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Environmental Engagement and the Problem of NIMBYism (The “Not In My Backyard” Syndrome)
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Let me begin with a truism. Environmental health and improvement are not isolated matters of interest to only a few. They permeate all of our lives from the water we drink, to the air we breathe, and the soil in which we plant crops. Yet listening to much public, and political discussion, one would think they are only a consideration for the self-interest of advocates (everyone from Al Gore and David Suzuki to those cryptically referred to as tree huggers or eco fascists), bureaucrats, and those with a financial stake.

For instance while not denying climate change, but apparently any meaningful human role, Mark Steyn (Maclean's magazine, 8 February 2010) described climate change apologists as hucksters, opportunists and global-government control-freaks (pew, who sounds more paranoid about a conspiracy?).

Our obligation to address these challenges is directly connected to the quality, ambience, and satisfaction of the places in which we live. Yet we have deliberately disengaged from these challenges, often vociferously opposed measures for improvement, and failed to understand how we might live in better places.

Andres Duany, a leading proponent of the “New Urbanism,” has observed that the quality and health of our living places are directly related to the challenge of human habitability, and this in turn is reflected not just in our personal residence but in its surrounding places which for our purposes we call neighbourhoods, a term fraught with sentimental misunderstanding but still appropriate for describing essentially the urban place with which we are most familiar.

Neighbourhoods, particularly those in the developed world, are excellent starting points for environmental initiatives ranging from district energy solutions and green infrastructure projects, to stay-at-home working arrangements and civic engagement possibilities leading to further spin-off opportunities. They are obviously bigger than individual household efforts and thus have built-in synergistic possibility, but they are also smaller than big project stuff that often dwarfs and mystifies citizens. They are at a scale in short which allows for real and understandable change and improvement. Unfortunately they have too often become centres of retreat and disengagement.

NIMBYism, the popular and short form for “*Not In My Back Yard*”, describes the resistance and outright opposition by residents, either within a distinct place such as a neighbourhood, or, more broadly, in a larger civic area right up to a town or city level, against some planned nearby facility, service, or changed land use. These items can include plans for a halfway house for mentally challenged adults, a Habitat for Humanity development, a district heating plant, a medium to high density development, a corner store, or virtually anything bringing change.

NIMBYism is also about our more extensive relation to the world of change, and our understanding of the wider places in which we move. It is an existential issue touching on the ways we find meaning in the world. As such it is an ethical issue connected to choices which are often less about care for others than our ability to consume. It is tied into the integrated nature of our civic, economic and environmental obligations.

1. Historic Roots of NIMBYism

Change has never been without its adherents and opponents. NIMBYism is just another name for this human

dynamic. Nor are its challenges a recent urban phenomenon. People next to each other have always had cause to object to intrusions on their daily life. As often as not however the diversity of nearby livelihoods and land uses meant that residents of early urban settlements accepted the reality of multiple potential changes in their surroundings. The relative proximity of countryside meant that there was an area of temporary escape or alternate work and living arrangements. The undeveloped sense of what city life and its associated institutions meant also militated against a clearly articulated notion of what was appropriate.

Perhaps the greatest reason for a muffled response to change however was the unequal distribution of power and the lack of formal or informal democratic channels through which one could express opposition or resistance.

The rise of NIMBYism in the modern urban world is thus directly related either to the existence of formal democratic means for their expression, or the confidence that even when such processes are non-existent or negligible, resisting voices will at least be tolerated and occasionally even listened to, as in modern China.

In accounting for modern NIMBYism we often forget that the modern city is the culmination of two seemingly contradictory developments. The first was the ascendance of the compact urban form, often in historically prescribed locations, on the back of the industrial revolution. It was characterized generally by mixed uses in close proximity to each other, a setting in which walking was the primary means of getting about (most needs being within 400 to 800 meters of one's residence), and conditions imposed by dependence on nearby water for steam power, necessitating factories which were essentially in one's backyard. The second was the dispersing effect of later technology which made possible the suburban character defining so much of the contemporary city.

a) Public Expenditure

The 19th century city for all the idealized glory of remnant architecture and easily traversed and narrow streets was for most people a miserable setting, lacking clean water and regularized sanitation services. It was akin in many ways to cities in the developing world in our own time. Nor was there necessarily general agreement that something should be done about these conditions. Self interest and what Tristram Hunt calls a small shopkeeper mentality argued against public expenditure. Only as the level of deprivation became pronounced did a class of publicly inspired, privately successful entrepreneurs emerge willing to take on the challenge of civic improvement. There was however no guarantee that such altruism would outlive them.

Taxation has always been a focus of public agitation from its earliest introduction. The degree of personal antagonism largely reflects alienation from the broader public realm, perceived fairness, and transparency in its collection and allocation. The more separated one becomes from the sense of connection to others the less likely citizens are to support public initiatives. This was the case in the 19th century for affluent people who often could escape the city when disease threatened or whose residences were less likely to be anywhere near the factories they owned.

NIMBYism has its modern origins in the contested discussion about appropriate taxation, though its explicit identity has evolved from this consideration to one regarding physical surroundings.

(b) The Decline of Urbanism

Suburbanization was the second phase of modern city development. While a feature of even the strong central city of the 19th century, its eventual ascendancy can be laid at the door of urbanism's apparent decline in the early 20th century. Authors on geographically distinct phenomenon such as Douglas Rae's description of cities in the United States (Rae, 2003) and Tristram Hunt on cities in the United Kingdom (Hunt, 2004), have described the end of formally dominant urban centres as the result of multiple factors including the dispersing influence of alternating current electricity, car dominance, and growth at the edge of the city in response to an unhealthy urban setting.

Lively if downtrodden traditional urban downtowns and their associated and engaged neighbourhoods were replaced as the dominant form of urban development by single use, and most often single income and similar family type neighbourhoods, at some remove from services, shopping and workplaces. From being

active participants in their city whether they wanted to be or not (either as advocates for improvement or merely an extra set of eyes on the street), and as celebrated in Jane Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Jacobs, 1993) citizens in suburban enclaves assumed a consumer outlook. Their lives revolved around private concerns and spaces, an identity reinforced in the early 21st century by a range of individual digital communication tools.

The old city of the 19th century remains, but it stands in some cases alongside a new suburban form bleeding into the historic core in the form of early 20th century garden villages, or more recently as the commonly understood single use, low density, cul-de-sac streetscape, first at the old city's edge, but now a powerful form stretching outwards 100 kilometres or more, overwhelming quasi independent and geographically compact small towns once surrounded by agriculture.

More insidiously the shape and ideology of the suburb has often been laid right on top of the old city, in the form of downtown shopping malls that turn their back on the street, or gated, and child-prohibited occupancy condominiums.

(c) Integration and Segregation

Historically, arguments regarding the built environment have been more likely to occur in anonymous city environments as opposed to smaller town places. In the latter, rich and poor were more likely to live within blocks of each other and their children likely attended the same school, thus they had a greater sense of public connection and obligation, as well as tools for achieving consensus. In big cities however this was less likely to be the case.

In American cities these arguments have been exacerbated by centuries of institutionalized racism. Beginning after the First World War white flight from inner cities, as Blacks moved in, led to restrictive covenants in the new neighbourhoods to which whites moved. These explicitly banned sales to Blacks, Jews, and other minorities. In some ways this was the final straw necessary for the perfect storm of explicit and modern NIMBYism.

(d) Urban Planning

Modern urban NIMBYism cannot be separated from the types of urban development which characterized post-Second World War North America. Freeways through inner city cores, paving over of green spaces, widening of roads making them more dangerous for pedestrians particularly children and the elderly, were some of the antagonizing aspects of this new order. But others included the paving of streams and rivers to rush storm water through town and either flood those downstream or dump street refuse (from leaking car oil to dog detritus) into once pristine lakes. Few urban areas are as ugly and as likely to attract unwanted items from shopping carts to murder victims as the famous paved ditch in Los Angeles (and also in movie shots as a symbol of urban decay!).

As well the massing of poor people in Soviet style high-rises not only objectified the indignity of these people's plight but also was often at the expense of once lively but "down on their heels" mixed urban neighbourhoods of homes, shops, workplaces etc. These were torn down to accommodate single use apartment neighbourhoods with no nearby resources or urban variety, and as often as not quickly evolved into dangerous no-go places for everyone except those forced by circumstance to live there.

One had once expected public officials, transportation engineers, urban planners, social workers and others to protect the public from the worse predatory aspects of the free market and the self-interest of developers eager to destroy working neighbourhoods and replace them with ugly high rises. Instead urban residents had every reason to believe the public sector might be a worse enemy than private entrepreneurs who at least had to worry about their image, future sales and new regulations.

(e) Evolution of Real Estate Value

The exploding value of real estate as the most significant investment most people will make in their lives has led to the further evolution of NIMBYism. Those who invested early in the real estate market saw the

value of their property exceed even their wildest dreams. NIMBYism was a means of shielding this inflated value from anything perceived as a threat to its exponential increase, but as well it led to greater conservatism within neighbourhoods. Even heritage designation, which while it protects the quality of the neighbourhood might also dampen the widest possible potential market for individual homes, is cause for local objection.

So while desirous of preventing unacceptable intrusions in one's surroundings, the irony of NIMBYism is that it isn't really about preserving the neighbourhood, as it is about individual self-interest. Too often the objector's ultimate objective is to make the most profit possible and then leave the very neighbourhood supposedly being protected for some apparently more pristine, isolated, and guarded place.

2. Contemporary Forces in Continuing NIMBYism

Like all phenomenon however it is important to understand the range of forces driving contemporary NIMBYism, as more than an a-historical, inevitable process. Only then can public policies and private initiative deal with it as a challenge.

(a) Alienation from the Built Environment

As noted above, a major contemporary issue is our alienation from the surrounding built environment and its sheer ugliness, a point marvelously documented by James Howard Kunstler in *Geography of Nowhere* (1993).

If we were residents of a slum in a developing country we would regard even the blandest of new subdivisions as marvellous destinations. As we advance up the chain of self-actualization beyond survival needs however we begin to pay attention to factors such as the quality and beauty of life. Much of modern North American urban development is characterized by tremendous utilitarian banality in the built environment – dour high rises with no connection to their surrounding neighbourhood; lack of human scale (in which building size, location, use and roadway width, don't connect in an ordered way and leave us feeling uncomfortable and unsafe walking within them); multi-lane roadways and wide turning radii at the end of the street creating pedestrian discomfort and serving only the interest of traffic; dreary single use residential subdivisions dominated by multiple snout nosed garages fronting on to the street; strip retail development with garish signs and lowest cost building materials and mediocre design.

No wonder people with the best of intentions say, I don't want this where I live.

(b) Personal Disengagement from Public Obligation

Alongside this however there is significant personal disengagement from public obligations (be these shared responsibility for halfway houses, energy supporting facilities, nearby schools and shops to which kids and older people without cars can walk). It is a loss of social capital poignantly documented by Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone* (2000). Much of the opposition to confronting the challenge of climate change for instance is a barely disguised play on the economist John Maynard Keynes's observation that in the long run we're all dead. We simply don't care about future generations, and by extension this includes our own children and grandchildren, much less those seven generations from now (an aboriginal imperative).

Against this point of view of course are those who plant trees knowing their full splendour will not appear until long after their life is over, but this requires a higher level of intentional ethics which most of us are prepared to suppress. Beyond this lack of attention to future generations is denying awareness of the over billion people in emerging cities of the developing world who live without sanitation, property rights, clean water, education for their children, job and residential security. It is a world described in harrowing terms by Mike Davis in *Planet of Slums* (2006), and with a somewhat more optimistic tone by Doug Saunders in *Arrival City* (Saunders, 2010).

In the England of Charles Dickens, deprivation surrounded well-off citizens. Peter Ackroyd in *London: The Biography* (Ackroyd, 2000) has described the city's eccentric character in which the lack of settled education and absence of a defined social "system," a concept not receiving recognition until the mid 19th

century, meant the emerging Victorian agencies of uniformity and propriety only slowly overtook a world depicted in Hogarth's prints, the political cartoons of Rowlandson and Gillray, and Pierce Egan's colourful accounts of Regency-era pugilism.

Emerging critical perspectives ranging from those penned by Karl Marx at the library of the British Museum, to the "Garden City" urban theories of Ebenezer Howard, transformed public conversation if they did not always change attitudes. Public authorities could delay acting but the obligation to do so faced them on a daily basis. Reform, while quixotic, gradually overcame the worst abuses of public neglect.

Today however the overwhelming challenge of poverty in other parts of the world leads not to engagement with the issue but either avoidance for their being out of sight and also out of mind, or the rationalization that an unencumbered free market will lift all boats. On a more local level then our rejection of small measures, which might benefit those with greater problems than our own, parallels the larger problem of modern living in a developed world alongside that of the developing world.

(c) Monetary Issues

The triumph of one issue, private property value, over all others has been referenced above. In simple terms it means any measure, from protecting the heritage character of the neighbourhood to positive performance objectives such as main street improvement, are objected to if they mean private property owners can't do as they please with their property, even tear it down, regardless of whether it destabilizes the neighbourhood, or adds construction waste to landfills (which of course no one wants in their neighbourhood). The largest possible dollar return on property sale and the opportunity to escape to some perceived better place trumps all other issues.

Individual property owners are encouraged in this view by real estate interests and the property industry. While claiming to sell homes based on the quality of the living place, their ultimate interest is churn. This distorts local decision-making, turning it into a servant to profits over quality of life and place.

Absentee ownership and tenancy in a neighbourhood are more problematic issues. They may have the potential to destabilize an area, if not engaged in substantive dialogue and participation. Such a rapprochement however is often not in the perceived best interest of the landlord for whom alienation from public involvement prevents lively debate as to property conditions or neighbourhood improvements, particularly if the latter lead to increased assessment and taxation.

The latter is a powerful force in NIMBYism detracting from a collective perspective in which we celebrate a shared public realm and instead ask only what it costs. If it is too much we reflect on how this imposes limitations on our personal spending, from being able to afford long commutes to purchasing more privatized electronic resources.

(d) Diminished Local Media

A powerful ally alongside this personal interest in property values is the increasingly narrow role assumed by local media, once a strong advocate for vibrant, diverse places.

One need only consult small town, regional, and even small city newspapers which flourished in the middle of the 20th century and in some cases until its end. They are remarkable records of communities with everything from police blotter details of local misdeeds to photos of those receiving bowling trophies, to the dinner guests of anyone who chose to share that information. As these newspapers were purchased by larger media conglomerates, coverage of local matters declined and was replaced in large measure by massive quantities of flyers for regional big box stores, and an editorial policy slanted less towards community engagement in its own ongoing story and more towards the interests of the real estate industry, not surprisingly one of the largest advertisers.

With a reduced sense of their own identity and no alternate source of community portrait the ties of local endearment disappeared to be replaced by isolation in which it is easier to just say no, rather than engage in meaningful dialogue.

(e) Professional Practitioner Practices and Standards

Sometimes the very attributes one would have thought would have increased the resilience of public decision-making, and with it public confidence in its practitioners, contribute to NIMBYism. The intellectual and governing biases and standards of professionals, reflecting generations of standard practice, often lead to decisions alienating neighbourhoods.

The dominance of engineering imperatives in public design is one example. Traditional traffic engineering has mandated wide roads and excessive impermeable surfaced parking. It is based on single use and low-density suburban models and operates regardless of the area in which it is applied. Even its application in suburban locations however merely furthers the solely utilitarian character of those areas and prevents their possible evolution into more lively places with mixed uses and richer experiences.

Alongside this is the contested nature of what constitutes public safety, often resulting in dreary, and in some cases even less safe, places. Fire and emergency service providers demand wide unencumbered streets, which might allow them to get to fires quicker, but which also allow for increased and faster traffic with resulting pedestrian fatalities. A law enforcement bias emerges favouring automotive flow over a walker's entry into the public space of the roadway.

The cumulative result for places lacking in human vitality, is increased resident disengagement from public roles and obligations.

(f) Insurance and Banking Interests

The insurance and banking industries historically manipulated the enhanced value of new suburban development over older neighbourhoods, despite the contribution of the latter to urban quality and public health. They did so in some cases by redlining older areas (a practice of refusing loans to the residents of largely inner city neighbourhoods in the 1930s which not only furthered white flight but also degraded those places through a lack of available investment for necessary retrofits).

Insurance companies continue to apply higher premiums for older houses, on the questionable assumption that their older components such as electricity, plumbing, etc. make them more vulnerable to destruction. More often this results from out of date risk management analysis. This encourages teardowns with resulting construction waste, neighbourhood destabilization, public defensiveness and the loss of local character and sense of belonging.

(g) Political Self-Interest

Political self-interest also encourages local NIMBYism. Some areas are disadvantaged simply because they have no political clout. Democratic obstructionism occurs because representatives care only for the interests of their ward or region, or lack respect for the very government they are empowered to represent. No wonder there is public distrust of the political process as one that never serves necessary ends.

Imposed controls by a central authority without meaningful opposition, more likely in single party states but becoming more common in democracies as parties come to resemble each other, turns citizens into disengaged spectators, less inclined to take on any public responsibility. Decisions based not on public interest, but only on getting re-elected, further sour public engagement.

Because we now live in megapolitan regions stretching 100 kilometres or more in every possible direction from the historic big city downtown, we sense that there are many other places to put those facilities and land uses that people don't want in their neighbourhood. Decisions reflect the power and influence of some and the lack of such by others. The latter unhappily are the recipients of unwanted facilities or people. The harsh political reality of this process suggests to many that it pays to engage in NIMBYism, there being no tax breaks or political favours for those places in which unwanted elements are located.

(h) Governance Failure

Perhaps even more damaging is the failure of governance to catch up with the reality of most people's lives. In Canada for instance the federal government is often more concerned with regional cries of inequity by its excessive attention to declining rural and non-urban areas, whose votes often carry more weight than those of city dwellers. Provincial jurisdictions are generally too big for the realities of modern urban territories. On the other hand existing urban areas, as politically defined, are too small.

Jurisdictionally Toronto ends at Steeles Avenue in the north and is bounded by the Rouge and Humber rivers in the east and west. The real Toronto that most experience and depend on however corresponds to what has been described as the Greater Golden Horseshoe stretching east to Port Hope-Cobourg, northeast to Peterborough, north to Orillia, northwest to Orangeville, west to Kitchener, and south around to Niagara Falls. Its summer holiday retreats and winter skiing trips spread that influence even further, while an urban lifestyle now characterizes the lives of most people regardless of where they live.

This dispersed region, as the effective living area for people, includes everything from work, shopping and worship destinations to friendships and the many places in which kids play weekend hockey. No level of government effectively represents the reality of most people's lives and so left on their own they resort to building barricades rather than acknowledging obligations.

(i) Paradigms of Urban Development

It goes without saying as well that we are still victimized with out of date (post Second World War) paradigms of urban development, which degrade built and natural environments. The history of neighbourhoods demolished by public authorities for expressways and public housing as noted above angered, horrified, and alienated potential supporters of public initiatives.

Though these practices are less likely today nevertheless paradigms of urban planning focused only on automotive movement, big boxes on the edge of town destroying main street retail areas, or monster homes replacing streetscape integrated bungalows, continue to be built. These satisfy some even as they disadvantage others.

More nuanced participative planning processes, characterized by public education rather than public relations strategies, and incorporating a wider variety of interests, voices, and points of view, are required. They have the potential both to intelligently engage the public as to the implications of their often clichéd responses to issues, as well as providing eventually for their enhanced active participation in public issues.

(j) Logistics Management

Current economic processes also contribute to NIMBYism. Logistics management interest in just-in-time delivery, results in an emphasis on roads and entire blocks of dead streets with facilities such as warehouses. Add to this the off shoring of production for cheaper goods, contributing to climate change, by enabling countries like China to ignore pollution controls, and we face the only conclusion that our pursuit of the lowest cost product degrades built and natural environments.

For now we are uncomfortably aware of the contradiction in our desire for cheap products and their impact on the places we live and perhaps the livelihoods of present and future generations. Our response has been to disengage from these issues as if our neighbourhoods could somehow avoid their implications. For now NIMBYism is a symbol of the paradoxes of our lives.

(k) Perverse Public Subsidies

We say we want to mitigate climate change but then provide massive tax breaks for companies investing in measures increasing greenhouse gas production. Locally we talk about the value of community institutions to which people can walk, then provide financing for school boards that encourage big box schools which are reachable only by school buses or parents driving kids to school. This policy destabilizes and eventually leads to the closing of local neighbourhood schools, with resulting increase in public health maladies and greenhouse gas production.

More ominously bigger places breed greater anonymity with implications for school violence and vandalism, linkages we are only now making.

(l) Public Service Provision

Fire and emergency service imperatives were listed above as factors, but other quasi-public agencies like electrical utilities also contribute to diminishing public confidence in the motivation of public agencies. They often engage in destructive tree trimming near above ground transmission lines rather than investing in the burying of such lines below ground. Often this is due to perverse public regulations, which both ignore the impact of overhead wires on neighbourhoods and prevent investment in underground measures because these are rationalized as being against a fiduciary obligation to public and private investors in utility companies.

NIMBYism is also the product of unintended consequences. Police are so encumbered with responsibility for traffic management and watching over dead city areas such as parking lots, industrial dead ends, and places with no eyes on the street that they don't have time for neighbourhoods. Vandalism and crime often go unchecked with the result that residents just want to seal themselves off from the world with cul de sac streets and quasi or fully gated communities.

(m) Privatization and Electronic Communications

The triumph of privatization in personal resources and public decision-making is reflected in the explosion of electronic communication tools from cell-phones to iPods, iPads and BlackBerries. Each of us has become our own niche with a corresponding sense of individual entitlement and reduced public obligation. Turning on its head Andy Warhol's famous dictum that in the future everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes, the English graffiti artist Banksy described a more likely scenario in which everyone will be anonymous for only 15 minutes in the future.

At what passes for a communal level we now have gated communities (even gated countries as the American obsession with security seems to be intent on realizing), private legal systems, and disconnected roadways forcing all traffic onto gridlocked main corridors with no dispersing opportunities through alternative minor roads.

Our lifestyles contribute to the above process of disengagement in that our places of work, play, worship, entertainment and even the home team we cheer for may bear no relation to the neighbourhood in which we live. Our lives are a collection of shared interests with those to whom a geographic connection is irrelevant.

(n) Metaphysics of Place

Neighbourhood change often removes the peculiarities and what might be thought of as a metaphysics of place and spaces (the sights, sounds, and smells which in an indefinable, seemingly mystical way, connect us to a location). Too often it eliminates any local anomalies such as crooked roads, potholed side streets which slow down speeding cars or deter them from entering the street in the first instance, as well as overhanging trees, and funky street signs.

Since change defines most things in modern living one's neighbourhood becomes a refuge. One wants it never to change from the way it was first encountered but think how difficult this is. There are just so many more people today; twice as many in Canada and the United States as there were 50 years ago. There are fewer quiet places, fewer places dark at night without intruding light being visible on the horizon, fewer places of genuine escape without encountering others.

3. Solutions for Overcoming NIMBYism

Is there a way out of this?

Ironically we confront NIMBYism's pursuit of non-changing character in a world of constant change and

churn, as increasingly stoked by the evolving individualism of modern communications. The result is a neighbourhood life that is even more separated and disengaged. The challenge in confronting this contradiction is essential, particularly since not only do most issues far surpass the narrow boundaries of one's perceived neighbourhood, be these climate change or economic globalization, but they inevitably rebound back upon local places.

Some preliminary suggestions include:

- Crisper definition, rather than sentimental descriptions, of what constitutes a neighbourhood, recognizing its essential horizontal and walkable history alongside its increasingly vertical reality, as well as the peculiar features of multiple and single use places, low density versus high density configurations, developed versus developing world typologies,
- Encouraging YIMBYs – “Yes In My Back Yard” proponents by publicizing, applauding, and even rewarding such activists,
- Recognizing that at least in some cases NIMBYism is a legitimate stance. Some places are overwhelmed by intrusions of a physical, social, or environmentally threatening character because they lack political power or the will to oppose proposals from authorities who prey on their weakness or naivety,
- Just as we have towns and cities twinning with each other why not neighbourhoods in developed and developing countries, as one means of raising our awareness of broader obligations and responsibilities,
- Rewarding those, even if they fought against such items, who receive unwanted facilities and people in their neighbourhood or town/city, through lower taxes, political favours, street improvements, and other public benefits,
- Using Wi-Fi connectivity to define neighbourhoods by placing it in community locations such as mail box pick up areas, public benches and in what Ray Oldenberg [9] calls “third places” such as restaurants and coffee shops,
- Allowing neighbourhoods to hire the architect/planner/engineer responsible for assessing their neighbourhood and designing its proposed facility,
- Water! – surprisingly many who have faced the challenge of NIMBYism found that providing a project with some element of water, be it daylighting a formerly buried creek, or adding a pond or fountain enhanced its appeal and support,
- Better public and private design of individual buildings, streetscape and institutions so that people clamour for such places in their neighbourhood,
- Re-ordering the nature of local governance so that it both recognizes the regional character of modern urban living (with its 100 plus kilometre radius), and at the same time provides forums and opportunities for the re-engagement of neighbourhood entities at street, unit and district levels in the political and governance process,
- At least some of the funds for local improvements or those paid to the Municipality as part of development charges should be placed at the disposal of neighbourhood choice, be this sidewalk improvement, expanded daycare, renewal of public space such as a local park, or some form of public art,
- Identify or fund an advocacy agency for the neighbourhood with skills in marketing and branding to assist the neighbourhood in defining itself, and discovering its unseen or unexpected attributes through such means as psycho geographical walks and portraits, as a resource for soliciting future ideas and improvements,
- Providing some form of mapping, portraiture, etc, which is transparent, readily available, and perhaps mounted at a known public location such as community mailboxes, which describes the zoning, regional context of their neighbourhood, and plans for local change envisioned for a reasonable time into the future, be that the future of elementary schools, road closings, new tree planting etc.,
- Celebrating new forms of neighbourhoods be these in expensive condominium high-rises, or squatter settlements for the distinct manner in which they define their relationships with those who live nearby, and
- Taking the suburb seriously. Rather than simply throwing one's hands up at the sheer banality and environmental impact of such places, there is a public policy need to address their real challenges, opportunities, and place in the urban conversation about engaged living places. While for many they will always be places of escape, such an attitude can be countered by effective options for

improvement, appropriate tax regimes, and encouragement of positive public voices.

Finally the increasing potential for distributed as opposed to centralized delivery and provision of services from energy to water supply and treatment promise new means of engaging communities not only in the design of such systems, but the ability to hire people at a local level to maintain them, alongside a more robust political framework within which residents can debate and manage the future evolution of new ways of meeting public needs.

Environmental improvement through these emerging technologies and related public engagement processes, as well as the false promise of many current “greening” strategies, however requires further study beyond the scope of this paper.

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