

## Turn the Page: Browsing the bookshelves of Toronto's top urban planners



By: [Brittany Devenyi](#) January 16, 2014



Toronto's skyline has experienced somewhat of a growth spurt in the last decade. Soaring skyscrapers and high-rise towers continue to decorate the horizon with no sign of slowing down, but there is method to the condo madness.

This is where the city's top urban planners come in, who often turn to planning-related reads for insight and inspiration. "I have books everywhere stacked up in piles," says Jennifer Keesmaat, Toronto's Chief Planner. "I'm the type of person who goes back to books again and again."

To continue our bookshelf series, which previously focused on Toronto-based [architects](#) and [interior designers](#), we list the texts that planners across the city consider to be required readings.

### **Jennifer Keesmaat, Chief Planner for the City of Toronto**

*Cities for People* by *Jan Gehl*: Just as the title of this read suggests, the author argues that a city should be designed for its inhabitants rather than its vehicles. "When you design a city for a car, you design it in a fundamentally different way than you would for people," Keesmaat says. "So he walks through key tangible strategies about how you actually achieve that city at eye level."

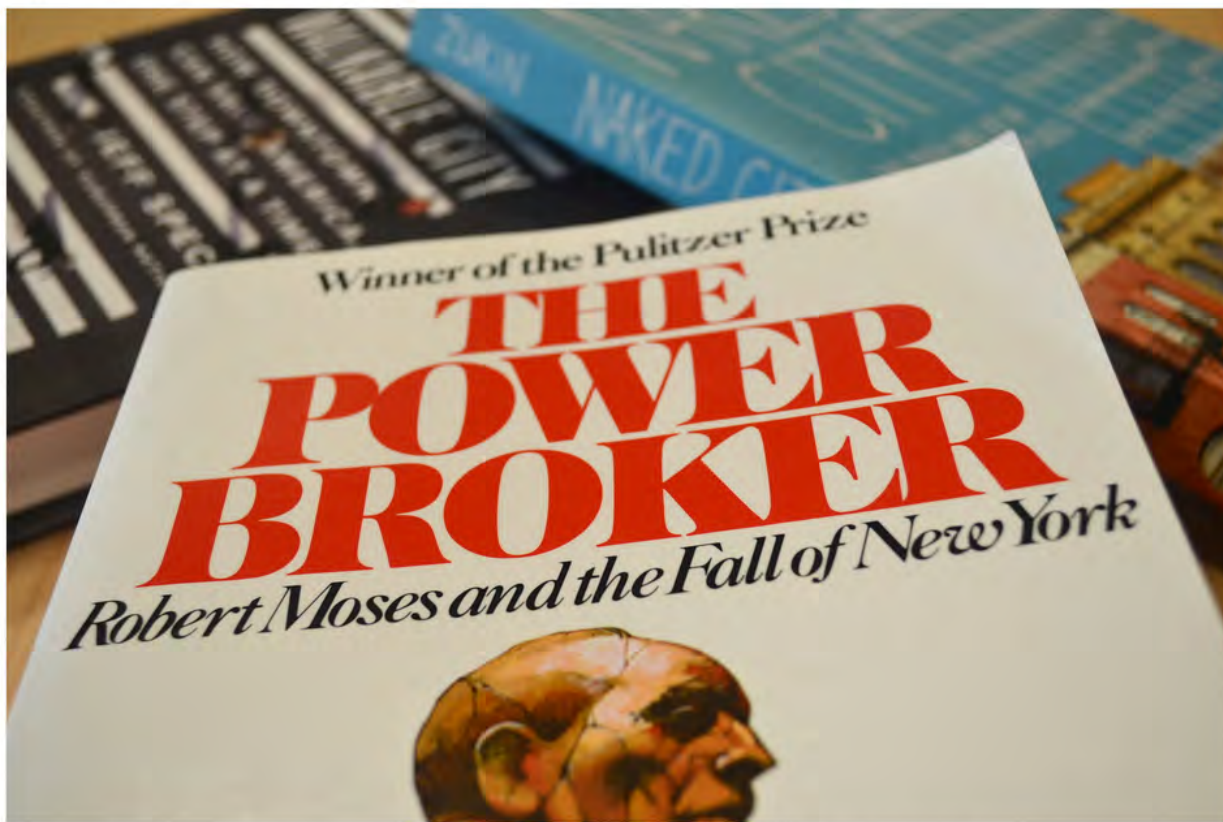
*Perverse Cities* by *Pamela Blais*: The Toronto-based urban planner and author pens about urban sprawl and low-density development. "She looks at finance policy and the way it often dictates our urban forms," Keesmaat says. "In doing so, she exposes the ways that we need to reaffirm our values with respect to sustainability and creating high-density places by getting our finance mechanisms right."

*Arrival City* by *Doug Saunders*: With the expansion of urban spaces throughout the world, Saunders focuses on the way in which people migrate from rural communities to urban ones. "It's such an important book because growing global poverty and growing inequity is something that is increasingly manifesting itself in our city," she says. For Keesmaat, the book helped to reinforce the importance of rethinking policy frameworks on affordable home ownership.

### **Evan Weinberg, Policy and Advocacy Manager at the Toronto Financial District**

*The Power Broker* by *Robert A. Caro*: This hefty read sits at 1,100 pages and details the life of controversial master planner Robert Moses in the 20th century, who is often tagged as the anti-planner of New York. "As a planner at a city level it's crazy to see the level of control he had. It wasn't about speaking with people and finding out what works," Weinberg says. "It reminds you how important it is to work within the community compared to a top-down approach."





*Walkable City* by Jeff Speck: This paperback hones in on the role downtowns play in society and the walkability of a city. "You look at cities touted as models, like Copenhagen, which has systematically taken away lanes and parking spaces over time to encourage people to walk," he says. Toronto is going through cycles of revitalization and Weinberg says this book helps him look at the process with a critical eye.

*Upper West Side Story: A History and Guide* by Peter Salwen: Becoming somewhat nostalgic, Weinberg says he cracked open the pages of this small read when visiting his uncle in New York at the age of seven. Then he reread it as an adult to fully grasp its relevance. "You watch New York go from a city of two- to three-storey buildings to skyscrapers," he says. In Toronto, this growth spurt is happening now. Weinberg poses the question: "How do you retain some of the authenticity and character of the city with a forty- or seventy- storey condo as a part of it?"

**Joe Berridge, Partner at Urban Strategies**

*The Death and Life of Great American Cities* by Jane Jacobs: Urban writer and activist Jane Jacobs is a prominent figure in the realm of planning and some even refer to her as the guru of cities. She also lived around the corner from Berridge in Toronto, where he says the two got to know each other quite well. "She understood the organic soup of the city and what makes a good flavour is many ingredients," he says. "What she says really works is a mix of old and new — where the streets are the most important part of a city because that's where people mix. It's the theatre of the streets."





He goes on, noting that a great city is more about disorder than it is about order. Take Paris for example: "You name an interesting city in the world that isn't congested," he says. "If you go to Paris and there's no one on the street, you wouldn't want to go to Paris. What makes it interesting is the mess of the place."

*Cities and Civilization* by Sir. Peter Hall: This compelling read poses one overarching question: what makes a city successful? According to the author, the secret to a city's success is immigration together with a significant business opportunity. "The fundamental purpose of a city is to make money. If it doesn't make money, it doesn't exist," he says. Berridge then points to Detroit, as the author would argue that the city failed because it didn't attract new immigrants. "The car companies got fat and comfortable but weren't shaken up," he says. "They didn't have new people coming in to say, no you could do it this way."



**Rick Pennycooke, President of The Lakeshore Group**

*Harvard Design Review*: While not a book per se, Pennycooke says he is most inspired by planning-related journals and magazines. He recalls a particular article in this journal about the plans for Manhattan's west side. "To get anything approved in New York City, you have to be very creative in your planning," he says. "I think because of how Toronto is growing and getting denser very rapidly, a lot of the lessons learned around Manhattan are applicable to Toronto."

*Journal of the American Planning Association*: This peer-reviewed journal (also known as JAPA) blends academic texts with more practical pieces. "This has become an urban planning text that I keep on a shelf and refer to for any project I'm working on," he says. It's about creative problem solving.

*Ontario Professional Planner's Institute Journal*: A similar journal to the ones mentioned above, Pennycooke notes, only with a central focus on Ontario. "It's skewed a little bit more toward planners who are working for municipalities, but there are good articles for consulting planners like myself," he says. He skims its pages every month to fuel his imagination.

TAGS [Bookshelves](#) [Urban Planning](#)