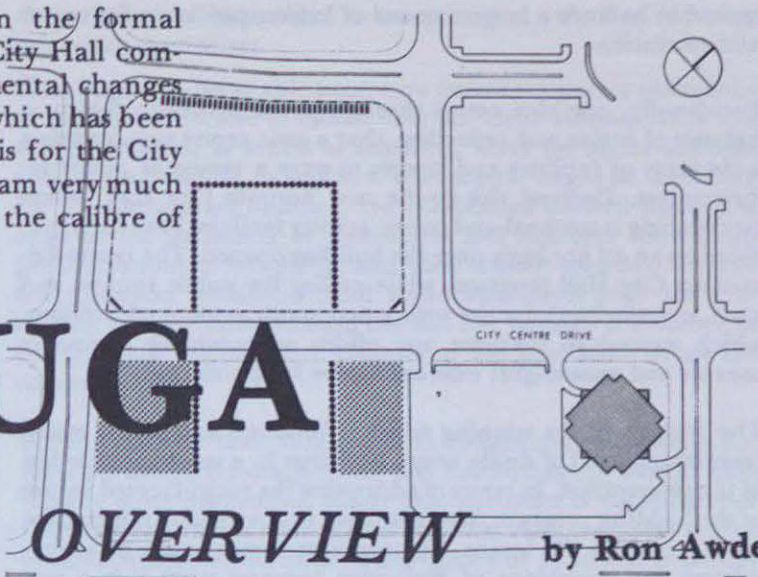


While many reviews and articles have concentrated on the formal characteristics of the winning schemes in the Mississauga City Hall competition, or have examined the implications of the fundamental changes in the nature of suburban planning, one important aspect which has been more or less ignored by reviewers is the programmatic basis for the City Hall competition. The richness and complexity of the program very much lent itself to the calling of a national competition and to the calibre of the winning entries.

MISSISSAUGA

A PROGRAMMATIC OVERVIEW

by Ron Awde



Based on the Secondary City Plan prepared for Mississauga in 1979, George Baird and Associates worked with the city council to recreate and re-define the city hall as a community centre. The program which they jointly proposed was designed to inspire reflection and creativity by the competition entrants. In this case, if we look for the reasons for fundamental changes in modern architecture, we can look beyond the academic and stylistic changes and assess, as well, the changes in the perceptions of the public toward civic structure as reflected in the program content.

Urbanity is predicated on the notion of a formalized civic structure, both social and physical. One of the major needs of a community is the creation of a civic centre. Beyond the policies and politicians there is an acquired yearning for the corporeal presence of the civic building. While much of the actual workings of a government now are presented by the electronic media, it is still the basic nature of people to congregate for civic functions. In bedroom communities such as Mississauga, however, years may pass before the population perceives the necessity of a City Hall. Many of the commuting residents still feel an affinity for the Toronto City Hall as the seat of power of the Metropolitan Toronto government. It is a daring group of local municipal politicians who, in difficult economic times and facing an election, will propose the spending of thirty-five to forty million dollars of public money. However cloaked in practical reasons, it remains that Mississauga is to get a monument to the growth of the suburban community and its government.

In the most practical terms, a large community requires a sizeable bureaucracy to control taxation, licensing, and planning. Mississauga has shared with the other boroughs of Toronto the astounding suburban growth of the past fifteen years. The Mississauga government has simply outgrown its present quarters and is now leasing additional office space in the area for some departments. Over a period of a decade or two, this becomes an extremely expensive proposition. Accepting the fact, as we have in North America, of larger civic bureaucracies, it only makes sense that a city would want to be its own landlord in expanding facilities.

Beyond this, however, are the more poetic notions of a need for a City Hall. For office space or government chambers more likely to be seen on videotape than in person by the vast majority of citizens, a large office building would have sufficed. The Mississauga decision to carefully develop a richer program and hold a national competition is indicative of a fundamental change in what constitutes a City Hall. Within the Metropolitan Toronto area the city halls which have been built since 1960, starting with the new

Toronto City Hall by Viljo Rewel, display an increasing internalization and preoccupation with creating an external single-image package. In programmatic terms, except for a few obligatory gestures in Council Chambers and lobbies, the vast majority of these city halls are simply office space. The most depressing local example for comparison is the North York Civic Centre, which is engulfed in its glass-shed remoteness that a sign over the door is required to announce the Main Entrance. In terms of City Halls, it represents the low ebb. Another recent example, Moriyama's Scarborough Civic Centre is a bold technological package, crisp and cool and only somewhat more accessible as a public building.

The government of Mississauga, embarking on the development of a program, could not help but be aware of the general alienation of the public in civic affairs as represented by other local City Hall buildings. Therefore, as stated in the program introduction, "A foremost requirement of City Council for the City Hall is the accommodation and promotion of public accessibility and participation in the events of municipal government."

This statement would be so much window dressing if not followed up by the program of a building with more than the usual attention to entrances and viewing galleries. In the Mississauga program, however, a significant portion of the space is required for public activities. The program essentially breaks down into four major components: Public Areas/Council Chambers, Public Facilities, Departments, and Building Services. Of the approximately 37,500 square metres proposed, 25,000 square metres was directly for the first three categories. The public related areas comprised 8,520 square metres, or about a third of the total. Besides the usual Council Chamber and support areas or the main lobby, the Mississauga program detailed requirements for a conservatory, art gallery, business library, daycare centre, fitness centre and retail areas.

It is clear from this that a decided break is being made from the introspective nature of city halls of recent memory. Part of this is practical as well, in that the sparseness of density and the need for revenue supports the inclusion of retail spaces, but in combination with the stated intent for promotion of pedestrian movement in the area, it provides a perfect opportunity to create a ground level screen of activity where in most city halls this is definitely not the case.

The inclusion of such a large proportion of public participation facilities, for either active or passive activities, is carried through in the program for outdoor areas. In addition to the major hard surface plaza, an open air stage, an amphitheatre for 300 people and a reflecting pool, which could be used for winter skating, were re-

quired to balance a large amount of landscaped areas for repose and recreation.

Continually, one idea comes through in the program; that is, a balance of action and reflection, that a civic centre can provide a wide array of facilities and images to serve a variety of public requirements. Contrast this to the new Toronto City Hall, where landscaping is minimal and public activity facilities have been provided on an *ad hoc* basis since the building opened. The recent Edmonton City Hall program, while calling for public squares and such, overwhelmed the site with a mammoth amount of building, which seemed to consume any efforts at providing distinctive useable and meaningful external spaces for public use.

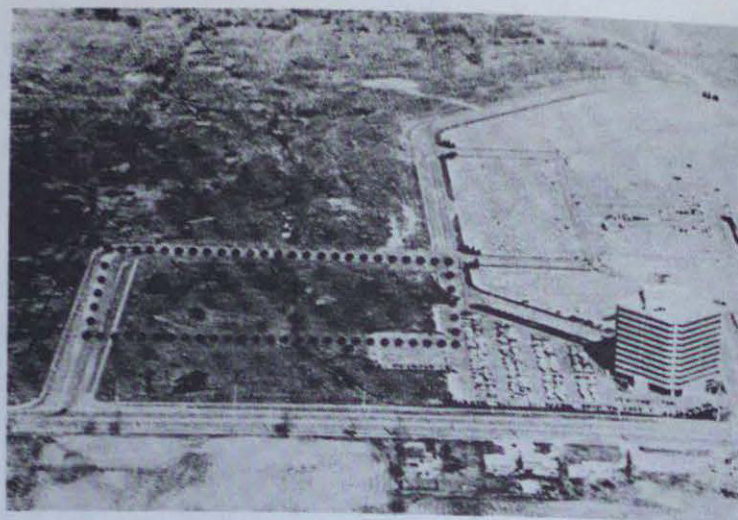
The authors of the winning scheme, Kirkland and Jones, stated their disapproval of single image buildings in a subsequent review of the competition. In terms of addressing the multi-faceted nature of the building program, they managed to continually respond not only to content but intent. By proposing a microcosm of a community, an assemblage of distinctive program parts into a new whole, Kirkland and Jones struck at the core of the fragmentation of intent and image in the program. In terms of response to the program, the awards jury was unanimous that the winning entry was "...the clear winner, superior by a significant margin to any other entry. The jurors were impressed by the fact that this submission so positively responded to the conditions of the program, in the ordering of its internal elements as well as in its positive, if simple, means of creating a strong relationship between the City Hall building itself and the Civic Square to the south."

The key to the winning scheme was the resolution of the primary major forms, the purity of the singular volume areas and, from initial appearances, an almost casual disregard for the supporting areas, although the planning displays a complex system of rituals of movement, internal and external views, and the like evidencing a great deal of thought in how a building once again might inform by its logic of arrangement of services as much as through the exterior form.

Many of the other 246 entrants' submissions were pre-occupied if not obsessed with the external image package they were proposing, at the expense of any system of coherent or rich planning. In the same way that the program represents a fragmentation of the image of the building, the submissions as a body are indicative of the dilemma in the field of Canadian architecture and the significant differences in coming to terms with a very highly defined program.

Two of the most interesting criteria for evaluating the entries were the twenty-five percent building footprint on the site and the forty percent frontage for at least three storeys on the north facade. The latter requirement reflects the intent of the Secondary City plan, of promoting infill around the existing Square One Shopping Mall and turning away from the existing radial road system in favour of an orthogonal grid. This is predicated on the idea of dense street scale buildings as being 'urban forms'. The footprint requirement in this light seemed to be a direct contradiction since the City Hall site itself would be scarcely inhabited by the building. The program stated that buildings to the east and west would give the edge to the civic square, but for many of the applicants the sense of enclosure of this special area became a principal concern. Although the resolution by wrapping the building around the perimeter of the site was difficult, the majority of submissions used the arcade as a form of mediating zones of activity in the square and to spread the building out as much as possible.

Submissions which attempted to wrap the square with the building tended to end up with sprawling expanses of low roof areas and a loss of building height. While not a stated requirement for the submission, the program did state that "City Hall will be the tallest building in the Square..." Occupied space could go up to twelve storeys in height with unoccupied areas going higher. It is evident that some sort of significant massing was expected to achieve this



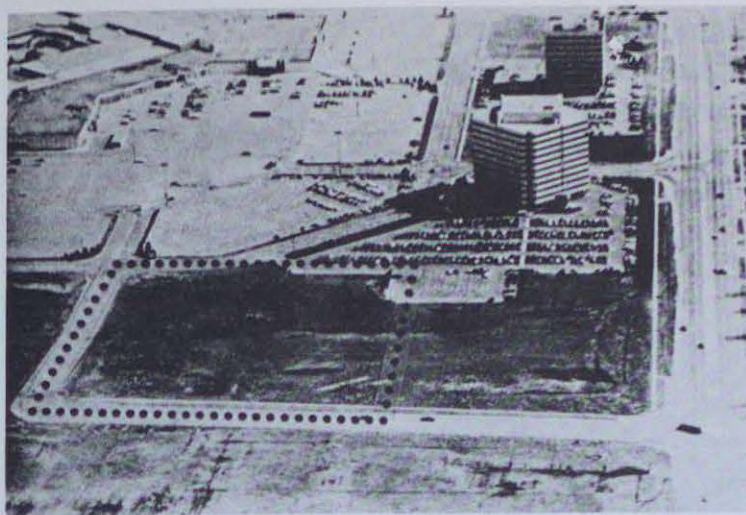
City Centre: View of the competition site looking north.

height which required a sacrifice of building area on the ground floor. As well, with building height allowances to the north and east of twelve storeys, a low rise solution would stand every chance of being overwhelmed visually by buildings on these sites. While some entrants, like the winning scheme, used the office portion of the building to achieve the maximum height, there were a relatively large number of entries which used a single slab extending across the site to create a more substantial 'set piece' wall toward Burnhamthorpe.

One of the most interesting comparisons related to the massing was in the general distribution of the building at the north end of the site. In terms of balance, entrants either had a central major element with relatively symmetrical massing, or the building shifted to one corner, most often the north-east, relating to the Square One Mall. Programmatically, the only key to the solution, such as that chosen by Kirkland and Jones, was a respect for the north-east intersection, which would, with its relatively low rise density, be in shade from tall buildings on the city hall site for much of the day unless such tall parts were kept to the north-west corner.

As well as the general distribution of the City Hall on the site and suggestions within the program for the general massing, the internal building program clearly outlined the functional intent with suggestions for the poetic intent for each principal area. These included the lobby which as large volume space was proposed as the 'indoor' equivalent to the Civic Square, with space for assembly, exhibitions and recreation. The conservatory was noted as being a 'garden' to the lobby, a place for repose as well as a showcase for the Parks and Recreation department. The Council Chamber, perhaps the most important elemental focus in the majority of submissions was described as the "symbolic and active centre of municipal politics". Of the three, the last suggested the most extraordinary exterior expression as a mediator or continuum of the long distance, immediate and internal views.

In evaluating the general program criteria, as well as simple stylistics, there were three major categories which presented themselves: the single image mass, the multiple image complex and the anti-image. The first category had by far the greatest number of examples which basically broke down into two stylistic categories. Most reflected (almost literally) the still current preoccupation with the sculptural massing of the building as a long distance viewing object, in much the same way as one of hundreds of new office buildings display ways of angling mirrored glass or as singular buildings such as Erickson's new Roy Thompson Hall in Toronto attempt to redefine the form of all known building types. These 'objects' immediately strike the viewer as totally contradictory to the program requirement of accessibility of the building on either a physical or mental level.



City Centre: View of the competition site looking east.

The other category, while referential in a broader sense to the historical building types or classicist compositions, have a coldness and remoteness in the comprehensibility and unity of their composition. Many of these entries seemed to rely heavily on the massing approach used by Graves in his Portland scheme, with overlays of the rationalist sensibilities of Rossi or the Kriers. While visually these entries were often more competent in terms of facades than the winning scheme, there is no struggling evident in this work. One is struck with the idea that the architectural firms who did them have thrown aside their Miesian design ethics and adopted a new formalist composition system without expending much time or thought. In comparison with the single image sculpture buildings, many of the former buildings display more sense of struggling and energy than these clever re-interpretations of the contemporary work.

Most depressing of all of these single image entries were the office/hotel blocks. There is a deadly earnestness and absolute lack of humour or sensitivity in these schemes. There is no doubt that functionally and technically they are buildable within the established budget. They say absolutely nothing about the intent of the symbolic nature of the building and respond only to the dry mechanics of the program. Many such submissions were prepared by the largest 'establishment' architectural firms in the country. The interior atrium/lobby/conservatory has lost the freshness of interpretation in this work, having become merely an extension of an idea being used in every other of their major buildings under construction.

The response to the outdoor spaces in these buildings further reflects the dispassionate nature. Empty plazas, fringes of planting and a free-floating collection of objects with no seeming relationship to each other, the building or the surrounding fabric in the future is evident. These entries for the most part seemed preoccupied with the requirement for a "coherent and identifiable image" at the expense of all other requirements.

The most fascinating category contained those entries which interpreted the program as a Gestalt exercise whereby the whole is disassembled and the parts re-assembled into a richer, more meaningful whole. In the same way that the authors of the program would have us believe in the natural inclusion of conservatories, daycare centres and fitness complexes to create a richer civic centre, these compositions assume that the viewer and user are competent enough to comprehend the layering of multiple images.

In the winning entry, this decomposition and recomposition is masterfully executed not only in terms of physical elements but in the sophistication of derivation. The academic references are never quite allowed to overpower the distinctive vernacular allusions or

the almost idiosyncratic re-interpretation of the historical references themselves.

With respect to being able to capture the contemporary philosophy of architecture, there is indeed only one clear winning entry and this determines, as much as anything, what the social attitudes toward the building, as well as to the content, might be. In calling for a contemporary building, the Mississauga Council placed the onus on the architects to understand and interpret the current preoccupations of the public and their stylistic mentors. That so few Canadian architects could shake themselves from the continuum of their work through the last two decades is evidence of the generally introspective attitude of the profession across the country.

Beyond the two basic differences in categorization of single and multiple image buildings, there is a third category, which, while visually quite distinctive, shares characteristics of the other two. Only several entries truly fitted into this category. The evident preoccupation was not with contemporary or historicist buildings, but more to do with the graphic fragmentation of the program and of building itself. The results are unresolved graphic images, extremes of linear abstractions. There is so little corporeal presence to the buildings in these proposals that they eliminated themselves as possible or desirable alternatives. They have, in general, a similarity with Mies Van der Rohe's Opera Hall, a graphic collage which anticipates, but does not practically propose a futurist solution. In the same way that the Opera Hall anticipated the advent of electronic music, the new wave city hall schemes seem to herald the disintegration of civic government structure or of buildings as civic theatre. Unfortunately, while there is a freshness of approach, these schemes are antithetical to the richness suggested in the program. They are an extension of the starkness of the prismatic glass or stone sculptures of the single image buildings.

By way of comparison, the 'old guard' architects with their consummate respect for practicality and the massing of objects seemed to throw away the opportunities for extension. The classicist, historicist entries, while reflecting some international movement toward making more approachable and appreciated structure, still did not demonstrate that they could break the rules significantly enough to give anything but someone else's aesthetic. Much of the work submitted to the competition, then, seemed to suffer from politeness and excess restraint. There is no sense of exploitation of a building program. Rather, it seemed that it was accepted as a necessary evil. The hundreds of questions by competition entrants were obsessed with the precise clarification of each program point, indicating a definite lack of faith in the act of interpretation by the architects themselves. This attitude was present in many of the schemes, the safety in proposing what has worked in the recent past, simply adjusted to hold the City Hall functions. Contrasted to the playfulness and in some respects the clumsiness of the winning scheme or even the anti-image proposals, there was a demonstration of competence on the most mundane level.

The competition, which drew 246 entries from all across Canada was to represent the calibre of our national architecture. That one of these entries, developed by a team headed by an American and a British architect was considered superlative in its response to the program suggests that the Canadian architectural community should re-evaluate how such documents can be more creatively and richly exploited.

Note

We can look forward to the publication sometime in early 1984, of the Mississauga City Hall competition results in a book from Rizoli of New York. In the tradition of the Humana Competition in Louisville, the book will include a look at each one of the competition entries with jury comments.

Ron Awde is a student at the University of Waterloo and is currently in the employ of Phillip Carter.