

## The Redevelopment of Fairview Slopes in Vancouver, 1975–1995

John Zacharias

Volume 26, Number 1, October 1997

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1016663ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016663ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (print)

1918-5138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Zacharias, J. (1997). The Redevelopment of Fairview Slopes in Vancouver, 1975–1995. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 26(1), 32–42.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1016663ar>

Article abstract

Fairview Slopes was almost completely transformed as the political class and the planning and development community focused much of their efforts for a time on this inner city district. While city planning reports in the 1970s were concerned with the preservation of the existing community and the heritage buildings of Fairview Slopes, the redevelopment nevertheless resulted in rapid displacement of the population and replacement of the buildings. This article is concerned with the spatial and temporal patterns of redevelopment. In this case, the redevelopment shows regular temporal and spatial distributions sensitive to topography and location. On the other hand ownership, land use and the distribution of the existing community were relatively unimportant in explaining the distribution of development over time. Municipal regulations introduced at the onset of redevelopment had an important effect on the shape and size of the projects, while redirecting land assembly activity.

# *The Redevelopment of Fairview Slopes in Vancouver, 1975–1995*

*John Zacharias*

## **Abstract:**

*Fairview Slopes was almost completely transformed as the political class and the planning and development community focused much of their efforts for a time on this inner city district. While city planning reports in the 1970s were concerned with the preservation of the existing community and the heritage buildings of Fairview Slopes, the redevelopment nevertheless resulted in rapid displacement of the population and replacement of the buildings. This article is concerned with the spatial and temporal patterns of redevelopment. In this case, the redevelopment shows regular temporal and spatial distributions sensitive to topography and location. On the other hand ownership, land use and the distribution of the existing community were relatively unimportant in explaining the distribution of development over time. Municipal regulations introduced at the onset of redevelopment had an important effect on the shape and size of the projects, while redirecting land assembly activity.*

## **Résumé:**

*Fairview Slopes a été presque entièrement transformé durant une période où la classe dirigeante et le milieu de l'immobilier et de l'urbanisme ont concentré leurs efforts sur ce secteur central de la ville. Bien que les rapports d'urbanisme émanant de la Ville pendant la décennie 1970 discutent surtout de la conservation de la communauté existante et du patrimoine architectural, le redéveloppement aboutit néanmoins à la disparition de la population et au remplacement des bâtiments. Le présent article examine le redéveloppement sous ses aspects spatial et temporel. Ce cas d'étude démontre que les distributions temporelles et spatiales, par ailleurs systématiques, répondent à la topographie et aux caractéristiques de localisation. Par contre, les propriétés, l'utilisation du sol et la distribution de la communauté existante étaient des facteurs peu importants pour expliquer la distribution des projets durant la période du redéveloppement. Les règlements municipaux mis en vigueur au début du redéveloppement ont eu un impact important sur la configuration et la taille des projets, tout en réorientant les opérations foncières.*

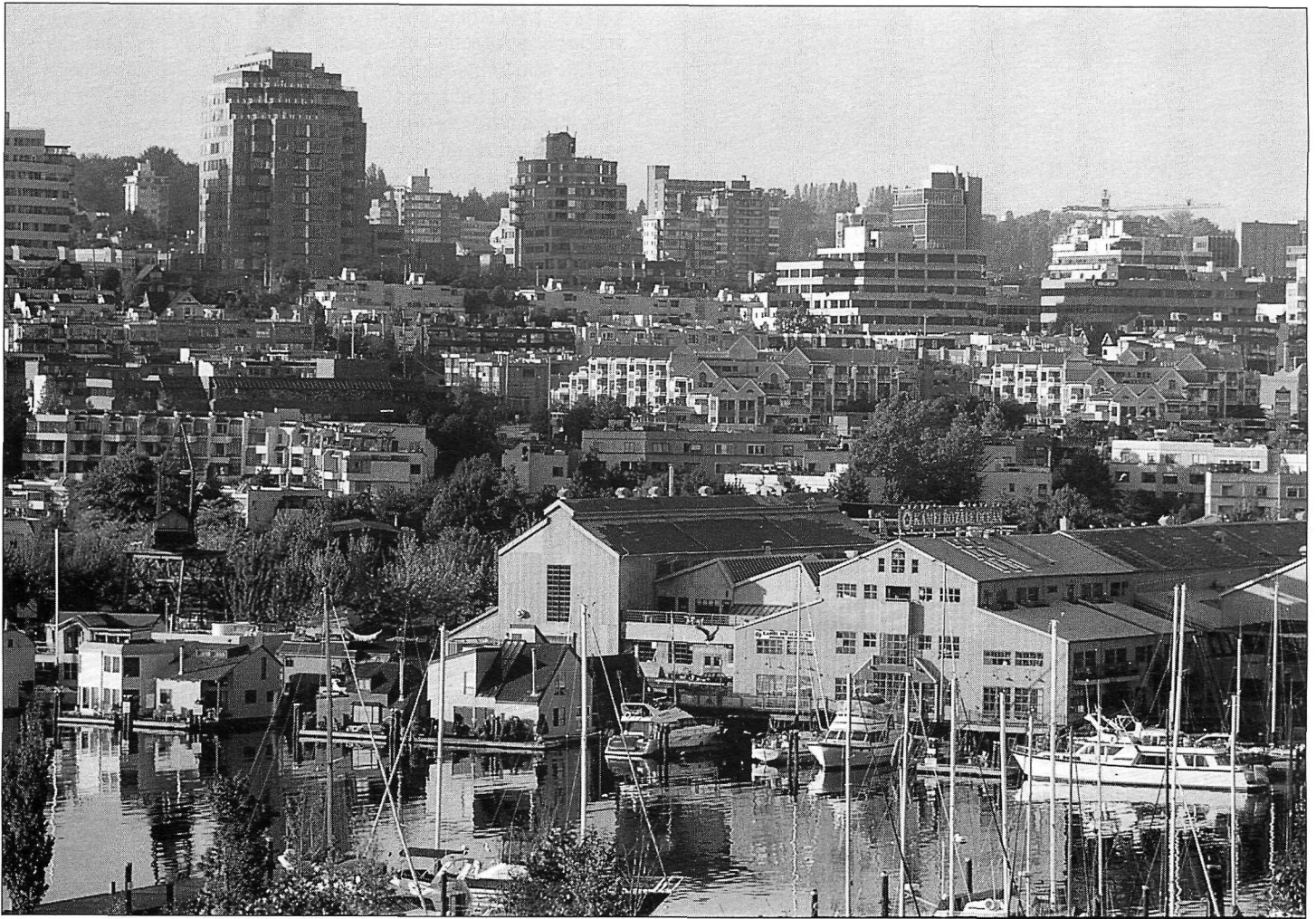
Development regulations are so ubiquitous, it seems surprising they are so little studied. Perhaps because they are often seen as mere instruments of socio-political processes, in particular capital investment in property, they have not merited independent study and attention has instead focused on the human actors and their interests. Just how such regulations translate property interests would itself make a fascinating study, as would the study of how such regulations are actually used. The

present study is mostly concerned with the latter; specifically, how a set of regulations that embodied certain intentions, interacted with the prevailing local conditions to result in a certain built form.

Development regulations have a wide variety of purposes and sometimes unexpected outcomes. It is often argued that they are mere instruments of ineluctable economic forces, having little impact on the pace of development or even the density ultimately achieved. However, as promotional instruments they may also result in overbuilding<sup>1</sup> or alternatively, may be irrelevant and innocuous to the developer's interests. They may be intended, as in the case described here, to guide the redevelopment of an area, promote socio-physical conservation and protect developers from each other. Zoning regulations may also embody a set of form and design prescriptions. Planning intentions embodied in the zoning are interpreted by the architect, adapted and optimized for an individual site, then translated into a building. In this way a single set of prescriptions has many potential outcomes but in reality only a few are actually exploited. The reasons for certain physical outcomes and not others are fundamentally interesting to the framer of regulations who is attempting to optimize site conditions while providing certainty of results.

This case study is an attempt to link the initial conditions to the new planning regime, to see whether in this case the regulations had the same results over the zone, whether the results were as expected and whether the regulations themselves effected a change in property acquisition and development. The analysis begins by considering the macro-level factors propelling the redevelopment of the area. The lifecycle of the redevelopment process itself is examined next, based on the principle that a planning regime set up conditions that were taken up by various developer actors in the physical and social context of the time, a process which had its own internal dynamic. The role of various *a priori* conditions – land ownership patterns, the age and occupancy of buildings and land uses – in the incidence and order of redevelopment is examined. Finally, some consideration is given to how the regulations themselves were interpreted in terms of the configurations of the projects, since such configurational attributes were notably absent in the original legislation.

The nature of this paper necessarily leaves out a discussion of the political process leading to the institution of the planning regime, which would have helped elucidate the major question posed at the outset; namely, the degree to which planning was carried out independently of the initial conditions. Nor is it possible, although it would be very interesting to do so, to examine the hearing process for each project to see just how various aspects of the regulations were addressed. The present study is admittedly rudimentary in examining statistical relationships but perhaps serves to guide more focused study of the role of development regulation in local areas.



**Figure 1:** *Western end of Fairview Slopes, 1996, sandwiched between Granville Island and the Broadway Avenue commercial area.*  
Source: *Leticia Martin*

### ***Forces driving the redevelopment of Fairview Slopes***

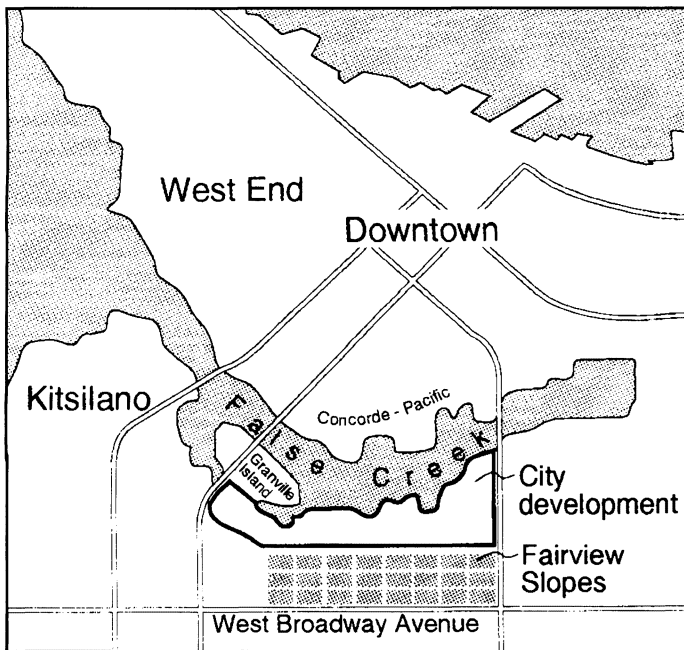
Fairview Slopes is a 24-block area lying south of False Creek in Vancouver, bounded by major arterials on the other three sides [Figure 2]. The area was laid out by the Canadian Pacific Railway on their land grant from the Dominion of Canada and named by CPR Land Commissioner L.A. Hamilton. Fairview was advertised as a “pretty suburban village” for upper income city-dwellers but was also attractive to developers anxious to provide needed housing for railway and industrial workers.<sup>2</sup> A handful of grand homes for an emerging business class were built on properties made up of three or four 25-by-100-foot lots. Detached clapboard houses were built on single lots around older tenements built for indentured Chinese railway workers.

The growth of heavy industry in the False Creek Basin and the establishment of a National Harbour after the First World War devalued the area for residential use and promoted small-scale

commercial activity. The proximity of Fairview to the major bridges linking the central area to Broadway Avenue which spans the city in an east-west direction, made it attractive for service activities after the Second World War, a change supported by rezoning. Industrial uses remained in the Basin through the 1960s, including barrel-making, railcar shunting yards, a fishing marina, drydocks, forges and metal-fabricating of various kinds. Still, the port was in steady decline from the end of the Second World War. Neighbouring areas were devalued by views over the industrious but somewhat derelict Basin with its inaccessible and polluted sea inlet.

The City’s plan of the 1960s showed a forest of towers, following the model of the West End, then being built up at a rapid rate. But Fairview did not benefit from the West End’s accessibility to Stanley Park, the beaches, and downtown. By the 1970s, the market for high-rise rental buildings had reached a

## The Development of Fairview Slopes in Vancouver, 1975–1995



**Figure 2:** *The situation of Fairview Slopes in relation to the City-sponsored development in the False Creek Flats.*

plateau. The area remained a nearly intact district of woodframe houses, part of the inner city swath slated for urban renewal in Vancouver. As such it remained an urban backwater until the citizen-led defeat of large-scale demolition and reconstruction around 1970. In the 1970s, more than half of the extant houses on the Slopes predated the First World War, making this group one of the oldest in the city.

While the City's own studies were primarily concerned with building preservation,<sup>3</sup> which was intended to be implemented indirectly through zoning regulation, the results fell far short of the expectations announced in these reports. The reasons can be found in the regulations themselves and in larger development forces that overtook these public intentions. Not the least of these was the emergence of a class of upwardly mobile professionals looking for the architectural trappings of a dense, urban village with some of the amenities of traditional urban neighbourhoods.

In spite of its long-standing commitment to centrally located industry, the Non-Partisan Association (NPA) council rezoned the western half of the Basin from industrial to mixed urban uses in 1969. The reformist Electors Action Movement (TEAM), led to power in 1972 by Mayor Art Phillips, expanded the plan while maintaining the industrial east end of the Creek, much of it also owned by the City. The False Creek project was the single most important initiative of TEAM, signalling the City's transformation from a gritty bulk goods port to a business and services centre.<sup>4</sup> With remarkable speed, public hearings (1972) were

followed by a limited design competition, won by the planning and architectural firm Thompson, Berwick, Pratt and Partners (1973), with implementation (1975–1978) that dispensed with some of the usual approval procedures. Immediately following the City initiative, the Federal Government announced the conversion of industrial Granville Island, located in the middle of the Creek, to a public market. These City of Vancouver and Federal government projects of low-rise, medium density development provided local services and a waterfront park that made redevelopment of the Fairview Slopes more attractive. The Flats project was actually linked to the Slopes by a 'land bridge', built by the City. Moreover, the low profile of the promised housing guaranteed views in perpetuity for Fairview Slopes over the Creek Basin toward the downtown and the Northshore mountains.

At the same time, the existing community attracted the attention and concern of the city council for their eventual displacement as a result of redevelopment. As in certain other degraded inner city areas in North American cities, urban pioneers make an undesirable area attractive and are then displaced by the consumers of the lifestyle myths so created.<sup>5 6</sup> In Fairview as well as in neighbouring Kitsilano, the relaxed, alternative lifestyle communities of the 1970s fell prey to denizens and others with greater means and desires to replay halcyon days as resident property owners. The unique character of tight urban lots built up in 3- to 5-storey woodframe houses was itself appealing if not sustainable in the long term. The replacement housing as miniaturized Slopes houses, multi-leveled on tiny footprints, was entirely novel in the city and represented a new urban lifestyle, largely inspired by the community that existed and was replaced. Ironically, recent projects have incorporated remaining Slopes houses, bundled together in rationalized site plans, as pastiche reminders of the historical Slopes.

While some of the architectural firms that dotted the Slopes were captivated by the design potential of the site, a few going so far as to build their own prototypes, developers were reluctant. The articulate Fairview community made some developers nervous, particularly in light of TEAM's public commitment to citizen involvement in local area planning. Others were intimidated by the immensity of the task, the particularly degraded appearance of the whole area<sup>7</sup> and the uncertainty of the design intentions of the City.

Rick Elligott and I were studying at the University of British Columbia and were contracted to undertake a first study of the Slopes area. A detailed lot-by-lot survey was published including the land use, building structural condition, occupancy, ownership, building age, architectural interest, and property values among other aspects, of the area, along with proposals for development.<sup>8</sup> New zoning regulations were implemented following our study and have remained in force largely unmodified.<sup>9</sup>

During the twenty years since our work, most of the area studied has been redeveloped. This area represents a very in-

interesting case of contemporary redevelopment activity because it has been privately carried out within the context of an overall policy framework, and has been comprehensive and rapid. A discussion of the general forces directing investor attention to the Slopes in the late 1970s is needed to establish how they may have shaped the outcome.

Rapid and sustained growth in Vancouver increased the pressure for redevelopment in certain parts of the inner city starting in the early 1970s and ultimately led to near complete replacement of this particular neighbourhood over a period of 20 years. The increasing duration of the daily commute to the CBD exacerbated the land price gradient in the city making Fairview Slopes increasingly attractive for development.<sup>10</sup> In fact near the end of the redevelopment cycle studied here, the transaction value of vacant properties was as much as 3/4 the value of properties with old buildings.<sup>11</sup> In other words the general pressures for change were quite obvious both in retrospect and at the time, leading to a great number of property transactions.

The neighbourhood also had a unique broad mixture of land uses in a city known for single use zones.<sup>12</sup> Even though the redevelopment plan supported a continuation of mixed use, commercial and especially industrial uses declined sharply after 1975 and throughout the period of redevelopment. In the 1990s, Fairview is once again a homogeneous residential enclave without street life or a commercial heart. While planners have generally supported mixed land use in new development over the past twenty years, such variety appears to be singularly difficult to achieve.<sup>13</sup> In this case, land use equilibrium and presumably buyer satisfaction were achieved by private market elimination of the mix and with it the essence of what is claimed to be created in such 'dense, urban villages'. Certainly the intention and expectation that small-scale offices and services would prosper in the area under conditions of redevelopment were not realized. In this sense, this area is typical of so much urban re-investment which results in sanitized versions of life, custom and built form that formerly invested places.<sup>14 15</sup>

The Elligott and Zacharias report published by the City, endorsed this low-rise model, which found common cause with a broad spectrum of the architectural community in the city at the time. For example, Rudofsky's work on vernacular forms of architecture was beginning to have a major impact on architectural thinking. Other published works on traditional urban environments and especially picturesque building forms exploiting dramatic topography were finding their way into local planning reports. Alexander's 'patterns'<sup>16</sup> were receiving much attention in academic and architectural circles because they suggested that a small-scale, incremental approach to development could be used to produce newly built-up areas that would appear to have existed for a very long time. Many of the patterns themselves were adopted directly in the City's own implementation of the False Creek Flats project.<sup>17 18</sup> The romantic themes of this literature had a practical counterpart in an emerging, widespread market demand for small-footprint townhouses

close to the ground and architecturally individuated. The emerging class of upwardly mobile professionals followed the lead of the architectural and academic trend-setters in a city where urban development is a significant part of the city culture. The real amenity for hard-working urban professionals was escape to an imaginary and corrected Tuscan hill-town, where life as a successful artist could be imagined if not actually lived.

The complex factors propelling redevelopment go a long way to explain why it occurred so quickly. For the sequence of redevelopment and the pattern and texture of the results, we must also consider the zoning regulations and the varying conditions that existed before these regulations.

The role of regulation in the development of areas is poorly understood yet we know it to have a key role in the development of Canadian and American cities. It has the effect of dampening or fuelling demand for urban land though it perhaps cannot initiate interest in an area. In this case, previous City-initiated plans for much higher density redevelopment were replaced with a low-rise, medium-density model.

The implemented zoning regulations, in keeping with the principles enunciated in the literature, were volumetric in nature, reproducing the topography in the built form. For the first time in Vancouver, all references to setbacks and space between facing windows were expunged, an approach based on the idea that variety, interest and livability would result from a creative use of available space. Similarly, there were no references to minimum or maximum lot sizes. Such a regulatory approach could be said to favour architects' interventions, inasmuch as formulaic solutions were not available for these conditions, the conditions themselves varied from site to site and, as will be explained later in this article, design skill was required in order to maximize both the density and the number of residential units.

The chronology and pattern of redevelopment can tell us a great deal about the importance of both regulations and existing conditions. While existing structures must be demolished before redevelopment, a *tabula rasa* is now practically very difficult and politically unpalatable in most cities. As a result it is expected that the sequence of redevelopment will be "discrete and lumpy"<sup>19</sup> generally thought undesirable in new development. From the standpoint of creating coherent urban ensembles or ensuring critical mass early on in the redevelopment process so that activity would be sustained, it would be desirable to be able to predict the sequencing of development.

### ***The temporal character of development***

Endogenous and exogenous factors may affect the pace of redevelopment although regulation as an expression of a consumable product, can focus what market interest actually exists. For example, the property market will follow the vicissitudes of the wider economy, while investment and redevelopment are not evenly distributed in cities. The exogenous factors discussed in the previous section must be



## *The Development of Fairview Slopes in Vancouver, 1975–1995*

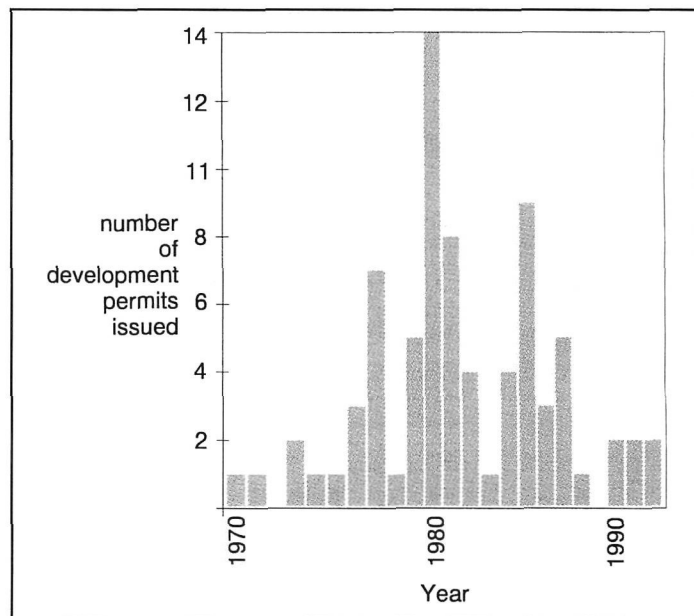
combined with a mention of internal factors which, it can be suggested, quickened the pace of investment in this particular area.

Zoning may respond strategically to identified market interest and act as a catalyst in the development process, as we suggest was the case here. The primary evidence is growth in the rate of development until the exhaustion of “good” sites imposed a gradual decline, a pattern that was largely independent of economic cycles over the twenty year period.

In the Fairview Slopes, some 100 major development permits were issued during the period studied, each covering individual projects with 3 to 100 residential units each, some with commercial content as well. In Vancouver, permit application and approval procedures took several months in most cases, including a billboard on the site describing the project and a public hearing. The development permit itself was valid for two years from issuance, so that there was in general a close correspondence between the applications filed, the actual developments and the time taken for their implementation. In this study, only a handful of permits were not acted upon.

It can be seen in Figure 3 that the rate with which development proceeded followed a rising curve, a peak in 1980 with some 14 major projects approved, and then a decline in the pace of activity. This pattern may be a demonstration of rising competition, as initial pioneering success was followed by a larger number of projects that exploited this success and the publicity accompanying it. Major developers also resisted involvement until a few pioneering projects had demonstrated success. Following 1980, a noticeable decline in the number of available sites began to reduce the pace of development, which we believe to have resulted from exhaustion of sites that best corresponded to the promise of the regulations. This is shown to be the case in the next section. Interestingly, in most recent years, the few projects approved and built targeted a higher income clientele, exploiting the environmental qualities of a newly built-up, architecturally refined and visually coherent district.

It can also be seen that the permit approvals over time follow a peak-and-trough pattern. In a highly competitive environment where timing is crucial, it is not surprising to observe a number of projects, each with dozens of purchaseable units coming onto the market at the same time. However, the saturating effect this has on the buyer market also dampens project proposals such that the flurry of activity is followed by a year of relative inactivity. Not only do the permits cluster by year, but they can be observed to cluster within the years of intense activity, confirming the competitive character of such development. Since intentions to design proposals were announced publicly on site at an early stage, developers and owners would have been fully aware of all projects undergoing preparation. This, then, is a second element of evidence for the temporal character of local area redevelopment: an early period of gathering interest is followed by periods of great activity and subsequent decline during which there are smaller peaks and troughs.



**Figure 3:** *The number of major development permits issued in each calendar year is indicated. The cyclical nature of the development process is suggested with the most rapid development in the late 1970s and early 1980s, while peaks and troughs in development can also be observed throughout.*

This evidence suggests that an ordering and selection of sites had to be undertaken, given the substantial number that were eventually exploited. It remains to see how important the pre-existing conditions were and whether the chronology of development and the patterns of the ultimate result were related to one or several of the pre-existing conditions.

### ***The role of property assemblies a priori in project development 1970–1990***

Before new development regulations were enacted or even discussed and before redevelopment began in earnest, investors began to assemble lots in order to prepare for future redevelopment. In a climate of rising prices and uncertain regulatory outcomes prevailing at the time it would be reasonable to expect investors to hedge their bets in assembling as many 25-by-100-foot lots as possible. The policies then enacted may have rewarded the intentions of the investors or chastised them by facilitating or thwarting the development of the properties they had assembled.

In Vancouver property values were modestly and positively correlated with size, chiefly because the zoning typically required more land area to achieve the denser developments allowed. As a result speculative land purchases were guided by ‘more is better’ thinking and the Slopes were no exception. However, as will be shown later, the Slopes zoning described a prototype



**Figure 4:** *Central portion of Fairview Slopes, 1996, rising on the steepest slopes above the City's development on the Flats. The earliest redevelopment projects are situated here, along with a few remaining houses. Source: Leticia Martin*

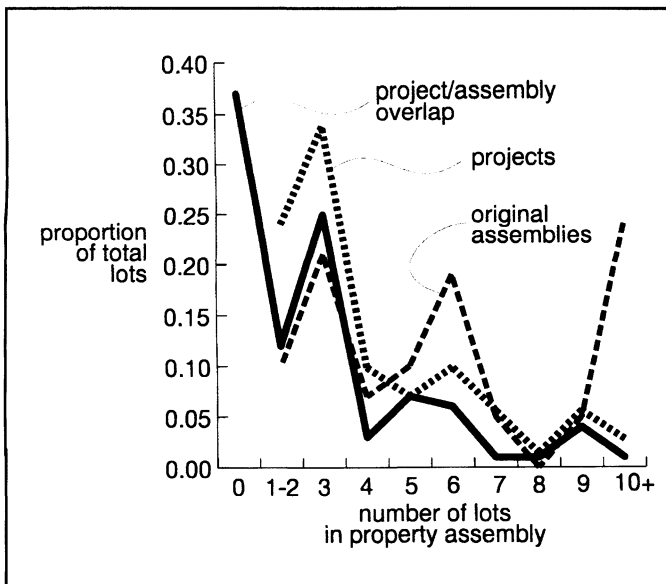
that was optimized at a relatively small property size. In this study we examine whether the introduction of this zoning plan produced changes in the size and configuration of properties as well as in the spatial distribution of their development.

Before the implementation of the Fairview Slopes zoning, a great number of property assemblies had already occurred and indeed most of the lots with individual houses on the Slopes had already been assembled into larger property holdings, varying substantially in size.

There are essentially three possibilities with regard to the exploitation of the property assemblies: 1) The projects actually realized exploited available property assemblies rather than being built on property assemblies created after the policies were enacted; 2) the original property assemblies were ex-

ploited by the new projects, which however did not rely heavily on these *a priori* assemblies; 3) the original property assemblies were not of the configuration or size suitable for the policies enacted and new ones were created.

The zoning made it possible to develop small holdings in accordance with the objective of infilling, but also something developers and owners might have insisted upon. Among the small holdings, it was arguably the 3-lot size that allowed maximization of typical site characteristics and density while meeting zoning regulations. As can be observed in Figure 5, the 3-lot sample accounted for 21% of the original assemblies but 34% of the projects. A substantial number of these exploited existing assemblies. At the opposite end of the spectrum it can be seen that a substantial number of large assemblies were never exploited as such. The low profile, intensive coverage form of-



**Figure 5:** *A shift from larger to smaller property assemblies after implementation of the zoning regulations is demonstrated. The number of lots that overlap between the original assemblies and the projects support the view that developers preferred already acquired properties to new opportunities.*

fers no advantages and many risks to developers wishing to proceed on the basis of these assemblies. Overall, more than a third of the projects do not overlap with the properties. Many new assemblies were created, often in 3-lot groups, while a great many of the originals were not exploited for reasons unknown.

Finally, it can be seen from the original assemblies map (Figure 6b) that many adjacent purchases were occurring from street to street rather than along the street. Buying down or up the slope was easier since often more than one adjacent vendor could be approached and, as the whole area is on a steep slope, this also provided an answer to the underground parking problem. However, the City Engineer suddenly insisted on the insertion of lanes at the backs of all redeveloped properties, so that the whole area could be serviced in the manner of all other neighbourhoods in the city. To the consternation of more than one owner, this effectively cut their properties in two and made development of mid-block properties all but an impossibility until access was attained at the block ends. In these cases, properties were split for the purposes of development. Also as a result of this policy, property acquisition activity shifted from a north-south direction to an east-west direction.

While the intention of the zoning was to create a generic envelope that would result in a variety of sizes and configurations of projects, it tended to favour a somewhat narrower range.

Developers made adjustments in their property acquisition strategies after enactment of the FM-1 by-law as well as in the way they exploited the assemblies they already had. Overall, the city regulations prescribed a rigid profile that could be and was “built out” but permitted much greater freedom than before in layout and architectural design, a development that was appealing to architects and developers desirous to design and package distinctive designs. Such an approach has proved to be durable here since the regulations have undergone almost no change over the redevelopment process.

### ***The significance of prior conditions in the development outcome***

The order in which development takes place across an area might be explained by the desire for propinquity, that is the attraction of like developments and improved physical context for projects. It might also be explained by topography or other positive external factors. Alternatively, it might be suggested that intervening economic and organizational factors that have nothing to do with site conditions make spatial ordering meaningless. We can test these propositions in our case study.

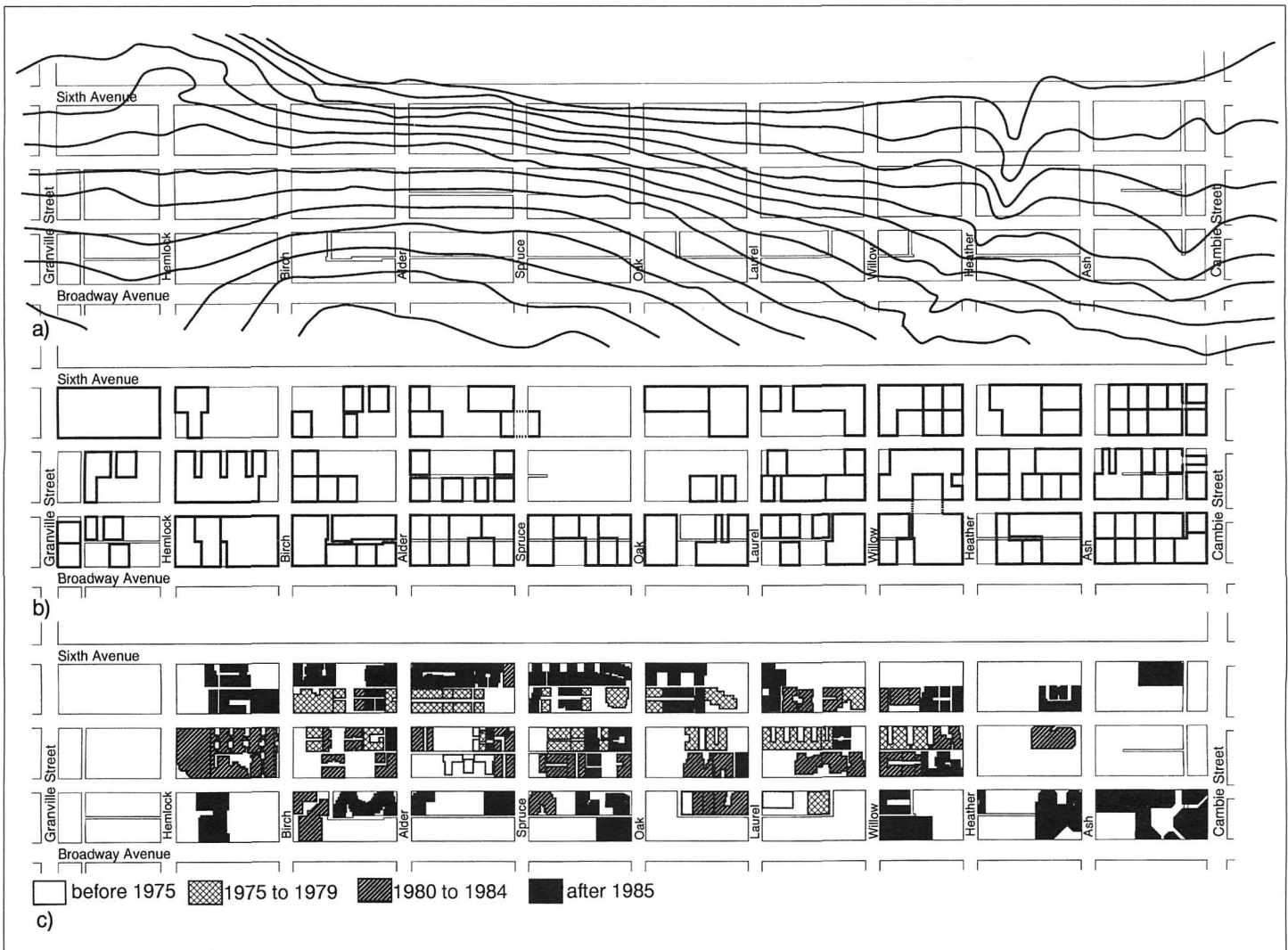
A slow beginning to redevelopment was followed by a period of very intense activity, at a time when little was happening in neighbouring areas enjoying some of the same location characteristics and amenities. An identifiable site visually tied to mountains and water along with the proximity to the downtown core may have been the most important factors in promotion. The marketing campaigns touted these advantages, along with the myth of an urban lifestyle that included patronage of the arts and especially architectural design.<sup>20</sup> Because of the social and symbolic importance of the developments themselves, there is some question whether location was most important at the level of neighbourhood, block or sub-block, which is discussed further on.

If we divide the 100 development permits issued into three periods corresponding to the decades and consider the 1970s permits as early, we might then examine where these permits are distributed spatially across the Slopes. If each of the three east-west avenues is examined separately — Sixth, Seventh and Eighth — we observe that 34% of the permits issued for Seventh Avenue were issued then, 13% for Eighth Avenue and an insignificant number (1 permit) for Sixth Avenue. Nearly half of the total number of permits were actually issued on Seventh Avenue, so that projects happened on this avenue earlier and more often throughout the development history.

The area of steepest slope, ie. more than 25%, accounts for 35% of the total land area and is concentrated in the central part of the neighbourhood, as can be observed in Figure 6. The 70% of 1970s permits located in this area can largely be explained by the positive incentives to seek steeply sloping sites incorporated in the zoning, as explained in the next section. However, this area is also farthest from the noisy avenues and in particular, Sixth Avenue where sites are also steeply sloped.



*The Development of Fairview Slopes in Vancouver, 1975–1995*



**Figure 6:** *The topography of the Fairview Slopes is illustrated with contour lines at 10-foot intervals (a). The property assemblies of 2 or more individual lots, that is those adjacent lots having the same owner in 1973, is shown (b). Projects actually built with their approximate configuration in plan and period of development permit approval are illustrated (c).*

The late permits, ie. after 1990, are concentrated at the eastern and western extremities of the area, also where the only significant developable parcels remain.

An examination of timing block-by-block does not reveal that it was more likely that projects would be close in time if they were very close together spatially. It would appear then that topography in particular ( $r^2=0.73$ ;  $p<0.000$ ) and distance from arterials are the major factors in spatial ordering. It also happened that the priority area very closely corresponded to that area inhabited by the 1970s Fairview Slopes community, resulting in their rapid dispersal in just a few years' time.

The other associations with the timing of development considered were the following: residential occupation, vacant land and non-residential uses. It was thought that residential occupation of buildings might delay or inhibit development, particularly in light of a chronic shortage of housing in the city, possible bad publicity and legal protections for tenants. Residential occupation was expressed as a proportion of the total property. No significant relation was found between these two, perhaps reflecting the fact that such properties tended to be found within the area of substantial developer interest.

Similarly, vacant land is often thought of as a temporary use and may therefore ultimately develop more quickly than proper-

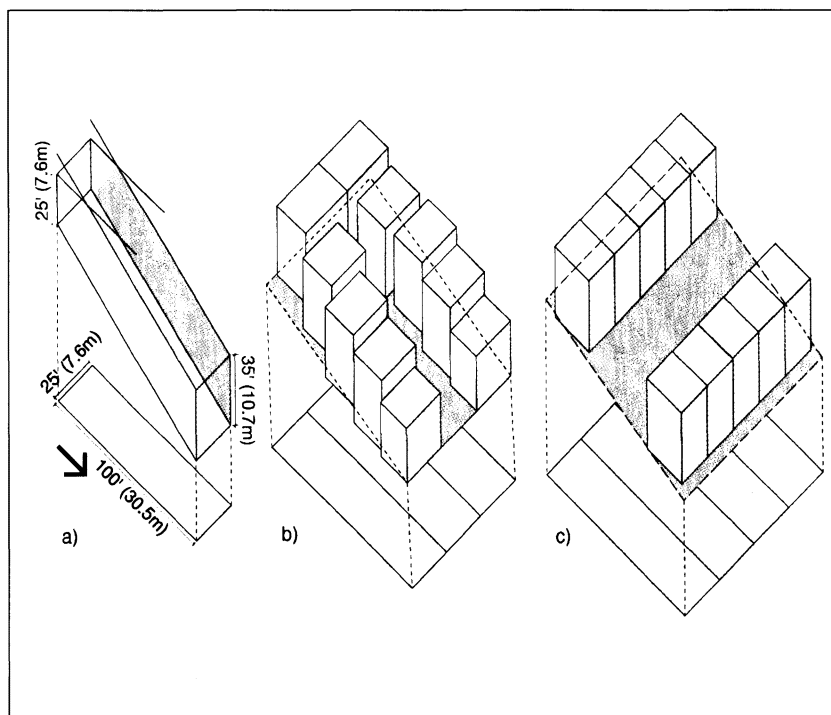
ties burdened with buildings. A weak but positive relation was found between the earliness of development and the degree to which the property was vacant [ $r^2=0.49$ ;  $p<0.000$ ]. Non-residential uses were similarly scaled such that parking lots were at the top followed by industrial, then commercial uses. The size or vintage of buildings was ignored. Again, a positive correlation was observable between the earliness of development and the non-residential uses of the properties [ $r^2=0.69$ ;  $p<0.000$ ].

In each of these cases, the *a priori* conditions were substantially less important than topography, location and zoning. The application of a clear policy with regard to development accompanied and perhaps even promoted the transaction of properties and site preparation. Project applications increased in the years immediately following the application of the zoning, in spite of a recession and a depressed local housing market. Approvals for development proceeded relatively quickly without an established community to object. Public objections during permit hearings were raised with regard to design compatibility or protrusions beyond the zoning envelopes. There was by this time widespread consensus concerning the benefits of sustained and rapid redevelopment.

#### **The significance of zoning in the development outcome**

The zoning was specifically designed to permit the exploitation of small holdings, to allow infill around existing buildings and so help preserve them. It was not known, however, whether this policy would actually lead to faster replacement of buildings by facilitating small projects. Larger projects would certainly have slowed the pace of development but might also have made it attractive to demolish early and often. In this case, in contrast with the usual scenario, land did not lie fallow for long before development, suggesting that developers had found sufficient flexibility in the zoning to prevent the usual preemptive practices. The chief intended effect of this zoning, that is the preservation of a large number of houses and the retention of the existing community, was not achieved.

A simple and uniform zoning envelope follows the topography and is illustrated in Figure 7a. Obviously, the greater the difference between the elevations of the front and rear property lines, the more levels that could be inserted. Two basic configurations are possible: one in which townhouses are aligned with the slope and another in which they are aligned in a double row across the slope. Small properties were developed with alignment down the slope while properties with four lots and more were developed in rows. At three lots it was possible to form a 'u' with an opening to the street and accommodate a full floor of parking below. In this way as many as 10 houses could



**Figure 7:** *The zoning envelope is shown in axonometric perspective (a), along with typical development on three lots (b) and four lots (c).*

be accommodated on 3 lots, 2 more than with the double row system and with more open space than equivalent developments on one or two lots.

The developers of larger properties in some cases compensated for this comparative disadvantage by stacking one house on top of another and increasing the amount of open space between the rows. This arrangement was possible on a minimum of 5 lots. Beyond this property size there was nothing to be gained in terms of site planning and some developers then opted to develop in completely separate phases. This event explains why the largest property holdings in 1973 were rarely developed as such.

Had rear lanes not been required by the City, it is highly likely that many more street-to-street developments would have taken place, arranged on long and narrow properties in 'u' shapes and other stepping forms. An examination of the property acquisition patterns suggests that a wide variety of configurations was likely, resulting in a greater variety of site plans. As it was, City policies constrained the project typology to a few variants, which were much less the result of developers wishing to replicate successful completed projects, than the necessity to comply with a rigid set of requirements.

The upscale and architecturally aware market of buyers probably would have fuelled the architectural bazaar that took place

## *The Development of Fairview Slopes in Vancouver, 1975–1995*

with or without city promotion. However, the very restrictive height controls and liberal rules on placement and coverage were very appealing to architects, who were then able to put to work their design skills without resorting to patterns and prototypes. The variety of configurations that resulted is certainly a product of the zoning system.

### **Conclusions**

While redevelopment was undoubtedly driven by metropolitan-wide forces, the densities and forms practised were the direct legacy of an architectural and planning consensus prevailing at the time. That the volumetric planning controls used to implement this plan were used throughout the development history unchallenged is testimony to their adaptability. The result can hardly be said to resemble the idiosyncratic arrangements and formal unity of traditional hill towns, however; with time, projects looked increasingly designed or at least distinguishable from their neighbours. The unintended uniform arrangements were also a product of the volume envelope in combination with topography and gridded blocks.

In this case, the multiplication of rows across the slope detracts from the topography and makes large plantings impossible since they would invade private views within projects. This would probably not have been the case with a larger number of small projects. Courtyard access spaces have become excessively privatized, since they no longer access the slope to provide secondary pedestrian ways from street to street. The zoning envelope worked very well on steep slopes and much less well on flatter properties where a modified envelope was perhaps more desirable; in fact, the zoning regulation is unacceptable for residential projects on flat sites since it creates too many vis-à-vis and no views out. This probably explains why flat sites were not only built up last, but were also given over to more commercial uses. The hoped-for variety and interest in Slopes development was not achieved although it was perhaps naive to expect that a generic zoning envelope would be instrumental in generating diversity or that creative talents would be liberated by limiting regulatory constraints and address the contents of their projects as well as the appearance.

Contrary to our intuitions at the time of the first neighbourhood survey, land use, owner occupancy and prior land assemblies turned out to be relatively poor indicators of spatial and temporal ordering of redevelopment. Topography and location within a several block area guided the initial developer efforts such that their strategies focused on a larger area than that of blocks, streets or immediate neighbours. It was then possible to conceptualize several sub-areas within the original 24-block area that represented distinct development conditions.

In general, it must be admitted that the factors in redevelopment interact to a considerable extent, so that it is not always clear to policy-makers what weight to accord to their policies, how stringent they should be and whether they should give in to pressures to change them. The dominant theme in the literature

on redevelopment in recent years is that it is systemic, that the dominant actors act in concert or at least interact in complex ways and the roles of different actors change over time. In this context, zoning regulations are often seen as products or effects, not causes. Of course, zoning regulations are written by people with intentions and in this sense are always outcomes.

Our own intention here was to present a case where the zoning regulations were unchanged over a twenty-year complete redevelopment of an area and so to treat it as an independent variable and the projects themselves as the dependent variable. The value of the case study might be to see how a stable regulatory regime is itself a factor in promoting and sustaining development activity. Admittedly and ironically, this development was aided by a regional transportation miasma that made the search for an ex-urban retreat singularly unattractive for many, and so supported redevelopment in this area.

The problem remains in many North American cities: Should cities continue to support restorative practices that preserve a building stock of dubious quality for a privileged minority, or should cities actively promote strategic redevelopment and intensification for the middle classes it so much wants to retain or attract back? Will it make any difference what they decide? At a time when cities seem to be actively retreating from interventionist policy, while waiting on private sector initiatives that seem increasingly remote, one wonders about the wisdom of such an approach. More case studies are needed since we really do need to know what importance to accord to policy that is an attempt at providing collective vision for many, small actors on the urban scene.

### **Notes**

1. Kayden, Jerold. 1976. Incentive zoning in New York City. Unpublished Master's thesis, Harvard University.
2. City of Vancouver. Department of Planning and Civic Development. 1976? *Fairview Slopes building heritage: a study of those buildings deserving preservation*.
3. City of Vancouver. Department of Planning and Civic Development. Sussex Group. 1974. *Fairview Slopes: the feasibility of preservation*. Vancouver, B.C.: The Group.
4. Hardwick, W.G. 1974. *Vancouver*. Don Mills, On: Collier-Macmillan Canada.
5. Ley, D. 1987. Styles of the times: liberal and neo-conservative landscapes in inner Vancouver, 1968–1986. *Journal of Historical Geography* 13 (1): 40–56.
6. Cole, D. 1987. Artists and urban redevelopment. *The Geographical Review* 77(4):391–407.
7. Mills, Caroline. 1988. "Life on the upslope": the postmodern landscape of gentrification. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 6, 169–89.
8. Elligott, R., and J. Zacharias. 1973. *Fairview Slopes: Summer 1973*. Vancouver, B.C.: City of Vancouver. Department of Planning and Civic Development.
9. City of Vancouver. 1988. *Zoning and Development By-law FM-1*.
10. Rosenthal, S. S., and R. W. Helsley. 1994. Redevelopment and the urban land price gradient. *Journal of Urban Economics* 35: 182–200.
11. Rosenthal and Helsey 1994; p.192

## ***The Development of Fairview Slopes in Vancouver, 1975–1995***

12. In 1973, land areas were devoted to the following uses: residential 28%; industrial 17%; offices 13%; parking 17%. In 1994, industrial uses and surface parking had disappeared, housing occupied 60% of the land area while the remainder was in some form of commercial use. Our 1973 survey of residents and business operators revealed a consensus of opinion that commercial expansion was likely and residential use would decline as a result. Surprisingly few individuals identified the potential of the Slopes for upper income housing.
13. McMillen, D. P., and J. F. McDonald. 1991. A Markov Chain Model of Zoning Change. *Journal of Urban Economics* 30: 257–70.
14. Jacobs, Jane M. 1992. Cultures of the past and urban transformation: the Spitalfields Market redevelopment in East London. In Anderson, Kay and Fay Gale. *Inventing places: studies in cultural geography*. London: Wiley Halsted Press.
15. Zukin, S. 1988. *Loft living: culture and capital in urban change*. London: Radius.
16. Alexander, C. 1977. *A pattern language*. New York: Oxford University Press.
17. City of Vancouver. 1973. Department of Planning and Civic Development. *False Creek: policies & actions*.
18. Thompson, Berwick and Pratt & Partners. 1973. *False Creek: Development proposals*.
19. Amin, K., and D. R. Capozza. 1993. Sequential development. *Journal of Urban Economics* 34: 142–58.
20. Mills, Caroline. 1993. Myths and meanings of gentrification. In Duncan, James and Ley, David (eds). *Place/culture/representation*. London: Routledge, 149–70.