

CANADIAN JOURNAL of URBAN RESEARCH

REVUE CANADIENNE de RECHERCHE URBAINE

The Hamptons of Toronto: Cottage-Condo Suburbanization and Implications for Public Space

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Abstract

Growth and development pressures in the City of Toronto and the surrounding region have led to the approval of a novel “cottage condo” development called Friday Harbour Resort. Marketed as the “Hamptons of Toronto,” the resort’s approval was contingent on a tenureship clause that restricts owners from occupying units for more than 300 days per year. As a public resort, the development introduces a significant amount of publicly accessible space to the town of Innisfil, where it is located. Through qualitative research, this article examines publicly accessible spaces at Friday Harbour Resort and contributes to the empirical research on public space in peripheries, highlighting potential social and spatial implications of this new “cottage-condo” trend in second home suburbanization.

Keywords: public space, suburbanization, suburbanisms, second homes, cottage-condos

Résumé

Les pressions exercées par la croissance et le développement dans la ville de Toronto et de la région environnante ont conduit à l’approbation d’un nouveau type de développement de «cottage condo/ chalets-condos» appelé *Friday Harbour Resort*. Commercialisé sous le nom de «Hamptons de Toronto», l’approbation du développement immobilier dépendait d’une clause du bail qui interdit aux propriétaires d’occuper des unités plus de 300 jours par an. En tant que lieu de villégiature public, ce développement immobilier introduit un nombre important d’espaces accessibles au public au sein de la ville d’Innisfil, où elle se trouve. Par le biais de recherches qualitatives, cet article examine les espaces accessibles au public du développement immobilier *Friday Harbour Resort*. L’article contribue également à la recherche empirique sur les espaces publics dans les périphéries, en soulignant les implications sociales et spatiales potentielles de cette nouvelle tendance en matière résidence secondaire dans la banlieue.

Mots clés: espace public, banlieue, résidences secondaires, chalets-condos

Canadian Journal of Urban Research, Summer 2019, Volume 28, Issue 1, pages 50-64.

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ISSN: 2371-0292

1. Introduction

In an era where suburbanization is the primary form of urban growth (Ekers, Hamel and Keil 2012), it is important to take stock of public spaces beyond traditional urban centers. Within Toronto's greater urban region—the Greater Golden Horseshoe region (the “GGH”)—Simcoe County is noted for its large scale development projects and unimpeded sprawl. This has particular implications for public space, as suburbanization often results in the privatization and fragmentation of land uses. This article discusses a new 590-acres condominium development called Friday Harbour Resort (“Friday Harbour”). Friday Harbour is an “all-seasons” luxury lifestyle resort located in the Simcoe County town of Innisfil, which sits on the western shore of Lake Simcoe, approximately 100 kilometers north of the City of Toronto. Marketed as the “Hamptons of Toronto,” the development is comprised of stacked New Urbanist condos and townhouses and is reportedly modeled off elite European waterfront villages, like Portofino in Italy and Port Grimaud in France (Hanes 2012). Once completed, Friday Harbour will replace two provincially owned beaches, an abandoned marina and rural and forested lands with 2600 “cottage-condos”, a 400-room hotel and conference centre, a 1000-slip marina, a “semi-private” golf course, a 200 acres nature preserve, two private clubs, a village with shops, restaurants and a theatre, and a boardwalk, pier, and small beachfront.

In addition to the development pressure driving primary residential growth, there is increasing investment in second homes in Ontario and “cottage-condos” (Hanes 2014) and “high-value resort developments” (Halseth 2004, p. 51) appear to be growing trends in the market. Already, Simcoe County is “the destination for some of the highest numbers of household private cottage nights in Canada” (Svenson 2004, p. 65) and so it is not entirely surprising to see the upscaling and privatization of Innisfil's Lake Simcoe waterfront for increased second home use. Yet, Friday Harbour still appears out of place amidst Innisfil's historic and exurban cottage settlements and the resort's dense built form is noticeable in comparison to the surrounding farmlands, forests and subdivisions. Moreover, from the perspective of land use planning the development also stands out. Whereas “other resorts and resort recreational areas in the County are designated as settlements” (OMB 2007, p. 10) and therefore must be located within local “settlement area” boundaries, Friday Harbour is designated as a “Special Development Area” and is located outside of Innisfil's settlement boundaries. To obtain this designation and approval for implementation on lands not allocated for development, a by-law that limits owner-occupancy to 300 days per year was proposed. This by-law is intended to ensure that Friday Harbour operates as a resort and not as a year-round settlement, circumventing the growth policies which would have otherwise restricted its approval. The effect is that, according to local planning policies, the resort does not qualify as growth.

Despite limited occupancy for condo-owners, the development includes pedestrian-oriented streets, a boardwalk, beachfront and a service and retail sector that remain open and accessible to the public year round. This has been leveraged by the local municipality in establishing Innisfil as a tourist destination, as well as for meeting goals to improve the town's public realm and accessibility to Lake Simcoe's waterfront. However, unlike ideally democratic public spaces which are valued for being spaces of openness and difference, the publicly accessible spaces at Friday Harbour are regulated and designed in order to meet the aligned interests of the state and private developers and to cater to the consumptive and luxury desires of tourists and cottagers seeking an escape to the “Hamptons of Toronto.” Here we see evidence of the fragmentation and privatization that typifies Toronto's growing suburban periphery and through the case study of Friday Harbour we gain insight into the forces and demands that are shaping this growth.

This article addresses how Friday Harbour fits into suburbanization processes shaping the GGH, the role it plays as a “public” destination and the way in which its public spaces function. I begin with a literature review on public space. I follow with a particular focus on how Ontario's second-homes—or cottaging—landscapes fit into the wider periphery. Through this exercise, I demonstrate the ways in which the resort's publicly accessible spaces are integrated into the town's public realm and posit the possibility of a “growth machine” between the town of Innisfil and the resort. I then arrive at the case study, where I outline the development and analyze it from the perspective of public space. Here I

aim to contribute to the empirical research on public space in peripheries and to highlight potential social and spatial implications of purported new trends in “cottage-condo” development in the GGH.

2. Research and Methodology

This article is based on qualitative research and a mix of methods including a review of literature and theory, archival research, content analysis and semi-structured interviews. This includes analysis of land use planning documents, documents filed in appeals at the Ontario Municipal Board, affidavits and depositions, local and regional policy documents, zoning by-laws, site plans, and municipal planning staff reports, relevant local news, advertising content, and other media. 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted, four individual interviews and three in groups of two, in-person or by telephone. Participants included environmental experts, policy and planning experts, officials and local politicians. Interviewees are anonymized and identified by general reference to their position or expertise. This research included phone calls and a visit to the Friday Harbour sales center, a guided tour through Innisfil and three site visits, including two tours during construction phase in 2016 and one to a partly opened resort in June 2018.

3. Literature Review

Public Space

Public spaces occupy important places within cities and urban regions and are valued as spaces of openness, diversity and inclusion. They are shaped by, and shape, the culture and image of the cities in which they are located (Zukin 1995). They are considered markers of democracy (Zukin 1995, Mitchell 1995) and are valued for meeting the varied, sometimes competing needs of differing publics. They are social and political spaces. They provide space outside of work and the private sphere where people can “relax, learn and recreate” (Low, Taplin, and Scheld 2009, p. 3) and are important sites for free speech, demonstration and dissent (Kohn 2004).

The definition of public space is necessarily broad and has different meanings legally and culturally, encompassing a range of spaces (Low and Smith 2006). Public spaces are open for access, but are not necessarily universally accessible. The conditions of a spaces’ publicness are determined by “rules of access, the source and nature of control over entry to a space, individual and collective behaviours sanctioned in specific spaces, and rules of use” (Low and Smith 2006, pp. 3-4). In the Canadian legal context, public space is not determined by ownership but rather it is described as “a place where the public goes, a place to which the public has or is permitted to have access and any place of public resort” (citing Vasan, 1980, p. 186; Ruppert 2006, p. 78). Thus private property can be public space and with this comes the property owner’s rights to regulate and control the users and uses of the space.

Privatization, a culture of fear and rising tensions over uses and users of public space serve to justify an increasing desire at the state and private level to assert more control over public space (Low and Smith 2006, Mehta 2014). The response has been increased securitization and surveillance (Low and Smith 2006), new design interventions such as “hostile” or defensive design (Petty 2016), or what may appear as softer forms of control, such as the festivalization or programming of space. Public spaces have become tools for rationalizing capitalist development and are increasingly developed through public-private partnerships (Lehrer and Laidley 2008). While appeasing the public, these partnerships also relieve local governments from the management and maintenance of public spaces (Németh 2009).

There is much evidence of privately-owned public spaces standing in for public space in the suburbs and peripheries, with malls being the most stereotypical example (Kohn 2004). We also see the replacement of public spaces with private amenities in gated and New Urbanist communities (Grant 2007). Attributed to Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, New Urbanism is an architectural and planning movement that has taken hold in North America and is promoted as a mixed-use solution to suburban sprawl (Lehrer and Milgrom 1996, Grant 2002). Inspired by neo-traditional design, New Urbanism is typically oriented around a public realm and seemingly caters to pedestrians, while encouraging natural surveillance (Grant 2007, p. 486). In theory, it rejects “the intense privatism

of the suburbs,” (Kohn 2004, p. 97). In practice, New Urbanism tends to be leveraged as a means to enhance the “public” realm through private development. In looking at condominium developments, Sorensen (2018, p.70) notes, this growing trend in private ownership of shared spaces, “is probably the most important example of the growth of private space at the expense of public space in contemporary processes of suburban development.”

Suburbanization and Suburbanisms

It is often noted that we are living in an urban era, however much of the growth we see today is actually occurring in urban peripheries. Thus, as Keil (2018, p. 15) argues, “[t]he urban century is really the suburban century.” Accordingly, “suburbanization”—defined as “non-central city population and economic growth and urban spatial expansion” (Ekers, Hamel and Keil 2012, p.407) is a more accurate way of understanding the social-spatial realities of everyday life. By looking at suburbanization we invert the assumption that growth only occurs in a linear path outwards and, in doing so, open up the opportunity to “recognize the periphery in the processes” (Keil 2018, p.11).

As Harris and Lehrer note (2018, p. 27), the periphery is shaped by “urbanization, the globalization of capital and culture, and the steady commodification of land.” In the North American context, the periphery is also historically and continually shaped by colonization. These processes take on variegated and hybridized forms, are comprised of differing social relations and result in a range of property regimes (Ekers, Hamel and Keil 2012; Sorensen 2018). Suburbs tend to be closed off and, in this way, reinforce their own peripherality. Whether this is through the privatism and exclusivity evident in gated communities and residential enclaves, or dislocation and neglect found in racialized or working class inner suburbs (Young and Keil 2011), the suburban periphery is uneven and fragmented.

Suburbs are also hybridized and diverse landscapes. Under the conditions of urban expansion, the definitive boundaries between “urban”, “rural”, and “suburban” have been blurred and conflated (Keil and Shields 2013), especially so with the emergence of new post-suburban centralities (Phelps and Wu 2011). As Keil and Shields point out, “it is possible to “play” across these understandings of the suburb as the limit of the city and as a notable edge within an environment that stretches from an urban to rural conditions” (2013, p. 77). This is not to say there are no longer any distinctions between the rural, urban, and suburban in terms of form and geography, but rather, the ways of life associated with these constructs are not always so easily distinguishable from one another. In the age of suburbanization, we can therefore look to “suburbanisms,”—that is, suburban ways of life—as a way of understanding everyday life in the periphery. According to Walks (2013) “suburbanisms” exist in dialectic with urbanism, produced through constant flux and tension. Suburbanisms “flow in and out of different urban and suburban spaces at different times” and allow for the production of “new hybrid ways of life and consciousness” (Walks 2013, p. 1485).

Second Home Suburbanization

Suburbanization is “a process of creating differentiated property rights in land” (Sorensen 2018, p. 64). While the North America subdivision is no longer an accurate representation of the vast and wide-ranging property forms that constitute suburban land (Keil 2018), privately-owned, single family residential enclaves still remain prominent typologies of suburbia. This includes second homes, which are defined as “a single additional dwelling used by the household, other family members and/or friends purely for leisure use, typically at weekends and for holidays” (Paris 2010, p. 45). Second home ownership tends to be driven by affluence, mobility and the desire to own property (Paris 2010). There are a range of variations on ownership and tenureship that exist for second home properties, including freehold, leasehold, fractional ownership, timeshare and condominiums. With the spread of urbanization and the emergence of new post-suburban centers, second homes are increasingly indistinguishable from primary residences.

As Keil (2018, p. 33) notes, suburbanization has always been about escape, or “social-spatial distancing,” from the city. Second home communities occupy a distinct place in the periphery as they are often, by definition, *peripheral*. That is, they typically offer an “escape” from everyday urban

or suburban life. The escapism associated with second home lifestyles is typically bound up in ideal images of the rural countryside or the wilderness (Halseth 2004), especially in the Canadian context. Yet, day-to-day (weekend-to-weekend or holiday-to-holiday) life in second home peripheries differs little from suburbanisms experienced elsewhere. However, important distinctions are made between the “elite landscapes” of second home dwellers and the rural communities within which they are located (Halseth 2004). As Halseth demonstrates distinction between these communities tends to be made along the lines of class and politics, at times giving way to considerable tension and conflict.

4. Context

Ontario's Cottage Country

Ontario's second homes are referred to as “cottages”. Second home landscapes, often oriented around a body of water (or other rural amenity) and located outside of major urban centres, are referred to as “cottage country.” As Luka (2010, p. 199) points out, cottage country is “an extensive if ambiguously defined territory,” it is a “collage of natural landforms, settlement patterns, social practice, and cultural narratives of ‘nature’” and it links the Canadian hinterland to “its contemporary urban realities and as such is part of the rural-urban fringe.” There is a long tradition of cottaging in Toronto and there is continued and growing investment in second homes in Ontario, with a greater number of baby boomers purchasing with the intent of retiring at their second home (Royal LePage 2017). As Bourne et al. (2003, pp. 263-264) have pointed out “the limits of the Toronto metropolitan region are now being pushed into central cottage country” so that cottage country is not merely a “holiday landscape” but rather a “metropolitan extension” operating as a “peri-urban echo or shadow effect of the GTA's urban growth”. Moreover, an increased global interest in Canada's recreation property market, driven by the dropping loonie, means that cottage country is now a place for global capital (Siekierska, 2016).

As cottage country becomes enmeshed in the GGH's suburban sprawl, “cottage-condos” reflect the blurring and conflation of urban, rural and suburban boundaries. For decades now, demands for second-home ownership have fueled the development of waterfront condominiums and townhouses in Toronto's amenity-rich communities (Bourne et al., 2003, p. 263), with condominiums occupying a growing subset of the second home market. In 2012, Sandbanks Summer Village, reportedly Canada's first “cottage-condo” community, was introduced to the town of Picton (Hamilton Spectator 2012). In 2014, “cottage-condo” developments were reported as an emerging trend in second home ownership, with Friday Harbour cited as one among two other examples (Hanes 2014). Through amenity and geographic location, these New Urbanist designed resorts combine ideal images of secluded cottage life with dense pedestrian-oriented design.

Without sacrificing the exclusivity and lifestyle associated with second homes, the condominium model is marketed as a convenient and more affordable entry point into cottage ownership. Tenureship varies among these cottage-condo resorts. Friday Harbour and Sandbanks Summer Village both have limited occupancy, the latter being only open from April to October and the former limiting occupancy to 300 days per year. The trend towards “cottage-condo” developments reflects what Halseth (2004, p. 51) identifies as “an even more intense kind of activity centered more upon high-value resort developments” driven by growing demand for second home ownership. It is also possible that this could be driven by a demand for primary homeownership, especially in the Toronto case where high property prices have some first time buyers looking to cottage country as a way to enter into the property market (Kalinowski 2018).

Innisfil, Simcoe County

Friday Harbour is located in the town of Innisfil, along the western shore of Lake Simcoe in Simcoe County. Simcoe County is a predominantly agricultural county that, due to unprecedented sprawl and large-scale development approvals, has been referred to by environmentalists and activists as the “wild west” of development in southern Ontario (Gombu 2007). The pro-development culture in Simcoe pre-dates the provincial 2005 Growth Plan, has been exacerbated by development leapfrogging over the GGH Greenbelt, and codified at the provincial policy level by a county-specific amendment made to the Growth Plan in 2012.



Figure 1. Innisfil, June 2016. Photo by Author.

As a result, low density sprawl and large-scale development has continued to proliferate across the county.

Simcoe County is home to a highly mobile primary and secondary population and growth in the county is driven by demand from both markets. As Svenson (2004, p. 65) notes, Simcoe County is “an example of a former cottaging hinterland that is becoming increasingly urban” as it is both a destination for some of “highest private cottage nights in Canada” while also being a significant source of cottagers to other counties. Decades of urbanization has put Lake Simcoe, which is an important economy, infrastructure and amenity for the county, at ecological risk (Palmer et al. 2011). Despite policy efforts, the stresses of development continue, as do reports of high phosphorus loads and depleted fish populations.

The town of Innisfil is situated on the indigenous territory of the Huron, the Haudenosaunee and later Mississauga. After colonization Innisfil became a farming and lakeside cottage community and has since been transformed into a commuter suburb, much like its northern neighbour, the city of Barrie. Since the 1970s there has been ongoing conflict over the annexation of land from the town of Innisfil to meet Barrie’s land supply demands. Some have characterized development patterns in the area as a “race” between the municipalities (Vanderlinde 2015), propelling a “use it or lose it” mentality in regards to land use. As a town that relies on a 95% residential and farm tax base, the preservation of boundaries and development is crucial to Innisfil’s economy.

Innisfil’s Plans for Growth

Friday Harbour meets Innisfil’s goals to develop land and therefore maintain its boundaries against annexation from Barrie while also growing the municipal tax base, tourist economy and public realm. In light of these factors, Innisfil’s ongoing support of the resort and integration into the town’s economic and growth strategy suggests the potential of a “growth machine.” Growth machines, according to Harvey Molotch’s 1976 theory, are “[c]oalitions of land-based elites, tied to the economic possibilities of places” that “drive urban politics in their quest to expand the local economy and accumulate wealth”



Figure 2. Friday Harbour Resort development site, February 2016. Photo by Author.

(Jonas and Wilson 1999, p. 3). This is not uncommon in growing peripheries, where the transformation of land from rural to urban comes with high financial return and significant “development gains,” such as development charges or taxes (Harris and Lehrer 2018, p. 25). Friday Harbour includes many development gains for the town of Innisfil, including building permit fees, development charges and municipal taxes (Vanderlinde 2012). The developer also financed new wastewater and sewage infrastructure to service the resort. This infrastructure is available for up to 1,700 nearby homes and cottages to get off private septic systems, should individual households choose to do so. In 2018, the resort committed a further \$5 million for a “Health and Wellness Centre”, a fire boat, and a capital facility in what was defined as “essentially a public-private partnership deal” by Innisfil’s chief administrative officer (Ramsay 2018b, n/p).

Local policy and development documents reflect Innisfil’s support for the project and demonstrate an integration of the resort into local growth plans. In a document that addresses strategies for tourism growth, Friday Harbour is identified as one of the key features that make Innisfil stand out and it is expected to “become the region’s primary tourism destination” (Innes, O’Donnell and MacDonald 2017, p. 48). By adding to the local public realm and improving waterfront access to Lake Simcoe, the resort meets local planning goals set out in Innisfil’s Official Plan (the “OP”)—the policy document that provides a framework for future growth and planning (Town of Innisfil 2018, p.3). The resort is also identified as one of the town’s “key place making destinations” (p.9), defined as places that “build the social and emotional ties that hold our community together” (Town of Innisfil, 2018, p.6). These destinations include the town’s main civic, commercial and open spaces. Through this policy, Friday Harbour is embedded into the town’s public realm, demonstrating Innisfil’s willingness to integrate the brand of Friday Harbour—the “Hamptons of Toronto”—into the brand of the town. Subsequently, approval of development on land that was otherwise restricted for development turns out to be incredibly marketable for the town of Innisfil.



Figure 3. Friday Harbour Resort boardwalk and condos, June 2018. Photo by Author.

5. Case Study

Friday Harbour Resort

Friday Harbour was originally proposed in 1999 and approved in 2007. It underwent a long and contentious approval process where public objection was discouraged through legal measures and meaningful indigenous consultation was circumvented by colonial planning mechanisms. Opposition to the resort culminated in the developer filing near to 100 million dollars in lawsuits claiming defamation against nine individuals who spoke out against the resort (ED 2012). All lawsuits were dropped once the resort was approved in 2007, however this had a considerable chill effect, reportedly quieting a group of citizens opposing the same developer on a separate project elsewhere in Simcoe County (Cotenta 2008).

The initially approved plan for Friday Harbour included 1600 “cottage-condo” units to be occupied no more than 300 days per year, a 400-room hotel, 1000-slip marina, a golf course, and a number of public and private amenities. In 2018, the town of Innisfil approved an application for an additional 1000 condo units. Presently, the resort is not monitoring the occupation of units. The resort also includes privately-owned publicly accessible spaces, including a boardwalk, pier, 200 acres of preserved woodlands, 7 kilometers of maintained walking trails, and a beach. Prior to the resort, the development site consisted of agricultural lands, woodlands, wetlands, provincially-owned Crown land beachfront, and an area zoned commercial with an abandoned 375-slip marina. The old marina had naturalized and become home to local habitat including Ontario’s Blanding’s turtle—classified as “threatened” by the provinces *Endangered Species Act, 2007*. To provide for the marina expansion, the developer purchased the provincial beachfront from the Ministry of Natural Resources. This purchase allowed for the connection of the lake to the expanded marina, boasted as the largest inland marina in North America. In order to build the new marina a 30-acre hole was dug in the shoreline. This has been marketed as an enhancement of local fish habitat, while also creating four and half new kilometers of “interior shoreline” (Watt 2015).



Figure 4. Boardwalk, June 2018. Photo by Author.



Figure 5. Semi-private golf course, June 2018. Photo by Author.

The 300-day per year occupancy limit was a condition for Friday Harbour's approval and allowed the resort to circumvent the growth policies which would otherwise restrict its development. In my interviews no local town official or planning expert knew why this limit was set at 300. Unlike other resorts with limited occupancy, the services and amenities at Friday Harbour remain open to homeowners and the public year-round. The sales office indicated that in the contract of sale, purchasers sign off on this tenureship agreement, however presently the resort is not enforcing or monitoring the occupation of units. The sales office had no knowledge of how, or if, monitoring will occur and indicated that some units are being occupied as primary residences. Notably, the resort offers a rental management service where they will rent out and manage your property for you while you are away. For those purchasing with the intent of secondary use, this service could, in theory, ensure that units are filled year-round.

Friday Harbour's Publicly Accessible Spaces

Friday Harbour is designed in the New Urbanist style by Duany Plater-Zyberk and Company. According to local planning policies, it must include "pedestrian friendly streetscapes and a dominant resort centre with a mix of uses" (p. 3) and "be defined by a public space such as a public square, Boardwalk, park or significant intersection" (Town of Innisfil n/d, p. 12). The latter is realized as the boardwalk and pier and is where the resort village and marina intersect. At this intersection there are shops and restaurants with adjacent patios. The boardwalk runs along the entire marina over to the beach and is lined with benches, Muskoka chair and signs prohibiting fishing, swimming, diving and smoking. In addition to the beach, there is also a 200 acres nature preserve with 7 kilometers of publicly accessible walking trails.

Friday Harbour also has two private clubs, the *Lakeside Club* and the *Beach Club*. These are accessible by membership which is available only to homeowners and made known to the public by the "Homeowners Only" signs that surround the club. Within the marina, there are two private islands, one of which is gated. These are located across the pier and in renderings include their own private swimming pools and amenities. The golf course is "semi-private", meaning owners are able to purchase an exclusive membership which includes preferred tee times. The resort has staff who maintain the public spaces and there are private security guards throughout, including at the entry point to the Beach Club. There are a number of activities on offer that enhance the experience of the resort's outdoor amenities. You can rent bikes, boats and other outdoor toys and take lessons or classes oriented to adults, kids, or the entire family. The resort also plans to program and host live entertainment in its public spaces.

Through public-private partnership, Friday Harbour adds a significant amount of publicly accessible space to the town of Innisfil. By replacing a previously abandoned and naturalized waterfront

with a publicly accessible all-seasons resort, the development is justified as an improvement to Lake Simcoe's waterfront and an enhancement in accessibility. There is an important argument to be made for improving access to natural amenities and rural spaces in the pursuit of more democratic and low-carbon forms of leisure (Cohen 2014), as well as for decreasing barriers to accessibility. However, accessibility must be measured against the other conditions and factors that shape publicness. The publicness of Friday Harbour's publicly accessible spaces are regulated and conditioned through various factors I will discuss below, including governance, built form and design, and the branding and programming of the resort.



Figure 6. Beach Club, June 2018. Photo by Author.

Governance

As “key place making destinations” the publicly accessible spaces at Friday Harbour are intended to “build the social and emotional ties that hold our community together” (p. 6) and they are considered “important gathering places...where improvements can be made to make them into even greater places” (Town of Innisfil 2018, p. 10). The town proposes to “enhance” these spaces for Innisfil’s residents through various measures. Some examples of this include recreation programming or entertainment, adding cycling lanes or sidewalks, improved seating or furniture, farmers markets or food trucks. These enhancements are a way to shape and regulate space in a way that is aligned with the goals of the town. However, these goals may not always be compatible with the goals of Friday Harbour which, as private property, the town of Innisfil has little jurisdiction over. This raises questions around governance of the resort and its accessible spaces. Management and regulation will be up to the Resort Association and condominium boards which, once established, will be comprised of condominium owners and business owners and operators. This will be complicated by the fact that some condo owners will be occupying units as a primary residence and some on a secondary basis. The interests of hotel and conference guests will also be represented, as they represent an important revenue stream for the resort.

The potential for conflict among the various uses and users of Friday Harbour’s public spaces has already come up in public consultation with the town. In a recent public meeting regarding adding 1000 new units and increasing facilities for visitors and tourists, a Friday Harbour resident raised concern about “noise, crowds and the impact [on] security,” stating: “I purchased my condo at Friday

Harbour with the knowledge this was to be a private residence community...I am concerned with the traffic and the transient nature of the conference centre attendees” (Ramsay 2018a, n/p). Underlying these concerns are questions of what public these spaces are for, who has the right to occupy them and for what use? Evidently, given the private governance structure of the resort, answers to these questions will be shaped by the preferences of those with ownership and commercial investment in the resort.



Figure 7. Marina and pier, looking out towards gated island, June 2018. Photo by Author.

Built Form and Design

Built form and design features are important factors in shaping public spaces and have the ability to influence inclusivity of space. Friday Harbour offers luxury in a compact New Urbanist form, introducing a level of density and walkability not previously seen in Innisfil. The resort’s neotraditional design is said to take inspiration from elite European waterfront villages, such as Portofino in Italy and Port Grimaud in France (Hanes 2012). However, this begs the question, posed by Lehrer and Milgrom (2006, p. 63) “whose traditions do the Neo-Traditionalists draw on?”

The design of the resort favours walkability. With large windows and outward facing balconies, the four storey condo buildings and townhouses are oriented towards the streetscape, boardwalk and pier. This “eyes on the street” design, which is common in New Urbanism (Grant 2007), provides homeowners with the powers of surveillance over these publicly accessible spaces. Design features such as furniture and signage also set the tone for the ways in which the publicly accessible spaces at Friday Harbour are interpreted and experienced. Muskoka chairs line the boardwalk in symbolic representation of the culturally elite practice of cottaging, reminding the resort’s various publics—the condo-owners, Innisfil residents, hotel guests or tourist—that they either are, or aren’t, “at the cottage”. Further reminder of this comes from the signage that distinguishes the private amenities from the publicly accessible spaces. While private amenities, like the Beach Club establish a sense of community among the homeowners, the “Homeowners Only” signs serve as stark reminder of stratification among those at the resort.

Branding and Programming

The “Hamptons of Toronto” branding of Friday Harbour suggests that the resort is intended to attract and cater to a particular crowd for leisure purposes, thereby suggesting the resort’s publicly accessible spaces will be regulated in a way that ensures that they are used for leisure purposes as opposed to political or social causes. This is reinforced by the curation of everyday life through programming and activities. The resort’s ideal user is depicted in marketing images where predominantly white, young adults and families indulge in middle and upper class leisure activities. While the resort does not expressly exclude those who do not fit the profile of “ideal” user, the programming and the activities offered regulate and exclude by establishing norms and expectations around uses and users of public space.

In my interviews a local official expressed enthusiasm about the neighbourhood quality and pedestrian-oriented design of the resort: a place where they can take their kids to go get ice cream, see a movie, or walk around. These activities fit into the expected norms of the how the spaces at Friday Harbour will be used. As “key place making destinations” the publicly accessible spaces at Friday Harbour are intended to “build the social and emotional ties that hold our community together” (Town of Innisfil, 2018, p. 6). Evidently, what is meant by “community” at Friday Harbour is greatly influenced by the ways in which the resort excludes and stratifies. Over time it will be interesting to see how the publicly accessible spaces at Friday Harbour contribute to the building of community. Though perhaps more interesting will be to see *what* community is built.

6. Conclusion

Suburbanization is the primary form of urban growth today, and suburbs are where the bulk of people work and live (Keil 2018). Urban and suburban development continues to extend across southern Ontario, to and beyond Toronto’s cottage country (Bourne et al. 2003, Svenson 2004, Luka 2010). This has important implications for public spaces in these areas. Friday Harbour offers the ultimate in luxury escape for cottagers and tourists looking to simulate the Hamptons experience. As an open and public development, Friday Harbour also adds a significant amount of publicly accessible space to the town of Innisfil. Moreover, it is considered an *improvement* to Lake Simcoe and its waterfront. That the land the resort is located on was not intended for full time settlement does not appear to factor into what qualifies as an “improvement”. The question becomes: improvement for whom?

As a private resort it is unsurprising that the branding, design and regulation of Friday Harbour and its publicly accessible spaces caters to the consumptive desires of outsiders and tourists. The “Hamptons of Toronto,” the very brand Friday Harbour is built on, is premised on exclusivity, undermining its public function. This is further undermined by governance, design, built form and programming, which serve to control and regulate users and uses and establish norms of behaviour. The public function of Friday Harbour remains largely subject to the influence of those with ownership and commercial interest in the resort. This is further complicated by the tenureship clause that owners agree to upon purchase, which could prove to raise more issues should monitoring go into effect in the future.

Growth in the second home market is part of the suburbanization processes shaping the GGH, and this growth contributes to the fragmentation and exclusivity of Toronto’s periphery. This article aims to point to the ways in which certain peripheries, in particular those peripheries that cater to middle and upper classes, are unevenly accounted for in regards to land use and growth impact. While Friday Harbour’s 300-day per year occupancy limit may be novel, it is an important example for understanding the alignment of public and private interests in driving urban spatial expansion in the GGH. Innisfil and Simcoe County’s support for the project and the integration of the resort as a key component in the town’s planning and economic development goals suggests the potential of a growth machine. That the resort’s occupancy limit is presently going unmonitored reflects a disregard towards the land use policies that exist to restrict sprawl and protect Lake Simcoe, making Friday Harbour a case study worth re-examining in the coming years.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Theresa Enright, Ute Lehrer, and Roza Tchoukaleyska for organizing this special issue and offering critiques on earlier versions of the manuscript. Further improvements are owed to Cara Chellew, Christopher Misura, and the journal’s anonymous reviewers. I would also like to acknowledge the Social

Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the support of Roger Keil and Sara Macdonald in the development of this research.

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