

**New role for municipalities**

# Cities to decide own fate?

by Dan O'Connor

During her recent visit to Halifax, Susan Fish suggested that Canadian cities should be given a new and more important role in planning urban policy, especially in the field of housing. The cities must have primacy in making social housing decisions because it is in the urban environment that the issues actually exist.

Fish, co-author of the Task Force on low-income housing, said that insistence on having primacy elsewhere is a useful smokescreen for avoiding the real issues of local areas. The upper levels of government should encourage and aid municipalities in the development of an overall policy.

"The most basic constraint on this happening is the myth of U.S. origins, that cities are non-partisan, non-political administrative units. Municipalities are very political and partisan. The reason is that every decision affects the distribution of resources — who gets what, when, where and how." She suggested that municipalities should be reorganized to recognize that societal values are brought forward at the municipal level. This is where the decision should be made as to where investment will go.

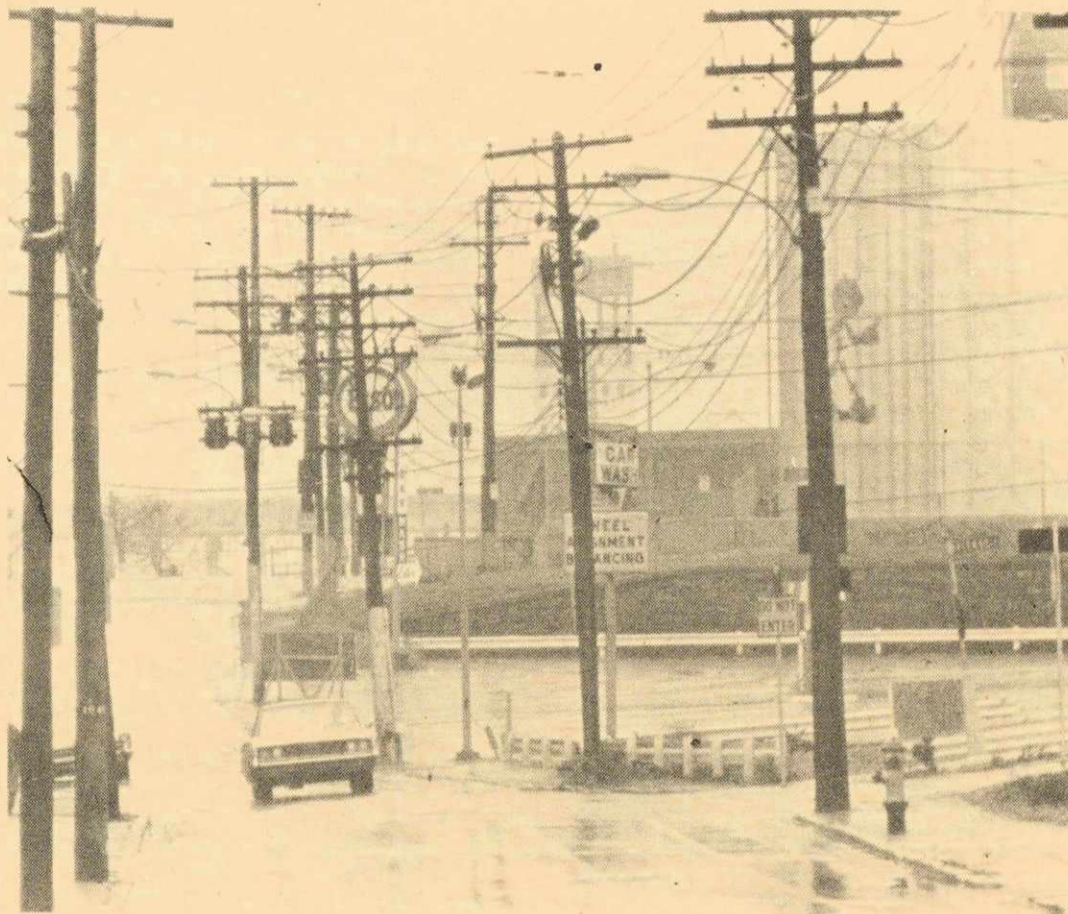
The purpose of changing the

organization of municipal government must not be to allow more efficient delivery of provincial policy. It should allow diverse groups and appropriate areas to bring forward interest groups' values. The change should facilitate bringing forward different perspectives so that all can be taken into account in making the decisions.

The structure of municipal governments is very important, and there are many variations that can be used. The financial area is also important.

"At the present time," she stated, "there is reliance on property tax which leads to serious biases in the selection of planning alternatives. Some alternatives are seen as out of the question. Opening them up for possible implementation is part of developing policy sensitivity at the urban level."

Another financial problem is that not all provinces can make massive fiscal transfers. Where this is the case, they should lobby for block federal grants limited specifically to purposes such as housing or transportation. The federal government should get out of the present programs, she said. It has a role in regional equalization and national financial development, and this can be done through mass agreements with the provinces



Lower Water St. is evidence of the results of urban planning only being done in Ottawa.

for the block grants.

The current problem, and distant from the possible solution outlined above, became evident at the federal provincial

housing conference in January. It was billed as a housing conference but some of the provinces wanted to look at the whole area — the federal role, the federal system and its appropriateness. This subject was put at the end because the feds just wanted to discuss the National Housing Act amendments.

"Alberta and Ontario said that they would go it alone because they do not like the federal priorities. However, this is not possible for most of the provinces. They are stuck with what Ottawa offers. They are in a bad, severely discriminatory and unjustified position.

"The accidental wealth of a province provides no grounds to

determine the degree to which it has the ability to make its own decisions. The poor provinces are currently under the thumb of a federal government worried about its political image, not about local needs and concerns."

As long as this continues, Fish sees no chance for municipal control of urban planning in Canada. Many cities are gaining the sophisticated research and planning staffs necessary for them to take the lead. However, they will never get it when the federal government won't cut the strings and the provincial government won't give them the necessary financial and institutional support.

## Marathon raises \$1700

by Larry Grossman

On Sunday, March 18, Youth Across Canada for the Mentally Retarded sponsored a forty-eight hour fund raising dance in the lobby of the Dal. SUB. The participants in the dance came from different schools throughout the Halifax area and danced for as many hours as they possibly could. This included some dancers who lasted the entire forty-eight hours.

Greg Jensen, a spokesman for the organization, stated that "the goal of the dance is to raise enough money to send fifteen to twenty Y.A.C.M.R. members to a leadership training program in Sydney. Any remaining money is to go to the Recreation and Social Services program."

Jensen stated that "each dancer was financially sponsored by an individual or



Some of the marathon dancers who helped raise \$1700

company for hour long periods throughout the dance. The couple who raised the most money and danced the longest, won a trophy."

Jensen was happy with the results of the dance which raised \$1,700. He stated that "the leadership training program would cost \$1,000 and the other \$700 would go to the Recreation and Social Services

Program."

Lolly Dorey and Patrick Dorey won the couple's trophy. A trophy is to be given out for the high school whose dancers raised the most money. The winner has not been determined yet.

Jensen speculated that the dance's success leads him to believe that the dance might become an annual event.

(peter clarke dal photo)

## Talk . . . talk . . . talk

... is cheap, cheap, cheap. Unless it's based on something and leads somewhere; unless it relates to the truly human — unlike the millions of sterile words which wall up the intellectual in his ivory tower; unlike the shallow sentiment of middle-class values that attempts to rationalize its own selfishness; unlike the rhetoric and dogma of the fanatical Left that is as alienating as it is alienated.

Yet some of us are looking for something more than empty words: like a freer world (which starts with each of us but does not end there); a more equal society (which starts with your most basic relations to anyone and everyone else); and especially the means to make it happen (which are as varied and as strong as those involved). Remember, it doesn't happen all by itself or all by yourself.

Interested in making it happen? even in some small way? Got a few ideas? or like to hear some of ours? Then come along (bring your lunch if you want) and let's talk about it. Open meeting.

Halliburton Room, Kings — (main bldg.)  
12:00 Tuesday, April 3

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