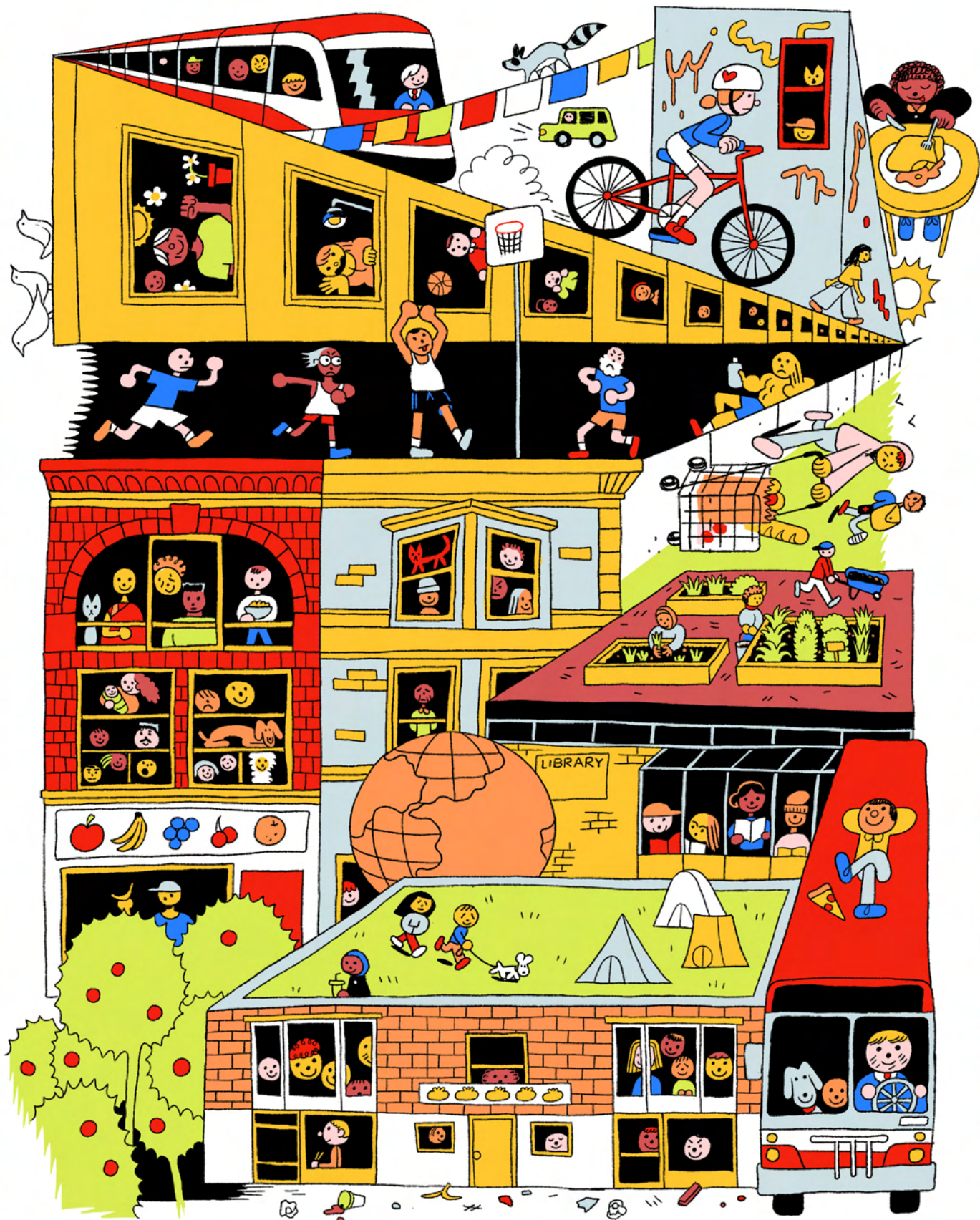


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FORGING A COLLECTIVE VISION FOR CLIMATE, ECONOMIC, AND RACIAL JUSTICE IN PARKDALE WITH AN ANALYSIS OF SIX THEMES: HOUSING JUSTICE, SOLIDARITY ECONOMY, COMMUNITY HEALTH AND SAFETY, FOOD SYSTEMS, CLIMATE ACTION, AND SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE.

PARKDALE PEOPLE'S ECONOMY 2024





Parkdale People's Economy (PPE) is a network of over 30 community-based organizations and hundreds of community members collaborating toward economic, racial, and climate justice in Parkdale. The network combines neighbourhood planning, collective action, mutual aid, and community-based research to build shared visions for the future of Parkdale. Over the past three years, we have been collaborating with community members, non-profits, grassroots organizations, health institutions, and local businesses to create an updated community plan that will guide collective strategies in the neighbourhood for the next five years. The goal is to build a caring local economy that centres community wellbeing.

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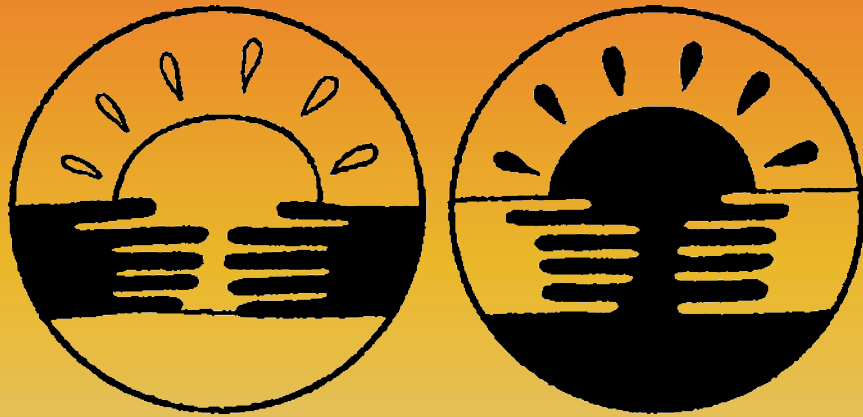
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Parkdale People's Economy

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LOFT Community Services

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Land Acknowledgement

Parkdale is nestled along the shorelines of Lake Ontario on the treaty lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit and the homelands of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Wendat, and Petun First Nations. Located in Toronto, the neighbourhood sits along historic portage routes and continues to be a meeting place for Indigenous peoples from across Turtle Island. The land is subject to the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt, an agreement between the Anishinaabe and the Haudenosaunee to peaceably share the resources of the land as long as the dish never runs dry.

The land is also governed by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, a contested agreement settled in court in 2010 as an unjust “purchase” of land by the Crown without the Nation's informed consent. It is important to honour this truth and acknowledge the ongoing land theft and dispossession of Indigenous peoples by the settler state of Canada, and how this process continues to inform the gentrification and displacement of Indigenous, Black, racialized, and working-class communities in Parkdale.

As treaty people who plan and organize on these lands, it is our collective duty and commitment to uphold the values of mutual care and reciprocity with all our relations, and to respect the right to self-determination of Indigenous peoples.

Statement in Solidarity with Palestine

Parkdale People's Economy is in solidarity with Palestine and calls for an immediate ceasefire. Palestinian liberation is intricately linked to the freedom of all oppressed individuals, including working-class, Black, and Indigenous residents of Parkdale who face constant threats of displacement and are denied access to basic needs such as food, housing, community health, and safety.

Interconnected systems of white supremacy, settler colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism oppress communities worldwide, spanning from Palestine to Turtle Island, Haiti, Congo, Tibet, and more. We are dedicated to liberation from these systems which depend on the disposability of people and preservation of statehood to exist. We cannot stand behind this plan without standing behind the end to genocide.

To someone,
I can't forget you,
not because I have a strong memory,
but because I have a heart that never
denies those who settled in it once.

— Mahmoud Darwish, a Palestinian poet and author

Abbreviations

2SLGBTQIA+

Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and additional sexual orientations and gender identities

AGI

Above Guideline Increase

AMR

Average Market Rent

BU

Building Up

CAMH

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

CBA

Community Benefit Agreement

CCST

Community and Cultural Spaces Trust

CLT

Community Land Trust

CMHC

Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation

CREW

Community Resilience to Extreme Weather

ESNP

Encampment Support Network Parkdale

GHG

Greenhouse Gas

IBPOC

Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour

KMCLT

Kensington Market Community Land Trust

MAP

Mutual Aid Parkdale

MCIT

Mobile Crisis Intervention Team

MURA

Multi-Unit Residential Acquisition Program

NIA

Neighbourhood Improvement Area

NLT

Neighbourhood Land Trust

ODSP

Ontario Disability Support Program

OW

Ontario Works



PARC

Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre

PCBF

Parkdale Community Benefits Framework

PCLS

Parkdale Community Legal Services

PNLT

Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust

PPE

Parkdale People's Economy

PQWCHC

Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre

PRA

Parkdale Residents Association

PVBIA

Parkdale Village Business Improvement Area

PWLG

Parkdale Women's Leadership Group

REIT

Real Estate Investment Trust

RFP

Request For Proposal

SHJN

Shelter and Housing Justice Network

SPUHNTA

South Parkdale University Health Network
Tenants Association

TAF

The Atmospheric Fund

TASSC

Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council

TCBN

Toronto Community Benefits Network

TCCS

Toronto Community Crisis Service

TCHC

Toronto Community Housing Corporation

TEA

Toronto Environmental Alliance

TICLT

Toronto Indigenous Community Land Trust

TPL

Toronto Public Library

TPS

Toronto Police Services

TRCA

Toronto and Region Conservation Authority

TTC

Toronto Transit Commission

UBI

Universal Basic Income

UHN

University Health Network

WEFC

West End Food Co-op

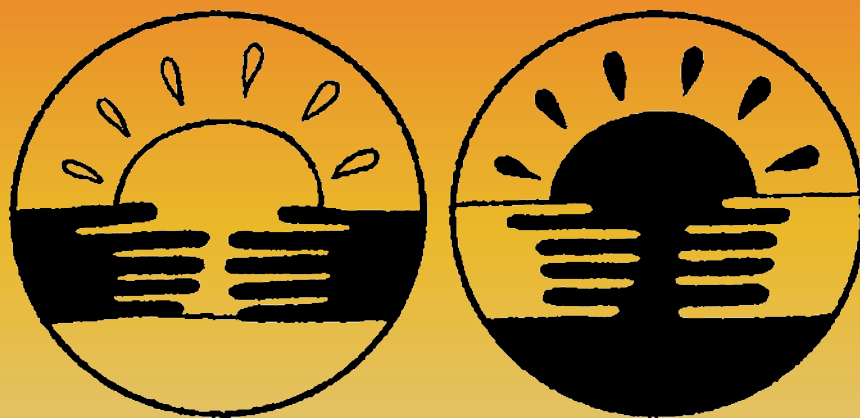
West NH

West Neighbourhood House

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Introduction

Welcome to Parkdale

The global COVID-19 pandemic taught us that in the face of heightened adversity and inequities, the collective push for solidarity economies founded on mutual respect and care is more tangible than ever. Mutual aid efforts such as community fridges, care banks, neighbourhood phone trees, tenant defence, and encampment support became commonplace responses for communities building alternatives to charitable models of service provision in the absence of government support. Sustained movements for racial justice have also led to growing calls for new forms of care and support in moments of crisis that do not rely on the police. This includes a push to build visions for wealth redistribution that support life-affirming services such as affordable housing, mental health and harm reduction programs, and income and employment supports.

In Parkdale, these movements coalesce into a rich social infrastructure of support, care, and reciprocity. This infrastructure has become increasingly critical throughout the pandemic, which exposed deepening wealth disparities, rampant development, and eviction blitzes that were un-

precedented in scale. These conditions have been exacerbated by the impacts of growing austerity and socioeconomic polarization under the Ford government, the global rise of fascism and white supremacy, and the destructive impacts of settler colonialism and climate change on communities at the margins.

Despite the looming threats of development and investment that continue to alter the tactics of our work, there are growing opportunities for transformative shifts in imagination and collective practice. These can be built through deep organizing, participatory planning, strengthened local democracy, and a building up of the solidarity economy.

The *2024 Parkdale Community Planning Study* sets into motion a community plan for Parkdale created through sustained community-led visioning, strategizing, and organizing. The community plan dreams of a future where the people of Parkdale can unite and build collective power for transformative change that centres community wellbeing and justice.

A People's History of Parkdale

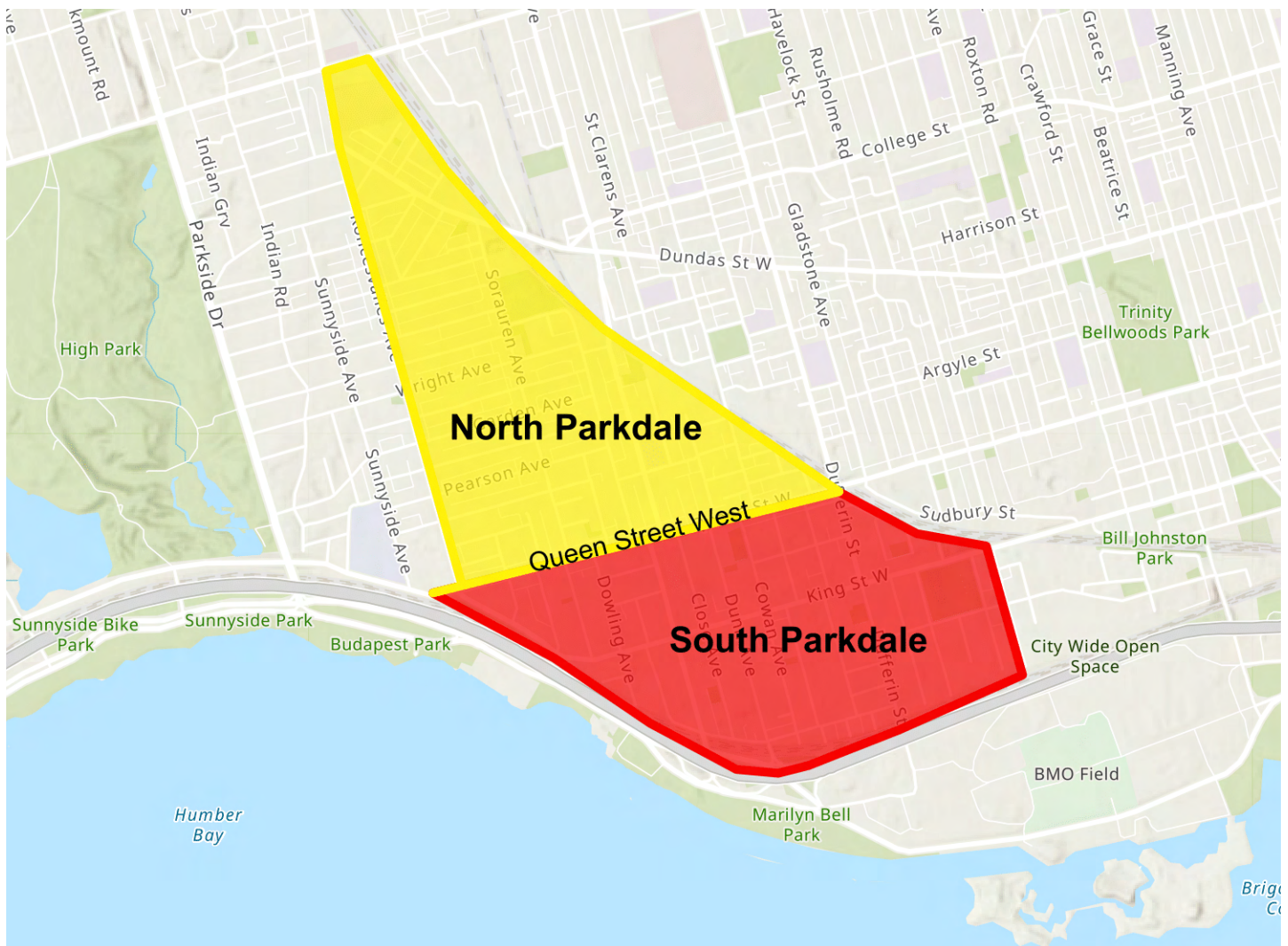
Parkdale is one of the last neighbourhoods in downtown Toronto that is affordable and accessible to diverse community members, though it is becoming less so over time. Historically, low-income people, newcomers, and people with mental health and addiction experiences have found a home in Parkdale thanks to accessible housing. These communities form an important component of Parkdale's cultural heritage.

Located on the shore of Lake Ontario, the lands now known as Parkdale are the traditional territories of the Petun First Nations, the Wendat, the Anishinaabe, and the Haudenosaunee peoples. Incorporated as a village in 1879, Parkdale was initially a beach suburb of the City of Toronto before being annexed into the City in 1889. After World War I and into the Great Depression, large single family mansion houses were divided into multiple apartments and rooms for rent. Single, working women and immigrants from Eastern Europe moved into the neighbourhood. By World War II, Parkdale was stigmatized as a slum, ripe for 'urban renewal' and the displacement of 'undesirable' people. The Gardiner Expressway project of the late 1950s razed 150 homes and displaced 400 people, in tandem with the demolition of houses to construct large high-rise apartments along Jameson, Spencer, and Tyndall Avenues. These high-rises were built with federal subsidies

for low and moderate income household. With the influx of newcomers brought by the immigration reforms of the 1970s, these affordable buildings became home to diasporic communities hailing from Tibet, Hungary, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines amongst others.

After deinstitutionalization in the 1970s and 1980s, thousands of psychiatric survivors from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) and Lakeshore Psychiatric found housing within Parkdale's deeply affordable housing stock, much of it boarding homes and rooming houses. These included purpose-built three storey walk-ups (small apartment buildings) and converted Victorian mansions, commonly equipped with small studio units called bachelorettes. Parkdale possessed one of the highest concentrations of this type of housing in Toronto.

Parkdale is a neighbourhood shaped by the grassroots efforts of its residents, who have continuously identified and addressed ongoing gaps in social and political needs. Rita Cox, for example, was for over 20 years the head librarian of the Toronto Public Library's (TPL) Parkdale branch where she built the Caribbean Heritage Collection and founded Parkdale Project Read in 1977. Parkdale Project Read offers literacy and basic skills education programs for English-speaking adults who want



Map showing the boundaries of North Parkdale (yellow) and South Parkdale (red), 2024.

to learn to read and write, or use basic math, or computer skills. Her work was driven by her strong commitment to storytelling and recognition of literacy needs in the neighbourhood.

With guidance from Indigenous Elders and influence from the American Indian Movement (AIM), the Native Education Society of Toronto (NEST) was located at 18 MacDonnell Avenue in the mid-to-late 1980s. Run by Indigenous artists and activists including Mike Cywink and Jay Mason, the NEST had a kitchen and a sacred fire, and was a notable landing place for Indigenous community members seeking connection, health, spirituality, and artistic practice. Organizers facilitated out-

reach and legal support when needed, and also had a radio program to broadcast information and education related to the land struggle (Wright-McLeod, 2021).

Parkdale is also a place of inspiration for the Toronto Mad Pride movement. In 1993, activists from the West End Survivors group founded Mad Pride Toronto, originally called Psychiatric Survivor Pride Day. Mad Pride is an arts, culture, and heritage festival created by psychiatric survivors, consumers and people the world has labelled “mentally ill” to exclaim that “psychiatric survivors are part of the community and belong here just like anyone else” (Reaume, 2008). The movement supports social

activist theatre such as the Friendly Spike Theatre Band, who created a play called The Edmond Yu Project to reflect upon the life and death of a Parkdale tenant killed by the police during a mental health experience on the TTC in 1997.

In the 2000s, Parkdale's surrounding neighbourhoods of Liberty Village and West Queen West began to see significant condo development, alongside efforts to rebrand the areas as 'creative hubs'. This resulted in new businesses catering more to upper-class and outside clientele, replacing long-term, local serving, and low-cost businesses. Meanwhile, more middle class professionals and artists in search of affordable home ownership were attracted to the potential of Parkdale's preserved Victorian and Edwardian buildings. This increased displacement pressures for low-income tenants due to the conversion of rooming houses and bachelorettes back into single family homes.

Recognizing that places have varying socio-economic needs, in 2000 the City made administrative boundaries for social planning neighbourhoods to collect data, create actions for poverty reduction, and help with local planning. Historically, residents of South Parkdale have had significantly lower incomes than residents of North Parkdale; South Parkdale was designated as a Neighbourhood Improvement Area (NIA) while North Parkdale, also known as the Roncesvalles neighbourhood, was not. As a NIA, South Parkdale has benefited from planned public investment, with continued financial support for social services, programs and community organizations. The concentration of these longstanding organizations, such as Osgoode Hall's poverty law program at Parkdale Community Legal Services (est. 1971) and Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre (est. 1977) has contributed to Parkdale's activism and community empowerment around issues of housing justice and anti-displacement.

In July 2002, Pope John Paul II visited Toronto. For this historical moment of mass tourism when the media had their eyes on the city, the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) strategized a direct action dubbed "The Pope Squat." Parkdale community members moved into an abandoned building at 1510 King Street West and created a housing community to address the social housing shortage, provide a place for tenant organizing, and protest economic evictions. The neighbourhood pulled together to provide support for the people living there. The action lasted three months before squatters were evicted, ultimately bringing attention to the housing crisis in Toronto and the potential for radical solutions.

Despite community power gained from social supports, social movements, and education, the 2010s brought rapid gentrification (displacement) pressures to Parkdale due to the rise of financialized landlords, the loss of rooming houses, vacancy decontrol, and private sector development that was unaffordable to many. In response, Parkdale Organize emerged in 2014 as a membership-based group of working-class people who organize to build neighbourhood power. They use tenant-to-tenant education to share knowledge, empower tenants, and organize to fight against displacement, rent increases, and disrepair.

With the belief that neighbourhood change could be intercepted to address displacement, in 2016 the Parkdale Community Economic Development (PCED) Planning Project (now known as Parkdale People's Economy) designed the *Parkdale Community Planning Study: Building a foundation for decent work, shared wealth, and equitable development in Parkdale*.



Community members outside of Parkdale Fruit Market, a local grocer on Queen Street West.

Community Planning

From 2016 – 2023, this community plan leveraged policy tools and social movements to tackle growing inequality and poverty, and was used as a blueprint for decent work, shared wealth, and equitable development in the neighbourhood. It served Parkdale by sharing education and inspiration for community organizing that is still embedded in the social and economic systems of the neighbourhood, though there have been stark changes since its conception. Since 2016, we have entered a true shelter and housing crisis, with hundreds of people sleeping outside with inadequate amenities, and City shelters completely full. Food bank intakes are at an all time high, and people are in dire need of employment and employment supports. This is alongside the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic and climate change, which has positioned us to create alternative approaches to care and create never before seen community infrastructure. Important teachings and takeaways from extraordinary times require its documentation, as it can inform neighbourhood strategies going forward.

We believe that communities should be in control of planning for their futures. It is important to remember that while change is constant, the way it takes place can be shaped through collective visioning and action. Community planning is a vital method of building a shared vision for the future of Parkdale. Together we need to explore how to

align existing initiatives with big visions and create neighbourhood strategies that will help us transition from an economy that is extractive and exploitative, towards one that is caring and regenerative.

The 2016 community plan was not a report designed to sit on a shelf. Parkdale People's Economy (PPE) activated the plan by hosting bi-monthly Working Groups of community members to strategize how to advance key directions in the plan. The Working Groups brought community spaces to life by gathering neighbours over food and music, while providing childminding, interpretation, and transportation support to ensure that community members could meaningfully engage and feel supported in collective dreaming, visioning, and strategizing. In addition to the Working Groups, the network convened a Neighbourhood Planning Table of community organizations and community leaders to guide collaboration on advancing the plan and make collective decisions about shared resources.

Together, the Working Groups and Neighbourhood Planning Table brought the plan to life. Significant accomplishments included the creation of the *Parkdale Community Benefits Framework: Guide for Development Without Displacement* (2018) which paved the way for material gains through coalitions and campaigns pushing back



Parkdale
People's
Economy



Local residents conducting engagement for the planning process outside of Edmond Place.

against profit-driven development; the formation of community care groups such as the Parkdale Women's Leadership Group (PWLG) and Mutual Aid Parkdale (MAP); and ensuring community voices are at the forefront of local decision making and public policy. Other tangible outputs came from the creation of the 2016 community plan, and this iteration intends to account for the policy and community-level wins and losses that have occurred over six years and address how to create community-driven movement going forward.

Process: How This Plan Came to Be



Laying the Foundations

Reflecting on the 2016 *Parkdale Community Planning Study*

In 2020, PPE began to shift towards creating a new community plan by assessing what was accomplished, what needed to continue, and what needed to change to seize the moment and prepare for the future. We created a tracker that outlined every direction in the 2016 community plan and measured how far we had come toward achieving our goals.

We found that nearly 50% of the goals set in the community plan were accomplished through collective action – significant, given that the overarching goals were oriented towards systemic change that would take longer than five years to accomplish and would continue into the new plan. We achieved a number of concrete wins related to decent work, participatory democracy, and social infrastructure.

★ **Decent Work - Direction 7:** Explore partnerships with local anchor institutions to leverage their procurement and hiring capacity for decent work and community benefits.

Through negotiations with the University Health Network (UHN) and the City of Toronto, and collaboration with the South Parkdale UHN Tenants Association (SPUHNTA) along with community partners, we secured a 2020 Section 37 agreement that incorporates strong tenant protections and the creation of new supportive housing at 90 Dunn Avenue (formerly known as 150 Dunn Avenue) and includes potential for local hiring opportunities.

★ **Participatory Democracy - Direction 3:** Establish a Parkdale Community Benefits Framework to advocate for unified community needs and community benefits from infrastructure investment and development.

In 2018, PPE released the *Parkdale Community Benefits Framework* to guide community campaigns and coalitions. The Justice for Queen's Hotel Coalition secured a \$1.2 million

settlement in 2022 for affordable housing and tenant compensation for unlawful evictions, with support from the Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust (PNLT).

- ★ **Social Infrastructure - Direction 2:** Develop a community service hub for co-location and service integration.

Since the release of the 2016 community plan, the City of Toronto has approved the Parkdale Hub, which will include — thanks to community visioning and pressure — the expropriation of private land for at least 231 housing units.

Recovery, Rebuild, and Transformation Engagements

In the wake of the global pandemic and sustained movements for racial justice, we oriented our planning to address crisis response, and long-term visions for transformation in the Parkdale neighbourhood. In July 2020, we supported Social Planning Toronto and the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council (TASSC) in engaging over 80 community members in Parkdale to build recommendations for the City of Toronto's Recovery and Rebuild process. Community members represented a unique cross-section of the neighbourhood: approximately 60% of the respondents were racialized, with 12.2% identifying as Indigenous and 13.5% as Black; over two-thirds of the respondents were low-income (\$0–\$29,999 per year); and over a quarter did not have a fixed address.

Through the leadership of community members, we conducted community-led consultations with

members of the Tamil and Filipinx communities and smaller-scale story circles with members of the Milky Way Garden and people living in encampments. Through this work, we heard three core themes impacting community members during COVID-19 that were foundational for the creation of the renewed community plan:

- ★ **Housing Justice:** Preserve and expand deeply affordable units, implement rent control, halt evictions against tenants and encampments, maintain units, decommodify housing, mandate affordable housing in new developments, and reclaim vacant units and properties for affordable housing.
- ★ **Income and Employment Supports:** Raise the rates for Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP); implement Universal Basic Income (UBI); advocate for a living wage; subsidize education, employment programs, and skills training, and expand green jobs.
- ★ **Mental Health and Harm Reduction:** Invest and make culturally relevant improvements to mental health and harm reduction programs, expand street outreach workers, decriminalize and legalize drugs, subsidize training and education in wellness, and defund the police to support and reinvest in community safety and wellbeing.

Formation of the Planning Committee

In 2021, PPE created a Planning Committee to support the community planning process. The Planning Committee met monthly and was tasked with co-designing, reviewing, and providing feed-



Parkdale
People's
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back on draft materials developed by PPE staff, and collaborating on the implementation and evaluation of the planning process.

The Planning Committee was made up of 12 members with the following representation: one-third PPE partners (community agencies, grassroots groups), one-third PPE members (working groups, MAP, PWLG, Parkdale Black Caucus, and Climate Justice Circle), and one-third broader community members (with priority given to Black and Indigenous community members, newcomer and immigrant communities, psychiatric survivors, disabled people, low-income community members, and youth).

Throughout 2021–2023, the following community members and partners supported the Planning Committee:

- ★ Annette Barragan
- ★ Angela Koh (West NH)
- ★ Bernadette Rilloraza
- ★ Beryl-Ann Mark
- ★ Butterfly GoPaul (PCLS)
- ★ Chemi Lhamo
- ★ Colin Love (TRCA)
- ★ E.M. Uzoamaka
- ★ Emma Clayton Jones
- ★ Hari Ghimire (PIA)
- ★ June Henry
- ★ Kai Wong (Parkdale Project Read)
- ★ Karlene Stubbs
- ★ Ko Hosoya
- ★ Phuntsok Chomphel (PNLT)
- ★ Rayna Syed (Common Space Coalition)
- ★ Shareen Shazeena Ally
- ★ Shane Philips
- ★ Shannon Copenace
- ★ Sonam Chokey
- ★ Stephanie Francis
- ★ Theresa Hernandez

- ★ Thevishka Kanishkan (Common Space Coalition)
- ★ Tiffaney Malley

At each meeting, we reflected on questions for organizers set forward in *Unapologetic: A Black, Queer, and Feminist Mandate for Radical Movements* (Carruthers, 2018):

- ★ Who Am I?
- ★ Who Are My People?
- ★ What Do We Want?
- ★ What Are We Building?
- ★ Are We Ready to Win?

In reflecting on these questions, the committee members created a space rooted in shared values of cooperation, solidarity, sustainability, integrity, accessibility, transparency, and non-judgment. In doing so, we not only accomplished the work but also created a space for dreaming, learning, and caring for one another as we strategized.

Participatory Planning Process

To develop the Community Plan, we engaged with over 400 community members, 50 local businesses, and 30 community organizations through a three phase participatory planning process.

Phase 1: Community Wellbeing Workshops

The first phase of our planning process, the Community Wellbeing Workshops, aimed to build a community-based vision for economic, racial, and climate justice centred on local wellbeing in Parkdale. To support this phase, we led three public workshops online, hosted workshops with community partners such as Parkdale Project Read, and conducted in-person outreach in key community spaces such as the Parkdale Good Food Market and at Lhakar Gorshey, a weekly gathering outside of Parkdale Collegiate of Tibetan community members for a traditional circle dance in solidarity with the liberation movement. These combined efforts engaged over 100 community members in 2021 to re-envision the local economy.

During the pandemic, we experienced a constant back and forth between public health recommendations to stay at home, and the drive to “re-open

the economy.” We witnessed many community members being left behind by these conflicting narratives, whether they lost their jobs and could no longer pay for rent or food or were working frontline jobs where their employers did not provide paid sick days or proper health protections. Meanwhile, many corporations were making record profits while benefiting from public subsidies. So when we think about “the economy,” who does it serve? What is it code for? What is its purpose?

To unpack these issues, we asked community members to reflect on the following questions:

- ★ Who controls the economy? Who does it serve?
- ★ How are decisions made? What values and visions guide these decisions?
- ★ What activities are involved in the economy? What does work look like?
- ★ How is wealth generated? How are resources used and distributed?
- ★ What is valued? What is not valued?

We then asked community members to focus on their personal experiences of wellbeing. For example, we asked how we know if the local economy serves community needs and enhances community wellbeing. To answer this question, we wanted to look internally and understand our personal roles in the economy and how it affects

our individual wellbeing. We asked community members to share stories or personal anecdotes to answer the following questions:

- ★ What do I need to live well? What do you need to have a decent quality of life for now and in the future?
- ★ How do I know if my needs are being met? What indicators or signs show that this is being achieved?
- ★ How does the economy impact my personal wellbeing? Am I able to access the resources and supports that I need to live well? Why or why not?
- ★ What changes need to happen to improve my wellbeing? What does recovery, rebuild, or transformation look like in my personal life?

Next, we wanted to understand how we as a community can support each other's wellbeing. Reflecting on our collective experiences in Parkdale, we asked community members to share stories or anecdotes that helped us answer the following questions:

- ★ What do we need as a community to live well? What do you and your neighbours need to have a decent quality of life for now and in the future?
- ★ How do we know if our collective needs are being met? What indicators or signs show that this is being achieved?
- ★ How does the economy impact our collective wellbeing? Are we able to access the resources and supports that we need to live well in the neighbourhood? Why or why not?
- ★ What changes need to happen to improve our collective wellbeing? What does recovery, rebuild, or transformation look like in the neighbourhood?

We then encouraged community members to reimagine the economy. Many people think that the

economy is something that you only participate in if you have a job or exchange money. If, however, the economy is conceived as including all the work that human beings do to survive in a world of unevenly distributed resources, the term can be used more expansively. Even unpaid activities, such as raising a child or making food for another person, are part of the economy because they are necessary for human survival. These types of care labour are essential for reproducing the ability of people to work in the productive economy and for social wellbeing overall, but are often undervalued as the work that falls to racialized women.

Drawing on these reflections, we asked community members:

- ★ If you had a magic wand, how would you reimagine the economy?

We came full circle and asked community members:

- ★ Who would be in control, how decisions would be made, what activities would be involved, how wealth would be generated, and what would be valued.

Taking a birds eye view, we then envisioned how we could move away from the harmful practices of our current economy and re-centre our relationships with one another through strong values and principles with the question:

- ★ What values are necessary for this continued work as we build towards alternative economies in Parkdale?

This exercise helped inform the core values and principles driving our updated community plan. What was generated across all our sessions was a cohesive vision for a people's economy that centres community wellbeing, collective steward-

ship, and participatory decision making.

Reflections on a People's Economy

If you break down the word economy, it means “home” (eco) “management” (nomy). In other words, the economy is how we organize and fulfill our relationships with one another. It is a place where we come together to create value. When thought about on a broader scale, the economy is both created by society and how society produces the things we need to survive.

Historically and culturally, we have seen many different forms of economies. Some economies are built on mutual respect and reciprocity, such as Indigenous and gift economies. There are also economies built on exploitation and extraction, such as slavery, servitude, and racial capitalism. It is important to remember that economies are not fixed — they can change over time through crises, opportunities, and organized movements.

Because the economy is created by society, we can harness collective power to shape it and make it reflect the values we believe in. Rather than thinking about the economy as an abstract system we don't have control over, how can we as a community think about how the economy can support each other's wellbeing? How can we shift away from the current model of capitalism with deep ties to systems of oppression and move towards a system that shares and redistributes resources? How can we reframe key ideas such as wealth, value, and wellbeing to centre our needs? Instead of focusing on the wealth of corporations and institutions, how can we centre the collective wealth of communities through skills, knowledge, and resources?

Just Transition Framework

To support our framing and thinking for this work-

shop on community wellbeing and the local economy, we drew from the Just Transition Framework developed by Movement Generation (2017), a justice and ecology project based in the United States that inspires and engages in transformative action towards the liberation and restoration of land, labour, and culture.

Just Transition envisions how we can shift from an exploitative, extractive economy towards an economy that is ecologically sustainable, equitable, and just for all its members. We drew from Just Transition to think about how the current economy impacts our livelihoods in Parkdale, and to envision what values and practices are necessary for building towards more regenerative and caring local economies.

As a team, we also reflected on the best ways to translate this framework to make sense for diasporic communities, such as contextualizing the context of the "economy" in Turtle Island to stateless refugees from Tibet, and what kind of language and concepts felt approachable and understandable to community members.

Phase 2: Community Mapping and Business Survey (2022)

Community Mapping Workshops

In the second phase of our planning process, we conducted Community Mapping Workshops to understand people's experiences of belonging and wellbeing in the neighbourhood and the impact of development and displacement through a mapping and storytelling process. To support this goal, we partnered with Common Space Coalition,



a newly established Toronto-based non-profit organization that aims to combat systemic racism in the landscape architectural professional practice. We are grateful for our partnership with the Common Space Coalition, who created an interactive map of Parkdale on a virtual community engagement platform called Social Pinpoint, helping us integrate community mapping, storytelling, and virtual engagement. Their engagement with our team aimed to challenge top-down models of community consultation, and instead develop and evaluate strategies for impactful community-centric design processes through collaboration with grassroots community organizations. Likewise, our partnership helped generate helpful lessons for the landscape architecture profession. We also partnered with Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA) to facilitate a mapping workshop on wealth redistribution aimed at building a campaign to fight for dedicated funding to transform our city for the better, as well as with Greenest City to build an understanding of people's experiences of climate action, food security, and relationship to the land in Parkdale.

During this phase, we led seven public workshops on housing and development, safety and well-being, climate justice, and wealth redistribution; hosted workshops with community partners such as Parkdale Project Read, Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre (PQWCHC), Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre (PARC), and PNLT; hosted four interpreted sessions in Tibetan, Tamil, Tagalog, and Mandarin; and conducted in-person outreach at key community events such as the Parkdale Harvest Festival, the Black Health and Wellness event, and outside of the PARC drop-in (also the former location of the Parkdale Food Bank). These combined efforts engaged over 200 community members from 2021–2022 to build a power analysis of community needs and assets in the neighbourhood.

When engaging community members in person, we asked them to reflect on the following questions:

- ★ Where in Parkdale feels like home, and why? Where do you feel a sense of belonging?
- ★ What significant changes do you see in Parkdale? What are the impacts of this change?
- ★ What changes do you want to see in the neighbourhood? What is currently missing?
- ★ Are there any community spaces at risk of displacement? What can we do to support?

We also asked community members to share stories of housing justice, climate justice, and places where they feel safe and supported by the community. Finally we asked community members to reflect on what collective action we want to take as a community moving forward, including community investments. The community mapping process revealed that Parkdale is a place of friendships and warmth. The neighbourhood is closely tied to people's memories and feelings, connections that may be difficult to find in other parts of the city if they are displaced. Currently, residents are grappling with change that marks them as mere memories, and there is a valid fear of loneliness that comes with that change. The mapping process holds that these feelings of belonging are valuable and worthy of protection. The looming threat of displacement has a mental impact on Parkdale residents, meriting that we counteract it. In the future, who will Parkdale be for? If the community has a say in the process by which this future comes about, it can be for them.

Municipal consultation strategies often disregard the voices and visions of community members by tokenizing community engagement rather than meaningfully responding to community needs and excluding community voices not traditionally engaged in these processes. This is antithetical to the intended purpose of community consultations,

which is to inform the community about proposed projects or policies and solicit feedback for the next steps. In the community mapping workshops, we wanted to build a greater understanding of informal urbanism in the neighbourhood. By that, we mean organizing and gathering spaces that are not planned from a top-down approach, but instead are cultivated bottom-up by the community. We also wanted to understand how places are used over time and what cultural significance they hold. By understanding how places change over time, we can build a stronger community analysis on how to organize for the change we want to see in the neighbourhood.

Business Survey

During Phase 2, we also surveyed over 50 local businesses in Parkdale to understand their experiences and inform a community-based vision for the local economy. To support the circulation of the survey, we trained a team of volunteers who canvassed over 350 storefronts along Queen Street West and King Street West and offered a variety of ways to answer the survey including completing it online, filling out a physical copy, or having a guided conversation with a volunteer in person or over the phone. The survey focused on building an understanding of the rental conditions for commercial spaces, opportunities for local decent work and opportunities for policy changes and training that can support the local business community and its relationship with the community.

Black and Indigenous Outreach

A core commitment in the community planning process is to ensure visions for economic, racial, and climate justice are accountable to and guided by the leadership of Black and Indigenous community members. We engaged with representatives from Black and Indigenous communities during Phases 1–3 of the participatory planning

process in the visioning and implementation of the plan.

The Parkdale Black Caucus is a grassroots initiative to build community among Black, Afro-Canadian, African, and Afro-Caribbean members of the Parkdale neighbourhood and to strengthen the voice of Black community members in the neighbourhood's larger planning and visioning. Collaborating with Beryl-Ann Mark, the Black Caucus advisor for Parkdale, we surveyed 15 adults and five youth from the Black community in Parkdale. Beryl-Ann was crucial in connecting us at varying sites including the TPL and West Lodge Towers.

Throughout our engagement, we addressed the following questions:

- ★ What are some things we need in Parkdale?
- ★ What are some changes you want to see in Parkdale?
- ★ Where do you feel a sense of belonging in Parkdale?
- ★ What are skills that you would like to learn?
- ★ Where do you feel safe and supported by your community? Where do you feel unsafe?

During the Indigenous sharing circle, we worked closely with Tiffaney Malley, the Indigenous Caucus advisor for Parkdale, and Jacques Nadjiwon, an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper. The Parkdale Indigenous Caucus is, similar to the Parkdale Black Caucus, a grassroots initiative that builds community among Indigenous members of the neighbourhood and strengthens their voice in planning and visioning. Jacques engaged participants of the Niiwin Wendaanimak (Four Winds) Indigenous health and wellness program at PQWCHC, aligning the timing of the sharing circle with their regular programming. The sharing circle had 10 Indigenous participants. In preparation for the event, Tiffaney and PPE created tobacco tie-ins to present to Jacques in gratitude for guiding the sharing cir-

cle. Remaining tobacco tie-ins were later respectfully offered to a sacred fire.

During the sharing circle, we asked the following questions:

- ★ Where do you see change happening in Parkdale? Where do you feel belonging in Parkdale?
- ★ What does self determination look like for Indigenous peoples in Parkdale?
- ★ What community support would be helpful to ensure that your mental, spiritual, physical and emotional wellbeing is grounded in a good way?

Co-Design Now

The following reflections for urban designers were shared by the Common Space Coalition team in *Co-Design Now: A Resource for Design Activism* (2022):

- ★ Acknowledging and checking inherent biases: As designers trained in Euro-centric design principles at accredited academic institutions, Common Space Coalition was forced to step back and assess the impact of their professional lens on community engagement. Their initial assumptions that a simple online directory of community resources would be sufficient to address existing community engagement issues proved misguided. Limited access to computers and internet, diverse linguistic backgrounds, and varying technological literacy all pointed to the fact that the first iteration of the project was not aligned with the requirements for a genuine inclusive conversation on the community's terms. This realization underscored the importance of collaborating with an activist group like Parkdale People's Economy to share valuable best-practices for community engagement developed and improved throughout years of outreach.

For example, we created a hybrid approach for in-person and online engagement that met communities where they are at.

- ★ Trauma is site specific: When engaging with communities who have suffered trauma, housing displacement, and other losses, facilitation led by established local organizations (like Parkdale People's Economy) is vital. In our workshops, we asked questions that could bring up past traumatic experiences for attendees, related to public space, accessibility, and housing. To account for the potential impact of our questions on individual community members, we included an 'active listener' in all workshop conversations. We found that it was critical for the active listener to be experienced working with people who had faced or were currently facing housing-insecurity, in the event that a workshop participant was triggered by past or ongoing trauma and needed a private space to speak out.
- ★ Relationships before deliverables: Early on in this project, the priorities of Common Space Coalition were focused on developing project deliverables and hitting deadlines. This echoes how landscape architects operate in a professional context. In pursuing the project goals, however, the team realized that they needed to refocus priorities on the cultivation of trust and meaningful relationships with community partners. Without that trust, we could not have created a forum for open community dialogue, which included community elders, representatives of cultural groups, and community activists and leaders. It takes time to build trust, but through finding a willing community partner, they were able to learn through their experience to better position themselves for meaningful and productive community engagement.

- ★ Expand the scope of analysis and inventory: Through the workshops, we heard from people from all walks of life who shared stories of joy, family, friends, home, sadness, and fear that were all tied to physical spaces. In the established site inventory and analysis framework, landscape architects document the physical aspects of a site – sun exposures, existing buildings, trees, circulation and additional infrastructure – limiting the ability to capture diverse cultural lived experience. Memories, stories, and people’s human experiences are equally as important in understanding physical space.

Phase 3: Visions to Actions (2023)

Visions to Actions Workshops

In the third phase of our planning process, we conducted Visions to Actions Workshops where we intended to share our findings from Phase 1 and Phase 2 with the community. Through deep community engagement practices, we aimed to identify value-based strategies and resources to transform our visions into actions.

During this phase, we hosted a public forum in the Parkdale library branch with over 50 community members where we offered food, interpretation, and childminding to support community participation. We also hosted a virtual public forum and targeted workshops for each key theme, as well as workshops with community partners such as Parkdale Project Read and Niiwin Wendaanimak (Four Winds). We conducted in-person outreach at community events such as the Filipino Community Health and Wellness event, the second Black Health and Wellness event, and a

community market. These combined efforts engaged over 200 community members in 2023.

The PPE project team, alongside the Planning Committee and the Neighbourhood Planning Table, analyzed the findings from Phase 1 to inform the visions, values, principles, and practices of the community plan, and reviewed findings from Phase 2 to inform the needs, assets, directions, and indicators of the core themes for community action and policy. The team created a summary package of core findings from this analysis to guide the Visions to Actions forum. The forum’s goal was to ensure that we were on the right track with the community plan, and focus on moving from abstract visions to concrete actions. We invited community members to conduct a “gallery tour” of posters outlining key findings for each key theme, and then to move into breakout groups for each key theme facilitated by a community partner and/or community member.

In the breakout groups, we asked participants to choose one or two priority directions and reflect on the following questions:

- ★ What resonates with you based on your experience in Parkdale? What is a priority? What is missing?
- ★ What exists now that supports or hinders the direction? What challenges and opportunities exist?
- ★ What actions can we take to advance the direction? Working backwards, what do we need to achieve in the next five years to get closer to our long-term vision?
- ★ Who will be involved and how will it be implemented? What resources and policies are required to move the direction forward?

The findings from these workshops directly informed the strategies and action plans outlined

CLIMATE ACTION

Transform towards a just transition and sustainable economy by supporting green jobs, building retrofits, and community-based climate solutions.



I envision massive investments in transforming the economy away from reliance on fossil fuels. Such investments are community and democratically directed and go toward helping the most vulnerable.

Give communities money to secure housing into land trusts and provide incentives for those communities to retrofit buildings so they are energy efficient.



Climate is going to change. We are going to see warming. With rising temperatures people who live in rental apartments in our community without access to relief are going to be effected very negatively. We need to be thinking about how we are building our community to provide people with relief when the heat rises.

Capitalist organization is about extraction. Alternative is a more equitable term of organization where we think about how we can build a more local economy, built on trust and stewardship.

Directions

Policy Recommendations

Community Climate Solutions

Direction 1 - Expand community-based education and knowledge sharing circles on climate justice.
Direction 2 - Establish a local climate emergency response plan that is responsive to extreme weather.
Direction 3 - Build solidarity with Indigenous-led movements for self-determination.

Hold corporations accountable for their share in climate change and environmental degradation.

Building Retrofits and Green Jobs

Direction 4 - Advocate for climate resilient housing in new and existing buildings.
Direction 5 - Implement building retrofit measures across social housing providers.
Direction 6 - Invest in the creation of Green Jobs by making massive investments in transforming to a sustainable economy.

Advocate for maximum and minimum temperature levels in housing during peak winter and summer.

Assets



Roncy Reduces



Parkdale People and Pollinators Peace Garden



Milky Way Garden

Community Climate Solutions



Building Up

Social Procurement and Sustainability Action Framework



Social Procurement and Sustainability Action Framework

Building Retrofits and Green Jobs

Needs

Capitalism, colonialism, and white supremacy are drivers of climate injustice. Low-income and houseless community members are at the forefront of bearing the brunt of climate change.

Older buildings are prone to flooding, overheating, poor air quality, and are significant contributors to emissions in Parkdale. Concerns regarding impact of extreme climate and land contamination on tenants.

Gallery poster outlining key findings presented at the Visions to Actions public forum at the TPL.

in this community planning study. The Visions to Actions phase was a momentous opportunity to honour and celebrate the wealth of knowledge shared with and trusted to us by community members, to strategize for the future of Parkdale, and to reflect on the shifting landscape of community engagement, planning, and organizing as a result of the pandemic. We learned to be flexible and patient with our timelines — which stretched out over three years — while maintaining accountability to the community by setting the plan into motion.

Agency Survey

To gain insights into Parkdale's current social infra-

structure and identify ways agencies can adapt to the evolving needs of the community, we created and distributed an agency survey. Participants could complete the survey online or verbally over Zoom. Our outreach strategy involved sending direct emails to community agencies and integrating the survey into multiple communication channels, including our newsletter. In total, we garnered 12 responses from agencies. The objective was to grasp the shifts in service requirements and offerings, understand organizational priorities, explore ways PPE can enhance support within the network, facilitate information sharing among organizations, and assess organizational strategic policies.

Quantitative Data Analysis

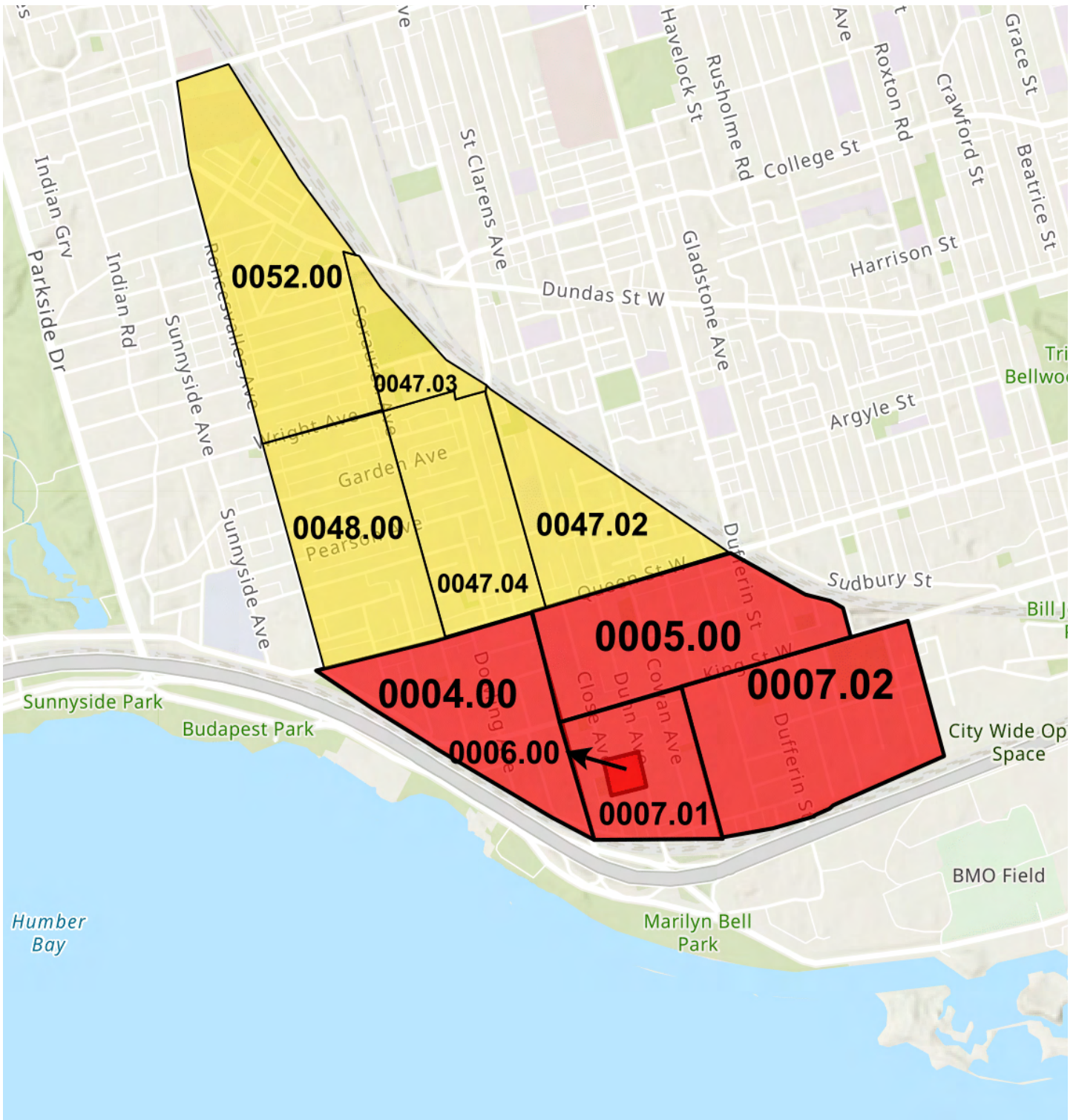
Qualitative data from our engagement was complemented by quantitative data analysis of neighbourhood change in Parkdale. Quantitative data was sourced from Statistics Canada and the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) Rental Market Survey to create the tables and graph visualizations in the community plan. (Detailed list of tables and graphs can also be found in the Appendix.)

It is important to note that census tract 47.02, which comprises the West Lodge Towers, is not included in datasets from CMHC, as it is suppressed by CMHC. Additionally, data from Statistics Canada does not include census tract 6, the Bickle Centre for Complex Continuing Care.

For our quantitative data analysis, we used the following boundaries for Parkdale: Bloor Street West to the north, Roncesvalles Avenue to the west, the lakeshore to the south, and the rail line to the east. We understand that this boundary does not necessarily reflect the many ways in which diverse community members understand Parkdale. We chose this boundary to facilitate data access and compatibility, as it covers eight census tracts, and overlaps with two of the City's social planning neighbourhood (Roncesvalles and South Parkdale). Queen Street West is considered the boundary between North and South Parkdale.

Throughout this report, we hone in on South Parkdale because of its City of Toronto designation as NIA. South Parkdale is a common landing place for immigrants and newcomers and has a lower average income (\$36,090) than North Parkdale (\$54,222) and the City of Toronto (\$46,960) (Statistics Canada, 2022), making the population of South Parkdale more affected by the impacts of displacement, higher costs of living, rising rents, and more. To achieve racial, economic, and climate justice, South Parkdale must be supported thoughtfully.





Map showing census tracts in North Parkdale (yellow) and South Parkdale (red), 2024.

A Guide to the 2024 Parkdale Community Planning Study



Visions

What do we hope to achieve for the future?

The *2024 Parkdale Community Planning Study* (“the community plan”) is divided into six themes to achieve the shared vision of economic, racial, and climate justice:

- ★ **Housing Justice:** Preserve, protect, and expand affordable, safe, and permanent housing for all through tenant power, community stewardship, and equitable development without displacement
- ★ **Solidarity Economy:** Build a just and sustainable economy in Parkdale where community members have collective ownership and decision making power over resources, decent work, and shared wealth.
- ★ **Community Health and Safety:** Practice new forms of care and support in moments of crisis that radically reimagine community safety through abolition and transformative justice, and that centre community health and wellbeing.
- ★ **Climate Action:** Transform towards a just transition and sustainable economy by supporting green jobs, building retrofits, and enacting community-based climate solutions grounded in righting relations.
- ★ **Food Systems:** Enhance affordable and equitable access to healthy food by building a sustainable local food economy.
- ★ **Social Infrastructure:** Support a collaborative social infrastructure of services, programs, spaces, and networks in Parkdale to enhance the overall wellbeing of community members, community organizations, and grassroots groups in the neighbourhood.

For each theme, the community plan dives into the following:

- ★ **Assets:** What resources and strengths exist within the community?
- ★ **Needs:** What are the pressing concerns and needs in the community?
- ★ **Directions:** What are the concrete steps and solutions towards addressing those concerns?

After the plan’s launch, PPE will re-start Working Groups for each of the six themes. These Working Groups will be led by PPE and be composed of community members, staff of partner agencies, and members of the Planning Committee. The Working Groups are intended to meet bi-monthly and configure actions and strategies to execute the directions of the community plan. The Working Groups are crucial in translating the theoretical aspects of the plan into practical, real-world applications, effectively turning aspirations into tangible outcomes.

Values

What beliefs inform our visions?

These interconnected themes are grounded in six core values that inform all decision making for the plan:

- ★ **Equity:** Ensuring fair access to resources, services, and decision making.
- ★ **Solidarity:** Committing to stand with each other against all forms of injustice.
- ★ **Reciprocity:** Providing mutual support to uplift collective wellbeing.

- ★ **Belonging:** Being part of a community that supports you.
- ★ **Accessibility:** Ensuring everyone has what they need to live with dignity.
- ★ **Affordability:** Ensuring cost is not a barrier to wellbeing.

Principles

What guides how we achieve our visions and values?

The visions and values of the plan are guided by six key principles that govern the actions of the plan:

- ★ **Community Control:** We believe that our movements and organizations must follow the leadership of people most impacted by issues affecting our community to guide decisions and redistribute resources from the bottom up.
- ★ **Participatory Democracy:** We believe that to build equitable local economies, we must re-distribute decision-making power to promote local democracy and ensure trust, transparency, and accountability.
- ★ **Righting Relations:** We believe that to build solidarity with Indigenous peoples and movements, we must uphold our treaty obligations and engage in respectful relations with the land, resources, and Indigenous sovereignty.
- ★ **Shared Wealth:** We believe in building shared wealth by valuing people over profit. This means that we are committed to building shared knowledge, skills, and resources that benefit our community under the banners

of “each one, teach one” and “no one knows everything, but together we know a lot.”

- ★ **Culturally Responsive:** We believe that our work must be culturally responsive and accessible to the diasporic communities that have built this neighbourhood.
- ★ **Collective Care:** We believe that our work must be rooted in care by centring people’s health and wellbeing. Our movements are sustainable if we care for ourselves and each other.

Practices

How do we achieve our visions, values, and principles?

The following four practices are essential to achieve the visions, values, and principles set forward by the plan:

- ★ **Community Planning:** Community-led planning is a vital practice for building a shared vision for the future of Parkdale, and identifying strategies and policy options to make that vision a reality.
- ★ **Collective Action:** Grassroots organizing and collaborative mobilization are necessary tools to bring neighbourhood planning to life, build collective power, and foster solidarity between movements.
- ★ **Community-Based Research:** To inform neighbourhood planning and collective action, participatory and action-oriented research led by community members and partners is a vital practice that also promotes education and knowledge sharing.



Parkdale
People's
Economy

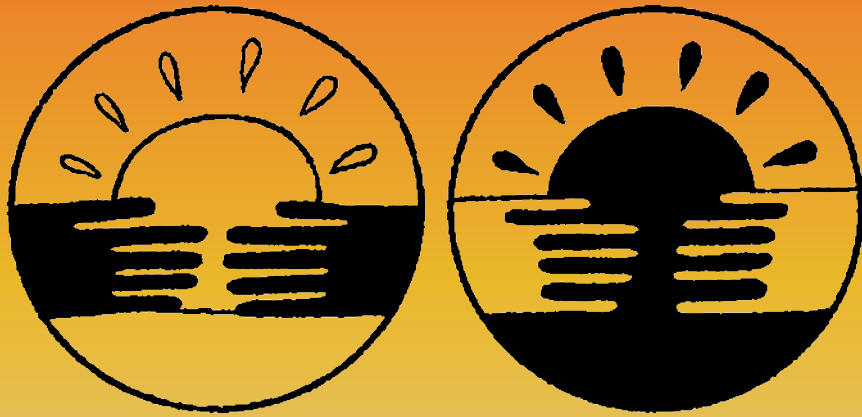


Community members protesting at Allan Gardens for National Housing Day of Action, 2023.

★ **Mutual Aid:** In addition to proactive planning, mutual aid is a necessary practice of collective care to sustain the movement and ensure that community members are supported through moments of crisis.

After years of dedicated effort in Parkdale towards fostering decent work, equitable development, and shared wealth, PPE is enthusiastic about contributing to the realization of this shared vision alongside community members and partners. This

community plan embodies the tireless contributions, passion, and dedication of countless individuals and organizations who believe in Parkdale's potential to enact meaningful change rooted in our fundamental values and principles. With this plan as our compass, the PPE network is committed to fostering values-based collaboration toward the pursuit of economic, racial, and climate justice. We extend our gratitude for your engagement and patience as we collectively strive towards actionable change.



The Community Plan

Housing Justice

Preserve, protect, and expand affordable, safe, and permanent housing for all through tenant power, community stewardship, and equitable development without displacement.



Context

Housing justice is achieved when housing is affordable, adequate, and accessible to everyone. While housing has been recognized as a human right — not a commodity — by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Housing (2023), cities still lag in being able to provide residents with safe and appropriate places to live. Decades of commodification, divestment from social housing, and the easing of rent control by the Province have seen housing in Parkdale become increasingly unaffordable. Tenant power, community stewardship, and the push for equitable development without displacement can make progress toward achieving housing justice in Parkdale.

In South Parkdale 86% of residents are renters, placing them at the whim of landlords and developers and subject to risks of displacement. Rents in Parkdale have increased rapidly over the past decade, while wages in the neighbourhood have remained relatively stagnant. According to 2021 census data, the average annual income in South Parkdale, \$36,090, is 23% lower than the City of Toronto average and has increased by only 3.7% since 2011. Yet during this same timeframe, the average market rent (AMR) for a one-bedroom unit in South Parkdale increased by 52%.

In 2022, the AMR for a one-bedroom in South Parkdale was \$1,396 — over 46% of the average income (\$36,090) of a South Parkdale resident. The 11.67% of South Parkdale's population who

are on social assistance are in an even more dire situation. In 2023, Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) shelter allowances for a single individual were \$390 and \$556, respectively (Income Security Advocacy Centre, 2023) — not even half of the monthly rent for a one-bedroom unit in the neighbourhood.

Parkdale's AMR of \$1,396 for a one-bedroom unit does not capture how expensive new leases are since the AMR data includes all market rental households regardless of when leases were signed. For renters looking for housing today, the average advertised rent on Viewit.ca (a popular rental search engine) for a one-bedroom unit in Parkdale as of November 2023 is \$2,298. Considering this rate, the average income earner in South Parkdale could be looking at spending around 76% of their income on housing if they needed to sign a new lease on a one-bedroom unit. The City of Toronto defines “affordable rental housing” as either below the City of Toronto's AMR, which they identify as \$1,708 for a one-bedroom, or below 30% of a renter's gross monthly income (City of Toronto, 2021b). Based on this definition, it is clear that advertised rents in Parkdale are highly unaffordable.

The majority of Parkdale residents live in apartment buildings with five or more storeys. Many of these are privately owned towers, which have historically offered relatively-affordable housing to low- and middle-income tenants. However, the affordability of this housing stock has been under threat for the past decade (August et al., 2022). The *Parkdale Tower Rental Housing Study* published by PNLT in 2022 found that 96% of survey respondents living in tower apartments “reported

Private Households by Tenure

Condensed	Total - Private households by tenure - 25% sample data	Owner #	Renter #	Owner %	Renter %
Toronto CMA	2,262,470	1,472,905	789,545	65%	35%
North Parkdale	6,785	3,155	3,630	46%	54%
South Parkdale	11,015	1,520	9,495	14%	86%

Plain language description: Tenure refers to whether the household owns or rents its home. A household is considered to rent its home if no member of the household owns the home. **Who is included:** All private households. Does not include people living in rooming houses or people living in institutions (e.g. hospitals). **Note:** Census tract 6 (Bickle Centre for Complex Continuing Care, a rehab hospital) is suppressed by StatCan. **Source:** Statistics Canada, Census 2021.

experiencing at least one dimension of core housing need (inadequate housing, unsuitable housing, or unaffordable housing)” (August et al., 2022, p. 12).

The study reported that rising rents, low incomes, and the increasing cost of living have forced roommates and families to live in small tower apartment units that cannot reasonably accommodate them. Overcrowded conditions were reported by 38% of tower apartment residents, and households living below the low-income cut-off threshold are “nearly three times more likely to live in overcrowded conditions” (August et al., 2022, p. 45). South Parkdale also severely lacks housing suitable for larger families, as units with 3+ bedrooms make up only 1.2% of the area’s rental housing stock.

Large corporate landlords and financial firms own

71% of privately owned tower apartments in Parkdale (August et al., 2022, p. 11). Financial firms and real estate investment trusts (REITs) “buy apartment buildings on behalf of investors and treat homes as investment products, managing them with the aim of driving profits for those investors” (p. 11). These companies profit by aggressively increasing rents, harassing tenants, neglecting unit conditions, and evicting tenants to replace them with higher-paying ones to extract value and capitalize on gentrification.

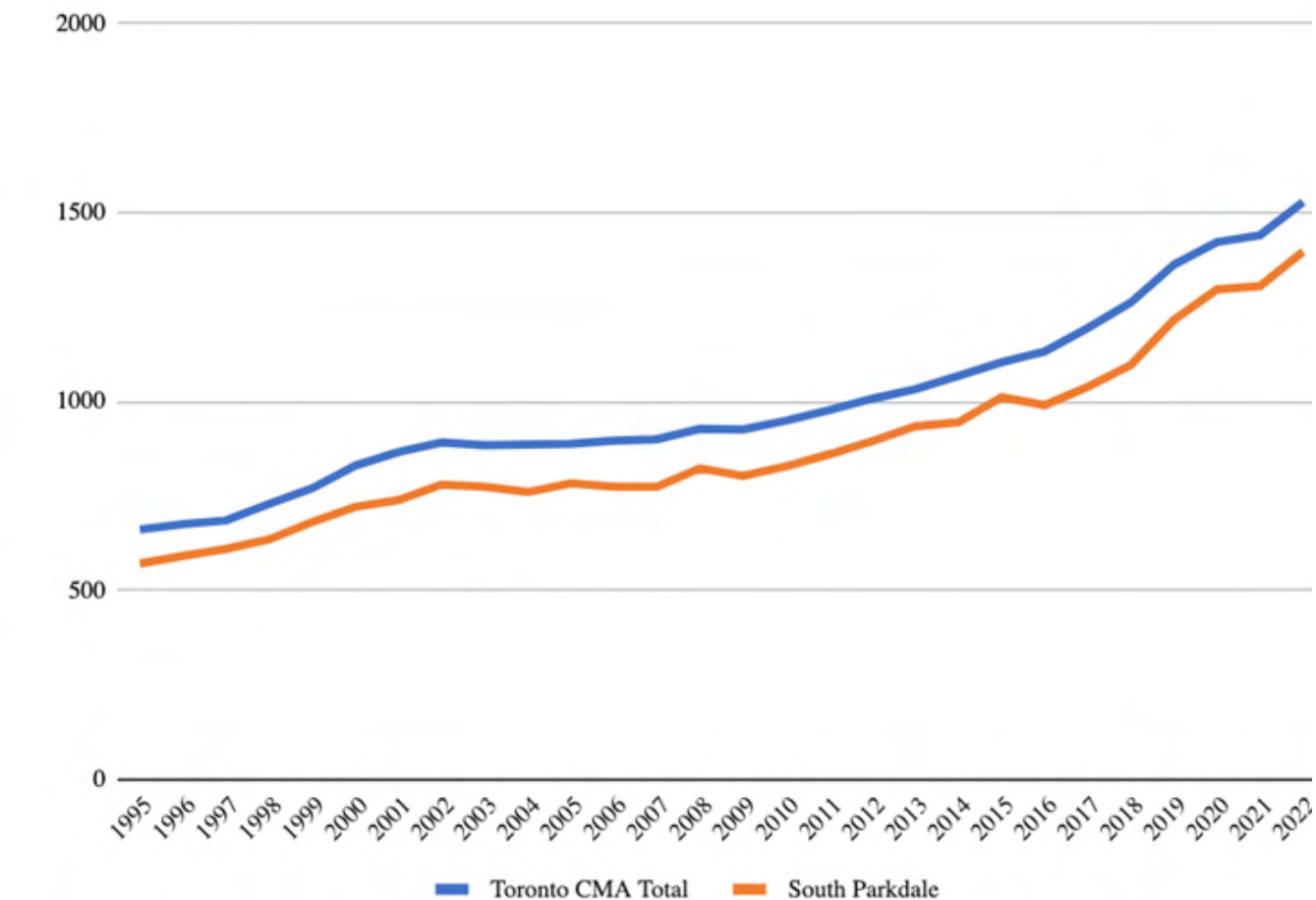
This financialization of housing has been enabled by housing policy choices (August and Walks, 2018). Ontario’s limited vacancy control means that when a unit is vacated, there is no limit to how much the landlord can increase the unit’s rental price. This has created a financial incentive for landlords to evict long-term tenants, coerce them

to live in dilapidated housing, or force them into homelessness.

The Ford government has further catered to corporate interests with its market-based approach to policy. In 2022 the Government of Ontario introduced *Bill 23, More Homes Built Faster Act* with the intention to “increase housing supply and provide attainable housing options for hard-working Ontarians and their families” (Ontario Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2022). This sup-

ply-based strategy incentivizes and reduces barriers to for-profit development while failing to invest in much-needed affordable housing. *Bill 23’s* changes to development charges have reduced municipal funding available for affordable housing initiatives like the City of Toronto’s Open Door Affordable Housing Program, which is now under review (City of Toronto, 2023). More and more, developers are appealing the City meaning that an already undemocratic process of community consultations are being even further limited as de-

Average Market Rent (AMR) for one-bedroom units



Plain-language description: AMR is the average rent paid by renter households who live in market rental homes in rental buildings, regardless of when they moved into their homes. This “average rent” differs significantly from what new leases cost for renters looking for rental homes today. **Who is included:** Only renters living in market rentals — i.e., not those in affordable or social housing — in “purpose-built” rental buildings, i.e. buildings with five or more rental units or three or more storeys. **Notes:** Current dollar rents (i.e. not inflation adjusted). South Parkdale rents are weighted averages, author-calculated. Census tract 47.02 (West Lodge buildings) is not included, as it is suppressed by CMHC. Toronto CMA is the Census Metropolitan Area. **Source:** CMHC’s Rental Market Survey, various years.

Percentage changes to social assistance recipients in Parkdale

	Population over 15 in 2016	On social assistance	Percent	Population over 15 in 2021	On social assistance	Percent	Percentage point change
South Parkdale	17,595	2,460	13.98%	17,525	2,045	11.6%	-2.31%
North Parkdale	12,130	1,040	8.57%	12,060	680	5.64%	-2.94%

Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021.

velopments are now being debated at the Ontario Land Tribunal between developers and the City, and community groups can only engage if they are resourced and can be represented by lawyers and have deep understanding of planning law. This is deeply inequitable and removes community voice from development decisions.

Meanwhile, the overhaul of Section 37 of the *Planning Act* (2023) has limited organizers' ability to negotiate for Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs), as community benefits charges are now pre-determined and capped at 4% of land value. While Section 37 was a flawed, misappropriated, and undemocratic policy mechanism that lacked transparency, it still allowed for more community benefit negotiations than what the new legislation allows for. Additionally, new private developments in the neighbourhood are outside of the purview of the City's Inclusionary Zoning policies because Parkdale is not a Protected Major Transit Station Area. These housing policy choices are all rooted in the commodification of housing and are directly linked to long shelter wait lists, encampments, and overall housing precarity. Landlords and developers are financially incentivized to displace low- and middle-income tenants and replace them with new tenants who are willing and able to pay more.

Despite the escalating challenges that Parkdale residents face, Parkdale harnesses these obsta-

cles as ignition for its resistance and advocacy efforts around housing justice. Many existing community-led initiatives exist to support housing justice, including community land trusts (CLTs), supportive housing, co-ops, and tenant organizing networks. Since the launch of the last community plan in 2016, an estimated eight properties totalling 175 units have been preserved and converted into permanently affordable housing by local non-profits, including the Neighbourhood Land Trust (NLT), PARC, Native Child and Family Services, WoodGreen, and COTA Health. New initiatives for affordable and supportive housing are also underway, such as Social Medicine supportive housing at 90 Dunn Avenue, with 51 units of supportive housing and the minimum 231 housing units being developed as a part of the Parkdale Hub. In addition, Parkdale United Church Foundation is in the planning phase of developing 100 units at King and Dunn.

However, these efforts are juxtaposed with rapidly rising rents, limited tenant protections, an influx in private sector development, and the depletion of existing affordable housing stock. We currently know of 18 development proposals in the area, most of which are private. Existing housing initiatives, although crucial and commendable, are not enough to offset rampant gentrification, and many Parkdale residents live in fear of being displaced from their homes and community. These issues are rooted in the financialization of housing and

Occupied private dwellings by structural type of dwelling

Condensed	Total	Single-detached house	Semi-detached house	Row house	Apartment or flat in a duplex	Apartment in a building that has fewer than five storeys	Apartment in a building that has five or more storeys	Other single-attached house
Toronto CMA	2,262,470	883,125	164,580	210,100	90,500	215,325	694,735	3,470
North Parkdale	6,790	680	1,015	315	390	2,725	1,640	10
South Parkdale	11,015	205	160	340	195	3,100	7,015	0
Parkdale Total	17,805	885	1,175	655	585	5,825	8,655	10

Plain language description: Private dwellings can be single detached houses, apartments in a building, etc. **Who is included:** All private households, including renters and owners. Does not include people living in rooming houses or institutions (e.g., hospitals). **Note:** Renters and owners included. **Source:** Statistics Canada, Census 2021, profile.

societal acceptance that housing is a privilege. While there is substantial work ahead, Parkdale community members have generously given us a look into their plans and courses of action.

Assets

Asset 1: Tenant organizing networks

Parkdale's tenant organizing networks are some of the most innovative and resilient in the country. The neighbourhood features organizing groups such as Parkdale Organize, an independent working-class movement known for forging tenants together to resist profit-driven landlords and unjust housing practices. In 2017, Parkdale Organize launched a historic rent strike that lasted three-and-a-half months and resulted in "re-

ductions in planned above-guideline rent increases, relief for tenants facing financial hardship, as well as a program of maintenance and repair work" (Metro, 2017). More recently, in 2022 Parkdale Organize helped tenants at 12 Lansdowne Avenue fight eviction notices by organizing within the building and refusing offers to buy them out of their homes. In addition, there is an array of tenant organizers in various buildings across the neighbourhood — 109 Jameson Avenue, 9 Laxton Avenue, 40 Beaty Avenue, 1475 King Street West, and many more. Tenant organizers build neighbourhood power to combat issues such as renovictions and rent hikes through the simple yet effective strategies of talking with their neighbours to inform collective action, mobilizing campaigns through political art, and carrying out direct actions visiting landlords' residences. In 2020, Parkdale tenants participated in a #KeepYourRent rent strike campaign that called on tenants to withhold their rent in solidarity with tenants who could not afford to pay during the pandemic. Parkdale's tenant orga-

nizing networks have helped inform organizing efforts across the city — as one workshop participant noted,

“Neighbouring communities are inspired by wins in Parkdale, such as the organizing in the West Lodge Towers. Incredible stories of organizing help inform other neighbourhoods.”

Asset 2: Community stewardship

Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust (PNLT) and its charitable arm, The Neighbourhood Land Trust (NLT) are celebrated organizations in the neighbourhood because of their strength in taking land off the private market and putting it under community ownership while also acquiring and stewarding housing with deeply affordable rents. PNLT and NLT work together to acquire and manage land as a CLT, promoting long-term community benefits and housing affordability and enabling democratic local planning and control. As a community-controlled membership-based organization, decisions are made by a Board of Directors made up of members (including tenants, community members and organizational members) who are democratically elected by the membership, ensuring community control of the organization and the land it owns and stewards.

In 2017, NLT acquired its first parcel of community owned land — the Milky Way Garden. A 7,000-square-foot property and community garden was initially programmed for newcomers including Tibetan seniors and is currently leased and operated by the Greenest City program at West Neighbourhood House (West NH). Two years later, the NLT acquired an at-risk 15-unit rooming house

at 26 Maynard Avenue, which is now operated as affordable housing with supports by Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre. In 2021 the NLT was successful in acquiring an at-risk 36 unit apartment building 22 Maynard Avenue, which is now operated as affordable rental housing by St. Felix Centre. Most recently, between 2022 and 2023, the NLT acquired 82 homes and small apartment buildings (totalling 153 units) from Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), all of which are operated as affordable rental housing by the feminist organization YWCA Toronto. As of early 2024, the NLT stewards 85 community-owned properties, with 206 rental units, and has plans to expand to 300 units of affordable housing by 2025.

More recently, the Toronto Indigenous Community Land Trust (TICLT) has started to take shape. This Indigenous-led CLT has been actively collaborating with Indigenous community members and housing providers, engaging in discussions with non-profit leaders, and partnering with civil society organizations in its development. During our sharing circle with Indigenous community members, a participant said that

“Without a home, the next steps of your day don’t happen. People need a space where they can rest”

and emphasized the importance of combining both social and health programming with housing.

Asset 3: Community benefits organizing and advocacy for development without displacement

Parkdale boasts a rich history of community benefits organizing that stands as a testament to the community's unwavering determination and resilience. Over the years, community members have united to secure community benefits by engaging in strategic communications campaigns, direct actions, and planning mediation processes, underscoring the strength of collective action and the weight of the *Parkdale Community Benefits Framework* (2018).

In 2017, a Lifetime Development proposal encountered substantial resistance, as it was the first in a wave of major new developments making their way west past Dufferin Street. For a long time Parkdale had not been considered to be a profitable area for development, and developers had mostly targeted adjacent neighbourhoods like West Queen West and Liberty Village. This development led to the displacement of Parkdale Project Read and Island Foods, as well as the demolition of the McDonald's on King Street West and Dufferin Street. These spaces were vital sources of sustenance and employment, and served as communal gathering places. The Parkdale community responded with swift organizing, marking some of the beginnings of resistance to development in the neighbourhood.

A noteworthy initiative was the establishment in 2015 of the Justice for Queen's Hotel coalition, which aimed to rectify the unlawful eviction by the BS&R Group of Companies of 27 tenants living at 1521 Queen Street West. Tenants were given a mere 10 days notice to leave the premises and would later come home to find their belongings on the street, rendering them homeless. In 2022, a resolution was achieved through negotiations involving the City of Toronto, PNLT, and BS&R. This \$1.2 million settlement not only provided compensation to the affected tenants (\$200,000 allocated) but will also contribute \$1 million to the creation of permanently affordable housing in

Parkdale through the Multi-Unit Rental Acquisition (MURA) fund. PNLT helped advocate for the creation of the MURA fund following their *No Room for Unkept Promises: Parkdale Rooming House Study* (2017a) and during their work on *Fixing the Leaky Bucket* (2017). MURA is a financial initiative aimed at securing affordable housing, particularly small apartments and rooming houses, under non-profit and co-operative ownership. In the 2024 City of Toronto budget, Mayor Olivia Chow committed \$100 million to the MURA fund over the next three years.

Justice for Queen and Close, created in 2022, is yet another example of a community-driven campaign led by a dedicated coalition of community members. This time, they were advocating for the development of affordable housing at 1375 Queen Street West. Skale Developments had made five explicit commitments to construct affordable housing on this site in line with the *Parkdale Community Benefits Framework*, but failed to fulfill its pledges. The coalition continues to call for increased transparency regarding the environmental condition of this brownfield site (a former gas station), as there is a high likelihood that environmental remediation will be necessary. To raise awareness, the coalition has created a website, organized a rally, undertaken direct actions, engaged in phone zap campaigns and established a public art studio exhibit — all part of its ongoing efforts to ensure that its demands are met.

With regards to public development, we have seen momentum around key sites of interest, such as 11 Brock Avenue and the Parkdale Community Hub, and have continued our community benefits campaign in response to UHN's Social Medicine supportive housing initiative at 90 Dunn Avenue. In October 2020, UHN entered into a Section 37 Agreement with the City of Toronto to protect the tenancy of the residents that make up SPUHNTA and expand social housing on its properties. While

this win would not have been possible without strong community pressure, it still falls short of the community benefits proposal put forward by PPE to integrate affordable housing, decent work, and equitable process into the long-term care facility's redevelopment.

In June 2021, the Social Medicine initiative also announced plans to create a four-storey modular building with supportive housing in the parking lot at 90 Dunn Avenue as part of the Rapid Housing Initiative with the Federal government, with priority given to unhoused people who are Black, Indigenous, have complex health needs, and are sleeping outdoors, or have a history of sleeping outdoors. In January 2024, Fred Victor was chosen as the site's non-profit housing provider. Due to the "Not in My Backyard" (NIMBY) response at the community consultation, PPE and West NH worked to create a Welcome Committee to build community awareness of the significance of supportive housing and to create a safer neighbourhood for incoming tenants.

Needs

Need 1: Rent control and tenant protections

Throughout the planning process, community members expressed key concerns related to widespread evictions, displacement pressures, unsafe living conditions, and a lack of tenant protections. Residents recounted experiences of navigating landlords, property managers, and building supervisors who routinely dismissed maintenance requests and engaged in harassment and intimidation of tenants. This echoes findings from PNLT's *Parkdale Tower Rental Housing Study*, which

notes that "around 45% of respondents reported landlord harassment, such as bullying, physical threats, racist or other discriminatory behaviour, and interference with tenant organizing" (August et al., 2022, p. 12). Dismissal, harassment, and intimidation are often used as tactics to push out existing tenants so that units can be rented out at a higher price (August et al., 2022).

Landlords in Parkdale also use above guideline increases (AGIs) to raise rents higher than the annual inflation guideline amounts and pass on the costs of renovations to tenants. Community members shared that these renovations may be gratuitous and strictly aesthetic enhancements in the common spaces of their buildings. According to the *Parkdale Tower Rental Housing Study* (August et al., 2022), "the M6K postal code area, which includes most of South Parkdale, has seen one of the highest concentrations of AGI applications in the City of Toronto" (p. 37). As the rising cost of living has not been matched by wage increases, even minor increases in rent can have urgent implications for tenants, infringing on their ability to pay other bills and pay for their groceries.

South Parkdale has an eviction filing rate that is 33% higher than the City of Toronto average (August et al., 2022). This rate temporarily dropped at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, likely due to the provincial moratorium on evictions. However, evictions have been back on the rise since 2021 (August et al., 2022). From January through September 2023, 1,767 N12 evictions were filed with the Landlord and Tenant Board across the City of Toronto, a 77% increase compared to the first nine months of 2022 (Harrison and Bowden, 2023). Research has found that evictions have highly detrimental mental and physical health impacts and disproportionately impact low-income tenants, families with children, and Black, Indigenous, and racialized populations (Leon, Balasubramaniam, and Roche, 2023). According to the City

of Toronto's 2018 Street Needs Assessment, evictions are also one of the primary reported causes of homelessness (City of Toronto, 2018b).

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit Toronto, many individuals experiencing homelessness did not feel safe or comfortable living in the densely populated conditions of the shelter system (Encampment Support Network, 2022). The shelter system operated at limited capacity leading to a loss of 700–1000 shelter beds, social distancing remained impossible, and outbreaks were frequent (Encampment Support Network Parkdale, 2020). Stricter social controls were also imposed that limited shelter residents' autonomy and community support, deterring individuals from using the shelter system (Encampment Support Network Parkdale, 2020). These factors, among others, have contributed to the expansion and increased visibility of encampments both in Parkdale and across Toronto. Encampment residents have been subject to police harassment and violent evictions, while not being offered adequate long-term housing options (Encampment Support Network Parkdale, 2020).

These interrelated issues have all contributed to the displacement of low-income residents and the depletion of affordable housing stock in Parkdale. Although Parkdale has a strong presence of tenant organizers, many tenants still lack information on tenant rights and are not connected to local tenant organizing. Community members noted that barriers to tenant organizing included fears of eviction or retaliation from landlords, a lack of communication among tenants in different buildings, and social isolation among tenants. Encampment support, vacancy control, stronger tenant protections, and stricter enforcement of maintenance guidelines were highlighted as key needs to support housing justice and healthy living conditions in Parkdale.

Need 2: Affordable, community-owned housing

Ongoing challenges related to the financialization of housing point to a need to expand both social housing and the community ownership of land in Parkdale. Participants expressed the importance of decommodifying housing by investing in deeply affordable units, supportive housing, transitional housing, co-operative housing, social housing, shelters, and CLTs in Parkdale. These investments are crucial to ensure that community members experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness can stay within their community and access local services.

The lack of maintenance investment in existing social and affordable housing also raised concerns among community members. One workshop participant stated that they received an offer for co-op housing outside of Parkdale, but could not accept it due to the inaccessible location and the dilapidated conditions of the building: *"I could not bring my daughter there to live. It was extremely loud... the windows were broken, there were issues with the building [...] It is also hard for me to move down there because I don't have a car."* Similar sentiments were expressed towards other social housing options offered by the City.

Community organizing around 11 Brock Avenue, a former LCBO site that sat vacant for years, led to the City acquiring the property in 2019 with the intention of creating affordable and supportive housing. However, progress on the redevelopment has been slow and has lacked transparency. The City has not yet broken ground on the site, even though it was "anticipated that the construction will be completed at the end of 2023, with occu-

pancy beginning in 2024” (City of Toronto, 2021a). Some recent progress has been made – in November 2023, the City announced that \$21.6 million in capital funding was being invested in the project to develop 40 rent-geared-to-income units, and in February 2024, the City issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) to identify a non-profit housing operator for the site.

Need 3: Development without displacement

Parkdale has continued to see a rise in private sector development, accompanied by a lack of commitment to providing affordable or community-serving spaces. Throughout our community engagement, “development without displacement” consistently emerged as a key priority. Community members raised concerns about how new developments are impacting Parkdale’s housing and retail affordability, amenities, and social fabric. Community members also expressed fears of being pushed out of the neighbourhood and no longer being able to access the community and resources they rely upon. The approval of the Lifetime Developments condos in 2017 signified the initiation of developers expansion into Parkdale.

Frustrations were expressed about developers’ lack of investment in not only affordable housing but also public spaces. For example, several participants noted the privatization of condo amenities:

“It really breaks that social fabric and that's something that communities should receive more investments in, spaces that can be shared and used by the public.”

Meanwhile, the need for more park and recreation

space was also highlighted: *“There has been a lot of condo construction that took over the park spaces. This is difficult for the kids as there isn’t a lot of park space. There is a lack of flowers... and gardens. Also, there is no common swimming pool – a public swimming pool.”* Overall, participants spoke of developers’ disinterest in community engagement and coordination:

“There's no room, no time, no space in their budget to meaningfully engage with people to actually try and build a community.”

Community members also noted that affordable businesses have continually been pushed out of the neighbourhood while spaces have been re-developed into either condos or luxury services. Many workshop participants expressed a desire to see more affordable and culturally relevant services in Parkdale:

“A lot of businesses have gone under in the last year and half. Each new business seems more and more distant from the actual need of community members. There seems to be a disconnect. What we would want to see is more input from community members. If only the services we need and want can stay, instead of services we don't need or can't afford.”

Concerns were raised about how these changes are reshaping Parkdale’s identity, cultural diversity, and sense of community. Reflecting on the influx of development and the rising cost of housing, one participant described Parkdale as *“feeling like a community divided.”* Multiple participants emphasized that Parkdale’s culture and community have been shaped by its high propor-

tion of renters and immigrant communities. As residents and businesses are increasingly priced out of the neighbourhood, gentrification threatens Parkdale's culture. As put by one participant,

"The sheer number of developments on the map [is] very scary, as they are not guaranteed to bring community benefits. Parkdale will become less welcoming because it is less affordable, more exclusive to those of certain incomes."

It is thus crucial to ensure that new developments in Parkdale reflect the needs of community members and do not contribute to further displacement. There is a need to mandate the incorporation of affordable housing in private development and to push for more community benefits and community-based decision making overall. However, the current policy landscape presents some challenges to this. As noted, Inclusionary Zoning requirements do not apply to Parkdale, and the recent replacement of Section 37 has weakened organizers' ability to directly negotiate with developers for community benefits.

Directions

Direction 1: Pursue and support the development of new affordable and supportive housing

It is important for Parkdale to have a thoughtful strategy of opportunities for intervention in the affordable and supportive housing space.

This would require extensive research on sites of opportunities for the development of new affordable and supportive housing, utilizing tools such as community mapping while in conversation with community members, non-profit and social housing providers, and politicians. From assessment and research, the Working Group could create a strategy on points of intervention and advocacy while working with community members to organize around these sites. Working Group members could engage in advocacy work at the municipal and provincial level to achieve this objective as well, with the intention of communicating and sharing these efforts with community members for movement building.

It is crucial for the neighbourhood to establish community-wide objectives and collaborate with one another to formulate strategies aimed at developing new affordable and supportive housing. Parkdale housing partners and Working Group members could convene regularly to explore optimal paths toward de-financialization, which could be coordinated and facilitated by PPE. In 2021, PPE facilitated a Housing Provider RFP Table to facilitate strategic conversations between non-profit housing service providers around social housing RFPs in the neighbourhood. This RFP Table could be revitalized to provide a platform for community members and partners to commend each other's successes as we collectively progress towards the common goal of de-commodifying housing. It could also serve as a space for housing providers to set targets for preserving, developing, and acquiring property for deeply affordable and supportive housing.

Direction 2: Promote public education on tenant rights through a

Tenant Resource Centre

Accessible, multilingual, and public education on tenant rights is needed to equip more Parkdale residents with the tools and information they need to engage in tenant organizing. While many tenant resources are available online, it was noted that this digital format is not accessible to all residents. Low-income workers and residents with language barriers also face significant barriers to participating in tenant organizing. To address these barriers, community members suggested developing multilingual, culturally specific Working Groups to address housing issues, with a focus on immigrant families and seniors. One priority for these Working Groups would be to develop a multilingual tenant rights care package for new tenants.

Another key recommendation for this direction was to establish a Tenant Resource Centre at TPL's Parkdale branch to disseminate tenant rights information and facilitate educational workshops. It was also noted that the Tenant Resource Centre should make an effort to engage directly with youth, as they often act as interpreters for family members. Partnering with local schools and educators to engage youth in housing rights education could also help build their skills and knowledge around their rights as future tenants. Community members emphasized that the Tenant Resource Centre's resources should be jargon-free, multilingual, grounded in tenants' lived experiences, and relevant to the needs of different community members along the housing continuum. Educational workshops at the Tenant Resource Centre should be community led and offer honorariums to support the participation of low-income workers.

Although the library would host the Tenant Resource Centre, leadership is needed to implement the program. A leading agency, group, or

non-profit needs to be identified and the necessary funding secured. This could also be a tenant-led program with a trusteeship model. Organizations and groups like Parkdale Project Read, Parkdale Community Legal Services (PCLS), Community Legal Education Ontario, and Parkdale Organize could be engaged to support the development of resources for the Centre, and the Centre should host conversations so that tenants from various buildings could learn about tenant rights.

Direction 3: Establish a proactive eviction prevention framework across Parkdale

The City of Toronto's Shelter, Support, and Housing Administration defines eviction prevention frameworks as "services directly linked to support housing retention or assist a household to be rehoused, where the household is at imminent risk of eviction. Imminent risk of eviction is defined as having a formal eviction notice, or at-risk of losing housing within 60 days." Pathways exist to ensure that prevention is considered not only when the risk of eviction arises but well in advance. Eviction prevention frameworks need to be complemented with interrelated services and programming, such as mental health, income, and employment supports. According to CMHC, "Across the eviction prevention literature, the strongest evidence exists for financial supports for tenants; legal supports, advice, and representation; and comprehensive financial, housing, health, mediation, and case management supports" (Zell and McCullough, 2020). Rent banks have proven to be ineffective as landlords are incentivized to evict tenants so they can increase the pricing of units.

Parkdale's Housing Justice Working Group can collaboratively develop strategies for effective

ive support and eviction prevention pathways. This involves exploring options such as educating tenants, advocating for policy changes, and establishing partnerships with entities like PCLS and tenant collectives. The Working Group could conduct a thorough assessment of the most suitable eviction prevention measures for private and non-profit housing in the neighbourhood, in collaboration with the PNLT Board, which is already doing this work with non-profit housing providers. This includes assessing the specific needs of tenants and actively engaging with essential organizing groups and organizers to create and implement a comprehensive framework.

Direction 4: Build solidarity with tenant-led organizing and grassroots encampment support in Parkdale

A need exists to build solidarity among independent tenant groups across Parkdale. During our engagement, community members noted a need for more communication among tenant organizing groups, especially those in different buildings with the same corporate landlords. Collective action is needed to not only resist profit-driven landlords, but also advocate for policy changes such as vacancy control.

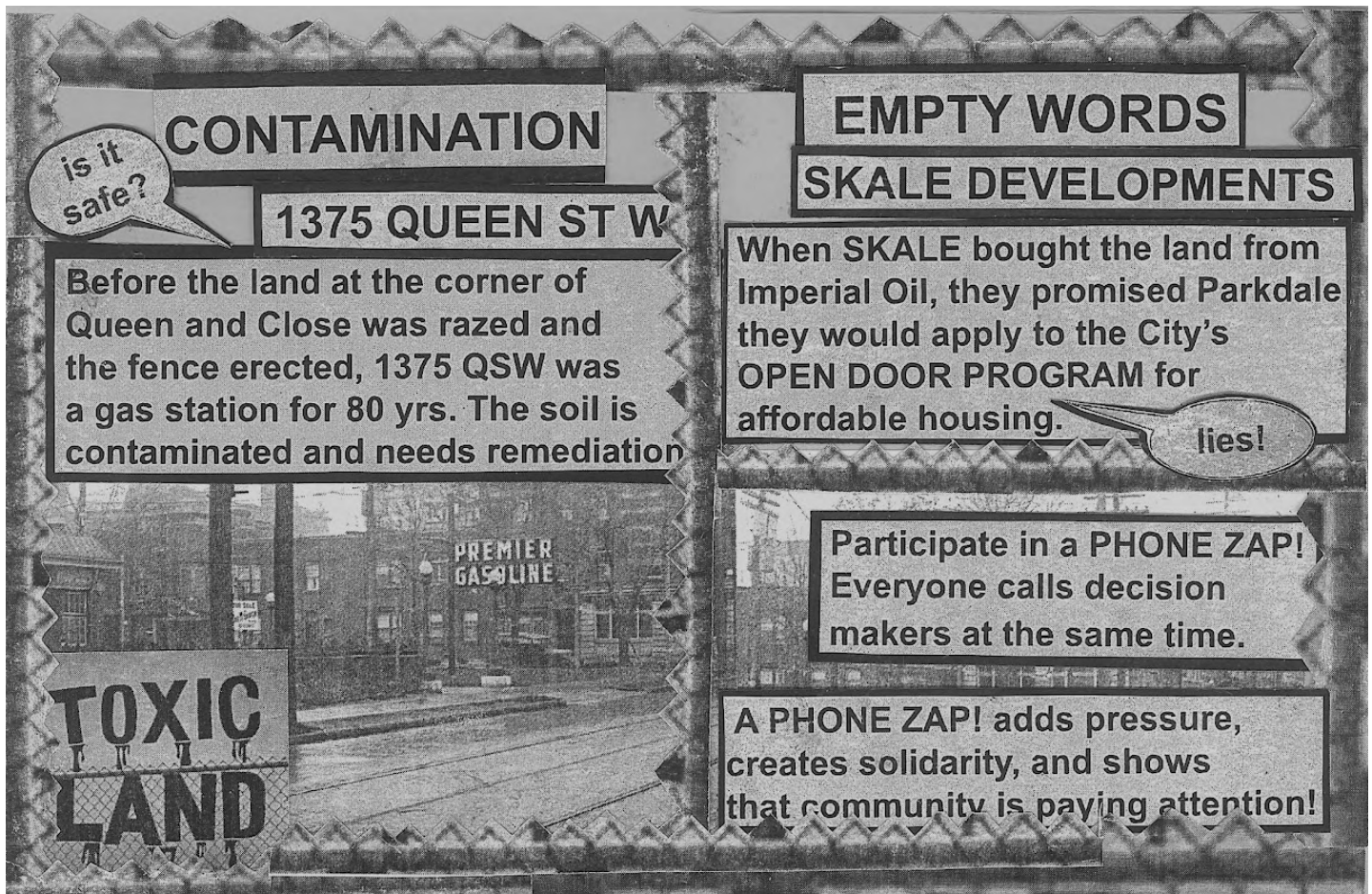
To support this direction, community members indicated a need for more collective meetings and networking opportunities for tenant organizers across the neighbourhood. This can be implemented by building upon existing leadership and networks. Parkdale Organize is an example of a leading network-builder for tenant groups across Parkdale. As suggested by a workshop participant, the first step would be to create a comprehensive list of all the tenant organizing and housing

justice groups in the neighbourhood. Community members also emphasized the importance of resource sharing, and suggested there should be a community bulletin to disseminate information about organizing initiatives in Parkdale. If the Tenant Resource Centre recommended in Direction 2 is established, a community bulletin and/or resource sharing hub should be incorporated.

Solidarity also needs to be built between grassroots encampment support networks and tenant organizing networks in order to collectively advocate for housing justice. In November 2023, Shelter Housing and Justice Network (SHJN) released its *Winter Plan 2023: Responding to a Deadly Housing Emergency*, which “highlights five areas of action for the City to meaningfully address the housing and homelessness emergency through immediate and long-term interventions” (Shelter and Housing Justice Network, 2023, p. 7). Discussions should be initiated with grassroots encampment networks to better understand how to support their work and amplify their advocacy.

Direction 5: Provide community-based education and advocacy for the expansion of the co-operative housing sector and community land trusts

To support the expansion of the co-operative housing sector and CLTs, there is a need to build public understanding and advocacy around these non-profit housing models. This could be done by developing and executing a public cam-



Zine created by the community coalition Justice for Queen and Close (2023) depicts the pursuit of safe, healthy, and affordable housing in the neighbourhood.

paign in collaboration with local housing co-ops, CLTs, and other community organizations. The campaign would disseminate knowledge about housing co-ops and CLTs through social media posts, community workshops, public events, and other collaborative efforts. Outreach to the press should also be done to build on the momentum of recent media coverage on CLTs.

Key collaborators for this initiative would need to include CLTs and co-operative housing providers in the neighbourhood, including PNLT, Dufferin Grove Housing Co-operative, John Bruce Village Co-operative, Spencer Co-operative, Co-operative Housing Federation of Toronto, and the emerging Toronto Indigenous Community Land Trust. The Canadian Network of Community Land Trusts,

which offers Community Land Trust 101 workshops, could also serve as a resource and partner. It was suggested that community workshops could be delivered by reviving the Parkdale Free School, which was a "PNLT-sponsored project that regularly programmes classes and workshops dedicated to equity, community-building and social justice" (Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust, n.d.).

Another step towards pursuing this direction would be to raise awareness about and support the campaign to implement a municipal gentrification tax in Toronto. The idea behind the gentrification tax is that when homeowners sell their property, they extract unearned profit from the culture and vitality of the neighbourhood. The gentrification tax seeks to tax this "unearned in-

crement” to “channel real estate profits back into the communities that created them” and fund “locally managed, deeply affordable housing” (Gentrification Tax Action, n.d.). Specifically, this funding would directly support CLTs and co-operative housing in the neighbourhood.

Direction 6: Reclaim vacant units and properties through expropriation for social housing

Multiple participants in the mapping workshops made note of units, buildings, or lots in Parkdale that have sat vacant for years — and even decades — such as 1–3 Close Avenue, 17 Close Avenue, and 5 Elm Grove Avenue. Many vacant sites are owned by deceased individuals or defunct corporations. Some community members also noted a pattern of Parkdale tenants being mass evicted for redevelopments, only for these redevelopments to never occur. For example, rooming house residents at 155–157 Cowan Avenue were evicted in 2014 for a redevelopment, yet the site remains vacant nearly a decade later. Another workshop participant stated that some high-rise tower apartments have many vacant units due to landlords pushing out existing tenants.

These examples show how profit motivated development has led to lost potential for housing justice. Workshop participants saw this misuse as an opportunity to reclaim and repurpose vacant properties for community-owned housing and other collective uses, like community gardens. We see expropriation, the power of the City of Toronto to take private land for public use, as a means to achieve this end. Toronto’s history of

expropriation, however, has often contributed to the displacement of working class and racialized communities. In the 1950s, projects like the Gardiner Expressway and the new City Hall acquired the land they were built on through expropriation. Parts of South Parkdale and the whole of Toronto’s original Chinatown were levelled for these developments. These decisions were made with little to no consideration for how they would displace the communities subject to expropriation. Displacement must be avoided in the expropriation process — instead, expropriation should be used for public good and community-serving purposes, such as developing affordable housing.

The *Parkdale Tower Rental Housing Study* outlines several precedents for expropriating private property, both in Toronto and internationally (August et al., 2022). In Toronto, 194 Dowling Avenue was expropriated by the City in 2006 and developed into supportive housing (Edmond Place) by PARC. Additionally, the City approved 1337 Queen Street West for expropriation in 2021 to deliver affordable housing and community space in the Parkdale Hub project. Community advocacy for expropriation policies has been inspired by a 2021 referendum in Berlin, in which 59% of people voted in favour of expropriating rentals from financialized landlords and transferring them to public ownership.

Another Canadian precedent for expropriation can be found in Vancouver, BC. In 2018, Vancouver City Council approved the expropriation of two single room occupancy hotels in the Downtown Eastside (St Denis, 2020). These buildings, which housed hundreds of low-income tenants, had been deteriorating for decades and were evacuated for health and safety reasons in 2017 and 2018. Although the City ended up settling on a purchase price with the landlord in court, the expropriation attempt nonetheless initiated the process of transferring these buildings to public ownership. The sites are currently being redeveloped

to provide safe and secure low-income housing.

In a 2018 report, City of Toronto staff noted that the City “does not currently have a policy or standardized approach to the acquisition/ expropriation of properties for affordable housing development” and recommended that “an affordable housing real estate acquisition/ expropriation strategy” be developed as a part of the *Housing TO 2020–2030 Action Plan* (City of Toronto, 2018a, p.1). However, the final document includes no mention of expropriation policies. There is a need to apply pressure to the City to implement a government program and process for expropriation. The *Parkdale Tower Rental Housing Study* recommends undertaking further research to create a proposal for this program (August et al., 2022). Another first step to pursuing this direction would involve developing a community-led strategy for identifying and assessing opportunities for expropriation in Parkdale. One workshop participant recommended that we undertake a census of vacant properties.

Direction 7: Decommodify housing such as rooming houses, small rental buildings, and tower rentals through community-led acquisition

Parkdale’s relatively affordable housing options have typically been concentrated in rooming houses, small rental buildings, and tower apartments. Both the upscaling of rooming houses and small buildings and the financialization of tower rentals pose threats to the neighbourhood’s affordability for low- and middle-income tenants.

The City of Toronto recently introduced a *New Regulatory Framework for Multi-tenant Houses* which came into effect March 31, 2024 and legalized multi-tenant houses (“rooming houses”). The framework includes regulations for the number of dwelling rooms allowed per rooming house based on zoning laws as well as licencing requirements and enforcement programs for rooming house operators. While these new regulations require landlords to meet health, safety, and property maintenance standards, if landlords fail to comply, this could potentially lead to rooming houses being shut down or sold. The framework requires stronger preemptive measures to ensure that tenants will continue to have housing stability, while also preserving affordable housing stock. Throughout our engagement, community members expressed that supporting the decommodification of housing and the expansion of community-owned land are key to ensuring the preservation of permanently affordable housing in Parkdale. In 2017, PNLT’s *Parkdale Rooming House Study* (2017) outlined a 10-year Affordable Housing Preservation Strategy for Parkdale, which included preserving the affordability of at-risk private rooming houses by acquiring them under non-profit community ownership. Significant progress has been made in the years since. Mobilized by PNLT, sustained advocacy by Parkdale residents and organizations galvanized the City of Toronto to launch the Multi-Unit Rental Acquisition (MURA) program in 2021. This annual funding program now makes it possible for local non-profits to access funding to acquire, improve, and preserve at-risk low-end of market rental housing buildings. Since 2017, local non-profits have “collectively acquired eight properties in South Parkdale, preserving the affordability of over 120 units of rental housing, a majority of which are deeply affordable” (August et al., 2022, p. 77).

PNLT’s more recent *Parkdale Tower Rental Study* (2022) recommended that a similar approach be

used to acquire tower rentals that are currently privately owned by financialized landlords (August et al., 2022). The study proposed the development of a tower rental acquisition strategy and set a 10 year target of decommodifying 2,000 tower rental units. Developing this strategy will involve conducting a financial feasibility study, undertaking a pilot acquisition project, and implementing an ongoing program for acquiring tower rentals. In addition to these ongoing efforts, the decommodification of rooming houses and tower rentals will require securing increased funding for community-led acquisition. During our engagement, community partners highlighted the lack of funding as the key challenge to this direction. Workshop participants emphasized the importance of advocating for the expansion of MURA funding. Some progress has been made on this front. In October 2023, City Council passed a motion to allocate any additional revenue from the 2023 Vacant Homes Tax to the MURA program (Freeman, 2023), and the City of Toronto 2024 budget has “expanded MURA funding by \$100 million over three years” (City of Toronto, 2024).

However, it was also noted that there is a need to look beyond the MURA program. This is particularly true for tower rental acquisitions, since MURA is designed for smaller acquisitions (up to 60 units). One participant stated that *“MURA is too specific, so we may need to advocate for a new type of funding program, for a new type of policy.”* It is thus crucial to also advocate for new federal and provincial funding mechanisms, and explore opportunities to work with impact investors to bolster government funding. Workshop participants also recommended working with the City to create incentives for property owners to donate units or sell first to non-profit housing providers.

Direction 8: Revise and update the Parkdale

Community Benefits Framework and sustain community benefits campaigns across new developments

The *Parkdale Community Benefits Framework* published in 2018 provides an insightful overview of Parkdale's development history while articulating the pressing demands of community members concerning new development in the area. These demands are around the need for affordable housing, accessible commercial spaces, decent work opportunities, and equitable consultation processes. This framework stands as a thoroughly researched and community-driven document, born out of extensive engagement within the Parkdale community, aimed at conveying the essential requirements of incoming developers. Since its inception, significant changes have occurred, including adjustments to the Ontario living wage, an upsurge in development proposals across Toronto, escalating housing costs, and shifts in policy and urban planning legislation. These substantial policy and planning changes necessitate careful consideration and incorporation in a forthcoming iteration of the community benefits framework.

PPE has developed a relationship with Councillor Gord Perks' office, and as a result the community benefits framework is presented to developers upon their submission of a development proposal in Parkdale. We have estimated that there are 18 development proposals in Parkdale and more incoming, creating an urgent need to update the framework to reflect the current context of the community. Furthermore, due to the change to Section 37 in *The Planning Act*, organizers lack a community benefits negotiating tool

embedded in planning legislation. *The Planning Act* also lowered community groups' opportunity to appeal to the Ontario Land Tribunal from 90 days to 30 days, another legislative limitation that needs to be addressed in the framework. The updated framework needs to preemptively address these changes so developers cannot merely offer standardized responses as to why they choose not to commit to the framework.

Creating and refining an updated community benefits framework will require utilizing the housing justice data gathered throughout our planning process and gathering more targeted data through more community engagement. We hope to host at least two workshops, mapping the different development proposals in the neighbourhood, giving policy and planning updates, and brainstorming updates for the framework with community members. We hope to launch the revised community benefits framework by Fall 2024.

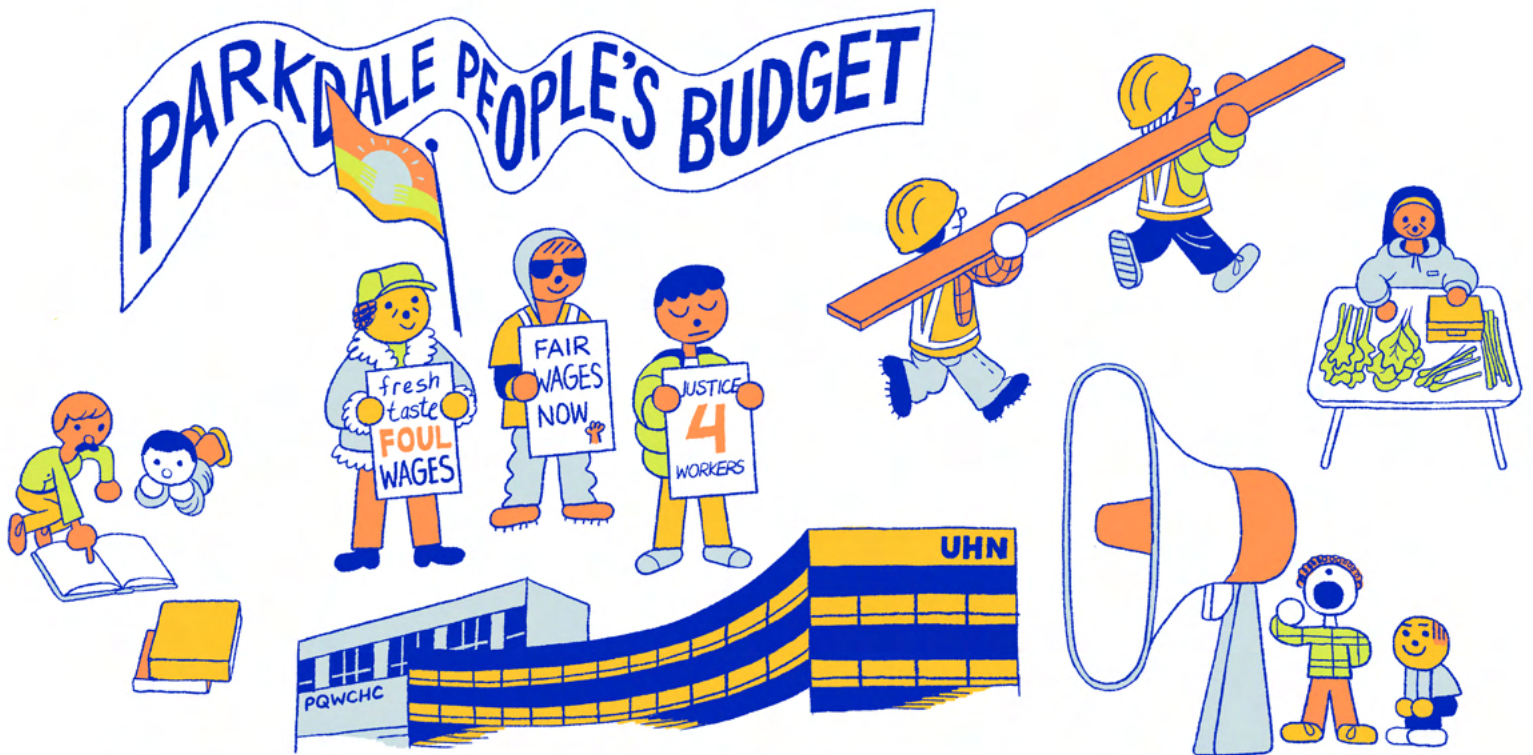
Ongoing community benefits campaigns engage both community members and the PPE network. These campaigns persist in their pursuit of collective action and momentum, exemplified by initiatives like the Welcome Committee for 90 Dunn Avenue, Justice for Queen and Close, the Parkdale Community Hub, and numerous others. Community members have intentions of organizing for more affordable housing at the Parkdale Hub site, as the City had previously committed to 50% affordable housing and has now changed its language to 30–50% affordable housing.

Coalitions actively orchestrate events, direct actions, and roundtable discussions and employ various communications channels to raise awareness of developments and their failures to meet community demands. The coalitions share knowledge and resources with one another, especially given that several developers

are involved in projects across the city. Recent developments have shed light on certain developer tactics; for instance, KingSett Capital, a contentious multi-billion dollar developer with property in Parkdale, has been known to rapidly resell after rezoning for increased density, making a great profit on formerly affordable housing and commercial buildings. KingSett's powerful financialized approach underscores the enduring need for community benefits organizing as private development continues to encroach upon the neighborhood — often with inadequate provisions for deeply affordable housing units, affordable commercial space, and decent work opportunities.

Solidarity Economy

Build a just and sustainable economy in Parkdale where community members have collective ownership and decision making power over resources, decent work, and shared wealth.



Context

The Solidarity Economy theme is an evolution of several themes — particularly the Decent Work and Inclusive Economic Opportunities, Local Participatory Democracy, and Community Financing themes — from the 2016 *Parkdale Community Planning Study*. Under this new framing of Solidarity Economy, we have brought together actionable practices and policies that are grounded in our core values of building collective solidarity to challenge existing economic power and creating opportunities for generating community wealth. In general, solidarity economy refers to a range of economic activities and movements that prioritize social, cultural, environmental, and community wealth-building goals over individual financial profits. This approach is rooted in values such as collaboration, co-operation, local democracy, cultural diversity, and pluralism. It represents an alternative to capitalism, market-driven models, and other economic development paradigms, emphasizing the participation and empowerment of residents and communities in decision making and production processes. The solidarity economy model suggests a shift towards more inclusive, participatory, and community-centric economic practices where community needs are prioritized, community assets are valued, and community actions are made with the strategic and direct intention of solidarity and collective wealth-building.

Recent engagement and census data suggest that many Parkdale community members are current-

ly struggling in the face of high rents, low wages, COVID-19 impacts, a lack of decent work opportunities, and increasing gentrification. Wages have remained relatively stagnant and unemployment rates in the neighbourhood are high in comparison to the rest of the city. From 2012 to 2021, South Parkdale's average income increased only by 3.67%, remaining 23.15% lower than the City of Toronto's average income. Meanwhile, the area's unemployment rate rose from 8.5% in 2016 to 17.67% in 2021. This is notably higher than the City of Toronto's average unemployment rate of 13.9%. During our engagement, one community member shared, "*I haven't held a job for more than nine days,*" underscoring the necessity for a local employment support system.

Increasing unemployment rates could be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in mass lay-offs and business closures. Data from the Parkdale Recovery, Rebuild, and Transformation survey in 2020 show that 50.8% of respondents indicated they had lost employment or income due to the pandemic. Throughout our engagement we also heard from many community members who had to quit inflexible jobs to care for themselves, family, and loved ones. This is a particularly high barrier for low-income working parents, as the high cost of childcare has impacted their ability to work while raising children. Many frontline workers who did remain employed during the pandemic expressed feelings of burnout and highlighted the need for benefits.

Community members also noted a lack of entry level jobs that provide training and entry into the workforce for unemployed, underemployed,

Average individual income changes (accounting for inflation)

	2012	2016	2021	Difference 2021 Vs. 2012	Relative to CMA 2021
North Parkdale	\$53,342	\$45,887	\$54,222	1.65%	15.46%
South Parkdale	\$34,813	\$32,767	\$36,090	3.67%	-23.15%
Toronto CMA	\$53,481	\$44,331	\$46,960	-12.19%	—

Source: Kamizaki, 2016; Statistics Canada, Census 2017, Census 2022.

and youth workers. A respondent to the *Parkdale Recovery, Rebuild, and Transformation* survey emphasized that “*There is a tremendous need to focus on how we can get back on our feet with specific skills.*” Additionally, barriers to employment are particularly high for newcomers and immigrants with language barriers. As one participant in the Tibetan workshop proposed,

“We need a space where newcomers can find support with finding jobs.”

Census data also show that 11.67% of South Parkdale’s population is on social assistance. Individuals receiving assistance from Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) face government clawbacks that prevent them from entering the workforce. If they make over \$200 a month, individuals on OW will have their financial assistance reduced by \$0.50 for every \$1 they earn (Don Valley Community Legal Services, 2023). For ODSP, individuals making over \$1,000 per month will have their assistance reduced by an amount equal to 75% of their net monthly earnings over the first \$1,000. During our engagement, community members stated that this prevents them from taking on more work:

“I could imagine taking on 30 hours per week of work, but I am scared to re-engage in working because of the deductions (clawbacks) that take place.”

Echoing this sentiment, a member of a local social enterprise also stated that paying

“A living wage is near impossible for people on OW/ODSP due to government clawbacks.”

Individuals take on informal jobs to cover their cost of living, forcing them into precarious and unsafe working conditions.

The business landscape has also undergone significant changes creating unique challenges for some local independent businesses. Through our Phase 2 business survey, which collected responses from 53 businesses, highlighted a number of factors contributing to neighbourhood change. Of the respondents, only 9.4% of businesses owned their property; the majority of businesses were on fixed-term or month-to-month

Unemployment rate

	2016	2021
North Parkdale	6.30%	10.90%
South Parkdale	8.50%	17.63%
Toronto CMA	7.70%	13.90%

Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2016, Census 2021.

“Our previous landlord claimed he owned 300 properties in the area. If someone owns this many units, there should be regular checks that they are fulfilling their duties as landlords and not exploiting their many retail and residential tenants.”

Additionally, the pandemic caused significant turnover of many local businesses — according to our survey, approximately 59% of businesses along Queen Street West and King Street West changed between 2016 and 2022. The majority of respondents accessed government support to subsidize their businesses and/or wages, but several shared that they were not eligible and went into significant debt to survive the economic downturn as a result of COVID-19 closures.

Labour force status: participation rate

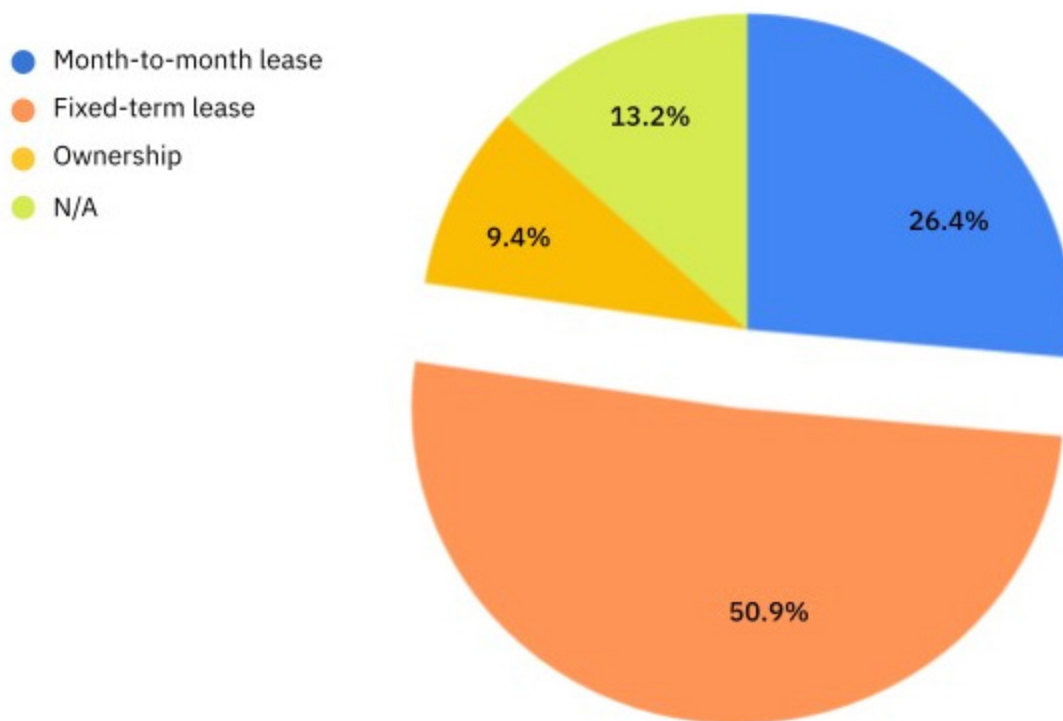
	2016	2021
North Parkdale	73.2%	69.84%
South Parkdale	70.90%	68.93%
Toronto CMA	66.30%	63.90%

Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2016, Census 2021.

Despite these challenges, Parkdale community members are deeply committed to economic and skill advancement. Collective actions in wage advocacy, skill sharing, and job creation have been crucial to creating pathways for workforce development and nurturing a robust solidarity economy. Additionally, some local businesses in Parkdale are not just economic entities but integral parts of the community identity. Their growing involvement in community initiatives, partnerships with social enterprises and local institutions, and support for local events and causes demonstrate a deepening commitment to the wellbeing and prosperity of Parkdale. Advancements in community wealth building in Parkdale as of 2024 also highlight a community deeply invested in mutual support and collaborative economic models. Parkdale already serves as an inspiring model for how communities can leverage their collective assets to build sustainable, inclusive economies. Our hope is to build upon these assets to strengthen Parkdale’s solidarity economy and build community wealth.

leases. Given the lack of rent control on commercial properties and increases to property taxes and utilities, many survey respondents voiced the pressures of maintaining their businesses and how this compromised key values such as affordability and living wages. One business owner shared the need for greater accountability around commercial landlords:

Commercial tenancies in Parkdale



Source: PPE Business Survey, 2022.

Assets

Asset 1: Worker power and solidarity

The ongoing efforts and initiatives to strengthen worker power in the community have collectively aimed at improving financial conditions for workers, while working to enhance skill sets and strengthen solidarity across different sectors. Advocacy campaigns for a higher minimum wage, such as the Justice for Workers campaign, have had a significant impact on raising the floor for workers in Parkdale. A participant from the Tamil workshop shared: “My income has risen in the time I’ve

been here. My kids are educated. I have been working. Minimum wage increased so it’s been good in terms of that. I would say compared to others with more financial means, this has been an average increase.” Although the general minimum wage of \$16.55 per hour is still a far cry from a living wage of \$25.05 per hour (Ontario Living Wage Network, 2023), successful decent work campaigns have resulted in tangible benefits of wage increases for workers in the community and have planted seeds for enhanced worker power and agency in Parkdale.

A notable development in Parkdale has been the solidarity between tenants and workers, demonstrated in actions by independent working-class groups like Parkdale Organize and community organizations like PCLS to support Ontario Food Terminal workers, Nestle workers, and more recently, Metro workers on the front-



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lines in their efforts to negotiate a fair contract. These solidarity actions show the interconnected nature of housing and employment challenges, highlighting a strategic approach to connecting labour struggles to working-class tenants.

Non-profit and community-based organizations have also played a pivotal role in providing employment support and skill building in Parkdale. Working for Change has been foundational in providing entry-level, “transitional” employment opportunities and facilitating workforce reintegration. Working for Change is the umbrella organization of three local social enterprises — Out of This World Cafe, Raging Spoon, and Parkdale Green Thumb Enterprises. Working for Change operates knowing that poverty is a key component of mental health destabilization. Its relationship with CAMH gives it access to retail spaces in the city. A community member noted that Working for Change can serve as a valuable asset for supporting emerging social enterprises: *“They have a cafe for CAMH — so they have knowledge on how to connect workers with businesses, and they have ideas on how to create the business itself and manage it, and how to access funding for training programs.”* Another example of employment support and skills building is Parkdale Property Management, a property maintenance enterprise operating out of PARC that provides employment opportunities for psychiatric survivors and people at risk of homelessness.

Parkdale Project Read is an organization that focuses on literacy skills, and forms a foundation for expanding technical literacy within the community. This initiative aligns with the broader objective of equipping residents with diverse and relevant skills to become integrated in the workforce and the Parkdale community more broadly. Parkdale Project Read is also a vital community hub that supports relationships, cross-cultural connections, and political education. For example, one participant shared, *“Parkdale Project Read is my*

second home because I've been there a long time — I learn a lot, I met so many friends and met so many cultures,” while another participant noted,

“Parkdale Project Read is such a special place where all the needs are met.”

Asset 2: Local businesses strengthen reciprocity and economic vitality in Parkdale

Parkdale's local business scene continues to consist of diverse, independent stores that significantly contribute to the neighbourhood's cultural and economic fabric. These businesses offer affordable, inclusive, and culturally relevant goods and services, vital to maintaining Parkdale's unique community identity. A PARC staff member expressed their affinity for such inclusive spaces:

“I really like the energy at Grocery Coffee on Queen, across from PARC. It feels like a place where everyone in the neighbourhood is welcome.”

Social enterprises like Raging Spoon and Parkdale Green Thumb Enterprises also stand out for their commitment to providing employment opportunities to individuals excluded from the labour market.

Community organizations also play a reciprocal relation in supporting many local businesses. A workshop participant stated, *“St. Felix Warming Centre in Parkdale made an effort to get some of their hot meal distribution catered from*

Black-owned businesses last fall.” This example demonstrates local organizations’ commitment to supporting social procurement and community needs, as well as businesses keeping prices accessible to their community. We also found that many local businesses supported the local economy by offering donations to food banks, homeless shelters, and Indigenous organizations, as well as by providing in-kind use of space and services.

Likewise, community events such as the Queen Street West Parkdale Storefront Festival, Parkdale Night Market, and Parkdale Good Food Market have been instrumental in supporting local businesses and entrepreneurs. Organized by entities like the Parkdale Village Business Improvement Area (PVBIA) and the Parkdale Residents Association (PRA), these events create platforms for some local businesses to showcase their products and services, enhancing their visibility and customer base.

Asset 3: Innovative approaches to building community wealth

In 2019, PPE’s Community Finance Working Group released the *Community Wealth Building Report*, which explored how impact investing could be used at a community level to support the community’s objectives for shared wealth and equitable development. In particular, community development, collaborative initiatives with anchor institutions, and new models for financing community enterprises were identified as key community assets that work to improve the livelihoods of low-income residents.

As a key asset, PNLT works to acquire and preserve affordable residential, commercial, and community spaces under community ownership. The resident-led organization is now working to

leverage the community ownership of land and its purchasing power to support some local businesses and individuals seeking careers in construction. PNLT’s *Social Procurement and Sustainability Action Framework* sets a key example of how many local businesses, community organizations, and anchor institutions can strategically use their economic influence to foster community wealth. Since publishing this action framework, PNLT has piloted a number of social procurement initiatives that could be expanded in the neighbourhood. The land trust maintains a social vendors list and seeks to purchase services and goods from vendors who meet its social procurement goals.

An example of a workforce development initiative is PNLT’s innovative Social Employment Partnership with the social contractor Building Up (BU). Through this partnership the land trust provides BU up to \$1 million a year in construction contracts, enabling BU to improve NLT’s homes while also providing paid pre-apprenticeship training opportunities for residents interested in careers in the trades. Since its start in 2022, this partnership has resulted in 15 community-owned properties receiving renovations and paid training for over 40 equity-deserving trainees, eight of whom were from Parkdale. Initiatives such as this can be scaled to ensure investments in the community and to support community wealth building.

Anchor institutions are large local institutions that are rooted in place and have significant purchasing power. In Parkdale, key anchor institutions are largely in the health sector, including St. Joseph’s Health Centre, CAMH, UHN, and PQWCHC — and have increasingly engaged in local hiring, purchasing, and investment. In one precedent-setting example, CAMH provided Working for Change with affordable leasing space to run a cafe that employs local residents with transitional work opportunities. This example opens doors for mutually beneficial relationships, in which anchor institu-

tions make a commitment to local social procurement and many local businesses supply goods and services to anchor institutions, circulating greater economic benefits within the community. Mutual aid networks in Parkdale have been critical in building a caring, resilient, and shared economy that has been a key asset to the community. From organizing grocery deliveries to creating care networks for medicine and mask distribution, initiatives like MAP have addressed immediate needs while fostering long-term community connections. A community member shared examples of how individuals have contributed to this communal social wealth:

“Being outside a lot sharing things we have... Personally keep track of elderly people to make sure they are okay.”

During our engagement, community members proposed how they could use their own skills and resources to support knowledge sharing in the community. Residents emphasized the unrecognized potential within the community:

“There’s things that we don’t even realize we have wisdom on, that we could share with others.”

As one community member remarked,

“If we think about it in a different way – we have space and knowledge to share [...] Funding isn’t a barrier for some things – like I can teach a class for free on landlord-tenant relationships, if we have a free space to host it in.”

In the face of funding challenges, many Parkdale residents have placed relationships over transactions and have leveraged existing resources and

skills as assets. This illustrates a shift towards de-financializing knowledge exchange and fostering a culture of shared learning, mutual support, and care-based economies.

Needs

Need 1: Clear pathways to decent work opportunities

During our engagement, community members discussed the various challenges they face accessing decent work within the neighbourhood. Decent work is defined by the International Labour Organization as “work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all [people]” (York University Staff Association, n.d.).

Systemic barriers, a lack of decent work opportunities, and discriminatory hiring practices force many workers in Parkdale into precarious, informal, and low-paying roles that lack benefits, flexibility, and safety. Furthermore, wages do not reflect Toronto’s rising cost of living. According to the Ontario Living Wage Network, “There is still no place in the province where someone could make ends meet working full-time at [minimum] wage” (Coleman, 2023). In order to support a solidarity economy in Parkdale, worker power needs to be strengthened and barriers to decent work pathways need to be addressed by embracing existing worker campaigns, fortifying worker solidarity,

and pushing for policy frameworks that support workers.

Newcomers and immigrants face particularly high barriers to employment due to language barriers and the lack of institutional recognition of foreign credentials and experience. Supporting local hiring practices by de-credentialing job postings was highlighted as a need. Language barriers also prevent many community members from accessing services and resources meant for job-seekers. One participant in the Tibetan workshops stated,

“Finding jobs in the closer neighbourhood is also an issue as to why Tibetans are moving out [of Parkdale].”

In the Black community consultation survey, participants noted that they would like support with navigating employment documents, such as resumes, cover letters, and job applications.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a detrimental impact on many workers, especially essential workers and frontline workers in the health and community sectors. The lack of benefits for frontline workers was highlighted as a key issue. As one frontline worker explained,

“We don't have benefits, lived without them my whole life, and that's what leads to burn out.”

The pandemic also forced many working parents to “choose between childcare and jobs that didn't seem to reduce their requirements.” We heard from multiple working parents who had to leave their inflexible jobs during the pandemic to care for their children while schools were closed. The unaffordability of childcare further inhibits low-income parents from being able to pursue employ-

ment opportunities.

There is also a lack of entry-level opportunities to support entry into the workforce, impacting young people's ability to gain skills and experience in the workforce. As one community member noted,

“Too many young people are out of work in Parkdale.”

Individuals receiving assistance from OW and ODSP are discouraged from transitioning into the workforce due to government clawbacks. Additionally, individuals who have criminal records or have previously been incarcerated face barriers during the hiring process. One community member described being rejected for several jobs due to a criminal charge from over a decade ago.

Strengthening Parkdale's solidarity economy includes bolstering local businesses' capacity to play a supportive role in the neighbourhood. While many local businesses expressed that they would like to better support Parkdale's low-income community, there is still a need to address discriminatory and stigmatizing behaviours towards those who are unhoused and experiencing complex mental health or substance use challenges. Additionally, our engagement with both residents and business owners indicated a major disconnect between local job-seekers and employers. Residents expressed the need for more local job opportunities, but less than half of businesses shared that their workers are from Parkdale. One business stated,

“Well, I was planning on hiring local people. I didn't get a single resume, even I asked some locals to apply, not a single application.”

Efforts need to be made to improve communication and outreach between those looking to hire locally

and those looking for work and ensure that local employment opportunities are providing decent work. Engagement participants expressed that to address the needs of low-income, unemployed, and under-employed Parkdale residents, continued advocacy is needed for major policy changes, such as raising the minimum wage to reflect Toronto's living wage, currently \$25.05 (Ontario Living Wage Network, 2023). Community members also expressed overwhelming support for a Universal Basic Income to provide support for low-income community members. Another key area for policy advocacy would be to raise the rates for fixed incomes like OW and ODSP to match the cost of rent and the annual rate of inflation. OW rates have remained stagnant for the past five years. According to Feed Ontario, "When accounting for inflation and the rising cost of living, OW recipients have experienced an 18% cut in real income" (Feed Ontario, 2023). Although ODSP rates were increased by 6.5% this year to reflect inflation, these rates still fall below the disability-adjusted poverty line (Feed Ontario, 2023).

Need 2: Displacement prevention and support for local businesses

Local businesses play an important role in Parkdale's culture and local economy. Many business owners expressed a deep care for and close ties to the community as a reason for opening up shop in the neighbourhood, with nearly half of business survey respondents sharing that they also live in Parkdale. For example, one business owner shared that

"Parkdale has always been an inspiring community to me. I knew that a bar for discussion, organizing and

community would go really well with Parkdale and I wanted to be part of the incredible things happening here."

Just over half of business owners shared that they were born outside of Canada, with one sharing, *"When I came to Canada, at the beginning, it's hard to find a job, and one of my friends said to me that a convenience store is easy to make money to survive."* Several shared that they opened their businesses to sell culturally relevant goods and services to their diasporic communities in Parkdale, notably the Tibetan, South Asian, and Filipino communities. For example, one respondent shared that they opened their business in the neighbourhood *"because our (Tibetan) community is here in Parkdale and we like to introduce our culture, also preserve our heritage."*

Results from our business survey revealed that local businesses in Parkdale were also originally drawn to the affordable rents in the neighbourhood but have since been struggling to stay afloat in the face of climbing commercial rents, pandemic closures, and inadequate streetscape management. Between 2021 and 2023, commercial retail rent went up 10–20% (Bogdan, 2023), and Ontario lacks commercial rent control, making retailers subject to displacement. Many respondents to the business survey indicated high commercial rents and property taxes as their key concerns and described experiences dealing with unaccountable landlords. Closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic also had a significant impact on local businesses. Many local businesses had their sales drop significantly, and some stated that they nearly lost their businesses entirely, with pick-up options saving them from closure.

During planning workshops, community members cited local businesses as important assets

and social spaces where they felt safe and at home. However, it was also noted that due to ongoing gentrification, many of these spaces have been replaced and are now physically and financially inaccessible to community members. Parkdale has seen a decrease in businesses that serve local, low-income community members:

"Many independently owned businesses have closed, reducing much of the inclusive community feel. They seem to be taken by larger chain businesses that don't provide the care or specialized services provided pre-COVID."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, some businesses shifted operations to no longer accept cash, though many people in Parkdale only have access to cash for payment. This demonstrates that new and gentrifying businesses can have class-discriminatory policies that do not fare for the unemployed and working-class.

Community members and businesses alike noted the need to address commercial gentrification with more resources and policies that support locally serving, independent businesses that benefit the community. For example, one business survey respondent stated,

"We need to provide incentives to landlords to rent to local businesses that welcome and support community rather than to the highest bidder [...] We need more caring and nurturing supports to encourage independent businesses and less chains."

As noted by a community member, *"Advocating for accountability for retail landlords... would be*

extraordinarily powerful." Another stated,

"Affordable rent for new businesses will allow smaller/independently owned businesses more opportunities to open within the neighbourhood".

To ensure affordability for commercial spaces, advocacy for changes in policies concerning commercial rent control and tenant protection is crucial, as is promoting affordable long-term lease agreements with regulated rent increases, in line with the call in the *Parkdale Community Benefits Framework* for "20% of new commercial spaces at affordable rates for community organizations, social enterprises, and local-serving businesses" (Parkdale People's Economy, 2018, p. 17). Efforts are needed to bring together business owners who rent their spaces to spearhead this advocacy. Responses to the business survey indicated overwhelming interest in advocating for commercial rent control, tax benefits for local businesses, and government rent and wage subsidies, as well as establishing a commercial land trust.

Another key concern for business survey respondents is the need for functional infrastructure to promote businesses and support their accessibility and foot traffic. Many local businesses highlighted Parkdale's lack of affordable parking and street parking as a major barrier. One local business stated,

"Since the 1221 King Street and 280 Dufferin parking lots are gone because of new condos, our business revenue is declining because our customers cannot park anywhere. Many of our customers park in front of our store for 10 seconds, then they get a \$150 ticket and they never come back."



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Multiple local businesses also noted that garbage management is an ongoing issue and indicated a need for more recycling bins and street cleaning. Additionally, prior road construction at Queen Street West and Roncesvalles Avenue has discouraged clientele.

Respondents to the survey overall expressed the need to build a more connected and supportive local business ecosystem. There was significant interest in attending skill-building workshops and learning opportunities to support businesses' roles in the neighbourhood, including training on crisis navigation, knowing your rights as a commercial tenant, and pathways for supporting decent work and local hiring. It was suggested that PVBIA could play a more active role in promoting Parkdale businesses and sharing resources with its members. Additionally, survey respondents indicated a need to expand PVBIA membership to businesses that are not located on Queen Street West.

Need 3: Anchor institution commitments to the local economy

Community wealth building seeks to redirect wealth back into the local economy to increase community control over resources and support the wellbeing of equity-deserving communities. In order to build community wealth in Parkdale, we need to address key challenges related to generating local employment pathways, promoting social procurement, and engaging with local anchor institutions such as hospitals and schools.

There is a need to better leverage the economic power of Parkdale's anchor institutions. These institutions have the power to redirect their hiring, procurement, and investment resources to invest in the local economy. In 2018, PPE initi-

ated a round table that brought together health institutions in Parkdale to demonstrate how they can better allocate their resources to address social determinants of health in the neighbourhood. However, these discussions have largely halted over the past couple of years, as health institutions had to prioritize dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. With significant staff turnover since then, there is now a need to re-establish relationships with these health institutions to build allyships and move forward with implementing anchor strategies that promote community wealth-building. Additionally, many profit-driven actors, including developers, REITs, and other corporations, are extracting wealth from Parkdale without supporting the local economy. This economic power needs to be effectively coordinated and redirected back into the local economy to ensure that financial investments in Parkdale benefit local community members, rather than contribute to their displacement. It's imperative to encourage companies and institutions in the construction, housing, and business operations sectors to commit to local hiring targets and to the social procurement of goods and services, specifically from local co-operatives, social enterprises, and community-owned franchises (Parkdale People's Economy, 2018).

However, some organizations have faced challenges when trying to transition to social procurement, as community-based suppliers can be more costly or complex to work with. There is a need to determine how organizations can be supported in making this transition and how local buying, spending, and hiring can be incentivized. There is also a need to assess opportunities for expanding and creating more local social enterprises and worker co-operatives that can address service and supply gaps in the neighbourhood.

Directions

Direction 1: Provide community-based education on the solidarity economy and worker co-operatives to assess local expansion

There is a need to build knowledge on alternative business models like worker co-ops to collectively assess opportunities for strengthening Parkdale's solidarity economy. During our engagement, both residents and local businesses expressed significant interest in supporting and expanding worker co-ops to bring democracy to the workforce. Doing so could help fill gaps in Parkdale's child-care, personal support, and housing maintenance services. For example, one participant in the Tibetan workshop shared their idea for a Tibetan nursery: *"It would be an incredible initiative to support parents, but also a site to teach Tibetan language and preserve our culture. If we can have a Tibetan seniors home, elder Tibetans will be able to support each other in our own language."*

Providing community-based education would be a crucial first step towards expanding worker co-ops in Parkdale. Pursuing this direction would involve developing a foundational workshop series on how to start a worker co-op, how worker co-op business models work, and how to access funding resources for co-ops. It was

proposed that this could be developed by the Working Group or a community organization and delivered by reviving the Parkdale Free School.

The expertise of existing co-operatives can be leveraged to support the development of this community-based education. One participant stated,

"It would be wonderful to create relationships with co-ops to share community benefits, allyship, knowledge, grants, and resources."

It was also noted that leaders who were involved in the West End Food Co-Op, which shut down in 2018, have a wealth of knowledge on running a worker co-operative in Parkdale. For example, former West End Food Co-Op team member and Parkdale resident Susanna Redekop has now co-founded Freedom Dreams Co-operative Education, a co-op development and education hub that shares knowledge and resources about co-ops and the solidarity economy from an Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour (IBPOC) perspective. Other assets that can support this direction include the Canadian Worker Co-op Federation and the Ontario Co-operative Association. Both organizations have programs, services, and resources to support education on co-operative business models and the development of new worker co-ops.

Direction 2: Create a local workforce planning strategy for employment opportunities in Parkdale that are sensitive to local workforce needs



Parkdale
People's
Economy

A Parkdale-specific workforce planning strategy would identify workforce opportunities, establish targeted employment pathways, and foster collaboration for community-driven solutions to local unemployment. The aim is to develop an employment ecosystem that not only supports job attainment but also sustains it, taking into account the diverse and specific needs of the community. A focus on creating supportive work environments that acknowledge and cater to diverse identities and experiences is essential for a thriving community workforce. As noted in community feedback,

"Amplify lived experience to create work for people... place people with lived experience with homelessness onto advisory committees, depute at City Council, tell stories for advocacy purposes, how to channel systems change."

In order to provide pathways that support decent work, local hiring, and connecting businesses, local groups, and initiatives, people must be met where they are in terms of skills, ability, accessibility, and understanding. Community-driven workforce opportunities must centre strong, collaborative relationships where intersectional identities and lived experience are shared and valued.

A review of employment opportunities and barriers to access could first be conducted by Working Group members by researching the existing education, training, and employment programs that support equity-deserving community members. There is also a need for training or resources for businesses to ensure they know how to deliver effective local outreach when they are hiring. Community members shared that a local, in-person, easily accessible job board emphasizing low barrier opportunities would be valuable, and suggested that this be developed in the Parkdale library branch. The proposed job board would not

only provide visibility for job opportunities but also serve as a platform for businesses to demonstrate their commitment to community-centric employment practices.

Creating supportive employment frameworks that can cater to individual circumstances and needs is essential for individuals from diverse backgrounds, including those with complex mental health challenges or criminal records. Employment opportunities can create supportive pathways that respect and adapt to varied needs by allowing for flexible employment arrangements to accommodate different life situations, such as those of parents or people on ODSP who can only work limited hours. These standards can be embedded as a community policy accessible to businesses and non-profits through the PVBIA. Addressing language barriers and making resources more accessible is essential, as noted in community feedback sharing challenges faced by Tibetan elders and newcomers:

"Because of the language barriers, Tibetans are unable to access different services and benefits [provided by the City]."

But embracing a diverse workforce with culturally competent or multilingual individuals, as emphasized in the community insights, provides grounding for understanding and also enriches perspective: *"In West Neighbourhood House Legal Services, we have Tibetans working there. It makes such a difference because of Tibetan employees."* Collaboration between community organizations and local businesses is critical for creating robust employment opportunities. In the social service sectors, establishing mentorship and advocacy programs, particularly with people with lived experience, adds immense value. For instance, when employers recognize the importance of experience with complex mental health challenges

and substance use challenges, workers can be set up in roles as empathetic and effective support workers. Additionally, integrating peer workers into advisory roles and ensuring they receive adequate trauma and wellness support is vital to prevent burnout and turnover. A focus on creating sustainable part-time employment opportunities complemented by community support services ensures collaboration and support are well established and long lasting. This is further elaborated on in the Community Health and Safety theme.

Direction 3: Mobilize organizations and non-profit agencies in Parkdale to provide a living wage and commit to a local hiring strategy

In order to support the livelihood of workers in Parkdale, local hiring practices must be promoted and wages must reflect the rising cost of living. As mentioned previously, employers struggle with local outreach. Additionally, an overwhelming majority of local businesses we surveyed are currently unable to pay their employees a living wage, stating that they cannot do so with their current business costs with an emphasis on commercial rent, sales, and price points. During our engagement, one community member proposed an idea for promoting voluntary hiring commitments:

“A lot of businesses do have pride in operating in Parkdale, so maybe if there was some kind of commit-

ment that they could make around hiring?”

This could be implemented through a local certification program, where local businesses get recognition for committing to local hiring targets and/or providing living wages. Organizations such as the Better Way Alliance, a network of ethical employers promoting living wages and worker benefits, could be vital partners in supporting this strategy.

With that said, voluntary commitments may not be sufficient for mobilizing a large number of organizations in Parkdale to start hiring locally and providing a living wage. This is especially true for larger corporate employers and institutions, who may be less dedicated to community development than local businesses. Significant advocacy efforts by workers are therefore crucial. Worker advocacy groups like Justice for Workers have played a pivotal role in mobilizing workers, raising awareness of worker rights, and advocating for fair employment practices. These efforts can help shift the paradigm from voluntary commitments to more binding agreements that ensure businesses adhere to living wage standards and local hiring policies.

Respondents to our agency survey pointed to barriers to offering decent work in the non-profit sector. These barriers include limited government funding and the limitations of *Bill 124, Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act*. Although these may be barriers to offering decent work, non-profit employers can commit to taking steps to become living wage employers. Non-profit organizations within the PPE network could pave the way for other organizations by signing the Ontario Nonprofit Network’s Decent Work Charter and/or getting certified as a living wage employer.

Community forums, workshops, and campaigns could be developed to educate employers about

the benefits of local hiring and fair wages. These educational initiatives could help businesses understand how offering competitive wages and hiring locally contributes to a thriving community and a loyal customer base. Advocacy efforts should also aim to establish a robust support system for local businesses that are willing to adopt these practices. This includes facilitating access to resources, training, and guidance on implementing living wage policies and effective local hiring outreach.

Direction 4: Provide community-based training and resources to local businesses to strengthen their supportive roles in the community

Many local businesses emphasized the need to advocate for stronger commercial rent control, tenant protections under the *Commercial Tenancies Act*, and a municipal tax benefit for small businesses. Advancing these goals bolster businesses' capacity to play a more supportive role in the community by providing decent work pathways and hiring locally.

As a first step, a Working Group led by local businesses should be established to develop an advocacy campaign to pursue these aims. One business owner expressed interest in helping start such a group: *"If there was an opportunity to be a part of a collection of businesses that try to work together in advocating for ourselves as well as the community [...] I have thought a lot about that and would love to chat about it."* There was also interest in supporting more dialogue between businesses and community groups. PPE can proactively reach out

to businesses to invite them to the Working Groups.

Once established, this Working Group would also be well positioned to deliver community-based training and resources to local businesses developed in collaboration with Parkdale community organizations. Data from the business survey show that multiple local businesses are interested in attending workshops, skill-building exercises, or learning opportunities that would support their role as business owners in the neighbourhood. Specifically, there was significant interest in attending crisis navigation training. Providing this training to local businesses would promote alternatives to policing and help address stigma and discriminatory behaviours against Parkdale community members who are experiencing homelessness, mental health challenges, and substance use challenges. Training businesses and workers on how to administer naloxone is crucial to helping them better support community members in crisis. Participants proposed that PQWCHC serve as a resource for developing and/or delivering this training, as they have expertise in harm reduction and crisis de-escalation.

Direction 5: Establish a Social Procurement Framework for Parkdale to boost the local economy through local spending and hiring

The establishment of a Social Procurement Framework in Parkdale would be a significant step towards harnessing the community's collective purchasing power for wider social benefits. Inspired by the principles developed by the PNLT's *Social*

Procurement and Sustainability Action Framework (Yoon et al., 2022), the framework would focus on invigorating the local economy and fostering sustainable community connections by channelling spending and employment opportunities towards local businesses. It would help guide small and medium-sized businesses in Parkdale that often grapple with the complexities of engaging in social procurement due to limited resources and a lack of understanding of the processes involved.

Social procurement is a practice that uses buying power to generate social, economic, environmental, and cultural value. In Parkdale, this social value means promoting local workers and businesses through local spending and hiring to contribute to their economic development, while promoting deeper community connections, and moving towards a more circular local economy. As echoed in community engagement sessions, there is a clear call to

"support our local businesses"

and *"keep manufacturing in Canada."* The framework aims to equip local businesses with the knowledge and tools needed to effectively participate in social procurement, thus strengthening their contribution to the local economy.

One of the key goals of the framework is to develop policies and practices that emphasize local purchasing and supplier diversity. This approach is in line with community sentiments advocating for the purchase of local products and a shift away from outsourcing jobs overseas. By modifying contract scopes and incorporating social criteria into the evaluation of RFPs, the framework seeks to create more inclusive economic opportunities for Parkdale's community members and businesses.

The framework will also include strategies to empower local businesses through workshops and

mentorship programs. These initiatives are designed to encourage profit-driven entities and developers to adopt social procurement strategies that align with community interests. This aligns with community voices that emphasize the need for more support and incentives for small businesses to compete against online corporations like Amazon and Wish, highlighting a crucial shift in spending habits. A Social Procurement Framework aims to develop an economic alternative that puts community well-being and a local circular economy at the forefront.

A Social Procurement Framework for Parkdale represents a community-driven endeavour to strengthen the local economy by ensuring that spending and hiring practices contribute positively to the community. It's a reflection of a collective aspiration to build a more resilient, equitable, and sustainable local economy in Parkdale, centred on strong community ties, economic democracy, and a commitment to local empowerment.

Direction 6: Leverage the economic power of health institutions in Parkdale through coordinated anchor strategies

There are opportunities with all health institutions in Parkdale, including St. Joseph's Hospital, CAMH, PQWCHC, and UHN, to develop coordinated anchor strategies that leverage these institutions' economic power to support a solidarity economy. For example, UHN's Social Medicine modular housing initiative at 90 Dunn Avenue presents an opportunity to initiate local hiring and training programs. UHN has expressed interest in hiring for various positions, offering the

Preliminary Strategies for a Parkdale Social Procurement Framework

Strategy	Spending (Community Economic Development)	Hiring (Decent Work)	Example
Develop a business survey to understand procurement and hiring practices	Understand what organizations purchase and how they acquire goods and services, identify any policies that guide how purchases are made, and identify any methods for measuring the environmental and/or social impact of purchasing.	Understand whether equitable hiring processes achieve their intended goals, identify current salary grids, and benefits, and understand how fair compensation is determined within the full supply chain of purchases (e.g. contractors and subcontractors).	PPE's business survey conducted for the planning process in 2022 asked questions on local hiring, decent work, and procurement of goods.
Develop social procurement policies	Focus on supplier diversity and local purchasing for community economic growth.	Encourage major suppliers to offer subcontracting opportunities to community enterprises with decent work clauses.	Parkdale Property Management employs psychiatric survivors in property maintenance, ensuring living wages.
Empower local businesses and residents	Provide workshops and resources to help local businesses engage in social procurement effectively.	Encourage small businesses to become Decent Work Champions and/or certified living wage employers; and share training opportunities with surrounding communities to maximize opportunities for local residents.	Miziwe Biik Aboriginal Employment and Training offers diverse training and employment opportunities.
Reach out to and engage vendors	Create a preferred vendor pool for local and social enterprises aligned with social procurement goals; Develop a "Local Parkdale Social Procurement Certification" provided by PPE to support buy-in.	Create a Parkdale-based directory to connect with diverse enterprises for employment opportunities.	Examples include AnchorTO's Vendor Portal for Indigenous, Black and diversely owned enterprises; York University Social Procurement Vendor Portal Directory; Toronto Community Benefits Network's directory of its membership including community and labour organizations and groups, and social enterprises); and Buy Social Canada's directory of Certified Social Enterprises.
Adapt contract work	Modify contract scopes, like RFPs, to facilitate participation by smaller, local businesses.	Ensure job calls released by PPE and its partners are distributed throughout the local community.	Brook Restoration's pre-apprenticeship program trains local Tibetan youth in construction.
Evaluate contracts through an equity lens	Consider social criteria (e.g. diversity/ socio-economic status/ local geography) at a higher weight in the evaluation of bids and contract awards.	Ensure that staff employed by organizations in the PPE network commit to living wages.	Out of the Box offers construction trade training for racialized communities, leading to decent wage jobs with benefits.
Form partnerships	Collaborate with social enterprises, non-profits, and co-operatives for direct work awards.	Build strong networks with local organizations to create job opportunities.	Local social enterprises like The Silver Brush provide employment in maintenance and cleaning services.
Engage developers and corporations	Encourage large Parkdale entities to adopt strategies benefiting the community through social procurement.	Negotiate with developers and corporations to include employment clauses for local residents in their projects.	Developers in Parkdale incorporate local hiring strategies in new construction projects.
Leverage anchor institutions	Align local institutions' purchasing power with community-oriented goals.	Partner with local anchor institutions like hospitals and schools to provide training and employment opportunities.	Health institutions in Parkdale offer apprenticeships and job opportunities in various departments.

Source: Yoon et al., 2022.

chance to employ peer workers on a more permanent basis. To facilitate this local hiring initiative, it is crucial to engage in dialogue with Fred Victor, the social housing provider selected through the City's RFP process. This involves sharing the research and findings from the community plan and advocating for fair working conditions and decent wages for locally hired individuals.

Institutions employing peer workers on short-term contracts should implement bridging programs to facilitate the transition to longer-term positions. Both health institutions and non-profits engage community members as peer workers, as seen in PQWCHC's peer harm reduction program and PARC's Community Connectors, employed by the City of Toronto through the Vaccine Ambassador program. While these roles typically offer temporary, part-time employment, they present opportunities to create pathways leading to permanent, full-time positions in healthcare institutions. We propose collaboration among employers to provide training for permanent entry-level roles in healthcare, such as medical receptionists. Drawing inspiration from successful initiatives like the Good Jobs pilot in Scarborough's Greater Golden Mile, Parkdale can implement similar strategies. The Good Jobs pilot utilized the SkillsBuild.org platform and ACCESS Healthcare Connections curriculum to train local residents, subsequently connecting them to job opportunities at Sun Life. By learning from such partnerships, Parkdale can establish a database of skilled workers with expertise in vaccine access, outreach, peer work, and community connections.

Direction 7: Engage community members in Financial Dreaming to build a Parkdale

People's Budget

As an advocacy tool and strategy for imagining solidarity economies, Financial Dreaming in Parkdale can empower the community to engage in democratic processes, collectively determining how funds should be allocated and how community investments should be made. This approach allows residents to identify, discuss, and prioritize funding needs to build a Parkdale People's Budget for community initiatives and priorities. There is an evident need for an inclusive Parkdale People's Budget that genuinely reflects community priorities, particularly around the themes reflected in this plan. Building a Parkdale People's Budget is intended to guide local advocacy efforts and community partners' grant applications and funding priorities. To draft and implement a Parkdale People's Budget, the Financial Dreaming process that was identified in the *Community Wealth Building Report* can be applied, using the Financial Dreaming budget spreadsheets that were developed in 2018 (Longaphy and Heese-Boutin, 2019). Financial Dreaming involves a collaborative process where community members come together in a Working Group to envision and strategize how to execute the plan's directions with action steps and priorities. The budget spreadsheets should be populated with detailed tasks, cost estimates, key roles, and potential resources with their associated timelines. Financial Dreaming budget spreadsheets can also support the Working Groups in implementing the community plan, breaking down each direction into actionable steps with resource estimates. The final steps will involve seeking funding, developing implementation timelines, and working with Working Groups to execute the directions.

Direction 8: Work with PNLT to preserve



affordable commercial spaces through commercial property acquisition

Parkdale's local economy is grappling with a critical challenge: the rising cost of rents, speculative purchasing, and tax increases are leading to the closure of long-standing businesses. Results from the business survey indicate that only about 9.4% of local businesses own their properties. Taking action to create and preserve affordable commercial spaces for community-serving businesses and organizations is becoming increasingly urgent. A promising solution could be for PNLT to explore acquiring and owning commercial property. In PNLT's Strategic Plan for 2021–2025, a primary focus is preserving non-residential space (both commercial and non-profit). It emphasizes the importance of maintaining affordable options for community-oriented businesses, non-profit organizations, and social enterprises. PPE can support PNLT in its endeavours to acquire commercial space and make it deeply affordable. Typically, a commercial land trust operates as or within a non-profit entity that acquires and manages the land to ensure its affordability. CLTs such as Oakland CLT, Cooper Square Community Land Trust, Champlain Housing Trust, and Kensington Market Community Land Trust (KMCLT), own both residential and commercial property. Expanding into commercial property acquisition could support locally-serving businesses and organizations, working as a platform for storytelling and community empowerment — a vision echoed by a community member who suggested,

"Use the land trust to tell a story."

Community members have expressed concern

about the need to identify and repurpose vacant commercial spaces. By tapping into unused spaces, PNLT can provide platforms for new and existing businesses that cater to local needs.

Meaningful cross-sectoral partnerships between local businesses, workers, and residents, as well as non-profit organizations, community groups, and governmental bodies, must be built. Engaging with political representatives at the federal and municipal levels, such as Councillor Gord Perks' office, is crucial to driving supportive policies for community wealth-building and commercial land acquisition. With business owners, workers, and residents at the forefront of advocacy efforts, this ensures that community interests are well supported as a vital component in commercial planning. The Canadian Network of Community Land Trusts, and other land trusts in Toronto, such as the Community and Cultural Spaces Trust (CCST) and the KMCLT, can also offer insights and ideas on how they are working with commercial and community spaces. These partnerships will provide a diverse range of perspectives, resources, and expertise essential for addressing the multifaceted challenges of maintaining affordable commercial spaces in Parkdale.

PNLT could explore collaborative lease agreements with commercial tenants to provide stability against rent volatility. As one business owner expressed,

"I would be extremely into being part of a commercial land trust... Rent is obviously our number one cost... If there was an opportunity to be a part of a collection of businesses that try to work together in advocating for ourselves as well as the community. Maybe even sharing profits?"

As the PNLT expands into commercial space, it should prioritize collaborative community mod-

els over entrepreneur-centric ones, echoing the findings of the *Community Wealth Building Report* (Longaphy and Heese-Boutin, 2019).

A significant challenge to this direction will be to identify a viable business model due to a lack of government funding. Advocacy for the creation of funding opportunities for community-owned commercial property is vital to this direction, as no government funding currently exists for community acquisition of commercial property. Blending various capital funding sources or diversifying the capital portfolio with a variety of grants, donations, loans, and equity investments is critical to ensuring the financial security of the organization. Exploring community bonds (see Direction 9) might be one possible mechanism for funding commercial space acquisition, though PNLT has not used them before.

Direction 9: Explore alternative financial mechanisms that reflect and serve community needs

In the face of escalating financial pressures on Parkdale's local businesses and residents, there is a growing consensus from community members on the need to explore alternative financial mechanisms that prioritize and effectively serve community needs.

Parkdale's approach to financial literacy and inclusion should include capacity-building workshops that address the lack of knowledge about financial products and services. Collaborations with community organizations with a focus on financial education can strengthen these initiatives, making them a form of community reinvestment.

The *Community Wealth Building Report* highlights the need for a more integrated view of financial resources, emphasizing the collaboration between different funding sources – grants, loans, and equity investments – to prioritize community objectives. This reframing helps in identifying the types of community enterprises that can be nurtured in Parkdale, moving beyond conventional social enterprise models and towards more community-centred initiatives. Combining individual community investments with mentorship and training opportunities can further strengthen community power and agency in the investment process.

The advocacy around UBI has been a focal point in Parkdale's community discussions. Many see UBI as a tool to invigorate local economies. Recognizing the impact of poverty on both individual lives and the broader economy, participants in the engagement sessions strongly recommended advocating for UBI. As one participant indicated,

"A basic income support system would help support local economies (money would be spent on rent, food, transit – feed local economy) and provide more effective grass-roots support for Canadians."

Advocacy for policy reforms including UBI and increased ODSP/OW supports is seen as an essential component of equitable community wealth building. As a community member pointed out, *"Tax the wealthy and make sure no one is left behind! This will take a lot of investment."*

One approach that resonates within the community is the launch of a community investment or fundraising campaign, with a focus on supporting local businesses. One insightful suggestion from a local resident emphasized that offering a small financial incentive or tax credit to spend

in local businesses could help recirculate financial resources within Parkdale, reinforcing the local economy. A Community Investment Platform that recycles local financial capital into affordable housing, social enterprises, and other community-led projects could enable this economic flow within the neighbourhood. This would involve establishing a platform that integrates various financing mechanisms, such as community bonds and social financing, as explored by the Vancouver Island Community Investment Co-operative. This platform should address the nuances of combining different capital sources, ensuring that community projects receive balanced support.

Community bonds function similarly to traditional bonds, but are tailored to suit the needs of charities, non-profits, and co-operatives. They offer a way for individuals to invest in the neighbourhood, and are an alternative way to raise capital from the community rather than banks. Tapestry Community Capital, with its pool of investors, supports non-profits and co-operatives in using community bonds to facilitate repayable loans, encouraging community members to invest in their neighbourhood. These bonds can attract local, or at least values-aligned investors, who are keen to see their capital used for meaningful community wealth building and social change. As noted in a workshop, moving *"away from relying on inconsistent government funding"* is a strategic move towards community-oriented funding streams.

The concept of creating an alternative economy was also floated, with suggestions like creating a local currency and the exploration of local levies and community reinvestment to keep financial resources within Parkdale. This includes advocating for contributions from capital gain tax revenues and creating community block grants through programs like the Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy.

Parkdale's commitment to environmental sustainability is evident in the community's call for massive investments in a green economy. As a participant expressed,

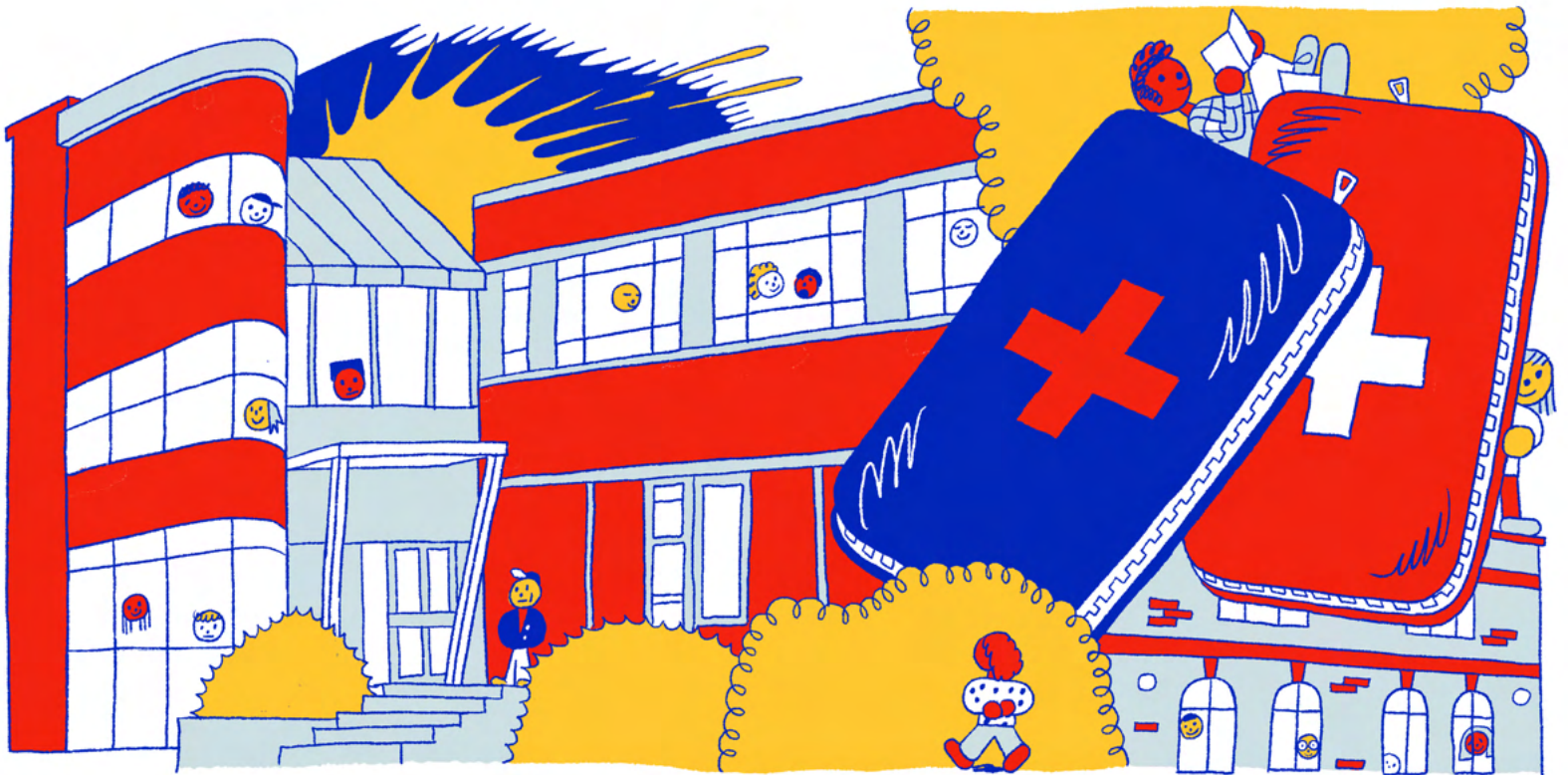
"We need to make massive investments in transforming to a green economy while ensuring the benefits of such investments go toward helping the most vulnerable."

Exploring stewardship financing, with Indigenous-led financing at the forefront, as demonstrated by models like Coast Funds, could provide a sustainable approach to fundraising. This approach aligns with the broader community calls for sustainable stewardship to be built within the local economy, such as creating jobs in active transportation infrastructure, providing local food options, stewarding vibrant public spaces, and completing green retrofits of existing buildings.

Parkdale's exploration of alternative financial mechanisms is not just about securing funding — it's about reimagining and restructuring the economic fabric of the community to be more inclusive, sustainable, and responsive to the needs of its residents. The community's proactive stance on UBI, green economy investments, and creating an alternative economy reflects a deep commitment to building wealth in a rapidly changing urban landscape. By integrating the collective wisdom of its residents, workers, and business owners, Parkdale is poised to create a financial ecosystem that not only meets its current needs but also paves the way for future growth and prosperity; central to that is Parkdale's solidarity economy.

Community Health and Safety

Practice new forms of care and support in moments of crisis that radically reimagine community safety through abolition and transformative justice, and that centre community health and wellbeing.



Context

The 2016 *Parkdale Community Planning Study* delved into how the social determinants of health – income, employment, housing, and work environments – are related to socio-economic factors and have considerable impacts on health outcomes. Parkdale has high health needs, with 11.67% of the neighbourhood on social assistance. However, Parkdale is also a neighbourhood that has many health programs and services available for residents through PQWCHC, UHN, St. Joseph's Hospital, and CAMH.

The COVID-19 pandemic drew attention to the systemic gaps that Parkdale residents face when it comes to community access to basic forms of healthcare and feeling safe in their neighbourhood. There continue to be long wait times to address chronic conditions and surgery, lack of access to primary care physicians, and Province-induced cuts to healthcare, depleting an already overworked and understaffed system. This iteration of the community plan will hone in on the gaps highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic to envision how we can build more resilient and community-centred systems to support Parkdale residents' health and safety.

In recent years, the provincial government has continued to create marked threats to the state of the public healthcare system. In January 2023, the Ford government responded to backlogs in the healthcare system by funding private health

facilities to conduct a range of surgeries (Crawley, 2023). Ontario already has the second lowest public hospital funding of any province in the nation, and there continues to be a healthcare labour shortage (Ontario Health Coalition, 2023) as public hospital staff are financially incentivized to move to the private sector. This is damning for Ontarians as the aging and senior population increases – demand for services will also be higher, but supply of staff and resources will be smaller. Long-term care workers, as a racialized and feminized workforce that is chronically underpaid, are also hurt by this system (Syed, 2020). As long-term care facilities are increasingly driven by profit and shareholder interests, often using a REIT model similar to financialized rental apartments, the quality of life for staff and clients will decline.

In conjunction with this, *Bill 124 – Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act, 2019* continued to impact the wages and retention of public sector employees including public healthcare staff. *Bill 124* capped public sector salaries at a rate of 1% per year for a three-year term and limited improvements to collective agreements (OPSEU, 2023), preventing healthcare institutions from being able to raise workers' pay and making it difficult to retain employees who may find more competitive wages elsewhere. In November 2022, the Ontario Superior Court ruled *Bill 124* unconstitutional after a coalition of unions brought the challenge before the courts (Ontario Superior Court of Justice, 2022). In December 2022, the Province filed an appeal of the decision – the public continues to wait for an outcome (Court of Appeal for Ontario, 2022).

There were, however, noteworthy provincial initiatives focused on training personal support workers (PSWs) with the adoption of the *Ontario Enhancing Personal Support Worker Training* (Government of Ontario, 2022). The policy was a \$54.7 million financial support program for up to 4,000 new students at Ontario colleges, with the intention of training PSWs to address the province's labour shortage. The *Pandemic and Emergency Preparedness Act, 2022* also offered a \$3-per-hour wage increase for PSWs in long-term care facilities, and a \$2-per-hour wage increase for those in hospitals (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2022).

In July 2020, PPE's engagement for *Parkdale's Recovery, Rebuild, and Transformation* found that mental health and harm reduction were core concerns for the community. Further, culturally relevant supports continued to come up as a need for community members in the context of both creating and offering supports in times of criminalization and police interaction. In light of these findings, PPE called upon the City of Toronto to support recovery by investing in culturally relevant and accessible mental health and harm reduction programs, decriminalizing and legalizing drugs, providing subsidies for wellness education and training, and creating alternatives to policing as a step towards ultimately defunding and abolishing police systems.

Community members have pointed to heightened social isolation, which can lead individuals to substance use, in turn preventing them from engaging in social connection and causing a cycle of isolation (Christie, 2021). In 2022, South Parkdale had the fifth highest number of suspected opioid overdose 911 calls of every neighbourhood in Toronto, with 118 calls. According to the Toronto Overdose Information System, "The number of fatal calls in May 2023 was higher than the number of fatal calls seen before the declaration of the COVID-19 emergency." There is an increase in toxicity of the

drug supply due to the lack of supply regulation, with 81% of all accidental apparent opioid toxicity deaths in 2022 within Canada containing fentanyl within the supply (Government of Canada, 2023).

The Social Development, Finance and Administration Division of the City of Toronto launched a Strengthening the Community Crisis System grant intended to increase the capacity of current community mental health and substance use crisis infrastructure across Toronto. They received over 71 proposals with funding requests totalling over \$30 million, highlighting the need for investment in community crisis infrastructure and the community sector's response capacity. In November 2023, City Council voted to expand community crisis service across the city.

Assets

Asset 1: Responsive community health programming and supports

Parkdale has several low-barrier, reduced-cost, and community-based health services. PQWCHC is a community-based health organization that offers a range of services, including primary health care, dental care, harm reduction, health promotion, counselling, and community development programming. Other low-barrier supports offered in Parkdale include Ontario Structured Psychotherapy program, Breakaway Community Services, Sistering, and PARC. PQWCHC also offers harm reduction programming, including a supervised consumption site in Parkdale, street outreach, and supports in many of the shelter hotels across the city.

In 2018, the newly-elected Conservative provincial government launched a review of supervised consumption sites, halting the opening of new sites. This decision came just days before PQWCHC's Parkdale location was set to open, forcing the previously-sanctioned and funded site to sit empty for months (McGillivray, 2018). In August 2018, the Toronto Overdose Prevention Society, a group of volunteer healthcare workers and activists (including staff from PQWCHC), responded to these provincial pushbacks and opened an unsanctioned overdose prevention site in a tent in Parkdale.

Another grassroots response to community health needs is Toronto Indigenous Harm Reduction, which is a 2-Spirit and Queer Indigenous collective that emerged during COVID-19 to offer basic needs, access to critical health support, harm reduction supplies and more to Indigenous community members experiencing homelessness in Toronto. Additionally, the Parkdale Women's Leadership Group and Mutual Aid Parkdale have collaborated to hold community wellbeing workshops that provide health and wellness resources with key health partners that serve and support community health.

The Social Medicine Initiative at UHN has been working with the United Way Greater Toronto and the City of Toronto to tackle housing needs in Parkdale. The 90 Dunn Avenue Social Medicine housing project is intended to address poverty, homelessness, and other social determinants of health through supportive housing (see the Asset 3 in the Housing Justice theme for more information). Social medicine “seeks to understand health disparities and socio-economic inequities, and promote innovations in health service delivery and policies to improve health at individual and population levels” (The Division of Social Medicine at UBC, n.d.). Using this approach, tenant selection for 90 Dunn Avenue prioritizes Indigenous, Black, 2SLGBTQIA+, people with complex health needs, and people sleeping out-

doors or who have a history of sleeping outdoors.

Asset 2: City of Toronto – funded crisis response

The Toronto Community Crisis Service (TCCS) is composed of four community crisis support service pilots that respond to people experiencing mental health crises and decent police in crisis response. From March to September 2022, 78% of calls transferred from 911 were handled by TCCS with no police involvement. However, TCCS service providers must grapple with the lack of safety and barriers when they cannot pre-determine if the police will also respond to a call with them.

The TCCS team is composed of community members from the communities that they work in and is made up of nurses, support workers, case managers, and community resource specialists. They are non-enforcement and consent based, and notably, they offer case management and support for clients for up to three months. After this time, clients have the option of transitioning into a peer support model — 28% of service users enrolled in a post-crisis case management program following their interaction with the TCCS (Phan et al., 2022). However, TCCS service providers do not have many referral options for long-term psychiatric care, dedicated shelter beds, or housing, and as a result, experience a high number of repeat calls.

Parkdale is supported by the Indigenous-led crisis response program, a TCCS pilot of 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations, in partnership with PQWCHC. The team comprises 86% members who identify as Indigenous. They operate in crisis response in 14 Division and offer three months of case management support and peer-to-peer support.

Needs

Need 1: Culturally relevant resources, especially around mental health

As described during the community wellbeing workshops, Parkdale needs *“more community involvement to help alleviate mental health issues.”* Culturally-adapted health services are critical to overcome stigma and to address the nuanced mental health needs of diasporic communities. Resources need to be grounded in cultural contexts to offer appropriate and responsive mental health services and programs to be useful for community members.

There are significant challenges posed by interpretation services for individuals seeking access to care. Despite the availability of social services, members of the Tibetan community have expressed difficulties due to cultural and language barriers. The lack of interpretation creates challenges for effective communication and access. Additionally, as raised by a community member,

“Many local Parkdale organizations do not adapt to the needs of Tibetan newcomers as they should. It probably comes down to the white people in Parkdale who racialize Tibetans as very one-dimensional, ‘happy’, ‘peaceful’ refugees... we are real people with real thoughts and lived experiences. Many Tibetans in Parkdale live in profound poverty.

We are colonized people who carry with us unimaginable trauma, pain, and loss as a result of Chinese colonialism. But local white organizations neither engage nor consult us when developing their programs or business plans.”

In the Tamil community, the absence of a Tamil-speaking social worker in the neighbourhood has created barriers to accessing support for mental and physical health:

“Back in the day, I received a lot of help from a Tamil [social] worker... There is no help now. Many people do not have access to an interpreter... Getting access to therapy is really difficult because of this language issue. There is no room to even share our sorrows or find a solution.”

Additionally, some clients have reported experiencing discrimination using over-the-phone interpretation services. Despite not being able to see clients, some interpreters may still display bias to certain communities based on their dialects. An illustrative case involved a Hungarian Roma community member who faced discrimination while utilizing interpretation services. Clients can be apprehensive about sharing personal information to interpreters and worry that divulging personal details to community members working as interpreters might result in breaches of confidentiality within their communities. One community member said,

“Another important issue is mental health. Many experience mental health issues and despite the services available, there is a language barrier. Although we have interpret-



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ers people might have concerns about privacy, so how do we mitigate such gaps?”

In the context of 2SLGBTQIA+ clients, further challenges emerge, as interpreters may fail to respect pronouns and exhibit transphobic or homophobic behavior during interactions.

Newcomer youth can experience mental health challenges from surviving systemic racism, financial strain, and adjusting to new norms that may clash with their families’ value systems. They may also face stressors from the Canadian educational system, challenges to finding employment, and supporting their families in navigating linguistic barriers (Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services, 2010). As a result of these systemic challenges, low-income and newcomer youth may partake in criminalized activities, and those who are also racialized are more likely to be targeted by the criminal justice system. Further, newcomer youth can carry trauma from their countries of origin from experiencing conflict or persecution, which can negatively affect mental health. To address the combination of stressors that can negatively affect the mental health of newcomer youth, there is a need for tailored supports that are grounded in their cultural context.

Feelings of social isolation amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic prompted communities to call for more accessible social events that honed in on wellness, music, spiritual practices, and children’s activities. The easing of pandemic restrictions has allowed for more of these social events recently, but there continues to be a need to ensure that they are accessible with childminding, food, honorariums, and physical access for Parkdale residents.

During the Indigenous consultation, a communi-

ty member emphasized the crucial role of Indigenous Elders in gatherings and in offering one-on-one time with members of the community. Elders have *“healed themselves and are now ready to heal others. They have the spirit, knowledge, and wisdom.”* Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 and health concerns, several Elders have opted to stay home and not attend in-person events and gatherings due to health concerns. It is imperative to provide support for Indigenous Elders, facilitating their participation in community events. This assistance may include transportation support, ensuring accessibility in event spaces, and offering financial aid.

Need 2: Supervised consumption sites staffed 24/7 with onsite social service support for harm reduction workers

Supervised consumption sites generally do not have 24/7 staffing, rendering safe substance use impossible beyond regular operating hours. This challenge is compounded by the escalating risks posed by the increasingly toxic drug supply, demanding heightened vigilance from harm reduction workers in their duties. In Toronto, benzodiazepines were found in about 44% of fentanyl samples tested by the Toronto Drug Testing Service in 2022.

Furthermore, the significant burnout experienced by harm reduction workers leads to low retention rates, underscoring the pressing need for improved support services tailored to harm reduction workers. A study conducted in Vancouver found that “participants who worked at OPS

[Overdose Prevention Sites] often described how the grief and trauma they experienced as a result of routine exposure to overdose events and the significant loss to overdose death in the community contributed to burnout in regards to their roles as peer workers.” (Kennedy et al., 2019, p.19). These feelings of emotional exhaustion can be harmful and overwhelming, leading some harm reduction workers to reduce their shifts or leave their positions altogether.

Need 3: Alternatives to policing and the incarceration system

Community members voiced strong concerns around policing in Parkdale, specifically regarding Black and Indigenous residents who are constantly under threat of policing and surveillance. This is evidenced in the use of police intervention and criminalization of individuals housed in tents in public spaces and violent encampment evictions throughout the city, most notably at Lamport Stadium and Trinity Bellwoods Park in June 2021. A Haudenosaunee community member said, *“Me and my partner are living in the park around the corner and no one is bothering us. When the police came, we told them it's our sovereign right to be here.”* Further, Tibetan community members voiced that Tibetan youth are finding themselves ensnared in the criminal justice system with little support navigating the system.

Calls to defund the police were further amplified by the murder of Regis Korchinski-Paquet, a Black and Indigenous woman, in the High Park neighbourhood on May 27, 2020. Police came to her home in response to a mental health call, and while they were in her apartment unit, she fell 24 storeys to her death. As per a lawsuit filed by Korchinski-Paquet's family, the police failed to em-

ploy de-escalation or mental health training during the incident, exacerbating the situation.

According to the *Race and Identity Based Data Collection Strategy Technical Report 2020 - Use of Force* created by the Toronto Police Service (TPS), “When compared to their presence in the city, Indigenous, Black, Middle Eastern and Latino people are over-represented in reportable use of force. In particular, Black people are 3.9 times more likely to experience a use of force, relative to their proportion in the City of Toronto; Indigenous people are 2.3 times over-represented; and Latino and Middle Eastern people were 1.3 times over-represented in reportable use of force incidents” (Phan et al., 2022).

Police are often dispatched with nurses to respond to mental health calls through the Mobile Crisis Intervention Team (MCIT), but they often lack the necessary training to respond effectively. Consequently, when law enforcement officers address such calls, they may find themselves with individuals experiencing psychosis or severe distress, potentially leading to the issuance of criminal charges. This approach often ends with criminalization, rather than addressing underlying needs and providing appropriate care, exacerbating existing mental health challenges.

When communities are underserved — with higher levels of poverty, food insecurity, unreliable transit, high rental costs and underemployment — there are also higher levels of crime because residents do not feel that they have the supports in place to tend to their basic needs. Parkdale community members demand that the police be defunded and that funding be used to invest in community services. As one community member said,

“Take 100% of the police's \$1 billion plus budget and streamline this into community-led mental health initia-

tives, and affordable housing options including co-ops and missing middle options (fourplexes/duplexes/etc, through loosening zoning restrictions), and increase awareness and education around food sovereignty and local food networks.”

To address the root cause of crime, the police budget could be reallocated to social services to address poverty, food insecurity, high rents, under-employment, and more. The City of Toronto’s 2023 police budget was \$1.16 billion, a \$48.3 million increase from the previous year. Though the TPS claims to be supportive of alternatives to policing, they are not supportive of defunding. The 2024 budget was maintained at \$1.2 billion, despite calls from advocacy groups across the city to defund the police and refund community. TPS continues to utilize funding for its own mental health units, when that funding could be reallocated to community response. Reallocation of the police budget to Community and Social Services could almost double the amount dedicated towards services that support citizens’ basic needs, including children’s services, court services, economic development and culture, fire services, the housing secretariat, employment and social services, and more.

Directions

Direction 1: Improve existing mental health programs to ensure they are culturally relevant, responsive,

support independence, and do not have extensive wait lists

When people of different cultures aim to access mental health programs and supports, the weight of navigating the mental health system is put on the individuals. Programming needs to be expanded to languages that community members speak, including Tagalog, Tibetan, Mandarin, Tamil, and Spanish. It is also crucial to have mental health practitioners who understand the cultural contexts of these communities, whether through lived experience or through extensive training in cultural humility and anti-racism.

There are gaps in the interpretation services that are currently offered through healthcare providers due to discrimination that service-users may face from interpreters. It is necessary for interpreters to partake in training that encourages them to check their biases, whether towards specific ethnic groups or the services that people are receiving when they need interpretation. Clients require safety when they work with interpreters to access services and programming, which means interpreters must be held to similar standards of training and professionalism as medical professionals. A professional practice licence for medical language interpreters could be advocated for on a provincial level in conjunction with professional training on ethics, patient confidentiality, addressing bias, and more (Sultana et al., 2018).

For some cultures and communities there is a stigma associated with participating in mental health programs and accessing mental health support. It’s key, therefore, to offer services and programs that support mental health without explicitly or externally referring to them as mental health supports, but as wellness programs (Petersen, 2016,

p.2). Research suggests that to address stigmatization, it is helpful to build partnerships with religious affiliations, have positive mental health campaigns, create psycho-educational groups for new immigrants, offer therapeutic group activities, have counselling services in community centres and settlement agencies, and educate family physicians on detecting mental health issues in their patients (Petersen, 2016, p.3).

Direction 2: Support the expansion of harm reduction supports and street outreach workers to address the rise in overdoses

It is imperative to invest social service funding into hiring and meaningfully supporting harm reduction workers to not only have 24/7 supervised consumption sites but also increase capacity to serve clientele. However, community health agencies also need to be given resources to support the mental health of peer and outreach workers. Peer workers navigate financial insecurity, lack of respect and recognition at work, housing challenges, inability to access or refer individuals to resources, and constant exposure to death and trauma (Mamdani et al., 2021). Harm reduction workers are prone to burnout given their proximity to trauma and death (Taha et al., 2022). One community member shared that they previously worked at a place that had a social worker on site, who workers would call after each client interaction to check in and get support if needed.

The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction suggests that government funding and policy interventions are needed to increase fund-

ing and capacity for psychotherapy, push health and disability insurance providers to insure mental health, and implement tax incentives or subsidies to encourage mental health supports (Handson et al., 2018).

Direction 3: Create a co-ordinated neighbourhood-wide strategy aimed at defunding the police and building alternative networks of community care, such as crisis response units and trained mental health teams

Long-term recovery planning is needed that hones in on primary prevention, while identifying the community and structural shortcomings that led to the crisis response being necessary (Handson et al., 2018). Traditionally, the Parkdale community has worked together to address the gaps that policy and public institutions fail to address, as exemplified by Parkdale's mutual aid efforts throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviews with community members suggested that we implement a social development strategy in Parkdale, investing in safety networks for residents to build capacity to support neighbours in crisis. The City of Toronto should reallocate its MCIT budget into crisis responses that do not centre the police, whether it's the TCCS pilot programs or community-based crisis response initiatives. The neighbourhood strategy can engage with

organizations that are working towards abolition, defunding the police, and building alternative strategies for care and crisis response. For example, Toronto Prisoner's Rights Project is a volunteer organization of former prisoners, people with loved ones inside, activists, front-line workers, artists, researchers, educators and students. No Pride in Policing Coalition is a queer and trans, Black, racialized, Indigiqueer and 2-Spirited coalition focused on defunding and abolishing the police. These organizations connect people to abolitionist principles using tactics such as direct action, public education, mutual aid, teach-ins, protests, art, and celebrations.

Direction 4: Expand community-based training and education to support navigating crisis and conflict in areas such as mental health support, crisis intervention, de-escalation, suicide prevention, transformative justice, mindfulness, psychotherapy, and social work aimed at helping the people in the neighbourhood

The community planning process revealed that to foster community safety, Parkdale residents need support and training through resident-led, City-funded initiatives to widen their capacity. There is existing infrastructure in place, including resident-led organizations such as SPHUNTA, which is founded in radical approaches to providing care and support. There are tenants' associations and tenant committees that could collaborate with one another and with neighbourhood agencies to create community-based training and education to support crisis response. Individuals in the neighbourhood have expressed interest in being involved and supporting their neighbours. Community-based crisis intervention requires an audit of the skills residents want and need, adjudicating what fair compensation looks like, and assessing what these roles look like for a nuanced approach to addressing the needs of the Parkdale community.

It is important to engage with youth to better learn how community-based training and education can better support them, as they have nuanced, culturally specific needs that must be assessed to strategize around them. The Parkdale branch of the TPL has a Youth Hub that could serve as a point of engagement with youth in the neighbourhood. This preliminary research is necessary before moving forward with strategies and programming for youth.

Peer workers tend to reside within the community, but generally are on short-term contracts, meaning they are not consistently working within the community and their roles are generally precarious. Non-profits and community agencies should look into means of continuing peer workers' employment so that they can continue to build trust within the community and utilize that trust to expand community education and crisis navigation. Peer work is an effective model of offering care, but peer workers themselves need care due to the potential triggers and burnout of the work.

Direction 5: Establish community healing and transformative justice circles to support community members in navigating grief, trauma, and crisis

The rise in inflation, renovations, the opioid crisis, losses due to COVID-19, and looming unaffordable developments coming into Parkdale has caused insurmountable grief, trauma, and crisis amongst its residents. Counselling and therapy are generally financially inaccessible to the working class and are often rooted in individualistic perspectives of wellbeing without creating opportunities for collective care. The Working Group could explore alternative practices to support community healing.

During the Indigenous consultation, community members spoke about the importance of Indigenous ways:

“We need to learn these ways [language, traditions, cultural history, stories] — because there will come a time where people don't know them and others will misrepresent them. We still need more of this learning. We need a safe space for people to heal. And we first heal the individual, then heal the community, and then heal the nation.”

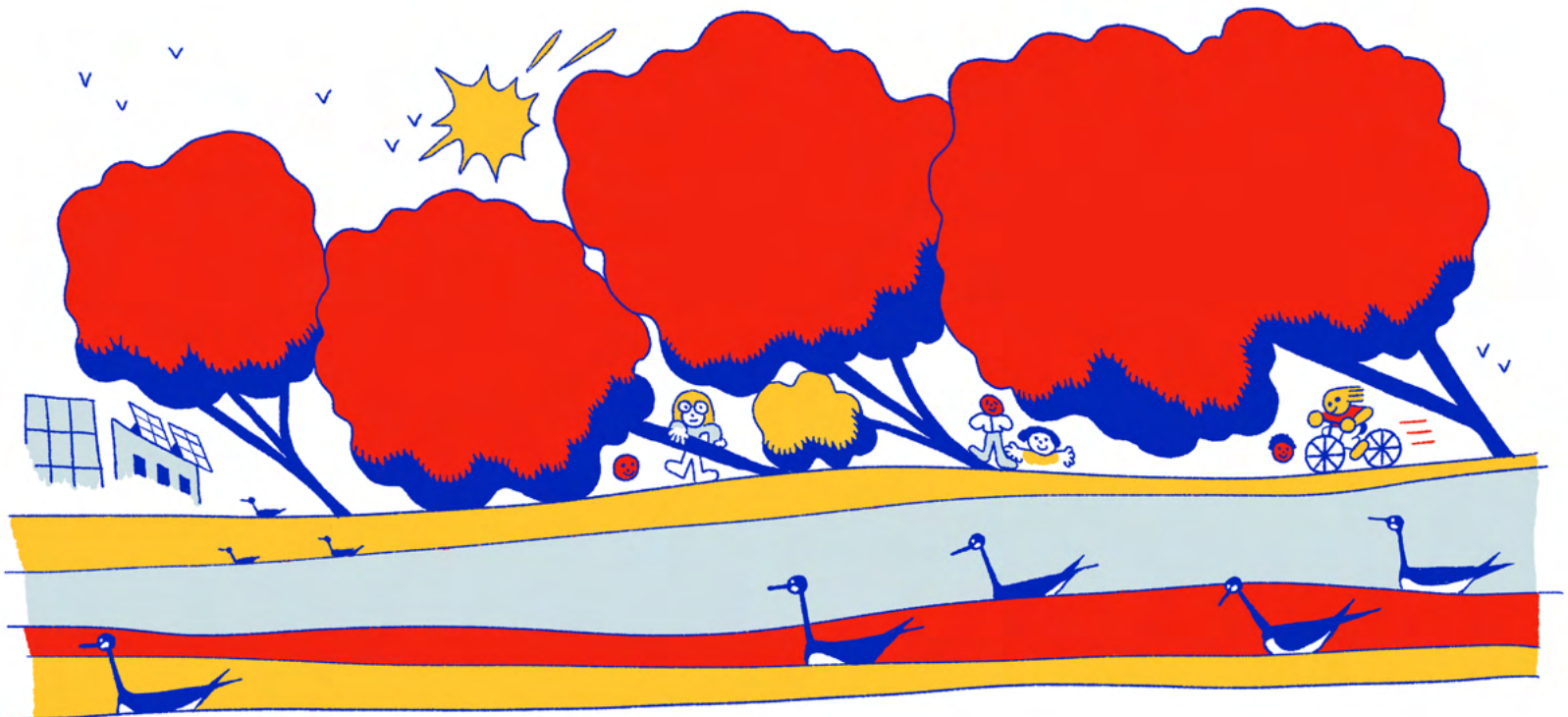
Sharing circles are an Indigenous approach to delving into a conversation around a question or problem. These circles require that the individuals who form the circle speak only when it's their

turn and are intended to prevent reactive or directly responsive communication (Mehl-Madrona and Mainguy, 2014). We also heard that these circles need to allow for children and be designed and led by Indigenous peoples. This programming could be administered by a local agency or grassroots organization, and an Indigenous Elder hired to lead the circle, covering themes of navigating grief, trauma, and crisis pertinent to the community and supporting healing that allows for mistakes and the complexities of being a person.

Transformative justice perspectives, which emerged from Indigenous justice practices, could offer community members the opportunity to cope with grief, trauma, and crisis with the support of others within the community. Transformative justice ensures confidentiality, reinforces the connection that individuals have with one another, and allows for group processing and care. One resource for this direction could be Rittenhouse, an abolitionist organization that has previously partnered with Harm Reduction Peer Workers at PQWCHC to use art and transformative justice for healing work. Rittenhouse builds capacity for transformative justice practices through trainings, resources, consultations, and advocacy.

Climate Action

Transform towards a just transition and sustainable economy by supporting green jobs and building retrofits and enacting community-based climate solutions grounded in righting relations.



Context

It is well documented that climate change disproportionately impacts low-income and racialized communities, as they are the first to experience the systemic implications of climate change that cut across housing, food sovereignty, transportation, and exposure to hazardous pollution. Compounded by socio-economic disparities and geographical factors, the Parkdale community grapples with the disproportionate impacts of climate change, exacerbated by insufficient governmental efforts. With Parkdale nestled next to the Gardiner Expressway, individuals residing in the apartment buildings alongside Jameson Avenue are more prone to the negative health consequences of air pollution from the highway. Climate Action is a new addition since the 2016 *Parkdale Community Planning Study* that comes directly from Parkdale residents' expressed desires to ensure healthy living conditions as the climate changes. This shift towards climate action in Parkdale is reflective of increasing public consciousness of the climate crisis and the ways climate change specifically impacts Parkdale residents.

Within the climate movement, “green growth” and “green washing” approaches fail to address the systemic causes of climate change and instead contribute to consumerism, gentrification, higher costs of living, and the continued destruction of land. This alienates communities most impacted by climate change from the climate movement by failing to recognize that climate change

– and therefore climate action – is interconnected with systems of colonialism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism. Moreover, climate interventions contribute to displacement and increasing costs for community members who are low-income and tenants – for example, climate retrofits are often used to justify higher rental and ownership prices. Such contradictions have inspired community members to organize for climate action. As one community member voiced,

“We live in a capitalist city which continues to have the pressures of capitalism – gentrification and planning that is maximizing consumption, not prioritizing community benefits or collectivity.”

In 2019, Toronto City Council voted unanimously to declare a climate emergency in Toronto and accelerate efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change. This was followed in 2021 by the City's launch of the *TransformTO Net Zero Strategy*, which aims to halve greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. These targets require phasing out all fossil fuels – primarily natural gas used in buildings and homes, and gasoline used in cars – by 2040. *TransformTO* focuses on establishing and tracking performance targets, investing in infrastructure that improves energy efficiency, increasing accessibility to low-carbon transportation options, and educating citizens to adopt sustainable behaviours that contribute to lower emissions.

We aim to phase out extractive industries harming workers and the planet, while providing just

pathways for workers to transition to new jobs and regenerating relationships to land, communities, and cultural practices in the context of climate change (Laboucan-Massimo et al., 2023). Transitioning from carbon-intensive energy to clean sources, designing new holistic energy systems, and retrofitting existing ones are contributing to a future aligned with decolonial values, which work in unison with the values this plan is founded on. As part of PPE's commitment to righting relations, we align our climate action planning with decolonial futures and movements for Indigenous sovereignty, resurgence, and self-determination.

Assets

Asset 1: Local network of community gardens fostering resident engagement with climate action

While community gardens are often linked with food sovereignty goals, they can also intersect with climate action if they are designed to support local pollinators, increase water absorption, and sequester carbon. Community gardens have also been shown to be an easy entry point for climate change work by nurturing resident leadership and offering connections to community, land, and food (Mah et al., 2018). Gardens are spaces where residents congregate, leading to climate-related conversations and opportunities for community connection. Participation and interest in community gardening could help to nurture a culture of organizing around issues of climate action in Parkdale.

There is a strong foundation of existing community gardens throughout the neighbourhood. Together, Greenest City and West NH have the trusteeship of many publicly owned community gardens in Parkdale. Before becoming a program of West NH in 2022, Greenest City was a local charity that worked with community members to transform underutilized space at abandoned lots, health centres, apartment buildings, schools, and parkettes into places where food security and climate action intersect across cultures and languages. As a result of these projects and other community gardens outside of the West NH purview, such as South Parkdale Community Pollinator Gardens, the gardening community has also amassed a wealth of knowledge and wisdom about how to grow in Parkdale.

Other lessons have been learned through living examples of community land stewardship in the neighbourhood. As described in the Housing Justice theme, in 2017 PNLT raised \$115,000 to purchase the 7,000-square-foot Milky Way Garden, challenging the paradigm of land ownership through a CLT model. This precedent in Parkdale has the potential to influence the creation of future community-owned gardens, taking back more land from the extractive private market and bringing it into community land stewardship.

Asset 2: Foundations for equitable and climate-resilient development

While advocating for housing security, affordability, and wellbeing, Parkdale community organizations and residents have developed comprehensive resources, visionary strategies, and expertise that can be applied to equitable and climate-resilient development processes for new and existing

buildings. For instance, the *Parkdale Community Benefits Framework* was designed to encourage and inform equitable community development processes. This framework outlines clear targets and demands for development proposals to consider, asserting priorities like investing in green space and climate retrofits (Parkdale People's Economy, 2018).

Another useful resource is the *Social Procurement and Sustainability Action Framework*, which outlines a strategy to achieve community benefits through the management of PNLT's/NLT's portfolio of 85 community-owned properties. The framework is an example of how to connect climate-resilient development with equity by weaving in the sourcing of preferred vendors from equity-deserving groups and individuals, workforce development, and collaboration with tenant committees to co-create climate-resiliency development plans.

The land trust is now working to realize this ambitious vision. In 2022, NLT secured \$22 million in funding and financing from the City of Toronto and the federal government to undertake a major five-year capital repair and renewal plan for its portfolio, with targets to reduce emissions and energy consumption. The land trust is seeking to leverage this investment to ensure not only the improvement of local affordable housing stock but also other community benefits — namely sustainability improvements, training, and jobs for local residents. One example is the retrofit of 31 Noble Street, a three-bedroom formerly dilapidated home that has been fully renovated into a high-performance net zero home. The Solidarity Economy theme elaborates on PNLT's partnership with social contractor Building Up, which has resulted in the renovation of 15 community-owned properties while creating paid apprenticeship opportunities.

Green Phoenix, a non-profit affordable housing

provider in Parkdale, also offers lessons for equitable and sustainable development through their experiences investing in energy-efficient retrofits (e.g. solar panels, geothermal systems, high-efficiency boilers, and heat pumps) since 2006. Through trial and error, Green Phoenix has gathered data and developed expertise on which green technologies support energy efficiency, while also contributing to building cost savings, and sustaining its commitment to housing affordability.

More broadly in Toronto, organizations including Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA) and The Atmospheric Fund (TAF) are leading research and advocacy efforts that place pressure on the City to support policies that will impact equitable and climate-resilient development. This includes establishing new revenue tools to fund public transit (Chong, 2023) and establishing building performance standards that will mandate investments in energy-efficient and climate-resilient building improvements (Tzekova, 2023). If realized, both policies have the potential to directly impact climate justice and resident wellbeing in Parkdale by protecting the cost of using public transit and creating incentives for landlords to invest in retrofitting buildings to align with current green standards. These retrofits include window replacements and building cladding.

Asset 3: Community climate actions and funding opportunities

In many cases, community members inherently employ sustainable practices out of financial necessity, including keeping energy consumption low, preventing and repurposing food waste, and extending the life of personal belongings through mending and repair. Research suggests that

low-income people are often equals or leaders in sustainable actions for this very reason (Khaykin and Kreacic, 2023).

In addition, Parkdale has a vibrant network of initiatives and organizations supporting climate justice in the neighbourhood. There are active community garden initiatives like the Milky Way Garden and St. Joseph's Community Garden, both trustee'd by West NH/Greenest City. A "bring your own" container and bag program called Roncy Reduces encourages small businesses to reduce single-use plastics and encourage waste reduction habits. Parkdale Seedy Saturdays events allow gardeners to exchange seeds and connect with other gardeners. A flourishing network of gardeners applies for funding to create and take care of numerous pollinator gardens in South Parkdale. And PHP4 Climate Action leads small business climate campaigns, farmers' market tabling, and door-to-door advocacy on topics including reducing food waste, home energy use and promoting active transportation.

This engaged citizenry is a vital asset that can be drawn on when working towards achieving an equitable, climate-resilient city. Previously, community members have stood, marched, and protested in solidarity with movements such as the Land Alliance March and made calls against banks funding fossil fuels, the Ontario government cutting the Greenbelt, and the federal government leading energy expansion projects. There are also small grant opportunities — such as PollinateTO (up to \$5,000), Neighbourhood Climate Action Grants (up to \$7,500), and Indigenous Climate Action (up to \$20,000) — that can support future climate justice projects.

Asset 4: Climate-forward

political representatives

Parkdale currently has two political representatives who have consistently championed climate action at the provincial and municipal levels. These representatives could help community members and organizations to garner political support for their efforts to influence climate-related policy and funding decisions at both levels of government.

Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) Bhutla Karpoche (New Democratic Party) was endorsed by GreenPac in the 2022 election and recognized for her work in bringing forward environmental petitions and advocating for issues pertaining to climate justice. These issues included protecting the Greenbelt from highway development, stopping the expansion of Ontario gas plants, restoring provincial funding to the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC), as well as introducing three climate-focused bills to the legislature that focused on preparing the public health sector for the impacts of the climate crisis. Karpoche also proposed a bill that advocated for the Union Pearson Express train to transition from diesel fuel to electrification. When tenants of 130 Jameson Avenue were being threatened with eviction for lawfully using air conditioning units during the summer, Karpoche supported tenant organizing and was vocal about the incident being a "serious health and safety risk."

Municipal Councillor Gord Perks spent nearly 20 years working with environmental organizations, including being a senior campaigner with TEA. He is particularly interested in protecting park and beach spaces, building the urban canopy, supporting climate-resilient development, and expanding bike lanes and cycling connections in Parkdale-High Park.

Needs

Need 1: Critical, anti-capitalist climate action

Climate action is the work of addressing the root causes of the climate crisis, including systems of racial capitalism, settler colonialism, and hetero-patriarchy. As stated by Kyle Whyte, a Bodewadmi scholar, “Colonialism and capitalism have laid the groundwork for carbon-intensive economies, which is driving climate change,” and these systems have inherently required the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and the occupation of Indigenous resources, land, property, and homes, towards the end goal of extraction and profit (Indigenous Climate Action, 2021). Dismantling these systems will require centring the voices, leadership and needs of those most impacted in climate action.

In Parkdale, a critical approach to climate action prioritizes the working-class. It should steer clear of green washing initiatives and individual responsibility narratives, centre working-class communities, have Indigenous leadership, and connect the local context with community organizing that leads to structural transformation. Such an approach threatens the underlying fundamentals of colonial and capitalist systems, and may necessitate wider political education and training on solidarity organizing.

Alternatively, a capitalist approach to climate action considers solutions within the current economic framework, which only continues to threaten equity, affordability, and housing sec-

urity. A prime example of this is retrofit-induced gentrification and displacement. Parkdale is the site of corporate-owned rental properties that are being “gentrified by upgrading,” a tactic to reposition rental properties as high-end products and thereby target high-end consumers (August et al., 2022). Investing in retrofits and energy-efficient technologies can be used as part of this tactic to increase rental prices and displace working-class tenants.

The City of Toronto has signalled interest in climate action through sustainable transportation, but this has not necessarily included protections for residents on the margins. Cycle Toronto has discussed how the disparity in bike lanes across the city is an equity issue, as neighbourhoods with more resources for advocacy often have better infrastructure, and places like South Parkdale are left with no safe bike lanes on major streets that connect to downtown, including Queen Street West and King Street West (Pelley, 2018).

During engagement sessions, community members recognized that living sustainably is a privilege inaccessible to low-income communities given the higher price tags of green and alternative products. For years, people have been asked to change their individual consumption choices and purchase “sustainable products” that are, on average, 75–85% more expensive than regular products (Kearney, 2020). Oftentimes, low-income households are already engaged in these sustainable practices and, in some cases, even need to increase their consumption to live a decent life. Despite their contributions, low-income communities are rarely acknowledged as sustainability leaders (Khaykin and Kreacic, 2023) and can experience alienation in environmental movements in the face of these narratives. An anti-capitalist approach requires us to re-orient our focus to reducing the overconsumption of high-income com-

munities and, more importantly, to transforming the underlying systems that drive consumption, resource extraction, and oppression.

With the recognition of the connection between capitalism and climate injustice, community members spoke of the need to build new institutions that are grounded in the values of stewardship and trust, and which enable the collective ownership of land, labour, and resources as well as equitable sharing. One community member voiced that they'd like to see

"Massive investments in transforming to a green economy while also ensuring the benefits of such investments go towards helping the most vulnerable."

Need 2: Protections for tenants and unhoused communities from the impacts of extreme weather

It has been predicted that by 2040, Toronto will have 66 days a year with temperatures greater than 30 degrees celsius, an average of five heatwaves a year, and extreme rainfalls throughout the winter (Toronto Environment Office, 2012). These extreme weather events are particularly destabilizing for community members who are more likely to experience high degrees of exposure and sensitivity to extreme weather, as well as a lower capacity for adaptation, especially those who are low-income, unhoused, recent immigrants, etc.

During our engagements, community members shared strong concerns about the impact of rising temperatures on their health and wellbeing. This

concern reflects South Parkdale's demographics, which is predominantly made up of people renting units in buildings mostly constructed before 1960 that are likely unfit for extreme heat, as they lack air conditioning (AC) or sufficient insulation and ventilation. The *Parkdale Tower Rental Housing Study* found that 46% of tower rental tenants in Parkdale reported having heating and cooling issues and 36% reported having insufficient hot water – which are all necessary services during extreme weather conditions (August et al., 2022). Though the risks of extreme cold did not surface in the consultations, this is also particularly concerning for unhoused communities (Shelter and Housing Justice Network, 2023). Toronto's lack of safe indoor spaces "[contributes] to a higher risk of violence, poor health outcomes and premature death for already marginalized groups" (Shelter and Housing Justice Network, 2023, p. 14), especially during extreme weather events. Toronto has not been able to meet the demand for warming centres (CBC News Toronto, 2023) and respite centres, leading to overcrowding and unsafe conditions.

Already, tenants in Parkdale are facing threats connected to extreme temperatures. In 2021, tenant groups at 55 Triller Avenue and the West Lodge apartments mobilized against building mismanagement due to prolonged power outages, insufficient heat, and various other unlivable conditions (August et al., 2022). The next year in June 2022, nearly 50 tenants at 130 Jameson Avenue were suddenly faced with possible eviction by The Myriad Group for installing and using AC units as Toronto grappled with humidity index values in the 40s. The tenants were presented with the sole option of covering hydro costs or being evicted, despite these costs being included in their lease. Orchestrated evictions like these capitalize on a legislative loophole in Ontario, initially created by policy from the Mike Harris Progressive Conservative government era, that does not regulate rental price increases of va-

cant units (CBC News Toronto, 2022). These are all part of a broader trend of the financialization of rental housing in Toronto (August et al., 2022).

Given that the *Residential Tenancies Act* (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2006) does not consider AC or a maximum temperature as part of its “vital service” requirement, as it does with minimum temperatures of 21 degrees celsius, tenants are left unprotected under Ontario law during increasingly hot summer months. The City of Toronto provides some heat-related protections for apartment tenants through Apartment Building bylaws and bylaw enforcement program, RentSafeTO. Landlords are mandated to establish a hot weather plan to safeguard tenants from heat-related illnesses, and must display tenant notices indicating the closest “Cool Space” within the City Heat Relief Network, along with designated air-conditioned or shaded areas on the property. However, there is no data on whether landlords adhere to this practice.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission has emphasized the necessity for a comprehensive review of access to and affordability of AC units as part of public health and human rights codes due to rising temperatures (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2022). In July 2022, when a review of the City’s *Heat Relief Strategy* (2023) was raised at City Hall, a recommendation for a subsidy program for AC units for low-income tenants was brought forward, but the decision was deferred, despite the urgency for tenants (McAllister and Bond, 2022). These findings reflect the need to push for equitable and climate-resilient development and housing that protects community members during extreme weather events.

Need 3: Coordinated local climate action

efforts through coalition building

Parkdale has a vibrant network of community groups and non-profit organizations leading climate action in the neighbourhood. However, our engagements revealed a need for smaller organizations to assemble as a coalition to coordinate their efforts and push for change at a systemic level. These collaborations will be necessary to prepare for climate emergencies and engage in mass organizing to influence landlords, developers, City Councillors, and government bodies to invest in equitable climate action. For example, as discussed in to the Housing Justice theme, the Justice for Queen and Close community coalition organized to protest against Skale Developments for breaking its affordable housing commitments and for evading transparency on the environmental degradation of the brown-field site that was previously a gas station (Justice for Queen and Close, n.d.). With over 18 new developments slated for Parkdale and many of the 68 mid-to-high-rise buildings requiring retrofits, it is foreseeable that this type of organizing will be necessary to ensure developers align with the community’s goals for climate action. As part of the *TransformTO* strategy, Toronto Community Benefits Network (TCBN), TEA, and Enviromentum led a feasibility study on the role community climate hubs could have on activating neighbourhood initiatives, reducing emissions, and building community resilience to extreme weather (Mah et al., 2018). The study found that climate hubs were an effective method for convening people to engage in social issues and can be leveraged to build greater climate action engagement. In some cases, hubs were used as a place to model climate-resilient practices and host low-carbon projects through “retrofitting” the building for energy efficiency and installation of water conservation systems and onsite green

space. The new Parkdale Hub at Cowan and Queen Street West (scheduled to be developed by 2029) is an opportunity for Parkdale residents to create and convene a climate hub. Nevertheless, Parkdale has existing infrastructure to reignite climate justice organizing via a hub or coalition building.

Directions

Direction 1: Establish a climate coalition or hub in Parkdale with a focus on organizing and building solidarity with Indigenous-led climate leadership in Parkdale

Parkdale is facing a wave of approximately 18 new developments and is home to approximately 68 privately-owned towers. To ensure the health and safety of residents during extreme weather events, a strong organizing community will be necessary to advocate for policies that both mandate and incentivize landlords to invest in energy-efficiency and climate-resiliency measures for these buildings. An organized community will also be critical for actualizing the climate justice goals within the *Parkdale Community Benefits Framework*, to ensure that residents benefit from these investments through equitable procurement and workforce development.

Community climate hub models could be a feasible and potentially effective method for mobiliz-

ing and organizing community members to create a low-carbon neighbourhood (Mah et al., 2018) and effect change for climate justice. Hubs can provide space to coordinate local climate change preparation; be designed to model climate-resilient building practices; deliver programs connected to climate justice, including food sovereignty and waste management; and offer an entry point for residents to engage in conversations about urban systems connected to climate change, including public transportation, and affordable climate-resilient housing. Parkdale has a strong culture of tenant organizing, mutual aid, and climate actions in the neighbourhood that can be leveraged towards climate justice and systems change as evidenced by initiatives like MAP, Parkdale Organize, PHP4 Climate Action, Niiwin Wendaanimak, Greenest City, PNLT, and Milky Way Garden. Partnering with an organization like Climate Justice TO that hosts workshops and training on climate crisis political education is a way to build further climate action organizing capacity in Parkdale.

During our consultations, community members expressed desires to turn underutilized roofs and lawns into gardens, to produce garments locally by gathering used fabric through a social enterprise model, and to establish a community kitchen (further explored in Direction 4 of the Food Systems theme). These initiatives could be implemented through a community climate hub model. Further, in recognizing the connection between capitalism and climate injustice, community members voiced the need for “new institutions rooted in values of collectivity and stewardship,” which the hub would aim to embody. Community members also shared their desire for safe space to learn about climate justice and retrofits, recognizing the vulnerability of their own knowledge gaps.

The hub could offer multilingual climate education to engage more residents in climate justice. As the hub evolves and grows, it could connect residents

to the workforce to benefit and participate in the green jobs economy. As more neighbourhoods establish climate hubs, there are opportunities for inter-neighbourhood organizing and knowledge sharing to contribute to systemic and policy change. Given that the development process of Parkdale Hub, led by CreateTO, includes plans for significantly expanding community and recreational space (CreateTO, n.d.), it is an ideal location to advocate for the inclusion of a climate hub.

Engagements with Indigenous peoples in Parkdale and the City of Toronto's TransformTO consultations noted a common request: to stop considering Indigenous knowledge as an "add-on" to climate change plans, rather than the foundation of the entire strategy (Indigenous Climate Action, 2018, 2021). There is a need for Indigenous climate leadership in Parkdale that is financially supported to realize climate justice that is not "simply focused on counting carbon" but "centres the place-based leadership of peoples with the longest-living knowledge of Earth's natural ecological systems" and the demands of the landback movement (Hoodwinked in the Hothouse, 2021, p.1). PPE has continued to pursue funding to support the existence of the Parkdale Indigenous Caucus to sustain an Indigenous-led group focused on planning and envisioning the future in Parkdale. If this funding is approved, the Caucus can allocate it to organizing sharing circles dedicated to discussing land back and growing Indigenous CLTs, as well as other pertinent issues on climate action, though allocation is ultimately at the Caucus' discretion.

Direction 2: Advocate for climate-resilient and equitable building standard policies

Climate-resilient, equitable development of new buildings and retrofits of existing buildings will have the largest impact on reducing GHGs in Toronto and protecting residents from extreme weather conditions. In 2019, buildings contributed to an estimated 57% of Toronto's GHG emissions. Given that 80% of the floor space that will exist in 2050 has already been built upgrading existing buildings through retrofits will have an even greater impact on climate action than building new net zero developments (City of Toronto, 2021).

The Working Group should develop expertise on how to successfully apply to the City of Toronto's Energy Retrofit Loan program, which offers fixed, long-term low-interest financing for building owners to invest in low carbon, energy-efficient capital investments, as well as other incentives provided by the Better Buildings Partnership program (City of Toronto, n.d.). This know-how can be used as a leverage point when negotiating with building owners to retrofit their buildings. TAF runs a retrofit accelerator program that provides technical and financial expertise to building owners in collaboration with residents, governments, and utilities. Given its expertise, TAF can offer training on the process of designing, financing, implementing, and monitoring a retrofit project. Creating a strategy to influence building owners in Parkdale to invest in retrofits would be useful. This strategy could include collaborating with TAF to explore how Parkdale can galvanize City Councillors to pass a building standards policy that will mandate and incentivize investment in retrofits and local green jobs, while protecting tenants from green washed AGIs (Tzekova, 2023).

Green Phoenix, a non-profit affordable housing provider that has been retrofitting its buildings since 2006 recommends the following low maintenance and operational cost investments that lend to energy-efficiency savings: window replacement, Exterior Insulation and Finish Systems (EIFS clad-

ding), wells, geothermal systems, heat and energy recovery ventilators, and high-efficiency boilers. During an informant interview, Green Phoenix noted that green roofs have high maintenance costs, and solar panels can be challenging and expensive to maintain if not installed on the roof.

PPE will continue to play a role in supporting, educating, and community organizing with residents to hold developers accountable to an equitable process and the demands laid out in the Parkdale Community Benefits Framework. When the 2018 framework is updated, it should include Climate Justice as a principle and be accompanied by a clear set of demands that developers use energy-efficient technologies to achieve climate goals while creating decent work opportunities and meeting affordable housing demands. Retrofitting and low/no-carbon technologies were estimated to create 24,500 to 32,000 jobs in Ontario between 2016 and 2021 (Environmental Defense 2017), and are on track to keep growing (Seskus, 2021). It is critical to outline specific demands on the percentage of jobs that adhere to decent work standards that must be allocated to Parkdale residents when installing energy-efficient technologies in new buildings.

Direction 3: Organize and educate landlords on pathways for sustainable building retrofits

According to PNLT's *Parkdale Tower Rental Housing Study* (2022), there are 68 privately owned towers with a total of 6,060 units that are mid- to high-rise with 25 units or more. In a survey of residents living in these buildings, 74% reported living in inadequate housing conditions, evidenced by units

requiring three or more repairs. Others reported issues that create risks from extreme weather on housing were heating and cooling issues (46%), insufficient hot water (35%), broken windows or doors (34%), and non-functioning smoke alarms (18%). Based on this data, landlords are not actively investing in maintaining buildings and providing healthy and safe living conditions for tenants, potentially as a means of pressuring tenants to vacate their units (August et al., 2022).

In order to shift the mindset of landlords and close the knowledge gap on retrofits, the Working Group should develop educational resources on how energy-efficient investments can lead to tangible cost savings and provide pathways to accessing financing. These efforts need to ensure that these educational resources are not used for landlords' profit-driven motives. One strategy is to work with non-profit housing providers first, while building a clear strategy for engaging private landlords to ensure that retrofits are promoted in a way that doesn't allow landlords to leverage the information as a tool for advancing evictions and AGIs.

Direction 4: Co-create a local climate emergency response plan

Parkdale residents have shared concerns about the impact of extreme weather conditions, especially rising heat. Developing a climate emergency response plan is a tangible way to build climate resilience as part of already supportive neighbourhood networks, such as MAP. In 2022, TEA and Community Resilience to Extreme Weather (CREW) worked with volunteers in the St. James Town neighbourhood to co-create and implement a climate emergency response plan focused on heat wave preparedness. The project trained vol-

unteers on how to prevent heat-related illnesses, prepare for emergency events such as power outages, and lead outreach efforts. Workshops were held with residents and community organizations to develop emergency preparedness and response plans. A draft framework for high-rise emergency preparedness was developed as a resource for other neighbourhoods. The next phase of the work is focused on developing specific heat-wave responses for high-rise buildings and creating the opportunity for volunteer residents to connect and share stories about their experiences through the process. This model and process could be replicated in Parkdale to address concerns of rising heat.

As part of this initiative, Parkdale could revitalize the Heat Registry initially established by PARC in 2007. This registry, endorsed by the Shelter Support and Housing Administration, serves as a guide for community organizations aiming to create registries of individuals vulnerable to heat-related issues. These registries enable organizations to reach out to these individuals during heat waves, either via phone calls or by deploying volunteers to conduct home visits for wellness checks. Additionally, the guide offers suggestions for supplementary programs aimed at assisting high-risk individuals in managing extreme heat and humidity. These programs may include an AC purchase initiative tailored for those with medical conditions that make them particularly sensitive to heat, as well as a fan-lending program designed to support individuals who may be unable to afford an AC.

Direction 5: Advocate for sustainable transportation options

Transportation is the second largest source of Toronto's GHG emissions, accounting for 33% of all emissions. A majority of these emissions (70%)

come from the fuel powering personal vehicles. To achieve net zero by 2040, trips taken in personal vehicles must transition to walking, cycling, or transit as much as possible, and to electric vehicles where necessary (City of Toronto, 2021).

Though most residents in South Parkdale do not own cars, the streets are congested — presumably exposing residents to higher levels of pollution — given its location as a connection point between Lake Shore Boulevard, the Gardiner Expressway, and adjacent neighbourhoods. The congestion is expected to get worse with increased development, the expansion of BMO Field, the Ontario Line, and the redevelopment of Ontario Place (Ceolin, 2023). Policies to protect the health, wellbeing, and mobility of Parkdale include tax levies on cars entering downtown, transitioning more streets to one-way traffic, and encouraging and incentivizing car share services.

Recent studies suggest a growth in bike ridership in Toronto. For instance, a 2021 study that examined the relationship between cycling infrastructure and activity in Toronto found an overall growth in cycling uptake, with double the amount of cyclists in neighbourhoods with bike lanes, cycle tracks and bikeways. Data indicates that better cycling infrastructure in Parkdale would increase uptake and that encouraging bike use requires providing safer connections to downtown from Parkdale.

Bike sharing in Toronto has exploded in ridership — from 665,000 rides in 2015 to 4.5 million in 2022. Bike Share Toronto is a subscription bike-sharing program that is operated in partnership with the Toronto Parking Authority, with ports and equipment available city-wide. While there is a reduced fare pass available for residents living in social housing operated by Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) and for ODSP recipients, as well as incentives for employers to subsidize their employees' memberships, the program is still

not financially accessible to all. Further research needs to be conducted on bike usage and affordability in Parkdale amongst equity-deserving communities to understand usage, barriers to uptake, and affordability needs (Sasitharan, 2023). Parkdale-High Park Bikes is a group of residents who advocate for bike safety and infrastructure in the neighbourhood and could be a collaborator in organizing around bike-related equity issues.

Micromobility options, including e-bikes and e-scooters, have been hotly contested modes of transportation in the city due to the high risk of accidents. While e-scooters are currently banned, e-bikes are often used by food courier workers, most of whom are new immigrants to Toronto trying to make a living wage (Taylor, 2023). Recently, tenants of 110 and 120 Jameson Avenue raised legal concerns when the landlord, Oberon Development Corporation, banned electric vehicles from the property for being a potential fire hazard (Bowden, 2023). Lawyers believe the ban is contrary to the *Residential Tenancies Act* and discriminates against people with disabilities, those who may not be able to afford a car, and those making an environmentally friendly transportation decision. In addition to car congestion in Parkdale, the deterioration of the King Street transit corridor has made it challenging to reliably access the downtown core on public transportation. While TTC services were increased in August 2023 (Pasieka, 2023), the service changes throughout early 2023 disproportionately impacted low-income communities, those with precarious income, new immigrants, and older and younger people who depend on public transit, compared to other income groups for whom public transit is a choice (Mittra and Peterman, 2023). Currently, the TTC is expected to have an operational budget shortfall of \$366 million in 2023, unless new revenue tools are introduced to cover the deficit (Chong, 2023). This shortfall places the affordability and reliability of the TTC at risk — issues to keep abreast of in advocacy efforts.

In July 2023, the TTC announced it was expanding its Fair Pass Transit Discount Program for 50,000 people between the ages of 20 and 64 living in “deep poverty,” including those on wait lists for subsidized childcare and housing. Participants in the program receive a 36% discount, with a single ticket costing \$2.10 and a monthly pass costing \$123.25. However, advocacy group TTCriders believes the program still excludes individuals with incomes below the poverty line and the rebate remains unaffordable. TTCriders recommends more advocacy work to offer free transit to those who need it the most (Lavoie, 2023). Connecting with TTCriders and Free Transit Toronto to support advocacy demanding free transit is a tangible way Parkdale could support its community in achieving affordability, mobility, and climate justice.

Food Systems

Enhance affordable and equitable access to healthy food by building a sustainable local food economy.



Context

Parkdale residents experience some of the highest health needs among all of Toronto's neighbourhoods, and these inequities extend to the neighbourhood's access to food. Unlike other low-income neighbourhoods in the Greater Toronto Area, South Parkdale is not a "food desert" where there is limited availability of food options. Rather, as a neighbourhood characterized by gentrification and income polarization, available healthy food options are unaffordable to many residents. Household food insecurity is a well-established determinant of health that is heavily associated with chronic disease and mental health issues, and is closely tied to economic, racial, and social inequities.

In South Parkdale, 11.67% of the population over 15 is on social assistance. As of July 2023, under the Ontario Works program, a family consisting of two parents and two children qualifies for a monthly income of \$1,517.82, which includes \$494 designated for basic expenses (Income Security Access Centre, 2023). In contrast, as of 2022, the monthly cost of a Nutritious Food Basket for a standard family of four was \$1,141 (City of Toronto, 2023). This glaringly illustrates the stark challenge people face in attempting to sustain themselves on social assistance while also being able to afford nourishing and wholesome meals.

As one community member shared in the Community Mapping workshop,

"Food prices are going up at grocery stores and I have a food card and it's hard to get food with them. Rents are going up. Once you turn 65 the prices go up."

The COVID-19 pandemic both highlighted and exacerbated the problems with the affordability and accessibility of food within Parkdale (Alberga, 2023), a concerning trend that is echoed across the city and continues today. The pandemic has played a major role in driving a significant jump in inflation, by causing blockages to supply chains, making some items scarce, and driving up the cost of those that are available (Financial Consumer Agency of Canada, 2023). As a result, the cost of food has continued to rise: in 2023, Statistics Canada's Consumer Price Index report showed that prices for food bought at grocery stores have risen at a rate of 9.1% per year since 2020 (Lord, 2023).

In the Spring of 2020, many Toronto residents, including a significant portion of our neighbours in Parkdale, lost their jobs for months at a time, and many struggled to pay rent, care for complex health needs, and maintain an adequate and nutritious food supply at home. Kitty Costa, Executive Director of the Parkdale Community Food Bank (PCFB), noted that prior to the pandemic, the PCFB serviced approximately 1,500 families a month, and now that number has jumped to 7,000–8,000 families. The number of PCFB clients with full-time employment has also risen, as increases in the cost of living have made it more challenging for people to afford necessities like food and housing. According to the City of Toron-

to, the percentage of Torontonians living in food insecure households rose drastically from 18.6% in 2021 to 24.1% in 2022 (City of Toronto, 2023).

Parkdale's food and retail offerings are representative of the diversity of the community. Within Parkdale is an area recognized as "Little Tibet," with many newly established and long standing restaurants from the Tibetan diaspora. Community members are also able to access culturally relevant food through the many small grocers found on Queen Street West. In the face of gentrification and displacement pressures, community members have organized to maintain the character of the neighbourhood and its businesses. For example, in 2018, residents vocalized their opposition to the rebranding of Parkdale in the Queen Street West and Brock Avenue area as "Vegandale" by one numbered corporation owning multiple restaurants that were financially out of reach for many people living in the neighbourhood. Though most of the original Vegandale restaurants have closed shop, they have been replaced by restaurants that offer finer dining and are not accessible to many in the neighbourhood. Nevertheless, community staples continue to mark the streets of the neighbourhood. For example, St. Francis Table offers patrons social interactions, a restaurant dining experience, and a wholesome meal for \$1, a price kept consistent for three-plus decades.

During our community planning process, Parkdale residents shared clear visions for a neighbourhood where food is available and affordable and supports the health, wellness, culture, and connections of its diverse community members. Achieving this vision requires us to continue addressing the urgent food needs of community members while simultaneously tackling the structural causes of food insecurity and building new food systems. Food justice means addressing intersections of oppression in food systems which includes colonialism, capitalism, white supremacy, and patri-

archy (FoodShare, n.d.). With this goal in mind, the directions outlined in this theme seek to not only promote food security, but also to build and sustain food sovereignty. While food security is about ensuring that all people have physical and economic access to adequate food, food sovereignty is a "movement that works to help producers and consumers regain power and agency within the food system" (Centre for Sustainable Food Systems at UBC Farm, n.d.). It is centred on the rights of food consumers to make decisions about their food and nutrition, as well as the rights of those who produce food to manage the lands, waters, vegetation, and livestock that encompass the food system. By working towards food sovereignty, we aim to move beyond band aid solutions by transforming our food systems to be more equitable, community centred, and locally controlled.

Assets

Asset 1: Network of formal and informal organizations addressing immediate food access needs

Parkdale's robust network of agencies and resident solidarity regarding food security has laid a solid foundation for galvanizing future resident actions in response to our urgent food needs. The PCFB has been in operation since 2007 and now functions as a non-profit with a Board of Directors, while the West Lodge Food Bank is a tenant-run mutual aid initiative created during the pandemic. Tenants expropriated an empty apartment unit at 103 West Lodge Avenue and turned it into a food bank, catering to 60–70

families a month. A community member noted,

“West Lodge tenant organizers who organized their own food banks. I know a couple of people who live there who found it inspiring. To me it was a perfect example of how people who are affected took matters into their own hands and created something from nothing.”

With the creation of the food bank, West Lodge tenants were also organized around issues of housing justice, an example of food continually being a pillar of community building, a means of bringing people together, and a source of comfort, connection, and understanding between community members.

Mutual Aid Parkdale (MAP) is another example of Parkdale’s collective resilience and mutual support in the face of compounding crises. MAP is a neighbourhood group organized on the core principle of practicing solidarity in times of crisis. In Spring 2020, residents began safely checking in on hundreds of neighbours to see what material and social supports they needed and by sharing what they had.

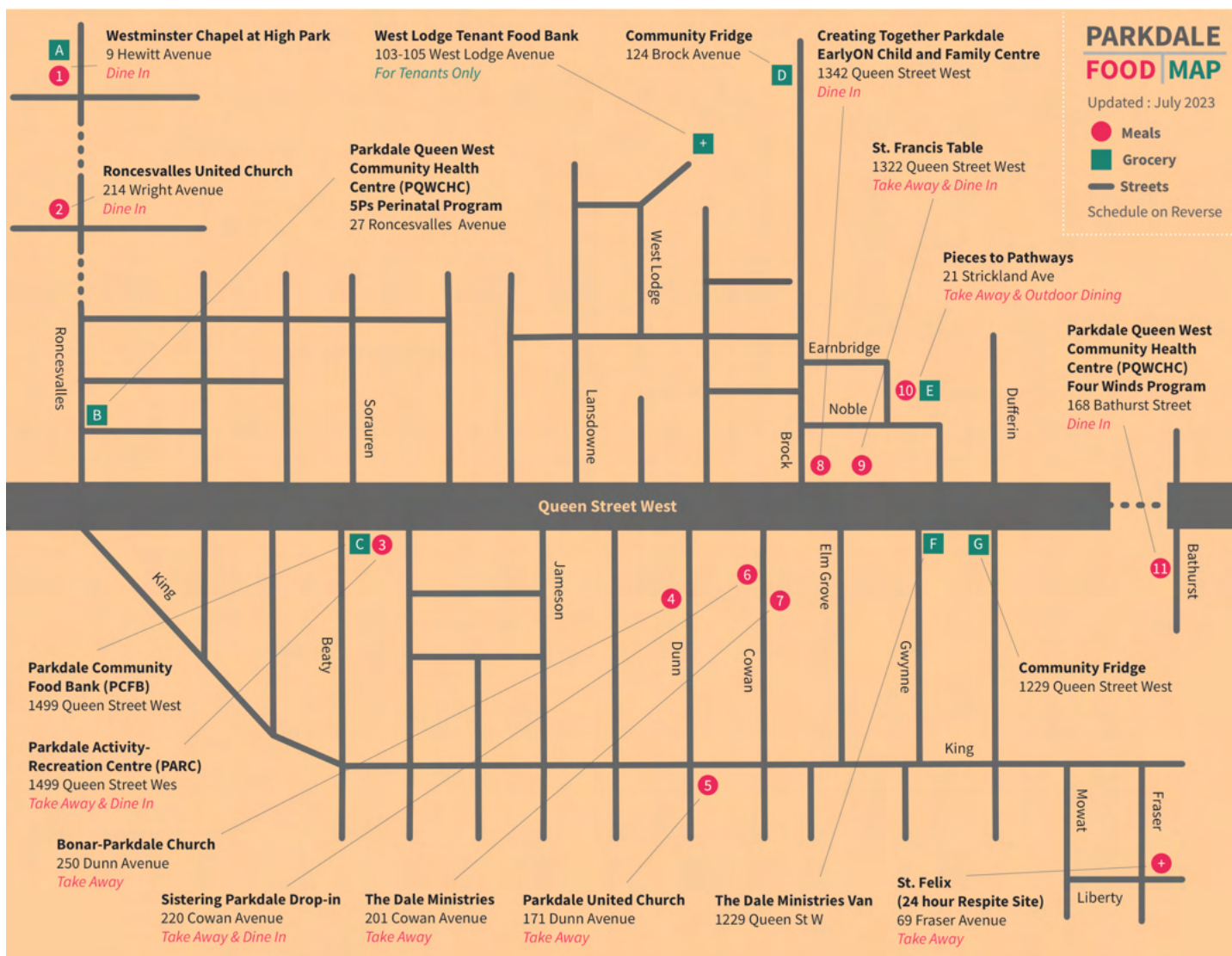
With the support of PPE, MAP was built on the informal existing networks of Parkdale residents within their community. MAP members broke off into “neighbourhood pods,” often comprising of residents living on the same street or in the same building. Pod members communicated through WhatsApp or phone trees, asking for help and offering support – delivering groceries and medicines, sharing extra pantry items, providing emotional and mental health supports over the phone or at a distance, and more – to their neighbours. MAP was able to leverage its growing network to partner with other community-based food initiatives including Community Fridges TO, the Bike Brigade, and the Good Food Boxes from Food-

Share, in order to expand their capacity and reach.

There are 11 places where community members can get meals including: Westminster Chapel at High Park, Roncesvalles United Church, PARC, Bonar-Parkdale Church, Parkdale United Church, Sistering’s drop-In, The Dale Ministries, Creating Together Parkdale, St. Francis Table, the Niiwin Wendaanimak program at PQWCHC, and Pieces to Pathways. There are also six locations where community members can get groceries, including Westminster Chapel, PCFB, The Dale Ministries, Pieces to Pathways, and the perinatal program at PQWCHC. These organizations, their services, and their hours of operation are listed in the Parkdale Food Map created by the Parkdale Food Network in 2023 to help community members identify and locate accessible food resources. The map also supports community organizations co-ordinating food-related services and programs within the community. While not listed on the food map, other neighbourhood initiatives tend to the need for access to healthy foods and growing spaces in Parkdale, such as the practice of having food at community meetings, Seedy Saturday events at the library, the Balcony Planting program, and Parkdale Collegiate Institute’s horticulture program.

Asset 2: Local food distribution and food production initiatives

Parkdale’s food production initiatives range from those that are informal and individual to those that are systematized and housed within agencies or organizations. The Ontario Food Terminal is a public institution and wholesale market that supplies small and mid-sized businesses with both locally grown and imported food. For \$275, any business can obtain a two-year pass and gain access to wholesale produce. The major super-



Parkdale Food Map, 2023.

market chains in Canada (Loblaws, Sobeys, Metro, Walmart, and Costco) do not utilize the food terminal unless there are “shorts” in their own supply chains. Parkdale’s close proximity to the food terminal allows for the numerous grocers and restaurants on Queen and King to regularly obtain fresh food at affordable prices and for local and regional food producers to create direct relationships with food suppliers (Elton et al., 2022, 2023). As a result, independent retailers occupying Parkdale’s mainstreet storefronts are able to provide specially chosen, culturally appropriate food at competitive prices to the neighbourhood, though these prices are becoming less affordable.

The food terminal also supplies the “food peddlers” who sell produce at the Parkdale Good Food Market in Masaryk Park in the summer months (FoodShare, n.d.). Supported by FoodShare’s Community Markets Support Program, the Parkdale Good Food Market is co-ordinated in partnership with local residents and organizations such as West NH/Greenest City, Toronto Public Health, and the Parkdale Food Network to provide fresh produce and locally made goods like samosas and momos to the Parkdale community. Another regular local market is the Sorauren Farmers’ Market in Sorauren Park. Created in 2008 by the founders of West End Food Co-op (WEFC), the market operates weekly outdoors in Sorauren Park during the summer months and indoors during the winter. The market partners with organizations such as Sistering and Community Fridges TO to share unsold leftovers with the community, with mutual aid volunteers from the Bike Brigade making deliveries to Parkdale’s community fridge, located at 124 Brock Avenue in the Stay Gold Fitness lot. There are opportunities for more partnerships between Community Fridges TO and businesses in Parkdale that have access to safe, well-maintained locations. Community Fridges TO has indicated interest in finding a spot for an additional community fridge in Parkdale, ideally closer to Queen Street.

Food production initiatives occur within the network of formal community gardens as well as gardens located on private balconies and lawns. Recognizing the constraint that not all residents currently have access to places to grow food brings forth community visions for growing opportunities on the neighbourhood’s vacant sites and as part of private and public development proposals. Due to the numerous development proposals for new buildings in Parkdale, there are now more opportunities than ever for the neighbourhood to gain gardens and farms by negotiating for community benefits using existing policies (such as the City of Toronto’s *Green Roof Bylaw*) and inserting demands for green space in CBAs.

Needs

Need 1: Food security solutions, including those focused on affordability and living wages

Food insecurity arises when households are unable to access essential needs or withstand financial shocks, such as increased living expenses or loss of income. Further, in Canada, household food insecurity is racialized with 39.2% of Black people, 33.4% of off-reserve Indigenous peoples, and 29.2% of Filipino people living in food-insecure households in 2022, compared to 15.3% of white people (Li et al., 2023). Food security is a racial and economic issue, which requires collaborative efforts to “improve the financial circumstances of food-insecure households” (Li et al., 2023).

The Daily Bread food banks saw a record-breaking number of users in May 2023, with 270,019 total visits that month (Daily Bread Food Bank, 2023). During the COVID-19 pandemic, PCFB started serving 7,000 to 8,000 families per month and, in July 2023, moved its location to 263 Dunn Avenue. While 38% of food bank users shared that their primary income came from social assistance programs, including Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and Ontario Works (OW), an increasing number reported being employed (Gupta, 2022). During the height of the pandemic, larger foundations offered larger amounts of funding to support food banks, but as the pandemic subsided, they pulled back funding as they had overextended themselves in previous years. Meanwhile, major supermarket chains and their CEOs are making billions, despite inflation, prioritizing profits by passing financial costs and stressful burdens onto consumers and workers.

The disproportionate impacts of the pandemic faced by Parkdale residents, compounded by low wages, the lack of paid sick days, the lack of affordable and supportive housing, rising costs of food, and the opioid crisis have increased the number of Parkdale residents who seek the support of local groups including PARC and the PCFB to feed themselves. The PCFB identified that there has been an increase in the number of children accessing its services, and its delivery program for seniors and people with disabilities is wait listed.

Resident-led mutual aid initiatives formed in response to COVID-19 have shone a light on the groundswell of need and resident desire for mutual support. These incredible initiatives have remained resident run and have struggled to sustain long-term feasibility as a food security solution.

This is the landscape for a growing movement; Parkdale residents and service providers alike advocate for support beyond band aid solu-

tions, such as reliance on food banks. They call on the government and the private sector to address the root causes of food insecurity, such as by implementing a minimum living wage of \$25.05 per hour in the Greater Toronto Area, a minimum living wage as indicated by the Ontario Living Wage Network (Coleman, 2023).

Need 2: Resources and funding to support food sovereignty initiatives

Although Parkdale is home to a range of community gardens, there are limitations to the number of community members who can participate in their use. During community engagements, participants shared that they experienced challenges reserving a free plot at the neighbourhood's community gardens due to lottery systems and long wait lists. As well, while participants emphasized the strengths of the Milky Way Garden, they also discussed barriers they had faced when trying to access it, whether for a community event or due to mobility needs. Stories told at community workshops highlighted the need to work on expanding access to existing gardens and securing more land in the neighbourhood where community-based food sovereignty initiatives could be enhanced.

Food sovereignty initiatives in Parkdale also continue to grapple with substantial financial barriers to initiation and long-term viability. The neighbourhood was once home to the West End Food Co-op (WEFC), an organization committed to "bringing more healthy and culturally appropriate food to Toronto's West End" (Kinneer, 2018). WEFC's operations included a grocery store that stocked local produce sourced from farmers, a

commercial kitchen that offered educational food programming, a Co-op Cred program where community members could volunteer in exchange for store credits, and the Sorauren Farmers' Market (Caton, 2017). In 2016 WEFC was informed that its below-market lease would end in two years, and it set out to find a new financially-viable space in the neighbourhood, or, if necessary, shift towards new programs in alignment with their mission (Daily Hive Toronto, 2018). However, in 2019, the organization announced that there was “no path forward” due to financial and capacity challenges, including a significant debt burden, the struggle to find a new and affordable location for the co-op, and insufficient staff capacity to rebuild the organization (West End Food Co-op, 2019). While the Sorauren Farmers' Market continues to operate as an independent organization, WEFC has been dissolved.

This experience demonstrates the need for expanded resources and funding for food sovereignty initiatives in Parkdale in order to support their growth and resilience amidst gentrification and affordability pressures. Initiatives that offer culturally relevant, affordable food and enhance community control over local food systems need to be prioritized. In particular, there remains a need to support local IBPOC businesses in creating food solutions. There is currently a lack of institutional support and recognition for IBPOC-led food sovereignty initiatives across Toronto. According to the *Black Food Sovereignty Plan*, “63% of Black (food) organizations expect to run out of funding in 6 months or less” (City of Toronto, 2021). Recent research on Indigenous food sovereignty in Ontario also found that “Indigenous peoples continue to be excluded from decision making, and as a result, programming and funding opportunities often force Indigenous applicants into a very limited and inappropriate set of goals, guidelines, and definitions of success [...] with little support for ongoing work and programming to be sustained.” (Robin et al., 2023, p.4).

On municipal and provincial levels, there is a need to push funding bodies to reframe their thinking about food and land, while adopting policies that are informed by Indigenous food practices.

Directions

Direction 1: Co-ordinate existing food service programs and mutual aid initiatives to ensure consistent access to food for local community members

Formal and informal systems of mutual support, as well as the neighbourhood's network of social supports, have contributed to our community's wellness during the pandemic and beyond. However, there is a need to support and sustain these initiatives beyond band aid solutions in times of crisis. A proposed means of addressing this is to continue to hold monthly tables where organizations and agencies invested in food sovereignty and food security in Parkdale meet. While a Parkdale Food Network exists, there is a need to invite more grassroots food initiatives to the network and create solidarity efforts for agencies to support grassroots initiatives, as it currently consists of only charity organizations. As one community partner stated, it

“should be inclusive of all grassroots, community, churches, all people playing a role right now in

supporting food needs in Parkdale.”

The network could also benefit from creating a circular system of support and food access, such as mapping out opportunities to consolidate resources. This could start with creating a list of all key contacts from each food organization to improve cross-organizational communication and coordination. Developing a clearer understanding of Parkdale’s comprehensive food system would help the network identify potential inefficiencies, gaps, opportunities, and areas for collaboration.

The Parkdale Food Network could also benefit from strategic planning. There is an opportunity to refine its work and revisit its framework — its goals, values, and principles — so that there is a clear vision of what the network aims to do and how it can go about doing this. It simultaneously serves as an opportunity for food banks to coordinate to offer training and support opportunities to their volunteers. These same organizations and grassroots groups could unite to pursue policy changes that benefit food security in Parkdale, such as an increase in social assistance funding so that households can allocate more money towards food and funding increases to the Toronto Food Policy Council. As one community member stated, we need to

“Increase the wage of people who are on ODSP, OW, and minimum wage so they can afford healthy foods.”

Direction 2: Expand education, resources, skill-building opportunities, and initiatives that promote food

sovereignty

Food sovereignty initiatives are efforts aimed at ensuring that communities have control over their own food systems in a way that prioritizes local needs, cultural preferences, and environmental sustainability. These initiatives emphasize democratic decision making, social justice, and the rights of small-scale food producers. Parkdale is the birthplace of many food initiatives, and has a robust network of organizations and programs dedicated to building local control around food. However, many residents may not be connected to or even aware of these initiatives.

It is important to expand the community’s awareness and participation in food sovereignty initiatives through education and knowledge sharing. This includes facilitating community events and programs to expand residents’ understanding of food sovereignty practices and principles. For example, skill-building efforts could include workshops on seed saving, composting, and urban gardening, and intergenerational and intercultural knowledge exchanges on traditional food preservation techniques. During our engagement, community members also emphasized the importance of expanding children’s food education and access to nature — as one workshop participant stated,

“Have... children touch their hands in the soil. Push every school to have every child have this experience. It is a must. Children should have a connection to the earth and know where their food comes from.”

Building agency and community control around food also involves promoting food literacy and food preparation skills. Affordable cooking classes and food handling certification courses would support this learning. Examples of existing food

literacy and skill-sharing initiatives include PCFB's free community cookbook and Greenest City's seniors cooking class, which took place from October to December 2022 and offered seniors an opportunity to build cooking skills while connecting with others. The Parkdale Food Network is well-positioned to explore how food organizations in Parkdale can collaborate further to expand this type of programming in the neighbourhood.

There is also a need to expand resources and funding to support food sovereignty initiatives. Many struggle with limited funding and rely on competitive grants and donations, making long-term financial stability difficult to achieve. These resource constraints also make it challenging to maintain the staffing and infrastructure needed to scale up operations. Accessing land and space for food sovereignty programming is especially challenging in Toronto given the exorbitant cost of real estate. Addressing these barriers could include exploring alternative financial mechanisms (explored in Direction 9 of the Solidarity Economy theme) that could be used for food sovereignty initiatives, building collaborative networks to pool resources, and advocating for improved food sovereignty funding and recognition at the municipal and provincial levels.

Direction 3: Expand community food growing spaces and create a support network for local growers in the neighbourhood

Parkdale's community gardens are places to imagine beautiful, abundant futures for residents and produce food that sustains us. But as described in Need 2, residents have reported long wait lists and lottery systems for plots in community gardens that are trustee'd by West NH/Greenest City. In addition, resources provided to gardeners, such as access to water, soil, and seedlings, vary from garden to garden. Resource co-ordination is needed to directly address these concerns and provide support to both existing and new initiatives.

A recurring worry is that there is not enough available land in Parkdale to support food sovereignty initiatives. In the past, Greenest City offered Parkdale residents a balcony garden program to mitigate the lack of growing space in the neighbourhood, providing tools and resources to high-rise tenants to grow herbs and vegetables from their balconies. A community mapping exercise to identify sites that could be adapted for food growing would be useful to expand food growing spaces.

During the Climate Justice workshop that was part of the community engagement process for this plan, residents shared other ideas:

"Parking lots — lots of access in the city, great spots to grow food because there aren't any trees."

"Rooftops are untapped resources of big buildings and new buildings. Top floor can house container farms."

"You can save so much rainwater, which brings herbs, perennials don't need much water. Cilantro, parsley, red chilis, veggies too."

Community members also voiced their desire for the conversion of vacant properties into sites for

community gardens, such as the former rooming houses located at 155–157 Cowan Ave that have been vacant since 2014. The need to partner with existing institutions such as Exhibition Place has also been recognized:

"Accessing anchor institution's land resources... to do more for community."

There were community proposals for creating a rooftop farm and other green spaces for food-production initiatives at the proposed Parkdale Hub near the intersection of Queen Street and Cowan Avenue. Participants described the need to

"make sure the Hub is going to have accessible green space, where we can grow food... and push for this in [other] local developments."

The City of Toronto's current *Green Roof Bylaw* calculates its coverage requirements based on the size of the building, requiring a minimum of 20% of available roof space to be reserved for green space on developments 2,000 m² or larger (City of Toronto, n.d.). As a large proposal of approximately 17,000 m² (CreateTO, n.d.), the Parkdale Hub could be negotiated to include a publicly accessible garden or farm onsite with up to 50% rooftop coverage. This massive addition of greenspace to the neighbourhood could provide food production opportunities and be replicated on the roofs of other proposed developments. These green space additions would not only reduce competition for food-growing spaces but also increase assets for climate action.

Direction 4: Continue to build community food hubs that

support food security, health, and economic development through a shared-use community kitchen

A community kitchen is a shared space where members of a community come together to prepare and/or share meals. Community kitchens can help promote food security and social cohesion by providing an accessible space for residents, community organizations, local food entrepreneurs, and grassroots groups to share kitchen equipment and host programming. Throughout our engagement, many community members highlighted the need for shared-use community kitchen space in Parkdale.

There is currently a kitchen on the lower level of Epiphany and St. Mark Anglican Church. This kitchen could provide residents with a space to produce and co-create food. However, limited funding and staff capacity have been identified as barriers to making this space publicly accessible for shared community use. Additionally, physical intervention would be needed to make the entrance and physical space accessible to residents with mobility barriers and devices. Community partners noted that funding and a leading agency need to be identified in order to pursue this direction, as running a shared-use community kitchen requires a high level of coordination. Staffing capacity is also crucial, as the Province's Food Premises regulations would require that a certified food handler be on-site at all times. It was proposed that the community kitchen could be used for training, apprenticeship, and educational programs, which could create an avenue for securing grant funding. For example, there may

be grant opportunities for food-handling training programs that could help community members build skills for food sector employment. Other programming ideas included training on healthy cooking, knife skills, growing a garden, and building a food business. Another idea was to reach out to local businesses and the PVBIA to explore whether they would be interested in accessing and partnering on a shared-use community kitchen.

CBAs could also be pursued as a way to secure space and/or funding for a community kitchen. As noted in Asset 2, community members could organize to demand that developers in the neighbourhood provide community benefits that promote food systems, since new development can lead to increased food costs. This could extend to demanding that developers include community kitchen spaces within proposed developments or otherwise contribute funding to such initiatives.

Further research should be done to identify funding opportunities and determine an appropriate model for a shared-use community kitchen in Parkdale. Best practices could be learned from other organizations that run community kitchens and/or food hubs across the Greater Toronto Area. For example, East Scarborough Storefront's Eco-Food Hub is a commercial kitchen space that grassroots groups, gardeners, residents, local entrepreneurs, and other partners can access to cook, eat, and exchange knowledge. Another example of a community kitchen space can be found at the Neighbourhood Food Hub, in Toronto's east end. The 519, FoodShare Toronto, and The Stop Community Food Centre also have community kitchen spaces and/or programs. One workshop participant also suggested reaching out to caterToronto, a social enterprise and network of caterers. It runs a unique kitchen networks program that works with community partners to offer underutilized commercial kitchen spaces to its members at affordable rental rates.

Efforts should be made to connect with these organizations to learn from their approaches. Additionally, community members and local organizations (including gardeners, food-related organizations, small businesses, and local entrepreneurs) should be engaged to identify their priorities and expectations for a shared-use community kitchen.

Direction 5: Establish an IBPOC-led co-operative or worker enterprise to support the local food system

Food justice is a racial justice issue. Many of Parkdale's affordable grocery and restaurant options are owned by racialized community members. As described in the Solidarity Economy theme, a large number of small businesses in the food sector have struggled to pay rent during the pandemic and the resulting economic downturn. Amidst the backdrop of compounding crises and longer-standing structural inequalities, residents have identified a need to support Parkdale's Black, Indigenous, and racialized populations to access culturally relevant options for food and medicine, as well as to support diverse local businesses to continue to create food solutions that foster local autonomy and health.

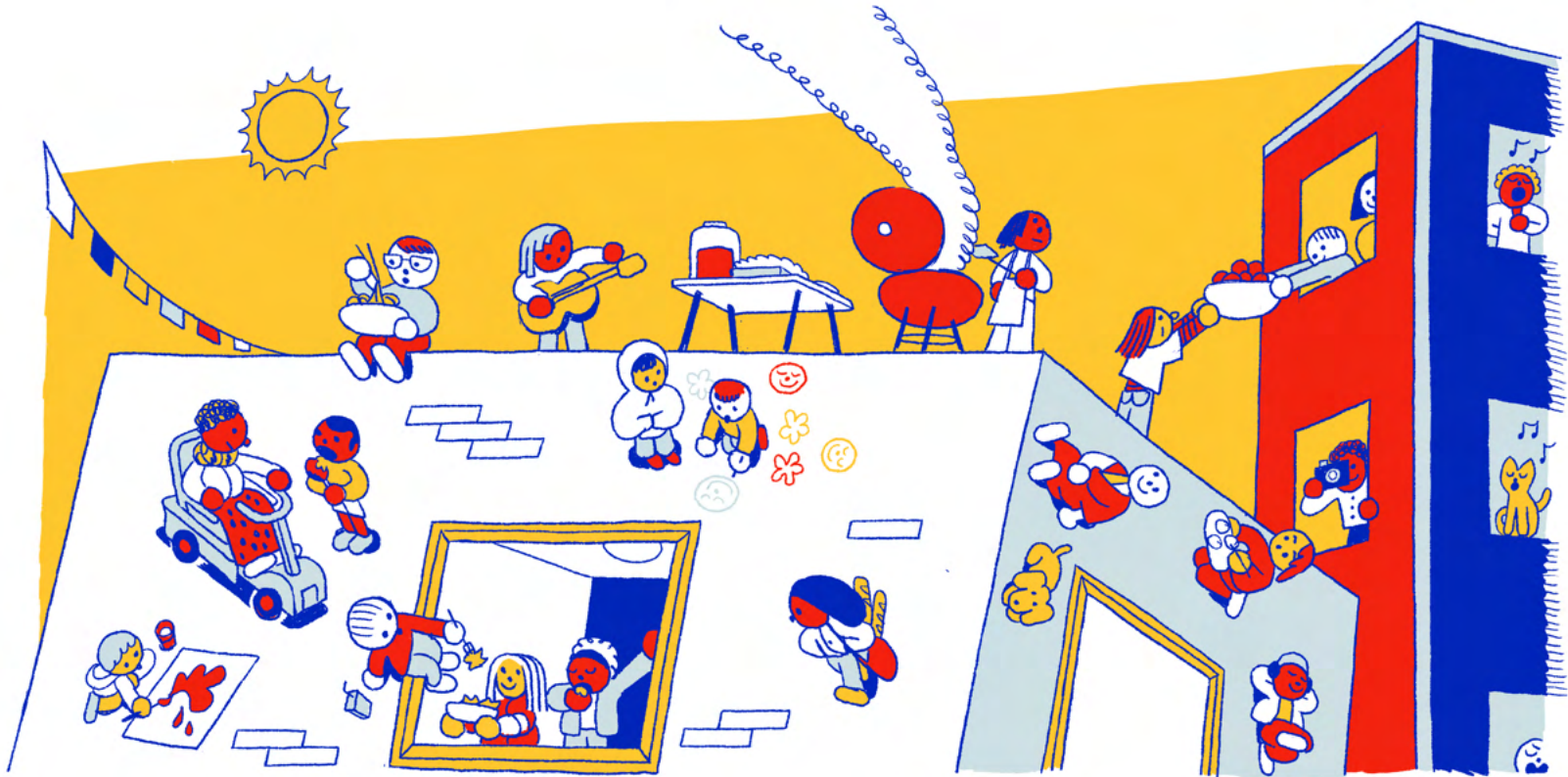
To support the wealth building and food sovereignty of IBPOC residents and initiatives, establishing a local co-operative system or worker enterprise could be explored. Pursuing this direction could include seeking urban agricultural funding, advocating for community-stewarded container farms on all new developments, developing a real estate co-op or commercial CLT to secure the tenure of locally serving food businesses, building partnerships with farms outside the city, or developing a compost

system using kitchen scraps and coffee grounds from local businesses. These are just a few examples of co-operative or worker enterprise ideas that would support just food systems in Parkdale.

It's important to note that bureaucracy, a lack of trust, and systemic racism are persistent barriers to entry into the co-operative sector and exclude and erase existing IBPOC co-operatives (Redekop, 2022). These barriers are compounded by limited resources and funding, especially since many co-operatives start through unpaid labour (Redekop, 2022). Pursuing this direction, therefore, also needs to involve working towards expanding funding, resources, and education to support the development of IBPOC co-operatives. Freedom Dreams Co-operative Education, which is “a co-operative development and education hub that shares knowledge and resources about co-operatives and the solidarity economy from a Black, Indigenous and Person of Colour (IBPOC) perspective” (Freedom Dreams Cooperative Education, n.d.), would be an excellent resource for supporting this direction. Additional resources for supporting the development of worker co-operatives are explored in Direction 1 of the Solidarity Economy theme.

Social Infrastructure

Support a collaborative social infrastructure of services, programs, spaces, and networks in Parkdale to enhance the overall wellbeing of community members, community organizations, and grassroots groups in the neighbourhood.



Context

Social infrastructure refers to “the networks of spaces, facilities, institutions, and groups that create affordances for social connection.” (Latham and Layton, 2019, p. 3). This includes a broad range of public institutions and amenities, such as libraries, schools, parks, and public spaces, as well as community and grassroots organizations, and informal gathering spaces. This infrastructure is a vital part of the social fabric in Parkdale, offering a range of places, resources, and support to community members across several critical areas, such as health, wellbeing, food, employment, housing, education, faith, legal, and social services. As one community mapping participant shared,

“It’s so amazing all the services we can find in Parkdale, and all the diversity. High population of immigrants reminds me of my former country. People can say hi to each other, and can build a small social network.”

The charitable and non-profit sector plays an important role in the provision of social infrastructure. There are currently 50 charitable organizations registered in Parkdale and an additional 15 providing programming and services in the neighbourhood. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many local non-profit organizations demonstrated leadership by pivoting to provide emergency aid and filling critical gaps in services. For example, frontline

service providers like PARC kept their doors open for unhoused community members when many services were shut down, and food security organizations like the Parkdale Community Food Bank (PCFB) began serving between 7,000 and 8,000 families per month compared to 1,500 pre-pandemic. However, these efforts placed strains on the sector, as organizations had to navigate how to provide community support with limited staff and space capacity. In some instances, staff members and resources were redirected to frontline roles, which resulted in non-essential but important programs and services being put on pause indefinitely.

Social distancing and occupancy restrictions also limited the number of people who could attend in-person programs and drop-in spaces. While many programs and services shifted to online and hybrid delivery models to adapt to pandemic conditions, the digital divide meant that not everyone had the digital literacy and technological access to participate, leaving some community members inadequately supported. These barriers to accessing services contributed to increased feelings of social isolation. Though many spaces have since reopened to the public, many community members continue to face isolation and difficulty accessing supports around mental health, safety, food, income security, and housing. Public services that aimed to support grassroots responses helped to temporarily support community leadership and employment. However, many of these initiatives created precarious short-term employment and did not provide funding to resource long-term, sustainable movements. For example, government-funded initiatives in response to the pandemic enabled the hiring of local community members on short-term contracts but continuing these con-

tracts was not feasible due to funding constraints.

Mutual aid movements grew due to the inability of public and charitable models to adequately respond to the crisis, popularizing the slogan “solidarity not charity.” Through mutual aid, community members leveraged, deepened, and expanded their social networks to nourish collective care. In Parkdale, mutual aid networks were formed through Mutual Aid Parkdale’s (MAP) neighbourhood pods, enhancing community power and self-efficacy in navigating resources such as vaccination and healthcare services. Grassroots initiatives worked with one another to fill in service gaps, such as the collaboration between the Bike Brigade and MAP to redistribute critical resources to local community members. Another example is the Parkdale Solidarity Fund, which fundraised with local community members to pay for and deliver groceries to households across Parkdale over 300 times, brought neighbours together to support each other through regular friendly check-ins, helped navigate landlord-tenant matters, helped apply for government assistance, supported with technology and internet access, and built connections, trust, and community power among neighbours. Some of this mutual aid infrastructure still exists — for example, there are local WhatsApp groups that continue mutual aid work. As one community member shared,

“Through [mutual aid] we were able to build a connection to each other and support each other through anxiety and loneliness, through economic hardships, in small but important ways.”

The pandemic showcased how the community sector is expected to execute services and programming that are responsive to emergency situations with inadequate resource support and prior preparation. Due to funding constraints in

the non-profit sector, many employees, despite being essential workers, are not receiving a living wage, placing them in high-risk situations and devaluing their work. Smaller-scale organizations also found it difficult to compete for resources with larger organizations, leading to pressure to amalgamate. In Parkdale, we have witnessed at least four smaller-scale organizations amalgamate with larger ones (Parkdale Community Information Centre merged with CultureLink, JobStart with WoodGreen, Greenest City with West NH, and Regeneration with West Toronto Community Health Services) and one health institution amalgamate with wider health services (St. Joseph’s Health Centre merged with Unity Health Toronto).

Charities in Parkdale have a combined annual revenue of over \$120 million (see Appendix B). When extended to organizations and institutions that operate beyond the neighbourhood, such as health institutions and housing organizations, this figure rises to over \$4 billion. If these resources could be harnessed collectively and collaboratively in Parkdale and beyond, the community sector has a unique opportunity to collectively impact the wellbeing of the community and directly support the local economy in tangible and material ways.

Non-profit organizations and grassroots groups in Parkdale have been working to plan for complex neighbourhood changes while championing long-term public support for social infrastructure that fosters a healthy, liveable neighbourhood. However, Parkdale’s social infrastructure continues to face structural challenges and unmet needs. This community plan aims to amplify the need for investments in social infrastructure, services, and programming to support community connection and wellbeing. What we have learned as we try to shape a more inclusive recovery from the pandemic is that the protection of robust social infrastructure directly builds resilience at both the household and community levels.

Assets

Asset 1: Community care

The COVID-19 pandemic created emergency needs while exacerbating long-standing crises, such as housing insecurity, mental health, poverty, food insecurity, and other systemic gaps. As many local services closed or operated at a limited capacity, mutual aid and community care grew and have continued to grow across Parkdale as a community response to filling service gaps and addressing needs.

MAP emerged during the pandemic and consists of 21 neighbourhood pods built through community leaders and personal social networks and composed of 5–30 community members. Neighbourhood pods are organized by language and residential building and use low-barrier technology such as WhatsApp groups, phone trees, and Facebook groups to communicate. MAP has organized food deliveries for community members, garage sale fundraisers, emotional support groups, and other forms of community support. Though social distancing restrictions have been lifted, ever-present systematic gaps remain, and MAP continues to be used as a source of knowledge sharing and collective care.

Community care manifests in both formal and informal collectives, encompassing tenants, neighbours, faith-based organizations, and community networks. For instance, dedicated organizers exerted considerable effort to facilitate the registration of seniors and other community members for pop-up vaccination clinics, even arranging accompaniment for newcomers. The Tibetan Health

and Wellness event (April 2023), the Black Health and Wellness Townhall (February 2022), the Black Resiliency Table events (in April and December 2022) and the Filipino Health and Wellness event (November 2022) were culturally informed community health events that brought together various healthcare providers, local organizations, and guest presenters to encourage vaccination and serve as a space for other health-promotion initiatives.

Another example of local mutual aid work is the Parkdale Women's Leadership Group (PWLG). PWLG is a collective of racialized women in Parkdale who created community wellbeing workshops to train residents to support community members in areas of mental health and wellness, collective healing, transformative justice, supporting survivors, suicide prevention, conflict resolution, and navigating crisis.

The network of community gardens such as the HOPE Community Garden, Bonnie Storr Garden, Milky Way Garden, and South Parkdale Community Pollinator Gardens have also served as places for exchanging peer support, healing, and positively addressing mental health.

Parkdale benefits from a diverse set of organizers and community members who create accessible spaces and opportunities for community connection, racial justice, and solidarity. For example, Made in Exile is a community-arts initiative for Tibetan youth navigating exilehood that creates spaces for storytelling and art in Parkdale. Parkdale Against Racism was a group formed as a result of an anti-Black racist incident in October 2021 at Parkdale Collegiate Institute, when a teacher wore blackface to the school for Halloween. Parents organized together to demand that the Toronto District School Board hold perpetrators of discrimination accountable. Additionally, the Black Student Success Committee, a parent-led group supporting Black student achievement

and wellbeing, organized to address issues of anti-Black racism within Parkdale's schools. They helped lay the groundwork for the name change of Queen Victoria Public School, named after a figure associated with a violent and colonial regime, to its new name, Dr. Rita Cox-Kina Minagok Public School. Kina Minagok is translated by Indigenous Knowledge Keeper Henry Pitawanakwat to mean "all is growing well" and represents the community and school's role in nurturing learning.

Further, Dashmaawaan Bemaadzinjin (They Feed the People) is an Indigenous catering company that has been working to support Indigenous seniors and community members and Giwaabamin Street Patrol is another initiative that brings herbal medicine to people who may need it. Both offer cultural resurgence and revitalization efforts for intergenerational survivors in the neighbourhood. This kind of collaborative organizing presents an opportunity for using cross-cultural learning as a tool to not only combat racism and other systemic injustices, but also strengthen solidarity as a growing community.

The utilization of community-based knowledge frameworks in Parkdale has proved invaluable for crafting effective strategies. Notably, members of the Roma community, originating from various parts of the city, collaborated with Hungarian-speaking staff in Parkdale to address the needs of their traditionally underserved demographic. In response to a longstanding history of discrimination within the healthcare system, they implemented a "Tea with Grandmothers" outreach initiative, strategically tapping into matriarchal decision making structures prevalent in the close-knit families characteristic of the Roma community.

Asset 2: Participatory democracy

Participatory democracy is "what happens when we can all participate in policy-making, budgeting, and other decisions that impact our lives" (Democracy Beyond Elections Coalition, 2022). The idea of participatory democracy was born from these territories, with the Haudenosaunee Confederacy described as the oldest participatory democracy on Earth through its blending of law and values. It has also been recognized as a global movement with deep roots in Indigenous, Black, and cultural traditions from immigrant communities. Examples include participatory budgeting efforts in Brazil, people's assemblies in Puerto Rico, and cooperative economies in Jackson, Mississippi. In Parkdale, efforts to embed community-led decision making in policy decisions has looked like the work of community benefit coalitions, community-led governance bodies like PNLT, and community narrative building through arts-based interventions.

Planning law and policies are deeply inaccessible to communities yet have a profound impact on the day to day lives of community members. A key effort of PPE's work has been to translate the language of land use planning into accessible terms and engaging in political education about the opportunities and challenges of engaging in formal planning processes, while also building alternative tactics for intervention like direct action, mobilization, and art as protest. For example, when the City of Toronto introduced a new proposal for Inclusionary Zoning (IZ), a planning tool to create affordable units in new private developments, PPE created a set of tools to help community members understand and intervene in the planning process — this included a critical analysis of IZ to understand how the City defines "affordable" and how drastically different that is from people's lived experience, the minimal targets the City was setting compared to community-led targets established in the *Parkdale Community Benefits Framework*, and deputation support packages for community members to engage in their right

to depute — by sharing personal stories to paint the realities of people's experiences and humanize the impacts of policy decisions. PPE also facilitated direct action against developments, such as when community members interrupted a community meeting to hold a community vote on Lifetime Developments, disrupted a City Council meeting by unfolding a banner calling for affordable housing, and various interventions done by the Justice for Queen's Hotel and Justice for Queen and Close coalitions. PPE continues to create in-person events so that community members can access online consultations (often hosted on Zoom), such as hosting a corresponding in-person workshop for community members to participate in Councillor Gord Perks' virtual budget town hall meetings and development proposal open houses.

Many Parkdale organizations are structured to promote local decision making and community involvement. Notably, PNLT has a Board of Directors comprising of elected members (tenants, community members, and organizational members) who oversee the decision making of the land trust. There is also a member base; members are part of the working committees to develop projects, exchange insights, and meaningfully inform participatory planning in the neighbourhood. The community is integral to the structure and decision making of the organization, and thus the planning processes for more affordable housing created and preserved in Parkdale.

An encouraging set of narrative- and arts-based practices are ever present in Parkdale to support the participation of community members in local decision making and leadership. For example, SWITCH Collective has a residency that uses theatre to preserve knowledge of the resilience-making work of local women leaders. Justice for Queen and Close utilized the gallery space at The Public Studio to showcase its engagement with community members on alternative visions for the

development at Queen Street West and Close Avenue. Similarly, Justice for Queen's Hotel shared an art installation at the local Capital Espresso coffee shop of a white ghost house with 27 windows, highlighting the loss of 27 tenants from the unlawful eviction at Queen's Hotel in 2015. The Welcome Committee launched a socially engaged community art call for proposals to welcome the new residents of the supportive housing at 90 Dunn Avenue. These examples can help inspire ongoing efforts to convey community visions of diverse community members in an engaging and accessible way.

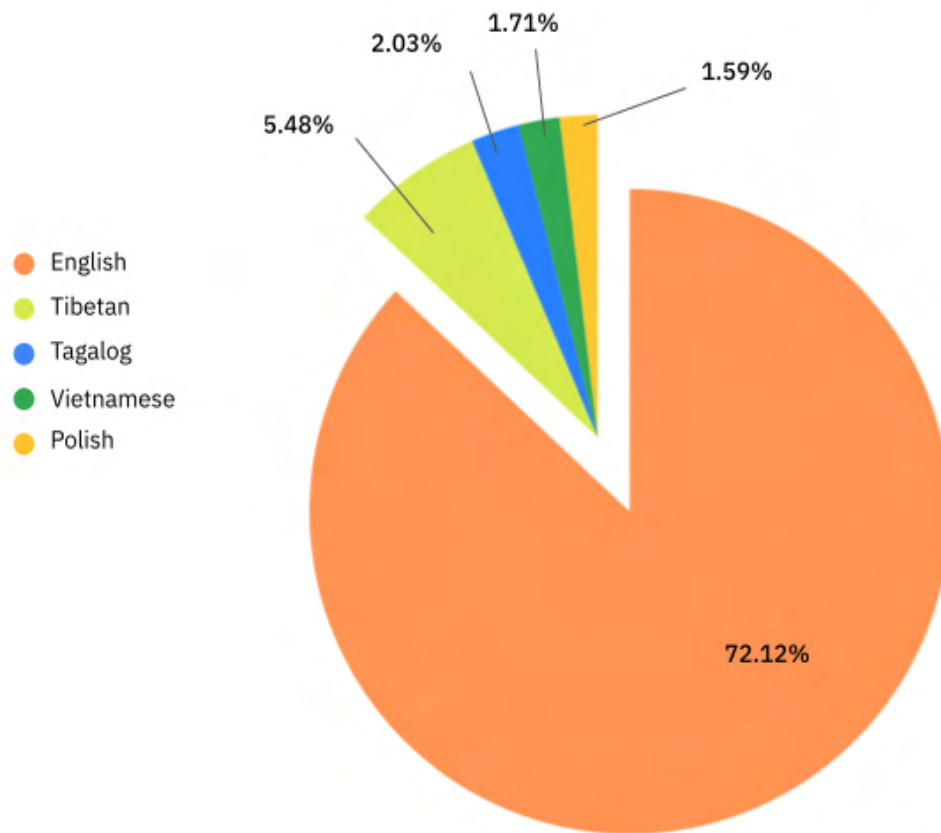
Parkdale's social infrastructure continues to find ways to orient towards a shared goal of mobilizing collective action on solutions that address our most urgent and complex crises around protecting liveability, wellbeing, and trust. We will need existing and emerging leaders in our neighbourhoods to continue to work together, as their voices, insights, and expertise will help us shape and act upon these pressing challenges.

Needs

Need 1: Culturally relevant programming, services, and spaces that foster community connection and care

With the rapid scale of neighbourhood change in Parkdale, both formal and informal community spaces continue to be lost due to gentrification pressures. This is especially true for local amenities and businesses that reflect the values and needs of lower-income households. Over time, Parkdale has seen the depletion of affordable

Languages most often spoken at home in Parkdale



Source: Statistics Canada, 2022.

community spaces for community connection and collaboration, which has heightened social isolation and contributed to feelings of displacement in the neighbourhood. For example, Parkdale has lost the local Coffee Time and Jason's Coffee restaurants on Queen Street West, two sites that were identified by community members as affordable and valued meeting places. Additionally, the former McDonald's on King Street West and Dufferin Street, which served as a source of employment and community convening, has been replaced by a new condo development called Lifetime Developments. While the Tim Hortons on Queen Street at Jameson remains, its seating options have been gated off, preventing community members from sitting down and convening there. During our engagements with Tibetan community members, participants shared that they need more intentional, dedicated space to hold events

as evidenced by ongoing tensions with the Toronto District School Board over the use of outdoor space on Parkdale Collegiate Institute's property. Their weekly Lhosar gathering was vulnerable due to an informal arrangement challenged by a change of administration at the school. Community-directed space animation that helps create resources is often at the mercy of how much surveillance or policing is applied. The reliance of community space use on more organic or informal agreements is jeopardized when partners are no longer able to champion or support the navigation of more flexible and accommodating space usage policies. In general, community use of public spaces, including City-operated spaces such as schools, gardens, community centres, plazas, and parks, is limited by excessive permit and insurance requirements that neither promote flexible use nor centre multiple, diverse understandings of community ownership.

Another key priority expressed throughout our engagement was the need for more local Indigenous resources and spaces for Indigenous community members. One example given was the lack of a nearby sweat lodge, as one of the nearest and most accessible ones is at Na-Me-Res, which requires significant travel from Parkdale. It was iterated during the Indigenous community consultation that Indigenous community members desired more opportunities to convene, with one member highlighting that a portion of Milky Way Garden should be for Indigenous communities with opportunities to host Full Moon and other ceremonies there.

During consultation with Black communities in Parkdale, many community members mentioned the need for a Black Resource Center offering a place for Black community members to connect with one another, seek support as immigrants and newcomers, get help navigating employment and government documents, and attend adult and children's programming. Community members expressed that they would like the centre to be located in the Parkdale Hub and referenced the now-defunct Parkdale Information Centre as a comparable service space. Community members also voiced that they would like children's programming for homework support, navigating emotions, and addressing the stigma associated with seeking assistance for learning disabilities.

There are additional unmet language, cultural, and technological needs in accessing services in the neighbourhood. Language and interpretation services continue to be a barrier to accessing services. Tamil informant interviews highlighted diminishing available supports, particularly due to the absence of a Tamil-speaking social worker in the neighbourhood. Additionally, immigrant populations using interpretation services have encountered discrimination and have expressed concerns about sharing personal information with interpreters (see the Community

Health and Safety theme). English classes funded by the Toronto District School Board used to be offered by TPL, but those classes stopped due to the pandemic, and now there is no source of funding for them. Community members have repeatedly voiced that these classes were integral to their learning and they want them to continue.

Need 2: Resource sharing and collaboration across organizations and grassroots groups (such as shared service delivery and space use arrangements)

Key drivers and nodes of local social infrastructure in Parkdale are seeing significant shifts in a volatile operational environment that requires capacity to navigate successfully. Too many exist in project-based "survival" mode without financial reserves to fall back on, reflecting a deep need to support different groups and community organizations in accessing resources more equitably. This is essential to effectively offer care to those who are underengaged by existing services or have historically poor connections to institutions.

For example, the Jean Tweed Centre, a non-profit that offers treatment, support, and a safe place for women looking to overcome challenges with substance use, gambling, and mental health, has limited staffing and access to supplies for their work. PCLS temporarily relocated their offices away from Parkdale to University Avenue and

Wellington Street, which put stress on Parkdale clients who accessed their services. Now, one of the PCLS offices is located at Melbourne Avenue and Dufferin Street, currently a site where a mixed-use development proposal has been submitted to the City by developer Hullmark, with no guarantees that non-profit organizations will be able to continue their tenure at affordable rates.

Accessible, low-barrier spaces for delivering programming and relevant services are a precondition for the overall sustainability of groups and community organizations working to meet diverse needs in Parkdale. Grassroots organizations have attested to barriers in sustaining their meaningful work and contributions in the community due to their limited capacity and inexperience in accessing funding. Smaller non-profits are also not immune to a lack of organizational capacity due to the limitations of government funding. For example, in 2021, JobStart merged with WoodGreen Community Services to jointly offer employment and workforce-development services programming. Greenest City merged with West NH in 2022 to stabilize its funding. This required a larger organization identifying mutual benefit to exchanging expertise with a smaller organization and being willing to pool resources. Changes to how existing services and programs are delivered in Parkdale reflect trends across the charitable sector as it is faced with declining revenue sources, with an estimated 12% drop in charitable donations between 2019 and 2021 (Canada Helps, 2022) in a recessionary environment with pressure from austerity politics to clawback social spending.

With the exception of a few organizations, most non-profits do not own land in Parkdale and smaller or grassroots organizations are subject to a mix of formal and informal arrangements to access spaces for their activities. Parkdale has seen some innovative shared space arrangements, such as at 1497 Queen Street West (owned by

PARC), the various organizations based out of the Church of the Epiphany and St. Mark's, and the former Artscape mixed-use heritage building at 1313 Queen Street West. These shared space and tenancy arrangements should be reflected on to inform the ongoing development of the Parkdale Hub, which will hopefully stabilize space needs and increase grassroots groups' access to low-barrier meeting, programming, and event space.

Further, non-profit organizations are riddled with capacity challenges due to staff turnover, burn-out, and structural leadership gaps. Non-profit organizations are likely to continue to experience financial instability due to wider, downward economic trends as pandemic recovery has slowed, while non-profits deal with rising costs. Without further supportive government policies and initiatives to buffer our wider social safety net with more robust poverty alleviation investments, Parkdale's social infrastructure will see greater reliance on food banks, clothing distribution, the healthcare system, shelters and other transitional housing, etc. Simultaneously, non-profits are experiencing a decline in their purchasing power and are looking for ways to meet growing demands, as wages cannot keep up with the cost of basic needs (Ontario Living Wage Network, 2022). Organizations that are structured as social enterprises or with low-cost fees may in some cases have to pass on increased costs to service users. However, the large majority of service delivery in Parkdale is free and most non-profits are unable to pass on costs to clients. Affordability and accessibility concerns will likely surface as organizations either absorb the increasing cost of wages, rent, and supplies or reduce provision. This is especially problematic for organizations with multi-year funding that often do not have inflationary mechanisms built in, as funding will essentially decrease each year (Hilell, 2022). Additionally, key informant interviews highlighted that there is a need for a table of non-profits within

the housing sector with a more agile capacity to hone in on project development and strategizing, with parallel groups comprising of community members to offer strategic insights, and build capacity in organizing for equitable development outcomes that protect housing diversity in the neighbourhood.

Need 3: Accessible and widespread avenues for engaging in participatory democracy

To foster democracy at the local level, community members expressed that they want to see more accessible touchpoints to engage and influence decision making processes, such as citizen assemblies, town halls, and community governance boards both online and in-person. Barriers such as lack of internet access, cultural or language differences, literacy, and childcare needs prevent residents from contributing to these opportunities to build democracy. To facilitate broader engagement, information about opportunities to participate should be made available in a wider variety of formats and languages. The engagement processes themselves should also be restructured to address these access needs.

Community members suggested providing low-cost internet and technology access for people to meet their base-level communication needs. The digital divide continues to be a concern particularly a lack of technological access for people to participate in online events, which organizations have continued to embrace even as pandemic restrictions have been relaxed. Individuals who are seniors or immunocompromised rely on hybrid

services to maintain social engagement, and need low-cost or free access to wifi, tablets, phones, or computers to participate. There are spaces where community members can go to temporarily access technology, such as the TPL and PARC, but they have limited operating hours, and community members must use the technology on-site. The library system was victim to a cyberattack in November 2023, which prevented community members from reserving books, using library computers, and accessing printing services. TPL's laptop loan program, though currently on pause, was downloaded onto community partners that provided outreach, referral and administrative work that is not resourced, meaning community organizations are compensating for system design flaws.

The reduction of City Councillors from 47 to 25 in 2018, aligning with federal and provincial ridings, has hurt participatory democracy. Residents are represented by fewer Councillors, whose coverage capacity has, in turn, been stretched more thinly. This change has not only decreased opportunities for minority representation on Toronto's City Council but also increased the challenges faced by communities in accessing local government for services and representation. This shift is in line with other changes, largely at the provincial level, that have eroded community involvement in planning processes, including the ability to appear at the Ontario Land Tribunal, as *Bill 23, More Homes Built Faster* has curtailed consultation requirements for certain developments. Refer to the Housing Justice context for more on this.

Directions

Direction 1: Expand resources and

supports for mutual aid and grassroots initiatives across the neighbourhood

Non-profits and community agencies can support mutual aid and grassroots efforts on the ground by taking a more hands-off approach to the distribution and handling of funding. There generally is significant red tape in distributing funding, which is a product of the nature of financial reporting and auditing. However, this power imbalance can create a relationship of distrust between agencies and community members. Parkdale non-profits can meet with community leaders to decide how to amend funding regulations and configure opportunities for funding redistribution to grassroots groups.

Non-profits in Parkdale should collaborate to seek funding for a community liaison staff position that centers dialogue between agencies and community members. A collection of interested agencies could jointly finance the position, which could find ways to share, distribute, and support grassroots groups with funding opportunities. This staff position could be developed alongside a neighbourhood resource and information centre, so community members could access resource development support. The staff person could find grants and opportunities for community members and grassroots groups and support them in the grant application process. Participants in the agency survey articulated that their budgets don't allow them to execute communications effectively, though regular, consistent communication was identified as necessary for collaboration between organizations. One non-profit response highlighted the need for an electronic bulletin board, suggesting that PPE host it on its website and update it for events. PPE

has previously had conversations with TPL about having a physical community calendar and resource board that could be regularly updated and crowdsourced for information. The community liaison staff position could be tasked with updating these online and physical resources regularly.

Meaningful employment and fair compensation are also important resources for sustaining a connected community and advancing change at the individual, household, and systems levels. It is crucial to prioritize the retention of trusted, connected community members who anchor the ecosystem of care in Parkdale while creating pathways to longer term forms of work through organizational employment policies. The Solidarity Economy theme further elaborates on how local businesses could adopt such employment policies, which should also be adopted by non-profits.

Direction 2: Meet commitments to support Indigenous sovereignty and racial justice in leadership at the City and community level

The ability to have access to and be in good relationship with the land is central to Indigenous sovereignty. Private land ownership models that go hand in hand with settler colonialism have harmed Indigenous peoples' access to land, affordable housing, and Indigenous-led spaces for ceremonies and traditional practices. During the sharing circle at Niiwin Wendaanimak, it was expressed that Parkdale needs more Indigenous-led spaces

to convene and hold ceremonies. For example, community members have to travel to Na-Me-Res to access a sweat lodge, and Trillium Park in Ontario Place is one of the only places near Parkdale that currently supports having a sacred fire. While Indigenous community members have identified that a sacred fire would be appropriate as part of the new supportive housing development at 90 Dunn Avenue, this requires the non-profit housing service provider, Fred Victor, to grant permission. Commitments need to be made to support Indigenous sovereignty over the land in Parkdale by consciously reframing relationships to sharing land. It is imperative that when settler non-profits have been granted trusteeship of community land in Parkdale (such as the network of community gardens or community housing), Indigenous communities are provided with every opportunity to take part in decision making regarding the land.

One example of the intentional creation of Indigenous-led space in Parkdale happened in 2022, when a community group of queer and two-spirit Indigenous earth workers called Indigiqueer Earth Work TO stewarded a garden in the Dunn Avenue Parkette as a place to conduct ceremonies, grow plant medicines, and harvest traditional foods. Formally, the project is part of the Indigenous Guides program at West NH and the public land is trustee'd by West NH/Greenest City. Water for the garden was obtained next door from 245 Dunn Avenue, a high-rise apartment building operated by the Toronto Community Housing Corporation. Although the garden is not being utilized for ceremony and medicine growing at this time, it illustrates the potential of collaboration between settler organizations and Indigenous communities when re-making land stewardship practices in Parkdale.

With the formation of an Indigenous-led community land trust, the Toronto Indigenous Community Land Trust (TICLT), come more great opportunities for Indigenous sovereignty, this time by re-

framing the relationship between land and housing (University of British Columbia, 2022). There are at least 231 housing units proposed for the new Parkdale Hub that could be stewarded by TICLT and other Indigenous-led housing providers. Settler non-profits, community organizations, and governments should immediately seek the leadership of Indigenous community groups and leaders, such as the Matriarchal Circle of Toronto and Giwaabamin, when making decisions about land-related projects. Indigenous leaders should be provided with honorariums to help reduce barriers to participation and to compensate them for their time and knowledge when working on collaborative projects regarding land stewardship.

Direction 3: Strengthen local democracy and resident participation in community-based strategies for Parkdale through skill-sharing, popular education, and arts-based action

Residents and community groups have the power to shape Parkdale by using democratic tools that support community decision making and local leadership. However, as noted by community members, there is a need to

"make democratic process more accessible to the public. Unless you have the time and resources to understand how City Council works,

you don't really know how the City makes decisions."

Due to most community engagement by the City shifting online and changes to the *Planning Act* through *Bill 23, More Homes Built Faster, 2022*, there are fewer opportunities than before for communities to engage within the formal development process. Examples of these restrictions include mandatory public meetings being held online with no interpretation services (requiring both computer and English literacy), little notice given about meetings, and less time given to provide feedback on development applications. Yet, there are still chances for residents to take part in neighbourhood change and local democracy with meaningful participation, community decision making, and leadership.

By learning and teaching one another facets of tenant law using the *Residential Tenancies Act* and how to work within the legislated planning system using the *Planning Act*, residents have interjected and shaped neighbourhood change at tribunals such as the Landlord and Tenant Board and the Ontario Land Tribunal. Monitoring new development applications in the neighbourhood and key dates related to City processes creates opportunities for residents to make informed deputations at Toronto and East York Community Council, thereby influencing Council's decision to approve or deny various development applications in Parkdale. The Parkdale Residents Association, PPE, and West Side Community Council have been regularly monitoring development applications in Parkdale and participating in written and verbal deputations. PPE can update the Deputation Support Package developed in 2021 and provide training sessions for Parkdale residents interested in challenging development applications at the City.

Another example of success that would not have

happened without learning from other more experienced community group is the participation in the development process for 1521 Queen Street West by the community coalition Justice for Queen's Hotel. Build a Better Bloor Dufferin and TCBN shared methods from their own struggles with the development process during meetings and teach-ins with Justice for Queen's Hotel. Parkdale needs to proactively engage in organizing coalitions across the city to share learnings and exchange knowledge about planning and development processes.

Residents can benefit greatly from learning how to navigate the city's democratic institutions. A greater understanding of how these systems of engagement work will amplify community organizations' efforts. PPE can facilitate two-way knowledge exchanges where residents share and generate information to explore crowdsourcing policy and legislative changes, as well as participatory budgeting (expanded on in Direction 7 of the Solidarity Economy theme). There is interest in reviving the Parkdale Free School as a way to share knowledge and build capacity. There are no prerequisites or fees to attend a free school class. In the past, community members with expertise and interest in subjects such as negotiation and land stewardship have organized seminars and reading groups to build capacity, reach collective goals, and create social change. Enabling the participation of community members in local decision making will also require creative communication methods and practices that promote accessibility for diverse audiences. Community organizations should continue to collaborate to identify and utilize arts- and narrative-based communication and storytelling practices in their work, building on the examples outlined in Asset 3. This should include nurturing existing relationships with gallery spaces and local artists, strategically using public space for public art, and working to preserve and archive public installations.

Direction 4: Co-design and conduct an equity assessment of existing programming and services in Parkdale, especially those related to housing and food

Efforts to protect and enhance social infrastructure in Parkdale need to be grounded in an understanding of the ways that the community sector, as an extension of the non-profit industrial complex, perpetuates systems of white supremacy and colonialism. An equity assessment of the neighbourhood's programming and services would help to reveal ways that these systems operate within Parkdale's community sector.

This might include identifying the impacts of how community supports are currently designed, communicated, administered, and evaluated, as well as gaps in these supports. The assessment could also outline recommendations to guide the development of culturally relevant supports in Parkdale that are informed by a decolonial, gender equity, anti-racist, and disability justice lens. These recommendations might also explore how to build equity through the development of institutions for shared decision making over social investments in Parkdale. The Working Group needs to identify potential actors to conduct this assessment and ensure that it is co-developed with the leadership of equity-deserving groups in Parkdale.

neighbourhood resource and information centre at the new Parkdale Hub to improve access to services and information and address the digital divide

Community visioning processes that ran in parallel to City-led consultations pointed to the potential of the new Parkdale Hub to house a neighbourhood resource and information centre that will provide access to community reports and data, as well as offer intergenerational and multilingual access to community services and events, tenant rights education, local work opportunities, and information on policy and topics relevant to the city and neighbourhood.

The neighbourhood resource and information centre should be designed intentionally and informed by the knowledge and practices of community organizing in order to ensure the space meets the needs of community and informal groups. It could feature a culturally specific Black Resource Centre that would serve as a place of shared connection and programming, provide support to children with homework and emotions, help navigate employment and government documents, and potentially facilitate healing circles. Toronto organizations have written guides for creating community spaces that could be referenced when developing a neighbourhood resource and information centre (SPACE Coalition and Social Planning Toronto, 2019). These ideas should be communicated to the City of Toronto as the de-

Direction 5: Build a



Community member participating in the music program at the PARC Drop-In held every Friday.

velopment of the Parkdale Hub moves forward.

This physical space would also help improve access to services and programs for community members with limited digital literacy or access. The City of Toronto can build an administration team to coordinate with various organizations across Parkdale to build upon and centralize programs and resources for addressing the digital divide. Existing initiatives that are addressing gaps in digital access include ALAB Resource Clinic's cell phone drive, wifi hot-spots, TPL's laptop loan program, and tablet loan programs for students offered by local school boards. It is important to note that the increase in

physical space at the Parkdale Hub will likely increase the number of service users, which means that there also needs to be additional staff and personnel to support the implementation of programming and services within the Parkdale Hub.

Moving Forward



Parkdale is a neighbourhood rich in community care and connectivity, which has persisted in the face of decades-long inequitable development. This plan lays out a vision for Parkdale's future to build a movement that honours and leverages the neighbourhood's collective power and culture of resistance and takes a proactive, values-based approach to community planning. The forward march of precarity, unaffordability, and gentrification is not inevitable. Rather, Parkdale community members have forged equitable, tangible alternatives to realize a shared vision of economic, racial, and climate justice. The plan guides the Parkdale People's Economy network towards this through six key themes: Housing Justice, Solidarity Economy, Community Health and Safety, Climate Action, Food Systems, and Social Infrastructure. Now, the work ahead of us involves strategizing and collaborating to achieve the visions and directions laid out in the pages above.

Since we published our first planning study in 2016, we've made strides towards realizing the vision of a more equitable Parkdale. Wins like the Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust and the cre-

ation and application of a *Parkdale Community Benefits Framework* showcase the viability of participatory community planning. Still, persistent, deep-rooted challenges like worsening poverty and mounting displacement pressures continue to take a heavy toll on Parkdale's low-income and newcomer residents. The crises of recent years have underlined the need for change. The COVID-19 pandemic, renewed calls for economic, climate, and racial justice across Turtle Island. So much is begging to be reimaged. Many of the structures we have turned to for care, democracy, and the basic comforts of life have been shown to be unjust, extractive, and apathetic to the worsening conditions many find themselves living in. Parkdale is no different, shaped as it has been by the same histories of racialized exploitation, settler colonialism, and cycles of inequitable development that define our contemporary world.

The planning study envisions a reorientation in our collective practice that offers an alternative to these histories. Many of the plan's directions, like forming an IBPOC-led food co-operative to support the local food system, are concrete and

local. Other pressing needs, such as those related to housing unaffordability, will require us to work towards large-scale and systemic policy changes.

Parkdale abounds with potential partners. Our visions and directions are to be actualized through community members, non-profit partners, local businesses, anchor institutions, local governments, and grassroots groups. Making change possible will require us to collaborate with a multitude of actors in the neighbourhood. By better coordinating our efforts, we stand to use our limited resources more effectively, find overlooked points of leverage, and create larger impacts than we could ever hope to achieve individually.

Now that the plan is launched, we can re-establish our Working Groups to collectively move the community plan forward, develop collaborative grant applications to resource the directions, and address systemic change by expanding our

membership to incorporate labour unions, tenant unions, interfaith groups, mutual aid networks, local schools, and broader Indigenous, Black, and racialized leadership.

Although the Working Groups will address different themes, their efforts are interrelated. The plan highlights Parkdale's complex networks and showcases how the challenges facing our community are systemic and interconnected. For example, high rents impact the neighbourhood's food system because low-income tenants are left with limited funds for food, which in turn affects the businesses of local grocers. This interconnectedness is an opportunity for us to think systemically about the future we envision for our neighbourhood, and collaborate on broader movement building for equitable economic development.



Caring friends and community members outside the PARC Drop-In.

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