4. The Montreal Region

4.1 The Region and its Governance

For the purposes of this report, the Montreal region is defined as the 29 municipalities on the island of Montreal along with the 107 municipalities adjacent to the island and corresponding roughly to the Montreal Census Metropolitan Area.[1] In 1991, the region had a population of 3,232,973, and a total land area of 5,000 square kilometers (see Figure 4-1).

At the centre of the region is the Montreal Urban Community (MUC), located on an island between the St. Lawrence and Des Prairies rivers. The MUC is linked by bridges to the suburban communities of the South Shore and to the island of Laval to the north. Laval in turn, is linked by bridges to the suburban communities on the North Shore. The MUC oversees the police, transportation and parks systems and does regional planning. However, the most effective land use planning powers reside mostly with the lower-tier municipal governments.

Suburban growth in the Montreal region has far outstripped the boundaries of the MUC and spilled into the surrounding suburban municipalities. The large number of municipalities in the off-island suburbs, many of them tiny by the standards of other provinces, has not lent itself to effective growth management.[2] The introduction of upper-tier municipal jurisdictions (municipalités regionales de comté or MRCs) on the North and South Shores was meant to help coordinate services at a wider level and stimulate more effective regional land use planning. As planning authorities, however, these are relatively weak compared to regional planning bodies such as the upper-tier municipalities in Ontario.

The metropolitan region as a unit has no governing municipal institution. The provincial government's intervention in the region is segregated into five administrative regions, three of which include large areas outside the Montreal region. Thus, there are five regional development councils with mandates to prepare regional economic development plans, five regional health and social service boards, and so on.

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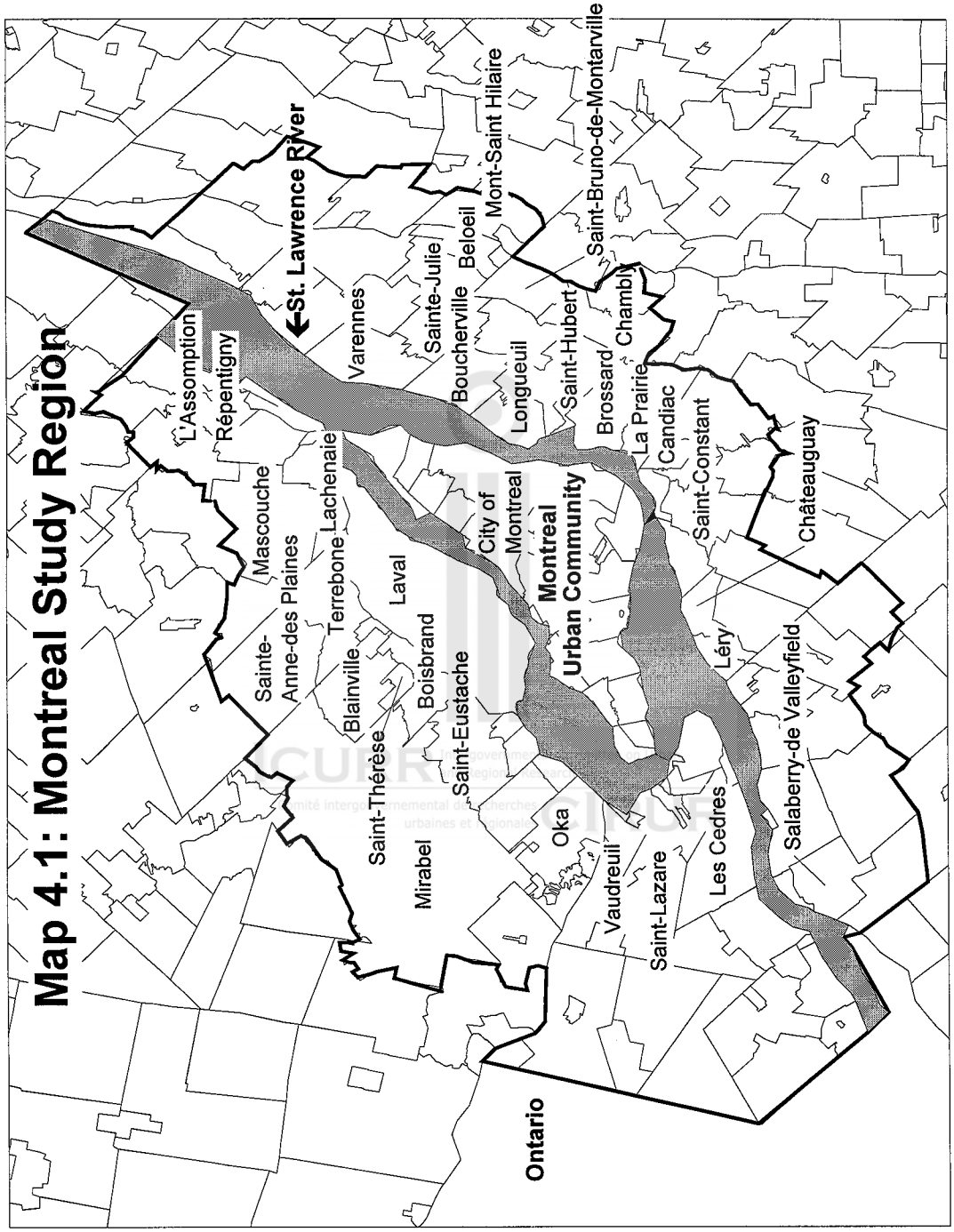
[1] This is the definition of the study region used by the Task Force on Greater Montreal, discussed later in this chapter.

[2] Of the 114 municipalities in the off-island suburbs, 11 have less than 1,000 inhabitants, and 61 have between 1,000 and 10,000 inhabitants.

Figure 4-1: The Montreal Region



4.2 Growth Patterns

Table 4-1: Population Distribution of the Montreal Region, 1971-1991

Territory	1971		1991	
	(000s)	Percent	(000s)	Percent
City of Montreal	1,254.0	44.1	1,017.7	31.5
MUC	1,959.1	68.9	1775.9	54.9
Laval	228.0	8.0	314.4	9.7
Northern Ring	171.3	6.0	376.6	11.6
Southern Ring	483.9	17.0	766.1	23.7
Montreal Region	2,842.4	100.0	3,233.0	100.0

Source: Statistics Canada

Population growth in the Montreal region has been slow compared to the two other study areas: between 1971 and 1991, growth was about 0.7 percent per year compared to 2.25 percent for Toronto and 2.4 percent for Vancouver. As shown in Table 4-1, however, there has been a dramatic shift of the population balance within the metropolitan area. In 1971, 44.1 percent of the regional population lived in the central city, but this had declined to 31.5 percent in 1991. The MUC has declined from more than two-thirds of the regional population to about 55 percent. In suburban areas, the opposite is true: on the South and North Shores, the population has grown from a combined 23 percent of the regional population to over 36 percent.

The figures reflect the immense migration that has taken place from the regional centre to suburban locations. Thus, the central areas of the region actually experienced a significant population loss in absolute numbers over the twenty year period: in both the City of Montreal and the MUC, absolute population numbers declined by roughly 200,000. In contrast, suburban municipalities on the South and North Shore experienced nearly a doubling of their populations. Sixteen municipalities on the urban fringe grew by more than 100,000 people between 1981 and 1991. Laval's share of the regional population has remained almost constant as migration into the area from the island of Montreal was balanced by out-migration to suburban communities further north.

Generally speaking, current development is strongest on the North Shore, in municipalities like Blainville, Bois Briand, Chambly, La plaine, Repentigny, St. Eustache. Populations on the island of Montreal and the mature suburbs on the South Shore are stagnant.

Between 1971 and 1991, population growth in the region was 14 percent, but urbanized land increased by 31 percent, suggesting settlement at diminishing densities. Nonetheless, as a

metropolitan entity, Montreal is compact relative to the other study areas. The average population density for the whole study area is 891 persons/square kilometre, compared with 697 for Toronto and 575 for Vancouver.

In many ways, the Montreal region is unique in its housing profile. Of the regional total of 1.3 million dwellings, the City of Montreal has about 460,000 units, a relatively large proportion compared to the other two study regions. Tenants make up 75 percent of households. This sets Montreal apart from other major North American cities, where home owners are usually in the majority. The city's housing stock contains a very low proportion of single-family houses, less than 8 percent of the total number of units. Also unusual is the dominant housing style, the "plex": a wood frame building of up to three storeys containing two to five units, each with a private entrance, and the building owner living on the ground floor.

Between 1989 and 1995, only 15 percent of housing starts in suburban areas off the island of Montreal were apartments, whereas over 60 percent of MUC housing starts were apartments. More than 90 percent of the single-family housing being created in the region were in the off-island suburbs. MUC starts account for only about a quarter of all starts in the region.

It is estimated that the region's 1991 population of 3.2 million people will grow to about 3.8 million inhabitants by the year 2023. This assumes a diminishing growth rate, from about 20,000 people per year in the 1971-1991 period to about 14,000 per year. It is likely that the demographic weight of the City of Montreal and the MUC will continue to decline, with over half the region's population residing off the island of Montreal by the turn of the century.

Other demographic changes are just as important. The population is aging: those over 65 made up 11.3 percent of the regional population in 1991 compared to only 6.9 percent in 1971. The aging of the population is especially evident in the MUC, where there are about 2.5 times more senior citizens than in the rest of the Montreal region.

About 15 percent of new immigrants to Canada come to the Montreal region. Almost 70 percent of these settle on the island of Montreal and more than 40 percent in the City of Montreal itself. In contrast, young francophone families have shown greater interest in suburban living. In particular, the francophone middle class has departed for suburban locations in large numbers. Between 1970 and 1985, the proportion of francophones residing in municipalities off the island of Montreal rose from 22 percent to 49 percent. The result of these two migrations trends will be a further concentration of visible minorities in the central area of the region, with a homogenous French middle class in the suburban areas.

Finally, the household structure is undergoing rapid changes. The traditional two-parent family with children is declining and there are growing proportions of singles and one-parent families, as well as aging empty-nesters. These trends are especially visible in the central part of the region.

4.3 Growth-Related Issues

The demographic trends have important implications: the decentralization of the population toward the off-island suburbs has outstripped effective administrative structures, leading to inefficient growth patterns; the central area of the region is in economic decline; many municipalities in the region are experiencing fiscal stress; and environmental impacts are high. The diversification of households implied by demographic trends are challenging municipal authorities to accommodate a wider range of housing types.

The issue of urban sprawl has become a significant political issue in the Montreal region in the 1990s. The Task Force on Greater Montreal, which was created in 1992 and made aggressive recommendations to curb sprawl, heightened the profile of the issue. The public attention given to sprawl continued into the middle-part of the decade. The topic emerged as a key issue in Montreal's municipal election in 1994, and was consistently raised during the provincial election campaign of 1994. In this section, some of the key public issues associated with sprawl are briefly reviewed.

4.3.1 Economic Issues

The key issue putting sprawl on the public agenda in the Montreal region is the link with the fate of the regional economy. It has become clear that it is impossible to have sustainable economic development without regional planning and without investments in infrastructure that support development. Of importance here are the overall rate of unemployment, the spatial distribution of total employment, and the shift in types of employment.

In the last 20 years, the regional economy has gradually deteriorated. Unemployment levels rose to over 12 percent in 1991, for the first time higher than the rate of unemployment in the rest of Quebec, and one of the highest unemployment rates in any major North American city. But not all of the region's municipalities are affected in the same way. In the period from 1981 to 1991, employment in the City of Montreal was stagnant, while its share of metropolitan employment declined from 55 percent to 50 percent. The remainder of the MUC underwent a slight decline in its share of metropolitan employment, from 29 percent to less than 28 percent, while the North and South Shores experienced very significant increases in their share of employment from about 16 percent to 22 percent of the metropolitan total (Coffey 1994). These figures suggest the migration of jobs to suburban locations, especially industrial and lower order service jobs. Left behind were a large number of unskilled labourers, some contaminated industrial sites, and unused infrastructure such as railyards and industrial buildings.

The other major issue is the lack of economic coherence of the region. The larger municipalities in the region have their own economic development offices that try to sell the municipality around the world. Municipalities of all sizes compete against each other for residential growth and non-residential investments, and the lack of an effective metropolitan administrative entity means that investment in infrastructure to support growth is often inefficient. The business community, and the municipalities themselves, appear to be deeply frustrated by this situation.

4.3.2 Fiscal Issues

Much of the concern over urban sprawl in the region has focused on the fiscal stress associated with an inequitable distribution of social costs. The migration of population from the central area of the region to ever more distant suburban locations has resulted in serious fiscal strains for those municipalities facing stagnation or population decline. This is an issue for older suburban areas on the island of Montreal, and is becoming a concern of the more mature municipalities off the island, like Longueuil and Laval. Most affected by these changes, however, is the City of Montreal itself.

Because the population of the City of Montreal is older and more heterogeneous than suburban populations, it requires more municipally-subsidized services. Land values and housing are more expensive in the central city, but residents are poorer. Unlike its suburban counterparts, the City of Montreal subsidizes housing costs for many of its residents, adding to its tax burden. The declining population of some parts of the central city means that fixed costs for maintaining and operating existing infrastructure must be borne by a smaller assessment base, while suburbanites who do not pay taxes in the city enjoy its amenities and employment opportunities.

The City of Montreal also has higher expenditure obligations due to its funding of regionally-significant recreational and cultural facilities, its higher policing and planning costs, higher social outlays, and greater infrastructure maintenance costs. Therefore, the tax rate in the central city tends to be higher than on similarly assessed properties in suburban locations. Although some of this tax burden has been shifted to the commercial sector, residential taxes remain above the regional average. This has contributed to the flight of mobile residents and businesses to lower-tax suburbs.

Taxation structure has become a progressively greater issue in the growth and development of the Montreal region since the Municipal Finance Act was introduced in 1979. The Act made municipalities the sole beneficiary of property taxes in the province. Up until that time, the school boards had also been funded through property taxes, but now they were to be funded directly by the province. Since then, provincial financial transfers to municipalities in Quebec have been gradually reduced.

In 1990, the "Ryan Reforms" associated with former Minister of Municipal Affairs Claude Ryan once again reduced provincial transfers by giving municipalities responsibility for funding transit, roads, and other services. In 1992, property taxes accounted for almost 80 percent of municipal revenue in the Montreal region. When other sources of local revenue are added, the figure is 99 percent. Thus, only 1 percent of all municipal operating revenue is derived from provincial transfers.

On the other hand, the provincial government continues to pay for, or subsidize, much infrastructure that is needed to support local development. Although municipalities are responsible for local and regional infrastructure, including water, sewer, roads, and recreation facilities, the province subsidizes some of the capital costs associated with them (e.g., 85 percent of sewage treatment facilities) and has full responsibility for highways, schools, busing for students, hospitals, and other major facilities.

There are several important implications of these trends. First, the gradual withdrawal of funding for many municipal services has tended to penalize central cities in Quebec because of the historically high level of provincial subsidies for services of a regional nature. Secondly, because of the dependence on property taxes as a source of revenue, municipalities in the Montreal region tend to compete with each other for new residents as a way of adding to their assessment base. Thirdly, in order to keep taxes low, there is a temptation for municipalities to underservice their residents and allow them to use services located in, and paid for by, other jurisdictions. Finally, municipalities make development decisions based on costs to themselves and do not systematically consider the implications of their decisions on the provincial treasury.

4.3.3 Transportation Issues

Transportation issues are also raised by growth patterns in the Montreal region. The metropolitan region has the highest level of transit ridership in the three metropolitan regions studied, and one of the highest in North America. However, a 1987 origin-destination study showed increasing use of the automobile with a decreasing share of trips being carried by public transit (Société de transport de la Communauté urbaine de Montréal 1987). Despite the increase in regional population and the investments in transit infrastructure, between 1974 and 1987 transit usage remained constant at about 800,000 trips per day while car trips rose from 1.2 million to 2.2 million. An update report in 1993 showed that ridership had declined in absolute numbers across the region since 1988, with alarming declines in the suburban communities off the island of Montreal. Causes for this decline in transit use are complex, but it is often attributed to suburban development that is difficult to serve by public transit, and a declining population base for the MUC transit system (IBI 1993). The lack of coordination between the many suburban transit agencies and the MUC Transit Commission can also be blamed for declining ridership. The massive public subsidies for car use, especially the major infrastructure developments paid for by the province are other reasons for the increase in car usage. Many people have criticized the government's decision in 1988 to remove toll booths from autoroutes leading into Montreal.

Falling ridership has made public transit more dependent on government subsidies. As the province has withdrawn from this field, transit spending has tended to exacerbate the fiscal stress experienced by municipalities. The increase in auto use has been associated with longer commute times, higher economic costs due to traffic congestion, and air pollution. Traffic conditions are particularly poor on and around the many bridges linking the island to the rest of the region.

4.3.4 Environmental Issues

A number of serious environmental issues are associated with development patterns in the region:

- less than half the regional population has sewage treatment facilities
- there is a very low availability of green space in the heavily urbanized areas
- about 85 percent of the region's wetlands have been lost due to human intervention

- 40 percent of the region's shorelines have been urbanized
- a large number of the small suburban municipalities are unable to afford municipal recycling programs, with the result that the regional diversion rate is only 10-15 percent of the solid waste stream
- the region suffers a higher rate of agricultural land loss than does the rest of Quebec
- the region is one of four zones in Canada where major interventions are needed to reduce the concentrations of ground-level ozone that are closely associated with automobile use.

As in the other metropolitan regions studied for this report, environmental issues are "in the air" in Montreal and are routinely included in background papers and government reports. But unlike the other regions studied, there have been few major environmentally-related task forces. There are a number of environmental groups in the area, some of which involve themselves in battles to prevent particular low-density development projects, but few have entered the regional debate on sprawl.[3] Thus, environmental issues have not reached the same level of public concern in Montreal as they have in Toronto and Vancouver.

4.3.5 Social Issues

Most of the issues already mentioned have significant social implications. Environmental problems reduce the quality of the living environment in the region and add to the personal stress of city life; traffic congestion increases the amount of time wasted in cars; decentralization of industrial employment has left some working class neighbourhoods in the central area with alarming rates of unemployment, poverty and social decay. Given the inequitable fiscal arrangements in the region, the lifestyles and travel behaviour of the mobile middle classes are being subsidized by the taxes of the less well-to-do in the central city.

Many of these issues have a high visibility in the Montreal region, especially those associated with the fiscal system. However, unlike in other metropolitan regions studied, housing choice and affordability are not major issues in the Montreal region. This is because housing in the region is relatively affordable, even in the central city, and vacancy rates in the rental stock are high.

4.3.6 Discussion

This survey of issues related to sprawl suggests that economic and fiscal issues are the most important in the Montreal region. Of paramount importance to the province is the coherence of the region as an economic unit, and the provincial role in funding and coordinating growth in the area. The City of Montreal, the MUC, and some of the older off-island municipalities

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[3] Exceptions to this rule are the municipal green parties, which have called for more compact development patterns in the region and Transport 2000 Quebec, which has promoted the idea of more transit-supportive development.

such as Laval and Longueuil, are concerned about growth at very low densities in suburban regions, the economic and demographic decline of the core, and the fiscal disparities and inequities between island and off-island municipalities. From the suburban perspective, the main issues are the withdrawal of government subsidies that support municipal services and new growth, and the lack of effective metropolitan planning for new infrastructure.

4.4 Provincial Planning Policies

The provincial government has undertaken legislative and policy steps to manage growth and reduce sprawl in the region.

4.4.1 The Protection of Agricultural Land Act

The plain around Montreal, especially to the south, is the most important agricultural area in Quebec. By the 1970s, however, serious problems had arisen in the farm economy of the region: farmers were avoiding long-term investments, much land was being taken out of production or converted to urban use, and production was only a fraction of its potential. Studies pointed to the leapfrog, low-density residential development in the suburban regions of Montreal, and the speculative activities of developers, as the primary culprits (Thibodeau, Gaudreau, and Bergeron 1986).

In response, the Ministry of Agriculture prepared and proposed Bill 90, The Protection of Agricultural Land Act (Loi sur la protection des terres agricoles). Despite strong municipal opposition, it became law in 1978. The purpose of the law was to ensure a permanent, strong agricultural base in Quebec. The principal instrument to be used toward this end was control over the creation of lots for non-farm development. The Act established an agricultural zone where it would be prohibited to subdivide or use a lot for non-agricultural purposes without authorization. Administration of the Act was vested in the Commission for the Protection of Agricultural Land. The commission began by identifying those municipalities whose agricultural lands would be protected. Maps showing the proposed agricultural zones were put forward by the commission, which invited municipal comments. Once the permanent boundaries were fixed, requests for inclusion or exclusion from the zone were considered by the relevant municipality and then forwarded with a recommendation to the commission, which made a final decision.

The commission receives about 4000 requests per year. About 80 percent of the requests come from private developers, and 80 percent of those are refused. About 20 percent of the requests come from municipalities during official plan reviews and official plan amendments, and about 80 percent of those are accepted. Thus, the Act has reduced development pressures by dampening land speculation. Although this undoubtedly strengthens municipal growth management capacity, the commission's decisions rarely contravene the growth aspirations of municipalities themselves. Unfortunately, no studies have been conducted to show the impact of the agricultural zoning law on residential densities.

The effectiveness of the Act may have been compromised by a number of changes since the mid-1980s. In 1985, the Liberal government amended the legislation to permit a revision of the boundaries of the agricultural zones in the province. Most municipalities submitted requests for dezoning of agricultural lands and these were routinely granted by the commission (Trépanier 1993). In the Montreal region, the revisions to the agricultural zone were completed in 1991: they resulted in the dezoning of 10 percent of the region's farmland. In Laval alone, 4000 hectares of land were dezoned. This was three times higher than the Quebec average (TFFGM 1993).

In 1989, the provincial government revised the Act to create a new body to appeal the decisions of the commission. The tribunal reviews about 30 percent of the requests refused by the commission and one-third of those decisions are overturned. Generally speaking, it is the larger developers who bring forward the appeals, which amplifies the impact of the Tribunal's decisions.

4.4.2 Housing Policies

The province of Quebec has tended to be relatively passive in the regulation of housing supply. For instance, it does not have a housing policy requiring municipalities to encourage the production of a diversity of housing types or to discourage homogenous, single-family development. Instead, the province has adopted two alternative strategies:

- it has implemented a series of funding programs for the production of social housing, housing renovation, and to encourage home ownership
- it has altered provincial legislation so as to allow municipalities authority to encourage certain forms of housing production.

The province's funding programs have had differential impacts on intensification opportunities. The social housing and rent supplement programs have been relatively neutral with respect to intensification. For example, the amount of social housing built on the island of Montreal has reflected the demographic weight of the island in the region. In contrast, the province's renovation programs have helped consolidate the urban tissue. Funding programs such as Loginove, begun in the early 1980s, have permitted the renovation of thousands of older housing units, mostly on the island of Montreal but also in the more mature suburban areas such as Longueuil and Laval. More recent programs, such as PRIL (Programme d'aide a la rénovation d'immeubles locatifs) are aimed at promoting the renovation of low-cost rental housing and boarding rooms, which will favour downtowns and older neighbourhoods. Two new programs—Revitalisation des vieux quartiers, and Rénove—will be funded jointly by provincial and municipal governments and the private sector, and are specifically directed to renovation of older housing stock. Through programs such as ReviCentre, the province has also funded infrastructure and other physical improvements in downtown commercial districts that enhance intensification potential.

Provincial funding for home ownership has tended to contribute to sprawl: Instead of subsidizing home ownership according to the difference between the price of housing and

available incomes (which would favour central city locations) these programs have generally made subsidies available up to certain price ceilings. This has meant that cheaper housing—mostly in suburban locations—would be more heavily subsidized. Furthermore, most programs are targeted at new housing, once again favouring suburban development.

The province has revised its legislation governing municipal powers on a number of occasions in order to increase municipal latitude in housing matters. In some cases, this has favoured the intensification of the central area of the region. For instance, the charter of the City of Montreal was revised in order to permit the municipality to subsidize residential development, and thereby attempt to reverse the depopulation of the area. Under this legislative provision, the city launched its successful program called "20,000 homes". The province allowed other municipalities to compensate property owners for tax increases that resulted from mature area revitalization schemes. The legislation was targetted at municipalities on the island of Montreal and would therefore have helped to increase housing affordability in the central area of the region. However, a loophole in the legislation allows suburban municipalities to use it to subsidize new construction. This has contributed to the competitive advantage of off-island municipalities in attracting home-seekers.

4.4.3 Environmental Policies

Up to 60 percent of vacant land on the island of Montreal is contaminated to some degree. Unlike in Ontario, where provincial standards on the remediation of contaminated sites is a major barrier to the redevelopment of former industrial sites, the Quebec government has helped stimulate development in older areas of the region by investing in soil remediation and remaining flexible on environmental health standards.

The province has signed a number of agreements with municipal governments in the region, especially the City of Montreal, in order to permit the decommissioning of industrial sites to allow residential development. The first of these was at the Angus Yard, an obsolete railway and industrial area where the province invested almost $30 million in site remediation. Since then, railway redevelopment has become one of the principle means of large-scale intensification in the central area of the region.

Quebec's 1988 Policy on the Remediation of Contaminated Lands is based on the principle that it is desirable from an environmental standpoint to recover former industrial lots that contain contaminated soil. According to the policy, this permits "the return of residents to the city centres and the creation of new living areas and parks in the heart of former industrial zones" (quoted in Church 1993, 13). Nonetheless, some municipalities have complained that standards are too high and that the associated decontamination costs effectively prevent the redevelopment of former industrial sites.

As in other provinces, the Quebec Ministry of the Environment has policies on flood plain protection, shoreline buffering, stormwater management, and woodlot preservation that require setting aside land from development. Inevitably this reduces the development densities in any given area, but these policies have not been identified as major obstacles to intensification.

4.4.4 Discussion

The evolution of Quebec's planning and policy framework demonstrates an intermittent provincial concern with the problems associated with urban sprawl. While a number of important advances have been made through these interventions—especially in terms of improvements to local planning and the curtailment of leapfrog development—the evidence suggests that government actions have not been entirely successful in realizing provincial objectives in controlling sprawl. In the next section, municipal policies that affect the density of residential development are considered.

4.5 Metropolitan Planning Policies

This section describes two major initiatives to improve planning on a regional scale: the creation of upper-tier governments, and the elaboration of a regional plan to guide provincial decision-making in the Montreal area.

4.5.1 Creation of the Montreal Urban Community

Until the end of the 1960s, annexation of suburban municipalities to the City of Montreal was the only form of growth management in place. In 1969, the Quebec government created the MUC, the first provincial attempt to get a larger than local perspective on regional problems. The MUC was given a mandate to take over extensive areas of municipal jurisdiction on the island of Montreal, including property tax assessment, regional planning, regulation of air pollution, traffic control, supply of drinking water, garbage disposal, sewage treatment, police and fire services, transit, libraries, public housing and regional parks. But because of disagreements between the City of Montreal and the suburban communities, only police, transit, and sewage were assumed by the regional council.

The MUC council consists of the entire membership of the City of Montreal council (now 59) along with the 27 mayors of the island suburbs. Voting power is proportional to municipal populations: each mayor casts as many votes as there are thousands of people in his or her municipality, while the Montreal councillors cast as many votes as there are thousands of people in the city divided by 59. Resolutions need to be approved by double majorities of city and suburban votes.

In 1973 the MUC issued the Proposals for Urban Development. This plan included an urban structure plan based on the notion of sub-centre development, one in the east end of the island and one in the west end. The purpose of the nodal development plan was to decentralize growth from the Montreal city centre, bring order to suburban development, and facilitate the creation of public transit networks (Sancton 1985, 129). Conflict between the central city and suburban municipalities prevented the plan from being formally adopted by the MUC, but market forces led to the partial realization of the suburban sub-centre concept.

4.5.2 Creation of MRCs

Until the end of the 1970s, there was no systematic legislation in Quebec governing land use planning. Municipalities controlled zoning, lot creation, and construction activities on an independent and voluntary basis. In 1979, soon after the Protection of Agricultural Land Act, the Land Use Planning and Development Act was passed. The purpose of the Act was to create a basis for local and regional planning as part of the government's drive to decentralize powers to the local level.

The Act provided for the creation of regional municipalities (municipalités regionales de comté or MRCs), all of which would have a minimum population size and maximum territorial size. Typically, a MRC council is comprised of the mayors of the component lower-tier municipalities, with a chairperson elected by the council members. The MRCs cover the entire province except the territory already included in the MUC, the Quebec Urban Community and the Outaouais Urban Community. The upper-tier MRC is responsible for strategic planning while the lower-tier municipalities are responsible for detailed planning. Unlike the MUC, the MRCs were not given responsibility for delivering regional services, such as water, sewage and transit.

According to the Act, the MRCs are obliged to create development plans for the region that give local municipalities direction on general land uses, urban limits and areas for urbanization, identification of land uses of regional interest because of ecological, heritage or cultural reasons, requirements for regional infrastructure, approximate densities permitted, and the location and type of major roads. During the preparation of the regional plan, the provincial government may give input about the land use and infrastructure aspects of the plan. Once the plan is adopted by the upper-tier government, it may be modified by the Minister of Municipal Affairs if it fails to reflect the policies and intended projects of the provincial government. Once the regional plan is finalized, local municipalities are required to pass official plans that corresponded to it within two years of its adoption. Provincial initiatives must also be consistent with the regional plan.

The creation of the MRCs, and the obligation to plan on a regional basis, have certainly increased communication among adjacent municipalities and facilitated greater collaboration among municipalities in providing services (Parent 1985). Their effectiveness as regional planning agencies, however, are in considerable doubt.

4.5.3 The Preferred Option

The 1960s saw a vast increase in the rate of suburbanization in the Montreal region, aided by an aggressive program of highway expansion[4] and housing programs that favoured home ownership in suburban areas. The first provincial initiative in management growth on a regional basis came with the creation of the Office de planification et de développement du

[4] 400 kilometres of expressway were built by the provincial Ministry of Roads between 1958 and 1976 within and around the island of Montreal.

Québec (OPDQ) in 1967. This agency had no implementing powers but was mandated to undertake studies on development trends and to identify potential problems.

By the late 1970s, the provincial government could no longer ignore the structural problems presented by patterns of growth in the Montreal region. Studies undertaken by the OPDQ indicated that the creation of the MUC in 1969 had not resolved regional issues, that the agricultural economy was under pressure in the region, that infrastructure costs needed to be brought under control, that the central area was experiencing a gradual loss of population, and that provincial action was required to better coordinate provincial policies and the planning activities of municipal governments (Office de planification et de développement du Québec 1977; Quebec Ministère des Affaires municipales 1977). The lack of a coherent framework within which to make major provincial investments had already caused the government to impose a moratorium on further subway construction in the region in 1977, and to withdraw commitments to fund major water and sewage treatment plants on the island of Montreal.

In this context, the Parti Québécois government introduced the "preferred development option for the region of Montreal" in 1978. This initiative was meant to address the key problems facing the region:

- the increasing consumption of land per household and leapfrog development on the fringe, with the associated waste of social resources
- the gradual depopulation of the metropolitan core where the remaining population grew older and poorer and financially less able to support major regional services.

The Preferred Option was based on three principles:

- consolidate the urban fabric within the present built-up area of the region
- give priority to redeveloping the island of Montreal
- pay special attention to improving the quality of life on the island of Montreal.

The Preferred Option was an attempt to guide the strategic decisions made by the government in the Montreal region to curb urban sprawl: decisions on the location of government facilities, infrastructure investments such as new subways and freeways, sewage treatment plants, greenbelts, and so on. This vision was to be realized by a moratorium on bridges and freeways connecting the central city to its suburbs, which served as the basis for the 1979 transportation plan for the region, and by preventing the urbanization of farmland in the outer reaches of the region, as expressed by the Agricultural Land Protection law. The Option was also meant to provide guidance to the newly formed MRCs in adopting their first strategic plans.

The plan was not well received by suburban municipalities, who resented the constraints it implied on growth. As a result, the Quebec government restated the goals by clarifying that it considered the near suburbs on the South and North Shores to be included in the areas designated for urban consolidation. Nonetheless, the lack of any concrete enforcement

mechanisms meant that the vision was not very effective either in coordinating provincial decisions, or in influencing the decisions of local governments in the area. For instance, the development plans of the suburban regional municipalities violated the regional vision in their growth projections and land designations. The plan soon came to be seen as a statement of good intentions by the government, but had limited impact on the form of growth in the area (Quesnel 1990).

After 1982, sprawl was somewhat contained by the recession and the oil crisis. In 1984, the province reinforced its commitment to the Preferred Option, but after 1987 sprawling tendencies resumed. This was partially due to improving economic circumstances for the region, but also resulted from policy changes: the Liberal government elected in 1985 lifted the moratorium on highway construction and invested in new highways in the outer suburbs, froze major public transport funding, and adopted policies that weakened the agricultural zoning law (Charbonneau, Hamel, Barcelo 1994).

4.6 Municipal Planning Policies

In this section, some of the planning initiatives undertaken at the local level to increase residential densities are surveyed. The policy context differs between municipalities on the island of Montreal (the MUC) and those in off-island areas. In off-island municipalities, planners report that the most effective growth management policy instrument has been the Protection of Agricultural Land Act, which has almost certainly served to constrain scattered, poorly planned development in rural areas, and the premature expansion of serviced suburban areas. This Act is less applicable to municipalities on the island of Montreal because of the dearth of agricultural zoning there. Policies of municipalities on the island also differ from those in off-island suburbs because of the availability of higher-order transit facilities which nucleate higher-density development. Finally, housing starts statistics for the Montreal region show dramatically different tendencies between the island and off-island municipalities: typically, only 15 percent of suburban starts are apartments whereas over 60 percent of MUC starts are apartments. Finally, patterns of housing tenure vary widely, with much higher rates of home ownership in off-island municipalities than on the island of Montreal. Thus, the discussion of local planning policies will be divided into two parts: municipalities in the MUC and off-island suburban municipalities.

4.6.1 The MUC Plan

In 1982, the provincial government required that a regional plan be produced by the MUC covering the items mandated for an MRC plan. MUC planners were faced with a number of serious challenges: population and employment had decentralized toward the extremities on the island, while the most valuable infrastructure remained largely in the central area: universities, hospitals, museums, cultural attractions. Several growth poles had emerged outside the central city, in Anjou, Pointe-Claire and Saint-Laurent, but they were not well served by public transit. The central city was declining in its share of population and employment, and the built environment was aging. New, weakly-structured, residential areas

were developing on the periphery of the island. Regionally-significant green spaces were disappearing.

The 1986 development plan, which came into effect in 1987, contained two general principles that reflected the objectives of the Preferred Option well : consolidation and structuring of the urban fabric in the suburban areas of the MUC, and revitalization of the central area of the MUC. In pursuit of the first objective, the plan contained a number of important policies:

- an urban limit line was established on the western side of the island to preserve remaining farmland
- intensification around transit stations was promoted
- consolidation of the residential fabric was encouraged
- medium and high-density housing was favoured, especially near existing and planned infrastructure.

The plan added a number of other measures to achieve the second objective:

- rehabilitate the existing housing stock
- promote housing for families
- promote rental housing
- maintain the residential function of the downtown and adjacent areas.

Although the plan contained a number of policies intended to promote intensification, an analysis shows that the urban structure was poorly defined. The three sub-centres identified—in Ville d'Anjou, Ville St. Laurent and Pointe-Claire—had already come into existence as a result of market forces, and few policies were elaborated to define their general character, permitted uses, or regional functions. Furthermore, the higher densities specified for the sub-centres and certain other areas of the island were not mandatory. The plan stated only that they "shall be taken into account in zoning bylaws of the municipalities." This lack of definition reflected the conflict and compromise between municipalities in the central area of the MUC and the suburban municipalities on the island (Trepanier 1993). Although the MUC has the power to demand changes to municipal plans in its jurisdiction, planners report that it is not very interventionist in this way. Nonetheless, the MUC official plan is seen by many municipal planners on the island of Montreal as effectively favouring more compact development, if only by raising the issue in an official document.

4.6.2 City of Montreal

The City of Montreal has a large number of programs to encourage housing production throughout the city, and has recently adopted planning policies to consolidate the city centre as a residential area. These programs and policies are at least partially motivated by the need

to reverse the population decline that has plagued the city, especially its downtown area, since the 1970s.

In the 1980s, the city embarked on "Operation 20,000 Units," a large-scale operation to interest residential builders in the supply of land available in the city's land bank. A total of 19,000 units was built under this program, representing nearly 40 percent of all housing starts in Montreal between 1980 and 1988, and substantially increasing the city's share of regional starts. In 1990, the City of Montreal revised its housing and land use policies with the aim of reducing housing costs and increasing the choice of housing available in the central city. As a result, a number of programs came into existence:

- The Homeownership and Assistance Program, which seeks to increase the city's ability to compete with suburbs for housing demand by encouraging home ownership.

- The Acquisition, Renovation and Sales Program, in which the city purchases an average of 1,200 units or rental housing units a year, renovates them, and sells them as housing co-ops.

- The Credit-proprio program, whereby new home buyers in the city are offered $2,000 in tax rebates and $10,000 in the downtown area over a three year period.

- The city-initiated Nouveau Montreal project, a strategy calling for the building of 10,000 new housing units in the downtown area.

A study undertaken by the city in 1992 suggested that there was enough vacant land to accommodate nearly 60,000 units, 10,000 of which could be located in the downtown area. The adoption in 1992 of a master plan for the district introduced a number of zoning changes to remove regulations that dictated lower-density ceilings for residential projects than for other land uses in the downtown. The new plan expressed the city's will to intensify the central part of the city to make use of existing infrastructure, and in order to maintain a lively street life and safe atmosphere. To avoid creating demands for expensive new services, the city is intentionally trying to attract non-standard households, i.e., couples without children, singles, and empty-nesters looking for an urban environment close to downtown's amenities. Because builders consider downtown development risky, the city has stepped in with financial and zoning incentives. Major public investments have been made in a strategy to revive the downtown area, including the rehabilitation of the Old Port area and Old Montreal.

The city has also taken steps to reduce regulatory barriers to intensification. The city co-sponsored (along with the provincial and federal governments) a design competition to generate ideas on affordable housing for the inner-city. Architects were invited to come up with designs for three sites within the city at the most efficient, buildable, and livable level. The contest helped to identify regulatory barriers to intensification, and these were addressed by the city's new master plan. Furthermore, after being the only municipality in Quebec not using the less stringent provincial building code, the city recently decided to adopt it. This will serve to reduce the cost of new development within the city, and put it on a par with suburban municipalities. In order to encourage mixed-use development, the city is also experimenting

with "performance standards" to replace the existing single-use zoning categories. This approach, pioneered in Vancouver, regulates development through standards for noise, shadowing, and height instead of restricting land use.

Montreal has shown flexibility in its zoning standards by permitting the creation of unusual ground-related housing forms outside the central area. Such forms include the innovative "grow home" designed by architects at McGill University. A grow home is a small two-storey home with a frontage as small as 14 feet and an unfinished interior that can be adapted to changing needs. The small size was primarily motivated by the desire to increase the affordability of housing and to respond to the housing needs of the increasing numbers of people living alone and in single-parent families. Several grow home projects have been built in the city, especially in the east end where greenfield development is still taking place. New units sold in a range between $76,000 and $85,000.

The conversion of industrial buildings has also been permitted by the city in certain areas, but this has not been a major source of intensification opportunities. The decentralization of industrial activity out of the city core led to the abandonment of many older industrial buildings in the 1950s and 1960s. In the mid-1980s, the city approved the conversion of some buildings along the Lachine Canal to residential use, but a strong citizen reaction to the gentrification process led to a moratorium on further conversion. There are not that many opportunities for industrial land redevelopment elsewhere in Montreal.

Another form of intensification that is being considered is the adaptive reuse of commercial buildings in the city's fur district. Because of the declining need for industry-related space, owners have approached the city about converting upper-floor space to residential use. The city is conducting a study on the issue and may make changes to the building code and zoning bylaws to permit this form of residential intensification.

An important part of the city's intensification strategy has been to enhance the quality of life within the city and thereby attract new residents and retain existing ones. Toward this end, the city has taken steps to reduce traffic speeds and volumes in residential neighbourhoods, to introduce parking regulations that favour city residents over suburban commuters.

Very few planning barriers to intensification remain in the City of Montreal. Building code requirements that prevent conversion of commercial or industrial buildings, a long and rule-governed approvals process, green space requirements, and parking requirements may play a role in reducing developer interest in housing construction within the city. Basement apartments are illegal in the city, but this has probably had little impact on housing densities because of the low proportion single-family homes. Most barriers to intensification have non-regulatory origins: the distaste of developers for working in downtown areas where land assembly is difficult and expensive, traffic congestion that makes development activities more difficult, financial institutions wary of the future economic health of the central city, residents in adjacent areas who are more likely to complain about new development activity, and relatively weak demand for housing.

4.6.3 Remaining MUC Municipalities

Because of higher taxation levels, higher housing prices, and the lack of greenfield land for new development, most island municipalities cannot compete with the off-island municipalities for single-family housing, any better than the City of Montreal. Nonetheless, many have adopted policies to attract new residents and to encourage appropriate housing forms.

Planners from island municipalities do not feel that they are being encouraged to do so by provincial policies. They do, however, report that MUC policies provide some minimal encouragement, especially with respect to the development of sub-centres.

A network of sub-centres is evolving on the island, based on office buildings, regional shopping centres, and high-density residential development. Sub-centre development has been aided through planning decisions and other government actions. They have been designated in the MUC plan—which imposed minimum density requirements in sub-centres—and in the local plans of Ville St. Laurent, Pointe Claire, and Ville d'Anjou. The MUCTC has coordinated transit provision to support the sub-centre concept: it uses the Pointe-Claire regional shopping centre as a major transfer point for bus services to the West Island and is planning a subway extension to the sub-centre in Ville d'Anjou.

Mixed-use development on main streets is a common form of intensification promoted in the island suburbs. This is being encouraged in a variety of ways, including zoning bylaws that favour the conversion of offices to residential uses above ground-floor retail, municipal programs to upgrade infrastructure and the streetscape to attract residents to the site, and by policies to permit development walk-up apartments of up to six storeys on main streets. Verdun, Pointe-Claire and Pierrefonds serve as good examples of this type of intensification. There, municipal policies have been adopted that allow for such development as a means of exploiting existing investments in infrastructure and public transit, building a clientele for main street retailers, and increasing public security in suburban commercial districts.

Several large scale intensification opportunities have arisen in more mature parts of the island as a result of economic changes. For instance, major redevelopment projects were being planned for several railyard sites—one in Outremont and another in Westmount—as the need for railway facilities declines and Canadian Pacific tries to raise revenue by selling its properties for development. In Ville St. Laurent, two very large residential developments are being proposed on the Canadair airplane assembly and airport site after the company transferred its facilities to Mirabel and Dorval airports.

Other types of intensification are occurring in the island suburbs:

- Mature municipalities that have seen a population decline and a reduction of family size have responded by allowing the conversion of schools to residential use. In Verdun, for example, four out of 18 have been converted

- Municipalities that host subway lines, are permitting intensification to occur adjacent to subway stations

- The production of high-density housing for seniors is encouraged as a way of freeing up lower-density units for families
- Municipalities have set planning goals for the mix of housing types in some new developments, such as those on Nun's Island in Verdun
- Municipalities have sold land on the condition that it be used for higher-density housing
- Renovation of the older housing stock in mature municipalities is a way of preserving housing and enhancing the attractiveness of island locations to new residents.

A number of planning policies that militate against increasing densities on the island: zoning regulation in some areas requires that large amounts of green space be set aside, which prevents intensification of the urban fabric. Parking requirements are also onerous, given the higher land values: it is not uncommon for municipalities to require two parking spaces per housing unit. Many municipalities on the island do not allow secondary apartments and there is no attempt in any municipality to substantially increase densities in established neighbourhoods. Finally, some of the mature municipalities are adopting policies to encourage conversion of their older housing stock to lower-density use in order to attract middle-class households that would otherwise go to off-island suburban locations. Lower-density ownership is seen as better than higher-density rental because it may lead to an increase in assessment and enhance private investment in maintenance and renovation of the housing stock.

4.6.4 The MRC Plans

The 12 MRCs outside the MUC were created in 1979, and the adoption of a regional plan was made obligatory. All MRCs in the Montreal region have adopted official plans. These plans usually contain policies that would favour intensification. These include:

- establishing urban boundaries
- completing the urban fabric within the urban boundaries before allowing new development outside the boundaries (Salaberry).
- maximizing the use of existing and planned infrastructure
- favouring the concentration of residential development in certain areas.

However, most suburban planners report that the MRC plans have had only moderate or little influence on actual development patterns, which are more directly controlled by municipal zoning. The plans currently in force are first-generation plans that contain some "motherhood" principles in favour of consolidating the urban fabric and preventing sprawl, but few policy instruments to ensure action on these matters.

The failure of the MRCs to act as effective regional planning agencies can be partially attributed to their institutional mandate and structure. MRCs have no responsibility for providing infrastructure, such as roads and sewage, and therefore have little leverage with local municipalities. Furthermore, MRCs are governed by councils that are indirectly elected (half based on one municipality/one vote and half based on demographic weight of constituent municipalities), and in many cases involve elaborate systems of municipal veto over regional decisions (Quesnel 1990).

Given these institutional characteristics, it is not surprising that the MRCs have failed to become a political forum of action independent from the local municipalities. Strong provincial guidance might have counteracted this situation and allowed the MRC to play a more assertive role. It appears, however, that this was not forthcoming (Charbonneau, Hamel, Barcelo 1994). For instance, the boundaries within which consolidation of urban development was to take place were not defined by the province; thus, each MRC was free to define its own urbanized boundaries. This resulted in highly optimistic growth projections and far too much land zoned for urbanization. Secondly, the province had proposed that MRCs adopt policies on the density of new development, but these were considered to be optional rather than mandatory. The Ministry may have made recommendations about density, but generally would not refuse to endorse plans that ignored them. Thus, most plans do not contain such policies. Without such policies, the MRCs could not serve as effective instruments of growth management.

4.6.5 Off-Island Municipalities

Planners from off-island municipalities report that provincial policies do not promote or encourage intensification. A qualified exception is the Commission for the Protection of Agricultural Land. The agricultural protection law has prevented some leapfrog development, but it has not served to substantially increase housing densities by placing constraints on the amount of land available for development. Planners report that it is fairly easy to dezone land from the protected areas, and that the amount of rural land available for development far exceeds foreseeable development needs.

Even in the absence of provincial encouragement, some off-island municipalities are adopting planning policies that would encourage intensification. In particular, the older suburbs adjacent to the island of Montreal are showing clear signs of interest in promoting intensification. In the mature downtown areas of cities such as Longueuil and Laval, the problems are similar to those found in the City of Montreal; services (schools, parks, libraries) have been created to serve an expected population growth, but population levels have more or less stabilized as suburbanization continues farther afield. These municipalities have adopted planning polices to allow the redevelopment of obsolete lands and to attract new households by emphasizing the quality of life.

Most other suburban municipalities adjacent to the island have moderately high densities and are growing at rates that are slow compared to the outlying suburbs. Some of the older suburban municipalities have identified residential areas where gradual density increases will be permitted, provided it is compatible with the surrounding built environment and the

available infrastructure (Brossard). Where new development takes place, some such municipalities have made provision for higher-density housing along arterials and near public parks (Brossard), have reduced the minimum lot size for townhouses (Ste.-Marthe Sur-Lac, Bois-des-Filion) and have changed zoning regulations to allow for zero lot lines (Saint-Hubert). Some (Charlemagne, Saint-Hubert) have legalized basement apartments in single-family homes. In a few cases, minimum-density zoning has been put in place for certain lands (Boucherville). Market conditions are seen as favouring a trend toward higher-density housing in these areas, especially smaller lots and townhouse development (Valleyfield). Higher-density social housing for seniors is welcome in many of these older communities.

In the outlying suburbs, where development activity is strong and densities are low, interest in intensification is much less and very few municipalities have explicit policies favouring redevelopment or intensification. Nonetheless, some such municipalities are permitting residences above stores on main streets (e.g., Saint-Anne-des-Plaines), or townhouses on smaller lots (St. Sulpice). Clearly, however, the emphasis in these municipalities is on the development of low-density housing.

In rural areas, development is at extremely low densities because of environmental regulations requiring large lots for septic tanks, especially near rivers and lakes. Density restrictions are also imposed by the agricultural zoning law.

4.6.6 Discussion

From the preceding review, we can conclude that intensification policies vary according to the geographical area. In the City of Montreal, great efforts have been made to reverse tendencies toward depopulation by improving the quality of life in the city and generating financial incentives and physical opportunities for intensification. Island suburbs are less proactive but show some commitment to consolidating the urban fabric, either by permitting major redevelopment of obsolete sites, main streets infill, or transit station intensification. There is some coordination between the MUC and suburban municipalities where sub-centres have been designated.

Off the island of Montreal, intensification is permitted as an adjustment to market conditions. Some municipalities have positioned themselves to attract first-time buyers, and have permitted smaller-lot singles and more townhouses than is customary. Those municipalities with older areas in decline are permitting them to be redeveloped, sometimes at higher densities, in order to sustain population levels and exploit pre-existing investments in public infrastructure. These policies may be associated with other strategies to prevent residents from migrating to the outer suburbs, such as resolutions to keep taxes low and services good. Few suburban municipalities are zoning for high-rise development, as the market for both condos and rentals is considered to be oversupplied. In the outlying suburbs almost no intensification policies can be detected and the vast majority of development occurs as low-density detached housing.

From this review, it appears that provincial growth management policies are poorly expressed at the local level: other than the Commission for the Protection of Agricultural Land, which

has had a moderate impact, municipal planners could not identify any provincial agencies or policies that were strongly in favour of intensification.

Nonetheless, there are a wide variety of local policy concerns that promote intensification policies, i.e., the repopulation of older areas, the need to respond to changes in the housing market by providing a wider range of housing types, and the pressure to use infrastructure more efficiently as a way of reducing taxation.

The most powerful impetus behind local intensification policies appears to be changing market conditions. Planners interviewed for this study expected that these conditions would eventually change to favour low-density housing once again. This suggests that, under the current policy and planning regime in the Montreal region, we cannot expect sprawl to be substantially curtailed: as long as suburban municipalities are competing with low taxes, single-family housing, and good highways provided by the provincial government, it is unlikely that the outward migration can be substantially constrained, and the consumption of rural land by low-density housing developments halted.

4.7 Recent Initiatives and Current Challenges

The forgoing review and analysis of provincial and municipal planning suggests a number of barriers to controlling sprawl in the Montreal region:

- there is no effective planning on the metropolitan level
- the transmission of provincial policies to local municipalities is impaired
- agricultural land preservation is not as effective as it could be
- there is no strategic transportation plan in the region to prevent sprawl and encourage more intensified development focused on the island and City of Montreal
- low-density suburban development does not account for the true costs of that urban form
- tax competition and municipal fragmentation is contributing heavily to the dynamics of urban sprawl
- residential intensification is not widely seen as a necessary antidote to sprawl, something to be promoted by municipal planning policies.

In this section, we discuss these issues at greater length and identify current initiatives to address them, and the challenges that remain.

4.7.1 Planning on a Metropolitan Scale

The Montreal region has no overall planning body responsible for land use planning or infrastructure development. Neither the province nor the MRCs are capable of coordinating

metropolitan decision making under the current structure. In 1988, the province abolished the administrative region for Montreal and created five functional regions to cover the area, including one for the island of Montreal, one for Laval, and three others extended into Quebec territory far beyond the boundaries of the Montreal region. This arrangement has resulted in poor coordination of provincial intervention in the Montreal region, with the associated problems of overlap and entanglement of responsibilities. The pre-existing MRCs have little planning authority within their own jurisdictions and have played no role in metropolitan coordination.

By the early 1990s, growth in the outer suburbs, and declining economic and fiscal conditions in Montreal, brought the issue of governance and planning in the Montreal region to a head. In December 1991, the Quebec Cabinet's Standing Committee on the Development of Greater Montreal—composed of MLAs from the Montreal region—published a Strategic Plan for Sustainable Economic Recovery in order to promote better coordination of government action with respect to economic development in the region. Entitled "Change Today for Tomorrow," the document exposed the two critical issues facing the region: the absence of a regional vision and the decline of the regional core. The lack of metropolitan governing structures and the immense fragmentation of municipal structures meant that only the provincial government had the wherewithal to remedy the situation. Thus, the Minister of Municipal Affairs announced the creation of the Task Force on Greater Montreal in April 1992.

4.7.1.1 Task Force on Greater Montreal

The Task Force on Greater Montreal (or the Pichette task force, after its Chair, Claude Pichette) was created as an independent commission composed of 12 members appointed by the province and representing various social sectors. No municipal officials, elected or unelected, were appointed, although municipalities were extensively consulted during the course of the task force's deliberations, which lasted approximately two years. The task force's mandate was:

- to deal with the conditions under which municipal functions should be carried out in Greater Montreal in the coming years
- to propose a future vision for the City of Montreal and the Montreal region
- to recommend a course of action to promote coordinated and sustained development for Greater Montreal.

From the beginning, the main focus of the task force was regional economic development, but this was consistently linked to the issue of regional planning. The challenge, as the task force saw it, was to make recommendations for promoting a more efficient region in terms of land use, infrastructure development, and service delivery in order to stimulate and sustain economic development in the region. It is important to note, however, that the task force was not expected to deliver a regional plan with projected population distributions, or even to consider future development options or urban structure scenarios, as was done in the GTA

and Vancouver. The task force only proposed what and how a future planning *process* would look like.

A reorganization of governance in the region was the major recommendation of the task force. It proposed that local municipalities be retained (for the time being at least), that the MUC and the MRCs be abolished, and that a metropolitan "agency" (to be called the Montreal Metropolitan Region or MMR) be created to address inter-municipal issues. The MMR would have jurisdiction in regional planning, economic development, the environment, transportation, arts, and police. The territory of the MMR would correspond roughly to the CMA, and would change its boundaries as the CMA evolved.

The MMR would be administered by a 21-member Metropolitan Council made up exclusively of municipal councillors, with representation weighted to population and a president agreeable to both the City of Montreal and the suburban areas. The region's municipalities would be grouped into four Intermunicipal Service Agencies (ISAs) to coordinate the funding and provision of cross-border services. An ISA would have no jurisdiction other than that voluntarily ceded by its member municipalities.

The Task force's recommendations targeted urban sprawl: "The idea is not to prevent peripheral development, but rather to take measures that would promote the consolidation of existing residential areas, orderly urban development, optimal use of existing collective infrastructures and facilities." There were four suggested instruments for achieving this end:

- Metropolitan planning and development framework: to include a definition of the areas to be urbanized, target densities, the identification of an urban structure based on activity poles, the consolidation of older areas, reservation of environmentally valuable areas, rural areas, major infrastructure and public facilities. Municipal plans would need to match the metropolitan plan, and a development project would have to include statements explaining how it is consistent with the metropolitan plan. Activities of the various federal and provincial departments impacting on the development of the Montreal region would need to be in harmony with the metropolitan plan.

- Housing policy: the report merely states that the Ministry of Municipal Affairs should adopt a housing policy to promote a diversity of housing types and social mix over the entire urban region.

- Transportation plan: including a plan for infrastructure development (subways, commuter trains, autoroutes, main roads, port and airport infrastructures), and integration of transit services and fares.

- Priority public investments: prioritization of public investment in the region that will support the regional plan.

The Task force proposed a structure that was designed to allay municipal fears of centralization and domination. By recommending only indirectly elected councillors on the Metropolitan Council, by decentralizing many services to the ISAs, and by proposing that tax

inequities be addressed by diversifying taxation sources rather than pooling property on a regional level,[5] the Task force tried to engineer a compromise between the central city and suburban municipalities. It was also careful not to arrogate to the regional level any functions closely guarded by municipal officials, e.g., control over residential development decisions.

4.7.1.2 Reaction to the Task Force

Following the commission's report, there was a variety of reactions, some favourable and some unfavourable. Suburban municipalities emerged as the most vocal opponents to the Pichette report. Municipalities in the region are organized into a number of associations that reflect the fractured nature of regional interests: the mayors of the suburban municipalities on the island of Montreal have their own association (the Conference of Suburban Mayors) and a similar structure has emerged on the North Shore, including Laval. On the South Shore, an informal coalition of municipalities has similarly sprung up [CUI 94-1]. The only two municipalities to endorse the Pichette report were the mayors of Montreal and Longueuil. Other mayors in the region have publicly spoken out against the report and the notion of a metropolitan council. They advance a number of arguments, including that a metropolitan council would mean more distant and unresponsive government, but particularly that a metropolitan council would mean higher taxes in suburban areas and more control for the City of Montreal over the growth of outlying areas. Thus, the main fear is that metropolitan government would prevent suburban municipalities from competing with the municipalities of the MUC and thereby undermine their growth prospects.

To implement regional structures given this situation would require forceful action by the provincial government. The current government is strongly supported by suburban mayors on the South and North Shores, but has little support from within the MUC, where the benefits of regional governance would be most felt. Mayors are powerful lobbyists in provincial election campaigns and exert considerable influence at the Assemblé Nationale in Quebec City. Without their support, it is unlikely that the provincial government could act in the absence of a ground swell of support from other social actors.

Some major stakeholders in the Montreal area show a relatively low level of interest in regional issues: the Urban Development Institute has not been active in addressing region-wide issues and has no position on sprawl; and the Quebec Home Builders Association is comprised of a large number of small builders who are primarily interested in promoting housing development, often on the urban fringe. There are no regional environmental groups that concern themselves with urban form issues, and social planning and advocacy groups operate mostly at the local level. There are few organized fora for the integration of central city and suburban interests, either at the municipal or the provincial level.

In contrast, major business and labour interests are strongly in favour of region-wide solutions to the economic problems besetting the area. They realize that Montreal as a region is

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[5] For instance, the report proposed that the City of Montreal and other core municipalities should receive a portion of the provincial sales taxes collected within their territories.

competing against other city-regions in North America for footloose investment. Thus, rather than being preoccupied with conflicts between the suburbs and the central city, or between the North or South Shore, some economic interests in the region are aware of the need to promote economic coherence in the region as a whole. The Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal has been one of the most vocal supporters of the Task force's report. Metropolitan-wide planning is essential, according to the Board, to build the economic coherence of the region and introduce policies to combat sprawl and revive the city centre. Furthermore, financial institutions and businesses, concentrated in the central area, are clearly concerned about the potential loss in investment values if the centre continues to decline. Likewise, the Montreal Metropolitan Labour Council, which includes the island of Montreal, Laval and the South Shore, also supports regional growth management policies to limit sprawl and strengthen the regional centre. The Council is in favour of development and housing policies to direct growth to the already urbanized areas and that will permit higher densities as a way to reduce the cost of services (and therefore of taxation levels) and the price of housing.

The Pichette report proposed a new level of government and threatened suburban municipalities by promising to serve as a mechanism to steer fiscal resources to the City of Montreal. Given suburban resistance to the task force's report and the political importance of suburban constituencies, it is no surprise that the report has not yet been decisively acted upon. If the province is to act on the task force report, it will clearly be balancing the economic imperatives facing the region with the interests of municipal stakeholders opposed to regional government. On the positive side, it appears that many suburban municipalities recognize the importance of coordinating service delivery and planning on a regional scale, and that there is a consensus that the City of Montreal should be a strong core to the region. Thus, it does not follow that because suburban municipalities resist metropolitan government, they do not recognize the need for metropolitan planning.[6]

4.7.1.3 Provincial-MRC Metropolitan Planning

Although a metropolitan government is one obvious means to achieve more effective growth management, other regional planning initiatives that rely on existing institutions, specifically the MRCs, are quietly being explored by the province.

We have seen that although the 12 MRCs in the Montreal region did produce official plans, with land use designations and infrastructure policies, they were often mere compilations of lower-tier aspirations and therefore tended to confirm existing development patterns. Furthermore, the MRC plans were themselves poorly coordinated across the metropolitan region. A second round of official planning is now being undertaken by the MRCs, this time with more policy guidance provided by the province on the contents of each plan, and more coordination required between them.

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[6] An illustration of this regional awareness is provided by the recent proposal before the Conference of Suburban Mayors to create a regional superstructure. The metropolitan council would not have the power to raise taxes or redistribute municipal revenue and would not deal with many of the portfolios recommended by Pichette, e.g., solid waste, arts and culture. But it would have significant powers over economic development, transportation planning and land use planning.

Provincial policy guidance has taken the form of new planning policies to govern MRC planning activities. These policies include:

- promote the consolidation of existing urban areas, favour more compact development patterns at higher densities, and provide for a greater mix of land uses
- give priority to the revitalization of downtowns and older areas
- manage the extension of urban envelopes so as to minimize economic costs (such as the need for new infrastructure), and to promote the economic feasibility of public transit
- manage the extension of the urban envelope so as to minimize environmental costs, such as the consumption of farmland, and to respect provincial environmental policies on waterways, shorelines and floodplains, and so forth
- improve housing conditions and adapt housing supply to the changing socio-economic context.

The Ministry is also asking the MRCs within urban agglomerations to adopt an integrated planning approach for the whole urban region. For instance, the province is requiring that the plans be temporally coordinated, i.e., that they come into effect at the same time. It is also asking the MRCs to reconcile their development aspirations among themselves, for instance, by allocating expected population growth for the whole urban region to specific MRCs, and to arrive at an efficient urban structure by designating growth nodes and the infrastructure required to support them. The MRCs are also asked to facilitate the coordination of planning decisions with other actors in the urban region.

Clearly, these policies are an attempt by the province to address many of the weaknesses of the first-generation plans. They flesh out some of the principles contained the 1978 Preferred Option and apply them directly to the second-generation of MRC planning. The province is asking the MRCs to adopt policies that will lead to a well-consolidated urban area, making best use of existing land and services. Growth at the fringe will have to be better justified, and based on adequate services, transportation links, and public transportation. Where such growth takes place, it must be more compact than has conventionally been the case.

The policies are less specific and directive when it comes to the housing provision. They do not ask the MRCs to take steps to ensure a wide range of housing types or an adequate social mix in their development decisions. In fact, the policies take pains to ensure that municipalities do not perceive them as a threat to municipal authority over housing development.

Nonetheless, the provincial policies appear to be favourable to intensification. It is difficult to predict, however, how they will play out in practice. For instance, it is not known whether local politicians will be able to achieve consensus on allocating growth and infrastructure investment across the metropolitan region. Also, although nodal growth is widely considered to be the most efficient, implementing the concept becomes problematic when decisions have

to be made on where the nodes and the connecting transportation corridors will actually be located.

The recent experience with the mayors' round table (la table des préfets et maires du Grand Montréal) has not been promising in this respect. The round table was formed by municipalities in the region in order to demonstrate to the provincial government their ability to resolve regional growth management issues without the need for a provincially-imposed superstructure. However, tensions between the central city and suburban municipalities have prevented the round table from addressing many key growth management issues.

In order to facilitate the process of metropolitan planning through MRC second-generation plans, the Quebec government was considering a strategic growth management plan for the Montreal region in 1996. Although confidential at the time of writing, it appears that the Ministry of Municipal Affairs is willing to move ahead with regional growth management in the Montreal area, using its approval powers over MRCs to achieve its policy objectives. This task may be aided by the recent creation of the Ministry of State for the Metropolis, with a mandate to:

- coordinate efforts relating to land use and transportation planning
- contribute to the dialogue between the Québec government and municipalities, the Canadian government, and the private sector
- coordinate the actions of the government ministries in the region
- contribute to economic, social, and cultural development of the Montreal metropolitan region.

If a metropolitan government or planning agency is ever established in the region, some of the preliminary work on elaborating a regional vision will have already been accomplished, and can be integrated into the new institutional arrangements.

4.7.2 Improving Links Between Agricultural Land Preservation and Land Use Planning

To the extent that the policy statements issued by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs discussed above will encourage a more orderly extension of the urban fabric, they will help address some of the pressure on the commission to dezone lands. Under the current regime, local municipalities approve 98 percent of dezoning requests coming to them from developers, irrespective of whether these requests comply with or violate municipal planning policies.[7] If the new planning policies are implemented as stated, this situation can be expected to

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[7] Perhaps this reflects the reluctance of municipal officials to obstruct the economic aspirations of the development community. Reportedly, some municipalities have told the commission, "you should say 'no' to this guy" after having recommended approval of the dezoning application.

improve. But beyond this, the policy statements will do little to enhance agricultural land protection in the region.

At present, there is no agency or process to question a municipality that allows its rural lands to be developed at low densities. Because the Commission for the Protection of Agricultural Land is the agency responsible for dezoning lands, it is in a good position to carry out this function. At present, however, its ability to play this role is constrained by a lack of integration with the land use planning process:

- there is no legislative link between the Planning Act and the Agricultural Lands Protection Act
- although the Ministry of Municipal Affairs is consulted on dezoning proposals, it rarely makes deputations at tribunal hearings
- the commission does not have the jurisdiction to evaluate the need for land development: its jurisdiction is limited to whether or not there will be an impact on the surrounding agricultural land base.

The result is that the commission's decisions have tended to slow down the rate of sprawl, but they have not provided an overall framework for the rational expansion of the urban region. The commission cannot raise questions about the desirability of the proposal from a metropolitan perspective or recommend that the development should take place in another part of the region. In the absence of a metropolitan planning authority, the Commission for the Protection of Agricultural Land Protection is the only regulatory authority with a geographical scope that encompasses the whole urban region. Thus, it may be called upon to play a stronger role in the future in preventing urban sprawl.

4.7.3 Improving the Integration and Delivery of Transit

A common theme in discussions about creating a more compact Montreal region is the need for a regional transportation plan. Such a plan would promote the use of public transit over automobile use and reduce the impetus toward auto-dependent land uses. It would give MRCs and local municipalities direction on growth and development issues and lead to more proactive regional planning rather than to reactive, sprawling growth. There are two key challenges associated with this effort: covering costs and creating an administrative regime that is seen as legitimate throughout the region.

The creation of the MUC in 1970 led to the take-over of transit services on the island of Montreal by a single operator, but it excluded the rapidly growing suburban municipalities. By 1986, the suburban municipalities had formed a further 23 transit authorities in the Montreal region, and a large number of intermunicipal transit agreements (Frisken 1994b).

The problems with this arrangement were obvious. First, the MUC was subsidizing transportation services that were being heavily used by suburban residents in their daily commutes onto the island and suburban municipalities refused to help pay for the services.

This included not only the subways and bus system; even the suburban trains serving the off-island suburbs were being operated and funded by the MUC Transit Commission. Secondly, the lack of coordination among the large number of transit authorities resulted in an inefficient system that was doing nothing to promote transit use as the region grew and travel behaviour adapted to include cross-regional trips.

In an attempt to resolve these issues, the province brokered an agreement in 1989 between the MUCTC and the Laval and South Shore transit agencies. The aim was to set up a regional transit coordinating agency (CMTC) to arrive at a more equitable distribution of costs and benefits in the region, and to get consensus on new projects such as subways or bus lanes on bridges. The province agreed to subsidize the costs of operating the CMTC in order to reduce conflict among its members, and to pay the full capital costs associated with subway and commuter rail expansion.

In 1990, however, the Ryan Reforms were introduced, which entailed a massive cut in transfers to municipalities for transit operations.[8] Then, in 1995, the province announced that it would stop two major transit subsidies in Montreal: one for suburban trains and one for the CMTC. Furthermore, arguments among members of the CMTC have prevented them from arriving at a workable regional plan. The council is widely considered to be a failure and will likely be abolished in the near future. This would leave the region without a metropolitan perspective in planning transit and transportation.

In a renewed attempt to address regional transportation issues, the Ministry of Transportation set up a new metropolitan transportation planning agency in 1996. Instead of allowing the agency to be neutralized by disputes among political representative of the constituent municipalities, the government has decided that it will be directed by three provincially-appointed administrators. The agency (L'agence de Transport Metropolitaine des Personne) will administer the metropolitan system of transit, including the subway system, suburban trains, and the intermunicipal bus lanes. It will also administer the regional road system, including autoroutes and major boulevards. It will plan and establish fares for the sub-regional transit agencies, and redistribute revenues to reflect the geographic distribution of users throughout the metropolitan region. The commission will ensure that the various sub-regional systems will be coordinated in terms of routes and schedules in order to facilitate cross-regional transport. Finally, the commission will plan and oversee the investment of new funds in the regional transportation system. In this matter, it will take direction from a new regional transportation plan that the government is drawing up in conjunction with local stakeholders.

Getting suburban municipalities to agree to this proposal is a key challenge to its realization. The plan will lead to lower levels of financial burden for the MUC and higher levels for Laval and the South Shore. Some municipalities in the region with no transit services whatsoever will nonetheless pay into the regional fund. Not surprisingly then, there has been some resistance from these quarters. However, implementation may be eased by graduating the increase in funding levels for suburban municipalities, and by imposing new taxes—such as on

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[8] In return, municipalities were give the authority to impose taxes on parking and commercial properties.

gas and parking—or by introducing electronic tolls for road usage. These instruments would not only tend to increase funding for transit, but would discourage car use and car-dependent development.

4.7.4 Improving Links Between Land Use Planning and Transportation Planning

Less than adequate attention has been paid to the connection between land use and public transit in the Montreal region, both at the level of metropolitan planning and at the local level.

A loose regional urban structure has emerged that includes Montreal's central business district as its hub, three sub-centres on the island of Montreal (Anjou, St. Laurent, Pointe-Claire) and two off-island sub-centres (Laval, Longueuil). But this urban structure has not been greatly encouraged through higher order transit investments (as is the case in Toronto and Vancouver). In 1988, the Liberal government responded to growing automobile congestion with a transportation plan calling for the expenditure of $1.6 billion for system improvements in the metropolitan region. This announcement was severely criticized for promoting sprawl (Frisken 1994b). Critics pointed to the new highways that would be built in the outer part of the region, and to the subway extension to Montreal North, where commuters from Laval could be served, rather than to Ville d'Anjou, where the MUC had already identified a sub-centre growth node.

A major initiative by the Ministry of Transportation—with the participation of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs—presents an opportunity to address this issue. In creating a transportation plan for the Montreal region, the Ministry has identified urban sprawl as a prime cause of growing inefficiencies in the transport system. The main principals behind this planning exercise are:

- promote the integration of the various modes of transport
- promote public transit
- optimize the use of existing infrastructure.

If the plan that eventually emerges from this process is based on these principles, it will tend to favour land use intensification. The major emphasis is on demand management rather than infrastructure extension and new investment proposals (Ministry of Transportation 1995). According to provincial officials, land use planning as a means of managing the demand for new auto-based infrastructure and as a way of enhancing the viability of transit will be an important part of the proposals that emerge from this planning exercise.

At the local level, the province has traditionally shown little interest in promoting forms of land use that would increase transit use and reduce costs. With the first generation of MRC plans the province required only that MRCs identify the major transportation requirements to support the land use projections of the plan. No mention was made of the need to reduce transportation investments by implementing transit-supportive land uses.

The 1994 revisions to the Planning and Development Act have corrected this situation to some extent by directing the attention of that MRCs to the link between land use and transit planning. Guidelines issued by the Ministry of Transportation in 1994, entitled Transportation Planning and Revising Regional Official Plans (Planification des Transports et révision des Schémas d'aménagement) were designed to give the MRCs guidance in linking land use and transportation in their second generation reviews. "In order to minimize urban sprawl, which affects not only the efficiency of the transport system but also entails significant costs in infrastructure and other services, the MRC may attempted to modify these tendencies" by using the following measures (Ministry of Transportation 1994, 3-86):

- establish an urban boundary that would consolidate the urban tissue
- indicate priority zones for development and redevelopment and densities within these zones
- raise the densities along principal transit routes
- diversify land use in order to reduce automobile dependency.

Given the importance of this problem, these considerations seem somewhat superficial. The guidelines do not lay out desirable urban form from a transit point of view, do not discuss the major role of urban structure in promoting transit use, give no guidance on urban design issues such road grids, are largely optional in character, and are not accompanied by any target densities.

4.7.5 Overcoming Tax Competition and Inequities

The large number and small size of many municipalities in the Montreal region has already been mentioned. Combined with their unusual dependence on tax revenue and the corresponding need to increase the assessment base, this has resulted in overzoning for residential development and other land uses. In 1993, zoning bylaws in the region were sufficient to accommodate a population of seven million, i.e., over twice the current population. Yet, rezonings of land to urban use are occurring every day in the region.

Merging existing municipalities into larger communities is one way of dealing with the fiscal impetus to sprawl. Unfortunately, municipal amalgamation is also a politically risky undertaking because of the link between local identity and municipal structure, the sense of community engendered by small municipalities, and the presumed greater opportunities for democratic participation they offer. Cognizant of these issues, in 1993 the Quebec government announced a plan to encourage cities and towns to merge.

The plan was to merge 375 small communities across Quebec into 187 larger municipalities. Rather than using a stick approach, the government offered carrots: to offer grants and technical assistance to municipalities that would agree to merge. The program is supported by the main municipal associations in Quebec, labour unions and business interests. In the Montreal area, several municipalities are considering exploiting the opportunity offered by the

government. Movement toward amalgamation may be strengthened by current trends toward reduced provincial transfers and the fiscal self-reliance of municipalities: amalgamation may become a municipal strategy to reduce administrative costs and make service delivery more efficient.

It should be recognized, however, that municipal amalgamation can only go so far in addressing sprawl. While it may reduce the incentive for suburban communities to compete with one another for new low-density residential and non-residential development, it will do little to dampen the competition of suburban municipalities with higher-tax municipalities on the island of Montreal. In order to address the latter problem, some form of fundamental fiscal reform will be required. Toward this end, Serge Ménard, Quebec's Minister of State for the Metropolis since 1996, suggested that a uniform tax for non-residential properties be instituted across the Montreal region (*Globe and Mail* February 6, 1996, A2).

4.7.6 Recognizing the True Costs of Sprawl

A frequently cited cause of sprawl in the region is the lack of correspondence between the cost of housing on the urban fringe and the true costs associated with low-density fringe growth. In Quebec, infrastructure was traditionally paid for and constructed by municipalities, in part because developers and builders were too small to handle such large expenses.[9] In recent years, subdivision agreements with developers have become more common, but they have generally dealt only with on-site hard costs. As transfers from the province have declined, there is increasing pressure for developers and home owners to pay the true costs associated with new development. Since 1994, the Planning Act has permitted municipalities in Quebec to require that developers construct infrastructure or facilities made necessary by a development, or to pay all or part of the costs where the municipality builds these services (Slack 1994).

This is clearly a step toward internalizing some of the costs of suburban development and will probably dampen the impetus to sprawl. Further challenges remain in this respect. First, the legislation does not permit municipalities to charge developers for soft infrastructure, such as police stations, fire stations, libraries, and so on. Secondly, charges are generally applied on a municipal-wide basis and do not reflect the marginal costs of new development in unserviced, high-cost locations. The Federation of Quebec Municipalities has proposed that development charges be scaled on a geographical basis, so as to increase in areas requiring the extension of services.

4.7.7 Building Support for Intensification at the Local Level

The issue of "sprawl" has a relatively high profile in the Montreal region: it has been consistently raised by university-based academics, by the City of Montreal, by the Quebec Institute of Urban Planners, and by the Task Force on Greater Montreal. The topic of sprawl is frequently raised in the Montreal press as a policy issue and a problem of public concern. In

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[9] In 1992, only 6.4 percent of capital spending by municipalities was finance by developer contributions.

contrast, "intensification" (or "densification" in French) is not in common use in the Montreal region. As a policy issue, interviewees claimed that intensification is of concern only to urban professionals. However, the issue is raised on a project-by-project basis when the density of new development becomes a concern to local stakeholders.

4.7.7.1 MUC

For a number of reasons, conflict over intensification projects is less frequent in the MUC than in the central areas of other metropolitan regions studied:

- Large scale intensification projects are relatively uncommon.
- Because there has been less redevelopment of industrial land on the island, labour unions have not developed positions and campaigns to preserve industrial land in the face of intensification proposals.
- Because the provincial government's standards on former industrial site remediation and its funding for decontamination programs are supportive of redevelopment efforts, this has not been raised as a controversial issue on the island.
- Because the demand for housing is low in the central area, there is less pressure from developers to redevelop or infill lands within established residential areas.
- Because the rate of home ownership is low and because ratepayer and residents' association tend be fewer in number, citizen resistance to intensification projects does not appear to be as pervasive as in other metropolitan areas.
- The issue of basement apartments does not have a high profile on the island of Montreal. This may be because the province has not tried to force acceptance of this housing form and because much of the existing built form is inappropriate for basement apartments, i.e., the plex form.
- Because housing densities are historically relatively high in the mature areas of the region, residents appear to be less disturbed by proposals for infill development. In the City of Montreal, for instance, only 8 percent of the housing stock is single-detached.
- The issue of housing affordability has not been critical in the Montreal region, reducing the number of actors demanding intensification policies.
- Environmental groups oppose sprawling development onto the island's remaining open and green spaces but have not actively promoted intensification as a policy choice.

- The high level of poverty in the City of Montreal has given rise to a number of advocacy groups that frequently raise awareness of the need for low cost, high-density housing when project opportunities arise.[10]

- Many municipal councils in the mature areas of the island tend to be favourably disposed toward intensification projects as a way to revitalize economically and demographically declining areas, and to increase public safety by adding to street activity.

There is conflict over particular intensification projects in the Montreal region. In such cases, the issues raised are much the same as those encountered in the other case study regions: parking and traffic congestion, loss of neighbourhood character due to heights and densities, and loss of open space. Planners and local politicians are aware of the risks associated with intensification and tend to avoid supporting planning policies and development proposals that will trigger local conflict. As in Vancouver and Toronto, our review of intensification planning policies in the MUC showed that there are few initiatives to densify established residential neighbourhoods on the island, and most municipal interviewees acknowledged that projects out of character with existing neighbourhoods would be politically unpopular.

There are, however, a few unique features to local intensification conflicts in Montreal. The overburdening of local services is rarely raised in newspaper accounts as an objection to intensification projects, perhaps because many parts of the island have suffered population losses and therefore have surpluses in infrastructure and services. Also rarely mentioned in the Montreal press is the potential for intensification projects to lead to social problems and more crime. Instead, the issue seems to be concern over introducing higher-income people into impoverished neighbourhoods, such as in the Nouveau Montreal projects and the adaptive reuse of industrial buildings in the City of Montreal.

High unemployment levels have also raised resistance to conversion of industrial lands and buildings to residential use. Working class neighbourhoods adjacent to the Lachine Canal in the City of Montreal successfully blocked some planned conversions to up-scale condos on the grounds that this form of gentrification was cutting off access of local workers to industrial jobs and increasing local property values and taxes.

Reflecting the age of the older parts of the central city, built heritage is often raised as an issue in intensification projects in the City of Montreal. For instance, the projects associated with Nouveau Montreal—most of which are in the old port area—have raised protests from archeological groups. Other projects entailing the demolition of heritage buildings have attracted objectors from the very strong heritage movement in Montreal.

Another unique feature of that pertains to municipalities other than the City of Montreal is the availability of the municipal referendum as an instrument of local resistance to intensification

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[10] For instance, the Popular Action Front for Urban Renewal, a coalition of 40 tenants' groups, has been active in lobbying for higher density housing on the former site of the Paul Sauvé arena in east-end Montreal, has supported the redevelopment of the CMHC lands at Benny Farm, and has campaigned for more funds at the provincial, federal, and municipal level for high-density social housing projects.

projects. According to Quebec law, residents of adjacent properties have the legal right to initiate a referendum on a zoning bylaw if at least 500 signatures are attached to a petition to city council. This has been an effective means of blocking high-density projects or gaining leverage to reduce densities in several recent cases.

4.7.7.2 Off-Island Suburbs

We have seen that in off-island suburbs, the higher-density, slower growth municipalities adjacent to the island have adopted planning policies that would favour higher-density new development and the consolidation of existing residential areas. It is important to note, however, that in all but a handful of the off-island suburbs, single-family housing is still the predominant form of development. Many municipalities have adopted planning policies and zoning regulations designed to prevent dramatic changes to the nature of the existing built environment or to the nature of new development. Zoning regulations adopted by councils often:

- place minimum lot requirements on new development
- restrict the amount of land available for medium or higher-density housing, often by placing explicit policies in official plans to maintain a high percentage (80-85 percent) of the housing stock as the single-detached type
- limit the height of buildings, often to three storeys
- prohibit basement apartments.

These policies reflect the unwillingness of suburban municipalities to accept the fiscal burdens they associate with low-cost housing, such as low assessments and high demand for municipal services like police, fire, recreational and library services. Local politicians fear that higher-density housing will bring crime and social decay. Social housing for seniors is the exception that proves the rule: suburban municipalities have been relatively open to higher-density senior citizen projects because these are not generally associated with social disruption.

4.7.7.3 Discussion

A public debate about intensification as a potential policy solution to sprawl may help to sensitize local decision makers and residents to the benefits of intensification in achieving regional objectives. Greater acceptance of intensification in the central areas could help increase developer interest in central city investment; and in suburban areas, greater acceptance could lead to more balanced housing stock, better use of infrastructure, and transit-supportive land development. A policy discussion could also help address the disadvantages of local intensification projects—such as shadowing, traffic, and design—and build confidence that these will be overcome through better planning practices.

There are a number of social groups that could help to carry on such a discussion: municipal planners, tenants' organization and anti-poverty groups, business associations and labour

unions. However, the provincial government is in the best position to initiate the discussion and set its terms through research, public consultations, and education campaigns.

4.8 Concluding Comments

There are three main obstacles to effective growth management and intensification in the Montreal region:

- inability of province to effectively coordinate its own interventions in the metropolitan area
- inability of municipalities in the metropolitan area to resolve growth management issues
- weak influence of provincial government on municipal planning for growth management and intensification.

These points will serve as the focus for our concluding comments.

4.8.1 Uneven coordination of provincial interventions in the metropolitan area

The provincial government has shown little interest in creating a truly metropolitan planning agency for the region. With more than half the population of Quebec in the Montreal region, the province has clearly been reluctant to create a metropolitan administrative super-structure that would rival its own political influence (Trépanier 1993). Instead, the provincial government has continued to act as the only public entity capable of mediating conflict among local interests and acting on the metropolitan scale.

By adopting the Preferred Option, the province recognized the importance of coordinating its own interventions in the Montreal region as a way to control sprawl and encourage more orderly growth patterns. To be successful, provincial coordination would be necessary among at least four key ministries: Municipal Affairs, Transportation, Agriculture, and Housing.

This has been only partially achieved. Success is most visible with respect to the revitalization of older city cores, where provincial housing programs have encouraged commercial and residential rehabilitation, taxation policies have permitted municipalities to provide financial assistance to private redevelopment efforts within a plan of revitalization, environmental policies have been designed not to stymie industrial land redevelopment, and financial incentives have been offered for decontamination efforts.

Coordination to prevent sprawl is a different story. Efforts to do so seem to have gradually dissipated in the aftermath of the Preferred Option. The strongest policy to prevent sprawl in Quebec is the Agricultural Land Protection Act, but this Act and its administration are poorly integrated with the policies and administrative activities of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. Transportation investment has also been imperfectly coordinated with regional planning objectives. Finally, housing policy—especially the system of mortgage guarantees and subsidies—is routinely cited as a source of suburban sprawl.

The inability of the provincial governments to enforce consistency and uniformity among its various ministries is typical of all the case study areas. To some extent it reflects the complexity of policy making in a modern state with multiple layers of jurisdiction (for instance, provincial housing policy is partially determined by spending in this sector by the Federal government), but it also reflects the rivalry among local interests in the Montreal region itself. This is the reality underlying the next sub-section.

4.8.2 Inability of municipalities in the metropolitan area to resolve growth management issues

Another feature of the Montreal case study is the very low level of cooperation between central city and suburban municipalities. Conflict is fueled by historic grievances. The City of Montreal resents the power that rural and suburban municipalities have traditionally wielded in Quebec City, despite their lesser population and economic importance, while suburban municipalities resent the mega-project profligacy of the City of Montreal and feel they are now being asked to pay for it. Ethnic and class cleavages, and the decline of the economic dependence of suburban municipalities on the central city also contribute to conflict (Sancton 1985).

Distrust and conflict has hobbled regional land use and transportation planning in the area for decades. In 1969, the province imposed regional planning in the form of the MUC, but the latter has been prevented from developing an effective strategic plan by conflict among island municipalities. Metropolitan planning for the entire region has been impossible, given the level of distrust between the City of Montreal and the off-island suburban municipalities. More recent attempts by area municipalities to show that they are capable of independently resolving metropolitan issues have proved that the municipalities in the region require some form of arbitrator with the authority and political legitimacy to impose metropolitan solutions on divergent interests. This may come in the form of a more proactive provincial planning authority (if the province chooses to pursue the notion of a strategic growth management plan for the Montreal region), or in the form of a metropolitan superstructure (such as that proposed by the Pichette task force).

4.8.3 Weak influence of provincial government on municipal planning for growth management and intensification.

We have seen that the province has attempted to influence municipal planning through a variety of regulatory activities:

- institutional reform (e.g., creation the MUC and MRCs as vehicles for managing sub-regional growth, creation of the Commission for the Protection of Agricultural Land)
- legislative changes (e.g., the Planning and Development Act and recent modifications)
- policy changes (e.g., the recent policy statements and transportation guidelines)

The impact of these reforms is debatable. While they have certainly improved the quality of local planning from the totally inadequate role it played in Quebec only 25 years ago, many observers believe that they have had little impact on the actual development pattern endorsed by local municipalities. Recent changes to the Planning and Development Act, policy statements and guidelines show a willingness to respond to these charges, but our review raises the question as to whether they will go very far in addressing the substantive problems. Growth management policies are vague and lack definable targets and control mechanisms, and municipal control over residential development is almost completely unchallenged by provincial policies.

Rather than attempting to exercise direct regulatory control over municipal decisions that affect the spatial aspects of residential development, the provincial housing policy has been exercised through funding. That is, the province has supported residential renovation policies that only indirectly and imperfectly favour intensification of mature areas and do nothing to increase the density of new development on greenfield sites.

One reason for this outcome may be the overriding respect for municipal autonomy shown by the province. This, in turn, may reflect two conditions: the strong decentralist ideology in Quebec, and the loss of leverage occasioned by the decision to move toward the fiscal independence of municipalities.

4.8.4 Growth Management Versus Intensification

These considerations help to explain one remarkable feature of the Montreal case study: that growth management at the regional level is a major policy issue whereas at the local level, intensification is little remarked as a policy issue.

This can be at least partially explained by the policy orientations of the provincial government. We have seen that the Quebec government has shown a long-standing interest in promoting regional growth management, i.e., stopping sprawl and concentrating development on the island and near shore areas. It has launched a variety of policy initiatives such as the Commission for the Protection of Agricultural Land, elaboration of the Preferred Option, and more recently, direction to the MRCs in their second round of official planning. These initiatives have stirred a great deal of discussion, research, and commentary on the problems associated with sprawl and the best means to address the issue.

In contrast, the government has shown little enthusiasm for translating these planning visions into a regulatory framework that would dramatically constrain municipal decision-making in matters related to residential development.[11] It has shown little interest in forcing municipalities to adopt planning policies that would diversify the housing stock throughout the

[11] The partial exception to this rule is the Agricultural Land Protection Commission. But we have seen that although it turns down most requests from private land owners, the commission approves about 80 percent of the requests coming to it from the municipalities. Thus it functions principally to reduce the growth aspirations of private land owners but confirms those of municipalities.

urban region, imposing minimum densities on new development, or setting local intensification targets.

These policy positions of the province are somewhat contradictory: provincial objectives for regional growth management can hardly be achieved without altering the regime of local decision-making that controls the spatial dimension of housing supply.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the main research findings across the three case studies are synthesized. Following some observations on general issues, the chapter offers some comments on provincial planning, metropolitan planning, and municipal planning.

5.2 General Issues

Growth-related issues were similar across the three urban regions: economic, fiscal, environmental, and social concerns were evident in each. However, significant variations among the regions are also detectable in terms of the priority afforded the various issues. In the Vancouver region, environmental issues such as air pollution, energy use, and the consumption of agricultural land are of very high priority, as are concerns about land and housing supply, and affordability. In contrast, these issues are not in the foreground in Montreal. There, fiscal issues and regional economic development are paramount in thinking about growth management and controlling sprawl. The main concerns are to develop the infrastructure required to increase the efficiency of the urban system, find an equitable formula for sharing the costs of regional services and infrastructure, and engender a regional identity to attract outside investment. Growth-related issues in the Toronto region have evolved over the last decade, from housing supply and affordability and environment issues in the late 1980s, to economic development, apportionment of the fiscal burden, and concerns over a declining core in the 1990s.

Another way of expressing the differences among the three regions with respect to the issue context would be to remark on the social interests involved. Although it would be an exaggeration to call them coalitions, two "camps" can be discerned on the regional political landscape: those who advocate greater coordination of public investment and provincial transfers in order to remove barriers to conventional growth patterns, and those who want to redirect conventional growth patterns in order to prevent a deterioration in the quality of life, the polarization of the classes, and environmental decay. In short, the first group is advocating development and the second, sustainable development. Although both camps tend to agree that some form of provincial action is required to direct growth and set priorities for infrastructure investment, their political agendas are quite distinct: the former favours growth as an end in itself, whereas the latter favours managing growth in order to achieve other collective goals and to minimize externalities associated with growth.

In Montreal, it is the former group that is paramount in regional issues, perhaps best represented by the Board of Trade. In Vancouver, those speaking the language of growth management are in the ascendancy, recognizing the need to control and even oppose growth in order to maintain the quality of the regional environment and mitigate the adverse social impacts of rapid growth. In Toronto, centre stage was occupied by growth management

speakers at the turn of the decade, but has since been turned over to the advocates of regional economic development, with declining concern afforded to the externalities associated with unmanaged growth.

To some extent these findings probably reflect the differential in rates of population and employment growth—both recent and expected—between Vancouver and Toronto on the one hand, and Montreal on the other hand.

Some general observations on the importance of growth management and intensification as policy issues in the three regions can also be offered. Sprawl and intensification are largely issues of concern to a professional cadre in each region, including provincial officials, municipal and private planners, academics, architects and some journalists. As far as the larger public is concerned, however, the need to plan on a regional basis and to manage growth is more widely recognized in Toronto and Vancouver than in Montreal, where the link between regional economic development and land use is still tenuous. Likewise, intensification (or "densification" as it is known in Vancouver and Montreal) is of much greater concern in Vancouver and Toronto where provincial and metropolitan policy efforts are strongest in forcing municipalities and neighbourhoods to address the issue.

5.3 Provincial Planning Policies

In all three cases, provincial governments have expressed a policy interest in controlling sprawl and encouraging more compact urban forms. All three regions show the same range of provincial strategies: direct provincial involvement in metropolitan growth management through infrastructure investment, creating metropolitan and sub-metropolitan planning institutions, and exerting influence over municipal planning.

However, the emphasis given to these various policy instruments has been markedly different across the three case study regions. In the Vancouver region, the province has kept control of certain metropolitan growth management levers (such as regional transit and highway planning, and the arm's length Commission for the Protection of Agricultural Land), but has chosen to rely heavily on regional institutions, which in turn rely on municipal cooperation for their effectiveness. The province has made little attempt directly to influence municipal planning policies in managing growth or promoting denser or more affordable housing.

In the Toronto region, the provincial government has used the broadest range of policy instruments: it has intervened directly in metropolitan planning decisions over major tranportation and sewerage investment, has attempted to create more of a top-down metropolitan planning regime through the OGTA, and has forcefully attempted to control municipal planning policies through its official plan review process.

In the Montreal region, provincial policy instruments have been less forceful: the province makes the key decisions concerning transportation and transit planning and has established the Commission for the Protection of Agricultural Land, but has not made any attempt to create

institutions of metropolitan cooperation, and has intervened little in municipal planning decisions.

To some extent, these variations reflect differences in institutional arrangements and political cultures among the three regions. In the Vancouver region, the various levels of government accept the need for cooperative, non-hierarchical planning and mutual adjustment, reflected best in the recent Growth Strategies Act. Municipalities generally enjoy a high degree of legal autonomy with respect to growth management and housing issues.

In the Montreal region, municipal autonomy is also important from an ideological point of view as part of the nationalist vision, but mechanisms of metropolitan cooperation are less developed. Municipalities do cooperate on the basis of intermunicipal agreements but region-wide cooperation has proved elusive.

These observations point to the continued importance of provincial decision-making in managing growth in the major metropolitan regions of Canada. Given their size and jurisdictional complexity, and the reluctance of provincial governments to create rival metropolitan-wide municipal entities with upwards of the half the provincial population, this is to be expected. The principal differences among the three areas relate to the strength and character of metropolitan planning institutions and of provincial intervention in local planning decisions. Each of these will now be considered in more detail.

5.4 Metropolitan Planning Policies

The metropolitan governance and planning institutions in the three regions vary widely. Vancouver has a single two-tier system that incorporates over 96 percent of the CMA population, while in Toronto, there are five upper-tier governments and in Montreal there are 13. However, no region has an effective metropolitan-wide planning authority in place.

In Vancouver, the GVRD has a long-standing metropolitan planning framework, but is relatively weak in its implementing authority compared to the powers of, say, upper-tier governments in Ontario. Even with their considerable planning powers, however, upper-tier governments in Ontario cannot serve as effective instruments of metropolitan-wide planning because of the obvious spatial fragmentation and competition among them for population, employment, and infrastructure spending. The Office for the Greater Toronto Area has brokered a plan including a vague urban structure and urban envelope, and population and employment allocations to upper-tier municipalities. The Montreal region has no metropolitan-wide administrative structure and no regional plan to coordinate the extremely large number of municipal governments in the region.

In all three regions, there is some evidence that provincial governments are loath to institute effective regional governance and create planning institutions that could challenge the provinces for power. This was most clearly seen in the case of Vancouver where the provincial government actually disbanded a rival municipal institution (the Lower Mainland Regional Planning Board), and later stripped the GVRD of its planning authority; but many

observers believe that this is also the case in Montreal and Toronto, where provincial governments have tried a number of governing innovations but have avoided metropolitan-wide institutions under municipal control. Whether or not this is a telling insight will be shown by provincial action (or inaction) in these two regions on recent reform proposals recommended by task forces set up by the provinces themselves.

In all three regions, the dynamics of regional planning are similar: the central cities offer general support for regional planning, while suburban municipalities resist it wholesale or in key parts. Suburban resistance is especially strong when regional planning involves tax pooling or other forms of fiscal transfer to the service-burdened central cities, or entails significant reduction in the employment or population growth potential of suburban areas.

In terms of electoral influences, suburban constituencies have become very powerful in the provincial legislature as the balance of population has shifted outside the core municipalities. This has created a cautious political atmosphere in which provincial governments have been reluctant to impose regional planning structures without first building a consensus among suburban constituents.

Where institutions for metropolitan-wide planning exist, i.e., in Vancouver and Toronto, growth management has been conducted through two main vehicles: urban structure planning supported by transportation planning, and growth allocation. The Toronto and Vancouver regions have undertaken some planning effort to create a hierarchy of metropolitan centres comprised of the core area and suburban sub-centres. In Montreal, this has been attempted by the Montreal Urban Community, the largest and most effective of the upper-tier governments, but not on a metropolitan-wide scale (perhaps reflecting the fact that decentralization is not considered as desirable in the Montreal region where the core is threatened with serious decline).

None of the three regions has managed to forge the necessary link between regional urban structure planning and transportation planning. In the Montreal region, there is no metropolitan-wide transit planning authority, nor is there one in the Toronto region. In Vancouver, a metropolitan transit authority only has advisory status to the provincial government. This makes for mixed record in term of the coordination of transit services and land use decisions on a metropolitan scale. On the one hand, major provincial investments in rapid transit have, in a general way, supported the urban structure concept in each region. On the other hand, highway development in all three regions has had the opposite effect, promoting an undifferentiated spread of the urban fabric.

The greatest threat to transit effectiveness and efficiency in the three regions are the land use decisions of suburban municipalities who continue to approve plans for low-density segregated development. On this score, the strongest link between transit goals and land use has been made in the Toronto region, where the Ontario government has attempted to influence municipal planning in favour of higher densities and mixed-use development.

All three metropolitan areas are now in the process of developing regional transportation plans, and all three are using a consultative provincial-municipal framework. Because

provinces are responsible for infrastructure development and the municipalities for land use planning, this holds the greatest promise for linking the two planning processes.

Regional population allocation has been the other main instrument of metropolitan planning. In both Vancouver and Toronto, the metropolitan planning agencies have attempted to direct population growth toward central cities and away from the suburban fringe. Our review of these efforts has suggested only moderate success in following through with growth management targets in official plans and in changing actual growth patterns. The main barrier to more effective management of population growth has been the lack of coordination of strategic decisions at the provincial level.

5.5 Municipal Planning Policies

The fact that planners often treat growth management and housing issues very differently emerged as an important theme in this study. In spite of the fact that these two policy fields are intimately related (e.g., housing development is the most important land use in terms of area and largely determines transportation needs), they are often separated in the planning discourse between the province and municipalities.

On the one hand, growth management is seen as a relatively legitimate intervention by the province. In BC and Quebec, the province intervenes through the activities of the respective agricultural land preservation agencies, which attempt to minimize the amount of valuable agricultural land used for suburban development. In Ontario, the province intervenes through its approval powers over municipal planning decisions. These provincial efforts encourage municipalities to consolidate development in already built-up areas, improve the efficiency of existing municipal services, and reduce the need to extend new services.

On the other hand, housing policies that require municipalities to ensure a wide range of housing types and an adequate social mix in their development decisions are seen as illegitimate incursions into the municipal sphere. In the Toronto region, the attempt by the province to influence housing development has resulted in widespread conflict between municipal and provincial governments. In the Vancouver and Montreal regions, provincial governments have been loath to attempt such intervention, preferring to consider housing as an area of municipal discretion.

One result of the different treatment afforded growth management and housing is that the provincial interest in providing a wide array of housing types at a variety of densities has been poorly expressed at the local level. Where municipalities in each of the study regions have undertaken housing intensification initiatives, they appear to be reacting to changing local economic, demographic and fiscal conditions rather than provincial policy pressures.

In the core cities, municipalities are highly motivated to reduce commuting into the core, to meet changing housing demand, to use existing infrastructure, and, in the case of Montreal, to stem population decline. In two of three cases (Vancouver and Montreal), the core city operates under special provincial charter that allows significant policy innovation.

Some standard principles are visible in core city intensification efforts. Most have sought to preserve existing neighborhoods as far as possible, direct growth to retail and high-transit capacity nodes and corridors, and create "new neighborhoods" in obsolete industrial and railway areas, and along waterfronts. All three core cities have been very active in encouraging the provision of social housing through municipal housing corporations and city-owned land. Adaptive reuse policies are in place or under consideration in each municipality, and small-scale infill is routinely permitted.

There are, however some differences. By adopting the neighbourhood centres idea in its recently approved official community plan, the City of Vancouver has forged ahead of Toronto and Montreal in promoting neighbourhood change. A similar policy would certainly be met with major opposition in Toronto and would not be seriously contemplated in Montreal where growth pressures are not as intense. Vancouver's success in this and other aspects of intensification policy may be partially attributable to its strong program of public participation in making the trade-offs between protecting neighbourhood character and promoting a functionally efficient regional system from which central city dwellers will benefit.

There are many common obstacles to intensification in the central cities. In particular, developers are sometimes dissuaded from undertaking residential projects in these areas because they feel that:

- there is little opportunity for economy of scale as infill projects are site-specific and the plans cannot usually be repeated for other sites
- the zoning and administrative procedures are more complicated and demanding
- local opposition to infill projects is likely to be greater in the central area than on the urban fringe
- it is difficult to assemble land in the central area and land prices are higher.

There is some evidence that obstacles arising from soil contamination on industrial sites are worse in the Toronto region than in Vancouver or Montreal. This is partially due to the severity of the contamination in Toronto and to the strictness of the provincial regulatory framework governing decommissioning of industrial sites. Intensification efforts encounter stronger resistance from heritage activists in Montreal than elsewhere, although this is a substantial force against redevelopment in all three central areas. In Vancouver, building heights are especially controversial because of the reduction in view they portend.

Suburban areas in the three study regions are adopting intensification policies in response to an aging population, fiscal constraints, market trends toward smaller housing units, concern to preserve environmental features, and the need to control the gradual market-led urbanization of some parts of the suburban landscape.

Intensification policies in the suburban areas of the three regions are more haphazard and difficult to classify. Some suburban municipalities are strongly resistant to changing the built

form, while others are more enthusiastic about the prospect of intensification. Many suburban municipalities in all three regions have adopted policies to promote arterial intensification, smaller-lot greenfield development, secondary suites, and infill development within neighbourhoods. In the Vancouver region, suburban municipalities are also promoting town centre development around a number of major nodes with high-order transit facilities. So are some suburban municipalities in Toronto and the more mature suburbs in Montreal.

The main obstacles to intensification in suburban areas of the three study regions are the widely shared antipathy toward higher-density urban-style development, the desire to limit the amount of affordable housing in the community, the ready availability of greenfield sites for new development, the political influence of development interests, the lack of consensus among municipal officials and planners on the undesirability of low-density development, the reluctance of professionals involved in urban design (e.g., transportation and public works engineers) to adopt new, more compact standards, and what appears to be a locked-in dependence on the private automobile for suburban travel.

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