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Although neither of us knew it at the time, my friend Celia Moore set this book in motion over a decade ago when she handed me a dog-eared copy of *The Myth of the North American City* and said, “I think this is your kind of thing.” It was. Born in Canada to American parents, and now married to an American émigrée, I have spent most of my life traversing the world’s longest undefended border, wondering how these two societies and their cities could be so similar and yet so different. As a trained urban planner attuned to the physical and spatial order of cities, I have come to understand that Canadian and American urban built environments differ in important respects, and that these differences have important social, economic, environmental, and even political consequences. As a student of politics and history, I questioned whether these differences are the direct outcomes of divergent political cultures and patterns of social conflict, or are reducible to economic forces. This book investigates how physical environments are shaped by the ways in which urban development policy decisions are made – in essence, how contention among interests, and the ideas they champion, is organized by political institutions. I hope that as a result of this work we know more than we did before, and can ask new questions.

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