

PLANNING EXPERTS AND LOCAL REFORMERS: THE 1915 TOWN PLANNING ACT IN NOVA SCOTIA

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IPHS Conference,

July 2010

Draft: 11 June 2010

Abstract:

In 1912 the province of Nova Scotia was among the first regions of Canada to adopt a town planning act. Just three years later the province substantially revised its act under the guidance of Thomas Adams, town planning advisor for the Commission of Conservation. The paper examines the context within which Nova Scotia adopted and overhauled its early town planning legislation. While Canadian planning history generally credits Thomas Adams with rewriting the legislation, experience suggests that prominent and effective local actors were necessary to facilitate policy change in the regions. Archival sources reveal the catalytic role played by Robert McConnell Hattie, journalist, president of the Civic Improvement League of Halifax, and former municipal councillor. Changes to provincial legislation in Nova Scotia in 1915 represented a confluence of the interests of national institutions such as the Commission of Conservation, international town planning experts such as Thomas Adams, and local reformers such as Robert Hattie.

Early in the 1910s, Canadian provinces began to pass legislation to enable town planning. New Brunswick moved first, passing its act in April 1912, followed in May 1912 by Nova Scotia. Only three years later, in April 1915, Nova Scotia adopted a new town planning act. This paper explores the history of that transition and attempts to set the events in context. In so doing it suggests that the province of Nova Scotia may have been responding to changing national and regional economic conditions by trying to stay at the forefront of modern town planning efforts. While planning history has generally credited the international town planning expert Thomas Adams with almost single-handedly rewriting legislation in Canada, a review of events in Nova Scotia reveals the catalytic role played by local reformers eager to see town planning implemented so that they could modernize the city of Halifax.

The paper begins by reviewing the context of Canada and Nova Scotia in the early 20th century before discussing the circumstances under which Nova Scotia revised its town planning act in 1915.

THE NEED FOR PLANNING

The Progressive Era, from 1890 to 1920, was a time of rapid growth and change for Canada (Brown and Cook 1974). Confederation of four provinces in 1867 created the new nation of Canada; the constitution placed power over land use and management in the hands of the provinces. As additional provinces joined the confederation the west opened up for widespread immigration. In the late 19th century, the national government committed funds to building a railway network linking east with west. Alongside improvements in agricultural technologies, the railroad opened up the vast Prairies to farmers interested in supplying wheat to new international markets. While earlier waves of migrants had headed to Canada from the British Isles and America, by late in the century growing numbers of migrants came from southern, central, and eastern Europe (Brown and Cook 1974). Many immigrants took advantage of inexpensive land and the opportunities that went with it. Building booms in western towns paralleled population growth (Buckley 1952). The nation urbanized rapidly as industrial, finance, and economic capacity expanded: between 1870 and 1921 the urban population grew from 18.3 to 49.5 per cent of the country's total population (Gilpin 1986).

As Rutherford (1984) noted, by the turn of the 20th century experts had begun rendering critical judgement on Canadian cities: the journalist Herbert Ames exposed dreadful living conditions in Montreal while preacher and reformer J.S. Woodsworth presented strategies for humanizing urban conditions. Concerns about the problems of cities had become the subject of discussions in men's clubs and women's groups across the country. The "long crusade to purify city life" (Rutherford 1984, 437) had commenced in earnest. Reformers described town planning as part of a progressive solution to urban problems.

Figure 1: Map of Canada showing Halifax on the east coast



City Beautiful influences proved pervasive and persuasive in the years following the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 (Simpson 1985). From 1896 to 1910, powerful forces pushed for beautification of civic centres as local leaders tried to make Canadian cities seem sophisticated and cosmopolitan (Simpson 1985). Some cities established guilds or leagues committed to beautification and advocating projects of civic grandeur (Van Nus 1984); in 1905, the Halifax Board of Trade formed a citizens' committee to push for civic improvement (Nicholson 2000). The idea of planning monumental and memorable civic centres suited the boosterism of

the times: local entrepreneurial and professional elites pursued strategies and advertising campaigns to ensure that their cities grew quickly by attracting immigrants and industries (Artibise 1982; Gilpin 1986). Such civic boosterism fuelled the speculation in land that burned across the west up until 1913 (Artibise 1984). Investors from as far away as Britain poured money into western real estate: land values doubled between 1902 and 1907, and doubled again before crashing in 1913 (Saywell 1975). In those years many western cities expanded their borders to provide room for the growth they were certain would come. Saskatoon subdivided land six miles from the city centre (Saywell 1975). Edmonton and Calgary had approved enough land for one million people at a time when they had populations under 50,000: when the market collapsed, they were left holding land assessed for much more than it was worth, much of it serviced for people who would not come for decades (Artibise 1984; Gilpin 1986). Excessive land speculation created huge debt burdens for these western cities that had invested in infrastructure no one was using (Weaver 1984).

The desperate search for growth and the crisis generated by the collapse in western land prices reinforced the calls that reformers made for town planning in Canada in the early decades of the 20th century. The entrepreneurial experiments of Western cities that operated like “real estate casinos” (Weaver 1984, 458) demonstrated the need for municipal efficiency and regulation of land development. Inflation in land prices affected cities far to the east. Saywell (1975) noted that land prices climbed in Hamilton from \$20/foot in 1910 to \$200 in 1913; the depression of 1914-1915 hit cities such as Hamilton hard (Doucet and Weaver 1984). Reformers argued that local governments needed to be more fiscally responsible and focus on improving urban conditions.

Progressives began promoting town planning in Canada as early as 1905, when projects such as Letchworth Garden City took shape in Britain (Simpson 1985). In 1909, the Canadian government created the Commission of Conservation, headed by Hon. Clifford Sifton, to lead Canada in efforts to ensure the conservation of resources. The Commission hired Dr Charles Hodgetts as medical officer. Hodgetts promoted planning extensively in the period from 1910 to 1914, seeing it as essential to improving the health of people in urban centres (Wolfe 1994). Like other medical experts of his era, Hodgetts was especially critical of the dismal conditions experienced by people living in the overcrowded slums and dilapidated shack towns of Canadian cities (Saywell 1975). He saw planning as offering useful tools to improve urban life and municipal management.

From 1910 on City Beautiful planning ideas were seen as wasteful and excessive: those in the Commission turned increasingly to an interest in the City Scientific (Simpson 1985). Under the new Conservative Prime Minister, Robert Borden, whose government took office in 1911, national leaders became increasingly concerned about finding ways to make government more efficient (Brown and Cook 1974). British ideas of health and housing proved popular, displacing the earlier interest in American notions of beautification and governance (Nicholson 2000). The Commission and other organizations sponsored lecture tours by prominent British authorities, such as Henry Vivian, and planners such as Thomas Mawson, Raymond Unwin, and Thomas Adams (Schmitz 1912, Simpson 1985). Town planning promised to apply the principles of scientific management to urban conditions. It appealed to those hoping to modernize and reform cities.

With the railway nearing completion and western land parcelled off to farmers and speculators, the long boom of immigration and growth from 1896 petered off by 1913 and 1914 (Brown and Cook 1974). Scores of unemployed labourers released by the railway companies flooded major urban centres, contributing to labour unrest (Schulze 1990), fuelling concerns about “foreigners” (Brown and Cook 1974), and challenging local efforts to deal with unemployment and poverty. After the land market began collapsing in 1913, depression conditions overtook the country in 1914 and 1915.

Canadian cities experienced many of the same problems that faced other nations in this period. Urban centres had begun to show signs of age, and large numbers of immigrants found housing in crowded older housing and tenements. High land prices had pushed immigrants outside the city to find land to build their own small homes in what authorities called “shack towns” (Wetherell and Kmet 1991; Harris 1991, 1996); residents living on these small lots with wells and cess pools crowded together sometimes fell victim to typhoid or cholera. Visitors such as Raymond Unwin warned Canadians that they were repeating Britain’s errors from the Victorian era, and urged authorities to act to remedy conditions (Simpson 1985). By 1914, officials in the Commission of Conservation saw town planning as a multi-purpose tool to address urban problems and to manage growth more effectively (Weaver 1984). To spread the word about planning across the country and to help governments develop tools to implement change, the Commission recruited an internationally respected British town planning expert: Thomas Adams.

CONDITIONS IN NOVA SCOTIA

While most of the country crested the wave of immigration between 1896 and 1913, the Maritimes were “scarcely warmed by the boom” (Simpson 1985, 71). The population growth and inflation in land prices that hit the west bypassed Nova Scotia, for the most part. Similarly, prices continued to rise steadily in Halifax during the depression years after 1913 even as they fell dramatically in the west (Emery and Levitt 2002). Although the land speculation boom missed the region, local authorities were well aware of the rapid growth and boosterism emanating from the west. The largest city in the region, Halifax, was increasing in population during the period, but not as quickly as the population of other cities in Canada: its size ranking was steadily dropping (McCann 1982). Halifax had a history of economic strength during war time, as its harbour accommodated convoys and its shores hosted troops and those provisioning the war effort; during times of peace the city languished as its economy relied on shipping, resources, and finance (Fingard et al. 1999). The region industrialized during the mid-19th century as tariffs supported domestic industries in areas such as sugar, cotton, and steel production (Fingard et al. 1999). Following confederation, however, the centre of economic gravity in Canada moved west to where land was opening and migrants were flowing. By late in the 19th century, industrial enterprises had begun moving west, lured by access to markets and capital. The end of protective tariffs and rail subsidies undermined any early economic advantages eastern Canada enjoyed (Brown and Cook 1974). By the 1910s, power brokers in the east were feeling increasingly marginalized and anxious to take steps to improve regional prospects (Fingard et al. 1999). Cities in the east, like those in other parts of Canada, were struggling to cope with problems of disease and poverty associated with urban living: for instance, the fight against tuberculosis preoccupied decision makers across the nation (Box 1).

Box 1

Hon O.T. Daniels, Attorney-General of Nova Scotia, presentation at Fourth Annual Meeting of the Commission of Conservation, 1913

Public Health, a Federal Question

If there is any one thing common to the whole of Canada, it is public health. Take tuberculosis, with which we are trying to deal locally in Nova Scotia; what matter can be more easily discussed from one province to another, than tuberculosis? If there is any subject that this Commission could effectually deal with and assist us with, particularly in the Maritime provinces, it is this question of the prevention of disease throughout Canada, and the impressing on the Federal government of the necessity for dealing with this subject of public health.

(National Library and Archives, Daniels 1913, 4)

The reform movement got off to an early start in Halifax, the largest city in eastern Canada. A variety of organized groups – from the Board of Trade to the Local Council of Women – pushed local government to beautify, clean up, and otherwise reform the city (Fingard et al. 1999). A committee of the Board of Trade became the Civic Improvement League of Halifax by 1906 and lobbied extensively over the next decade for beautification and civic reform (Nicholson 2000; Roper 1985). In March 1911 the League organized a major campaign for what it and the local papers called “civic uplift”: John Sewall, a prominent reformer from Boston, spent a week in the city delivering rousing public speeches linking Christian duty with civic responsibilities, urban reform, and town planning (Nicholson 2000; Roper 1985). A young Halifax lawyer, Reginald V. Harris, wrote columns in local papers to push relentlessly for municipal reform, and in 1911 was elected to city council (Roper 1985). Harris spearheaded the Board of Trade’s efforts to have the province of Nova Scotia pass a bill in May 1912 to change the governance system in Halifax to a Board of Control: with five paid elected controllers running the city with the oversight of a smaller municipal council (Roper 1985). Reformers hoped that the new system would reduce political squabbling and enhance the efficiency of urban government: as Roper (1985) explained, however, the experiment failed, and Halifax returned to its ward-based electoral system a few years later.

Figure 2: Halifax development to 1894

[Source: http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/halifax_1894.jpg]



Two provinces in the Maritimes moved early to adopt town planning acts as part of the reform agenda. Simpson (1985, 75) noted the strong adherence to British precursors in the early acts: “The all-conquering British influence led to three provincial planning acts – in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia (1912) and Alberta (1913). Slavish copies of the British act of 1909, adopted hastily and without

adequate means of implementation, they were failures". This analysis minimized differences between the acts and cast little light on why some regions in Canada moved more quickly to adopt town planning legislation than did others. Simpson (1985, 75) suggested that local groups had been pushing planning for some years, noting that a "Halifax plan was the culmination of a civic improvement league campaign begun in 1907". Schmitz (1912, 219) reported that Halifax was inviting experts to advise "an influential body of citizens" on developing "a big scheme". The first town planning act in Nova Scotia passed the provincial legislature the same month as the bill reforming Halifax council's structure: the Civic Improvement League and the Board of Trade undoubtedly helped to bring the matters forward¹. Local actors had already begun taking steps to initiate town planning in Halifax and in Nova Scotia in the years before the Commission appointed a planning expert to do the same.

THOMAS ADAMS: PLANNING EXPERT

In 1913 Sifton and Hodgetts at the Commission of Conservation began trying to hire an expert in town planning to get Canadian cities on track (Armstrong 1968; Hulchanski 1978; Stein 1994). They believed that Thomas Adams, a British planner who helped draft the 1909 English Town Planning Act and who worked to implement it through the Local Government Board, was the best candidate (Hodgetts 1913; Simpson 1985). Hodgetts was impressed when he met Adams at a planning conference in Philadelphia in 1911. The British government declined Canada's request to allow Adams to make an extended visit to Canada in 1913, but in May 1914 Adams attended the National Conference on City Planning held in Toronto. In July 1914 he accepted the job of Town Planning Advisor to the Commission. Hodgetts and his colleagues described Adams as the "highest authority" on the topic of town planning (Simpson 1985, 77). Canadian reformers advocating town planning were delighted: they saw expert knowledge as essential to urban transformation (Rutherford 1984).

While Canadians were emulating the English, Canada lacked the centralized land use control at the heart of the British system. In Canada, the provinces control and manage land: the national government cannot force them to permit town planning. Since the Commission was a purely advisory body of the national government, Adams had to work with local officials and provincial governments to persuade them to adopt provincial legislation and regulatory tools that he thought could achieve good planning. Consequently, Adams embarked on tours of almost all the provinces in 1915, visiting Nova Scotia in February. As Simpson (1985, 78) indicated, "His aim was to establish planning as a central function of government at all levels, buttressed by an integrated structure of legislation, administration, public support and professional organization, education and expertise." Adams promoted a pragmatic and utilitarian approach that worked well with political leaders and progressive citizens at the time. In 1915 Adams proposed forming a national Civic Improvement League, which the Commission launched in 1916 to educate the public about and involve them in planning (Simpson 1985; Rutherford 1984). His visits across the country played an important role in rallying supportive reformers and convincing governments of the need for further action.

Simpson (1985, 85) argued that Nova Scotia "found its act of 1912 unwieldy and irrelevant", giving Adams an opportunity to replace it with a new one in short order. According to his biographer, Adams played the pivotal role in revising Nova Scotia's legislation and substituting his own model planning act in its place. The

¹ Neither Nicholson (2000) or Roper (1985), who write at length about the reform movement in Halifax in this period, say anything about the 1912 town planning act. [Nicholson (2000) erroneously describes the 1915 act promoted by the Civic Improvement League as the first town planning legislation in the province.]

next sections of the paper examine that presumption in some detail to expose the local dynamics at play in the process of legislative change in Nova Scotia. While Adams clearly lent weight to the process and provided direction for the text, local reformers facilitated the effort in ways not previously documented.

LOCAL REFORMERS IN NOVA SCOTIA

The search for archival material to explain why Nova Scotia rapidly replaced its original town planning legislation with a new bill led to the papers of Robert McConnell Hattie. Born in Nova Scotia in 1876, Hattie graduated from Dalhousie University in 1897; he was the editor of trade papers like the *Maritime Merchant* for five decades and served as a reform member of the Halifax City Council for a term during 1912-1913, before retiring due to illness (Nicholson 2000). Hattie was passionately involved in civic life and planning matters in Halifax from the early 1900s until his death in 1953. Fortunately for those interested in planning history in the region, Hattie donated an extensive collection of correspondence and other materials to the Public Archives of Nova Scotia: few other materials shed as much light on planning history in the province in this early period.

Hattie wore many hats during his years of service. He sat on and often chaired groups such as the Civic Improvement League, Anti-Tuberculosis League, Board of Health, Tree Committee, Town Planning Board of the City of Halifax, Library Committee, and the Board of Trade's Civic Committee. His efforts to promote the causes he supported proved innovative and relentless (see Box 2).

Box 2

Letter to members of the Halifax County Anti-Tuberculosis League,
November 10, 1909

Dear Sir or Madam:

The war department of the Kingdom of Good Health, having declared war on Tuberculosis, is anxious to engage the enemy. The Officer Commanding the Forces in Halifax is therefore desirous that the recruiting [of new members] should be accomplished successfully by the end of the week. There should be at least two or three thousand in the firing line, and enough ammunitions of war to carry on the campaign during the current year...This recruiting is urged as a DUTY which all good citizens owe their country. It is commended as a privilege of which all who can should avail themselves to do really patriotic work. Now is the time for every good citizen to come to the country's rescue and help rid it of Tuberculosis.
Yours Truly, R. M. Hattie

(Hattie Papers – Hattie 1909)

Although the Civic Improvement League of Halifax played a part in developing the original 1912 Act Respecting Town Planning (Hattie Papers, Civic Improvement League 1915a), Hattie's papers offer relatively few clues about who drafted the early legislation². Some materials from this period attest to Hattie's early interest in planning (Hattie Papers, Halifax Civic Improvement Board 1912, Halifax Civic Improvement Committee 1912). In 1913 he was giving public addresses on town planning (Hattie Papers, Hattie 1913). Along with Council minutes (Halifax Municipal Archives 1913a, 1913b, 1913c) Hattie's Papers indicate that as Alderman with the City of Halifax Hattie tried unsuccessfully to convince the City to hire a professional planning expert (Hattie Papers, Halifax City Council 1913d, 1913e, 1913f, 1913g, 1913h). As chair of council's civic improvement committee, Hattie presented several motions to council in January and February 1913 to borrow funds

² Investigation of other sources may help to answer this question.

for a city planning expert: although his motions won simple majorities, they suffered defeat under council's requirement for a two-thirds majority on some monetary measures. He worked tirelessly to promote planning through city committees, to little avail.

Hattie's papers show his deep involvement with the Commission of Conservation in Ottawa. He corresponded frequently with planning boards and groups in the United States, Britain, and other Canadian provinces regarding advances made in planning. Clearly, he was a progressive proponent of planning in the region.

After leaving Council in 1913, Hattie continued to advocate planning as President of the Civic Improvement League of Halifax and other committees on which he sat (Civic Improvement League, 1915a, 1915b). The League played a particularly strong role in promoting planning within the city, bringing in famous town planners like John Nolen, Thomas Mawson, and Ewart Culpin to give public presentations and applauding the efforts of other local groups in supporting visits by John Sewall, Raymond Unwin, and Henry Vivian (Hattie Papers, Civic Improvement League 1915a; Nicholson 2000). It seems likely that the success of the Civic Improvement League in Halifax may have inspired Adams to propose a national organization of the same name and purpose late in 1915: the national group launched well enough in 1916 but petered out quickly as Canadians focussed on the war effort (Simpson 1985).

Hattie undoubtedly recognized that without direct government intervention the commissions and committees that he sat on would continue to have minimal influence on development outcomes in Halifax. Given his frustrations in trying to get a town planning scheme approved and experts hired under the 1912 Act, Hattie looked for other ways to stimulate initiatives in the city. His extensive correspondence with Dr Hodgetts at the Commission, and later with Thomas Adams, indicated that he turned to them to exert influence on the provincial government. Hattie saw the federal government and its experts as capable of adding credibility to his attempts to bring town planning to Nova Scotia. While he and his colleagues approached town planning from the bottom up, they enlisted national experts to do the same from the top down.

Hattie's correspondence includes letters he received, reports, minutes, and annotated drafts of legislation. Few of his outgoing letters are preserved in the collection: consequently the material requires some interpolation and interpretation.

PROPOSING A NEW TOWN PLANNING ACT

By 1913, Hattie was corresponding regularly with Dr Hodgetts at the Commission of Conservation. In a letter of 13 May, Hodgetts (Hattie Papers, Hodgetts 1913a) advised Hattie that a date for a visit from Thomas Adams to Nova Scotia had not been set. On 29 May 1913 Hodgetts (Hattie Papers, Hodgetts 1913b) wrote to request information on any actions taken by the province under its 1912 act, perhaps as part of the discussion at the Commission about whether to hire a town planning advisor. On June 2 (Box 3) Hodgetts acknowledged the frustration that Hattie faced in trying to get Halifax to adopt a town planning scheme under the act, and confirmed the need for further action (Hattie Papers, Hodgetts 1913c). In association with Lieutenant-Colonel Jeffrey Burland and members of the Health Committee of the Commission, Hodgetts was working during this period to establish a model town planning act for Canada that might have greater effect than the early legislation (Armstrong 1968; National Library and Archives, Commission of Conservation 1914).

Box 3

Dr Hodgetts' letter to Hattie, 2 June 1913

It is quite apparent that, with the legislation now in force in several of the provinces and the apparent inertness on the part of municipal authorities, some active work must be carried on if we are to succeed not only in town planning but also in housing matters.

(Hattie Papers, Hodgetts 1913c)

Hodgetts first presented the draft model act during the May 1914 National Town Planning Conference in Toronto. Thomas Adams offered comments on the draft, comparing it with the 1909 British Town Planning Act. Cautious about appearing overly critical, Adams noted differences in land use laws and political systems between the countries, and volunteered to work with the committee to rewrite the legislation (Commission of Conservation 1915a).

Following the conference Hodgetts toured several provinces to promote the model act. He journeyed to Halifax in July 1914 to attend the Anti-Tuberculosis League Conference. On 14 July the Civic Improvement League of Halifax (Hattie Papers, 1914) organized a meeting with him: its advertisement promised a “Conference with Dr. Hodgetts Re: Town Planning” to discuss remodelling the 1912 act. This is the first concrete indication in Hattie’s papers that locals were considering revising the Nova Scotia act adopted two years earlier.

On behalf of the Civic Improvement League of Halifax, Hattie followed up on the issue over the next months, becoming the lead local agent pressing for a new act. Along with a provincial government representative, Hon. George Faulkner, Hattie formed a board of prominent reformers and political leaders to revise the act. As Thomas Adams assumed the role of Town Planning Advisor in late July 1914, Hattie’s correspondence with Hodgetts gave way to a regular exchange of letters and draft legislation with Adams. Shortly after Adams came to Ottawa, Hodgetts left Canada to join the war effort, giving Adams the opportunity to revise the Commission’s model town planning act (Commission of Conservation, 1914). The new version became the basis of discussions between Adams, Hattie, and the board.

As reformers in Halifax worked on considering revisions to the act, Adams reported on planning in Canada to his colleagues in Britain. Writing about Nova Scotia’s 1912 legislation in the *Town Planning Review* Adams (1915, 20) said, “Up to the present no action has been taken in Nova Scotia, but the powers given under the provincial Act and the Halifax City Charter, together form the most advanced legislation in the Dominion.” Despite his praise for the original legislation, he added that he planned to spend a week in Nova Scotia in February 1915 to discuss amendments to the act.

Generating local momentum for change, Hattie corresponded in late 1914 and early 1915 with municipal and provincial politicians in Nova Scotia on the need for amendments to the 1912 act (Hattie 1915a, 1915b, 1915c). He requested permission from Halifax Council to form an inter-governmental committee comprising provincial politicians, provincial officials, municipal politicians from Halifax and Dartmouth, and local community groups to address the need for an amended act. While many of Hattie’s early efforts with Halifax council had failed to gain traction, this request was approved. The visit of Dr Hodgetts in 1914 had evidently helped Hattie in his organizing for town planning.

Once the initial inter-governmental committee formed in 1915, Hattie invited prominent political leaders from the neighbouring city of Dartmouth to join. The

committee worked closely with Adams and Hattie to draft what would become the 1915 Town Planning Act. Adams visited Halifax in late February / early March 1915 to finalize the wording of the act and promote it in the community (Box 4). With considerable haste the group developed the bill for the provincial legislature, arranging first reading of the legislation on 23 March 1915. Table 1 illustrates the key events and milestones framing the history of the 1915 act. By late April 1915 the act was law.

Table 1: Key events leading to the 1915 Town Planning Act in Nova Scotia		
Date	Event	Key Player(s)
Dec. 8, 1909	British Town Planning Act adopted	Thomas Adams John Burns
May 3, 1912	1912 Town Planning Act adopted in N.S.	[Civic Improvement League of Halifax]
1913	Commission of Conservation begins to draft Model Planning Act	Dr Hodgetts
1914	Dr Hodgetts and R. M. Hattie communicate about the Commission of Conservation Model Planning Act	Dr Hodgetts Robert Hattie
May 1914	International Town Planning Conference, Toronto	Thomas Adams Dr Hodgetts
May-July 1914	Commission of Conservation Model Act amended and promoted to the provinces	Dr Hodgetts
July 2, 1914	Dr Hodgetts visits Nova Scotia to present the Model Planning Act. Hattie organizes a conference with the Civic Improvement League and Hodgetts to discuss options for amending the 1912 Act.	Dr Hodgetts Robert Hattie Civic Improvement League of Halifax
July 1914	Board formed in Nova Scotia to review the 1912 Town Planning Act	Robert M. Hattie Mr. Faulkner
July 1914	Thomas Adams appointed to Commission of Conservation	Thomas Adams Dr Hodgetts
Jan. 30, 1915	Thomas Adams and R.M. Hattie begin communicating about a proposed visit to Nova Scotia. Drafts of a new Nova Scotia Planning Act, with amendments, are exchanged between the two.	Thomas Adams Robert Hattie
Feb. 23- Mar. 1, 1915	Thomas Adams visits Nova Scotia.	Thomas Adams Robert Hattie
Mar. – April, 1915	Hattie and Adams continue to exchange drafts of the Act and letters about proposed amendments to the draft.	Thomas Adams Robert Hattie
March 23, 1915	First Reading of the 1915 Act Respecting Town Planning	Nova Scotia Legislature George Faulkner
March 31, 1915	Second Reading of the 1915 Act Respecting Town Planning. Draft Act is reviewed by the Committee on Law Amendments	Nova Scotia Legislature
April 8, 1915	Committee on Law Amendments offers no amendments to the draft Act	Nova Scotia Legislature
April 12, 1915	Third Reading of the 1915 Act Respecting Town Planning	Nova Scotia Legislature
April 23, 1915	1915 Act Respecting Town Planning passes	Nova Scotia Legislature

Box 4

Story in Civic Improvement League newsletter, 15 February 1915

Nova Scotia Town Planning Act

It is in connection with the Town Planning Act that Mr. Adams is coming to Halifax. This Act was passed in 1912, Nova Scotia along with New Brunswick being the pioneer in North America in planning legislation. This Act was promoted by the Civic Improvement League. The Dominion Government, through the Conservation Commission [sic] is now endeavoring to interest all the provinces in Town Planning and we think it is to the credit of Nova Scotia and the Civic Improvement League that we should have here set the pace for the Dominion. But our Act requires some revision, and steps need to be taken to promote the idea of town planning, both in Halifax and some of the provincial towns. At the League's request, Mr. Adams is to pay a visit of several days to advise and help things along.

(Hattie Papers, Civic Improvement League, 1915a, 1)

Influencing the form and language of the new Nova Scotia act was a high priority for Adams: he mentioned his intention to travel to Nova Scotia during his first speech in Canada in 1914 (Commission of Conservation 1915b). While not all of the drafts circulated between Adams and Hattie have survived, letters show that Adams and the inter-governmental committee collaborated in crafting the 1915 legislation. In January 1915, Adams discouraged local efforts to amend the original act, instead favouring replacement by a new version adopting the principles he intended to embed in the model act. Rather than sending Hattie amendments to the old act, Adams dispatched an entirely new draft. This may have caught Hattie and his committee off-guard, as Adams apologized for having sent the new draft without first explaining why the 1912 act should be completely scrapped (Hattie Papers, Adams 1915g) (Box 5), and send an explanatory document (Hattie Papers, Adams 1915h). Throughout the exchange the tone remained polite and formal.

Box 5

Adams' letter to Hattie 15 February 1915

I think the best thing to do would be to drop the Act of 1912 and to consider the new Act on the lines of the revised Act prepared by the Commission of Conservation. One important reason for this is to secure uniform legislation throughout the Dominion and to point to Nova Scotia as the example which other provinces should follow.

(Hattie Papers, Adams 1915g).

Adams' letter of 15 February 1915 included a lengthy critique of the 1912 legislation apparently written on 9 February 1915 (Hattie Papers, Adams 1915h). Adams discussed some minor word-choice issues, but his major concern dealt with the power that the earlier act granted to the municipality. He specifically criticized section three of the act: "Any city, town or municipality within the meaning of this Act may prepare such a town planning scheme with reference to any land within or in the vicinity of their area" (Nova Scotia Statutes 1912, Chapter 6, 112-113). Adams wrote that giving the municipality the power "to prepare a town planning scheme instead of getting permission to prepare it from a higher authority must be a serious weakness in carrying out a scheme", especially for areas outside a city's political boundaries (Adams 1915g, 1-2). His roots in a system of highly centralized control were clear: Adams reminded Hattie that under the British legislation, municipalities must ask permission to adopt plans from the higher level of government. Adams recommended changing section nine, which gave the municipality the power to set procedural regulations, as "procedure should either be determined by parliament or it should be provided in the Act that it will be determined by an impartial authority outside the municipality" (Adams 1915g, 2).

The degree of local authority permitted municipalities in the original Nova Scotia legislation evidently troubled Adams who hoped to create a nationally coherent planning system in Canada through ensuring that provinces had the tools necessary to impose standards and procedures. While Adams made some adjustments to suit Nova Scotia conditions³, he was pleased with the legislation created and used it to guide his work on the model town planning act he released later in 1915 (Simpson 1985). Adams remained deeply involved with Hattie as the bill made its way through various readings, continuing to craft amendments and recommend changes to sections he found wanting (Hattie Papers, Adams 1915k, 1915l, 1915m). In setting out the language of the legislation Adams accommodated some Nova Scotia particularities to meet his aim of supplanting earlier legislation with something that better approached his ideals and would support his efforts to transmit the new model act to other provinces. As Adams wrote to Hattie on 12 March 1915, “if Nova Scotia adopts that Act which I recommended I propose to recommend the Commission of Conservation use it as their model” (Hattie Papers, Adams 1915i); he wanted to make sure it was the best possible act. As Adams explained to Hattie, “I am very anxious to get Nova Scotia to adopt legislation which can be referred to as an example to the other provinces” (Hattie Papers, Adams 1915g).

The participation of national experts such as Hodgetts in 1914 and Adams in 1915 helped local planning advocates like Hattie move expeditiously to prepare a new act and get it before the provincial legislature in spring 1915. Hattie’s committee accepted Adams’ advice and paraded his celebrity status to advance their cause of promoting town planning in the region. In wartime Halifax, busy with provisioning Canadian efforts to help out the motherland in the European war, British experts enjoyed considerable cachet. At the same time, however, it is clear that Adams relied on local colleagues like Hattie to do the legwork and publicity necessary to encourage the legislature to act. Hattie greased the wheels by developing the political connections that made change possible. He and his colleagues at the Civic Improvement League built public support over a period of nine years to make it easy for Adams to be effective virtually overnight. Without the local support and logistics provided by Hattie, Adams could not have changed the laws of Nova Scotia in 1915.

Several times the length of the 1912 act, the 1915 legislation provided more detail and central control than the earlier version. It began with definitions before proceeding to require local governments to appoint town planning boards and develop town planning by-laws. A provincial commissioner would review the by-laws to decide whether to approve them. Once approved, plans would be binding on future development. While Simpson (1985, 84) described Adams’ Canadian planning acts as timid and disappointing, the Nova Scotia legislation took bold steps for its time. Hattie assured Nova Scotia legislators that they could certainly claim to be in the forefront of the field in 1915 (Box 6).

Box 6

Hattie’s draft letter of transmittal to the province with the bill,
4 March 1915

On the whole I think the Act will give wide powers without conflicting with private interests. It will put Nova Scotia in advance of any other province or country in the matter of Town Planning Legislation and I believe it does not go beyond the general public sentiment of the province.

(Hattie Papers, Hattie 1915b)

³ This interpretation draws on numerous letters and documents between Hattie and Adams between January and May of 1915. (Hattie Papers: Adams 1915 a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h,i,j,k,l,m,n,o,p; Hattie 1915 b,c,d.)

LEGACY OF THE 1915 ACT

Nova Scotia represented an early and important victory for Adams and the Commission of Conservation in transforming the planning system in Canada. The model town planning act Adams promoted in 1916 reflected the Nova Scotia experience. Adams retained a strong connection to Halifax, returning in 1917-1918 to assist with re-planning parts of the city damaged by the 1917 explosion of the Mont Blanc ammunitions ship in Halifax harbour (Weaver 1976), and leading efforts to strengthen mandatory provisions in the planning act in 1919 (Simpson 1985).

The role of the province in the process of legislative change remains somewhat murky. Hattie and others in the Civic Improvement League took the opportunity to promote a local agenda: they sought to force Halifax to adopt a town planning scheme by developing planning legislation that required local efforts towards planning. Adams sought to implement a national agenda of effective town planning to promote urban quality and efficient development (Box 7). Both groups needed the province to act because only the province could adopt the rules and regulations to enable or require planning. The records discovered to date portray the province as a compliant if somewhat silent partner in the process. The legislation seems to have stirred little interest and no opposition from other members of the legislature. The records of proceedings in the legislature offer few clues as to political reactions (Provincial Archives, Assembly of Nova Scotia 1915a, 1915b, 1915c, 1915d, 1915e). In the context of the times, it seems likely that provincial politicians and officials appreciated Adams' and Hattie's assurances that Nova Scotia was leading the country in adopting the most modern and powerful town planning legislation in the Dominion if not the world.

Box 7

Press release by Thomas Adams, 27 April 1915

Nova Scotia Takes the Lead in Town Planning Law

A Town Planning Act has been passed into law in Nova Scotia which will revolutionize the methods of developing real estate and controlling building operations in that province. The Act is to a large extent compulsory and is in advance of anything of the kind in the world.

(Hattie Papers, Adams 1915o)

Robert Hattie was a catalyst for town planning in Nova Scotia in the 1910s. Inquiries into the genesis of the 1915 legislation find Hattie's fingerprints everywhere. As Hattie and his colleagues discovered, however, it was easier to get provincial legislation adopted in Nova Scotia than to get town planning schemes approved within municipalities. By the time the Nova Scotia act passed, Canada was increasingly preoccupied with war in Europe. Cities had relatively little interest in planning, although many turned to zoning after the 1920s (Wolfe 1994). The momentum for town planning proved short-lived, and the act appears not to have been widely implemented. Although council appointed Hattie to its Town Planning Board in 1916, Halifax did not adopt a town plan for decades to come. Hattie must have felt intensely disappointed after the months of work he committed to developing the legislation and years of pushing for civic improvement.

Events leading up to the 1915 Nova Scotia town planning act provide insight into the role of national context, planning experts, and local reformers in the early years of planning in Canada. Moving provincial governments to adopt planning legislation required a combination of circumstances. If Nova Scotia had been growing quickly like the west with a booming economy, it may have had less interest in turning to town planning. By the same token, high rates of tuberculosis and a desire for growth and prosperity made planning appear to be an appropriate tool for progressive

governments. Without the direct intervention of Dr Hodgetts and Thomas Adams, it seems unlikely that Nova Scotia would have developed a new town planning act in 1915, despite Hattie's organizing. Yet the search for an explanation for the rapid about face in legislation between 1912 and 1915 led to evidence of the pivotal role of local reformers in the process. Robert Hattie and the Civic Improvement League of Halifax developed the momentum needed for building a local consensus about the need to revise the act. They assembled the key participants to move the legislature to action. While they respected the sage advice that Hodgetts and Adams offered, they did not simply accept everything suggested. Hattie actively engaged in the process of shaping the legislation to meet the objectives his experience suggested were needed in Nova Scotia. In this context, Simpson's (1985, 85) claim that Adams "largely drafted the new Act of 1915" minimizes the important contribution made by local actors.⁴ Adams certainly acknowledged his debt to Hattie in a letter shortly after his 1915 visit (Box 8).

Box 8

Adams' letter to Hattie, 12 March 1915

I think that the work that has been done in the maritime provinces by Mr. Burditt [of New Brunswick] and yourself has been of great value, both because [sic] of local results and because it will give the lead to the other provinces. I hope that sometime the citizens will realize the value of the work which you have been doing.

(Hattie Papers, Adams 1915i)

Although contemporary planning history seeks to place events in the context of the times, it can sometimes fall victim to a "big man" view of history. Biographies get written about famous people like Thomas Adams who played influential roles at pivotal points in time. Experts such as Adams documented their activities in journals and books that remain to offer notable insights into the period. The publications of national organizations such as the Commission of Conservation highlighted the accomplishments of their own staff but said little about local initiatives or contextual factors that influenced political choices in various regions of the country. By comparison, relatively few resources remain to provide insight on the activities of local reformers. If Robert McConnell Hattie had not recognized the historical value of the materials he accumulated and had not arranged to donate them to the Provincial Archives, the role he played with the Civic Improvement League of Halifax in changing early legislation might be lost. The archives Hattie created help to reveal the catalytic effect of community-based reformers who thought that town planning could improve public welfare in a time when Canadian cities were experiencing significant health, social, and economic challenges.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are grateful to Alan Ruffman and to staff at the various archives consulted for this research.

⁴ Other provinces which lacked effective local reformers proved much slower to adopt planning legislation in this period.

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