

Ah, Toronto, you care about people!

Chester Smolski

TORONTO — They had a bad winter here this year and the sunshine and warmer temperatures of Spring did not arrive until April 17. Spring is called a myth here because it comes so late, yet even with severe and long winters there is not one single pothole to be found in the well-maintained streets of the downtown. (Would that Providence could say as much!) This is just one of the many unusual aspects of Canada's largest city, a city decidedly different from those in the U.S. Toronto also offers proof that cities can work, that they have a future, that people can enjoy them and, definitely, it provides a model that American cities could well emulate.

In many other ways this city with signs in the numerous parks that say "please walk on the grass" is unusual when compared to what we have come to expect in our own cities. Although the automobile is a very important aspect of Toronto life, planning — and here planning is stressed and done effectively — works to discourage increasing use of the car in the downtown. Many no parking zones are evident and parking violations start at \$20; planners discourage development which generates auto traffic; expensive and limited parking is found in parking garages; parking lots are eliminated in order to build on these sites; many tight traffic controls are seen; and public transit is encouraged. The 27 miles of subways and 49 stations put Toronto at the same size as Boston, but in Toronto the 176 million passengers carried in 1976 is nearly double that of Boston.

The marvelous downtown, architecturally prosaic, has a vitality that has grown stronger over the years. Demand for housing is very high and privately built apartments are being constructed; very

different from the federally subsidized apartments found in Providence. In most cases the commercial and office space in the same building allows for people activity both day and night.

Not only are new buildings being constructed but old structures are undergoing renovation (called "white painting" here), a process emphasized over the past 15 years. In-filling, the process of putting houses on empty lots, is also an important part of the housing program.

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It is in the neighborhoods that Toronto has provided some of its most innovative ideas. Rather than concentrating all of its planners in one city hall location, the city has decentralized its planning operations with 14 site offices scattered throughout the neighborhoods where planners work closely with residents. Not only do the planners gather ideas from them but there is also a direct liaison with the city residents and advice on proposals for development that will affect them.

Toronto is not without its own special type of problems. Mayor John Sewell feels that the unique metropolitan government established in 1953 and which

serves as a model of this type of regional government has reached the conflict stage. The city is usually outvoted by the suburbs whose values are diametrically opposed to those of the city in such areas as public versus private transportation, providing low income versus high income housing, and a variety of other concerns associated with six municipalities shared government arrangement.

In talking with the city editor of the leading morning paper, one hears of the lowered quality of services provided, the racial undercurrents that go along with an ethnically diverse community, the too heavy use of the automobile, the lack of adequate housing for the poor, and the increasing problems that would make this city subject to the same tensions and problems as American urban centers.

No longer a small provincial capital, Toronto today stands as the prime city of Canada, cosmopolitan and sophisticated (dresses and high heels for women, not slacks and wedgies), that provides a variety and excitement within an orderly and civil framework, a combination difficult to find in our own cities.

At 1 a.m. on the subway four middle-aged women sitting together are laughing and enjoying themselves with little apparent fear of the subway at night. How different from our cities. Again I am reminded that our cities tell us much about ourselves.

Yes, it is true we put the first man on the moon but the Canadians have directed their efforts toward making their cities livable. And then I ask myself what do I want for my children and myself — a moon shot or a decent city environment? Somehow, we have lost our sense of priorities.

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