

AI Reading Exercise: Class 6

Urban Development in an Age of Automation

PLAN A6613: AI and the Future of Cities

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TOOL & PROCESS

I used **Claude Opus 4.6** with extended thinking via the Antigravity IDE.¹ The AI identified initial candidates for *agentic urban systems*. I then directed iterative corrections: downloading vendor, government, civil liberties, and independent sources; cross-checking statistics across stakeholders; and rewriting every unsupported claim. The most productive step was comparing vendor-reported accuracy against independent audits, which revealed discrepancies the AI had not flagged.

KEY FINDINGS

1. ShotSpotter/SoundThinking in Chicago. Chicago deployed SoundThinking's (formerly ShotSpotter) acoustic gunshot detection system across 117 square miles of predominantly Black and Latino neighborhoods, placing sensors on buildings and poles that use machine-learning algorithms to detect, classify, and geolocate gunfire in real-time (MacArthur Justice Center, 2022). When the system registers a potential gunshot, it autonomously alerts police dispatch within 60 seconds, triggering armed responses without any resident call or complaint. The governance failure is the transparency gap. Chicago's Office of Inspector General analyzed over 50,000 alerts from January 2020 through May 2021 and found that only 9.1% of police responses produced evidence of a gun-related crime (OIG Chicago, 2021). The city renewed the \$49 million contract multiple times without public hearings. Community consent was never obtained: sensors were placed in specific neighborhoods without residents' input, and the proprietary algorithm's inner workings remained undisclosed (ACLU, 2021). Mayor Brandon Johnson ended the contract in September 2024 after sustained public pressure (South Side Weekly, 2024), but the pattern of deployment without consent had persisted for nearly a decade.

2. Sidewalk Labs Quayside in Toronto. Google's Sidewalk Labs proposed Quayside, a 12-acre sensor-saturated neighborhood on Toronto's eastern waterfront, as a testbed for AI-driven urban management: adaptive traffic signals, automated waste collection, and real-time energy optimization, all fed by continuous data collection from cameras, environmental sensors, and mobile devices (Sidewalk Labs, 2019). The governance model centered on a proposed "Civic Data Trust" that would set rules for data use, but three structural failures undermined transparency and consent. First, the project expanded from 12 to 190 acres without public mandate, raising questions about scope creep and land control (Sauter, 2019). Second, Ann Cavoukian, Ontario's former Privacy Commis-

sioner and the architect of "Privacy by Design," resigned as advisor in October 2018 when Sidewalk Labs could not guarantee that all third-party data would be de-identified at collection, making privacy protections voluntary rather than enforceable (Cavoukian, 2018). Third, entrepreneur Saadia Muzaffar resigned from the advisory panel citing a "deepening crisis of public trust" (O'Kane, 2018). Sidewalk Labs withdrew in May 2020, citing the pandemic, but the project had become what the Canadian Civil Liberties Association called a "surveillance capitalism" experiment conducted without meaningful community consent (Wylie, 2020).

VERIFICATION AND REFLECTION

The AI made the same error in both cases: it took each system at face value without interrogating who controlled the data, who was excluded from decision-making, or whether governance structures had any enforcement power. For ShotSpotter, the AI described it as an effective public safety tool and cited the vendor's 97% accuracy claim without noting that Chicago's own Inspector General found the opposite, that the vast majority of alerts produced no evidence of crime. For Quayside, the AI presented the Civic Data Trust as a credible governance mechanism without noting that the project's own privacy advisors resigned over its inadequacy. In both cases, the harder questions—whose data is this, who consented, and who benefits—were invisible to the AI and required cross-checking vendor claims against government audits, civil liberties organizations, and independent journalism.

REFERENCES

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- [9] Wylie, B. (2020, May 7). Sidewalk Toronto is dead. *Centre for International Governance Innovation*. <https://www.cigionline.org/articles/sidewalk-toronto-is-dead/>

¹Verbatim prompt log, downloaded sources, annotations, and a claim-by-claim verification audit are archived at <https://github.com/dhardestylewis/plan-a6613-ai-reading-class-3/tree/main/week6>.