

## *Planning Toronto: The Planners, The Plans, Their Legacies, 1940-1980* by Richard White

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Volume 109, numéro 1, spring 2017

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1039204ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1039204ar>

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### Éditeur(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

### ISSN

0030-2953 (imprimé)

2371-4654 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

### Citer ce compte rendu

Temby, O. (2017). Compte rendu de [*Planning Toronto: The Planners, The Plans, Their Legacies, 1940-1980* by Richard White]. *Ontario History*, 109(1), 141–143.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1039204ar>

unusual book together. As such, it would be of interest and benefit not only to those interested in this history and ethnography of the community and its residents, but also to those either engaged in linguistic

research, or in the process of learning the language itself.

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*Planning Toronto: The Planners, The Plans,  
Their Legacies, 1940-1980*

by Richard White

Vancouver, British Columbia: UBC Press, 2016. 464 pages. \$50.00 hardcover. ISBN 978-0-7748-2935-9 (ubcpres.com)

Richard White has written a remarkable new book on the history of Toronto's postwar planning. The central thrust of his analysis is that, in the period of rapid postwar growth and heightened faith in government and technology, Toronto undertook a halting attempt at modernizing its infrastructure to accommodate the city's increasing population and demands associated with rising economic prosperity. Beginning during the Second World War, and accelerating after the creation of Metropolitan Toronto in 1954, professional planners articulated a comprehensive vision of the city in which land uses were separated within the city and between it and its surrounding area, neighbourhoods were creatively shaped with cul-de-sacs and large open spaces, high rise apartments were built in park-like plots, and accommodations were made for the increased use of automobiles. Yet during the late 1960s, substantial resistance to this approach materialized, namely, the "reform" era of planning. It rejected both the processes and outcome of postwar planning, advocating for local citizen participation instead of technocratic management, repurposing of existing buildings instead of demolition and replacement, mid rise residences instead of high rise apartments,



and an end to thoroughfare construction. White points out that this lefty critique of expert-led modernization was insidiously conservative. Its valorization of neighbourhood participation in decision making and general expectation of public consultation spelled the end of comprehensive planning. A "paradigm" shift thus occurred in Toronto's planning. Its objectives fundamentally changed from, initially, accommodating

the demands of the public through infrastructural transformation to, in the new paradigm, social engineering incentivizing certain types of activity over others (e.g., encouraging commuting by bicycle or public transportation instead of building new highways) within the extant urban fabric.

White (not to be confused with of American environmental historian of the same name) is a freelance historian who presently teaches Canadian history as a lecturer at the University of Toronto. He had previously researched nineteenth-century Canadian engineers, culminating in his first book, *Gentlemen Engineers: The Working Lives of Frank and Walter Shanly*. Sometime between completing his doctoral dissertation at the University of Toronto in 1995, and the publication of his first book, he developed a “layman’s curiosity,” he says, about the history of the physical form of the city for which he had lived for more than a decade. This led him to discover the academic specialty of “planning history,” and work as a researcher at a Toronto-based foundation focused on Canadian urban issues. White refashioned himself into an expert on Toronto’s planning history. *Planning Toronto* is the outcome of this decade and a half research project, and White’s ostensive *magnum opus*.

The historical arc White presents is nothing novel to specialists of planning history. White’s contribution is the extensive fleshing out of Toronto’s experience during this period and its embodiment of the larger phenomenon occurring elsewhere. He shows that Toronto’s planners sought to build the city of the future through studies and plans aimed at rationally distributing growth across the urban area and specifying the infrastructure necessary to make it happen. This worked with some success at the city government level and was a spectacular failure at the regional scale (a planning

effort including the counties surrounding Toronto). But for Metropolitan Toronto, the municipal federation, planning efforts were efficacious, and their legacy includes Toronto’s ravine parks, lake-piped infrastructure, and high suburban residential density. White shows how this happened, and how the process of metropolitan planning came to a halt.

The account provides rich material for White’s thoughtful meditations on urban governance issues like the meaning of modernism, conservatism, and, that persistent Gordian knot, expert-led technocratic versus democratic and inclusive management. His incisive political observations indicate a mature grasp of the nuances of urban planning and politics. This is perhaps this is why White’s narrative displays a curious trait, namely, an evident empathy with, and admiration for, Toronto’s planners for the full duration of the study—even though the different generations of planners disagreed on central questions. Illustrative is White’s indelible defence of the planners who made Toronto’s suburbs, which he describes as having been “the preferred urban form for most forward-thinking people,” the planning of which “included a good measure of both logic and social progressivism” (p. 93).

White’s placement of Toronto’s development in the Western postwar context, and use of planning to present other events—like the formation of Metro Toronto or the counter-culture movement—make this an engaging read. He is particularly adept at tying together scholarly literatures and contemporaneous strands of political thought, highlighting convergences and divergences that had implications for planning efforts and outcomes. To provide one example, in his account of regional planning during the 1960s to mid-1970s, he expatiates its intellectual

and political roots. Regional geography, the scholarly subject, and government interest in regional development intersected to influence planning in Toronto and its surrounding geographical areas. White's account of how these discourses became relevant in Toronto not only lends the book applicability outside the city, but also underscores Toronto's place in within the broader trajectory of planning history.

Over the book's five chapters, the narrative unfolds as an utterly potent and interesting angle with which to explore the city's broader history. The successes and failures of past planning efforts, and their ideological underpinning, reveal how we got to where we are and offer a glimpse at

the constraints with which future efforts will contend. Thus, to call this book a monumental accomplishment in the academic nooks of Ontario history or planning history would insufficiently represent its contemporary relevance and potential appeal. *Planning History* merits wide readership. I hope that Toronto's elected officials and career civil servants count as many among them. The lessons of Toronto's history are presented too eloquently, and too pointedly, to ignore.

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### *Fields of Authority: Special Purpose Governance in Ontario, 1815-2015*

by Jack Lucas

IPAC Series in Public Management and Governance.

Toronto, Ontario: U of T Press, 2016. 320 pages. \$65.00 hardcover. ISBN 9781487500184. ([www.utpress.utoronto.ca](http://www.utpress.utoronto.ca))

Institutional change is often a slow process that takes place on a timescale perhaps comparable to a glacier; “taken individually, political institutions often seem solid as granite, unmoved and unchanging for decades” (3-4). In *Fields of Authority*, Jack Lucas turns his attention to a particular type of political institution that is responsible for many of the public services Canadians have come to expect and take for granted: the special purpose body, more commonly known in the field of public administration as “agencies, boards, and commissions” or ABCs. To extend Lucas’ geology metaphor, special purpose bodies are responsible for managing many of the types of public goods and services that form the bedrock of society: park boards, conservation agencies, school boards, boards of

health, and hydro power commissions are just a few examples. So ubiquitous are these institutions and so wide-ranging are their responsibilities that they have somehow managed to attract little scholarly attention. Perhaps the lack of study stems from the assumption that these institutions have always existed largely unchanged. In any case, as Lucas asserts, “when we step back the magnification, so that we can see many institutions at once we soon realize that Canadian institutions, like all others, float atop a roiling sea of change” (4).

*Fields of Authority* is an impressive work that fills a gap on a subject that has otherwise received little attention. Both a history of special purpose governance in Ontario and an examination of institutional change, Lucas uses special purpose bod-