

CCPA – Nova Scotia Student Essay Contest (Undergraduate Winner)

The Voices of Downtown Dartmouth: A study of urban decay and renewal

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Abstract

Urban decay and renewal have been studied in the North American context for about a century, most notably by urban studies pioneer Jane Jacobs. This paper examines the most prominent theories of urban decay and renewal that are relevant to my case study of downtown Dartmouth. My qualitative research, determines how accurate the prominent theories of urban decay and renewal are, and if there are any major elements missing. Most importantly, I uncover opinions often unheard from community members with different backgrounds and ideologies, including residents, former politicians, non-profit organizers, businesspeople, and municipal planners. When it comes to urban renewal, an almost inevitable occurrence is gentrification. What my case study of downtown Dartmouth demonstrates is that urban decay and renewal does follow many of the prominent structural theories; however, the hostility that can unfairly push lower-income residents out is less from big business and developers, and more from a stronghold of conservative long-term residents and local politicians who have been a powerful force in local politics, implementing zoning policies based on conservative values and even discriminatory thinking.

What makes a once vibrant and growing city suddenly decay into a city with a poor reputation? What makes this decaying city suddenly spring into renewal? Who makes development decisions? Or, are urban decay and renewal inevitable effects of capitalist forces and global trends? The use of downtown cores in North American cities has transformed since the early twentieth century, when downtowns were a mix of residences and large industries. This completely changed in the mid-twentieth century, when industries failed to keep up with global competitors or were moved to peripheral business parks for more space. Along with the removal of industries came the suburban dream where families wanted a large home away from dirty industries and with ample land, safe for their children to play. Downtown cores were hollowed out. But at the start of the twenty-first century, we are again seeing the rise of the downtown core as the place to live. There are so many layers to urban decay and renewal and it is fascinating how one urban centre can grow and shrink and grow again, and how these changes can engender significant controversy.

The analysis of urban decay and renewal is not a new area of study, but it is both exciting and controversial. Downtown Dartmouth, Nova Scotia has undergone the massive transformations of a rising city to decay, back to a state of renewal. Much can be learned about the decay and renewal of an urban core by speaking with those involved on the ground, rather than just the politicians or urban planners. This is what makes this analysis valuable to urban studies. I interviewed community members from various backgrounds to understand the trends of decay and renewal. I believe the voices of individuals without stature can often be left out of policy

planning and making. It is important to research what they can add to already existing theories of urban decay and renewal.

Although the decay and renewal of downtown Dartmouth does follow prominent urban theories, the gentrification that is occurring seems to be caused not only by obvious structural forces, but also by more subtle cultural forces. The conservative mindset of long-term residents who desire little change to their community, a lack of transparency from the local government, policies based around some discrimination, and little help for lower-income residents seem to be the major problem areas of the urban renewal of downtown Dartmouth. Current policies are ultimately negatively affecting lower-income residents the greatest.

Part One: From Success to Slump

What was once a bustling town full of young families and successful manufacturing industries suffered a major downfall in the mid-twentieth century. In recent decades, Dartmouth has had a poor reputation for problems stereotypically related to lower-income populations such as homelessness, crime, and addictions (not to say these problems are isolated to lower-income populations). Until the past few years, downtown Dartmouth supplied ample cheap housing. Recent developments, however, including two large upscale condominiums called King's Wharf, other more upscale townhouses nearby, more expensive coffee shops and restaurants, a higher-end hair salon and spa, and an upward surge in cost of housing all indicate that downtown Dartmouth is undergoing urban renewal. The transformations that have occurred and are currently taking place, as well as the fact that I grew up in downtown Dartmouth and have seen the transformations first

hand, are the reasons I am using this location as a case study for examining and applying theories of urban decay and renewal.

“The Fastest Growing Town in Canada”

Downtown Dartmouth began growing steadily after the establishment of Halifax in the mid-nineteenth century. With its proximity to Halifax, downtown Dartmouth was a convenient location to settle for those starting large industries that would serve the growing city of Halifax. Employment in the variety of industries, as well as the location of the Marine Slips on Dartmouth Cove, were major reasons for expansive settlement in the downtown Dartmouth area.

Downtown Dartmouth contained everything from one of the continent’s most famous skate manufacturing companies (Starr Manufacturing), the Acadia Sugar Refinery, Plymouth Cordage, to the Dominion Molasses Company, which all supplied goods for Dartmouth residents, the greater city of Halifax, and even much of the Maritimes (Chapman 2001, 268-271). The Marine Slips were also located in the downtown Dartmouth area, employing hundreds of workers. These industries were central to downtown Dartmouth’s growth. To accommodate the increasing number of residents, Portland Street and the surrounding area grew to accommodate everything the residents needed. There was a movie theatre, men’s and women’s clothing stores, a furniture store, a jewelry store, and other essential businesses for the community (Chapman 2001, 268-271).

An August census of 1950 to 1955 reported a growth rate of Dartmouth at four hundred per cent over previous accounts with a population of 20,000 residents (Chapman 2001, 369). At this time, Dartmouth was considered “the fastest growing

town in Canada” (Chapman 2001, 369). Downtown Dartmouth was bustling and vibrant, with active aquatic clubs on Lake Banook, skating on Sullivan’s Pond in winter, increasing enrollment at the local schools, and an expanding Dartmouth newspaper, the *Dartmouth Free Press* (Chapman 2001, 374).

Fifty Years of Decay

The second half of the twentieth century is not a story of such growth and prosperity for downtown Dartmouth. Market forces such as streamlining of manufacturing, as well as increased worldwide competition, put financial strains on the once successful Dartmouth industries, forcing them to downsize and then ultimately close. Business trends also changed with shopping centres and industrial parks becoming the norm, where businesses could expand and shoppers could get everything they needed in one building. This drained the downtown streets of their shops and industries. Suburbanization, as well as the closures of old downtown schools, played some part in the decline of downtown Dartmouth as well. Long-term residents’ desire to keep downtown Dartmouth the way it was also played a role in why there were so few new developments happening in downtown Dartmouth. A unique circumstance downtown Dartmouth dealt with, which also had an impact on the area’s demographics, was the deinstitutionalization of those living with mental illnesses and intellectual disabilities at the Nova Scotia Hospital in Woodside, just outside of Dartmouth in the 1970s and 1980s.

Global market forces caused the streamlining of factory work and strengthened competition from foreign competitors. This affected almost all mom-and-pop businesses and local industries, including those in downtown Dartmouth.

Starr Manufacturing, which was most famous for its skate production, could no longer compete with cheaper American and German skates. An early harbinger of the decay of downtown Dartmouth was the closure of the skate division of Starr Manufacturing in 1939 (Chapman 2001, 271). In 1956, the Dominion Molasses Company was purchased by two Halifax businessmen, who streamlined the operation: "The company was doing brisk business in Ontario and the western provinces" requiring less work in the Dartmouth plant (Chapman 2001, 367). In 1957, Plymouth Cordage on Wyse Road closed after ninety years of business due to labour costs being more expensive locally: "Labour costs on foreign rope products imported locally were estimated at \$0.35 an hour compared to local labour costs of \$1.50 an hour" (Chapman 2001, 373). These are just some examples of how difficult it was for local industries to compete with foreign companies and how difficult it was to keep employees with extensive streamlining of production.

A desire for more space was also a trend that would negatively affect the shopping district of downtown Dartmouth. When factories and businesses wanted to expand, they eventually had to move out of their original spaces in the downtown area. They often moved to industrial parks, such as Woodside and Burnside, or newly built shopping centres. A downtown core of small shops became a thing of the past. With the completion of the Angus L. Macdonald Bridge in 1955, the first shopping centre in all of the Maritimes was planned for the Dartmouth side of the bridge and construction began in 1957. The convenience of a shopping centre with its free and ample parking was a hit: "The novel one-stop-shopping approach to retail merchandising was the beginning of the end to downtown Dartmouth as the

retail centre of the community” (Chapman 2001, 363). As exciting as this was, the downside was the draining of businesses from Portland Street. The logic of the market is a structural force that spurred the hollowing out of the downtown core. (Jacobs 1992 & Harris 2004).

Another indicator of decay in downtown Dartmouth was the changing demographic from young middle and upper-class families to a rising number of seniors and low-income families. These indicators of decay can, again, be explained by a structural argument of changing tastes playing a large role in the decay of a city, as William Alonso (1964) explained. This seems to be a factor in why downtown Dartmouth’s population began aging and hollowing out. Don Chard, a former member of the Halifax Regional School Board and former Member of the Legislature for Dartmouth South (which encompasses downtown Dartmouth) argues the downtown area no longer met the interests of young families. He argues, in line with the structural arguments of William Alonso, that families wanted single-family homes with yards. New family-friendly housing with space that families could get outside of the downtown core was not abundant in downtown Dartmouth. Families also liked the idea of small schools with close-knit communities. In the mid-twentieth century, the older downtown schools were closed, as was shared by Don Chard. The old Dartmouth High School was located downtown on Ochterloney Street in the historical Greenvale building, but was eventually moved in 1958 to a newer and more modern building on the corner of Thistle Street and Victoria Road, closer to north Dartmouth (Chapman 2001, 375).

Not having the family-friendly environment downtown led to an aging

population in downtown Dartmouth. Dennis Pilkey (2013), a member of the Public Good Society of Dartmouth wrote a discussion paper, which outlines the decline of Dartmouth's population and housing, as well as the challenges they face with a demographic quite different from the rest of the Halifax Regional Municipality. Pilkey examines Dartmouth Centre, which encompasses a slightly broader range than the downtown Dartmouth area I am examining. Over the past twenty years, the population of Dartmouth has declined by six per cent while the Halifax Regional Municipality grew twenty-six per cent over the same time period (Pilkey 2012, 7). Pilkey's statistics show that seniors make up a large proportion of the Dartmouth Centre population, and many of them live alone (Pilkey 2012, 9). The population is seeing a major decline and challenges in comparison to the rest of the Halifax Regional Municipality: "There are many people living alone, especially seniors, and there are more single parent families existing on low incomes. In fact, incomes for all categories are lower than the earnings of those in the HRM. There is a large part of the population not even in the work force" (Pilkey 2012, iii).

The inclinations of downtown Dartmouth residents were also a structural force that inhibited development in their neighbourhoods. Mitch Dickey, a planner for the Halifax Regional Municipality's Planning and Development Services, who primarily focuses on the planning of Dartmouth, illuminated a major structural force that has inhibited growth in downtown Dartmouth. According to Dickey, here are three powerful groups in downtown Dartmouth when it comes to its development: conservative long-time residents, progressive residents concerned with social justice, and business-oriented residents. From Dickey's experience, the only thing

these three groups can agree on in terms of development is design and aesthetics. The conservative long-time residents of downtown Dartmouth are concerned with the height of new buildings in the downtown business core. This has to do with sight-lines to the harbour and concerns about the community character changing. As Dickey puts it, whenever there are public consultations about development proposals, the topic of height “becomes the lightning rod.” The force of this group has protected the downtown core from high buildings thus far and causes developments to occur in a sprawling fashion. Prior to 2000, the policies surrounding development in downtown Dartmouth were actually anti-development. Dickey discussed how it was very difficult to develop high-density housing because there was “a perception among some that such housing leads to higher crime rates.” However, as Dickey notes, “there is no empirical evidence of crime resulting from development... So the crime concern is usually a standard response from people who just oppose community change.” Dickey stated that only since 2000 has higher-density housing been encouraged in downtown Dartmouth (only in the commercial core), but the conservative group of long-time residents continues to be a powerful stakeholder.

From the above reasons, downtown Dartmouth’s decay was quite typical. Market forces of manufacturing streamlining and competition, and tastes for single-family homes in more suburban neighbourhoods are global trends that few old North American cities could escape. Long-time residents’ hostility towards change in their downtown neighbourhoods is not necessarily surprising either. Downtown Dartmouth does, however, have a unique circumstance that many believe also

played a role in the decay of the area. In the 1970s and 1980s, a move to deinstitutionalize those living with mental illnesses and intellectual disabilities was on the rise. The Nova Scotia Hospital, once called the Mount Hope Asylum for the Insane, was established in 1868 as a psychiatric hospital just outside of downtown Dartmouth, in Woodside (Simpson 1983, 8-11).

Until the 1970s and 1980s, people with mental illnesses and intellectual disabilities lived in this institution and were not well integrated within a real neighbourhood. The move to deinstitutionalize and integrate people with mental illnesses and intellectual disabilities into the community seemed like a positive step in terms of inclusion and offering more possibilities for independent living. However, the deinstitutionalization of patients from the Nova Scotia Hospital was done poorly, according to most of my interviewees, who witnessed it. It is common knowledge in downtown Dartmouth that many of these people were boarded in the rooming houses of slumlords. As Bev Cadham, Program Coordinator and Branch Manager of Among Friends Social Club, notes:

[T]he landlords were not really maintaining their properties... because I guess they probably didn't feel they had to. They were guaranteed an income anyways because all the money came from Community Services, so whether they kept them up, it didn't matter. They were just always going to be occupied. They were unsightly. They were a health hazard.

The fact that residents were taken advantage of by slumlords was not the only problem that came with the deinstitutionalization of patients from the Nova

Scotia Hospital. There was generally not enough support in the community for these people to be living independently and they were often left to wander the area with little to do. Some even succumbed to homelessness, as Chard recalls. Another common story was how the mixing of these residents into apartment buildings that were predominantly populated by seniors in the downtown area created problems. When Don Chard served as the Member of Legislature in 1998, he heard many stories similar to this:

Alderney Manor was intended, I think, as a senior's building, but the social services people were apparently moving other populations into the building. So you had people there who had perhaps been discharged from the Nova Scotia Hospital and if they were taking their medications, they might be fine, but they might stop taking their medications and then start having problems. And I was hearing stories about old ladies who were living in an apartment there. They'd be woken up at two o'clock in the morning because their next-door neighbour had run out of cigarettes.

The patients who were deinstitutionalized from the Nova Scotia Hospital could have had a positive experience integrating into a residential community. Unfortunately, there was inadequate support in the form of proper small options housing (where those with mental illnesses or intellectual disabilities can live in a regular home with a small number of people who are taken care of by support workers or caregivers) or other types of more independent living that provides

various supports. This is why it became common to see many mentally ill people in downtown Dartmouth, and from a first glance, what seemed to be many homeless people panhandling or biding time around the different downtown streets.

Slum landlords also housed major drug production and dealers, which was also common knowledge to the public. As Cadham recalls, “There were crack houses working out of those rooming houses. There were always drug busts.” Many who lived in the area or visited were somewhat scared of the population of mentally ill, homeless, those with addictions, and drug dealers. However, this massive demographic shift could have been avoided if the deinstitutionalization process had been done more carefully and more proper housing options had been planned.

For some time, downtown Dartmouth’s streets, once vibrant and active with young families and successful businesses, became a true example of a decaying city. As Cadham puts it, “It was quite an active little community and then it kind of fizzled and there was a lot of businesses people opened up that people weren’t exactly pleased with,” including a strip club. There was also a Hell’s Angels club organized in the area for some time, a drug paraphernalia store, and a few bars that still exist, among the few more typically family-friendly businesses like Fisher’s Stationary, Janet’s Flower Shop, multiple bank branches, a drug store, and the Alderney Gate Public Library.

All Adds Up to Structure

The decay of downtown Dartmouth can best be explained by the structural theories argued by theorists such as Jane Jacobs, Richard Harris, and William Alonso, where they believe tastes, market forces, and the culture of a population plays a

large role in the development of a city. What makes the decay of downtown Dartmouth unique is the circumstance of deinstitutionalizing patients from the Nova Scotia Hospital and the attempt to integrate them into the downtown Dartmouth community. This unique circumstance of a substantial proportion of the population having mental illnesses and intellectual disabilities may also play a significant role in the examination of downtown Dartmouth's renewal process.

Part Two: A Layered Renewal Process in Downtown Dartmouth

Since 2000, downtown Dartmouth has undergone a process of renewal spurred by policy changes that are more supportive of new developments. The aesthetic changes to buildings and the developments of upscale condominiums are the most visible changes to downtown Dartmouth in the past decade. There are more businesses in the downtown area, and these new businesses are a new *type* of business. There is also a shift in the demographic of those who work and live downtown. With the new attractions of downtown Dartmouth come increasing housing costs. All of these characteristics of downtown Dartmouth are positive indicators of renewal.

The reasons for renewal relate back to the structural theories explained in the decay of downtown Dartmouth. These forces are changing trends, environmental concerns, market forces, and political agendas and the power of the municipal government. There have been notable setbacks to the renewal process. There is a wide array of people in downtown Dartmouth who have contrasting needs and wants for their community. While some of the developments and development plans have been well-received by the community, a large proportion of the community has

also been concerned about gentrification and the changing community character. Besides these indicators of renewal, I also examine whether the policies for urban renewal in downtown Dartmouth, are sufficiently inclusive, fair, thoughtful, and long-term oriented.

Ten Years of Transformation

What began as incremental and unnoticeable change in the area has boomed into a total transformation in the past five years or so. In the early stages of downtown Dartmouth's development, a condominium was built here or there, but little fuss was made of it. Many wondered: "Who would buy a condo in downtown Dartmouth?" Now, the environment of downtown Dartmouth is friendly to business developers, artists, real estate agents, and wealthy "empty-nesters." Aesthetic changes, such as more attention paid to the streetscape, newer buildings, and businesses with enhanced décor, are obvious indicators of renewal in downtown Dartmouth. With aesthetic changes come a demographic that is attracted to the area. This leads to rising housing costs. Among these obvious structural forces are more subtle structural forces such as the cultural norms and values that influence local politicians in the municipal government who have played a large role in the decay and renewal of downtown Dartmouth. The politicians' culturally shaped values and the trend of politicians trying to please those with the most clout are at the centre of their decision-making, even though this may not be politicians' intent.

At first hand, if downtown Dartmouth prior to 2000 is compared with downtown Dartmouth in 2014, there are many aesthetic transformations, which tend to surprise people who are familiar with the area's poor reputation. After years

of decrepit housing, disreputable businesses, and seeming disinterest for the façade of the neighbourhood, downtown Dartmouth has gained a polished look, with upscale businesses, revamped streetscapes, and more aesthetically-pleasing properties. More emphasis is placed on features that beautify the area, such as flower boxes, new signs with slogans demonstrating what Dartmouth has to offer, décor during the Holiday season, and a cleaner look in general.

There are new businesses include a coffee shop, a spa, a fine dining establishment, a candy store, a yarn shop, an art gallery, and a bicycle retailer and repair shop. The most popular new establishment in downtown Dartmouth is a coffee shop called “Two If By Sea,” which prides itself in its specialty coffees, barista art, and its own coffee bean roasting. It also maintains sunny outdoor seating during the warmer months. It is located in the bottom floor of a new condominium development called “Founders Corner,” which also greatly improved the streetscape of one section of downtown Dartmouth.

These new businesses have attracted a new demographic contrasting the previously dominating demographic of a high percentage of low-income families, single mothers, seniors, residents living with mental illnesses, and long-time residents of the area. This new visible demographic is another indicator of downtown Dartmouth’s renewal. Kevin Little, from the Public Good Society of Dartmouth, noted “there were always professionals working in the area, but you never saw them on the streets. You saw low-income people and seniors.” Now there are visibly more businesspeople and professionals, and young people who are

interested in the new businesses and the atmosphere downtown Dartmouth has to offer.

The new businesses cater to a higher-income clientele. Two If By Sea's selection of drinks will typically cost between three and five dollars compared to a place like Tim Horton's that costs between one and three dollars. The success of businesses with higher prices is evidence that there is a demographic shift happening in downtown Dartmouth. Establishments like the coffee shop and other higher-end businesses will continue to attract those who have the money to spend on their products. As Cadham puts it, all of these changes "create a newer, more refreshing look for the downtown core," but "the members [of Among Friends Social Club] won't access the new shops because it is out of their price range" (Cadham 2013).

With the new demographic these businesses are attracting comes more successful upscale housing developments. Single-family homes, senior-oriented apartment buildings and slum landlord-owned properties were what made up most of the housing in downtown Dartmouth for the second half of the twentieth century. This has changed dramatically. Downtown Dartmouth has undergone a substantial shift from single-family homes to condominiums in the past ten years. Each new condominium seems to be more upscale and grand than the previous.

The King's Wharf condominium development in downtown Dartmouth is not yet completed, but is already one of the most upscale places to live in downtown Dartmouth. According to its website, King's Wharf is considered "the premier neighbourhood on Halifax Harbour." People who buy a condominium at King's

Wharf can go on “sunset strolls along the Harbour,” “take the elevator to the ocean,” and “cast off from the King’s Wharf dock and arrive at the office with your hair a little windblown but your spirits soaring” (King’s Wharf: Halifax Dartmouth Condos 2014). Just last month as I exited the first floor coffee shop in one of the King’s Wharf condominium developments, there was a sign stating: “2 bedroom apartment for rent. \$2100 per month.” That is a rental rate unheard of in downtown Dartmouth. If you examine local listings on the Downtown Dartmouth Business Commission’s rental page, most two-bedroom rentals fall between \$700 and \$1200 per month (Downtown Dartmouth Business Commission 2014). Though the higher-class condominiums are currently an exception to the downtown neighbourhood, the rent and real estate prices for properties downtown have definitely risen in the past ten years, and most dramatically in the past five years. A 2007 housing report showed a three-bedroom older home in old Dartmouth, or the residential zone of downtown Dartmouth, cost around \$190,000 (REMAX 2007). In 2013, it was estimated the average cost of a home in old Dartmouth was approximately \$287,000 (Innovative Real Estate 2013).

There have only been small pockets of housing developments closer to the style of a single-family home. There are a few new rows of townhouses in the downtown core. However, there is much more of a focus on condominium developments than single-family homes and townhouse developments because developers can make more profit from higher condominium developments. What these condominium developers consider affordable, according to Dickey, is around the three hundred thousand dollar range. This does affect the demographic makeup

of downtown Dartmouth. As Don Chard suggests, young families typically desire the single-family home over apartment-style living, so the new demographic is swaying more toward older couples (“empty nesters”) and childless businesspeople.

An article in *The Coast*, entitled “Welcome to the New Dartmouth,” states: “oddly enough, the ‘new’ Dartmouth figures to skew older. If it follows the HRM’s demographic and condo-ownership patterns, King’s Wharf won’t be populated by yuppies and artists but by retirees moving from the ‘burbs” (Semansky 2010). This argument is actually not so surprising. Urban theorist William Alonso stated in 1964 that families tend to want single-family homes while their children are growing up, but once the children move out, parents desire the action, convenience, and vibrancy that the downtown core offers (Alonso 1964, 230).

Why is Downtown Dartmouth Renewing Now and Who is it Attracting?

Structural forces play a major role in the renewal of downtown Dartmouth, but some more than others. The theory of environmental pressures causing a family to move from the suburbs is not unique to downtown Dartmouth. The price of gas is rising, which makes long commutes from suburbs less desirable. In the suburbs, when a family’s children grow up, it almost becomes necessary to have two cars, and this also strains a family’s financial resources with the rising price of gas and the cost of upkeep on a vehicle. There are also residents who believe in the protection of the environment and purposely choose to live downtown in order to lower their carbon footprint. Living downtown offers the convenience of ample metro transit options and the ability to travel by foot or bicycle. However, these environmental concerns

were only a minor part of explanations that came from speaking with my interviewees.

One of the major selling points of downtown Dartmouth is its convenience. From downtown Dartmouth, you can take the ferry to downtown Halifax in about ten minutes. There are also several major bus routes that take you to downtown Halifax, the industrial park in Burnside, or the shopping centres in Halifax and Dartmouth. From downtown Dartmouth, the bridge to Halifax is only about a two-minute drive away. Some even commute to Halifax by bicycle across the bridge. Downtown Dartmouth offers the convenience of close proximity to downtown Halifax, but maintains a small town feel and cheaper housing options. This is an advantage to living in downtown Dartmouth often advertised by organizations like the Downtown Dartmouth Business Commission and condominium projects like King's Wharf.

With the increasing attractiveness, cleanliness, and safety of downtown neighbourhoods, middle and upper class people are attracted to living downtown again after the trend of suburbanization. The deindustrialization of downtown cores made them more appealing to middle and upper classes. In downtown Dartmouth, the renewal process did not take place instantly after the deindustrialization process. This makes sense, however, because it takes time to remove or upgrade old factory buildings and to remove any stigma from what may have been considered an unclean and more industrial community. There also has to be the appropriate housing to attract higher-class people to an area. Downtown Dartmouth's transition from industrial to a higher-end residential and business district has been a slow

process, but it does follow the theory of renewal after deindustrialization argued by Alan Ehrenhalt (2012).

Downtown Dartmouth is not being renewed in a family-friendly direction yet. There is not much room to build single-family homes, so the only young families that are moving in to the area are the few willing to buy and renovate an old home, as noted from some residents in a public consultation around zoning changes in downtown Dartmouth (Halifax Regional Municipality 2007, 7). You will see some new young families in the more residential areas of downtown Dartmouth, but the actual downtown business district continues to be populated by single professionals or “empty-nesters.” There are some new businesses that attract young people like a bike retail and repair shop, restaurants, and coffee shops, but the majority of businesses and developments seem to be geared to older people who do not have children. They can afford smaller but more luxurious downtown condos and no longer have a need for backyards and extra bedrooms for children. In an interview with Matt Semansky of *The Coast*, Hugh Millward, a professor of Geography at Saint Mary’s University explains:

We don’t have the same number of young professionals, even proportionally, as a city like Toronto, because we don’t have the same big finance industry downtown... We’re getting a lot of people, a lot of the wealthy Maritimers who are downsizing from the four-bedroom suburban house to a smaller, inner-city condo, and they can do that because they’ve got the equity (Millward in Semansky 2010).

With a demand for investment in downtown Dartmouth because of all of the selling points such as convenience, protecting the environment, and vibrancy, many interviewees believe that the renewal of downtown Dartmouth is exciting, but also believe the municipal government is taking an easy way out. Many believe that because one big developer has the money to take on a huge development, like King's Wharf, which will attract wealthier and older residents who will spend their equity on the downtown Dartmouth economy, perhaps local politicians find this easier and more profitable than dealing with small-scale local and community-oriented redevelopment of properties. Don Chard recalls all of the red tape his historical society was required to get through in order to revamp an old school building into a cultural community centre. They managed to jump through every frustrating hoop until finally one more item was demanded of them and they gave up. As Chard notes, the old Greenvale School was turned into upscale condominiums not long after.

With all of these new developments and the refreshing look of downtown Dartmouth after years of decay, what is the force behind this transformation? Mitch Dickey, a planner from the Halifax Regional Municipality's Planning and Development Services, who focuses on downtown Dartmouth, explained the political forces behind the move to renew downtown Dartmouth. As Dickey notes, prior to 2000, the downtown Dartmouth community and its bylaws made for a climate that was very anti-development. In 1997, the HRM began designating Priority Planning Projects. The municipal government and Planning and Development Services realized downtown Dartmouth needed a new community plan. They began holding public consultations with residents and businesspeople, where Dickey remembers

“many lively debates” around how to improve downtown Dartmouth. While many residents, developers, and businesspeople wanted to move forward with progressive developments, there was considerable resistance from some long-time conservative residents who were “concerned about change and liked things the way they were,” as Dickey recalls.

Part of the HRM’s Priority Planning Project includes bringing four thousand more residents to downtown Dartmouth by the year 2020. The current population of the downtown core is 6700 people, Dickey reports. Thus far, he adds, the population has remained stagnant and enrollment in local downtown neighbourhood schools has actually decreased. The HRM wants to encourage families to move to the area, but there are currently few developments that meet the wants of most young families, i.e. single-family homes. Gloria McCluskey, councilor for downtown Dartmouth, has some doubts about HRM’s desire to encourage families to move to the area. She believes “downtown Dartmouth has too high a concentration of rooming houses, and development geared to higher-income residents is a winning move for the neighbourhood right now” (McCluskey in Semanskey 2010); the high-income residents that are being attracted are not families but older people. As well as few single-family homes being planned, Dickey explains there is no plan in place for affordable housing as of yet. This is concerning for the lower-income residents who have resided in the area for a long time and require the services of downtown Dartmouth.

It seems that the Municipality would rather work with more profitable and large-scale developers than with community members on projects that would

benefit the whole community but perhaps not be so profitable. Politicians supporting large-scale developments over less-profitable community-based developments in Nova Scotia may have increased due to Community Services and Housing switching from a municipal responsibility to a provincial responsibility. Chard claims the local government is responsible for new property developments but has no responsibility to keep lower-income or other community needs in mind; therefore, many believe that because they do not have to be concerned with housing or community services that they simply choose not to take it into consideration when making decisions concerning new developments. If this is the case, the renewal of downtown Dartmouth may not be living up to its best potential and decisions may be disproportionately made in the interests of wealthier single professionals and older couples. Millward predicts:

That equity [from older couples and young professionals] translates into authority, and if the senior-dominated downtown Dartmouth condo Admiralty Place is any indication, empty-nesters will fight hard for their own vision of downtown, one that doesn't prioritize a hopping late-night scene... Young artists give a neighbourhood hipster credibility... but an older crowd with cash makes more of an impact (Millward in Semansky 2010).

This is a somewhat worrisome prediction that could mean further gentrification for downtown Dartmouth residents who do not have the income to keep up with luxury development plans. Council is essentially investing more in individual economic

profit over a community coming closer together. Therefore, what may aesthetically and financially renew downtown Dartmouth may hurt the vibrancy and close-knit community feel, or the “cultural health,” that attracted new residents in the first place.

Although the typical trends of gentrification tend to lead to a friction between businesspeople and developers versus grassroots, non-profits, and community services, this does not seem to be a major problem in downtown Dartmouth. Tim Rissesco, the Director of the Downtown Dartmouth Business Commission, said he and other business-oriented community members are well-aware of the services many in downtown Dartmouth need and use, such as Community Services, Margaret’s House, and Among Friends Social Club. He believes there is little friction coming from his and others’ business-oriented approach to improving downtown Dartmouth. As well, both Kevin Little and Bev Cadham, who are more grassroots members of our community, also believe they have positive relationships with the business-oriented community members of downtown Dartmouth. Any exclusion of lower-income residents seems to be coming mostly from the local government. A majority of those interviewed brought up their disappointment with the decisions of the local government to support larger more profitable developments over community-oriented developments, and their lack of support for the vulnerable population of downtown Dartmouth.

The displacement of long-time lower-income residents is not only coming from the local government’s encouragement of large new developments but from the conservative long-time residents, who fear either change, people from different

backgrounds, or both. They too do not want an increase in non-profits moving next to them. At a community meeting concerning a zoning regulation that allowed non-profits in the downtown neighbourhood zone, many residents were outspoken about certain uses of a nearby property, and it showed a trend of “not in my backyard” prejudices. The particular complaint was stated in the community meeting’s minutes: “concern has been expressed by the community regarding the frequency and geographic concentration of registered non-profit organizations in the neighbourhoods within the DN [Downtown Neighbourhood] Zone” (Halifax Regional Municipality 2007, 1). It appears that this specific concern came from the arrival of the Elizabeth Fry Society’s Holly House (the Elizabeth Fry Society is a non-profit organization created to rehabilitate women who were in prison for up to two years) to a downtown neighbourhood street. Holly House takes in a small number of women (seven) who can access many services in order to get themselves on a positive track (Schizophrenia Society of Nova Scotia 2009).

The local councilor of downtown Dartmouth held a public meeting where residents spoke out about concerns around the “unintended impacts” from legislation allowing non-profits like Holly House into their neighbourhood (Halifax Regional Municipality 2007, 2). Community members voiced concerns, as outlined in an official HRM document. One resident stated: “What do we have to do to stop this? We don’t want non-profit housing in our area” (Halifax Regional Municipality 2007, 6). As well, another resident stated: “the KKK could operate an office in the area under this provision of the LUB [Land Use Bylaw] if they are registered as a non-profit” (Halifax Regional Municipality 2007, 8). Another resident stated that she did

not purchase her property to live beside non-profit housing (Halifax Regional Municipality 2007, 8).

The legislation allowing non-profit housing projects like Holly House to move to the Downtown Neighbourhood Zone was changed to prevent future such occurrences. Clearly, there is some prejudice about low-income and disadvantaged people living in the downtown neighbourhood, emanating not from newer residents and developers, but from long-time residents. However, this could be because of the long-time residents' negative experiences with the deinstitutionalization of those with mental illnesses from the Nova Scotia Hospital in the past. These residents may be wary that history will repeat itself, even though these are different situations. This adds another complication to the renewal process of downtown Dartmouth and gives another reason for concern. With long-time residents rallying against affordable and rehabilitative housing in their neighbourhoods, and there being no plan for affordable housing in downtown Dartmouth, it seems low-income residents are not being included in the renewal of downtown Dartmouth.

The renewal of downtown Dartmouth has followed many prominent structural theories: changing tastes, environmental concerns and pressures, and an aging population spurring a revival of the downtown core. What was unexpected in the renewal of downtown Dartmouth is the force and possible lack of transparency from the local government, and their one-sided approach to development that favours large and profitable developments over small-scale, community-oriented developments. This force in the development of downtown Dartmouth may cast a dark shadow over the excitement of its renewal if more

displacement of lower-income residents occurs and downtown Dartmouth becomes less of a close-knit community.

Conclusions

For understanding urban decay and renewal, structural theories are most relevant and persuasive when applied to downtown Dartmouth. Jane Jacobs (1992), for example, demonstrated the importance of a diverse economy. If one successful business is replicated, a community is not diversified, and an area can subsequently be “left beached, in the wake of popularity that (has) moved away” (Jacobs 1992, 244). With downtown Dartmouth’s renewal, there is diversity in the new services. However, newer businesses are all catering to the same demographic: the middle and upper classes. Planners and business developers seem to have learned from the mistakes Jacobs observes of having a variety of businesses, but they are only partly providing heterogeneity to the community. They are only catering to one demographic, and this could cause the renewal of downtown Dartmouth to be fragile.

Downtown became decrepit because of the loss of business in the area, and the flight of the middle and upper class residents became even more pronounced. First, they found the downtown to be aesthetically unpleasing and there were businesses that made them uncomfortable. Second, they believed it was unsafe because of the demographic that was populating the area more and more. Lastly, they harboured discriminatory views against the demographic that had moved into the downtown core. The desire to come back to the downtown core was again influenced by cultural trends and market forces. These are all structural forces:

cultural values, the market, the environment, convenience, and aesthetics, which make the structural arguments for urban decay and renewal much more valid. However, my research shows that global trends are not the only force in urban renewal, and that the political power of a few should not be overlooked.

Based on my conversations with community members, I believe many people from all backgrounds are willing to work together to form a strong and vibrant downtown Dartmouth. Currently, conservative and discriminatory policies are holding back that positive relationship between traditionally opposing sides (grassroots and businesspeople). There are those who want to revitalize downtown Dartmouth with large and more upscale condominiums and higher-end services. However, there is also a large group of people who provide and use services such as the United Way, the Food Bank, churches, Among Friends Social Club, Community Mental Health, the Department of Community Services, Holly House, and the Public Good Society of Dartmouth. These organizations are all clustered in the downtown Dartmouth area; they have a stake in what happens to their community, and act as a force that continues to help lower-income residents remain safely in the community.

When speaking with business-oriented people, like Tim Rissesco of the Downtown Dartmouth Business Commission, and more grassroots-oriented community members like Bev Cadham of Among Friends, and Kevin Little of the Public Good Society, both sides understood not only the concerns but also the hopes of the other side. These are the people who really want to help renew downtown Dartmouth. They are open to housing and services targeted towards the wealthy but

just want to protect the voices and needs of the marginal (such as affordable housing). Both sides now believe they have positive relationships with the other.

Alas, conservative politics are preventing this relationship from flourishing. Some long-time residents do not want change and some local politicians are maintaining a conservative, and even discriminatory, status quo. This is the main area that needs to change to foster a healthy, vibrant, and diverse community that will not just suffer from what Jane Jacobs (1992) labels “repeated success,” where the whole community revolves around expensive condominiums occupied mainly by older couples and single professionals. If this were to occur, where would be the diversity that young families and local schools add to a community?

A policy that could make for a healthier and more diverse community would be density bonusing, wherein a condominium developer would be allowed to build outside height limits as long as they created something in their building that provided community benefits. This could be affordable housing on a few floors, a community cultural centre, a daycare, or a multitude of other ideas. Paul Johnston, Coordinator of Corporate Affairs for Halifax Regional Municipality, says downtown Halifax has this policy in place, but downtown Dartmouth does. Another area that should be revisited is the zoning change that, after the creation of Holly House, no longer allows registered non-profits in the Downtown Neighbourhood Zone. The documented public discussion shows that that decision was based on prejudiced grounds, and no policies for our community should be based on discrimination or ignorance. This policy maintains a status quo of “not in my backyard.” However, besides such specific policy changes, I think more people need to be informed on the

practices of inequality and discrimination that are occurring in our local politics. As well, local residents should be informed of the positive impacts of the many different groups in our community, and how they can work together to break down the traditional hostility between grassroots and business.

After decades of decay, the renewal process of a downtown core almost inevitably leads to gentrification because with increasing success in a community comes rising prices of rent and real estate, and higher-end services that are out of the lower-income residents' price ranges. What my research finds is that the gentrification of the community does not solely happen because of structural trends innocently transforming the downtown core into something more upscale, but that political leaders, whose values are culturally shaped, fail to stop the displacement, and even abet the unfair and discriminatory policies. Though downtown Dartmouth does follow many of the prominent theories for urban decay and renewal, it has its own unique characteristics that have played just as large a role. What I believe has been most powerful in aiding gentrification are policies that are based on conservative (and sometimes discriminatory) values, which hinder progress and most negatively affect the more vulnerable members of downtown Dartmouth.

Appendix: List of Interviewees (in order of appearance)

Don Chard: A resident of Dartmouth, Nova Scotia for decades, Mr. Chard has been involved in the downtown Dartmouth community in numerous ways, including local and provincial politics (a previous Member of Legislature), a past member of the School Board, the Dartmouth Historical Society, and various other groups. Chard is a wealth of knowledge when it comes to the history and politics of downtown Dartmouth

Mitch Dickey: Mr. Dickey is a resident of Dartmouth and a planner for Halifax Regional Municipality's Planning and Development Services who focuses primarily on the planning of Downtown Dartmouth. Mr. Dickey was able to inform me with statistics and details for plans for the future, as well as shed some light on past and current developments for downtown Dartmouth.

Bev Cadham: While Ms. Cadham does not reside in downtown Dartmouth anymore, she has worked for the Canadian Mental Health Association's Halifax-Dartmouth Branch as a program coordinator for Among Friends Social Club, located in downtown Dartmouth, for twenty years. She has a vast knowledge of the population that is affected by mental illness or intellectual disabilities, as well as the low-income population of downtown Dartmouth in general, and what services are needed to support them.

Kevin Little: A member of the Public Good Society of Dartmouth and navigator of Connections that WORK, Mr. Little is heavily involved in the downtown Dartmouth community by helping lower-income community members make connections from Food Banks to employment and education programs.

Tim Rissesco: Director of Downtown Dartmouth Business Commission, Mr. Rissesco is a leader in the development and improvement of downtown Dartmouth. The Commission works to increase economic growth as well as the social well-being for the downtown Dartmouth community through a web of partnerships.

Paul Johnston: Mr. Johnston, Coordinator of Corporate Affairs for Halifax Regional Municipality, an expert when it comes to technical details around the planning of the Halifax Regional Municipality in general. Mr. Johnston was able to summarize municipal zoning laws, the Halifax Regional Municipality's Charter, as well as alternatives to development that can encourage affordable housing.

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