 (1986): 148–55.
- 106 Melles, “Policy, Planning, and Neighbourhood Change,” 118.
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- 115 David Ley, “Artists, Aestheticisation, and the Field of Gentrification,” *Urban Studies* 40, no. 12 (2003): 2527–54; see also Zukin, *Loft Living*.
- 116 Bridge and Dowling, “Microgeographies of Retailing,” 205.
- 117 Jill L. Grant, Robyn Holme, and Aaron Pettman, “Global Theory and Local Planning Practice in Halifax: The Seaport Redevelopment,” *Planning Practice and Research* 23, no. 4 (2008): 517. See also Jacobs, *Death and Life*; Jane Jacobs, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations* (New York: Random House); Florida, *Rise of the Creative Class*.
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- 120 Popular media coverage of the current commercial resurgence on Gottingen Street often nostalgically recalls the heyday of the

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- 121 Millward and Winsor, “Twentieth-Century Retail Change,” 195.
- 122 See Deener, *Venice*; Ley, “Artists, Aestheticisation and the Field of Gentrification”; and Jason Patch, “The Embedded Landscape of Gentrification,” *Visual Studies* 19, no. 2 (2004): 169–86.
- 123 Interview participant G04B (emphasis added).
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- 126 Interview participant G08E.
- 127 Interview participant G02E.
- 128 Interview participant G07B.
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