

2 Walled
Out /
Walled
Off /
Walled
In

Beverly
A.
Sandalack

2

1

Introduction

There is probably no urban element more antithetical to the making of a good city, especially a hospitable one, than a wall. An edge, actual or implied, delineates being inside or outside, welcome or not. Walled cities and gated communities are obvious examples of where strong edges have been built, and it is easy to understand their intentions—perhaps necessary at one time for defence, or designed to achieve questionable objectives of seclusion. There are also situations where less obvious walls have been created, with more obscure(d) (and possibly unintentional) objectives, but every bit as strong and impactful.

Our way of seeing the world is partially determined by attitudes to property and exchange.¹ How land is subdivided and sold has a profound and far-reaching effect on the quality of the city and the quality of the public realm. The lot is the basic cell of the urban fabric—it links built form to the land and to open spaces, at the building scale and at the city scale. Lots may be subdivided or consolidated over time, a process that influences how properties are developed, and property lines can form distinct edges and sometimes walls.

The city form is a manifestation of both the legal and the social-spatial—the cultural-material environs that Delaney calls the nomosphere.² The values placed on the built landscape are reflected in changing patterns of land ownership and land development, and consequently in the spatial qualities of the public realm. The evolution of the city reflects the evolution of ideas and ideologies, and of changing theories and practices of architecture, urban design, and planning. It is useful and important to consider every urban development issue historically, otherwise there is a tendency to simply react to current conditions and misunderstand why things came to be as they are, and what the implications are for urban quality and urban life.

Two examples in Calgary's eastern downtown area are notable: East Victoria Park and the East



Figure 1.
An early resident's impressions of 1911
Calgary. Glenbow Archives NA-1209-2

Village are currently under redevelopment. At one time mixed-use working-class areas, they were each systematically dismantled during the mid-1900s under the pretext of clearing out substandard housing, to address sociological ills. Disjointed, blighted, neglected, and difficult to redevelop, these areas remained distinct enclaves within the city for some time. Although there are some similarities between the evolution of the two areas, both now part of the new Rivers District Master Plan area, their redevelopment seems to be following different planning paradigms—and the architecture and public realm are vastly different.

Decades after the deterioration phase, the East Village is now an emerging vibrant mixed-use neighbourhood and is being revitalized after several decades of false starts, following extensive work to address floodplain issues and create a high-quality public realm in advance of new development. A new library now mediates between the massive Municipal Building and the emerging neighbourhood, and the rivers are fully accessible at the area's northern edge. It has become a destination for Calgarians who enjoy the paths and public spaces and it is touted as an urban design success. In East Victoria Park, only a few blocks of high-rise condos have been built, while the rest remains as surface parking and the fenced Stampede Park. Subtle, invisible walls around the area make it difficult to envision a new future, and the area is challenged to become a real neighbourhood; the new buildings are vertically walled communities of upper-middle-class residents, and

the ground level is largely the domain of a sparse office population by day and the marginal elements of society by night. As well, the adjacent Elbow River is barely perceptible and difficult to access—hardly a walkable or hospitable neighbourhood for new residents.

In what follows we review the stages of evolution of each of these areas, focusing on the variety of walls—horizontal and vertical, physical and perceptual, in order to evaluate their effects on urban form and urban quality.

Early Context

In Calgary, the intersection of the Bow and Elbow rivers, the Canada Land Survey grid, the railway line, and the railway company grid determined early town form. The area around the confluence of the rivers was first used by aboriginal groups for shelter and campsites, and the waterways served as corridors for following migratory animals and for navigating the prairies. The area that is downtown Calgary remained completely free of individual ownership up until the coming of the railway and the early survey of the land. An isolated trading fort and a North-West Mounted Police outpost were established where the two rivers meet, and the area emerged as an important ranching centre. However, once the railway reached Calgary in 1884, the CPR established the downtown grid parallel and perpendicular to the rail lines, with commercial (typically twenty-five- or fifty-foot frontages) and residential (twenty-five-foot frontages) lots. Along with land subdivision and sale goes the ability and the right to erect walls (physical or implied) around that land, and soon, the people who had freely moved through the area were restricted from trespassing on newly private property—and in the case of the aboriginal groups, confined to reserves.³ Prior to this, the people who lived in the area were free to wander over and through the land, and to use it for their needs.

Anchored by the railway tracks and the downtown area that

grew up to its north, Calgary soon transformed to a city expanding in four directions with residential areas to house the booming population. The first phase of its urban development, as in most other western cities, lasted up to approximately World War II and was marked by incremental change. Lots were put on the market and a house was constructed as each lot was sold. The residential typology usually consisted of a wood frame house situated towards the front of the lot, with setbacks on all four sides, resulting in back yards for gardens and vehicle storage, a degree of privacy and separation from the side setbacks, and front yards for modest landscaping including street trees and porches. This created a stable residential neighbourhood characterized by low turnover and well-maintained houses, and although there was some uniformity of house size, style and value, there was also considerable opportunity for individuality. Most neighbourhoods exhibited a mix of uses, with retail areas within easy walking distance or accessible by streetcar. New development usually extended and grafted onto the existing grid framework, and the street was considered a public space.

Victoria Park and Churchill Park (today's East Village) were two such early neighbourhoods, characterized predominantly by one- or two-storey, wood-frame, single-family houses, with neighbourhood scale stores, churches and schools, as well as some businesses to provide employment (Figure 1). The city evolved with these neighbourhoods and others into a coherent urban fabric over several decades. The street network was a continuous grid, only interrupted by the railway tracks that bisected the city and the two rivers.

Over time these two neighbourhoods, directly north and south of the railway line, were fully built out, but because of infrequent road crossings, they had little connection to each other, and as they were each bordered on two sides by the Bow and Elbow rivers, they were somewhat isolated from

adjacent areas. Their location in the eastern part of the downtown, always an area of relatively lower value and status, set them off to a degree, but they were functional mixed-use neighbourhoods for many decades—ordinary and unremarkable urbanism scaled to the human being and accommodating the monuments and spaces of the city (Figure 2).

Walled Out

During the 1950s and 1960s, as the city underwent the massive post-war suburban expansion that distinguished its growth for many decades, the downtown was imagined as a modern office and commercial core isolated in a sea of substandard housing whose heterogeneous land-use patterns were described as a zone of deterioration. These higher-density areas (of around twelve units per acre) were compared unfavourably with the post-war suburbs that had a density of six-to-seven units per acre. Mixed uses and higher densities were presented negatively, paving the way for urban renewal and social relocation.

The Churchill Park/East Village area had started to gain a somewhat unsavoury reputation, as its residential areas with corner stores, hotels, mechanics, and other businesses were joined by bootleggers and brothels who were also attracted to the area, near the downtown but slightly detached from it. Between 1955 and 1965 the population dropped by more than thirty percent, and this further opened the door to total renewal.

Concurrently, during this period, urban planning as a profession had been changing radically from its early design period—when city planners were frequently architects, or had a background in architecture, surveying or engineering, and an interest and expertise in form making—to one where non-physical planning (social planning and policy planning) developed as a primary force. Design skills in planners declined, while other types of planning like social planning, policy planning, environmental

planning, and transportation planning emerged. Plan view drawings became one of the few representation tools that were utilized for some time, taken to an extreme in zoning maps that allowed the parts of the city to be drawn with distinct lines around them, neglecting the real character and nature of the city that was more effectively expressed, and understood, through other types of drawings. Although a useful tool, plan drawings by themselves tended to reduce the image of the city to simple two-dimensional views, and likely contributed to a devaluing of the public realm through the neglect of both design and representation at the scale of the street.

A number of important city planning documents were produced during this time, and they reflected the prevailing paradigm and practices. In 1965, the City, the Province, and the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) entered into a cost-sharing agreement to prepare an urban renewal scheme for the thirty-one blocks of Churchill Park. Aside from three buildings thought to be of historic or cultural value, the area was

slated for complete redevelopment. This set the stage for another highly influential document: the 1966 Downtown Master Plan, which recognized the continuing central role of the downtown, and set out strategies to improve its accessibility and simplify its structure, proposing plans to address “blight” in the east end.

The plan attempted to spatially segregate different land uses, and various historical accounts from this time talk about the “negative heterogeneous land uses” that had been allowed to develop and that needed to be addressed. This contrasts sharply with contemporary approaches which feature mixed uses as necessary to vibrancy. The plan identified six “comprehensive renewal areas,” which were found to have varying degrees of “substandardness,” defined in terms of “overcrowded homes, the inadequate nature of schools, parks and playgrounds,

Figure 2. Calgary downtown, 1966, showing low-rise downtown, continuous urban fabric, and intact residential neighbourhoods in Churchill Park (today’s East Village) and East Victoria Park. Range Aerial Survey Ltd. and University of Calgary.





Figure 3. Downtown after urban renewal projects, showing institutional blocks north of City Hall composed of more massive single structures, higher rise commercial core, and many empty lots and surface parking lots in East Village awaiting redevelopment. Fort Calgary has been reconstructed at the confluence of the Bow and Elbow Rivers. National Air Photo Library and University of Calgary.

worn-out buildings, inadequate water and sewer services, traffic congestion, a poor visual environment, and use of land that is unreasonable within the overall framework of the neighbourhood or of Downtown.” The plan also identified the need to restore the residential component of the downtown, and redevelopment was proposed for the West End, Eau Claire, and Churchill Park/East Village which was now described as “skid row.”

The plan hastened the demise of these neighbourhoods over the next decades. Lost were many of the amenities and services required to support residential development, including grocery stores, corner stores, and small retail businesses, with no redevelopment occurring. Clearance of the East Village began, and it was to sit largely vacant and to become even more derelict after the interventions began (Figure 3).

East Victoria Park, south of the railway tracks, was identified as populated by low-income families of long tenancy, and “aged” because it had undergone very little change, seen as a negative quality. The area was described as an intact neighbourhood, but with a high proportion of social problems and a preponderance of “certain ethnic groups.” The scene here was carefully set for redevelopment, and Victoria Park developed a very undesirable reputation, which

further discouraged investment and confidence.

The negative designation of these two neighbourhoods required that they be mapped and classified. Documents from that time show a clear line demarcating areas identified with poor social standards, poor health conditions, and sub-standard physical quality. New development and new residents stayed away as their reputations as a no-man’s land and a seedy backwater took hold, and the East Village and East Victoria Park were effectively walled out (Figure 4).

The perceptions were then sealed with the actual destruction of the areas. Urban renewal, one of the preferred planning strategies of the 1950s and 1960s, managed to destroy huge pieces of the downtown, without renewing any of it, despite the stated intentions of improving the sub-standard areas and getting rid of actual and perceived blight. Rather than encouraging revitalization, razing huge swaths of the east end created a place that further deteriorated in reputation, and the area became the closest thing to a slum that this rich city would ever have (Figure 5).

Walled Off

Neither the economy nor the zeitgeist were ready for the massive redevelopment required for the East Village or East Victoria Park, and

they languished for decades. In the meantime, several major projects were completed in the downtown, including an institutional district containing the Glenbow Museum, Convention Centre, Education Board buildings, Library, Performing Arts Centre, Municipal Building, and Federal Government Building. Most of these were massive concrete structures, with little regard for the creation of the public realm of streets and squares that could have helped to define this district as a more urban and pedestrian-friendly precinct. The institutional district ultimately became a functional and visual barrier between the river and the downtown, and between the west and east parts of the core (Figure 6). The new Municipal Building was particularly extreme in its effect on the East Village. Construction of the city’s light rail transit line, coupled with the closure of 8th Avenue at Macleod Trail in the early 1980s by construction of the massive City administrative building, resulted in East Village being walled off from the rest of the downtown (Figure 7).

There were some efforts toward redevelopment and renewal, including the proposed 1978 Downtown Plan. It noted that the downtown was becoming a single-function area and it warned against the negative effects on the area’s stability and image. The goals included development of a high quality pedestrian environment, and an integrated series of public spaces and at-grade pedestrian system; ensuring a high standard of new development, especially where private development shapes the public realm; increasing housing throughout the downtown; increasing accessibility by transit and for pedestrians; making better use of existing roads, emphasizing the functional and physical relationship between the downtown and the inner city; and

6

ensuring conservation of heritage sites and buildings. As redevelopment had still not taken place in the East Village/Churchill Park area following the urban renewal clearances, it also addressed east end issues, by proposing a broad range of residential development, services, and social housing throughout the downtown.

The plan was approved in 1979, with amendments, and Council directed the Planning Department to prepare detailed Area Redevelopment Plans for various areas of the downtown including the East End. The Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan (1981) was then prepared by a unique interdisciplinary urban design team with a visionary and refreshing take on urban planning, and it richly illustrated a comprehensive concept of an integrated system of public streets and spaces, recognizing the need for urban as well as natural spaces in the city, and it provided both an overall framework for development, as well as detailed plans for several character areas. The recommendations attempted to provide a mediating influence on development in the interest of creating a downtown of quality and character worthy of Calgary's prosperity. However, the plan was believed (by Mayor Ralph Klein and other councillors) to be interfering with developers' rights and with the function of the downtown as an economic engine, so the Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan was rejected, and development proceeded largely according to free-market forces.

In Victoria Park, a separate process was starting to wall off that area. In the 1960s, the Calgary Stampede, located for a half century in the south part of Victoria Park, considered relocating to other sites, which would permit its expansion and allow construction of new facilities. But in 1968 the City approved expansion of the Stampede on its present site so that its northerly boundary would move from 17th Avenue to 14th Avenue. This decision led to great uncertainty in Victoria Park, and was a catalyst for disinvestment from the neighbourhood.

2

1

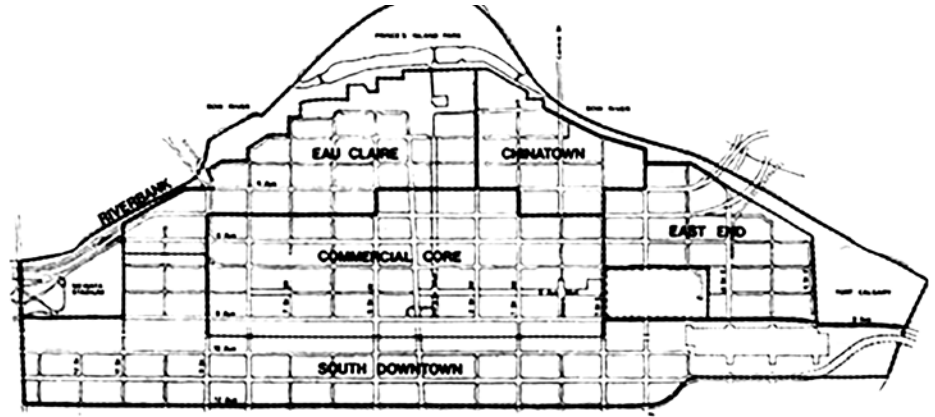


Figure 4. The East Village was now called "the East End" and associated with a substandard physical and social environment. This map is from a 1978 study that derived the area names from previous plans.



Figure 5. East Victoria Park, 2005, cleared due to urban renewal efforts, and sitting vacant in advance of Stampede expansion. Photo F. Shaw.

In 1994, Calgary was Canada's candidate for the World Expo 2005 bid, and Victoria Park was selected as the site. The bid was not successful, but as long as it was a possibility, investment in the area was at a standstill. In 1998, the announcement was made that the Stampede would expand northward to 12th Avenue, and a comprehensive master plan included a new agricultural building, expansion to the Roundup Centre, and a more explicitly public face presented through a multi-use green space of rest areas and parkland near the Elbow River. However, efforts have been focused more on improvements to its internal facilities rather than the public realm.

Both the East Village and East Victoria Park ultimately became walled off from the rest of the city, either from the presence of the massive vertical walls of the institutional buildings near the East Village, or from the horizontal expanses of surface parking that gradually replaced



Figure 6. Several blocks were converted to massive institutional buildings (shown here the Board of Education Building, with the Public Library in the left background, on Macleod Trail and 5th Avenue SW) that do not positively contribute to the public realm. Photo F. Shaw 2005.

most of the existing housing in East Victoria Park.

The timely redevelopment of the East Village lands had been a long-standing objective of the City of Calgary. It took decades of plans and planning, and a shift in planning and urban design paradigms, before anything was realized, but until then, a series of plans failed to bring about change. The General Municipal Plan of 1979 encouraged residential development in the area, the Core Area Policy Brief of 1982 identified the East Village as a potential residential area, a 1990 vision proposed a residential area, an Area Redevelopment Plan in 1994 proposed another transformation. In 2000, a joint venture arrangement, dissolved in 2002, was approved as a catalyst for development with a new Area Redevelopment Plan, and in 2003 an Area Redevelopment Plan amendment process was undertaken.



Figure 7. The Municipal Building truncated the flow of Stephen Avenue, Calgary's main downtown commercial street and essentially turned its back on the East Village to its east. Photos B. Sandalack 2005.

Redevelopment of the East Village was thus stalled almost fifty years after urban renewal processes decimated the area, and for decades the area was a disappointingly underutilized prime downtown location. The adjacent Fort Calgary site was cleared and commemorated in 1975 as a civic centennial project, but its approach at the time was to be distinct and cut off from the city. Two new relatively high-quality homeless shelters, the Riverside Drop-In and Rehab Centre and the Salvation Army Drop-In Centre, were constructed in 2001 and three high-rise apartment buildings were constructed for seniors. While serving important social service functions, in the absence of other balancing residential and commercial developments, perceptions were further entrenched, and this area continued to be broadly considered a backwater for criminal and marginal activities. Two residential

buildings were constructed in 2002, a twelve-storey building with 106 loft type units and a five-storey building comprising sixty-four units. At the same time, any other remaining buildings were progressively demolished, and the area continued to languish, so East Village became walled in by hostile urban form to the west and the east, by the railway lands and surface parking to the south, and by the river to the north until the river path was built.

Turning The Corner

A crucial turning point in Calgary's urban evolution was the completion in 1994 of the river path system through the Calgary Urban Parks Master Plan. It reintroduced Calgarians to their rivers, allowed people to walk and bike through the city and no longer be confined to one area, and made previously invisible neighbourhoods accessible. More importantly perhaps, it illustrated what a bold idea, such as focusing on the public realm, could do, and it was a catalyst for the next

phase of Calgary's urban evolution through a slow change in planning paradigms.

Council approved a new Area Redevelopment Plan for East Village in 2005 with the hope that this area might finally achieve its promise, and it rebranded the east side (East Village and East Victoria Park) as the Rivers District. In 2007, City Council approved the formation of a wholly owned subsidiary Calgary Municipal Land Corporation (CMLC) with the mandate to implement and execute the Rivers District community revitalization plan, and it emphasized a public infrastructure program to kickstart Calgary's east side urban renewal. It is funded through a community revitalization levy that pays for the new infrastructure. There are essentially two parts of the Rivers District—East Village, north of the tracks and south and west of the Bow and Elbow Rivers, and East Victoria Park, south of the tracks and contained by Stampede Park and the Elbow River, and the two have followed different development scenarios and resulted



Figure 8. The public realm and river path were constructed in advance of the residential development in the East Village. Photo B. Sandalack 2017.

in different urban environments, seemingly influenced by vastly different paradigms.

In the East Village, a new paradigm has been dominant. Construction began in 2007 with infrastructure improvements including a stormwater treatment pond, raising of the roads above the flood line, and development of the public realm. Notably, the river walk included a broad pedestrian and cycle path and plaza, public washrooms, and other amenities, and the message was communicated that the public, and new development, would be welcome, as the early emphasis was on developing a high-quality public realm in advance of other developments. It was now possible for pedestrians and cyclists to travel from the downtown section of the path all the way to the neighbourhood of Inglewood, even before the East Village was developed (Figure 8).

Several residential developments with at-grade commercial uses were soon constructed and are now inhabited, and the area now has a new cachet and is being

promoted as the “newest, oldest, hottest, coolest” neighbourhood in Calgary (Figure 9). The neighbourhood population was up to 3,234 according to the 2016 Calgary municipal census, a fourteen percent increase from 2015, and a drastic increase from decades earlier. This population is very mixed, with a proportion living in homeless shelters or seniors housing, although the overall trend is towards an ultimate estimate of a population of 11,500 that adds both home-owners and renters.

Concurrently, the construction of several key projects of high-quality architectural design including the National Music Centre and the new Central Public Library, have also helped to bring people into the area and change the perception of the neighbourhood, while major historic structures have been treated with care and now house popular cafes and restaurants. The development of a high-quality public realm has continued with the construction of three plazas and the revitalization of St. Patrick’s Island park, adjacent to East Village and connected to it by a new bridge.

The East Village is finally being renewed, due to an ambitious and aggressive twenty-year masterplan vision that includes a strong re-brand, a focus on the public realm, multiple residential projects, multiple public realm projects, accommodation of the homeless and seniors populations in the area, and an architectural emphasis on active edges on the residential buildings.

The result is, again, ordinary urbanism—unremarkable (in global terms), connected, and human-scaled, and accommodating of the monuments and spaces of the city. This is not to under-value the quality of the neighbourhood, but what has been achieved after several decades of decline and neglect, and after great effort, is simply “good urbanism.” But the many decades and unrealized plans show that good urban form is obviously not easy.



Figure 9. The public realm forms a seam between the Bow River and the newly redeveloped East Village. Photo B. Sandalack 2019.

Walled In

Across the railway tracks, East Victoria Park has continued to experience much deterioration, including the loss of the Co-op on 12th Avenue SE, one of the last inner-city grocery stores, an incident that was both a cause and an indicator of a declining residential population. More recently, the area was renamed Victoria Crossing by the business community to promote its commercial potential as a mixed-use tourism/entertainment destination. However, the perceptual walls remained, and Victoria Park was described as a “no man’s land of unsightly industrial buildings and decaying historic landmarks.”⁴

In 2018, CMLC completed the master plan for East Victoria Park with the vision of creating a high-density, mixed-use, walkable and accessible Culture and Entertainment District.⁵ The master plan outlines mainly infrastructure improvements adjacent to the

Stampede Grounds for the first ten years, then some residential development in the next ten-twenty years, with fifty years envisioned for the full build out. Development will include the few remaining heritage buildings, Stampede Park, and the adjacent Elbow River, and result in four million square feet of mixed-use development and more than 8,000 new residents. The plan anticipates that, similar to East Village, new infrastructure projects will connect the district to the surrounding neighbourhoods, but the challenges will be significant.

Over half of the Rivers District Master Plan (RDMP) area is owned by the City of Calgary, most of which is leased to the Calgary Stampede. Stampede Park occupies 270 acres of the 286 RDMP study area, and owns several blocks at its northern edge that are currently surface parking lots. The remainder is primarily privately owned. Not including Stampede Park, almost half of east Victoria Park is undeveloped, and significant blocks are occupied by Calgary Transit bus barns (across the street from the Elbow River).

Compounding the land ownership and land use issues is the presence of some recent condominium developments that were approved before the adoption of this master plan, and constructed according to the earlier paradigm of segregation and seclusion. Three towers were planned for the Arriva development, a one-block area between 11th and 12th Avenues S and between 3rd and 4th Streets E, although only one was ultimately built. At thirty-four storeys, it was the tallest residential tower in Alberta when it was constructed in 2007. One-hundred and sixty-four units house approximately 250 residents in units that occupy storeys four to thirty-four, with office and commercial space (some of it currently vacant) in the lower three storeys. When the developer experienced financial problems, the rest of the site was purchased by new owners and developed as the Guardian Towers. Part of the site is occupied by two heritage buildings that currently house the condominium presentation offices, and part by twin towers of forty-four storeys of 308 units each, with current

0



Figure 11. These Eau Claire condominiums express the paradigm of the early 1980s, with an isolated building in a sea of surface parking lots. Photo Glenbow Archives NA-5654-90, 1984.

values of \$275,000–\$2,500,000. Carefully promoted on some aspect of uniqueness, and intended to create a safe and secure environment in the otherwise underdeveloped areas, the towers rely on the architecture to establish strong edges between the buildings and the surrounding city—vertical walls that keep the residents in and any others out. Of course, most of us want to live in a world that keeps owners separate from trespassers, but there is still the need to include a high-quality public realm outside of the private walls. It appears as if urban design values and principles fell by default into the domain of the private developers, who have exerted the strongest influence on the image and quality of the built form. Although there are street trees and sidewalks, the public realm is confined to the space directly in front of the building, and although there is a provision in the lower story and townhouse units for retail or commercial, without

the people on the street, businesses are challenged.

Together, the buildings house a sizeable population of approximately 1,000–1,250 people in only one city block, in three towers of an average forty-four storeys each. An interesting thought experiment is to imagine if the same number of units and population was accommodated instead in six-eight-storey buildings. This would utilize approximately six blocks and would take up all of the surface parking in the area. Another more financially viable option of ten-twelve-storey buildings, plus some meaningful public spaces, would provide the same instant neighbourhood, covering several blocks, and with the likelihood of producing the people-on-the-street kind of city that is starting to happen in East Village. It could have been different...

East Victoria Park still has the early grid block structure, and the small lot subdivisions are still evident in the few remaining deteriorated blocks. Otherwise, new development has taken the form of superblocks, with one owner per large development, and public



Figure 10. The Arriva and Guardian towers, constructed during the early 21st century, have looked out onto surface parking lots for decades. They are out of place and out of time. Lots of space, but nowhere for the walled-in residents to go. Photo B. Sandalack 2019.

realm improvements in the area have only occurred directly around the new developments. The connecting infrastructure is not yet there, and although there have been some improvements, for example the 4th street underpass and a few blocks of streetscaping on 12th Avenue, they do not provide good connections for pedestrians as they are bordered by surface parking lots.

The relatively high crime rates in the Beltline (the area of Calgary that includes East Victoria Park) mean that it is unlikely that

3

1

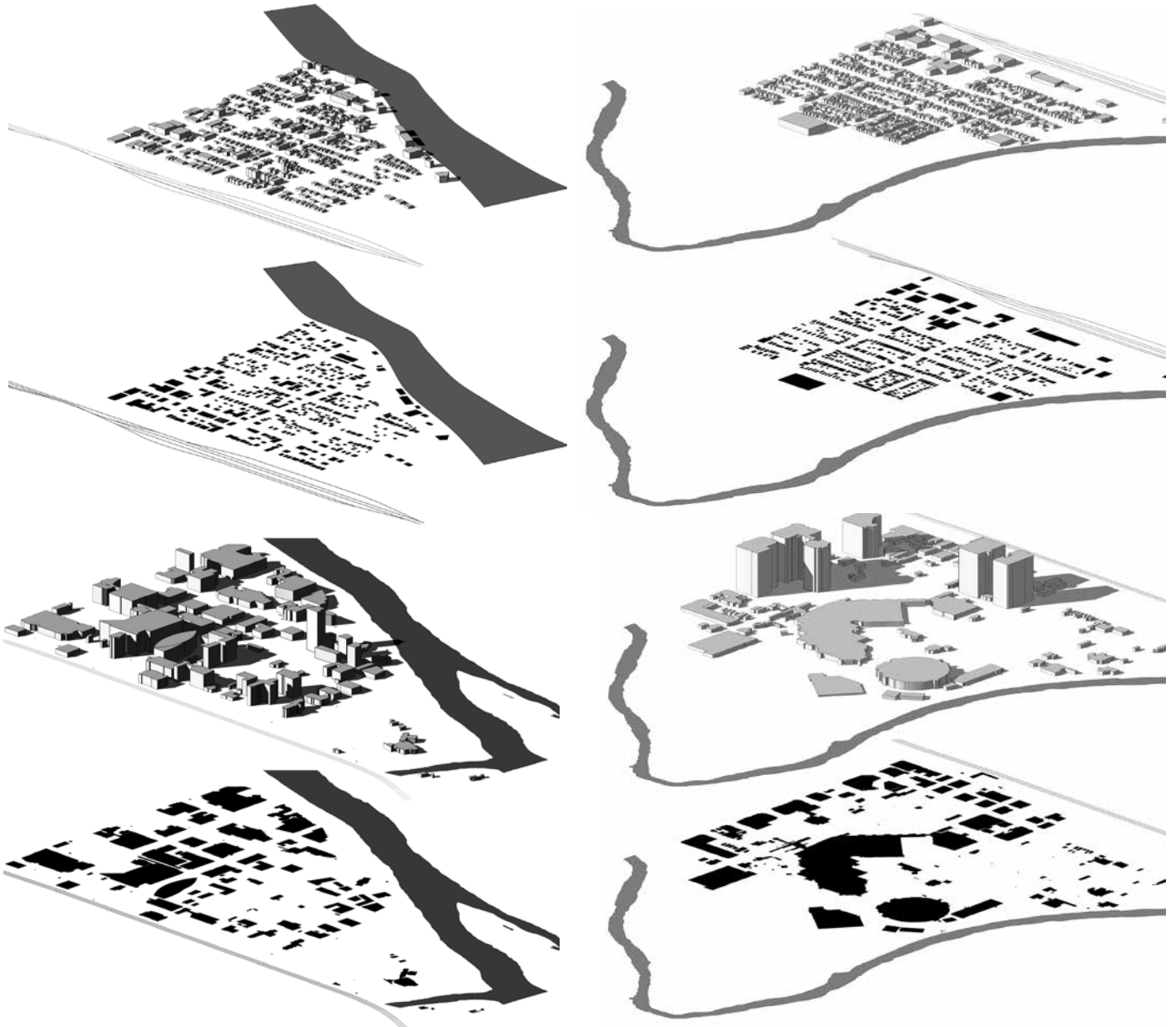


Figure 12 (left column). This portion of East Village was a fine-grained neighbourhood with mostly single-family houses and some light industrial and mixed uses along the river in 1922. In 2019, it had become almost fully transformed to mid and high rise condos, with some industrial buildings retained for commercial and public use and a new integration with the Bow River. Drawings R. UI Momin 2020.

Figure 13 (right column). East Victoria Park was a residential neighbourhood, with warehouse buildings along the northern blocks for much of its evolution, including 1969 shown here. By 2019, most of the area had been cleared out. Stampede Park continued to spread northward, and only two high rise condos had been constructed. The link with the Elbow River was now weak, with only the City bus barns as adjacent river uses. Drawings R. UI Momin 2020.

residents of the towers will utilize the public realm in the evenings. The close proximity to Stampede Park, the Saddledome (a venue that hosts NHL hockey as well as most of the major concerts and other indoor sporting events), and

a casino means that the area is frequented mostly by non-residents, rather than by people with a sense of community ownership.

There is hope for an urban renaissance in the area, and although several high-quality office and residential developments have recently been constructed near the residential towers, signs that the area will undergo significant transformation, the residential buildings are isolated and are effectively walled communities. The lack of improvements or investment in the public realm, the lack of public spaces, the continued poor connections to any nearby attractions such as the river pathway, the East Village, or the downtown, and the long-term horizon of the master plan means that the residents in

these three condo towers, essentially fortresses, will spend a very long time being walled in (Figure 10, 11, 12, 13).

Walls: Edges Or Seams?

Over the various phases of Calgary’s development, the east side of the downtown has variously been walled out, walled off, and walled in. Why has this occurred? Part of the reason may be due to the influences of urban theory, and part may be due to the organizational structure and processes of municipal development.

The emphasis on edges and boundaries had some genesis in the writings of Kevin Lynch and others, who were reacting to then

contemporary processes that had started to dismantle the historic city. Although hardly contemporary, these authors studied the same urban problems and urban forms as today, and it is difficult to find descriptions of the urban elements and their importance that have more clarity. Despite the value of their work, their theories and lessons may have been applied incorrectly.

Edges were described by Lynch⁶ and others as important in spatial definition, and in the ability to perceive being inside or outside of a place. Lynch noted the potential disruptive power that some edges had in their ability to negatively isolate areas and dismember the city, and observe how edges can conversely serve as seams, uniting rather than isolating adjacent areas. Clearly, as also shown by Sandalack and Nicolai in their urban morphology studies of Halifax⁷ and Calgary,⁸ it is not simply the definition of strong edge conditions that makes for high quality urban environments, as without consideration of other qualities—such as continuity, legibility, mix of uses, and sustainability—the city, or areas of it, can become sterile and hostile to humans, with the edges forming barriers rather than seams. But edges can be the opposite of walls, if properly and creatively considered; the river path forming the north edge of the East Village is one of the strongest urban elements in downtown Calgary, with a potent overlaying of a natural urban element with a superbly designed public function. This edge condition exemplifies how within a very short period of time, the East Village has been able to transform a previously neglected neighbourhood into one of the most desirable new residential areas in western Canada.

Many North American cities, Calgary included, have experienced three phases of urban development and urban planning ideas.⁹ The three phases were characterized by three dominant themes: first, expediency and attention to building the early city, where a walkable and relatively high-quality public realm was produced almost inadvertently; second, values for

efficiency, modernity, and standardization, and a reflexive attitude to the growing automobile culture, where properties were consolidated, whole neighbourhoods were demolished in the name of urban renewal, and the quality of the everyday public realm declined; then third, by a phase in which market forces and individualization seemed to dominate. We have likely now entered into a fourth phase, in which a new emphasis on the public realm has emerged, and where a reconsideration of mixed uses, human-scaled developments, concern for qualities such as walkability and creation of community are being supported by environmental, social, and cultural values. This is supported by a concurrent change in planning and design education that again emphasizes urban design as an area of concern, and by the increase in the number of Urban Design Review Panels included in many city processes.

However, planning and development can still be slow to reflect changing knowledge and values, and even within the same city, the four paradigms can operate concurrently. Benevelo points out that “town planning technique invariably lags behind the events it is supposedly controlling, and it retains a strictly remedial character.”¹⁰ It uses the tools that it currently has at its disposal—tools that are now either obsolete, or that contributed to the problems it is considering. However, when ideologies change, practices must change to meet those new needs. Modernist planning relied on zoning, subdivision regulation and land use bylaws, promoting homogeneity of form and segregation, and emphasized functional efficiency while neglecting both the social and aesthetic consequences of those decisions. The urban renewal plans of the mid 1900s involved the definition of edges, perceptual and drawn, and the sense of being inside or outside an area slated for redevelopment. Those ideas coincided with the break of planning from physical urban design to policy and social planning, and as a consequence the comprehensive approach to urban design was translated into

two-dimensional notions and a loss of understanding of physical space and urban quality. At the same time, architecture had lost some of its interest in urban design, and as the professions further segregated, the public realm fell through the cracks. City planning departments were growing and took shape during that period, and it is only relatively recently that physical planning and urban design have become stronger forces within the City bureaucracy. However, they have not developed quickly enough to provide powerful enough direction for the urban development projects that were taking place according to previous paradigms and shaped by private objectives. The urban renewal projects of the 1960s, the creation of the massive institutional districts of the 1970s, the construction of the barrier-like Municipal Building, and the early twenty-first-century walled-in condominium developments in East Victoria Park would not likely be approved today, but they were acceptable urban developments during their genesis. With no consistent or strong overall vision and leadership to provide direction for each individual property, as well as for the urban project as a whole, the results were wildly variable.

The shaping of the many components of the public realm particularly needs a high degree of cooperation and coordination between the actors involved in its development and management: city planning and engineering departments, the various owners and designers involved in the development of its edges, as well as the community that uses it. Otherwise, urban form values and principles will fall into the domain of the private realm and private developers, who then have the strongest influence on the image and quality of the built form—and their objectives are often quite different from those who are responsible for the physical (and metaphysical) public realm.

One of the qualities of “good” urban form is continuity, where the parts of the city are more or less connected. This is relevant to the promotion of walkability, where a pedestrian can navigate their way from one area to the next, and to

the somewhat more abstract notion of hospitality, the idea that the city should be accessible and welcoming to all citizens. Walls are often antithetical to these aims, and they have tended to be formed, intentionally or unintentionally, when the objectives of urban design and a high-quality public realm have been ignored or made secondary to other aims.

Endnotes

1 Stephen Daniels and Denis Cosgrove, "Introduction: Iconography and Landscape," in *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*, ed. Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 6.

2 David Delaney, *The Spatial, the Legal and the Pragmatics of World-Making: Nomospheric Investigations* (New York, Routledge, 2010), 25.

3 Reserves near Calgary were set up in the wake of the negotiation of Treaty 7 in 1877, between the Crown and Siksika (Blackfoot), Kainai (Blood), Piikani (Peigan), Stoney-Nakoda, and Tsuut'ina (Sarcee) First Nations, whose traditional territories fell within this treaty land. See Alex Tesar, "Treaty 7," *The Canadian Encyclopaedia*, 2019, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/treaty-7>.

4 Karen Durrie, *CREB NOW*, 15–21 March 2019, 2.

5 Calgary Municipal Land Corporation, "Rivers District Master Plan," <https://www.calgarymlc.ca/riversdistrictmasterplan#rivers-district-intro>.

6 Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1960).

7 Beverly A. Sandalack and Andrei Nicolai, *Urban Structure Halifax: An Urban Design Approach* (Halifax: TUNS Press, 1998).

8 Beverly A. Sandalack and Andrei Nicolai, *The Calgary Project: Urban Form / Urban Life* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2006).

9 For a discussion of these phases of urban development, see Edward Relph, *The Modern Urban Landscape* (London: Croom Helm, 1987).

10 Leonardo Benevolo, *The Origins of Modern Town Planning* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967[1963]), vi.