
Rhetoric and Restraint: Municipal-Federal Relations in Canada's Largest Edge City

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Ce chapitre examine les relations municipales-fédérales de la ville de Mississauga en Ontario au cours des dernières années. Les politiques concernant l'aéroport, la régénération du secteur riverain et le logement y sont soulignées. Cette ville a su exercer une certaine influence sur le gouvernement fédéral et a même parfois établi elle-même le programme politique, et ce sans médiation, ou très peu, de la part du provincial. Les gouvernements progressiste-conservateur de Brian Mulroney et de Kim Campbell ont été forcés de faire des concessions à la ville de Mississauga en ce qui concerne l'aéroport et ils ont essayé d'obtenir le soutien de la ville afin de se prémunir contre les autres lobbyistes. La ville de Mississauga était à la tête de la planification de la régénération des terres riveraines appartenant au fédéral. Les dirigeants de la ville de Mississauga et ceux du palier supérieur de la municipalité régionale de Peel ne se basent pas avec la même fermeté lorsqu'il est question de redistribution sociale que lorsqu'il est question de développement économique. Toute description des relations municipales-fédérales doit tenir compte de la perspicacité des chefs et de leurs prévisions pragmatiques, sur tout lorsqu'il s'agit d'un chef tel que la mairesse Hazel McCallion. Les descriptions imparciales des économistes politiques ne correspondent pas toujours aux prévisions et aux motifs des chefs politiques municipaux.

“A new deal for cities,” demands the *Toronto Star* in a year-long series of articles and editorials. In the same vein, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities’ Big City Mayors’ Caucus (FCM 2003) is calling for a new partnership with the Government of Canada. Given the considerable media coverage and expressions of concern from political, business, and social service leaders, it is difficult not to surmise that Canada’s cities – or at least the large cities – have some very wide-ranging and well-developed demands, not only of provincial but also of federal policy.

But if cities in general, and not just advocates for the inner cities, are determined to secure a comprehensive partnership with Ottawa, we would probably find that Mississauga, Ontario, is a leader in this campaign. With 680,000 people, it is Canada's sixth-largest city and the largest suburban municipality. Mississauga's long-serving leader, Hazel McCallion,¹ enjoys extraordinary popularity, has a high profile outside the city, plays an influential role in the upper-tier Regional Municipality of Peel (population 1.1 million), and has a reputation for being outspoken and often confrontational.

This paper argues that Mississauga does indeed exert some influence over the federal government – sometimes in unlikely areas – and the Constitution notwithstanding, it often successfully bypasses the province. Most of the advocacy, however, is carried out on a sector-by-sector basis with relatively short-term objectives. Despite the mayor's occasionally highly charged public rhetoric, the city is not generally pursuing major changes to federal policies that would serve redistributive rather than economic-development objectives.

Mississauga's and McCallion's approach to municipal-federal relations is thus consistent, to some degree, with Paul Peterson's "city limits" thesis. Peterson (1981) proposes that because of the structural constraints within which cities must operate, including their inability to regulate directly the inter-municipal movement of goods and people, they are likely to concern themselves primarily with "developmental" (economic productivity) objectives and much less with social or progressive goals.

This is an incomplete explanation, however, because it fails to account adequately for the shrewd, pragmatic calculations that give primacy to the leader's own prospects for influence. This paper therefore also invokes Richard Neustadt's (1990) "self-help" thesis of leadership. What is advantageous politically does not always serve local economic objectives.

SURVEYING THE LANDSCAPE

Federal policy affects Mississauga and the Region of Peel significantly. Loans and insured mortgages provided by the Central (now Canada) Mortgage and Housing Corporation arguably contributed to suburban development and sprawl (Sewell 1994). Immigration policies have altered the ethnic and racial composition of the community and have contributed to the city's remarkable growth. Mississauga's population is almost double what it was twenty years ago, though growth has slowed recently as the municipality becomes built up. According to the 2001 census, 39 percent of Mississauga's residents are immigrants and more than 40 percent are members of visible minority groups (Mississauga, PBD 2003).

National debates threaten occasionally to engulf local politicians. Take, for instance, McCallion's 1995 statement that Bloc Québécois leader Lucien Bouchard should be tried for treason (*Toronto Star* 1995) or her awkward

speech at a March 2003 peace rally, during which she told the crowd that they ought instead to be urging the federal government to solve domestic social issues such as homelessness (author's notes taken during the event). Even more controversial were the mayor's comments to a *National Post* columnist about federal immigration policies (Francis 2001). McCallion was quoted as complaining that one of the local hospitals was "loaded with people in their native costumes." Although insisting later that she had been referring only to illegal immigrants, she eventually did issue a grudging apology.

The most prominent intersection of federal and municipal responsibilities in Mississauga occurred in 1979 following the spectacular derailment of a Canadian Pacific train and the subsequent chlorine spill and fire. Almost 250,000 residents of Mississauga were relocated for up to five days, making this one of the world's largest peacetime evacuations. By most popular accounts, it was McCallion who was in control of the response. It was the dynamic municipal leader who determined, on the advice of the city's fire chief, when to evacuate and when to give the all-clear signal. It was her image more than anyone else's that was shown around the world (Cahill 1980). Later, some of the city's recommendations for more stringent federal regulations were echoed by the federally constituted Mississauga Railway Accident Inquiry and implemented. These included requiring detailed chemical cleanup plans, more sophisticated methods for measuring the amount of chlorine remaining in a boxcar, and that "all cars, whether dangerous-goods cars or not, should have roller bearings" (Grange 1980, 194).

Putting aside the exceptional circumstances of the great derailment and the mayor's occasional incendiary statements about federal policies and politicians, most federal-municipal relations in Mississauga have revolved around two themes: the use of federal property and requests for federal money, primarily for specific infrastructure initiatives. The controversy over the future of Pearson International Airport and the coordination of waterfront regeneration are cases in point. These can be contrasted with the less assertive municipal and mayoral advocacy of and activities on affordable housing.

THE CASE OF PEARSON INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Except for a tiny sliver in the City of Toronto, Canada's largest airport, Lester B. Pearson International, is situated within Mississauga. Big-picture students of intergovernmental relations would likely expect that municipal influence over such a major federal installation would be marginal. Indeed, even those who focus only on what is reported in the press, or on the actual influence the city exerts today, would reach the same conclusion. Alternatively, perhaps any meaningful opportunities for input from Mississauga emerged after 1996, thanks to the presence of two Mississauga residents on the board of the Greater Toronto Airports Authority (GTAA).² After all, the federal Environmental

Assessment Panel, which had endorsed many of the grievances of residents living close to the airport, had argued that a local airport authority would be much more accountable to citizens and their municipal governments (Canada, EAP 1992a, 81).

But a closer examination reveals that the city exerts less influence now, with the airport under the administration of a local airport authority, than it did when the facility was run directly by the federal Department of Transport. Especially intriguing are the not widely reported details of the city's behind-the-scenes manoeuvring during the 1989–93 period, when the Progressive Conservative federal government contracted out the construction of a new terminal and attempted, with the mayor's shrewd support, to privatize the operations and the major redevelopment of the two old terminals.

The privatization approach was favoured by Ottawa in lieu of devolution to a local airport authority, which seemed to be the preferred option elsewhere in the country and in the National Airports Policy of 1987 (Canada, Senate 1995a, 11 and II-7). Pearson Development Corporation, a private consortium, was awarded a fifty-seven-year lease and was contracted to effect major renovations. Finalized in the middle of the 1993 election campaign, the deal generated uproar from the opposition parties. The agreement subsequently was cancelled by a new Liberal government (*ibid.*, appendix B).

The Conservatives' transactions were the subject of extensive hearings in 1995 by a special Senate committee. Two very different interpretations emerged. In its report, the Conservative majority on the committee argued that the whole process had respected the public interest and had been carried out, over several years, with integrity and objectivity. The Liberal minority report charged that there had been a one-track determination to privatize the facilities and to ensure that the beneficiaries would be friends of the government. (Mississauga-based developer Don Matthews, chair of the Matthews Group and a key player in Pearson Development Corporation, was a past president of the Progressive Conservative Party.)³

According to the Conservative senators, Ottawa did not have a fixed privatization agenda but was being deferential to Mississauga because that is the city in which the airport is situated, because the renovations were needed urgently (McCallion was calling Terminal 1 "a slum" and actually was sending in the Peel Health Department), and because the mayor had the ability to create obstacles. McCallion had earlier threatened Huang and Danczkay, the outfit contracted by Ottawa in 1987 to build and operate a new terminal (no. 3), that she would not provide municipal services (including water and sewage) if they refused to pay development charges. They relented (Canada, Senate 1995b, 25 July).

But in 1991, with the federal government's promised call for private-sector proposals having still failed to emerge, and with Toronto business leaders and the provincial government working hard to set up an "airport authority" as a

proposed alternative to privatization, there was growing concern in Mississauga that Ottawa might waver from its course and allow the airport to be taken over by a Metro-dominated entity. Such a body, it was feared, would ignore Mississauga's requests for development charges, for building inspections (along with their associated fees), and for transportation infrastructure to connect the airport better with the rest of Mississauga rather than only with Metropolitan Toronto to the east. There was also concern that there would be attempts to divert the airport noise cones that affected Metro residents, deflecting them to Mississauga neighbourhoods (McCallion and Shaw interviews 2003).

McCallion thereafter became more aggressive in her efforts to thwart the Metro-dominated initiative. She showed up uninvited at a meeting of the would-be airport authority and senior federal and provincial officials – including ministers – to express concerns about the process. She began calling the Metro body “the illegal airport authority,” and, most important, she proceeded to launch a rival airport authority (Canada, Senate 1995a, 44).

Thanks to McCallion, therefore, while the federal government was evaluating the privatization proposals, the competing airport authorities, neither of which had any formal authority, were bogged down through much of 1992 negotiating a *modus vivendi*. A task force of the chairmen of the Greater Toronto Area regions had to be set up to break the impasse. An arrangement that gave Peel the right to appoint (not just nominate) two of the fifteen members and that limited Metropolitan Toronto to two members was finally concluded late that year (Peel 1992), soon after which Mississauga resident Sid Valo became the chair.⁴ The new set-up was endorsed by the Region of Peel Council and Mississauga City Council.

But Mississauga's endorsement was conditional – and the Peel council later was persuaded by Mississauga to support the city's qualified position. The city called on the new airport authority to oversee both Pearson and the Toronto Island airport, even though Toronto Island was being operated under a tripartite arrangement involving the City of Toronto, the Toronto Harbour Commissioners, and the federal government. This condition was cited by Transport Minister Jean Corbeil as the reason for not negotiating with the local airport authority but continuing instead with the privatization process (Canada, Senate 1995b, 19 September).

Mississauga was determined to extract guarantees from the federal government in exchange for supporting the latter's privatization initiatives. To force the issue, in June 1993 the city council passed a resolution saying it now was opposed to the new north-south runway, which had been proposed by Ottawa along with two new east-west runways. The stated motivation for Mississauga's resolution was the federal government's failure to meet eighteen conditions laid down by the city in a January 1992 resolution. This set the stage for negotiations between Mississauga and the federal government on an airport-operating agreement. The federal government agreed to establish a noise authority to

monitor aircraft traffic, and it also agreed that the runway would not be used at night and not when the wind conditions allowed for the use of the other runways. But the majority of the city's runway conditions were in fact infrastructure and financial matters, not noise issues. The minister agreed, for example, to construct new access roads, making it easier to get inside the airport from Mississauga (Pecar 1993).

The day before the privatization deal was signed, the mayor and the transport minister were still in touch to ensure that the minister would honour his guarantee that Mississauga would not lose any federal revenue as a result of the privatization. The private consortium would pay property taxes, a significant portion of which would go to the school boards and the region. But in the absence of property taxes, Mississauga had been receiving the full share of the federal payments in lieu of taxation. The switch to property taxes would mean an annual loss to Mississauga of approximately \$3.2 million. The federal government acceded to Mississauga's demand to make up the difference (*Mississauga News* 1993b).

The influence that Mississauga had, or was about to have, came to an end with the election in October 1993 of a new government, which was determined to pursue a very different course on the Pearson file than the one followed by the Conservatives. Even an attempt by Mississauga to appear conciliatory by dropping the Toronto Island condition did not so much as gain the mayor a sympathetic hearing from the minister (Petovello interview 2003).

The Greater Toronto Airports Authority's sixty-year ground lease, which commenced in December 1996, has exacerbated Mississauga's predicament. (The plural term "airports" is used even though the GTAA manages only Pearson.) Three of the board's fifteen members are nominees of the Region of Peel, but these directors (who are usually business executives) must be appointed formally by the GTAA board itself. They are required by the GTAA's bylaws to concern themselves solely with the airport's interests. This is not an obscure clause; it is top of mind for GTAA officials. In 1998 the GTAA board of directors rejected Peel nominee Lou Parsons on the grounds that he would be more loyal to Mississauga than to the airport. This rejection later was overturned by the courts (*Mississauga News* 1999). The board earlier had declined another nominee of the city and picked instead someone suggested by the Mississauga Board of Trade.

Meanwhile, the airport appeared to stall a long-planned and apparently badly needed western access road unless the city agreed to drop its eventually unsuccessful legal challenge to win the right to collect development charges on the airport's planned ten-year, \$4.4 billion expansion program. The airport refused to discuss noise-management issues with the city on the grounds that the authority was being sued by one of the residents' associations. Meetings of the board of directors are closed to the public.⁵

The governance structure – in which the board is, in effect, accountable to itself – gives enormous authority to its president and CEO, until recently was Louis Turpen. He had previously been manager of the San Francisco Airport, where he had frequent confrontations with Mayor Dianne Feinstein and State Senator Quentin Kopp (*San Francisco Examiner* 1995). Typical of most Mississauga observers, the head of the Mississauga Board of Trade perceives Turpen as a “gunslinger” and has compared him to New York’s legendary but unaccountable master builder, Robert Moses (Gordon interview 2002; Caro 1974). Turpen, for his part, did not hesitate to heap scorn publicly on his opponents.

Concerned perhaps that McCallion might still somehow get her loyalists onto the GTAA board, the sitting directors proceeded to rewrite the authority’s bylaws to state that the regions *collectively* would nominate several candidates and that the GTAA board would “consider” whether to appoint any of them. These changes were approved by Transport Minister David Collenette, an action that McCallion attributes to Collenette having been “a weak minister” (McCallion interview 2003).

Even the coordination of routine functions appears to have been affected by the political wrangling between Mississauga and the GTAA. According to the former city manager, the GTAA has refused to submit to the municipal fire department any structural blueprints or information on the location of hazardous material, even after pledges by the city to designate key officials who would undergo the strictest security clearance. The GTAA has likewise refused to submit its projects to the city for building permits, a practice which the federal government followed when it had direct charge of the airport (O’Brien interview 2003).

WATERFRONT REGENERATION: THE CITY IN THE LEAD

Until the 1970s, policy and planning concerning harbours and waterfront land use on Mississauga’s fifteen-kilometre-long Lake Ontario shoreline went largely uncoordinated among the many public bodies that had a stake and ownership. The federal government owned Port Credit Harbour and leased parcels of it to private parties without prior consultation with the municipality. The Government of Canada also retained ownership of a thirty-acre, largely derelict site in southeastern Mississauga, which had served as a military training area during the Second World War. The provincial government had acquired some land years earlier in anticipation of the South Peel Water and Sewage System, although some of it was leased to the municipality for park purposes. Ontario Hydro, a provincial Crown corporation, owned and operated the massive Lakeview Generating Station. In the late 1960s, the Credit Valley Conservation Authority (CVCA) began leasing or acquiring its own parcels

of land as part of the initial steps towards a scheme for regeneration (CVCA and Crysler and Lathem 1972; CVCA 1983; Kennedy interview 2003).

When one public body acted, it usually did so with minimal consultation with the other public bodies, unless agreement with another was a legal necessity. Thus, for example, in the early 1950s the federal government built, with little warning, a huge \$4.5 million structure on its harbour lands in Port Credit to accommodate industrial marine vessels, mainly those of Canada Steamship Lines.⁶ When the federal government decided that a breakwater was needed just offshore near Port Credit, it decided in 1974 to partially sink a large rusty surplus freighter, the *Ridgetown*. Some residents objected at the time to what they considered an eyesore (Mississauga, with Hough, Stansbury, and Woodland 1987).

In 1974 the federal government's industrial harbour building lost all its tenants as large-vessel traffic ceased completely around Port Credit. A long-term lease (in effect until 2035) with a private entrepreneur, who agreed to convert the terminal into a recreational docking facility, was then negotiated. Again, there appears to have been no serious consultation with other levels of government (Blanchard interview 2003).

Indications of intensifying cooperation between local and federal officials appeared finally in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when the city and the CVCA persuaded the federal government to construct a \$1.5 million breakwater in order to create dozens of new docking opportunities at the CVCA's new park, adjacent to the Lakeview Generating Station (Kennedy interview 2003). The federal government was also persuaded by the municipality to clean up the serious silt problem in Port Credit Harbour. The silt was proving to be an obstruction to the pleasure craft (Carr and Ruffini interview 2003) in what had become one of North America's largest freshwater recreational harbours (Mississauga, PBD 1990; Crombie 1992, 279).

A more fundamental change took place in 1984. The federal government's lease with the Port Credit Yacht Club (one of the major tenants at Port Credit Harbour) was set to expire in five years. The yacht club was eyeing new facilities at Lakefront Promenade Park, beside the generating station. Meanwhile, the city learned that the private entrepreneur who was leasing the former Canada Steamship facility was developing a proposal to purchase the site outright and redevelop it. Given the potential controversy, the mayor and local bureaucrats decided that it was time for the city to have a plan (Mississauga, PBD 1990, 11).

The ensuing Port Credit Harbour Study was promoted by the mayor as a potential formula for recreational and economic expansion. It became a multi-year, increasingly more expansive planning and implementation process, involving the city, the provincial government, the federal government, the Region of Peel, and the CVCA (Port Credit Harbour 1985, 4). What is especially significant for our purposes, however, is that thenceforth the City of

Mississauga was always the leading – indeed, the dominant – public body in this multilevel, multilateral process. The steering committee for the Port Credit Harbour Study, which concerned itself mostly with federal land, was made up primarily of city staff, with only one person representing the federal government.

All the officials at the table were at liberty to comment on any aspect of the matters at hand, even if these lay outside their jurisdiction (Barron interview 2003). This appears to have been possible because all acknowledged the city's leading role, since it was the one municipality that would be affected directly. It was also understood from the early stages that the city would shoulder most of the costs. The parties likewise acknowledged that the city had more expertise in land-use planning than any of the other public bodies (Carr and Ruffini interview 2003; McCallion interview 2003).

Furthermore, as of the mid-1980s, federal policy has called for the divestiture of all small-craft harbours (Blenkarn 1987). By then, the Government of Canada had fewer than a dozen staff overseeing its more than four hundred small harbours in Ontario, western Canada, and northern Canada. The staff did not have the resources to take a detailed interest. "We tried to operate in a non-confrontational way with the municipalities," explained Duane Blanchard, regional director for small-craft harbours, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (Blanchard interview 2003). "We recognized [the municipalities] as partners. It made sense. We weren't trying to build a federal empire. We were trying to get this stuff managed as well as we could for as little as we could ... We let them be the lead." He added that the province has been involved in these municipal-federal relations only where it has a contractual interest in particular properties, although the federal government tried initially and unsuccessfully to divest all the small-craft harbours to the provincial government and to let it deal with the municipalities or other interested parties.

City politicians and bureaucrats who were involved in the Port Credit process recall that there was no organized public movement pushing for it (confirmed by Carr, Ruffini, and Kennedy interviews 2003). The impetus seemed to come from within the bureaucracy and was quickly endorsed by the mayor. Although she involved herself only at strategic moments, she remained abreast of developments to the point that the chief federal official involved attests that he constantly "felt" her presence (Blanchard interview 2003).

AFFORDABLE HOUSING: LESS ASSERTIVENESS

Mississauga is not a strictly affluent municipality. It has neighbourhoods where poverty is a serious and pervasive problem. The waiting list for the Region of Peel's non-profit housing corporation stands at almost 20,000. In 2000 the

region opened a forty-bed homeless shelter in Mississauga, which immediately became filled to capacity. Between 1995 and 2002, only seventy-nine new rental spaces were created (sixty of which were considered high end) in the otherwise rapidly growing region. In 1999, 21.3 percent of children under fourteen were living in poverty in Mississauga (Layton 2000, 89–92; Peel 2002).

“Never one to shrink from a fight, Mayor McCallion has launched offensive measures on three fronts,” argues Jack Layton in his recent book on homelessness. “She delivered blistering and very public criticisms of the federal government’s abandonment of its affordable-housing mandate; she worked with her communities to establish emergency shelters; and she dispatched Peel Region housing agency head Keith Ward to help create the National Housing Policy Options Strategy of the FCM. A McCallion unleashed is a force that few voluntarily contend with. After all, as *Toronto Life* put it, ‘Her Town, Her Rules.’” But in the very next paragraph Layton presents a somewhat more subdued picture: “Not that an explosion of affordable housing has begun in Peel Region. A summer 2000 policy and planning document put together for Peel Regional Council sets aside some modest funds for small affordable housing projects and supportive initiatives for the homeless, but, as so many other communities, Peel is waiting for Ottawa” (Layton 2000, 91–2).

Which scenario best describes the local stance: assertive, proactive, progressive, or reluctant, not particularly assertive, and waiting but not pushing too hard? A casual observer might conclude that the local elected officials are tireless crusaders for affordable housing. Seldom do a few days elapse without a stirring speech by the mayor urging Ottawa to do more. Moreover, the regional non-profit housing corporation, established in 1977, was the first in the Greater Toronto Area after Metropolitan Toronto’s, and it is highly regarded in the human services sector.

Yet a closer examination reveals that the municipal politicians are far less assertive than is suggested by the public image they project. Mississauga council has, over the years, passed several resolutions that have specifically shunned an active role in promoting affordable housing. In 1995 the new Progressive Conservative provincial government pushed through legislation repealing the previous government’s prescribed targets for ensuring affordable housing as part of the land-use planning process. After Bill 20 received royal assent, Mississauga council deleted the following statement in the updated draft official plan: “The City will provide opportunities to ensure that on a City-wide basis a minimum of 30% of new housing units will be affordable” (Mississauga PBD, n.d.).

The homelessness and affordability problems have figured prominently in the headlines in the Greater Toronto Area, especially since 1998, when Canada’s Big City Mayors’ Caucus (which includes Mississauga) declared the problem to be a “national emergency.” Toronto Mayor Mel Lastman promptly

appointed a Mayor's Task Force on Homelessness. The reverberations were felt in Peel (where housing is addressed at the regional level).

In 1999, following Toronto's report, the Region of Peel appointed its own Task Force on Homelessness, although this one consisted primarily of regional staff. Its recommendations called for a much expanded role for the region and both senior levels of government, including re-engagement by the federal government in housing at least to the extent of the 1980s (Peel 1999).

Although new emergency shelters were established, and although the region's housing staff are respected by their professional colleagues and by many advocates, most of the task force's recommendations for local initiatives have not been implemented. The region has not revised its strategic directions to place more emphasis on housing. Staff reports recommending new measures must therefore be justified by referring to the rather vague "Goal 3" in the strategic directions, which states that there will "be a strong and effective regional government," or the strategic direction calling on the region "to act as a leader and advocate on issues of Regional concern" (Ward et al. 2001).

In late 1999, federal Labour Minister Claudette Bradshaw announced the allocation of \$753 million over three years to assist homeless Canadians and to prevent homelessness. In March 2000, regional staff reported to their political superiors: "[A] number of preliminary decisions may have already taken place regarding the allocation of \$250 million. It also appears to staff funding may be directed towards 10 cities identified as facing acute homelessness. Peel Region was not included" (Peel 2000). Staff urged councillors to demand federal support. Although council concurred, it seems that very little behind-the-scenes lobbying had taken place before the regional public servants urged their political superiors to take up the mantle – and not much has happened since.

This apparent sluggishness does not characterize local advocacy on all social programs. There are some files on which the local politicians have been more assertive. For example, Regional Chair Emil Kolb pushed hard, and successfully, to launch a federal-municipal pilot project, the Sponsorship Breakdown Program. Under this plan, the federal government and Peel Region have agreed jointly to be assertive in recouping social service costs from sponsors of immigrants whose sponsoree becomes a burden on the welfare system. The region has also been sending a bill (which goes unpaid, of course), with accumulating interest, to the federal government for all social service costs incurred by refugees (Kolb and Maloney interview 2003).

Regional staff have been working on ideas for pilot projects related to social housing (Ward interview 2003), but the politicians appear not to have taken up the mantle in an assertive manner. When asked by the author on which issue she spends more time, housing or immigration, the mayor replied without hesitation that it is the latter (McCallion interview 2003).

MUNICIPAL ADVOCACY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In the above cases, we see the local leaders tenaciously pursuing federal policies and arrangements that generate local benefits without requiring new local social investments, or those that seek a competitive advantage over other cities, such as preventing what was perceived as an attempt by local Toronto interests to control the airport. But we see a reluctance to become actively engaged in redistributive issues.

This portrait is consistent with Paul Peterson's theory of urban political economy, developed in his 1981 book *City Limits*. To understand the overriding thrust behind local priorities, we must understand that "city politics is limited politics" (Peterson 1981, 4). Cities do not make war or peace. They cannot impose tariffs. They cannot prevent outsiders from entering their jurisdiction. They are thus forced to exist in an extremely volatile economic environment, where they can do little to shield themselves from competition with other cities. As a result, cities prefer "developmental" policies (which are likely to expand the local economy) over redistributive policies, such as housing and welfare services. To put it simply, a city with generous redistributive policies and without a much greater fiscal capacity than its neighbours is likely to be unattractive to wealthy taxpayers but attractive to needy citizens, who pay little in taxes to the municipality but require more services than their more affluent fellow citizens. According to Peterson, the nature of local leadership, the machinations of elites, and the relative strength of various interest groups are all shaped by and exist within this framework.

"Developmental" policies are not necessarily of the same ilk. They can include everything from downtown redevelopment to building a new zoo – anything that is likely to attract business and bolster the prosperity of the city, taken in the aggregate. Peterson observes that cities' propensity to favour developmental initiatives even spills over into intergovernmental relations. He finds, for example, that it is too simplistic to assert that local governments' failure to implement many of President Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" initiatives can be attributed to the "complexity" of the programs. Economic-development-oriented programs (such as federal money to build roads and infrastructure) were implemented successfully, but many redistributive programs languished. In the former case, the federal government and local governments had congruent interests. In the latter they did not (Peterson 1981, 87–8).

On the Pearson Airport file, although Mississauga's mayor worked hard on behalf of the expansion and modernization of the old terminals, she was less enthusiastic about defending the neighbourhood interests articulated by organizations representing residents who would be affected by aircraft noise generated by the new runways. The mayor cited the economic benefit of having Canada's largest (and expanding) airport within Mississauga's boundaries.

It is almost certain that this benefit would far outweigh a possible decline in the property values of some residences, a decline that even the negative report of the federal Environmental Assessment Panel expected to be minor (Canada, EAP 1992a, ch. 4).

The residents argued that the 1978 official plan – based on the stated assumption (which was not challenged at the time by federal or provincial authorities) that there would be no new runways at Pearson – represented a “social contract” with the community. This interpretation was supported by the MP for Mississauga East (Canada, EAP 1992b, 271; Searle interview 2003). It was rejected by the city, however, which asserted that there were no legal guarantees to this effect from the federal government and that “the Doctrine of Paramountcy continues to rule” (Marc Neeb, Mississauga airport liaison officer, in Canada, EAP 1992b, 90).

To be sure, the mayor did manoeuvre in an attempt to ensure that any new airport authority would not be constituted so as to shift negative effects (such as noise) to Mississauga. But she always supported expansion. As she complained in 1995 to the Senate committee: “Here we sit with Canada’s most important airport and no action [on expansion].” She also told the senators, “We have 101 Japanese companies in our city. We have 86 German companies, and we consult with each company as they move in as to why they chose Mississauga. I would say that eight times out of 10 it is the airport. Others are because our taxes are the lowest. I am sure you know that we are a debt-free city. I thought that Ottawa might like to know that especially” (Canada, Senate 1995b, issue 20, p. 10).

Consider also the only airport-related issue that the City of Mississauga has pursued aggressively since the Greater Toronto Airports Authority’s ground lease took effect – namely, the unsuccessful judicial dispute that Mississauga launched against the GTAA to get the latter to pay development charges to the city on the planned \$4.4 billion expansion. By failing to pay, the mayor charges, the GTAA has been turning the airport into “a city within a city” (McCallion interview 2003).

With regard to waterfront regeneration, the city became active even without previous public pressure to do so. In recent years, as regeneration has spread beyond the relatively contained Port Credit Harbour to include vast tracts of shoreline, the city has brushed off neighbourhood resistance to the prospect of increased traffic and disturbance, arguing that property values are likely to increase markedly (Kennedy interview 2003).

The local reluctance to be more assertive on housing is not surprising considering that the mayor of Mississauga appears to be almost as critical of the regional staff as she is of the federal government. In her interview with the author, Hazel McCallion called Peel’s housing managers “empire builders.” She argued that the region’s housing stock should be contracted out to a private firm and that the federal government’s housing strategy should be based

entirely on rent subsidies and incentives to build private rental housing rather than public housing. Although she spoke passionately about the right of every Canadian to lodging, she conceded that she is reluctant to seek support for expanding the region's housing initiatives, because the matter ought to be strictly federal: "Otherwise, Milton [which borders Mississauga on the west] could get away with doing nothing and the problem would be shifted here" (McCallion interview 2003). According to the mayor, housing should be a federal and not a local matter precisely because it is a basic human right.

There is evidence that when a formerly dormant issue becomes entangled with the municipality's developmental interests it rises accordingly on the city's intergovernmental agenda. Until recently, public transit in Mississauga had been regarded as a social service, a method of transportation for those who cannot afford an automobile.⁷ Even in the six years before the provincial government's downloading of transit costs, Mississauga's transit system had gone without any expansion, despite the rapid population growth (McCallion 2003a).

In recent years, however, with a marked increase in traffic gridlock, the municipality has come to see an effective public transit system as critical to the economy. "All levels of government need to deal with this pressing issue with speed if we are to maintain our competitive edge in the world arena," wrote the mayor in an article (2003a). McCallion has been calling loudly for more federal and provincial investment in transit, including dedicated gas taxes, which now appear to be in the offing. This, along with timely infrastructure funding and the uploading of housing responsibilities, are what she sees as the most important planks in a "new deal" for municipalities (McCallion 2003b).

THE "SELF-HELP" THESIS AND MUNICIPAL-FEDERAL RELATIONS

Peterson uses the term "able servant," as opposed to "inefficient slave," to describe local leaders who tenaciously pursue the economic productivity of their cities. Does this description apply to Hazel McCallion's relations with Ottawa, or does it omit some important dynamics of local leadership?

Peterson describes in detail only one "able servant," New Haven Mayor Richard Lee, who, with great "entrepreneurial skill," saw to the execution of a major program of downtown redevelopment that involved significant investment from other governments. Peterson claims that this program was indisputably an economic boon to the city because it made the downtown more accessible to automobiles (and to the shoppers who drive them) and because it encouraged middle- and upper-income residents to move into new high-rises in the core. Moreover, it supposedly did not cost the city a penny,

since most of the money was extracted by the mayor from the federal government (Peterson 1981, ch. 7).

Whether or not Peterson's glowing evaluation of downtown redevelopment is accurate (the hollowing out of many American downtowns has been exacerbated by misguided redevelopment schemes), it must be acknowledged that there are very few economic development initiatives in which a municipality can participate directly that come free of charge to the city. Yet initiatives requiring local investment, if pursued, may well result in enormous stimulus to the local economy.

But what if local leaders have built a reputation on rigid fiscal conservatism, even if it sometimes defies the city's economic interest? What if a local leader must tread carefully to protect political credibility that is based on foundations that are not strictly economic? In short, does politics matter more than Peterson allows? Here we find the bifurcation between the dispassionate prescriptions of the political economists and the calculations (and motives) of local leaders.

The "self-help" or "prospective power" thesis is an apt moniker for the leadership analysis developed by Richard Neustadt in his famous study *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*. It is based on the assumption that an American president's starting position as a leader is weak because most of his powers are shared, *de facto* or *de jure*, with others. His effectiveness (measured in influence over the long term) is thus based not strictly on decisions examined in isolation but on what calculations he makes that might in future give him leverage over other matters or political actors.

Neustadt's framework requires heavy doses of pragmatism, caution, a willingness to forgo immediate success in anticipation of future gains, even on unrelated issues, and an approach that never strays too far from the grain of public sentiment (Neustadt 1990). By invoking the "self-help" thesis, we can gain a satisfying perspective on why an effective leader sometimes pulls back from acting in what appears to be the economic interest of the city. The level of risk may be acceptable to the city as a corporate entity, but the same level of risk may be unacceptable to a mayor concerned about other policies, about maintaining an air of strong, successful leadership, and about building a reservoir of influence for future decisions and controversies.

In her dealings with the federal government, Hazel McCallion has followed the self-help/prospective power principles very astutely. She has recognized that even issues over which her government has no formal authority whatsoever could affect her leadership adversely if they are not handled attentively and diligently and with an eye to the prevailing public mood. Her positions on airport issues have never diverged markedly from the grain of public opinion. For example, in the 1970s, as mayor of Streetsville and then as a councillor on Mississauga City Council, she opposed any expansion (Mississauga 1978, 38–42). In the 1990s, as mayor of Mississauga, her ambiguous position was

generally to support (albeit with conditions) new runways that would cause airplanes to fly over neighbourhoods.

Without the aid of opinion polls or a formal network of advisers, McCallion had sensed that the mood of the municipality was far more complex than it had been in the 1970s. Whereas in the 1970s local economic expansion and residential development were almost synonymous, and whereas at the time a far greater proportion of the municipality's population lived in the eastern neighbourhoods (which were under the proposed flight paths), by the 1990s the population was much more dispersed, and many in Mississauga regarded Canada's largest airport as a major economic asset to the city. The Mississauga Board of Trade, which did not exist when the earlier controversy was raging, favoured airport expansion without conditions. Furthermore, the residents' movement of the 1970s was certainly more vociferous than its counterpart twenty years later. This probably was partly due to the fact that aircraft in the early 1970s were more noisy than in the early 1990s when "Chapter 2" jets were being phased out in favour of the quieter "Chapter 3" variety.

Although McCallion sometimes was criticized by leaders of the anti-airport-expansion residents' groups, she managed to contain the opposition and protect her local public stature through well-calculated public relations, such as refusing to attend certain airport functions or ribbon-cuttings because of the failure of the federal government (and later the Greater Toronto Airports Authority) to comply with the city's noise conditions. Far from enhancing the local economic balance sheet, these mayoral gestures alarmed the airport boosters in Toronto and even the board of trade in Mississauga (Stewart 1994), making them more wary of the city, and rendering them all the more determined to build in provisions to shield the new GTAA from any political influence. This may have harmed the mayor's prospects for affecting airport decisions, but it defused a potentially explosive local controversy that was threatening to erode what is arguably McCallion's most formidable political asset – the overwhelming popular support she receives from her constituents, making her the dominant figure at City Hall.

Although placating the residents in some respects, the mayor was also careful to ensure that they did not become emboldened. She resisted Transport Canada's attempt in early 1993 to establish its own community advisory committee with representatives of some of the vocal residents' groups (Ferenc 1993). When residents' angst over the runways grew louder, and when some groups demanded not only city support but also city funding to carry on their advocacy, McCallion created her own residents' advisory committee (as well as a business advisory committee) and tried to make it the focus for deliberations between the city and residents on the positions the city should take to the federal government. It appears that she and her council colleagues carefully controlled the information the committee received (Stewart 1993).

The battle for airport development charges can also be seen through a leadership lens and not simply in rational economic development terms. Consider, for example, that although the Mississauga Board of Trade was worried that appealing the initial ruling in favour of the GTAA would be futile and expensive (Gordon interview 2003), the city proceeded anyway. Although the city lost that battle and although its prospects for losing were always thought to be rather high (O'Brien interview 2003), it was by no means a futile fight from the mayor's point of view. Here was an issue around which the whole community could rally, including the business sector (at least initially) and the resident activists, who did not mind seeing the GTAA challenged. The case gave the mayor national attention and was seen as a very important test by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. Even in defeat, therefore, the mayor's stature was enhanced.

Despite the obvious economic benefit of some of the waterfront projects and the federal-municipal agreements that have been finalized, here too we find a divergence between what is probably in the objective economic interest of the municipality and what is in the perceived rational interest of its leaders. At the very least, it casts some of Peterson's analysis in doubt by demonstrating that it is not often easy to discern what is in the economic interest of a city. For example, Mississauga has not done anything to plan for its waterfront plan's proposed sport-fishing hall of fame, art gallery, or marine museum (Mississauga, PBD 1990). Such initiatives might qualify for funding, not only as infrastructure projects but under existing federal cultural investment programs. However, as is conceded by the mayor and the local councillor, such investment has not been sought. Instead, the city applied for and will receive waterfront funding through the Canada-Ontario Infrastructure Program to renovate an existing library and improve a park some hundred metres north of the shoreline.⁸

Part of the explanation may lie in the city's very conservative fiscal policy, which is frequently promoted as an example of "good management" but is not necessarily congruent with a program of economic expansion. The policy is conservative, not only by virtue of tax freezes or decreases (between 1992 and 2002 there was no increase on the city portion of the property tax bill) but also in its aversion to what many may consider acceptable risks. The local councillor, Carmen Corbasson, says that the proposed Port Credit tourist facilities (like the hall of fame and museum) will be left to the initiative of citizens, and she does not regard it as her role to be a facilitator or initiator of such projects (Corbasson interview 2003). The mayor, for her part, maintains that even if there had been federal or provincial funding, the city would almost certainly have had to assume a significant portion of the operating expenses (McCallion interview 2003). This factor alone, she believes, is compelling enough to put these projects on the back burner. In defending the above

assertion, the mayor points to the example of the city's \$76 million Living Arts Centre, which opened in 1997 with \$20 million from Mississauga's development charges fund and \$13 million from each of the senior levels of government. But the centre has had significant unanticipated operating deficits and has become a burden on the city treasury.

In a similar vein, although many of Mississauga's and Peel's objectives in their relations with the federal government have focused on economic development rather than social policy, this may sometimes be a function of what the local leaders have calculated to be likely to produce some results (a small success that they can deliver to their constituents) rather than being the most advisable in principle (a noble cause for which the municipality would have little to show for its efforts). Former Member of Parliament Bob Horner recalls that after the 1984 election he was summoned to the mayor's office and presented with a checklist of the mayor's ten most important demands from the federal government. No one has kept a copy of this list, but Horner insists that all the items were relatively small and local – money for railway overpasses, improvements around the harbour, and so on (Horner interview 2003). These matters could be arranged, and most have been. A demand concerning social policy would probably not be something that could be worked out for the city or the region alone. Indeed, the Mississauga councillor who chairs Peel's housing committee asserts that the paucity of forceful advocacy by local politicians is attributable to exhaustion and frustration with a perceived lack of federal progress (Mullin interview 2003).

NEXT STEPS

As the case of Mississauga reveals, an urban agenda is not necessarily a municipal agenda. Progressive civic movements and advocates of more federal intervention and activism in social policy areas affecting urban residents may find that their local leaders will champion their policies only half-heartedly. Knowing this, how should their strategies be fashioned? Let us consider the following two options.

BYPASS THE LOCAL LEVEL

In Mississauga, some groups demanding redress from the senior levels of government have devoted considerable effort to getting the municipal government outside. This is attributable in part to the stature of the mayor. As one MP said at a public meeting at which the mayor was present, "Everyone who lives in Mississauga knows the prowess of Hazel McCallion. If she wanted to stop the runways and she put her mind to it, she could" (*Mississauga News* 1993a). As we have seen, however, the municipal government may be very reluctant to

go beyond sympathetic public rhetoric in pursuing policies that have redistributive consequences. Even with federal support, such policies are likely to place an added burden on the local tax base and perhaps attract more needy residents to settle or remain in the city.

Although these economic considerations do weigh heavily on local policymakers, they are not always determinative. After all, the mayor has been publicly professing concern about the problem of homelessness, and this has helped draw attention to the issue, even if she has not always been working vigorously on the file behind the scenes. On the runaway issue, the mayor did show some deference to the neighbourhood groups, even in the face of pressure from the board of trade and even in the absence of concrete evidence that their property values would decrease. Might it still be possible, therefore, to enlist strong, spirited, and persistent participation from the municipal government in support of a progressive urban agenda? This brings us to the second option.

CULTIVATE AN ETHOS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

As the examples in this paper have shown, organized citizen pressure can sway the municipal government even to the point of defying the prescriptions of the economists. In a city whose leaders are astute at making calculations of prospective power – and at discerning the public pulse in order to make those calculations properly – efforts to alter the public pulse may bear fruit.

As mayor of the former town of Streetsville (1970–73), McCallion espoused a comprehensive progressive agenda based on protecting the environment providing more public amenities, and promoting heritage conservation, among other objectives. Streetsville (population 7,000, and centred around a historic downtown) was home to an active well-informed citizenry, an attentive press, and vibrant civic organizations (Urbaniak 2002a).

The same cannot be said of Mississauga, a fact conceded even by McCallion (interview 2003). Voter turnout in municipal elections seldom exceeds 25 per cent. Most residents' associations are moribund, tending to arise only to protest the occasional infill development project. There is no radio station focused on Mississauga, and the local cable television station serves all of Peel and part of the County of Dufferin. The Toronto media outlets do sometimes cover Mississauga issues, but seldom in depth. Despite the rapid population growth, the local press has been in decline for the past twenty years.

Perhaps, then, concerned citizens should focus initially on long-term mobilization strategies and on convincing the municipal government to nurture the conditions that make constructive civic participation a natural part of living in the community. Thus far, the municipality has been reluctant to do this (Urbaniak 2005, ch. 19). Moreover, although issuing statements of encouragement, the city has decided against contributing any funds to the nascent Mississauga Community Foundation (Prentice interview 2003), which has been

having trouble getting started. In many communities, such foundations play a critical role in studying and cultivating social capital.

Urban planning and design can also be faulted for Mississauga's civic stagnation. Streetsville was a compact, mixed-land-use community where people knew their neighbours. Much of Mississauga consists of sprawling subdivisions with few incentives for pedestrian circulation. There is usually a sharp division between residential and commercial areas, making it likely that people will use an automobile even for minor errands. Some reform may be possible on this front, however. In response perhaps to growing public unease and the apparently intensifying popular concern about the local environment, McCallion has been acknowledging recently that the city could have been planned better. She has been championing many principles of "Smart Growth" (see, for example, Central Ontario Smart Growth Panel 2003).

CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that the City of Mississauga does exert influence over some federal activities, though its objectives tend to be narrowly focused and developmental rather than redistributive. The combination of Paul Peterson's "city limits" thesis and Richard Neustadt's "self-help" thesis helps explain the city's positions.

The study of federal-municipal relations reveals more about these two levels of government than many social scientists have hitherto appreciated. It also prompts us to rethink some common assumptions. Are municipalities really the government's closest to the people? Are they the most sensitive to social needs? In what circumstances does Ottawa actually listen? Would cities be more sensitive if they had the money, or would other priorities get in the way? How do strong local leaders emerge in the absence of wide-ranging formal authority? Insofar as the large cities do pursue redistributive or socially progressive objectives in their intergovernmental dealings, are they acting in a manner that is not common among municipal governments?

To answer these questions, we need to bring the budding literature down from its sweeping characterizations to develop a series of case studies and comparative research enterprises that apply rigorous analysis to these issues. Whether or not a comprehensive "new deal" emerges, the questions raised by the intensifying rhetoric about cities should be a "big deal" to Canadian researchers.

NOTES

The author gratefully acknowledges John Stewart of the *Mississauga News* for his comments on an earlier draft of this paper and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for its doctoral support.

- 1 McCallion has been mayor of Mississauga since 1978, and she has served in one local elected office or another without interruption for the past thirty-five years. In each municipal election from 1985 on, she has polled more than 90 percent. Since 1991, she has not mounted any re-election campaign.
- 2 Indeed, proponents of the airport authority claimed that the new set-up would somewhat alleviate the situation whereby “local municipalities have no local control of federally managed airports.” See Peel 1992, UB-1(q).
- 3 Ibid. At one point the Liberal minority report even states, “The Prime Minister did not shrink from letting the Clerk of the Privy Council, Mr. Shortliffe, know that he wanted his friends ‘to get a piece of the action’” (II-116; emphasis in original).
- 4 Valo lasted as chair until shortly after the 1996 ground lease took effect. He was then offered a job as the airport’s vice-president of legal services. He therefore resigned as chair to take the new position. Within a few months he had suddenly departed, without any explanation being offered by the GTAA.
- 5 A request by this researcher to sit in on a board meeting was denied.
- 6 There are differing accounts about the federal motives for proceeding with this particular project, though the author’s interviewees who have first- or second-hand familiarity with this issue have suspected local favouritism of some kind. One version of events, articulated most assertively by former councillor Harold E. Kennedy, has it that the Liberal government of Louis St-Laurent believed that it could capture the Peel riding from the Conservatives, and that such an economic development project was part of the arsenal. Others, most notably former MP Don Blenkarn (a Conservative), assert that the Conservative MP Gordon Graydon was so well regarded on both sides of the House that he was successful in obtaining the project from a Liberal government.
- 7 The author served on the recent Citizens’ Task Force on the Future of Mississauga. This statement was made on several occasions by city manager David O’Brien in his meetings with the task force.
- 8 The federal portion of the funding is subject to a favourable review under the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*. The Credit Valley Conservation Authority will also receive funding to assist with the regeneration of Rattray Marsh Conservation Area in Mississauga. The total funding for local waterfront projects to be given to the Waterfront Regeneration Trust to disburse among its partners is \$4.6 million from both the federal and the provincial governments. See “Backgrounder,” www.superbuild.gov.on.ca/userfiles/HTML/nts_2_25603_1.html.

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