

## **An Inner City in Decline: St. John's, Newfoundland**

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Résumé de l'article

Le centre de la ville de St. John's a connu, entre 1971 et 1976, le plus fort taux de dépeuplement d'un noyau urbain au Canada. Cette dépopulation est attribuable en partie à la baisse de la natalité, phénomène qui touche toute l'Amérique du Nord, mais elle s'explique aussi par la détérioration du milieu commercial et résidentiel et par le constant aménagement de nouvelles aires résidentielles et commerciales dans la banlieue. Certaines des principales causes de la dégradation du centre de la ville sont étudiées, y compris la non-planification de l'aménagement par l'administration municipale. Sont examinées également les conséquences, tant salutaires que néfastes de différentes politiques du gouvernement fédéral.

AN INNER CITY IN DECLINE:

ST. JOHN'S, NEWFOUNDLAND

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Mark Shrimpton and Christopher A. Sharpe

*Résumé/Abstract*

Le centre de la ville de St. John's a connu, entre 1971 et 1976, le plus fort taux de dépeuplement d'un noyau urbain au Canada. Cette dépopulation est attribuable en partie à la baisse de la natalité, phénomène qui touche toute l'Amérique du Nord, mais elle s'explique aussi par la détérioration du milieu commercial et résidentiel et par le constant aménagement de nouvelles aires résidentielles et commerciales dans la banlieue. Certaines des principales causes de la dégradation du centre de la ville sont étudiées, y compris la non-planification de l'aménagement par l'administration municipale. Sont examinées également les conséquences, tant salutaires que néfastes de différentes politiques du gouvernement fédéral.

The inner core of St. John's suffered a higher rate of population loss between 1971 and 1976 than that of any other Canadian metropolitan area. In part the depopulation resulted from lower levels of fertility, a phenomenon affecting all of North America. Population loss, however, has also been influenced by the deterioration of the commercial and residential environment of the core, and by the continued development of housing and commercial space in the suburbs. Some of the major causes of inner city deterioration are discussed, including the lack of development control on the part of the municipal government. The impact, both beneficial and harmful, of various federal government policies is also examined.

\* \* \*

Large parts of the fabric of metropolitan St. John's, Newfoundland are indistinguishable from areas in many other Canadian cities. Twentieth century suburbs, especially those dating from the middle of the century, tend to be physically homogeneous and unremarkable. But the inner city of St. John's is a fascinating and in many ways unique area. It consists of street after street of Victorian clapboard terraces, some running along the contours and others plunging down the precipitous slopes which lead to the edge of the harbour. In an overall sense, the inner city is

charming, but this charm is also a serious weakness. The narrow lots, the steep slopes and the age of the dwellings all combine to create an environment not in great demand by the consumption-oriented middle-class household which tends to find housing and neighborhood more suited to its aspirations in the suburbs.

The inner city cannot, of course, be frozen in time and preserved. Time and the changing space economy have already caused the disappearance of the oldest original structures and businesses along Water Street, the main

LEGEND-LÉGENDE

CENSUS SUBDIVISION — SUBDIVISION DE RECENSEMENT

URBANIZED CORE: NOYAU URBANISÉ:

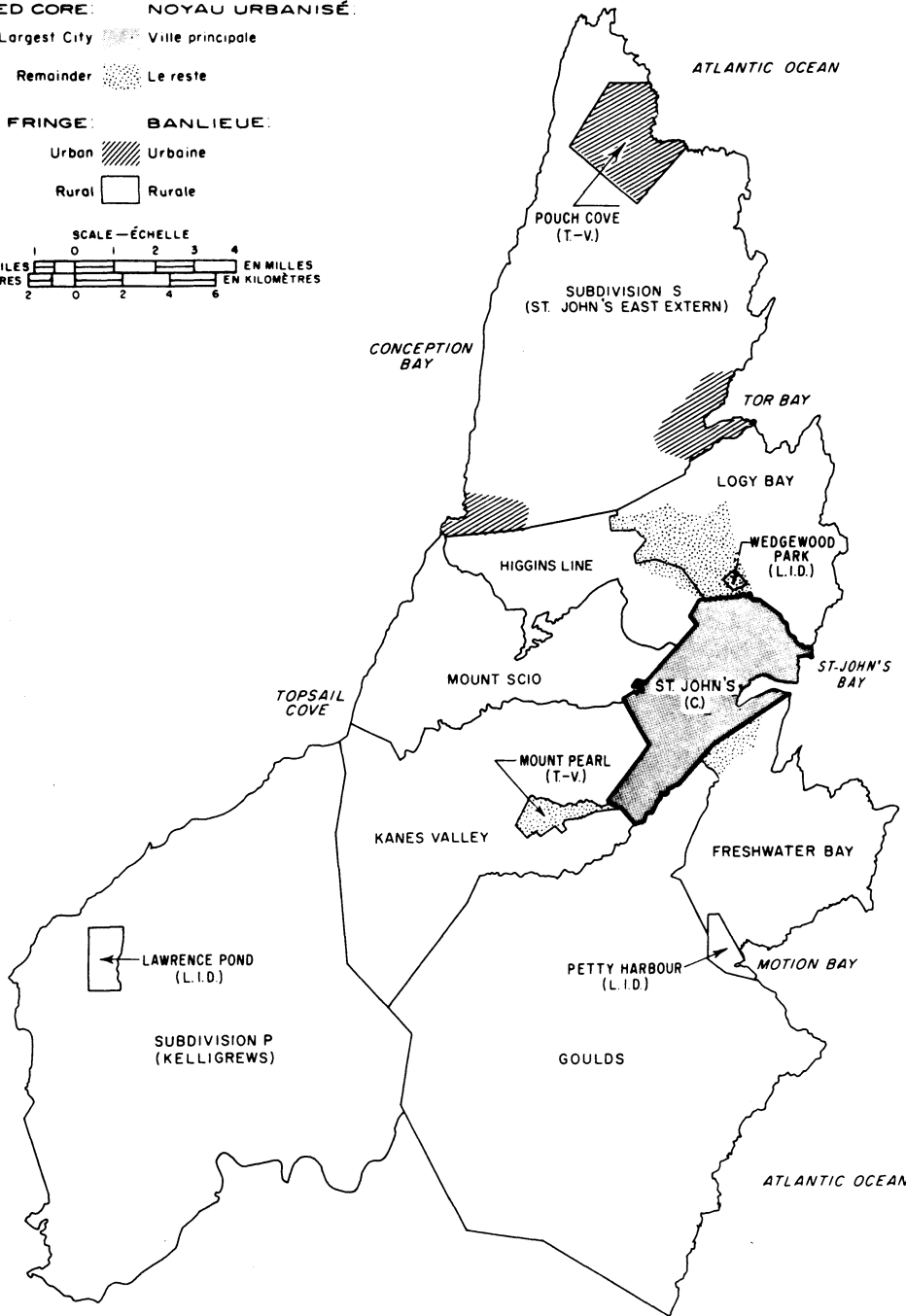
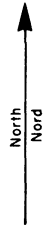
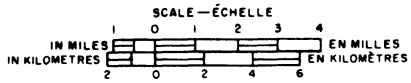
Largest City: Ville principale

Remainder: Le reste

FRINGE: BANLIEUE:

Urban: Urbaine

Rural: Rurale



downtown commercial artery. The only part of the inner city that is left in anything like its original late eighteenth century form is the residential segment.<sup>1</sup> These inner city residential areas provide St. John's with its largest concentration of low and moderate cost housing. However, the future of this stock depends in no small measure on the maintenance and enhancement of vitality in the central city's office and commercial sector. Unfortunately, as this paper demonstrates, such vitality has not been much in evidence in recent years. At the end of the Second World War St. John's was a compact city with a population of about fifty thousand (see Table I). Commercial and retail activity was concentrated along Water Street, while most manufacturing was associated with the adjacent harbour. Residential

development was at generally high densities, especially in the row houses of the East and West Ends which had been constructed after the catastrophic fire of 1892. Many of these buildings were in poor structural condition and lacked basic services.

These problems were enumerated in the reports of the 1942 Commission of Enquiry on Housing and Town Planning in St. John's.<sup>2</sup> The third report, a *General Review of Housing Conditions: Outline of Proposals for Remedies* noted that:

there is a very serious degree of over-crowding and ... a large proportion of our houses are of a very low grade (p. 9), [and] the quality of the housing available to the poor and low-income classes in St.

TABLE I

Population, City of St. John's, 1901-1976

|      |        |
|------|--------|
| 1901 | 29,594 |
| 1911 | 32,242 |
| 1921 | 36,444 |
| 1935 | 39,886 |
| 1946 | 44,603 |
| 1951 | 52,873 |
| 1956 | 57,078 |
| 1961 | 63,633 |
| 1966 | 79,884 |
| 1971 | 88,100 |
| 1976 | 86,576 |

Sources: *City of St. John's, Draft Master Plan Report, Plan 91*, Volume 3, 1970; and *Census of Canada: Population and Housing Characteristics by Census Tracts: St. John's, 1971 and 1976*.

John's is, on the whole, deplorable (p. 108).

It went on to outline these housing deficiencies and to review the existing housing agencies. Its conclusion was that "private enterprise does not meet the need" and after a discussion of the housing agencies of the United States, Canada, Australia and Sweden, it recommended the establishment of a St. John's Housing Corporation.

The first goal of this Corporation was to be "to develop some suburban lands to the north of the City and accommodate there such families as desire to go. For this we require sewerage in the Northern Valley and an external semicircular road to facilitate the establishment of bus loops and a tram line."<sup>3</sup> The fifth report of the Commission provided *Detailed Proposals and Provisional Estimates for Suburban Extension and Housing*, including an engineer's report and plan. It recommended the acquisition of 574 acres (232 hectares) plus a 158 acre (64 hectare) "annex." These proposals were rapidly accepted and implemented. The St. John's Housing Corporation was established in July, 1944,<sup>4</sup> and construction work started in October of the same year.

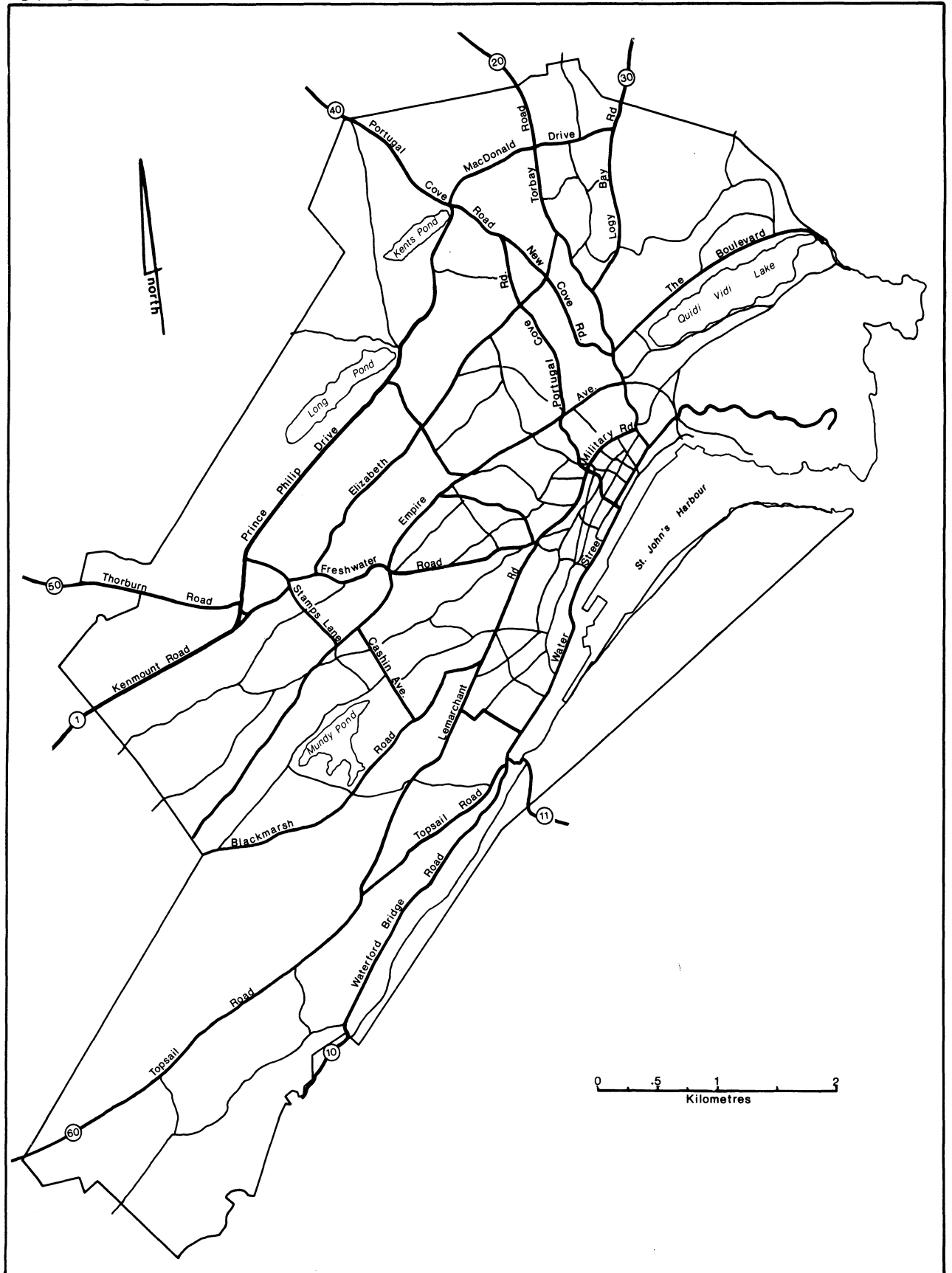
St. John's is probably unique among Canadian cities with respect to the degree of government involvement in post-war housing. The St. John's Housing Corporation, the St. John's Housing Authority (a public housing agency), and Central (now "Canada") Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) have all been very active. Virtually the whole inner city is covered by Neighbourhood Improvement Programme (NIP) and Residential

Rehabilitation Assistance Programme (RRAP) areas, the proportion of National Housing Act (NHA) funding of new housing is high, and a substantial proportion of construction has occurred, and is likely to continue to occur, in land banks in the city or adjacent Newtown. This involvement was particularly strong during the period 1944 to 1961. In the latter year Churchill Park accounted for about 29 per cent of the area of the city and 58 per cent of all post-war housing. Over 36 per cent of all the city's single detached dwellings and 24 per cent of its apartments were located in the area, housing 21 per cent of the population and 22 per cent of the families.<sup>4</sup>

The Churchill Park development represented the start of the suburbanization of St. John's. Post-war economic and demographic growth, spurred by Confederation in 1949, resulted in a population increase of over two-thirds between 1951 and 1971 (from 52,173 to 88,100). The majority of this increase resulted from peripheral expansion, with substantial outward revision of the city limits. Indeed, this outward expansion only served to disguise a pattern of increasing and expanding population loss at the centre. The Downtown census tracts experienced population declines at least as early as the first half of the 1950s, while by 1971 the entire pre-war area plus much of Churchill Park was losing population. During the period 1971 to 1976 the St. John's CMA had a population increase of 9.4 per cent. However, this period saw little extension in the city limits, and for the first time the city lost population (at a rate of 2.1 per cent).

While much of this loss is

# ST. JOHN'S



explicable in terms of the suburbanization which can be expected of any growing metropolitan area, the loss from the inner city of St. John's has recently accelerated to alarming levels. Between 1951 and 1961 the two tracts immediately adjacent to the central business district had a loss of 11.2 per cent. In the next decade the loss was 17.8 per cent. Then, during the five year period 1971 to 1976, there was a decline of 24.4 per cent.

Inner city population loss is neither recent, nor unique to St. John's. The phenomenon was widespread in Canadian inner cities during the 1961-71 period (see Table II).<sup>6</sup> The largest percentage loss (17.8 per cent) occurred in St. John's, although a number of other cities, notably Ottawa, Saint John and Winnipeg, suffered rates of loss nearly as severe. What is most alarming is the rate of loss over the five years between 1971 and 1976, when the St. John's inner city, which again suffered more heavily than any other Canadian Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) for which comparable rates can be calculated, lost nearly one quarter of its 1971 population.

The net result of this depopulation, not surprisingly, has been an aging of the population, because of the substantial losses suffered by the younger, and especially the school-age population (0-14 years:-34 per cent; 14-24 years:-25 per cent). This rate of loss can be expected to have significant effects on the distribution of infrastructure within the city. The closing of several inner city schools is the most obvious result of the shifting demography. Since 1970, the Avalon Consolidated School Board has opened five new elementary schools,

two of which lie outside the city. The Board has closed fourteen during the same period, eight within the city and three within the area defined as the central core.

At least part of the population loss can be attributed to declining levels of fertility in the Canadian population as a whole. In the St. John's inner city the fertility index (number of children aged 0-4 per 1000 women aged 15-44) was 40.6 in 1971 and 35.5 in 1976, and this decline resulted in a 13 per cent loss of children aged 0-4. The total decline in this youngest age group over the five year period was 35 per cent in the inner city, compared with only -1.4 per cent in the CMA as a whole. About a third of the decline can be attributed to reduced levels of fertility, while the rest is a result of out-migration.

Despite such losses, in 1976 this area was the home of over 11,000 people and therefore had a greater population than any community in the Province, other than St. John's itself, Corner Brook and Labrador City. The area is clearly an important source of housing and, especially and increasingly, low income housing. In the context of a 9 per cent decline in the total number of households, the number of non-family households increased by 42 per cent. One-person households increased by 58 per cent and in 1976 represented 16 per cent of the total, and the number of family persons dropped by 27 per cent. The number of one-family households declined by 16 per cent. In spite of the rapid rates of change for non-family households, the relatively small base means that such units still do not make up a very large proportion of the total

TABLE II

PER CENT POPULATION CHANGE  
CANADIAN METROPOLITAN INNER CITIES  
1961-1976

|                        | <u>1961-71</u> <sup>1</sup> | <u>1971-76</u> <sup>2</sup> | <u>1961-76</u> <sup>1</sup> |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| CALGARY                | 1.16                        | -9.89                       | -8.84                       |
| MONCTON                | 4.39                        | -5.95                       | -1.83                       |
| HALIFAX                | -12.19                      | -11.87                      | -26.34                      |
| HAMILTON               | 0.70                        | -11.57                      | -10.95                      |
| KITCHENER              | 17.69                       | -12.31                      | 3.20                        |
| LONDON                 | -15.14                      | -16.01                      | -28.73                      |
| MONTREAL               | -6.36                       | -11.54                      | -17.24                      |
| OSHAWA                 | 8.87                        | -6.13                       | 2.14                        |
| OTTAWA                 | -17.61                      | -13.33                      | -28.59                      |
| QUEBEC                 | -10.11                      | -13.52                      | -22.26                      |
| REGINA                 | -13.29                      | -14.23                      | -25.63                      |
| SAINT JOHN             | -13.23                      | -19.78                      | -30.40                      |
| ST. CATHARINES-NIAGARA | 1.48                        | -10.52                      | -9.19                       |
| ST. JOHN'S             | -17.80                      | -24.40                      | -37.76                      |
| SASKATOON              | -16.12                      | -7.35                       | -22.29                      |
| SUDBURY                | -8.87                       | -15.61                      | -23.09                      |
| TORONTO                | 5.10                        | -11.01                      | -6.47                       |
| WINDSOR                | 0.71                        | -13.50                      | -12.88                      |
| WINNIPEG               | -16.09                      | -13.56                      | -27.47                      |
| THUNDER BAY            | n.c.                        | -7.60                       | n.c.                        |
| VICTORIA               | n.c.                        | -3.23                       | n.c.                        |

1. Figures derived from *Census of Canada: Population and Housing Characteristics by Census Tracts, 1961, 1971, 1976.*

2 From *The Canadian Inner City, 1971-76: A Statistical Handbook.*





*An abandoned house on Gower Street.*



*A dilapidated, vacant house on Victoria Street.*

number of inner city households. Slightly more than 80 per cent of all inner city residents were still in family groupings. However, nearly a quarter (21 per cent) were single parent families and 14 per cent single-parent families with one or more children aged less than 18 years. Since 81 per cent of the heads of such one-parent families were unemployed in 1976, many are obviously living in poverty. Typically, the mean inner city income is less than the mean suburban income (the inner city family income was only 71 per cent of that for the rest of the C.M.A. in 1971) and the last decennial census indicated that nearly half (43 per cent) of all inner city families were below the poverty line.

The decline in the population of the inner city and, more particularly, the reduction in the number of households have clearly introduced some slack into the housing market. It is impossible, given the imprecision of the census data and the lack of records at the municipal level, to define exactly what stock adjustments have taken place in the inner city.

The census provides data only on the occupied dwelling units and nothing on the total stock. CMHC data are stripped of all locational information and cannot be grafted on to the census figures. But, by comparing the differences between the number of occupied dwelling units in 1971 and 1976, an indication of how much inner city stock was unused at the end of that period can be obtained. The 9 per cent reduction in the number of households translates to 281 units.

While the accuracy of this figure is open to debate, it is clear that there is a substantial

vacant inventory in the inner city. The market weakness thus revealed is exacerbated by the continued production of suburban and exurban housing, and it is a weakness which may hinder seriously the efforts being made, albeit on a localized basis, to restore old St. John's as a residential environment.

Many possible causes for contemporary inner city deterioration have been suggested in the literature, most of which can be considered as either push or pull factors.<sup>7</sup> The pull factors, especially rapid growth in the suburban housing stock, are well represented in St. John's. The number of occupied dwelling units in the CMA as a whole increased by 24 per cent from 1971 to 1976. While most of these 7,400 units have been provided through private sector activity, over 600 are new public housing on the city's fringes, and approximately 1,000 have appeared on the Federal-Provincial land banking project of Mount Pearl Newtown.

It is clear that federal housing and land development programmes (notably the Assisted Home Ownership Programme, AHOP) have supported the suburban housing market very actively in recent years to the detriment of the inner city. The balkanization of municipal jurisdiction in the metro region and the inability or unwillingness of the provincial government to finalize the plans for the introduction of regional government make it impossible to impose any kind of integrated control over the proliferation of suburban and exurban housing and services. Similarly, shopping centre developers have been able to blackmail municipalities by threatening to locate malls, and hence a part of the tax base, in

other jurisdictions.<sup>8</sup>

The effect of unco-ordinated policy in generating pull factors in the context of the depopulation and deterioration of the inner city is reinforced by the operation of push factors, several of which are unique to St. John's. A number of events have combined to create a very uncertain environment in the core - an environment which is not only responsible for the out-migration of population and business activity but for the hesitation on the part of potential new development. The regional lack of policy is repeated at the municipal level. St. John's has no adopted city plan, much less a clear development strategy for the central core, and in the absence of the kind of control which only such a plan can provide, development of the inner city has progressed in a haphazard and unco-ordinated manner. One result of this lack of policy was a loss of confidence in the ability of the core to support new development. Here we will briefly discuss two major developments which, because of their side effects and uncertain prospects, have been causes of disarray.

Atlantic Place is an incomplete retail and office complex on the south side of Water Street. Its proponents hailed it as a reversal of the movement of retail activity to suburban malls that had dominated the retail scene since 1967. Statistics Canada data show a steady decline in the inner city's share of the retail market since 1961. Between that year and 1971 its proportion of the CMA's retail receipts declined from 55.4 to 27.9 per cent, while the number of establishments fell by 29 per cent.<sup>9</sup> Since 1971, with the closure of at least five major

businesses, including Sears (moving to a new mall) and the flag-ship Ayres, and the expansion of one regional mall and the opening of a second, the situation has continued to deteriorate.

The original plan called for Atlantic Place to have 105,000 square feet of retail space. However, three years after it opened in its present unfinished state, some of this space remains vacant. While it may not be the case that suburban malls, *per se* have caused a deterioration of the retail trade of the inner city, they have certainly contributed to an unprecedented and, some would say, excessive expansion of the gross retail space in the city. Comparable cities on the mainland have between fifteen and twenty square feet of retail space per capita, and this is generally accepted as a healthy provision.<sup>10</sup> A rough estimate for St. John's shows a current figure of twenty-seven square feet per capita. This level of retail space provision may reflect the historic role of St. John's as the regional shopping centre, but this role is now being seriously undermined as a result of the construction of new malls "around the bay," in Whitbourne, Placentia, Carbonear and beyond.

The apparent overprovision of retail space cannot but result in a smaller slice of the retail dollar for individual merchants<sup>11</sup> and especially those in the inner city who cannot provide consumers with free parking, protection from the elements and a pleasant environment and whose elderly buildings generate high labour and overhead costs. All of these factors militate against successful head-on competition between the inner city and the malls, but this is not to



*Atlantic Place from Water Street. The main Ayre's store, closed in 1979, is in the foreground.*



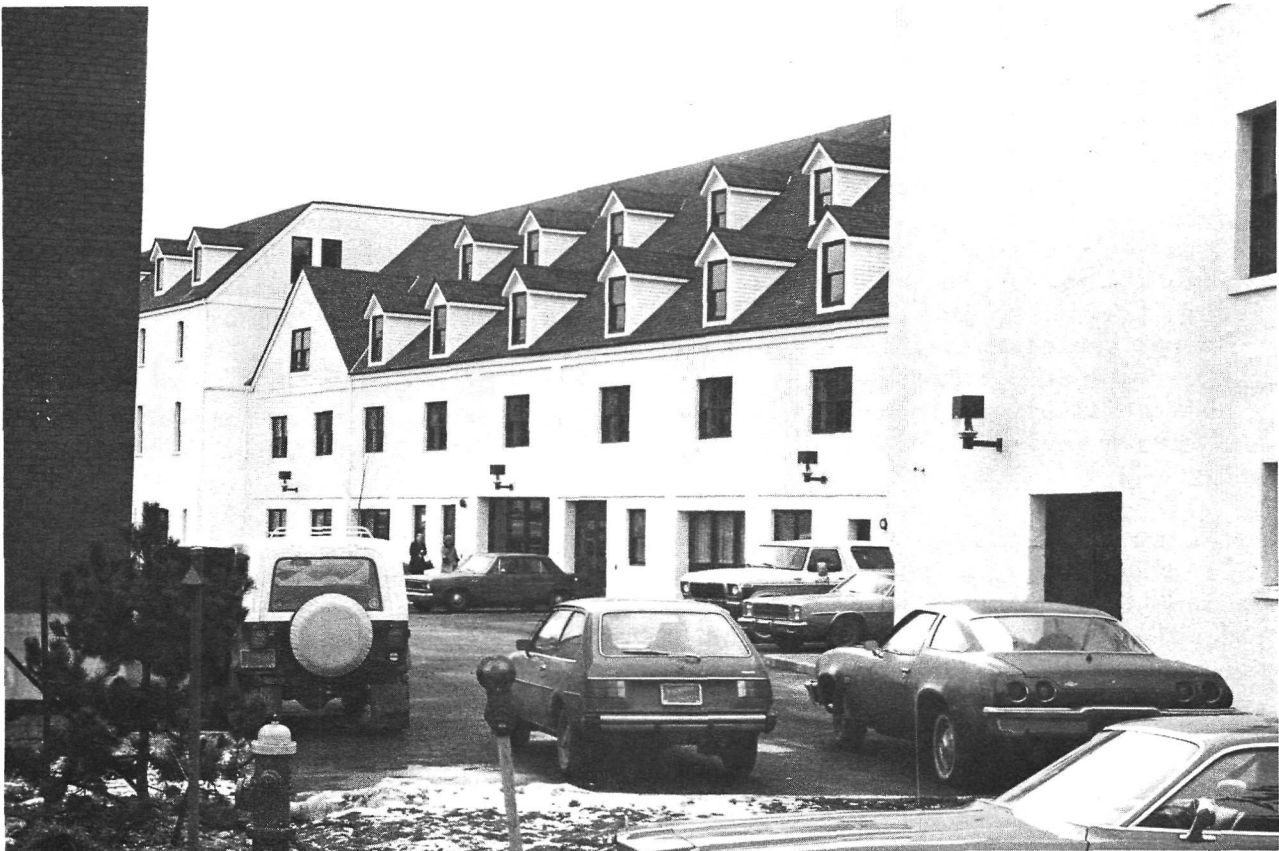
*Atlantic Place from the Southside Hills. The parking garage is the lower building to the right of the main complex.*

say that inner city business cannot survive and prosper. A recent study by Memorial's School of Business blames the relative decline of the inner city's retail sector on the downtown business people for having failed to identify and pursue, individually and collectively, other marketing opportunities. The recent renovation of the historic Murray premises indicate an increasing awareness of alternative retail strategies.

As a result of the decline in the importance of the C.B.D., and perhaps also as a reflection of the loss engendered by the closing of so many businesses, the physical environment was allowed to deteriorate. The delapidation of many premises, allied to the large number of vacant buildings, did

nothing to arrest the decline and likely further contributed to it. The same may be said of Atlantic Place, the appalling design and excessive scale of which are totally inappropriate to the Downtown.

The Atlantic Place complex, as originally proposed, was meant to revitalize the downtown retail environment, provide additional office space and be crowned by a major hotel. The presence of the eleven floor, 300-room hotel in the original plans was a prime factor in guaranteeing its acceptance by City Council. The developer, Andrew Crosbie (brother of former Progressive Conservative Minister of Finance, John Crosbie), was given major concessions at the negotiation stage. One of them concerned parking. Existing bylaws



*The Murray premises, built as a mercantile warehouse in 1849; rehabilitated and converted to boutiques in 1979.*

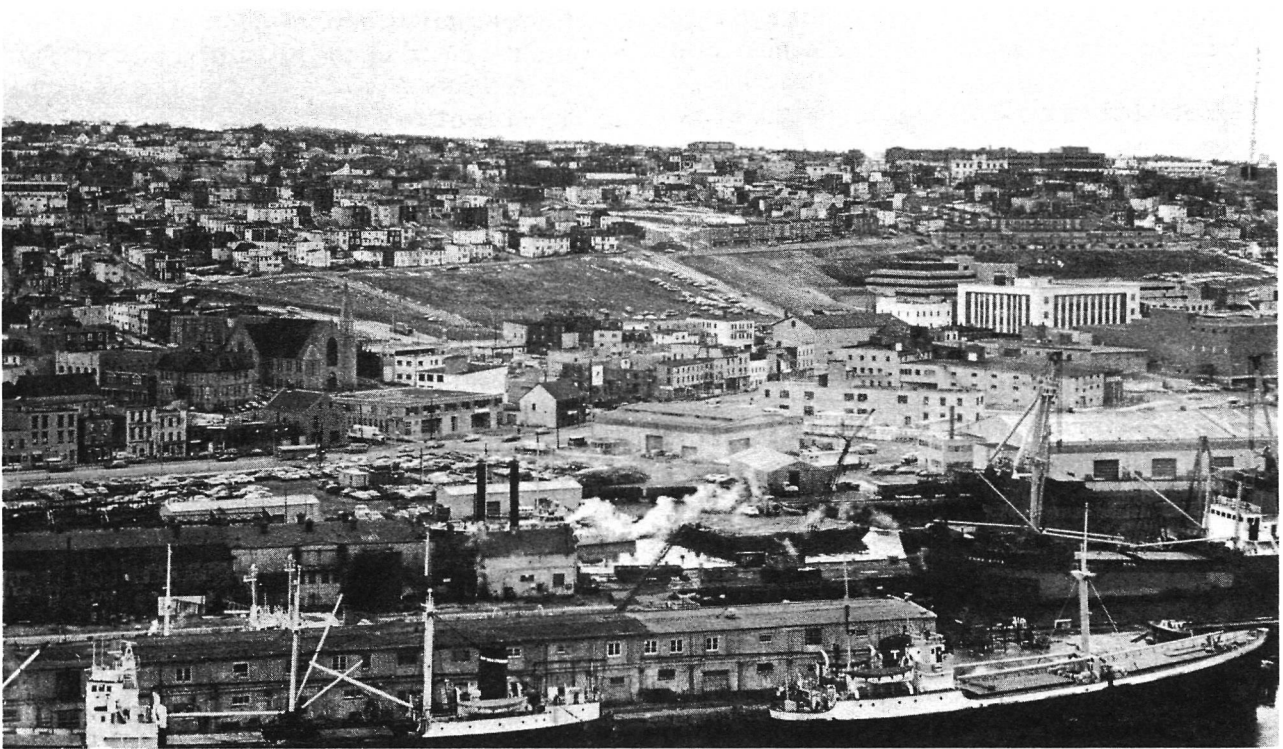


require 900 indoor parking spaces for a development of this size. However under the agreement between Council and the developer (which was kept secret until late 1978) the developer provided only 105 spaces, while the city, at its own expense, built an attached parking garage for 728 cars on the harbour side of the block. The design and construction work for this garage, paid for by the city, was performed by the developer of Atlantic Place itself, at a cost of \$8 million, \$6 million more than the developer's original estimate.

Early in 1978, the city indicated that it planned to sue the developer for breach of contract because of non-compliance with the original proposal. However, in November, on the strength of the voting power of the conservative old guard on Council, a revised agreement with the developer was accepted, giving \$2 million in tax concessions over the next ten years and relieving him of the obligation to build the hotel. He has an option, running until July 1, 1986, to build either a hotel tower or an office building. Perhaps the only positive factor about the project is that it represents major, recent and unprofitable capital investment in the downtown. The developer is understandably anxious to encourage downtown revitalization.

In the final analysis, though, the whole Atlantic Place debacle illustrated how little control Council was willing to assert over development. Its apparent refusal to accept the principal of strong municipal control of development can be argued to be a basic cause of the atmosphere of uncertainty which surrounds the future of the inner city.

The second major source of uncertainty is the large (2.1 hectare) vacant property to the west of City Hall, now commonly known as "the Trizec site." Formerly a densely settled residential area, it was cleared as part of an urban renewal scheme in the late 1950s. After a long search for a developer, an option on the land was taken by Trizec in October 1974, to enable them to put in place a gargantuan, \$75 million redevelopment scheme. The plan, bitterly but unsuccessfully opposed by many because of its scale, called for three towers: two office buildings of twenty-eight and twenty-one storeys and a sixteen storey hotel, all three perched on a seven storey base. The first phase, including a 300 room hotel, a 600 car garage, 350,000 square feet of office and 100,000 square feet of retail space, was to have been completed by the end of 1977. While the final installment of the purchase price for the land was paid in August of 1977, no construction work took place. In November, 1976 Trizec informed the city that they were declining to proceed with development at that time, largely because (it was claimed) the provincial government had backed out of an agreement to rent a large part of the office space at a time when, with 300,000 square feet of office space already vacant in the area, the development of any new office space in the absence of a guaranteed tenant was unwise. The existence of an agreement, much less the abrogation of one, has been denied by the provincial government. In the meantime the city had fulfilled its contractual obligations, including completion of the controversial Harbor Arterial road. This nine mile limited access highway cost over \$52 million and links the



*St. John's from the Southside Hills. The "Trizec Site" is in the middle of the photograph; City Hall is immediately to the right.*

Downtown to the Trans Canada Highway.

In January, 1978 Council decided to take legal action against Trizec for breach of contract. However in August, 1979 a settlement was reached whereby Trizec sold the land back to the city for the original purchase price. The city is currently deciding how best to proceed with the development of this land which has now been vacant for nearly twenty years. Their decision will be crucial as this is the only significant vacant land left in the Downtown. Thus, while the city has regained control of this land it is still contributing to an environment of uncertainty.

The picture presented so far has been one of inner city decline initiated by suburbanization,

accelerated by a lack of urban or regional policy and exacerbated rather than slowed by major projects in the area. But attempts are being made to improve the physical fabric of the inner city, and, while they are also suffering from a lack of overall planning, they are worthy of analysis.

St. John's has been a major recipient of Neighborhood Improvement Programme funding. The Downtown is ringed by the five NIP areas which were approved between 1975 and 1978. The intention of the programme was to "improve the amenities of neighbourhoods and the housing and living conditions of the residents" (NHA, Part III.1, Sec. 27.1), although the NIP programme itself did not affect the housing stock directly except by providing funds for the clearance of sub-standard units.

A total of \$9.8 million has been approved for these five N.I.P. areas since 1975, and 83 per cent of this sum has already been committed. The main activities have been the creation or rehabilitation of neighbourhood parks and street and sidewalk repairs. It is still too early to know the effects of this infusion of money in terms of providing a base for the revitalization of the inner core. Furthermore, it is interesting to speculate the degree to which this work would have been paid for out of the city's capital works budget had NIP funding not been available.

In addition it can be argued that the inner NIP areas, because of their contiguity with the deteriorating core, do not meet some of the criteria established by CMHC. NIP areas are to be so located that:

1. there are no indications of major construction or development plans which will cause major changes in land use within the area.
2. there are no conditions inside *or outside* the neighbourhood which will continue to exert a major negative influence.<sup>12</sup>

It seems undeniable that a continued decline of the core area enclosed by the ring of NIP neighbourhoods cannot help but have a negative impact. The uncertainty surrounding the possible effects of the Harbour Arterial and the future status of the former Trizec site is not conducive to stability. Further, the commercial core is hemmed in by these neighbourhoods, and the lack of a city plan and the demonstrated unwillingness of the city to exert strong development

control provide no guarantee that these neighbourhoods will not be encroached upon by non-conforming development. In any case the residential streets function as commuter parking areas and, in the absence of significant off-street parking space, further deter settlement.

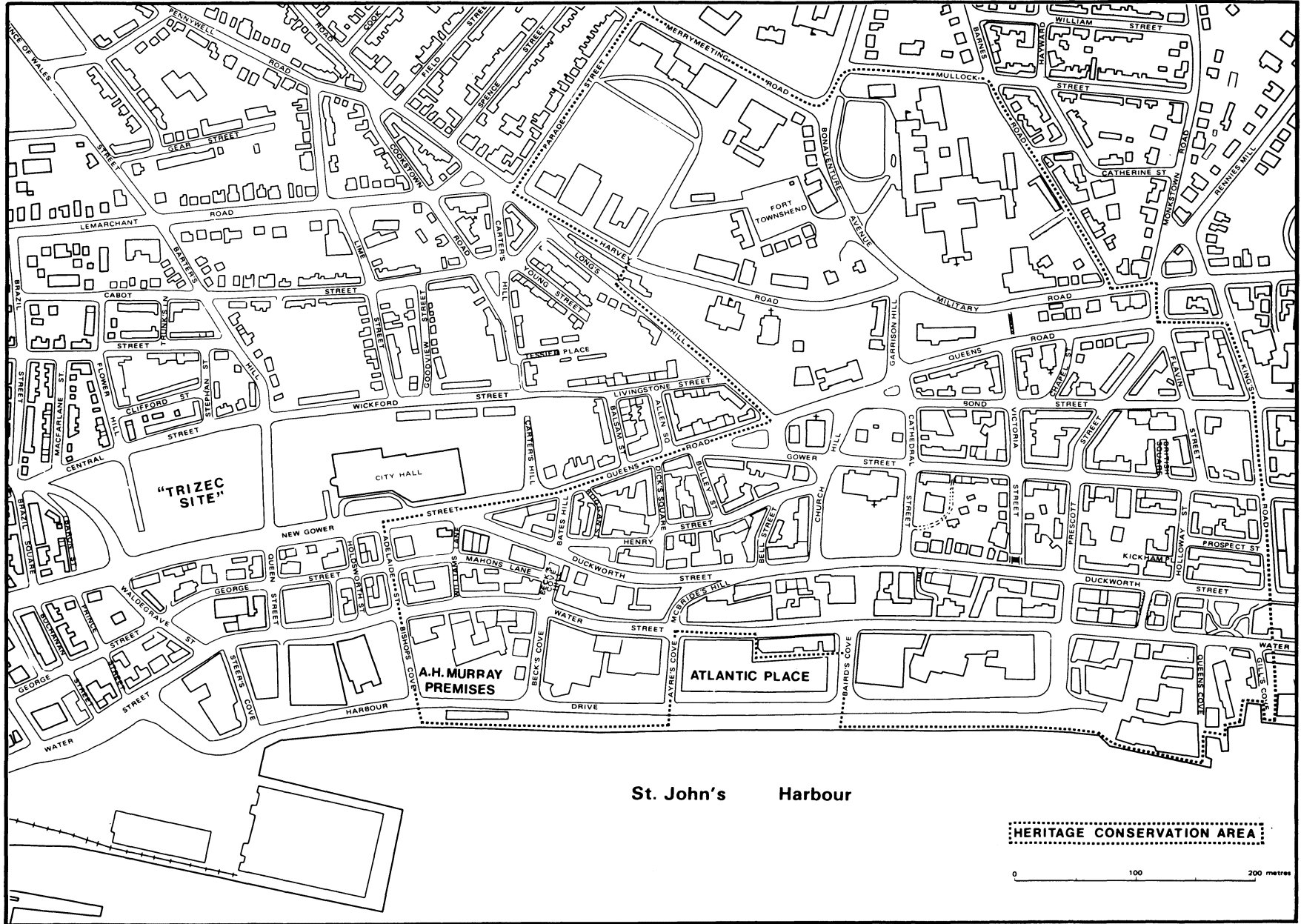
NIP areas are eligible for Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Programme funds and here again there are indications that a considerable amount of activity is underway. To the end of September 1979, 769 loans had been approved in the five NIP areas, for a total value of \$4.7 million. However, there are indications that the programme is running into difficulties, evidenced by the number of loans cancelled by householders after approval. The primary reason appears to be that many households expected free money to bring their homes up to standard, but many of the homes, especially in the West End, will require an amount greater than the grant portion of the loan to rehabilitate.

It is clearly too early to know what the long-term results of this programme will be. Many individual households are benefitting from it, but the aggregate effect on neighbourhoods will not be observable for some time.

Finally, the efforts that have been made within the inner core itself to preserve and protect the urban heritage of old St. John's must be examined. The Area Conservation Programme sponsored by Heritage Canada is designed to foster the preservation of the architectural heritage. The operating body in the city is the St. John's Heritage foundation, and



# CENTRAL ST. JOHN'S



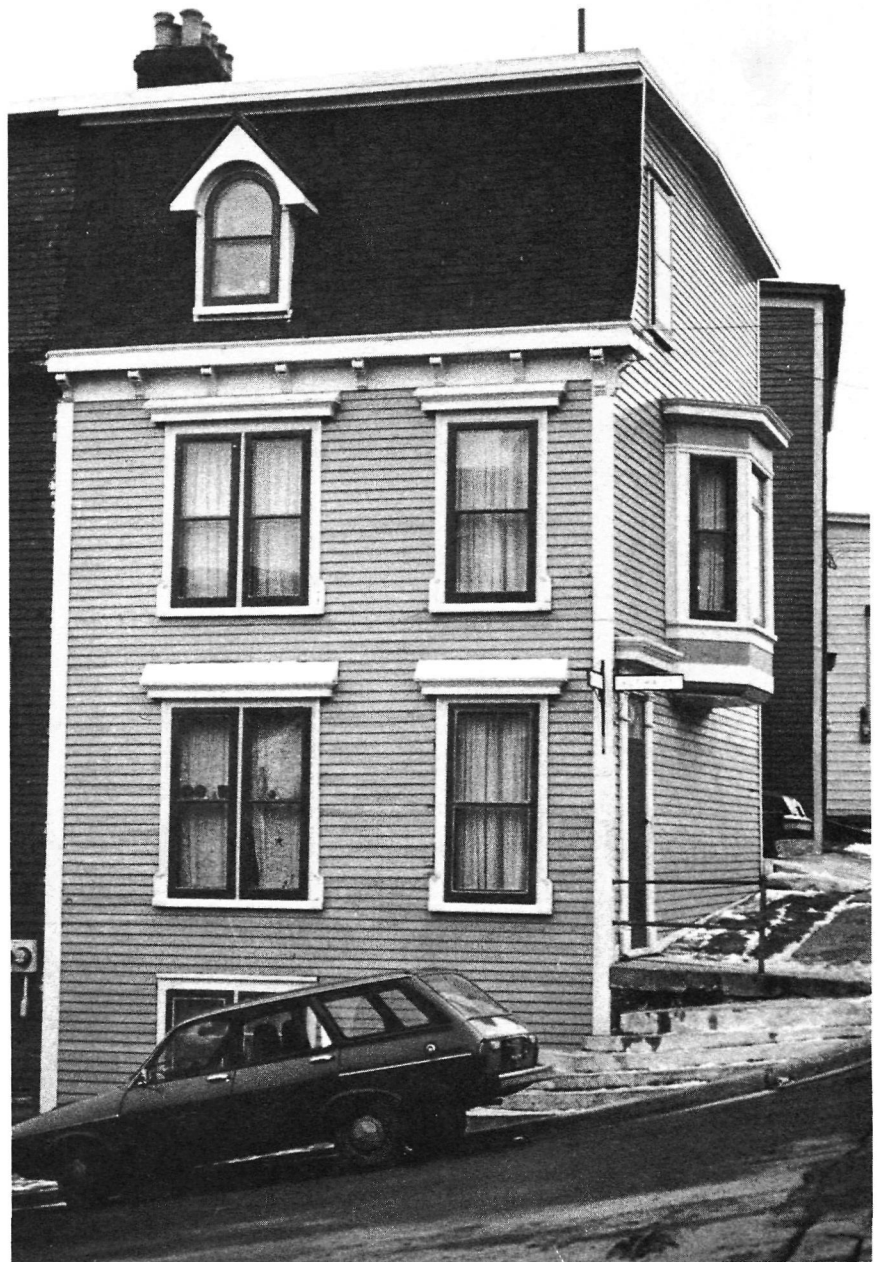
their efforts are concentrated in an Area Conservation Zone defined by a by-law passed in June 1977.<sup>13</sup>

The Foundation purchases residential and commercial property, restores the exterior, rehabilitates the interior and then offers the property for sale or rent. To date they have renovated twenty-three residential and two

commercial buildings. The aim is two-fold: to rehabilitate individual properties and to act as a catalyst for private activity in the same area. While it is not the overt aim to sponsor gentrification, the costs involved in restoring these houses make it inevitable that this will happen.

A vital question is how much demand there is going to be for

*A house on the corner of Victoria and Bond Streets, rehabilitated in 1978 by the St. John's Heritage Foundation.*



these units, when, for a lower price a middle-class household with children could buy a new house in Newtown, Mount Pearl or Kilbride and have some land and a more attractive neighbourhood environment in terms of schools, parks and some other facilities. If the houses currently offered are sold, indicating a strong demand for the package of house and neighbourhood that is offered, then one might claim the start of a trend towards a firming up of the market. It could then be claimed that the residential parts of the inner city can be "saved." But the fundamental question, so common to many cities where we see this sort of a return to the inner city is - "for whom" is the city being saved? The inner city is a major source of low incoming housing, and it is as low income housing that it must be renovated.

The NIP, RRAP and Heritage Conservation programmes, the latest changes to the N.H.A. and rising energy costs all favour a revitalization of the inner city. The recent renovation of the Murray premises by the St. John's Heritage Foundation, with substantial financial assistance from Parks Canada and the provincial government, suggests continued business interest in the core. A movement of new provincial and federal government departments into downtown offices will also increase the vitality of the area, as may the evolution of the offshore oil industry.

Yet there are other critical developments, upon which may depend the success of all the above projects. Until recently there has been an anti-planning bias in the city, but the balance of power in Council has shifted and progress is being made towards replacing

*ad hoc* decision making with policy. It is to be hoped that this trend will continue. If it does not, individual projects and programmes will continue to be in conflict. Residential renovation will be undermined by unco-ordinated policy and traffic flows and by continued peripheral construction of low income dwellings. Water Street retailing will suffer from the need of heavy traffic to use it to get to the Harbour Arterial and by unlimited mall development in the urban fringe, and an overall climate of decay and uncertainty will deter further investment and encourage disinvestment.

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#### NOTES

- 1 Like all wooden cities, St. John's has suffered heavily from fires. Relatively large conflagrations destroyed parts of the city in 1816, 1817, 1819 and 1846. The most serious damage was done by the fire of 1892 which erased virtually all structures in what is now the inner city.
- 2 The Commission produced a total of five reports: *First Interim Report: City Architect, Building Regulations, etc.*, November 1942; *Second Interim Report: King's Bridge Road Junction*, February 1943; *Third Interim Report: General Review of Housing Conditions; Outline of Proposals for Remedies*, June 1943; *Fourth Interim Report: Temporary Regulations to secure the width of future streets, etc.*, n.d.; and *Fifth Interim Report: Detailed Proposals and Provisional Estimates for Suburban Extension and Housing*, January 1944. All

- were published by King's Printer, St. John's.
- 3 *General Review of Housing Conditions*, p. 109.
  - 4 *Acts of the Honourable Commission of Government for Newfoundland*, 26, July 20th, 1944.
  - 5 Figures derived from Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Canada: Population and Housing Characteristics by Census Tracts, St. John's, 1961*.
  - 6 The inner city boundaries used here are those developed by CMHC for their analysis of inner city population change. See *The Canadian Inner City, 1971-76: A Statistical Handbook* (Ottawa: Policy Development Division, CMHC: 1979).
  - 7 One of the earliest references to the push-pull dictotomy is C.C. Colby, "Centrifugal and Centripital Forces in Urban Geography," *Annals. Assoc. Amer. Geog.*, 23 (1933): 1-20. More recent sources include the seminal study by G.M. Hoover and R. Vernon, *Anatomy of a Metropolis* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959), and the following: B.J.L. Berry, "The Decline of the Aging Metropolis," in G. Sternlieb and J.W. Hughes, eds., *Post-Industrial America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: C.U.P.R., Rutgers University, 1975); R. McLemore, *et. al.*, *The Inner City: Problems, Trends and Federal Policy* (M.S.U.A. Discussion Paper, B. 74.9); C.A. Leven, ed., *The Mature Metropolis* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath 1978); and L.S. Bourne, *Perspective on the Inner City: Its Changing Character, Reasons for Decline and Revival* (Research Paper 95, Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto, 1978).
  - 8 A classic case here involved a proposal by Atlantic Shopping Centres Ltd. to construct a 150,000 square foot mall just inside St. John's city limits. It was rejected on a number of grounds, whereupon the proposal was re-submitted to St. John's Metropolitan Area Board for a site just outside the city. This new mall is now accepted as a *fait accompli*, despite suggestions that the city of St. John's might seek a court order to prevent construction.
  - 9 Figures derived from 1961 *Census of Canada: Retail Trade, Business Location Statistics, Metropolitan Areas by Census Tracts*; and 1971 *Census of Canada: Retail Trade, Business Location Statistics, Metropolitan Areas by Census Tracts* (Catalogue 97-704).
  - 10 *Commercial land use survey, St. John's, 1974*, p. 11. Report prepared for the Planning Office, City of St. John's by the Department of Geography, Memorial University of Newfoundland.
  - 11 In October 1979 there were six foreclosures of locally run businesses in the Village regional shopping mall, just prior to its first anniversary. The Village is owned by Atlantic Place developer Andrew Crosbie.
  - 12 The Neighborhood Improvement Program was authorized as Part

111.1, Section 27 of the National Housing Act 1953-54, c. 23, s.1., as amended by Bill C-133, First Session, Twenty-Ninth Parliament. Section 27.1 (2)(a) stipulates that CMHC and the province will enter into an agreement which will, among other things, "set out the criteria upon the basis of which neighbourhoods in respect of which contributions or loans are to be made may be selected." The general guidelines for neighborhood eligibility, including those cited here, are outlined in CMHC Information bulletin NHA 5128-6.

- 13 The Heritage By-Law of the City of St. John's, enacted by Council on June 22nd, 1977.