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Kristopher Kowalchuk
Huron University College, Canada

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Kristopher Kowalchuk
Huron University College



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Sustainability in the Suburbs? Oakville's Sustainable Development Journey¹

Kristopher Kowalchuk, Huron University College - Western University

Abstract: This paper is meant to serve as an entry point into the topic of Canadian suburban sustainability initiatives. The goal is to assess whether Canadian suburbs can strive to be more than just local growth machines set on consuming greenspace for the sake of ever-more development. Oakville, Ontario, a city located within one of the most rapidly expanding suburban populations in North America, is looked at specifically to determine whether city officials can promote economic growth while simultaneously taking into consideration ecological impacts. Oakville's sustainable development journey is measured and evaluated using Clarence Stone's regime analysis. This research has found that Oakville possesses many of the demographic characteristics that would increase its likelihood of achieving its sustainable development goals outlined in its Livable Oakville Official Plan. The case studies of Saw-Whet Golf Course and Glen Abbey Golf Course are then used to put Oakville's sustainable development goals to the test. The city failed to protect Saw-Whet Golf Course which lent credence to Harvey Molotch's growth machine hypothesis. However, the failure to protect Saw-Whet provided an opportunity for civic learning and incentivized citizens to pursue collective action when Clublink submitted its request to demolish Glen Abbey Golf Course. The Save Glen Abbey coalition succeeded by urging city officials to designate the course as a heritage site. In summary, this research has found that suburbs can achieve their sustainable development goals provided the right structural conditions are in place. Motivated and dynamic civic leaders are also necessary to ensure that the city maintains its commitment to achieving these goals.

Keywords: sustainable development, civic leadership, regime theory, place-based approach, local governance

Historical background and the importance of the research

On April 23, 2012, just two months before the Rio+20 Summit, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon along with Dr. Joan Clos, the Executive Director of UN-Habitat, remarked, "Our struggle for global sustainability will be won or lost in cities" (United Nations, 2012). That comment reflects an increasing awareness of the role that cities will play in sustainable development in the 21st century. Prior to the Rio+20 Summit, most expressions of interest in sustainable development focused on global undertakings, rather than local ones. At the first major international conference of its kind, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, 1992)

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or “Earth Summit”, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was adopted. A major achievement from this summit was the realization of Agenda 21- Chapter 7, “Promoting Sustainable Human Settlement Development”. This document helped to shape an international global cities agenda. While that conference succeeded in drawing attention to issues of international concern, such as the need to combat global warming and reduce CO₂ emissions, the term “sustainable development” was applied broadly.

Recognizing macro-scale bias and that a focus on global efforts alone was insufficient, Canada’s Intergovernmental Committee on Urban and Regional Research (ICURR) commissioned Dr. Virginia Maclaren, a planning professor at the University of Toronto, to create a profile of sustainable development initiatives in Canadian cities. According to Dr. Larry Martin (1994: 43), a professor at the University of Waterloo’s School of Urban and Regional Planning, Maclaren’s main task was “to bring the urban dimension into sharper focus and provide local government officers with a better understanding of underlying concepts and tools for action”. Her work culminated in a three-volume report: “Sustainable Urban Development in Canada: From Concept to Practice” (Maclaren, 1993). Maclaren was a pioneer in the field and provided planners and government officials with much needed data on sustainable practices within 23 cities in Canada. Even so, the research was limited in scope, focusing primarily on geographically larger cities.² Although Maclaren’s work contributed significant amounts of data, the report was mostly descriptive and lacked significant analysis. More recently, University of Toronto professors David A. Wolfe and Meric S. Gertler & colleagues (2016) conducted research on large, small, and mid-sized Canadian cities. All contributors collected invaluable information about actions taken by their cities of interest. They considered such matters as talent attraction, collaborative governance, and innovative production strategies. However, even that research failed to look at a key factor in the success of cities: sustainable development. Generally speaking, research on Canadian cities places minimal emphasis on the matter of sustainable development. When it is addressed, only major hubs—for example: Toronto, Montreal, or Vancouver—tend to get the attention.

In order to promote sustainable development in the 21st century, it is critical that research be tailored to the demographic shifts of our time. In Joel Kotkin’s study (2016) of Cinco Ranch, Texas, in which he also examines general North American dispersion patterns, he highlights the movement of North Americans to outside of cities’ inner cores in the period after World War II. Suburbs, he concludes, are more “livable”. They often provide growing families with better quality schools, safer environments, and a sense of privacy that may not be found in an urban center. Academics historically disdain suburban life, but Kotkin shows that even after the 2008 Great Recession—and Richard Florida’s predictions—people continued to flow into the suburbs.

In Canada, the movement to the suburbs is perhaps most easily observed in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). In his work on the politics of the Greenbelt in Ontario, David Pond (2009: 244) notes that recent growth rates in the region have been

² Some larger cities, such as London and Saint John are notably absent from the survey, while smaller cities, such as Yellowknife and Whitehorse, are included.

unprecedented. According to his research, between 1981 and 2001, the population of the Greater Golden Horseshoe increased from 5.4 million to 7.8 million. With this growth, the “905” suburban municipalities around Toronto doubled their populations. In fact, the region between Toronto and Hamilton was the second fastest-growing city-region in Canada and the United States. In contrast, Toronto and Hamilton grew only 15 per cent (Government of Ontario MPIR, 2004). These findings indicate that in order for Canada to achieve its sustainability goals, set out in the above-mentioned international climate and environmental agreements, a closer examination of Canadian suburban sustainability projects is necessary.

The meta-question for this paper is whether or not suburbs have the agency and power to resist becoming pawns in a global chess game that involves pursuing policy aimed at promoting economic growth at all costs. In other words: Can suburbs aim to be more than just the local growth machines described by Harvey Molotch (1976)? In order to answer this question, Oakville, Ontario—a city located within the second fastest-growing city-region in Canada and the U.S.—will be examined. Specifically, the efforts of the city to protect Glen Abbey Golf Course from development will be used as a case study to argue that suburbs can, in fact, promote sustainability, provided that certain conditions are met. First, structural factors of Oakville will be looked at to assess the city’s ability to engage in pro-environmental behaviors. Those behaviors will be compared with the actions of other known sustainable cities. Of particular interest are the structural factors that make a city sustainable and the factors that powerful civic actors might be capable of overcoming. The research upon which this paper is based suggests that Oakville has some structural factors that are associated with sustainable cities. However, there is one factor—being a city with a primary employer in the manufacturing sector—that Dr. Kent E. Portney and Dr. Jeffrey Sellers believe could work against the city’s pursuit of conservation efforts. What has made Oakville special? This research suggests that Oakville has what Robin Hambleton (2015) has identified as “new civic leaders” committed to conservation. It will also be shown that the failure to protect Saw-Whet Golf Course from development may have recommitted Oakville to its sustainability efforts.

Definitions

Before the city of Oakville’s sustainability efforts are evaluated, it is important to have a working definition of “sustainable development”. This term signifies that both sustainability and development are important factors. Sustainable development was famously coined in the paper *Our Common Future* released by the Brundtland Commission (1987: 41): “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Portney, 2003: 10). This definition represents a practical approach to development. On its own, sustainability can suggest that an anti-growth agenda is what should be pursued. Some radical localists do, in fact, advocate against growth. However, economist Thomas Piketty (2014) points out that a lack of growth is likely one of several factors that has greatly contributed to the increased economic inequality we are experiencing. Given the realities of the new globalized economy, in the opinion of

most mainstream observers, anti-growth agendas are neither feasible nor desirable.³ Sustainable development, on the other hand, refers to a city that pursues economic growth while taking ecological impacts into consideration (Portney, 2003: 7).

Sustainable regimes

Having defined sustainable development, we will provide a typology for sustainable development in order to locate where Oakville sits in terms of its sustainable development capacity. For analytical purposes, it is not enough to state whether Oakville is entirely sustainable or whether it is completely unsustainable. Fortunately, urban scholars have recognized the need to categorize cities based on their urban regime type characteristics in order to better understand cities' likelihood of pursuing certain policies. Clarence Stone (1989) was the first to engage in this approach after studying the various kinds of informal arrangements and underlying processes at play in Atlanta. Urban regime analysis is quite flexible and has been used to understand the foundations for building coalitions in support of or in opposition to a variety of policies related to sustainability. Stone classified regimes based on the kind of governing responsibility a city elects to undertake.

Stone (1989) outlines four major regime types. The first is the “maintenance regime”. With this type, the city is focused on providing the traditional basic essentials. The important functions of a maintenance regime include providing garbage collection, ensuring the upkeep of roads, and servicing other local infrastructure projects. These goals are often the only focus of this type of regime. Exceeding them may be considered beyond a city's reach or outside its jurisdiction. The second type of regime, the “development regime”, is slightly more ambitious. It recognizes that coordinating local elites and institutions can lead to greater economic growth and development. Economic development is the key driver of coalitions that develop in this type of regime (Portney 2003: 26). The third regime—the “middle class progressive regime”—builds on the “development regime”, placing emphasis not only on economic development, but also on environmental protection, historic preservation, affordable housing, and the quality of urban design. A city's livability is of interest to the actors in this regime. A “lower class opportunity expansion” regime—the fourth regime type—adopts all of the principles of the third regime and then some. It seeks to achieve equity with respect to resource distribution. According to Dr. Kent E. Portney, “lower class opportunity expansion” regimes are seldom found in North American cities (2003: 27).

In order to place Oakville within one of these regime types and ultimately to determine whether it amounts to more than just a sprawling, growth machine suburb, Oakville's city plans will be analyzed. Then, demographic and structural factors will be judged and compared to those of other known sustainable cities in an effort to predict the likelihood of Oakville reaching the goals set out in its plan. Lastly, Oakville's ability to apply its plan will be judged by how it has performed in the Saw-Whet and Glen Abbey Golf Course development cases.

³ Some ‘deep ecological’ or degrowth movements may view this as a contested point and see all growth as harmful and instead advocate for a total restructuring of the capitalist economic system.

Oakville's city plans

After Mayor Rob Burton was elected in 2006, he decided that Oakville needed a strategic plan with a unifying goal. In his inaugural "Oakville Status Report", presented towards the end of his first year in office, he announced: "Oakville is a town of people who aim high. Our guiding vision for Oakville is to create the most livable town in Canada. Someone has already suggested that our vision should be higher, to be [the] most livable in the world. And why not?" (Duddeck, 2008). It is not uncommon to hear politicians speak about aiming high; what is interesting is the fact that aiming high was codified into the city's mission statement and that it remains there to this day. Since Mayor Burton's announcement, the slogan "Making Oakville the most Livable Town in Canada" has become the rallying cry for the municipality—or so the mayor's website declares (Robburton.org, 2018). The Town of Oakville's website has a "Livable Oakville" page. Every press release put out by the municipality includes this term or some variation of it. A "Livable Oakville Sub-committee of Council" was even established, whose responsibilities include regularly conducting and analyzing studies designed to assess whether or not the city is meeting its central goal and suggesting improvements that can be made.

The specific words used in the city's mission statement show which type of regime Oakville aspires to be. The mission statement reads: "To enhance the Town's natural, cultural, social and economic environments by ensuring that environmental sustainability, cultural vibrancy, economic prosperity and social well-being are incorporated into growth and development decisions" (Livable Oakville: Town of Oakville Official Plan, 2017). To achieve the goals set out in the mission statement, a guiding principle - titled Principle 2.2.1 "Preserving and creating a livable community" is provided which articulates a commitment to:

- a) Preserve, enhance, and protect the distinct character, cultural heritage, living environment, and sense of community of neighbourhoods;
- b) Direct the majority of growth to identified locations where higher density, transit and pedestrian oriented development can be accommodated;
- c) Achieve long term economic security within an environment that offers a diverse range of employment opportunities for residents.

Based on the criteria set out by the mayor and the city's plans, it appears that Oakville's aims are very much in line with Stone's "middle class progressive" regime type. Having concrete plans is encouraging and represents a step in the right direction with respect to sustainable development; however, actually achieving these goals is more challenging. The next section will look at which factors increase or decrease Oakville's chances of success.

Projecting Oakville's future based on other sustainable cities

Both Dr. Kent E. Portney (2003) and Dr. Jeffrey Sellers (2002) have conducted significant amounts of research comparing the environmental efforts of cities. Portney has focused on cities in the United States while Sellers analyzed cities in Germany,

France, and the United States. Both researchers used quantitative measures to try to determine which factors are more likely to produce sustainable development and which factors create hurdles or obstacles that progressive mayors will have to manage if they are to achieve their goals. Comparing Oakville to these cities can provide useful insight into challenges that the city may face in its pursuit of becoming the “most livable city in Canada”.

Portney’s work focused on eight cities: Austin, Boulder, Chattanooga, Jacksonville, Portland, Santa Monica, San Francisco, and Seattle. Portney chose these cities for the range of ways in which they “seem[ed] to be getting sustainability right” (2003: 178). Portney does not suggest that all these cities are equally sustainable, but he does say that they pursue sustainability at a far higher level than the average U.S. city. For him, the interest lies not in which city is more sustainable than the others, but in the common factors that prompt the cities to continue pursuing their sustainable development goals. Portney produced some fascinating findings in his research. First, all cities except Chattanooga have an aggressive indicators project. Subsequently, Oakville is in line with the majority of cities on this measure, as it includes specific indicators in its Environment Reporting Program (SOER) alongside its Environmental Sustainability Plan (ESP). Some of the indicators focus on the amount of waste recycled, the number of environmental outreach events, and other, even broader issues, such as water and air quality (Town of Oakville State of the Environment Report, 2018).

Another commonality between the cities is that nearly all of them started their sustainability initiatives with assistance from a nongovernmental organization (Portney, 2003: 217). Some of these include Sustainable Seattle, Jacksonville Community Council, and Sustainable City (San Francisco). Oakville, as the Glen Abbey case study will show, is host to several environmental movements that have impacted the council’s policy agenda.

Also of interest to Portney were the demographic and political characteristics of the cities studied. There is no direct way of measuring whether cities have political ideologies that correlate with the promotion of sustainable development, but the indirect measure of voting tendencies could at least be considered. The hypothesis was that cities that tended to vote Democrat—that is, cities that were hypothetically more progressive than their Republican counterparts—would be more prone to pursuing sustainable development. This hypothesis did not stand up with respect to the cities studied. In fact, the cities were nearly split down the middle between those voting Republican and those voting Democrat (Portney, 2003: 219). Oakville, too, has frequently shifted between federal and provincial conservative and liberal parties, indicating that partisan preference is not a significant factor. With respect to demographic factors, Portney’s focus cities were diverse in several ways. Not all of the cities were very large or very small in population size or land area. Not all of them were highly dense in population nor were they all low-density, sprawling cities. They were neither overwhelmingly poor nor markedly wealthy. The initial data is comforting in that it suggests that many cities are, in fact, capable of developing sustainably, but the data is also disappointing in that it does not produce a guiding blueprint for cities looking to become sustainable.

Portney went on to examine 24 sustainable cities using his “Taking Sustainability Seriously Index”, which was designed to measure to what extent some cities focused on sustainability relative to other cities. According to Portney, a reasonable extrapolation can provide the closest thing to a prediction about the likelihood of a city pursuing sustainable practices. In his research, he was interested in variables that could impact a city’s likelihood of pursuing sustainable development. Some of these included: the role of high median family incomes, high median house values, lower rates of poverty, and higher per capita governmental spending. Of these variables, only low poverty rates were statistically significant for cities taking sustainability more seriously. A low unemployment rate also indicated that a city would take sustainability more seriously than a city with a higher poverty rate. Overall, having significant economic resources was modestly associated with how seriously a city took sustainability (Portney, 2003: 230-235).

Portney also looked into factors like the age of a city’s population and the city’s degree of racial homogeneity. He found that common perceptions about cities with higher numbers of younger, progressive, and supposedly more environmentally aware citizens were incorrect. In actual fact, cities with older populations had statistically pursued sustainability with greater vigor. Cities with greater proportions of African Americans and Hispanics tended to be the cities that took sustainability less seriously. Portney could not definitively say why this was the case, but he hypothesized that it might be related to such cities’ chief focus being on more pressing problems (Portney, 2003: 233-234). Some of these issues may include the equitable distribution of resources and promotion of inclusivity.

When Oakville is submitted to Portney’s measures, it emerges as a city primed for sustainability. For example, in 2017 Oakville’s poverty rate was 33 per cent less than the provincial average, while its unemployment rate was 5.9 per cent, a whole point below the provincial average of 6.9 per cent. In addition, Oakville’s average median household income was \$163,752, compared to the provincial average of \$103,290 (Town of Oakville, 2017). Lastly, Oakville’s population did not stray much from the provincial average age or percentage of citizens over the age of 65.

However, in spite of the many positives, there is a major factor that works against Oakville. Portney found that cities which relied heavily on manufacturing industries for employment were consistently less committed to sustainability: “If cities that have a strong presence of manufacturing industries are the most in need of sustainability initiatives by virtue of the environmental threats that are associated with them, then they are decidedly not the cities that take sustainability most seriously”(Portney, 2003: 234). Portney is suggesting that cities with a strong manufacturing base seem to be inherently more likely to succumb to the demands of the developer, when in fact these cities ought to take an even stronger position against environmental degradation knowing that they contribute the greatest environmental harm. Sellers corroborates these findings. He, too, found cities with large manufacturing bases (in all of the countries he looked at) to be less likely to pursue sustainable development (Sellers, 2002). In 1953, the Ford Motor Company came to Oakville. Over the years, it has remained the main employer in the city. Even with advanced manufacturing in global decline, Oakville’s top two private sector employers—Ford and UTC Aerospace—have added jobs (Stasiuk, 2018). While

this is a positive sign for Oakville's economy, Portney's and Sellers's research suggests that Oakville is significantly less likely to take sustainability seriously. What Oakville is doing to counter this problem and to become Canada's most livable city will be addressed in the next section.

Recent development projects—an innovation story

Oakville's first major challenge to its "most livable" city plan came in March of 2014 when Bronte Green applied for a housing development project that would consume Saw-Whet Golf Course. This land was previously protected under the city's natural greenspace zoning. From the beginning, Oakvillegreen Conservation Association was hopeful, even confident, that the proposal would be rejected. The Oakvillegreen Conservation Association felt that there was enough broad support from citizens as well as sufficient scientific support to ensure that Saw-Whet Golf Course would receive environmental protection—that is, there would be no development. The Association regarded Saw-Whet's lands as an integral part of the Fourteen Mile Creek Valley and catchment area (Brock, 2016). The city debated the merits of building on this land for months—until Bronte Green grew impatient and, citing the city's failure to deliver a timely decision, applied to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB). According to Oakville citizen David Clattenburg, the city's reluctance to take a firm position allowed the development group to appeal to the OMB. In fact, Clattenburg believes this action was the development group's main objective as it would likely win under the circumstances (Clattenburg, 2018). Mr. Clattenburg appears to have been spot-on in his thinking: the development group not only won its decision, but it also worked out a deal to build more than 1,000 units, not the 700 that were originally planned. The city made the case to citizens that it had been provided with certain environmental protection guarantees from the development group, but citizens, including Mr. Clattenburg, were not convinced that it was a win for the city or the environment. Oakvillegreen's response was similar: "Livable Oakville just became a lot less livable". The first part of this story would lend credence to Molotch's local growth machine hypothesis. The city's plans did not ensure environmental protection when it was most needed. In the end, this was yet another case in which the developer with the deep pockets was the winner, while the natural environment, along with the wildlife and humans who rely on it, were the losers.

The failure to protect Saw-Whet Golf Course was a dent in the city's pledge to protect its natural greenspace. Fortunately, however, Oakville's sustainable development story does not end there. After witnessing Bronte Green's success, in 2017 Clublink Corporation applied to develop the famous Glen Abbey Golf Course. This time citizens did not sit back and wait for council to protect the land. Council was also more proactive in getting community input on the matter. Local civic leaders began to organize around the issue, the most influential organization being the Save Glen Abbey coalition. In an interview, the coalition's founder, Fraser Damoff, argued that Glen Abbey Golf Course is so important to the identity of Oakville that the coalition has managed to attract a wide variety of people with many different reasons for joining. Members in the group include proud Canadian sports fans, environmentalists, members of homeowners' associations, and just the average Oakville family with their communities' best interests in mind.

The Save Glen Abbey coalition has been instrumental in making the case that Glen Abbey is a heritage site and should therefore be protected under the 1975 *Ontario Heritage Act*. For Glen Abbey to qualify as a heritage site, it had to meet three conditions (Town of Oakville, Glen Abbey: Cultural Heritage Landscape, 2018). First, the course needed to show a special design value. In order to prove this, the coalition highlighted the fact that the course is a famous one designed by Jack Nicklaus specifically for the use of a national championship. Second, the course needed to show historical value. As if hosting 25 Canadian Open championships was not enough, Glen Abbey also hosted Arnold Palmer's first Professional Golfers' Association (PGA Tour) victory in 1955. Tiger Woods, arguably the best golfer ever or maybe second only to Nicklaus himself, also hit one of the most famous shots in golf history on this course. In short, reasons for Glen Abbey's heritage status have not been hard to advance. Even 2017 Canadian Open winner, Jhonattan Vegas, offered his support to the Save Glen Abbey coalition. The final criterion the golf course had to meet was one of contextual value, meaning that the place maintained or supported the character of the area. Mayor Burton has been especially pivotal in supporting this point. After meeting with Oakville citizens, he declared, "Glen Abbey is Oakville and Oakville is Glen Abbey. If Glen Abbey is not heritage, then what is?" (Lea, 2017). David Clattenburg echoed the mayor's sentiments. He recognized Glen Abbey Golf Course as a place that distinguishes Oakville from Toronto. He added that nearly everyone in the community feels some sort of connection or attachment to the property. Glen Abbey also has significant prestige and considerable name recognition amongst those living outside of Canada. Elite golfers and business people from around the world often mentally attach Glen Abbey to Oakville. In surveying golfers about their knowledge of Oakville, Ontario, several commented: "Hey, that's where Glen Abbey is, isn't it?". On August 21, 2017, Mayor Burton raised a motion to declare Glen Abbey a heritage site; it passed unanimously. Further protections were added to the Livable Oakville Plan zoning bylaws in the following months.

Why has Glen Abbey been different?

It is important to consider why Oakville has been more successful in protecting Glen Abbey than Saw-Whet. It is obvious that Glen Abbey is a famous course and Saw-Whet was not, but there is likely more to it than that. Both Fraser Damoff and David Clattenburg identified Saw-Whet as a "wake-up call" for the city. A lawyer who was willing to speak on condition of anonymity argues that Saw-Whet was the mayor and Council's first real challenge to Oakville's sustainability plan. After losing Saw-Whet, Council was motivated to get it right the second time—with Glen Abbey. In Portney's analysis of eight cities, he did not mention a catalyst as a common factor to pursuing sustainability. However, careful review of Portney's research shows that Chattanooga also used past sustainability failures to motivate its policy makers and citizens. In 1969, when Walter Cronkite announced that Chattanooga had the worst air quality in the country, many in that city agreed with him. Cronkite's remark spurred citizens on: they took the issue of sustainability seriously (Portney, 2003: 186-187). Oakville appears to have undergone a similar process with the loss of Saw-Whet Golf Course.

Clearly, however, the role civic leaders took in supporting the issue was critical. Robin Hambleton (2015) states that leaders in the 21st century need to come from a

variety of arenas and walks of life—they also need to be able to adapt to changing situations. In a private discussion with the mayor, Burton mentioned how his previous experiences aided him in his job as mayor. His post-secondary education at Columbia University, his past experience as a journalist, and his work in founding the YTV television channel have proved invaluable when it comes to managing relationships with different groups throughout the city (Burton, 2018). Evidence of his ability to work across sectors is displayed through the wide array of diverse groups he is a member of. He chairs the Ontario Auto Mayors Caucus, the Halton Police Services Board, the Canadian Nuclear Technology Mayors Association, and he holds membership in the Compact of Mayors. Environmental Defence Canada (EDC) even calls him the greenest mayor in the country (Civic Action, 2013).

Fraser Damoff—another key civic leader involved in conservation in Oakville, especially the Save Glen Abbey coalition—serves as Executive Director of Cycle Oakville, the leading advocacy organization in the promotion of cycle-friendly business districts and more cycling infrastructure in Oakville. When asked about his goals for Oakville, he responds: “I want to bring Jane Jacobs ideas’ to the suburbs. The reality is that suburbs are part of 21st-century living, and we need to apply her ideas to our times in order to succeed in creating a more livable city” (Damoff, 2018). Mr. Damoff has stated that he hopes protecting Glen Abbey is just the first of many sustainable development achievements in Oakville.

The future of Glen Abbey

Even with a national heritage designation, Glen Abbey’s survival is not yet guaranteed. Clublink Corporation appealed to the OMB, and many are concerned that the golf course will suffer the same fate as Saw-Whet. This concern from the citizens shows that Oakville’s sustainable development goals are not totally within its control. To address the problem, the Wynne government decided to replace the OMB—an administrative board that many citizens regard as being committed to developers’ interests, not theirs—with the presumably less-powerful Local Planning Appeal Tribunal (LPAT). It should be emphasized that civic leaders played a critical role in advocating against Glen Abbey being heard by the OMB. After a petition to Kevin Flynn— former Oakville MPP and Minister of Labour—Flynn stated that the case will be determined by the new LPAT (Lea, 2018).⁴ Despite Minister Flynn’s assertion, on March 5, 2018, Ontario Regulation 67/18 made under the *Planning Act* was filed. This regulation ensures that applications for development such as that filed by Clublink before December 12, 2017 will be heard by the OMB. The Glen Abbey case is set to be heard starting June 6, 2020 for 18 weeks. This decision was met with great disappointment from local activists as well as the Save Glen Abbey coalition. Nevertheless, the city continues to show resolve and has paid close to 9 million dollars to consultants and lawyers in its continued efforts to preserve the course. The city’s continued commitment to the cause may be best summarized in a recent statement made by Mayor Burton: “Any municipality that cannot defend its official plan’s rules for land use doesn’t really

⁴ All 2018 provincial election candidates (Liberal, Progressive-Conservative, NDP) who ran in Oakville supported this decision. All candidates also supported the city’s bylaws protecting Glen Abbey.

have an official plan and its neighbourhoods are wide open to whatever developers want...That's why council and I are so committed to defending our town and its policies" (Lea, 2019).

Conclusions

In the not-so-distant past, sustainable development was seen as an international or national goal, not a primary concern of local-level public officials. However, governments and citizens alike realized this was not enough. Researchers looked into major cities in Canada to determine what made some of them sustainable. Suburbs have not been examined as closely. There is still very little research focusing on Canadian suburbs and whether they can be more than just local growth machines. Since demographics tell us that suburbs are the fastest growing urban areas in North America, we need to understand them better in order to effectively tackle the big environmental issues of our times. This paper has sought to be an entry point into that field of study. Oakville was examined and compared to other known sustainable cities. It was found to share many characteristics with those cities. However, Oakville differed from them in that its main employer was a manufacturing company; a factor that researchers strongly believed would make Oakville's decision to interest itself in sustainable development significantly less likely. The failure to protect Saw-Whet Golf Course and the success up until this point in protecting Glen Abbey Golf Course have also been considered. Active civic leaders, motivated to learn from their failure to protect Saw-Whet, have proven to be pivotal in preserving Glen Abbey. In light of the mayor's goal to make Oakville the "most livable city in Canada" and the city's plans to facilitate that, Oakville fits Clarence Stone's description of a "middle class progressive regime type" city. Oakville's failure to protect Saw-Whet Golf Course suggests that Oakville was not initially prepared to vigorously defend its commitment to sustainable development. In practice, the city more closely resembled Stone's "development regime". Oakville's most recent challenge with Glen Abbey suggests that the city has a better understanding of how to meet the goals set out in its plan. It is, in fact, looking like a "middle class progressive regime". It may be that the path to becoming a sustainable city—or suburb for that matter—may not be a linear one. It certainly will not be one without conflict. As Oakville has proved, conflict is to be expected. However, Oakville has also shown that suburbs can indeed pursue sustainable development. They just need the right structural characteristics and some dynamic, motivated civic leaders.

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KRISTOPHER KOWALCHUK - is currently completing his final year of his Honours Specialization in Political Science at Huron University College - Western University. He recently completed his undergraduate thesis examining complicity in the Rwandan genocide. He hopes to pursue a career in international law and continue to compete in elite-level amateur golf tournaments.