



STRONG NEIGHBOURHOODS AND COMPLETE COMMUNITIES: A NEW APPROACH TO ZONING FOR APARTMENT NEIGHBOURHOODS

Prepared by
The Centre for Urban Growth and Renewal (CUG+R)

For
United Way Toronto

MAY 2012



FOREWARD

This report was commissioned in 2011 as a follow up to the findings of *Poverty by Postal Code 2: Vertical Poverty*. The aim of this report is to identify existing policy barriers and contemplate policy alternatives to enable Toronto's many hundred apartment neighbourhoods to reach their potential as healthy, vibrant and more complete communities.

Selected findings of this study were presented at the May 2012 Planning and Growth Management Committee at the City of Toronto. Following this presentation, the committee directed the Planning Division of the City of Toronto to work with the United Way Toronto and project partner, the Centre for Urban Growth and Renewal, to develop a city-wide zoning strategy for apartment neighbourhoods to address the opportunities and challenges outlined in this report. The first phase of this ongoing work is to be completed in early 2013. The research presented in this document, developed in spring 2012, informs this ongoing work.

This study was conducted in parallel with the forthcoming report from Toronto Public Health, *Toward Healthy Apartment Neighbourhoods: A Healthy Toronto by Design Report*.

For more information on United Way Toronto, *Vertical Poverty*, and related initiatives, including United Way Toronto's Tower Neighbourhood Renewal and Building Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy, visit www.unitedwaytoronto.com.

For more information and research related to Tower Neighbourhood Renewal issues, visit the Centre for Urban Growth and Renewal at www.cugr.ca.





Established in 1956, United Way Toronto is a charity dedicated to creating opportunities for a better life for everyone. Working in partnership with others, we mobilize people and resources to support a network of agencies that help people when they need it most. United Way also addresses the root causes of social problems, working to change community conditions for the better over the long term. Our efforts to support improvements to the land-use planning rules for apartment neighborhoods is one example of the systemic change we seek through partnership and collaboration.



The Centre for Urban Growth and Renewal (CUG+R) is a non-profit organization whose objective is to develop research to enhance public policy and promote private initiatives that foster City Regions and local communities that are well planned and designed, economically vibrant, socially diverse, culturally integrated and environmentally sustainable. Founding members of CUG+R are associated with two of Canada's leading architecture, planning and urban design practices: ERA Architects and planningAlliance (pA). CUG+R builds on decades of experience its directors and founders possess in research, architecture, planning and public policy. For more information visit www.cugr.ca.

Cover Image:

Fresh food vender in apartment neighbourhood, Halle-Neustadt, Germany, 2006. In most apartment neighbourhoods in Toronto, such a market would be against the current zoning by-law.

PROJECT TEAM

Authors, Centre for Urban Growth and Renewal:

Graeme Stewart, MARCH, MRAIC
Bryan Bowen, MCIP, RPP
George Martin, BURPI MSc(Conservation)
Jason Thorne, MCIP, RPP
Michael McClelland, OAA FRAIC CAHP

Project Team, United Way Toronto:

Michelynn Lafleche
Jamie Robinson
Pedro Barata
Anthony Fernando

External Technical Reference Group:

Paul Bedford, Adjunct Professor, Urban and Regional Planning, University of Toronto, Ryerson University
Paul Hess, Associate Professor; Associate Chair and Director, Graduate Programs in Planning, University of Toronto
Eric Miller, Bahen-Tanenbaum Professor Department of Civil Engineering, Director Emeritus, Cities Centre, University of Toronto

Acknowledgements:

We thank City Planning and Tower Renewal Office of the City of Toronto, staff from which provided support, advice and assistance with the preparation of this report.

Images:

All images and maps by the Centre for Urban Growth and Renewal, including international photographs by Brendan Stewart or Graeme Stewart, unless otherwise noted. Date in image caption is the year the photo was taken. Special thanks to the following photographers, artists and organizations for contributing their work:

HIGHRISE.nfb.ca at The National Film Board of Canada
Jane Farrow
William MacIvor, ERA Architects
Recipe for Community - St James Town
Tower Renewal Office (TRO) City of Toronto
City of Toronto Archives
City of Toronto

Copy Editor:

Sharon Singleton

CONTENTS

Executive Summary	1
Part 1: Strong Neighbourhoods and Complete Communities: The Emergent Policy Consensus	5
Part 2: A Progressive Legacy Legacy Barriers	9
Part 3: Dynamics, Trends and Emerging Challenges of Apartment Neighbourhoods	17
Part 4: Understanding Barriers to Investment: Regulatory and Process Barriers in Apartment Neighbourhoods	25
Part 5: Towards a Synchronized Policy Framework: Contemplating a New Zoning Framework for Apartment Neighbourhoods	37
Part 6: Conclusion and Recommendations	45
Appendices	49



Image:

Apartment Neighbourhood as Healthy and Active Communities, Drawing by William MacIvor, ERA Architects

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Overview

Southern Ontario's Greater Golden Horseshoe contains some 2,000 post-war high-rise towers arranged in several hundred apartment neighbourhoods across the region (Stewart and Thorne, 2010). Developed during an ambitious period of post-war growth, these towers are a fundamental part of the region's housing stock and create an urban form that is unique on the continent. At their best, they made good on their intended design as self-sufficient, master-planned communities. However, in recent decades these neighbourhoods have faced many challenges.

Recent research has uncovered two trends. The first is that apartment neighbourhoods have undeniably fallen behind. As described in *Poverty by Postal Code 2: Vertical Poverty*, the gradual decline of these neighbourhoods has transformed them into emerging centres of poverty (United Way, 2010). These neighbourhoods are home to thousands of people, yet they lack many of the hallmarks of today's notion of "complete communities" (Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure, Growth Secretariat, 2006), including access to fresh food; opportunities for entrepreneurs and social enterprise; employment; and many of the facilities and services fundamental to families, such as childcare.

Secondly, research has shown that apartment neighbourhoods have all the basic ingredients to evolve into complete, healthy and prosperous places. A series of recent studies, including the report *Tower Neighbourhood Renewal in the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (Stewart and Thorne, 2010), developed for the Ministry of Infrastructure, Province of Ontario, and the forthcoming *Toward Healthy Apartment Neighbourhoods* prepared for Toronto Public Health, have found that apartment neighbourhoods contain the density, diversity, and existing assets to support vibrant local economies and community infrastructure. As a result, there is every reason to believe in their potential to rise again as dynamic and self-sufficient neighbourhoods in their own right.

As other studies focusing on Toronto's apartment neighbourhoods have shown, similar urban zones throughout the world have successfully made this transformation and are now thriving, a renewal fuelled by a combination of reinvestment and revitalization efforts. In particular, formerly stagnant tower neighbourhoods have developed an active culture of small business, local retail, social enterprise and community infrastructure. Toronto's apartment neighbourhoods, on the other hand, have not had the same level of investment or attention and, as a result, continue to fall behind.

This study looks at why Toronto's apartment neighbourhoods have so little of the flexibility and dynamism found in other jurisdictions. What is preventing constructive social and commercial investment, and what are potential actions for change?

This study was commissioned in 2011 by United Way Toronto as a follow up to *Vertical Poverty*. It aims to foster a conversation on the great potential of the region's apartment neighbourhoods, the barriers to achieving that potential and possible action for removing them.

Towards a Solution: Closing the gap between policy and potential

Public policy supports the creation of strong neighbourhoods and complete communities throughout the region, but strict zoning codes are one factor preventing apartment districts from achieving these goals. The current zoning framework often prohibits the introduction of new uses, or any deviation from the existing neighbourhood form, due to what can be called "shrink-wrap zoning."

The "legacy" zoning by-laws from the 1960s and 70s that still govern land use in Toronto's apartment neighbourhoods severely limit potential changes and are hampering reinvestment. However, there are practical solutions.

Building on the history of pro-active planning in the City of Toronto, it's time to examine a modern and flexible zoning framework that supports these priority areas in reaching their full economic and social potential.

Many of Toronto's older high-rise neighbourhoods are not receiving their fair share of local investment, services and employment, despite their diverse populations and central locations in a prosperous city and urban region. While our city's avenues, transit corridors, downtown "Kings" neighbourhoods and central waterfront are benefiting from policy shifts in support of revitalization, many apartment neighbourhoods continue to face complex and rigorous zoning barriers to positive interventions both small and large.

It should be stated that barriers to investment in apartment neighbourhoods are not solely limited to, nor the principal responsibility of, the existing zoning framework. A multitude of socio-economic, demographic, real estate capital market, site constraints, and other forces, shape and influence the viability of investment in all communities.

This study does not seek to place unfair blame on a complex and longstanding zoning framework. Nor does it suggest that a zoning



solution alone is the answer to revitalizing communities. Rather, the study seeks to identify those barriers to investment that are within the jurisdiction of municipal planning policy and recommend possible tools to eliminate or reduce their constraints on apartment neighbourhoods. The report aims to close the gap between policy and potential.

The following is an initial investigation of potential alternatives to the current zoning framework. This proposal contemplates a 'tiered' approach of varying degrees of permissiveness.

Within this proposed tiered zoning framework, the first tier focusses on broadening land use permissions to enable a wide range of community, commercial and institutional activities. Tier 1 also proposes to reduce barriers to minor building alterations. This tier is envisioned to be broadly applicable across most or all apartment neighbourhoods in the city. The second tier would expand on this to permit as-of-right changes to the physical form of the building or property in order to accommodate modest additions or small buildings to house new uses. Tier 3 is intended to support more significant changes, such as new mixed-use infill development, and is therefore envisioned to apply only to select apartment neighbourhoods in the city.

This policy options discussed in this report are meant for the purposes of framing a broader discussion for the development of implementable recommendations for the creation of new policy tools that will help enable Toronto's many hundred apartment neighbourhoods emerge as more vibrant, prosperous and 'complete' communities throughout the City and region.

Images:

Opposite, Top: Typical apartment property, Toronto, 2006.
Opposite, Middle: Community centre addition at base of apartment tower, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2009.
Opposite, Bottom: Fruit market in apartment neighbourhoods, Melbourne Australia, 2012. In most apartment neighbourhoods in Toronto, such a market or building additions would be against the current zoning by-law.
Below: Typical apartment neighbourhood and new mixed-use development, including older and newer high-rise buildings, Mississauga, Ontario, 2010.



PART 1:

STRONG NEIGHBOURHOODS AND COMPLETE COMMUNITIES: THE EMERGENT POLICY CONSENSUS

Over the past few years, a series of commendable policy initiatives at the provincial, regional and municipal levels have promoted the creation of strong neighbourhoods and “complete communities” as a core principal of community planning.

The notion of a “complete community” is best defined by the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, which reads as follows:

Complete communities meet people’s needs for daily living throughout an entire lifetime by providing convenient access to an appropriate mix of jobs, local services, a full range of housing and community infrastructure, including affordable housing, schools, recreation and open space for their residents. Convenient access to public transportation and options for safe, non-motorized travel is also provided. (Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure, Growth Secretariat, 2006)

The Growth Plan recommends all communities be developed as complete communities. In the City of Toronto Official Plan a similar approach supporting complete communities is reinforced in policies specifically related to apartment neighbourhoods (Section 4.2. Toronto, 2006, 2010), The Official Plan encourages these neighbourhoods to provide a range of locally focused activities to support community needs, contribute to the quality of life through well-designed community infrastructure and to accommodate new residential and commercial development appropriate to the neighbourhood. (Toronto, 2006, 2010)

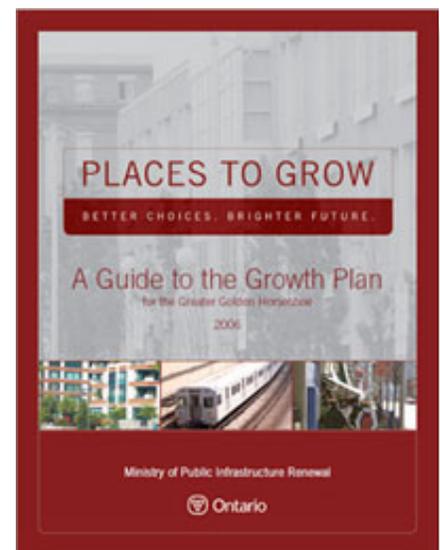


Image:

Places to Grow, (Ontario Growth Secretariat, 2006)

Apartment Neighbourhoods and The Toronto Official Plan:

The City of Toronto's Official Plan (Toronto, 2006, 2010) states that areas designated as Apartment Neighbourhoods are to be:

Made up of apartment buildings and parks, local institutions, cultural and recreational facilities, and small-scale retail, service and office uses that serve the needs of area residents. (Policy 4.2.1 page 4-6)

The Official Plan also provides direction on land use and development in Apartment Neighbourhoods that is intended to "contribute to the quality of life" in these neighbourhoods. This direction includes:

- Allowing for changes by "locating and massing new buildings to provide a transition between areas of different development intensity and scale" (Policy 4.2.2 (a)).
- Integrating community infrastructure by "providing indoor and outdoor recreation space for building residents in every significant multi-unit residential development" (Policy 4.2.2 (f)).
- Adding "ground floor uses that enhance the safety, amenity and animation of adjacent streets and open spaces" (Policy 4.2.2 (g)).
- Ensuring Apartment Neighbourhoods provide a home for everyone by allowing buildings to conform to "the principles of universal design, and wherever possible contain units that are accessible or adaptable for persons with physical disabilities" (Policy 4.2.2 (h)).

Further, the Official Plan encourages new development in Apartment Neighbourhoods that will:

- Help "organize development on the site to frame streets, parks and open spaces in good proportion, provide adequate sky views from the public realm, and create safe and comfortable open spaces" (Policy 4.2.3 (e)).
- Promote a better relationship between Apartment Neighbourhoods and public streets by "providing pedestrian entrances from an adjacent public street wherever possible" (Policy 4.2.3 (f)).
- Allow development that respects and builds on valued neighbourhood characteristics, which will "preserve and/or replace important landscape features and walkways and create such features where they did not previously exist" (Policy 4.2.3 (j)).

While not specific to Apartment Neighbourhoods, in section 2.3.1 Healthy Neighbourhoods, the Official Plan recognizes that all neighbourhoods are improved by being flexible and by changing to meet the current needs of local communities:

Apartment Neighbourhoods Defined:

Throughout this report, the zones under study are referred to as apartment neighbourhoods. The Toronto Official Plan also refers to the term "Apartment Neighbourhoods" as a specific land-use designation with a series of policies guiding growth and neighbourhood form. Many, but not all, of the areas discussed in this report are designated as apartment neighbourhoods in the Official Plan. However, some apartment neighbourhoods are also found in areas designated mixed-use or residential. As a result, these terms are not interchangeable. In this report, the capitalized term "Apartment Neighbourhoods" will be used to denote the specific Toronto Official Plan land-use designation, and the non-capitalized term "apartment neighbourhoods" will be used when referring to these neighbourhoods more generally.

Community and neighbourhood amenities will be enhanced where needed by “creating new community facilities and local institutions, and adapting existing services to changes in the social, health and recreational needs of the neighbourhood.” (Policy 2.3.1.6(b))

Challenges To Reaching Official Plan Goals

The policies outlined in both the provincial Growth Plan and the Toronto Official Plan provide clear direction to encourage the evolution of apartment neighbourhoods into more complete communities. Complementary policy initiatives, such as the City of Toronto’s ‘Priority Investment Areas’ also aim to address the growing community challenges in areas of high poverty and low investment in Toronto’s inner suburbs, where many apartment neighbourhoods are located.

However, ongoing research indicates that despite broad policy consensus supporting complete communities, barriers exist within the planning framework that work against the achievement of this goal. Specifically, the current zoning and site-specific zoning that exists in apartment neighbourhoods act as significant obstacles to realizing the types of changes that are necessary for them to evolve into more complete communities. As a result, these neighbourhoods are falling behind.

This report focuses on identifying specific policy and regulatory barriers that prevent apartment neighbourhoods from becoming more complete communities. It also examines potential solutions that may enable apartment neighbourhoods across the city to become more complete and prosperous places.

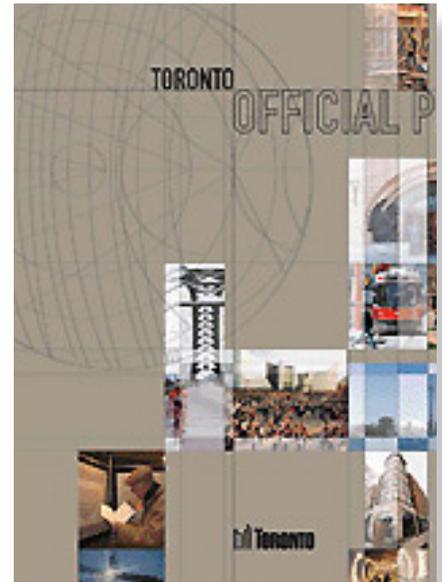
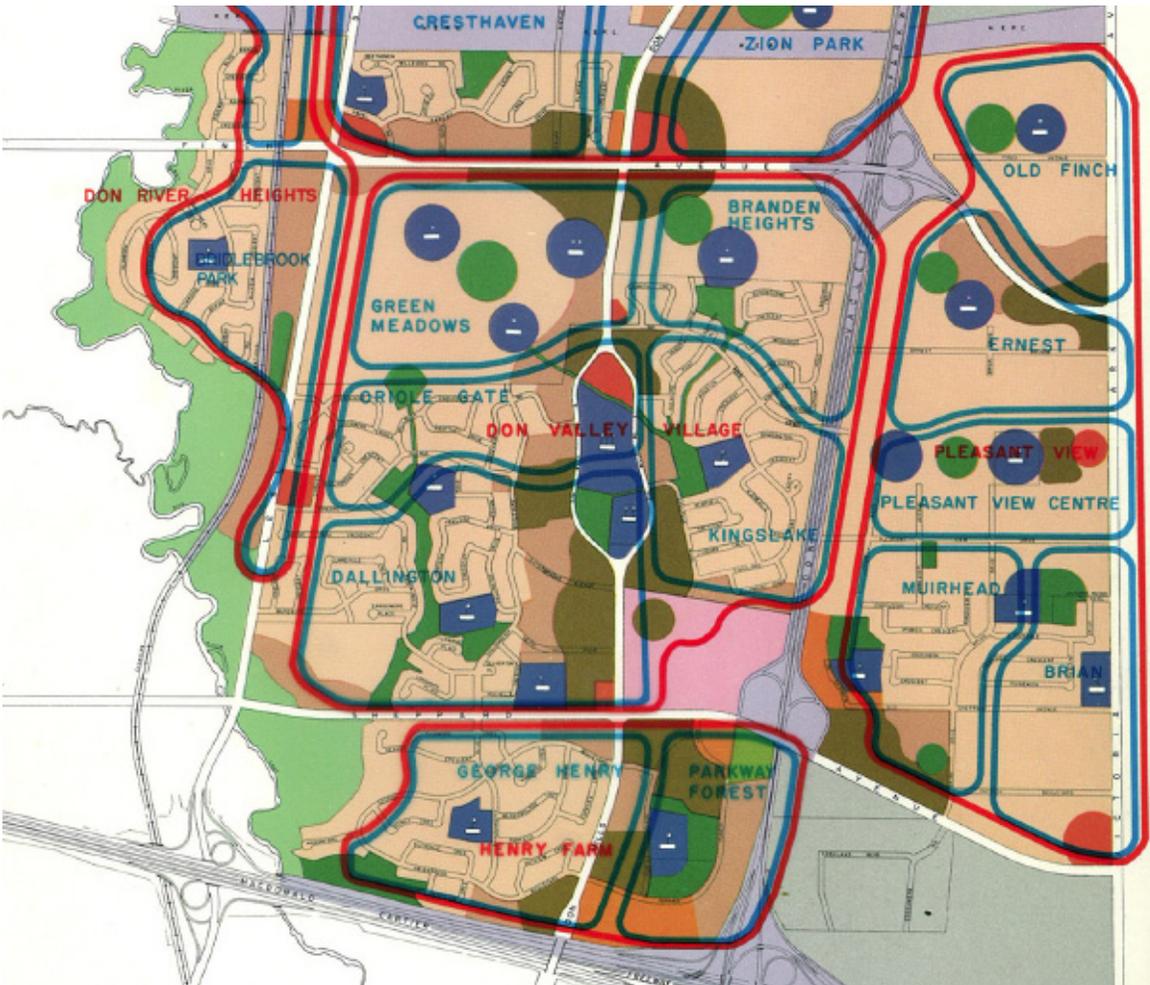
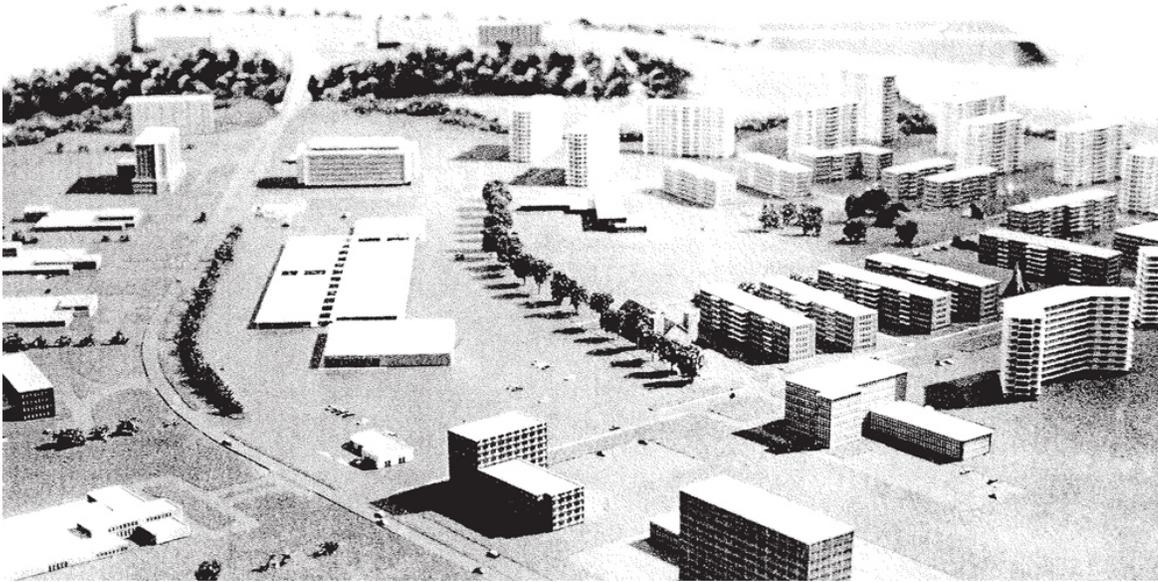


Image:

City of Toronto Official Plan, (City of Toronto, 2010)

progress continues . . .



PART 2

A PROGRESSIVE LEGACY | LEGACY BARRIERS

“In Toronto, an unusually large number of high-rise apartments poke above the flat landscape many miles from downtown, this is a type of high-density suburban development far more progressive and able to deal with the future than the endless sprawl of the U.S.”

Richard Buckminster Fuller, 1968

A Region of Apartment Towers

The Toronto area’s apartment neighbourhoods are a remarkable and distinguishing feature of the region. Consisting of 2,000 high-rise towers developed in the post-war boom, this concentration and organization of high-rise housing is unique to the continent (Stewart and Thorne, 2010).

They were a key aspect of the explosive urban growth of the 1950s to 1970s and are unique for their central role in suburban planning in Toronto. Whereas high-rise housing was nearly always excluded in suburbs in the US, these towers were key to community planning during the expansion of Metropolitan (Metro) Toronto and are present in nearly every neighbourhood from that time period.

The result is nearly half a million apartment units developed in the region (Stewart and Thorne, 2010) with high-rise apartment units outpacing the development of single-family homes by a ratio of 2:1 inside Metro Toronto (Metropolitan Planning Board, 1966, p. 10). The majority of these towers were privately developed and financed for young couples, empty nesters and newcomers to the region. There are hundreds of apartment neighbourhoods located in every corner of the City, from Etobicoke to Scarborough, North York, to Mississauga and beyond.

Apartment neighbourhoods help give the Toronto area a relatively high regional density – nearly twice that of Greater Chicago – a good start in achieving a well-planned and sustainable region (Neptus Foundation, 2007).

Apartment Neighbourhoods and Metro Planning:

Unlike the majority of cities in the United States, Toronto’s post-war growth took place within the context of an integrated regional administration, Metropolitan Toronto. At Metro’s formation in the 1950s, the majority of the land within its borders was agricultural (Metropolitan Planning Board, 1959). By the end of the 1970s, this entire area had been developed. Modern apartment neighbourhoods were a key feature of this growth (Metropolitan Planning Board, 1966).

Images:

Opposite, Masterplans for Toronto apartment neighbourhoods Thorncliffe Park (Top), and planning district 12, Don Valley Village or the “Peanut” (Bottom). (North York, 1965).

APARTMENT NEIGHBOURHOODS, PLANNING AND THE SMART GROWTH OF THE 1960s:

The District Scale:

Apartment neighbourhoods were developed in the post-war period in response to regional growth and at their best contained aspirations of what we today term “complete communities.” In part, they were encouraged as an alternative to the uncoordinated sprawl that typified the immediate post war years. Planned as a key component of new neighbourhoods, apartment towers helped manage growth, provide housing options and create higher density areas to support transit and retail in new communities at the city’s urban fringe (Metropolitan Planning Board, 1966).

The original neighbourhoods were the master planned communities of Thorncliffe and Flemingdon Park (Sewell, 1993). Conceived in 1955 and 1958 respectively, they were highly ambitious zones incorporating the latest in modern planning and design. Influenced by neighbourhoods in Scandinavia and the UK, they were the first of their kind in North America.

Both Thorncliffe and Flemingdon were initiated by private developers and designed by leading Canadian modernists including Macklin Hancock, the designer of Don Mills, and Irving Grossman.

They were devised to create modern self-sufficient “satellite” towns at the city’s edge, easily accessible to the downtown core via the new Don Valley Parkway. These communities were developed to provide retail, employment in the form of service jobs and light industry, schools, community centres, large parks and large apartment suites geared towards families. In some instances, community facilities were planned at the base of new apartment towers (Kolenc, c.1966).

Major cultural amenities were planned for some of these communities, with Flemingdon home to the new Ontario Science and Technology Museum (The Ontario Science Centre). For a time, the new headquarters of the CBC were also to be located there. These neighbourhoods were developed as significant new districts of a modern and growing city.

Apartment Towers as Metro Policy:

By the 1960s, the creation of higher density-apartment neighbourhoods had become integrated into Metro’s planning policy for new suburban areas (North York, 1965). These apartments were encouraged as they provided a housing mix, the density to support public transit and local amenities and also to optimize municipal services such as water and sewer systems.

By the 1960s, minimum density requirements were established by Metro for new suburban areas north of Highway 401 and apartment neighbourhoods were the key to achieving them. The use of the tower in the park created open space and a garden setting, while providing the density to keep the population within Metro's borders. This was an area of key concern, as development was discouraged north of Steeles Avenue due to the cost of providing municipal services, specifically water, north of the city. As a result, pockets of higher density apartment neighbourhoods became a regular feature of new developments as the city expanded.

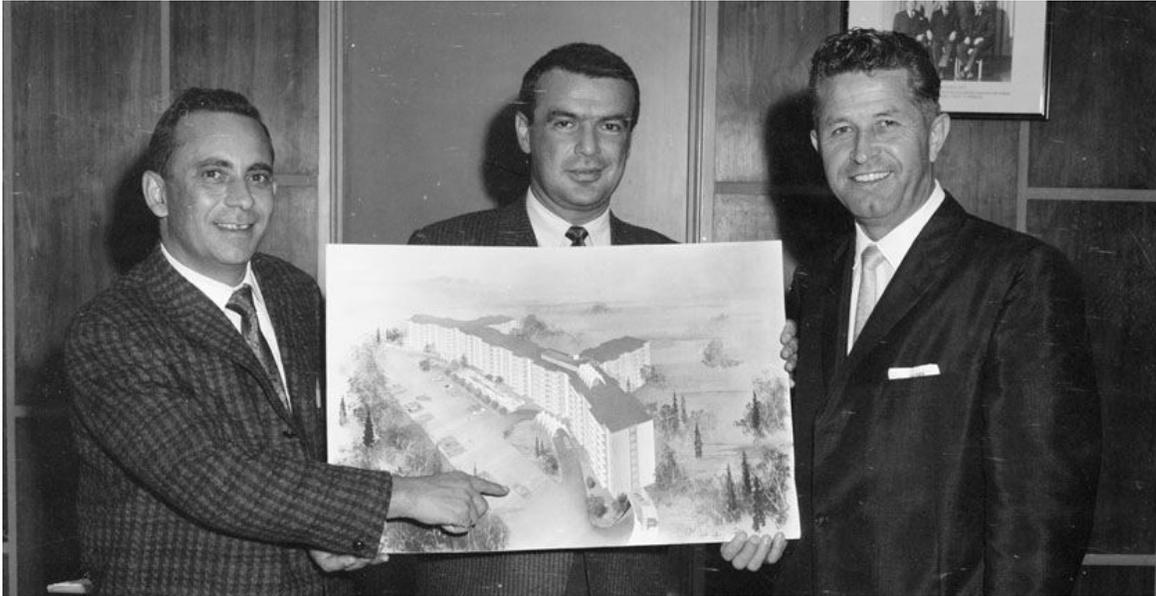
District 12 - Planning a Neighbourhood:

An example of a typical district plan that combines density requirements with holistic community planning is that for District 12, a then green-field area in the suburban fringe, today known as the Peanut. The District 12 plan, developed in 1965, was based on the following principles:

- A balanced housing stock with a mix of rental and ownership, providing family housing in low, medium and high densities.
- Self-sufficiency in terms of the provision of the full range of facilities and services, with the goal of optimum convenience for residents.
- A minimum net density for the area of 75 people per hectare to avoid the under-utilization of municipal infrastructure.
- Municipal land use policies allowing a range of major commercial, institutional and recreational uses to serve the district as a substantial sector of Metropolitan Toronto.
- Provide rapid transport to the city centre.

Districts such as the Peanut were planned as multi-functional, well-serviced communities as part of a growing, and multi-nodal region. They were an attempt at "smart-growth" in the context of the 1960s. Examples of these planned districts can be found from North Scarborough to Erin Mills, Bathurst and Steeles to Bramelea.

This legacy district planning forms a sound foundation, which we can build on in the years to come.



Legacy Barriers

The Local Scale:

Toronto's post-war planning has left a remarkable legacy of apartment neighbourhoods throughout the region. The policies that led to the development of these areas were based on sound planning principles and echo many of today's ideas on how to build new communities with transit supportive densities in response to regional growth.

However, while planning during this era promoted self-sufficiency at the district scale, planning at the local scale reflected post-war ideas of the strict segregation of these uses through single-use zoning.

The relationship between planned commercial, employment, and residential areas was designed at the scale of the car. Though considered a convenient drive away, neighbourhood amenities were largely absent within areas that contained the residential apartment towers themselves. As a result, apartment neighbourhoods, housing thousands, were often designed without easy access to types of amenities that were promoted at the scale of the district.

Zoning by-laws significantly limiting use and form within apartment neighbourhoods were a key legacy of these land-use restrictions. The by-laws remain in effect today.

Section 3 of this report will discuss how the lack of local shops, amenities and services is creating liveability challenges as a result of changing demographics in apartment neighbourhoods. Car ownership has fallen and there are more children, elderly and new Canadians (Statistics Canada 2006).

Images:

Top: Unavailing of apartment project, (City of Toronto Archives, 1962).

Opposite: Unrealized plan for Thorncliffe Park Community Centre at base of apartment tower (City of Toronto Archives, 1966).

Separated Uses, Green Space and the Conception of the Suburban City:

Zoning codes, established at the time apartment neighbourhoods were built, reflect the expectations and values of their era and outline how these communities were intended to function. A key aspect of the new suburbia, these neighbourhoods were designed as an alternative to the historic city. In their low-rise and high-rise form, the design and planning of new communities reflected attempts to create distinct residential districts, with the provision of ample open space, while responding to the setting of newly developed natural areas.

These sites were often in rural or lightly developed regions at the edge of the city. The zoning of the period reflected a strong awareness of the geographic conditions where apartments were built. The semi-urban context of apartments presented challenges (such as providing services and transportation) yet in general, these conditions resonated with a vision of living beyond the noise, pollution and congestion of the city core.

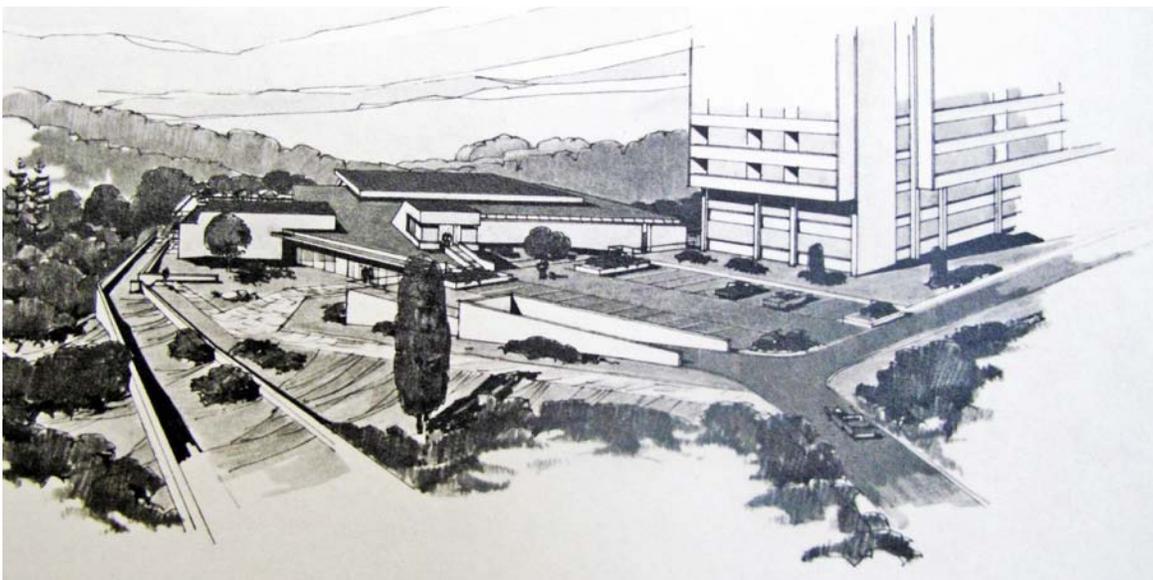
In a 1970 study of Thorncliffe Park, York University researcher D.H. Cox emphasized this perceived value in describing how Thorncliffe Park overlooks downtown with a view of the lake in the background:

'This plateau [location] is surrounded on three sides by the Don River Valley, which provides protection from any future encroachment by the burgeoning city, and...provides a spaciousness of vista, almost unique in a metropolitan area. It is probably not putting it too highly to say that this river valley is the property's crowing glory...and undoubtedly was a prime reason behind the planner's thinking to make this plateau a high-density living area.' (Cox, 1970, p. 2)

Additional Challenges, Incomplete Plans:

Many of the amenities planned in the original master plans of apartment neighbourhoods, such as Thorncliffe Park, (see image below) never materialized. These include community and commercial amenities at the base of towers. The current zoning by-laws present barriers to reintroducing these original design features today.

A further challenge is the original quality of neighbourhood planning. As the apartment boom progressed, many of the integrated planning ideas found in neighbourhoods such as Thorncliffe Park were replaced with a more clear division of land use and strict segregation of apartment clusters within neighbourhoods from retail and community amenities. This separation is reinforced in legacy zoning today.





Zoning was also used to set out the amenities and desired character of these communities. For example, by-laws often enforced the inclusion of swimming pools, tennis courts and other leisure facilities felt to be in keeping with the vision of these neighbourhoods. Other examples codified aesthetic values. In 1964, Etobicoke amended its comprehensive zoning to prohibit residents of apartment buildings from drying laundry outdoors.

Images:

Typical apartment property in Etobicoke, with 80% open space, of which over 50% is surface parking, 2010.

As discussed above, a new aspect of the new suburbia was the desire to separate private and domestic life from commercial, civic or institutional activities and was a theme commonly found in apartment zoning by-laws of the 1960s and 70s. Despite initial ambitions for more integrated apartment districts, the separation of uses emerged as a distinctive characteristic of tower estates in Metropolitan Toronto. This was noted by the East York Commissioner of Planning in 1966 when discussing Thorncliffe Park. The Commissioner had explained that while Thorncliffe “appears to have been [originally] based on the English New Towns theory that residents of the area would also work [locally]...as it is now known this is not the case in a Metropolitan Area. The commuting of workers to employment in the area, and of residents of the area to employment outside, creates large amounts of travel.” (McWilliam, 1966)

This approach to planning helped create the desired (Faludi and Associates, 1961) tower in the park districts, forming the apartment neighbourhoods with large land buffers between community and commercial space that permeate the urban landscape of Greater Toronto today. While there are many benefits to this form of planning, these neighbourhoods, in many regards, are frozen in time.

Conclusion

Toronto's apartment neighbourhoods were planned as a progressive response to a rapidly urbanizing region during the post-war boom. At their best they were designed to create complete and self-sufficient communities at the district scale. At the local scale, these apartment clusters were considered as residential zones within the new planned district. As such, planning policies limiting the range of permitted uses have created vast higher density areas that lack general community amenities, such as retail, food, employment, community supports such as child care, or even simple community meeting spaces.

The zoning codes setting out these conditions remain largely in place. As a result, while neighbourhood demographics are continually changing with evolving needs and aspirations, the physical form of neighbourhoods and the amenities they provide has remained unchanged. These zoning barriers present significant obstacles in developing the wide range of local uses that encompass today's concept of Strong Neighbourhoods and Complete Communities.

The following sections will examine the current state of apartment neighbourhoods; their demographic transformation; their current built form and the desires expressed by their current residents for positive neighbourhood change.



PART 3

DYNAMICS, TRENDS AND EMERGING CHALLENGES OF APARTMENT NEIGHBOURHOODS

Growing Challenges

The Toronto area's apartment neighbourhoods are home to more than one million people and are a vital housing resource. They are also a fundamental feature of the urban make-up of the Greater Toronto and Hamilton region. In the City of Toronto alone they represent half of all apartment housing, including the bulk of the city's larger family sized rentals units (Stewart and Thorne, 2010). Apartment neighbourhoods and their communities are a significant component of our dynamic region.

However, these neighbourhoods are falling behind.

A number of recently published studies documenting the dynamics of apartment neighbourhoods, including the United Way Toronto's *Vertical Poverty* (2010), have identified a series of key challenges facing these communities. These include:

- Increasing poverty.
- A lack of neighbourhood services and amenities.
- Increased isolation from Toronto's social and economic life.
- General neighbourhood decline due to lagging investment.

Apartment neighbourhoods are also confronting the process of aging, both in respect to their half-century-old building stock and a growing population of elderly.

A summary list of findings for various studies can be found below.

Specific Indicators:

Regional Inequity

There is a growing economic disparity between wealthy areas, primarily located in the city's core and along the Yonge Street corridor and Toronto's inner suburbs, where the bulk of apartment neighbourhoods are found (Hulchanski, 2010). A map of growing poverty and apartment towers can be found in Appendix A.

Images:

Opposite: Typical condition in apartment neighbourhoods: underutilized spaces with lack of community activity (top), and challenging walkability due to fencing (Farrow, 2009).

Growing Share Of Region's Impoverished Population

Poverty is becoming increasingly concentrated in tower neighbourhoods. United Way Toronto found the proportion of Toronto's low-income families residing in apartment towers has increased from 34% in 1981 to 43% (United Way, 2011, p. 34) Likewise, the median income (based on 2006 dollars) among renter households declined in Toronto by \$6,396 from 1981 to 2006, a decline double that of the median of all Toronto's households (United Way, 2011, p. 31).

Apartment Neighbourhoods And Social Need

The Tower Neighbourhood Renewal in the Greater Golden Horseshoe study found that 77% of apartment neighbourhoods are located in areas of high or very high social need (Stewart and Thorne, 2010). However, as indicated in the City of Toronto's Priority Neighbourhood index, many of these communities lack the services and supports to properly address these growing challenges (City of Toronto, 2008).

Changing Demographics, Changing Needs

These challenges are all taking place within the context of remarkable demographic changes. In the past several decades, apartment neighbourhoods have emerged as key landing pads for new Canadians. Much of Toronto's reputation for incredible diversity and for being a welcoming home for newcomers from across the globe is a result of the residents of these communities. They are places where Toronto's cosmopolitan society establishes local social, cultural and economic connections.

Specifically, it has been found that (Stewart and Thorne, 2010):

- Half of all apartment towers contain 50% or more residents born outside of Canada.
- Half of all apartment towers contain 20% or more children and youth under 19.
- In some cases, the percentage of children and youth under 19 is as high as 40%.

Despite this shift in demographics, the physical form of apartment neighbourhoods has remained largely unchanged from the time of their original construction half a century ago. There are few shops, restaurants, community services and other enterprises that reflect the ingenuity, aspirations and needs of their resident communities.

Limited Uses – Preventing Neighbourhood Change

Throughout the region, the majority of apartment neighbourhoods consist of “single-use residential zones,” where a limited number of uses are permitted. For example, these areas often permit residences, parkland, indoor and outdoor amenity areas and schools, yet many institutional and all commercial activities are often not permitted. Of the region’s 2,000 apartment towers, only 17% contain residential uses mixed with commercial uses (Stewart and Thorne, 2010). While a handful of these, such as Main Square and Crescent Town, contain integrated shops and services, the overwhelming majority are limited to a single small tuck shop. These small tuck shops are themselves strictly controlled with respect to their size and their ability to reach a market beyond the building’s residents. For example, restrictions exist on outdoor signage, the outdoor display of goods, outdoor entry and the expansion of store size. These shops were planned as a local convenience for building residents in the 1960s. New types of retail and amenities appropriate to today’s context that deviate from the form anticipated in the 1960s are prohibited.

“Mixed-use” areas are generally absent from apartment neighbourhoods. These areas of varying configurations form the backbone of Toronto’s successful communities, such as its celebrated 19th century neighbourhoods, which include local shops and services along main streets adjacent to residential neighbourhoods; within the ground floors of mixed-use buildings and occasionally even successfully tucked into the middle of quiet residential streets and neighbourhoods.

Likewise in newly constructed tower neighbourhoods, such as City Place, Liberty Village and Regent Park, grocery stores, shops, pubs and restaurants, services and live-work units, have been integrated into the bases of modern apartment towers.

In both 19th century neighbourhoods and new tower districts, there is a close spatial relationship between the residential component and complementary activities that support daily neighbourhood-focused living.

As discussed in Section 2, apartment neighbourhoods were planned within the 1960s framework of separation of uses. This policy was adopted to create safe and well-designed residential areas in new parts of the City. These ideas were promoted with the assumption that all residents would own cars and that daily conveniences would be provided in shopping centres within easy driving distances.

However, in the time since these neighbourhoods were planned, the rate of car ownership among residents of apartment neighbourhoods has dropped to well below municipal averages across the region (Stewart and Thorne, 2010). Likewise, the rate of walking and transit use has climbed dramatically. In addition, the rate of congestion on local roads continues to increase. For newly arrived families living in apartment

neighbourhood units, car ownership may not yet be an option. Lastly, the overall population of many apartment neighbourhoods is now larger than originally planned. The United Way (2012) has found for example that between 1981 and 2006 the percentage of units housing more than one person per room doubled in Toronto apartment towers (page vi). As a result of these factors, an exclusive reliance on shopping centres to serve daily community needs is no longer a viable option. This distance to shopping amenities has an impact on the quality of life of residents without cars and is counter to Official Plan and Growth Plan goals of creating more walkable and less auto-dependent neighbourhoods.

“The whole community’s not [designed] for walking, and all immigrants, they don’t have cars.” - Scarborough Village Resident (Hess and Farrow, 2010)

These distances are creating challenges for residents. As described in the Tower Walkability Studies conducted by the University of Toronto and Jane’s Walk, people living in apartment neighbourhoods routinely walk and take public transport long distances for work, shopping and daily needs (Hess and Farrow, 2010). Issues of community safety have also been identified in the largely empty areas within apartment neighbourhoods, particularly at night.

Though originally well intended, policies for the separation of uses have led to the creation of communities of tens of thousands living in apartment neighbourhoods without convenient access to food, childcare, shops, vibrant and safe meeting spaces or employment. There is great opportunity for change.

Opportunity: Neighbourhood Business And Social Enterprise

Apartment neighbourhoods can be described as “Arrival Cities .” This term, developed by writer Doug Saunders, describes neighbourhoods where newcomers first settle, establish roots, and develop the social and financial capital needed to assume a role in the wider urban community.

Saunders identifies three elements that functional Arrival Cities offer to new residents moving to a city (Saunders, 2010, p 21):

1. A “network” of social relationships for support, opportunities, cultural identity and political representation.
2. “Entry mechanisms” easing settlement, such as affordable housing, employment and opportunities to prepare for second-wave arrivals, such as family members or friends from home.
3. An “urban establishment platform” for building up wealth and the cultural and social status needed to engage in the city’s mainstream.

Findings Of Walkability Studies:

Although many people walk, apartment neighbourhoods are often not friendly to pedestrians, with significant barriers, such as chain-linked fences, making it difficult to access retail, schools and neighbouring apartments, particularly during winter. Large-scale open spaces must be traversed on the way to grocery stores, daycares and other neighbourhood amenities, while arterial roads present inhospitable walking conditions, with few lights, long cross-walks and traffic hazards (Hess and Farrow, 2010).

Successful Arrival Cities provide effective landing pads for the prosperity and wellbeing of newcomers, offering avenues for the talents, ingenuity and entrepreneurial spirit of the resident community. Areas of arrival that lack these qualities can become places of multi-generational poverty, whereas successful “Arrival Cities” can become thriving communities, as well as springboards for the economic and social life of the City at large.

The key attribute of a successful Arrival City is the ability to support and nurture small enterprises that directly service the community, a characteristic that the majority of the region’s apartment neighbourhoods are currently lacking.

Studies have shown that the diverse communities of apartment neighbourhoods have great potential for entrepreneurialism, social enterprise and for attracting residents interested in establishing and strengthening social connections. The United Way’s recent survey of apartment residents as part of the report Vertical Poverty found “extensive bonds of friendship, mutual support and reciprocity and considerable social cohesion among many tenants living in the high-rise buildings.” (United Way, 2011). The study further noted how “a vast majority of tenants say they are willing to work together with other tenants to improve their community.” (United Way, 2011, p. 179).

Social connections were found to be the leading reason why residents choose their specific apartment neighbourhoods (United Way, 2011, p. 105). They are considered places to form social bonds that foster trust, familiarity, and mutual support, an environment that is highly amenable to local business and social enterprise.

As stated in a recent study by Thorncliffe Park Neighbourhood Office, there is a “widespread interest in various aspects of self-employment – small business development, social enterprise, training for home workers etc.” Further, there is recognition that there are opportunities

Image:

The Thousandth Tower web documentary, (HIGHRISE.nfb.ca at The National Film Board of Canada, 2009).





to form stronger relationships with local businesses to support local hiring and other collaborative initiatives, business development, social enterprise, training for home workers, etc.” (Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office, 2009, p. 24)

This approach to neighbourhoods is echoed in Toronto’s Official Plan, which also anticipates local retail and services becoming more prevalent in neighbourhoods as “increasingly, people work in their communities, both in home offices and in local stores and services” (City of Toronto, 2006, 2010, p. 2-21).

Despite current challenges, residents of apartment neighbourhoods like their homes and communities and are advocates for their improvement. The United Way found three quarters of apartment residents surveyed agreed their buildings were a good place to live and nearly two thirds agreed they were a good place to raise children. (United Way, 2010, p. 103). Through an extensive process of interviews, community design charrettes and demonstration projects, residents are increasingly pushing for the introduction of a mix of uses, community enterprise, local shops, new housing and most of all vibrant meeting spaces. (see for example Hess and Farrow, 2010, Heath and Swerhun 2011, and Cizak 2010 and 2011)

“When it is all ugly around you and nowhere nice to walk it makes you feel bad and unappreciated. We live here and want to make it beautiful.” - St James Town Resident (Hess and Farrow, 2010)

“We really need some place to sell stuff, to get together, to really, really build a community.” -Kipling Towers Resident, quoted in 1 Millionth Tower documentary, National Film Board (Cizak 2010)

There is a growing desire for apartment neighbourhoods to become complete communities.

Image:

Community workshop and visioning session in North Kipling, Toronto (HIGHRISE.nfb.ca at The National Film Board of Canada, 2010)

Conclusion

Allowing trends of concentrated poverty, stagnant investment and increased isolation to continue presents a bleak picture for Toronto's future, as by David Hulchanski's report *Three Cities Within Toronto* (Hulchanski, 2010). However, there is strong evidence that Toronto's apartment neighbourhoods are well suited to positive change and revitalization.

Achieving this potential will require a thoughtful combination of removing barriers to positive neighbourhood change and providing the backing to enable such a transformation. A key aspect of the support needed is ensuring ease of enterprise for private, public and non-profit sectors, from a user-friendly approvals process and licensing, to enabling greater access to financing for large and small-scale initiatives.

The primary focus of this study is related to land-use policy, flagging current barriers and suggesting policy alternatives for positive neighbourhood change. Section 5 will explore the current state of land-use planning as it relates to apartment neighbourhoods, with a specific focus on zoning.

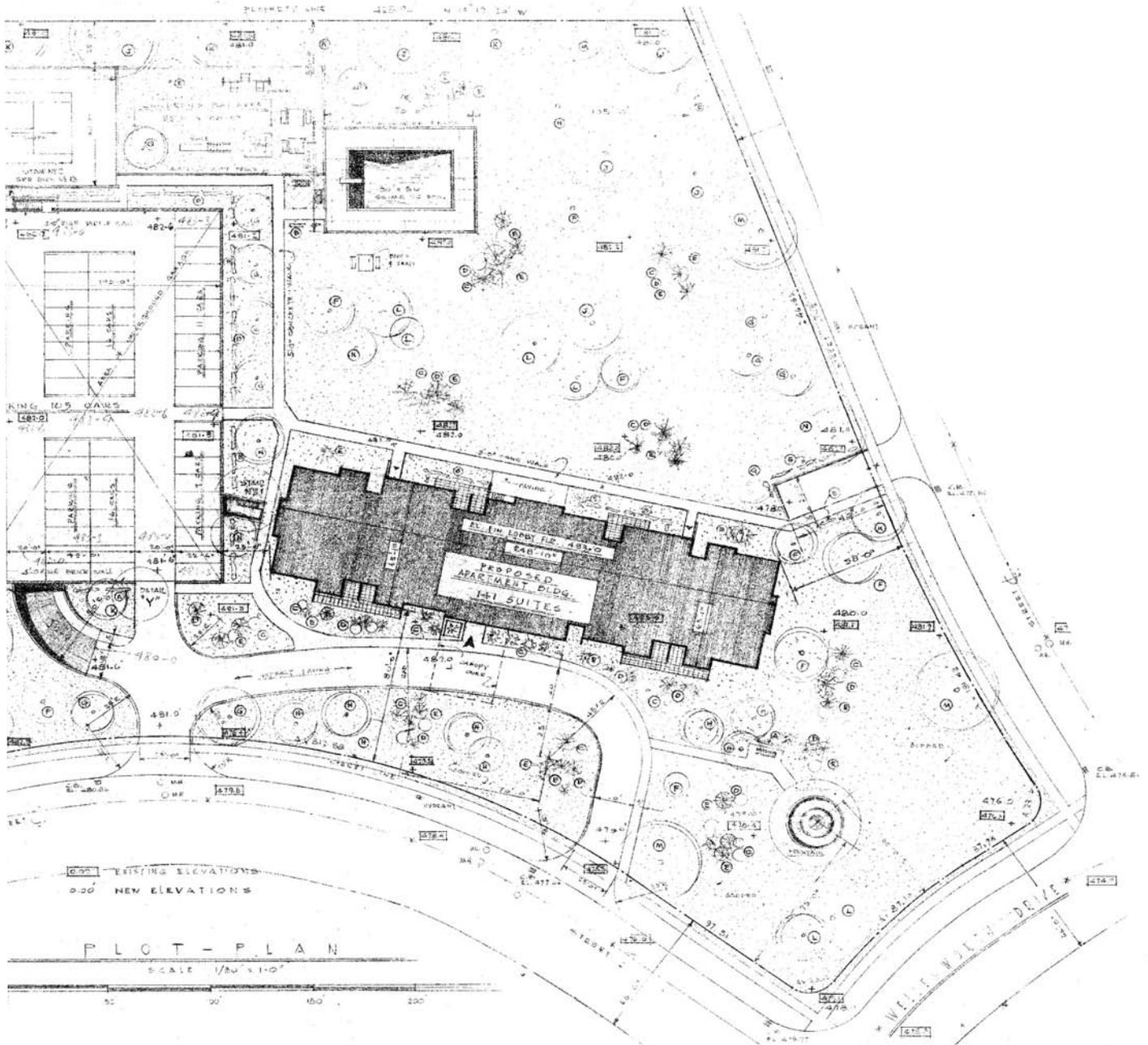


Image: Typical apartment site plan. The original configuration, and limited number of permitted uses on such a site, are often today enforced as the only legal use of the site. Changes to this arrangement require complex processes discussed in this section.

PART 4

UNDERSTANDING BARRIERS TO INVESTMENT: REGULATORY AND PROCESS BARRIERS IN APARTMENT NEIGHBOURHOODS

As discussed in Sections 2 and 3, zoning by-laws have been identified as a barrier to the changes in physical arrangements or uses within apartment neighbourhoods that would be needed to achieve the policy goals of stronger neighbourhoods and more complete communities.

Furthermore, the difficulty in making changes to zoning by-laws compounds the effects of zoning barriers, because the complexity of the process is beyond the capacity of a prospective tenant, be they a small business owner or community group.

This section examines how specific zoning by-laws affect communities and individuals wishing to engage in small business, social enterprise and community building within apartment neighbourhoods. Following this is a discussion on how the process for amending by-laws adds to the burden of fitting antiquated zoning rules to the needs and aspirations of apartment neighbourhood communities.

1. Zoning By-Law Barrier

Zoning by-laws have far-reaching effects in shaping neighbourhoods. They determine, among other matters:

- Land use: How land and buildings can be used, the activities that can occur in the neighbourhood.
- Density: The density to which a site can be developed; how the neighbourhood can accept more people or additional buildings.
- Setbacks: How buildings are arranged on a property; how the neighbourhood physically relates to its surroundings.

The zoning by-laws of a series of Toronto apartment neighbourhoods were examined in detail to understand the state of zoning in these areas. Typically, these by-laws were found to reinforce the existing conditions that, as explained earlier in this report, are often misaligned with the strong neighbourhoods and complete community goals of Toronto's Official Plan and the provincial Growth Plan.

In the bulk of cases, zoning by-laws limit the form and use of a site to the current configuration. Often, the by-law simply consists of a description of the existing neighbourhood in its current form, with little provision for future changes. They are, in effect, “frozen in time”. As a result, these neighbourhoods have remained, for the most part, physically unaltered for the last half-century.

The section below discusses how the three aspects of zoning regulation – land use, density, and setbacks – are currently limiting the potential of apartment neighbourhoods.

A) Land Use

The following samples illustrate some of the restrictions to land use found in either the current base zoning or site-specific zoning by-laws for apartment neighbourhoods, along with a discussion of how they could affect neighbourhood life. These specific examples are reflective of typical zoning frameworks found throughout Toronto’s apartment neighbourhoods:

- Zoning for apartment buildings at 4000 and 4010 Lawrence Avenue East prohibits commercial uses. This means residents must travel outside the neighbourhood for basic personal services, such as shopping for food, visiting a hairdresser, or other daily errands (Scarborough, By-law No. 10327, consolidated).
- At the Rideau Towers (43, 47 and 49 Thorncliffe Park Drive) zoning does not allow institutional uses, such as health clinics, education centres, and public services. Without local institutions, residents must travel a longer distance. The burden of travel could discourage residents from making full use of available community support resources and health services. (East York By-law, Leaside No. 1916 – Consolidated)
- Coffee shops and pubs are not allowed at 4010, 4020 and 4040 Lawrence Avenue East. As a result, the neighbourhood has fewer such places suited for meeting with friends and neighbours. (Scarborough, By-law No. 10327, consolidated);
- Restaurants can not be established at 2960 and 2980 Don Mills Road. Opportunities to build social and economic relationships with people beyond the neighbourhood are limited if neighbours have no venue near their home to host gatherings, celebrate with groups of friends, or bring extended family together over a meal. (North York By-law 7625)
- Commercial floor space is tightly restricted in the Kipling Towers at 2667-2677 Kipling Avenue. The small tuck shop business located at the Kipling Towers is limited in that it cannot expand, display exterior advertisements, or have an entrance directly from the exterior of the building. While a business owner may work hard to attract more consumers, the store itself is stunted, as it cannot expand to meet demand. (Etobicoke By-law No 0864-

Harmonized Zoning

Apartment neighbourhoods today are governed by a patchwork of zoning by-laws that are a pre-amalgamation legacy, when Toronto was made up of several municipalities each having their own zoning code. The City of Toronto is now harmonizing these legacy zones under a single city-wide zoning code. This process is generally meant to be consistent with and consolidate the codes it replaces and is scheduled to be enacted in 2013. Analysis of zoning codes in this report is based on the current base and site-specific zoning in use at the time of publication.

320]

- Outdoor display of goods in convenience stores located in apartment towers is not allowed at 2667-2677 Kipling Avenue. This means that business owners are unable to engage in outdoor commerce, such as setting up outdoor fruit and vegetable display stands. [Etobicoke By-law No 0864-320]

In the apartment neighbourhoods studied, zoning by-laws currently set out blanket restrictions on land uses. Phrases such as “no building, structure or land shall be used except for the following uses” are common. As a result, land uses that are not listed are prohibited in the neighbourhood. This approach, common in the 1960s and 1970s, is contrary to the more contemporary practice of only listing what is prohibited and allowing all other uses. The former approach presents challenges for introducing small-scale changes to apartment neighbourhoods that could benefit local communities, because everything is prohibited unless expressly permitted by the original authors of the by-law.

Following are some examples of the difficulties that this creates:

- Etobicoke By-law 0894-320 includes “R” or “R6” zoning designations, both of which allow apartment buildings. However, on apartment sites zoned as “R5”, the by-law specifies that land may be used for “lawn and gardening furnishings.” On apartment sites zoned “R6”, however, this was not included as a permitted use, leading to a lack of clarity about whether installing lawn furniture on “R6” apartment sites requires a minor variance or a zoning by-law amendment.
- In Scarborough, at 215 Markham Road, the zoning by-law requires an indoor recreation room for building residents. A plan by a community organization to offer after-school tutoring and mentoring programs for area youth was deemed not to be a recreational use. While there is no pro-active enforcement of the by-law, the property owner was concerned about the legality of offering on-site programming that contravened the zoning by-law. A minor variance was required to allow the program to operate legally within the building.
- The “R6 ” zoning for the Kipling Towers site, under Etobicoke By-law 0894-320, allows home daycare in private homes and nursery schools. However, similar uses, such as an after-school learning centre are not listed in the zoning regulation. It was therefore unclear as to whether such a program was permitted or not, requiring municipal review. This use was eventually permitted following a favourable interpretation of the by-law by City staff.

Specifying permitted uses rather than prohibited uses also acts to prohibit uses or functions that were not imagined at the time the by-laws were drafted several decades ago. For example, automatic bank tellers are generally absent from apartment neighbourhoods as they are

Activities allowed in Mixed Use and Apartment Residential zones, City of Toronto, Zoning Bylaw 438-86

Activity:	Mixed	Apartment
Dwelling	YES	YES
Clothing Store	YES	NO
Bank	YES	NO
Coffee Shop	YES	NO
Accountant	YES	NO
Drug Store	YES	NO
Patio	YES	NO
Art Gallery	YES	NO
A Place of Worship	YES	NO

not explicitly listed as a permitted use.

This approach to zoning presents significant barriers to positive neighbourhood change in response to evolving community needs, as well as general day-to-day liveability.

B) Density

Zoning by-laws for apartment buildings commonly establish maximum densities to regulate how intensively a property is used. This typically includes the maximum allowable number of apartment dwellings; the size of a building in proportion to its site; and/or how much of a site can be occupied by the building footprint. In the sites studied, the density restrictions contained in the zoning by-laws limited opportunities to use the land more effectively.

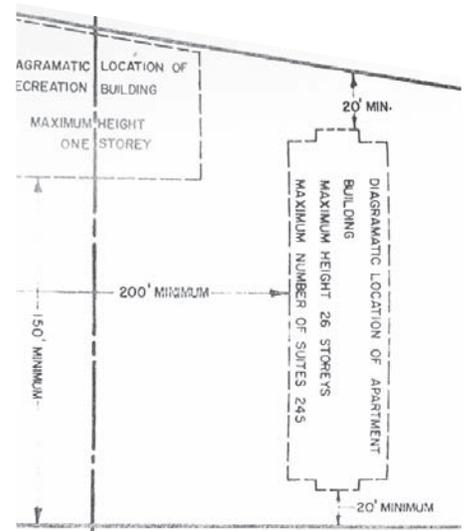
These density restrictions were intended primarily as a means to enforce the “Tower in the Park” approach to neighbourhood planning, which was fashionable in the mid-twentieth century. As discussed elsewhere in this report, this approach sought to maximize space, light, and air around high-rise apartments by placing towers in an open setting.

Zoning regulations written mid-century codified this approach by stipulating that large portions of neighbourhood land remain without buildings. They also set limits on the number of apartment units that could be located on specific properties.

As an example, regulations for the apartment block in Scarborough Village at 4010 Lawrence Avenue East illustrate how zoning can limit the site’s ability to accommodate new populations. Zoning for the site specifies that a ratio of one apartment unit per 67 square metres of lot area must be maintained. As a result, the number of apartments cannot change, either through the addition of new units, or by removing units, such as by consolidating smaller units to accommodate larger households. Similarly, the standard effectively prohibits part of the site from being repurposed under different ownership.

Zoning for apartment neighbourhoods also often explicitly prohibits the introduction of new types of housing, additions to existing buildings, or the addition of accessory buildings. The zoning by-law for 1765-1775 Weston Road bans any expansion of the buildings on the site. This means that a building addition to accommodate small-scale community services would be prohibited.

Collectively, the maximum density requirements, minimum open space requirements, and prohibitions on building additions or new construction create barriers to the types of mixed-use infill development that help other neighbourhoods throughout Toronto remain vibrant and viable. They limit opportunities to consider alternative and complementary uses for this open space that may better support these neighbourhoods as community needs and aspirations evolve.



These regulations are also a significant disincentive to capital reinvestment, which could otherwise enhance the quality of aging neighbourhoods.

As open space provides several community benefits, its role in apartment neighbourhoods and the ways that mixed-use infill may enhance open space through new programming and site upgrade requires thoughtful consideration.

C) Setbacks

Zoning by-laws for most apartment neighbourhoods also establish how buildings are arranged on a site, such as how far they are set back from the edge of the property and from each other. Such provisions are common in all neighbourhoods and are unquestionably important in creating good neighbourhood design. In the apartment neighbourhoods studied, however, zoning by-laws established strict setback requirements that essentially codify the current configuration of the existing property, precluding a building addition of any kind between the existing apartment and the street.

In most cases, the current configuration follow the “Tower in the Park” model, with the apartment block located deep within the property, often 30 – 50 metres. Such setback provisions can neglect the potential of different building forms, such as podiums or mixed-use storefronts, which can mediate between the lot line and tower and better frame public streets.

The North York Zoning By-law 7625, which governs the Peanut neighbourhood, provides a good illustration of setback standards. The by-law specifies that:

“Any minimum setback requirement shall remain open and unobstructed by any structure, from the ground to the sky ...” (North York Zoning By-law 7625 Section 6(9)).

A list of incidental building elements is listed as exceptions to this rule: exterior stairways, wheelchair ramps, decks less than 2.3 sq. m, among other components. Nevertheless, the setbacks from buildings are to remain largely open space.

The by-law further requires that setbacks remain reserved as open space despite changes to the site ownership or interest in establishing new ways to use the space around apartment blocks:

“Any part of the lot that is required by this by-law to be reserved as a yard setback or other open space shall continue to be so used and shall be deemed not to form part of any adjacent lot for any purpose regardless of any change in ownership of the lot or any part thereof.” ((North York Zoning By-law 7625 Section 6(10))

Images:

Opposite, Top: Typical setback requirement enforced in a site specific zoning-by-law. (North York By-Law No. 865) .

Opposite, Bottom: Typical apartment and property, North York, 2009.

This form of 'shrink wrap' zoning creates many challenges for thoughtful neighbourhood evolution.

Zoning Summary

The legacy zoning by-laws examined above limit changes in form and use and hinder the small and large-scale reinvestment that is needed to respond to evolving community needs and aspirations, such as small businesses and community services catering to local needs. This has created significant obstacles to improvements in general neighbourhood liveability within apartment neighbourhoods.

The following section examines the current process of changing these zoning barriers and explores how this process itself is a barrier to enabling neighbourhood investment.

2. Procedural Barriers – Amending Zoning By-Laws

The process for amending zoning by-laws presents a further barrier to apartment neighbourhood renewal.

There are two processes for making changes to zoning by-laws: (i) a zoning by-law amendment and (ii) a minor variance obtained from the Committee of Adjustment. Although the process of receiving a variance is less onerous than a full re-zoning, both present "process" barriers that can be an important disincentive to a small-scale entrepreneur or investor who is seeking to introduce a new use or other form of change to an apartment neighbourhood. A chart outlining this process can be found in Appendix B.

The Process

In order to change or amend a zoning by-law, the proponent must apply and fund a process which, if successful, leads to City Council passing a bill to amend the zoning by-law. Following Council's approval, the amendment must further avoid or withstand challenges at the Ontario Municipal Board.

Once the amendment is finalized, the applicant can proceed to subsequent approval steps, such as site plan approval, building permits, and business licensing, as may be required.

This situation presents a number of deterrents to applicants wishing to carry out a small-scale project.

First, small businesses and organizations wishing to operate in apartment neighbourhoods must fund the approval process and pay consultants to conduct the required urban planning studies. They must also seek the political support necessary to move their project forward to City Council. Even though the re-zoning may ultimately be successful,



Image:

Typical apartment along an arterial road, Scarborough, 2010.

the proponent is still responsible for initiating the by-law amendment, paying the necessary application fees, and providing accompanying urban planning studies to support their case.

A second concern is the financial and organizational resources required for the re-zoning amendment process. The cost of seeking approvals for the project could render it unviable. Furthermore, because there is no guarantee the by-law amendment will be approved, applicants are forced to place considerable resources at risk.

Third, the fixed-cost of the re-zoning process could drive out all but the most well-resourced and established proponents, whether commercial or non-commercial. As such, the re-zoning process acts to filter out small, locally-oriented services and lightly capitalized local businesses from engaging in the process of re-zoning, and subsequently reinvesting in their neighbourhoods. While some large development companies have successfully undertaken this process and amended the zoning by-law to allow for new housing development, such as in the case of Parkway Forrest in North York, the process presents a much more significant barrier to smaller scale entrepreneurs.

Some of the specific barriers for re-zoning may be grouped in three categories:

- Complexity and process
- Costs
- Timing

Complexity and Process

The approval of a zoning by-law amendment involves several steps, including a pre-submission phase, submission phase and a post-submission phase. It should be noted that projects requiring zoning amendments frequently include a parallel process of site plan approval.

To navigate the amendment process, applicants commonly require the services of a consultant, often a planner or lawyer, who understands procedures and can present the application effectively.

Phase 1 - "Pre-submission":

The applicant meets with planning staff to identify the studies and materials needed for the zoning amendment application to be accepted as complete.

This phase commonly involves at least one pre-submission meeting with City staff from City Planning and Technical Services, local stakeholders and the Ward Councillor in order to help build support and understanding for the proposal, discuss results of any Preliminary Project Review and determine the required studies necessary to assess the merits of the proposed zoning amendment. At minimum these often include: plans and drawings; Planning Rationale Report; Topographical Survey;

Arborist Tree Preservation Report; and, Parking Study. Larger projects, or those which require site plan approval, usually also require a Building Mass Model; Servicing and Stormwater Management Reports; and Transportation Impact Study.

Phase 2 – “Submission”:

This second phase consists of the compilation and submission to the City of the full development approvals package, inclusive of all drawings, supporting materials and technical studies.

Phase 3 – “Post-submission”:

In this final phase, the applicant’s consultants take lead responsibility for monitoring all subsequent stages of the development approvals process, including: conducting follow-up meetings with City staff to review the application materials; answering technical questions from commenting agencies; and negotiating the extent and scope of proposal revisions, as may be requested by City and agency staff. The applicant’s consultant may also have to undertake additional community stakeholder consultations, which are often a critical component to a successful and broadly endorsed approval process. The consultant may need to negotiate with City staff pre-and post-approval conditions related to the Zoning By-law Amendment and lead presentations at all formal public open house events and at the statutory public meeting.



Image:

Typical apartment and surface parking, Etobicoke, 2010

Costs

The City of Toronto charges development application fees for the Zoning By-law Amendment and Site Plan Control. For example, fees for a 4,500 square metre mixed-use building are estimated at just under \$30,000. For such a project, planning consulting fees to coordinate the development approvals process are estimated at more than \$25,000, excluding consultant fees or the design of the proposal. A more modest proposal, of 600 square metres would require a development application fee to the City of Toronto of roughly \$15,000 - \$20,000, excluding consultant fees.

In addition, the applicant would have to cover: architectural fees; fees for all technical supporting studies; the applicable development and education charge; utility hook-up charges; cash-in-lieu of parkland dedication; and other professional, and municipal fees and charges that may be required.

These fees and charges can add several tens of thousands of dollars to the cost of application. The costs associated with re-zoning present a significant barrier to many small-to-medium range entrepreneurs contemplating investment in these neighbourhoods.

Timing

The estimated timing for the amendment process is approximately one year from start to finish, barring any appeals to the Ontario Municipal Board. An appeal at the Ontario Municipal Board could extend the approval by several months.

After approval of the zoning amendment, the applicant must then apply for building permits and meet any conditions of approval before commencing with construction.

Other Procedural Considerations

Zoning amendments can also involve a number of related approvals, some of which are noted below.

Section 37 Agreements

Section 37 of the Planning Act authorizes the City, through re-zoning, to increase height and/or density beyond what is otherwise permitted in the Zoning By-law, in return for community benefits. Additionally, the City's Official Plan contains policies that: encourage new housing supply to be provided through infill and intensification; promote investment in new affordable rental housing; and seek to strengthen and diversify the retail sector by promoting a broad range of shopping opportunities in a variety of settings.

A re-zoning may require the applicant to negotiate an agreement on funding public benefits related to the proposal. Section 37 benefits are perceived as required to gain support of City staff and Council

Official Plan Amendments

The Official Plan provides the overall strategic policy direction for the City and assigns generalized land-use designations. Zoning by-laws set specific standards for each parcel of land. Apartment neighbourhoods have a unique "Apartment Neighbourhood" designation in the Official Plan but are also found in Mixed-Use and Neighbourhood designations.

The zoning in apartment neighbourhoods is generally more prohibitive than the Official Plan designations. Small-scale retail, service and other non-residential uses that serve the local area are supported by the Official Plan in most apartment neighbourhoods. While they usually require a re-zoning, they would not require an Official Plan Amendment. Otherwise, the applicant would need to ask City Council to amend the Official Plan in addition to amending the zoning by-law.

Site Plan Approval

Site Plan Approval is currently required for many proposed developments to ensure that: the proposed building design is appropriate; that transportation, engineering, and other technical standards have been met; and that landscaping elements are designed and executed according to applicable standards and guidelines.

Proposed new guidelines will require site plan control for 600 sq. m of new development or larger. Alteration for sites under this size will not be subject to many of the technical and planning reports mentioned above. However, they would still be subject to site re-zoning, licensing and other regulation.

Image:

Typical apartment neighbourhood,
Toronto, 2010



Conclusion

The process discussed above is for the assessment of large-scale projects that will have a major impact on the neighbourhood. It's the procedure used to assess major development projects, such as the condominium buildings that are in various stages of development throughout the city.

This process, however, was not necessarily designed to assess the merits and viability of small-scale neighbourhood initiatives, such as green grocers or daycares. The legacy zoning by-laws of apartment neighbourhoods, as well as the barriers to their amendment, are having unintended consequences on neighbourhood liveability. It is now an appropriate time to consider new solutions.

The next section will examine regulatory alternatives to better align the zoning of apartment neighbourhoods with the goals of Complete Communities and the aspirations of resident communities.



PART 5

TOWARDS A SYNCHRONIZED POLICY FRAMEWORK: CONTEMPLATING A NEW ZONING FRAMEWORK FOR APARTMENT NEIGHBOURHOODS

Building on the City of Toronto's legacy of pro-active planning, this report contemplates the merits of a new base zoning category for Apartment Neighbourhoods that allows for a wide range of commercial and institutional uses, as well as new performance-based zoning tools as an alternative to the current collection of inappropriately restrictive zoning designations and rigorous site-specific regulations.

The proposed approach to zoning draws from the structure and intent of current zoning standards within the City of Toronto, such as the generally more permissive Commercial Residential Zones often used for new condominium developments. Apartment Neighbourhoods can also draw lessons from the performance-based zoning standards found in the Kings' "Reinvestment Areas" and the context-driven urban-design standards emerging from Avenue studies throughout the city.

Moving forward from the existing legacy zoning, new standards could focus on creating land use and built form regulations that are able to respond to changing local needs and allow a steady evolution of neighbourhood character.

Images:

Opposite: Typical apartment neighbourhood (Top) and new mixed-use development, including older and newer high-rise buildings, Mississauga, Ontario, 2010.

The following is a comparison of current “legacy zoning” in apartment neighbourhoods, as compared to the more recent approaches to zoning found in the ‘Kings’ (near King Street West and Spadina Avenue and King Street East and Parliament Street) and ‘the Avenues’ (major street across the city identified for renewal):

Zone Standard	‘Legacy’ Zoning	‘The King’s’ Reinvestment Areas	Avenues
Density: GFA	Total GFA; disaggregated GFA per land use	None	None
Density: units	Maximum restricted to original unit count	None	None
Height	Maximum restricted to original approved height	Uniform height limit reinforces existing built character	Associated with ROW width; angular planes enforce setbacks to achieve good transition
Coverage	Typically less than 40%	None	None
Land use	Highly restrictive	Broadly permissive	Retail required at grade



Closing The Gap Between Policy And Potential

Barriers to change and investment in apartment neighbourhoods are not solely limited to, nor the principal responsibility of, the existing zoning framework. A multitude of socio-economic issues, demographic issues, real-estate capital market issues, site constraints and other forces shape and influence all communities, including apartment neighbourhoods. Furthermore, zoning constraints are not unique to apartment neighbourhoods, as evidenced by the multitude of zoning by-law amendments processed annually throughout the city.

This study does not therefore seek to suggest that a zoning solution alone will be a panacea for revitalizing apartment neighbourhoods.

A new approach to zoning is, however, a critical and important part of the solution. This study seeks to identify those barriers to apartment neighbourhood renewal that are within the jurisdiction of municipal planning policy, and recommends possible approaches to eliminating or reducing these barriers. The approaches proposed in this study build on the City of Toronto's tradition of pro-active planning that is witnessed by the innovative zoning approaches in the Kings' Secondary Plans and the ongoing Avenue studies, with an ultimate goal of closing the gap between policy and potential in the city's apartment neighbourhoods.

Recommendations: A Tiered Approach To Apartment Zoning

The proposed approach to zoning in apartment neighbourhoods is presented in three tiers. The first tier focusses on broadening land use permissions to enable a wide range of community, commercial and institutional activities. Tier 1 also proposes to reduce barriers to minor building alterations. This tier is envisioned to be broadly applicable across most or all apartment neighbourhoods in the city. The second tier would expand on this to permit as-of-right changes to the physical form of the building or property in order to accommodate modest additions or small buildings to house new uses. Tier 3 is intended to support more significant changes, such as new mixed-use infill development, and is therefore envisioned to apply only to select apartment neighbourhoods in the city and only after the completion of detailed planning studies similar to those being undertaken for the Avenues.



Images:

Opposite: Conversion of ground floor of apartment tower for café and terrace, Berlin, Germany, 2009.

Top: Outdoor fresh food market in apartment neighbourhood, Stockholm, Sweden, 2011.

Below: Visualization of outdoor market and new community buildings, North Kipling, 2006.



TIER 1: BROADENING LAND USE PERMISSIONS

The first tier of zoning change, designed for shorter term implementation, focuses primarily on changes in land use. It's intended to broaden the range of as-of-right primary and conditional land uses in as-built apartment neighbourhoods. Tier 1 zoning changes would remove the need for a zoning by-law amendment for minor alterations of sites, existing building interiors and small additions that do not trigger amendments to an existing Site Plan Agreement. Tier 1 would cover the sorts of minor interior renovations, temporary accessory structures and changes in permitted land uses that are necessary to establish home-run businesses in apartment units, run small business or community services from ground-floor areas, or locate temporary vendor display spaces and outdoor markets on existing apartment properties.

The first tier of zoning change could include the following features:

- Similar to the approach used in the Commercial-Residential (CR) zone of the draft Harmonized Zoning By-law 1156-2010, and consistent with the former Reinvestment Area (RA) zone created for the "Kings" precincts, a new "Apartment Residential Commercial" zone could establish a much broader list of principal, conditional and ancillary uses than are currently permitted in either the Residential Apartment (RA) zones or in the site-specific zoning by-laws that currently regulate development in apartment neighbourhoods. These broader permitted use provisions would take precedence over the more limited permitted uses contained within any applicable site-specific by-laws.
- In-force site-specific zoning by-laws would continue to regulate total gross floor area (GFA), building height, and all development setbacks for individual properties, thereby requiring significant changes to follow the zoning by-law amendment or minor variance process.
- Where a site-specific zoning by-law limits the amount of non-residential gross floor area, an exception would be made to allow a portion of the building interior to be converted from residential to non-residential use.
- Currently onerous on-site parking requirements would be harmonized with the new parking requirements of the Comprehensive Zoning By-law, unlocking the potential to dedicate underused parking to meet the needs of new non-residential uses, or to re-purpose underused parking areas to support new uses. Additionally, a similar approach to the City's current "Downtown Parking and Loading Zone" could be used. This permits on-site parking requirements to be met off-site in a municipally and/or privately operated parking lot within 300 metres of the property.



Images:

Top: Fresh food vender in apartment neighbourhood, Halle-Neustadt, Germany, 2006.

Opposite, Top: "IdeaStore" Community Centre addition to tower block, London, UK, 2006.

Opposite, Middle: Retail conversion and addtiaion to apartment, Sydney, Australia, 2012.

Opposite, Bottom: Scadding Court mobile vending market, Toronto, 2012.

The Tier 1 recommendations would affect primarily the permitted use portions of existing site-specific by-laws. Existing built form controls, including limits on building GFA, height, and all setbacks, would remain intact. The intent of Tier 1 is to limit the number of planning and development applications needed to permit either permanent indoor uses or temporary outdoor uses, that create minimal physical impact, yet which provide meaningful economic opportunities.

TIER 2: SIMPLIFYING & REDUCING DEVELOPMENT APPROVALS

The second tier of zoning changes would complement the first tier described above. This second tier would continue to permit the wider range of uses recommended for a new “Apartment Residential Commercial” zone in Tier 1. However, Tier 2 would seek to further simplify the approvals process for changes that contribute to creating more complete communities. Tier 2 would apply where the change in use also entails a minor change in the physical form of the building or property that would otherwise violate certain provisions of the existing site-specific zoning by-law. This may include, for example a reduction in the building setbacks, changes to the gross floor area as a result of a building addition, changes to the minimum parking requirement or to the available parking supply, and so on. Tier 2 could apply to a subset of apartment neighbourhoods whose site conditions would be amenable to allowing such changes to occur as-of-right, without necessitating a by-law amendment or minor variance application.

These applications for minor variances may address, for example, a minor decrease in minimum required development setbacks in order to permit the construction of a small-scale, ground floor convenience store within a new podium at the base of an existing building. Prior to enactment of the Tier 1 zoning changes described above, this Tier 2 commercial proposal would most certainly have triggered a full zoning by-law amendment, introducing risk and costs that may have delayed and even jeopardised the proposal.



TIER 3: CLOSING THE POLICY GAP - THE 'AVENUES' APPROACH

Tier 3 represents a longer-term opportunity. Tier 3 proposes the incremental replacement of the dated, prescriptive built form standards of current site-specific zoning by-laws. In their place, new site- or area-specific zoning regimes would be that are more suitable and supportive to apartment neighbourhood renewal. This zone is referred to here as an "Apartment Neighbourhood Reinvestment" Zone.

Rather than continue to entrench the as-built development form and site plan as the current site-specific zoning does, new precinct-scale planning studies, similar in scope and objective to the City's Avenues studies, would be undertaken to create individually tailored "Apartment Neighbourhood Reinvestment" zones with new site-specific zoning regulations. These planning studies, and their related new zoning standards, would consider potential for larger, infill development on under-utilized apartment sites. Whether institutional, residential, community use, or mixed-use, new development potential would be explored and embedded in updated zoning standards that look to the future potential of individual sites, rather than reinforce the past.

Depending on the specific conditions of the site, these new Tier 3 "Apartment Neighbourhood Reinvestment" zoning standards may consider:

- additional land use permissions, beyond those already permitted under Tier 1;
- changes to required setbacks to property lines, and/or between taller building elements, with due consideration of built form transition, shadow impact, and architectural design;
- increasing maximum allowable site coverages to enable infill development on under-utilized open spaces, in areas that are already well-served by community parks;
- removing or updating site-specific restrictions on maximum gross floor areas to allow for infill development or building expansions;
- removing upset limits on the number of permitted housing units in order to enable new infill development opportunities, while still maintaining current on-site rental unit supply as a baseline minimum; and/or
- increasing allowable building heights, with due consideration of built form transition, shadow impact and architectural design.



Images:

Above: Family terrace housing built as base of tower block, London, UK, [Karakusevic Carson, 2010].

Opposite, Top: Community centre built in centre of apartment neighbourhood, Berlin, Germany, 2009.

Opposite, Bottom: New housing and community centre built with open area surrounding tower block, London, UK, 2009.

SUPPORTING MEASURES

The above tiered approach to zoning change in apartment neighbourhoods is intended to facilitate renewal and investment in these communities. To improve the chances for success, these zoning changes could be supported by additional policy and planning measures, such as:

- design guidelines to ensure the placement of any new buildings or structures provides added value for overall neighbourhood design, such as creating usable community outdoor space, paths and connections;
- incentives for not-for-profit and affordable development models to provide needed affordable housing options;
- mechanisms to ensure that infill developments support community neighbourhood improvements projects; and
- provisions for long term neighbourhood planning so that infill housing and mixed-use developments contribute to the achievement of long term neighbourhood visions.





PART 6

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

The City's current policy framework of Strong Neighbourhoods and Complete Communities creates a progressive outline for a healthy city. However, in the case of Toronto's many hundred higher- density apartment neighbourhoods, the policy and process barriers related to legacy zoning by-laws create obstacles to these goals and are contributing to the neighbourhoods' gradual decline.

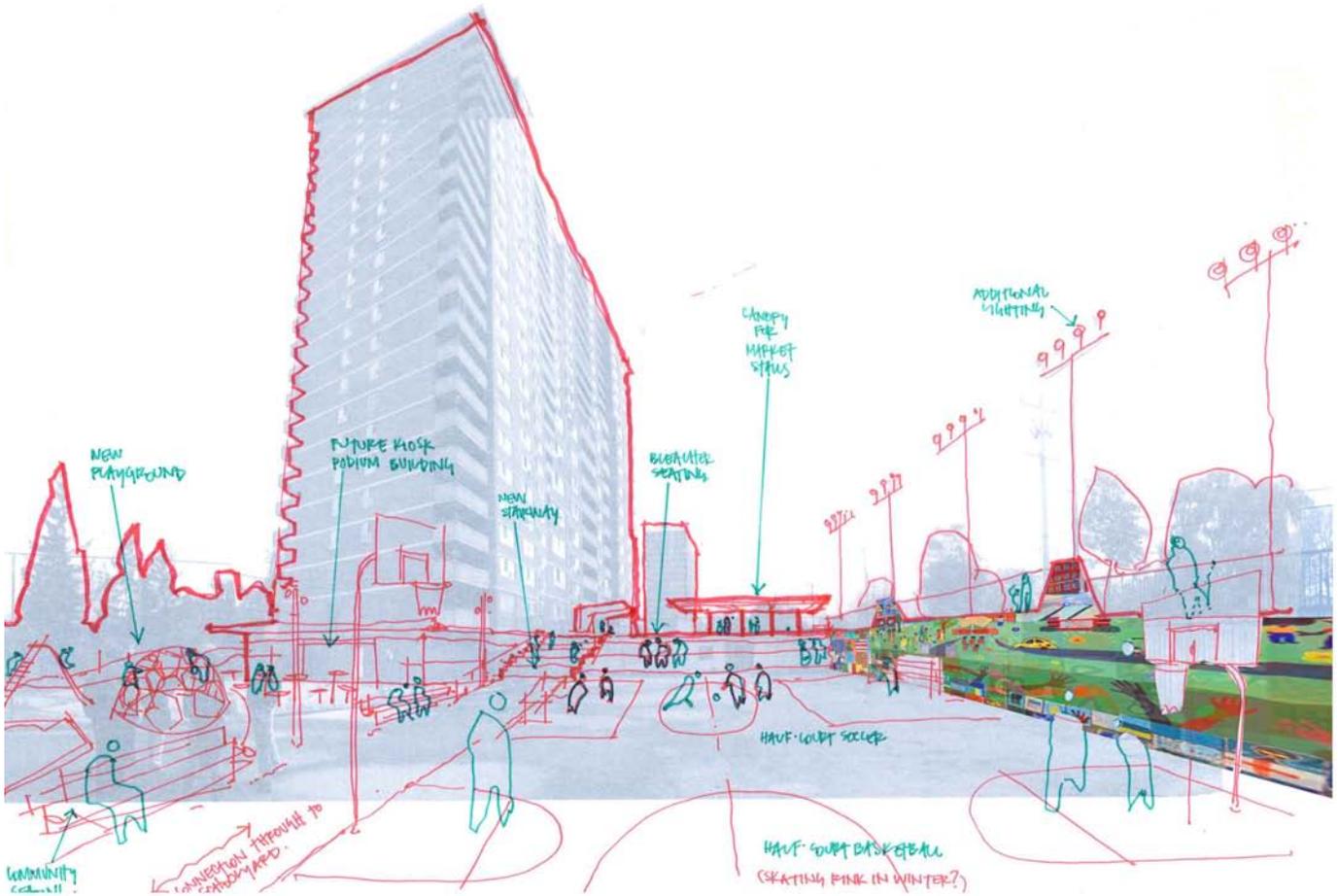
This report makes the case for a new zoning framework for apartment neighbourhoods to enable both grassroots economic development and larger scale investment. The purpose is to help apartment neighbourhoods reach their potential as healthy, vibrant, and complete communities.

This report also acknowledges that barriers to investment in apartment neighbourhoods are not solely limited to, nor the principal responsibility of, the existing zoning framework. A multitude of socio-economic, demographic, and real estate capital market forces, as well as various site constraints, shape and influence the viability of investment in all communities.

This study does not therefore seek to place unfair blame on the zoning framework for all of the issues being faced in apartment neighbourhoods. Nor does it suggest that a zoning solution alone is the panacea to help revitalize these communities. Rather, the study identifies a series of policy and planning barriers to investment that are within the jurisdiction of the City to address, and recommends a possible approach to eliminating or reducing this constraint on apartment neighbourhoods. Building on the City of Toronto's legacy of pro-active planning, this study proposes to close the gap between policy and potential.

Image:

Outdoor markets within apartment neighbourhood, Berlin, Germany, 2009. In most apartment neighbourhoods in Toronto, such a market would be against the current zoning by-law.



Recomendations and Next Steps

In moving this initiative forward, the following is recommended:

1. the current zoning and policy barriers be removed and the tiered approach to zoning in apartment neighbourhoods outlined in this report be implemented to enable economic and social development in these communities;
2. the City of Toronto's Official Plan be updated to further reinforce economic, social and community development in apartment neighbourhoods as a key to enabling strong neighbourhoods and healthy communities;
3. that partnerships and demonstration projects be conducted to promote and realize lower impact local projects described in this report as 'Tier 1 and 2';
4. that incentives, built form guidelines and other tools be developed to encourage and ensure high quality larger scale investment in apartment neighbourhoods, described in this report as 'Tier 3' projects;
5. strategies be developed for pairing social, commercial and community investment with building refurbishment through partnership with the Tower Renewal Office and other relevant stakeholders; and
6. that levers and other mechanisms be developed to encourage private, not-for profit and public sector investment in the priority investment areas that are the subject of this report.

Images:

Opposite, Top: Sketch of neighbourhood vision from community workshop, North Kipling, Toronto. (HIGHRISE.nfb.ca at The National Film Board of Canada, ERA Architects, 2010)
Opposite, Bottom: New outdoor fresh food market, St. Jamestown, Toronto. (Recipe for Community - St James Town, 2012)

APPENDICES:

APPENDIX A:

Mapping Apartment Towers, Poverty and Priority Investment Neighbourhoods

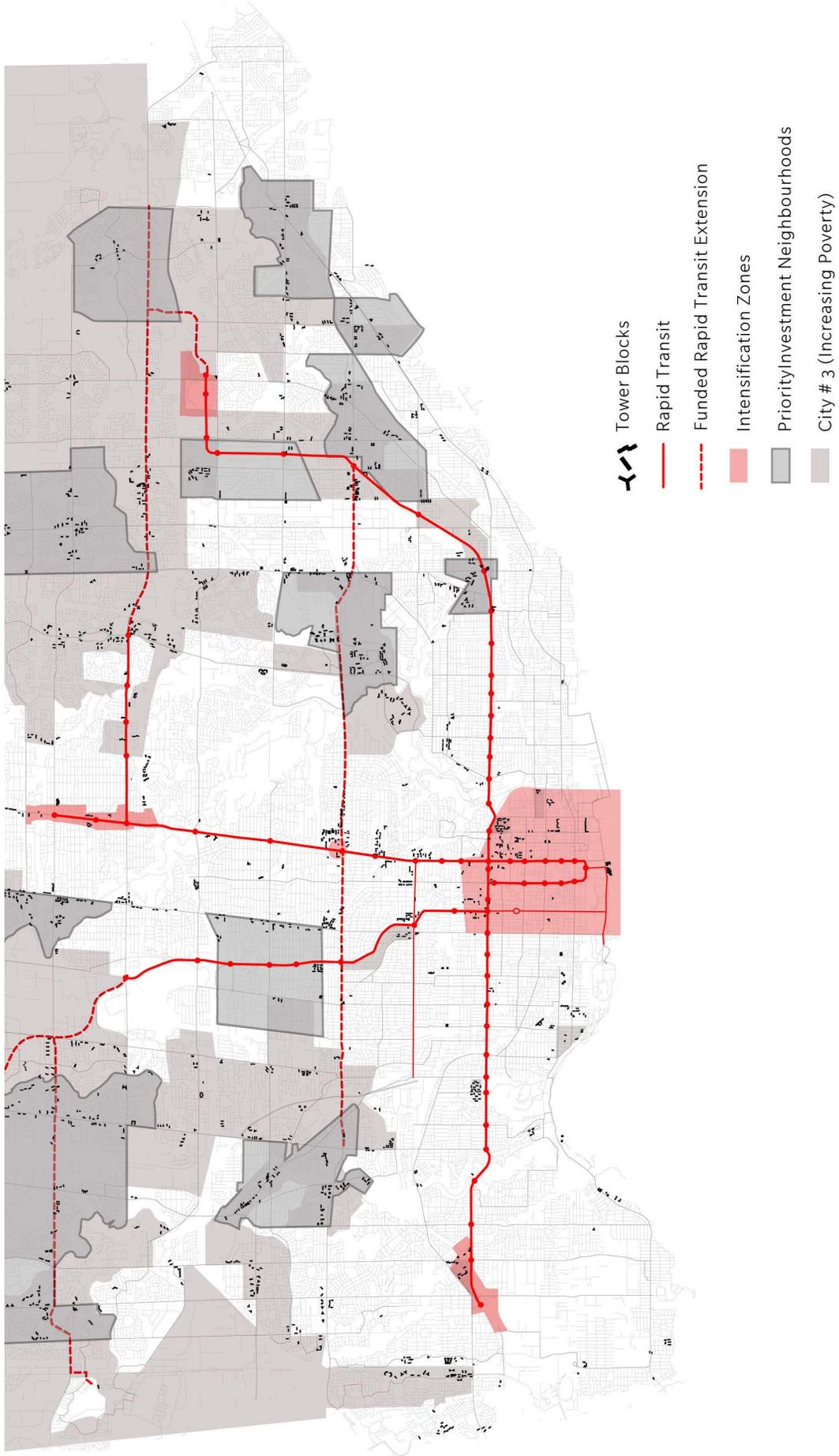
APPENDIX B:

Chart: Process for Building Permit, Zoning By-Law Amendment and Variance, a Comparison

APPENDIX C:

Policy Overview

Mapping Apartment Towers, Poverty And Priority Investment Neighbourhoods

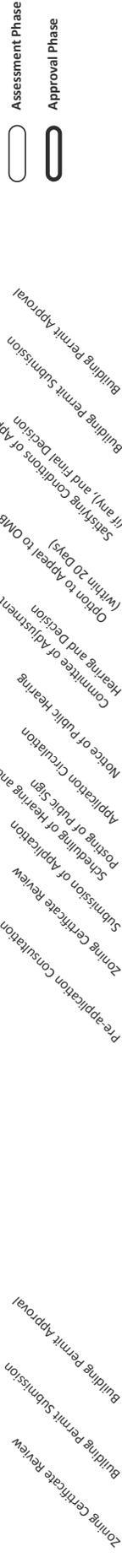


APPENDIX A:
**MAPPING APARTMENT TOWERS,
POVERTY AND PRIORITY INVESTMENT
NEIGHBOURHOODS**

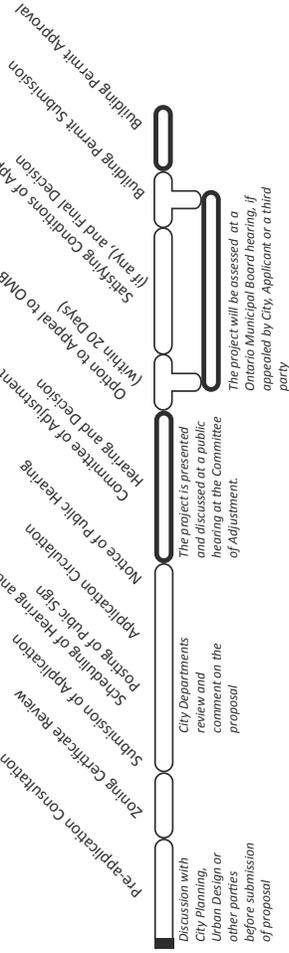
Development Approvals, a comparison

Based on the City of Toronto's Development Guide, 2010 and additional information by ERA Architects

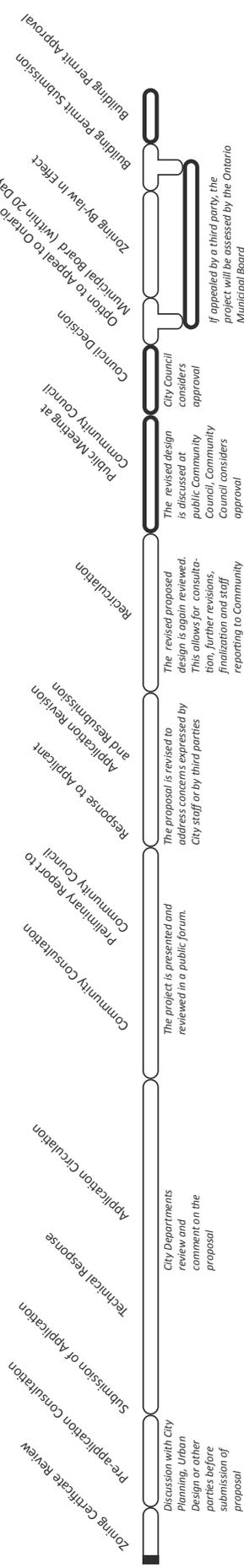
Zoning in place (21 Days)



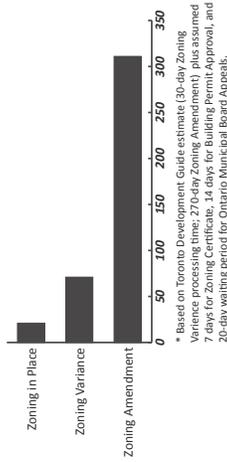
When a Zoning Variance is required (71 Days)



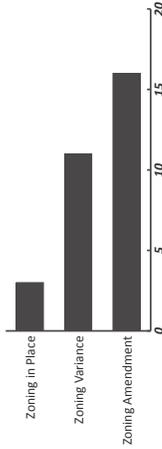
When a Zoning Amendment is required (311 Days)



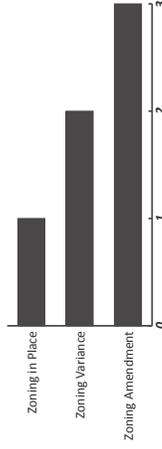
Number of Days*



Number of Steps



Number of Approval Points*



APPENDIX B:

CHART: PROCESS FOR BUILDING PERMIT, ZONING BY-LAW AMENDMENT AND VARIANCE, A COMPARISON

APPENDIX C: POLICY OVERVIEW

Policy Review – Supporting Strong Neighbourhoods And Complete Communities

The following is an overview of the overarching policies intended to ensure that all of the city's neighbourhoods, including apartment neighbourhoods, are healthy, vibrant and prosperous.

The following reference section identifies several of these key land-use policies and initiatives at the provincial, regional and municipal levels:

Ontario Planning Act

The Ontario Planning Act lists issues of provincial interest that both the province and municipalities "shall have regard for" in establishing land-use planning policy, including Official Plans and zoning by-laws. Section 2 of the planning act outlines the following related to complete, healthy and sustainable communities:

- (h) The orderly development of safe and healthy communities.
- (h.1) The accessibility for persons with disabilities to all facilities, services and matters to which this Act applies.
- (o) The protection of public health and safety.
- (l) The adequate provision and distribution of educational, health, social, cultural and recreational facilities.
- (j) The adequate provision of a full range of housing, including affordable housing.
- (q) The promotion of development that is designed to be sustainable, to support public transit and to be oriented to pedestrians.

The Ontario Public Policy Statement 2005

The Ontario Public Policy Statement, 2005 (PPS) identifies the establishment of liveable and healthy communities as a core objective of building strong communities. Policy 1 of the PPS affirms the view that good planning practices and public health are correlated:

Ontario's long-term prosperity, environmental health and social well-being depend on wisely managing change and promoting efficient land use and development patterns. Efficient land use and development patterns support strong, liveable and healthy communities, protect the environment and public health and safety, and facilitate economic growth.

Policy 1.1.3.4 highlights the importance of public health in promoting development standards:

Appropriate development standards should be promoted, which facilitate intensification, redevelopment and compact form, while maintaining appropriate levels of public health and safety.

Growth Plan For The Greater Golden Horseshoe: Complete Communities

The Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, prepared under the Places to Grow Act, 2005, is a framework for planning communities in the region around Toronto. A guiding principle of the Plan is the realization of compact, vibrant and complete communities. Complete communities are defined by the Plan, as those that:

Meet people's needs for daily living throughout an entire lifetime by providing convenient access to an appropriate mix of jobs, local services, a full range of housing, and community infrastructure including affordable housing, schools, recreation and open space for their residents. Convenient access to public transportation and options for safe, non-motorized travel is also provided.

The Growth Plan identifies several dozen growth centres throughout the region, that, tied together with the Metrolinx regional rapid transit plan and local municipal plans, are the framework for growth for the next 25 years. Many of the region's apartment towers are within these growth areas, and may be considered as areas for potential infill and mixed-use intensification.

A key aspect of the realization of this plan is the creation of "mobility hubs". These are multi-modal transit nodes where significant mixed-use intensification is encouraged. Mobility hubs are viewed as key centres of residential and employment growth, largely through reinvestment and intensification in existing areas. Many of the region's apartment towers are within mobility hubs, and may be considered as areas for potential infill and mixed-use intensification.

Metrolinx And The Big Move

The Big Move regional transportation plan, developed by the Province of Ontario through the agency Metrolinx, sets out a 25-year vision for travel in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area. The plan aims to reduce the distance that people drive daily and increase transit-based commuting and walking. The plan aims to accommodate significant growth in the region while increasing transit ridership by 50% and reducing congestion and improving satisfaction with transit services. In pursuit of this vision, Metrolinx is now overseeing the development of a comprehensive transit network for the GTA and Hamilton region.

City Of Toronto Official Plan

The following provides a brief outline of the Official Plan to illustrate how the document relates to vibrant, prosperous and “complete” communities”. This by no means addresses all such aspects included in the plan. Further, vibrant neighbourhoods are addressed in both individual policies and through the cumulative effects of policies in the plan.

City of Toronto Official Plan: Vision and Decision Making

The City of Toronto Official Plan (OP) is a tool for making choices about growing the city. The Plan advocates decision making that balances a range of considerations and builds a consensus around change by painting a picture of the City’s future (page 1-1).

The picture envisaged in the plan is of “creating an attractive and safe city that evokes pride, passion and a sense of belonging - a city where people of all ages and abilities can enjoy a good quality of life.”(1-2) The plan indicates that such a city is to include, among other elements (1-2):

- a. Vibrant neighbourhoods that are part of complete communities.
- b. Affordable housing choices that meet the needs of everyone throughout their life.
- c. Attractive, tree-lined streets with shops and housing that are made for walking.
- d. A comprehensive and high quality affordable transit system that lets people move around the City quickly and conveniently;
- e. Clean air, land and water.
- f. Green spaces of all sizes and public squares that bring people together.
- g. Green spaces of all sizes and public squares that bring people together.
- h. A wealth of recreational opportunities that promote health and wellness.
- i. A spectacular waterfront that is healthy, diverse, public and beautiful.

Policy For Enhancing Our Neighbourhoods

Neighbourhoods, according to the Official Plan, are to remain “physically stable”. However, the OP recognizes that improvements are needed in some neighbourhoods, including specific policies to make those neighbourhoods healthier places. As shown below, the plan-specific strategies for change may be required in priority neighbourhoods, to improve amenities and foster investment and partnerships aimed at neighbourhood revitalization.

In emphasizing the richness of uses and activities in designated “Neighbourhoods” and “Apartment Neighbourhoods”, the OP emphasizes that:

When we think of our neighbourhood we think of more than our homes. Our trees, parks, schools, libraries, community centres, child care centres, places of worship and local stores are all important parts of our daily lives (pg.2-21).

Section 2.3 of the OP, titled Stable But Not Static: Enhancing Our Neighbourhoods and Green Spaces, includes subsection 2.3.1 Healthy Neighbourhoods. The set of policies under this subsection is summarized below.

Policy 1 articulates the objectives of healthy neighbourhood stewardship:

Neighbourhoods and Apartment Neighbourhoods are considered to be physically stable areas. Development within Neighbourhoods and Apartment Neighbourhoods will be consistent with this objective and will respect and reinforce the existing physical character of buildings, streetscapes and open space patterns in these areas.

Policy 2 and **3** address new development on lands adjacent to Neighbourhoods.

Policy 4 identifies various means of improving neighbourhoods:

The functioning of the local network of streets in Neighbourhoods and Apartment Neighbourhoods will be improved by:

- a. Maintaining roads and sidewalks in a state of good repair.
- b. Investing in the improvement of bus and streetcar services for neighbourhood residents.
- c. Minimizing through traffic on local streets.
- d. Discouraging parking on local streets for non-residential purposes.

Policy 5 outlines approaches to improve environmental sustainability in neighbourhoods by focusing on naturalizing landscape and conserving water and energy.

Policy 6 addresses the enhancement of neighbourhood amenities where needed by:

- a. Improving and expanding existing parks, recreation facilities, libraries, local institutions, local bus and streetcar services and other community services.
- b. Creating new community facilities and local institutions and adapting existing services to changes in the social, health and recreational needs of the neighbourhood.

Policy 7 lists approaches to revitalization strategies specific to priority neighbourhoods:

- a. Improving local parks, transit, community services and facilities.
- b. Improving the public realm, streets and sidewalks.
- c. Identifying opportunities to improve the quality of the existing stock of housing, or building a range of new housing.
- d. Identifying priorities for capital and operational funding needed to support the strategy.
- e. Identifying potential partnerships and mechanisms for stimulating investment in the neighbourhood and supporting the revitalization strategy.

Additional Municipal Policy

Since the OP was drafted in 2000 and largely approved in 2006, a significant body of policy development and new research has emerged connecting healthy and strong neighbourhoods to land use. City Council has furthermore issued statements in support of a healthy urban landscape. These include The Toronto Bicycle Plan, the Toronto Walkability Strategy, and Toronto's Food Charter, among others.

A further rundown of relevant policies and initiatives is as follows:

Encouraging Complete Communities

To make the Official Plan conform to the Places to Grow plan, the City is now reviewing the identification and protection designated employment lands, areas dedicated to business and economic activity. This process is occurring concurrently with the Official Plan Five Year Review.

Walking, Physical Activity And Transit Use

To encourage walking and physical activity the City of Toronto established a Pedestrian Charter in 2002 and subsequently implemented its Walking Strategy (2009). Complementing pedestrian mobility, the Big Move Regional Transportation Plan, published by the Province of Ontario in 2005 established an action plan for improving access to regional transit. This transit system now being built had been outlined in only general terms in the OP (see Policy 2.1.1 (a) and Map 1).

Access To Nutritious Food

The importance of greater and more equitable access to nutritious food has been affirmed by City Council in the Toronto Food Charter (Toronto, 2001), which included a commitment to income, employment, housing, and transportation policies that support secure and dignified access to the food people need. Food security and food deserts have been further addressed in Toronto Public Health's Healthy Toronto By Design (2011).

Greater Affordable Housing Choices

A number of recently completed reports have enhanced our understanding about affordable housing choices. The importance of apartment towers in providing affordable housing options was identified in Ontario's Tower Neighbourhood Renewal in the Greater Golden Horseshoe Report (Ontario, 2010) and Toronto's Tower Renewal Implementation Book (Toronto, 2011).

The City has developed further strategies to expand housing options, such as promoting housing in mixed-use developments along avenues and highlighting specific neighbourhoods for priority investment and social support.

Likewise, strategies to realize affordable housing have been developed by the Province of Ontario's Ministry of Municipal Affairs and by community coalitions. Such initiatives illustrate the potential of reinvesting in and enriching neighbourhoods that feature affordable housing choices.

Healthy Environment

New policies have emerged since the Official Plan was drafted to promote a healthy environment and address climate change. These include standards for energy-efficient building design, such as Building Code standards introduced in 2011 making new homes 35% more efficient compared with those built prior to 2006; zoning by-laws to allow small-scale renewable energy generation, such as solar and wind, on private properties (Toronto consolidated zoning by-law, 2011 pending revision and approval), and the Toronto Green Standards (2010).

Further initiatives to promote a healthy environment include Toronto Parks and Recreation Plan (in preparation), and the City of Toronto Municipal Code, Chapter 813, Article III, 'Private Tree Protection' (2004).

Recognizing The Relationship Between Health and The Built Environment

Since the Official Plan was drafted and approved, further studies have been completed showing how health is interconnected with living conditions and location. Key reports include the United Way's *Poverty by Postal Code* (2004) and *Poverty by Postal Code 2: Vertical Poverty* (2011). St. Michael's Hospital's Keenan Research Centre is carrying out the Neighbourhood Effects on Health and Well-Being (NEHW) study, a large-scale survey to describe neighbourhood factors affecting mental health. Likewise, a 2007 study by the Clinical Evaluative Sciences found a relationship between neighbourhood form, specifically neighbourhood walkability, and rates of diabetes.

REFERENCES

Reports And Studies

Canadian Institute of Planners (2011). Healthy communities, practice guide. Ottawa: Canadian Institute of Planners.

Canadian Institute of Planners (2011). Planning healthy communities fact sheet series. Ottawa: Canadian Institute of Planners.

Cizek, K. (director) (2010). The thousandth tower [web-based documentary]. Canada: National Film Board of Canada. Retrieved from <http://highrise.nfb.ca/thousandthtower/>

Cizek, K. (director) (2011). Out my window [web-based documentary]. Canada: National Film Board of Canada. Retrieved from <http://interactive.nfb.ca/#/outmywindow>

Cizek, K. (director) (2011). The millionth tower [web-based documentary]. National Film Board of Canada. 2011 <http://highrise.nfb.ca/onemillionthtower>

Comay Planning Consultants, James Murray, et. al. (1969) Erin Mills new town, a proposal by Don Mills Development Limited – a wholly owned subsidiary of Canada Equity and Development Company Limited [planning study]. Toronto: Don Mills Developments Limited.

Frumkin, H. (2002). Urban sprawl and public health. Public Health Reports. Atlanta: Center for Disease Control. vol. 117 201.

Fuller Geometrics, Architects, Engineers, Planners (1968). Project Toronto: A study and proposal for the future development and design of Toronto. Toronto: Fuller Geometrics, Architects, Engineers, Planners.

Heath, A., & Swerhun, N. (2011). Weston 2012 design charrette: Community feedback summary. Toronto: SWERHUN Facilitation & Decision Support, 2011.

Heath, G.W., Brownson, R.C., Kruger, J., Miles, R., Powell, K.E., & Ramsey, L.T. (2009). The effectiveness of urban design and land use and transport policies and practices to increase physical activity: A systematic review. *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*, 3, Suppl 1, S55-S76

- Hess, P. M. & Farrow, J. (2011). Walkability in Toronto's high-rise neighbourhoods. Toronto: University of Toronto Cities Centre.
- Hulchanski, D. J. (2010). Three cities within Toronto: Income polarization among Toronto's neighbourhoods, 1970-2005. Toronto: Cities Centre, University of Toronto.
- Kolenc, A. [c. 1966]. [Architectural Sketch showing a planned, but unrealized recreation centre at base of tower in Thorncliffe Park]. Eli Comay Fonds, Fonds 39, File 29, City of Toronto Archives.
- Leyden, K. M. (2003). Social capital and the built environment: The importance of walkable neighborhoods. *American Journal of Public Health*, 93(9), 1546-1551.
- McWilliam, A. (1966). [Letter to Chair and Members from Alan McWilliam Township of East York Planning Board Commissioner of Planning, October 19, 1966]. Toronto Archives, Eli Comay Fonds, Fonds 39 File 29.
- Metropolitan Toronto Planning Board (1959). Official plan of the metropolitan Toronto planning area, Toronto. (Toronto Ontario: Metropolitan Toronto Planning Board.
- Metropolitan Toronto Planning Board. The Study of Apartment Distribution and Apartment Densities in The Metropolitan Toronto Planning Area. (Toronto Ontario: Metropolitan Toronto Planning Board, 1968).
- Neptis Foundation (2007). Regional Indicators. Toronto: Neptis Foundation.
- Ontario, Ministry of Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (2009). Planning by design: a healthy communities handbook. Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.
- Saunders, D. (2010) Arrival city: The final migration and our next world. Toronto: Knopf.
- Scarborough Planning Board (1966). Apartments: A comprehensive study. Scarborough, Ontario: Scarborough Planning Board.
- Sewell, J. (1993). The Shape of the city: Toronto struggles with modern planning. □Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Stewart, G. & Thorne J. (2010). Tower neighbourhood renewal in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. For the Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure and Renewal with Centre for Urban and Regional. Toronto: Center for Urban Growth and Renewal.

References

The Heart and Stroke Foundation (c.2010). Shaping active, healthy communities, a Heart and Stroke Foundation built environment tool kit for change. Toronto: The Heart and Stroke Foundation.

Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office (2009). Understanding Thorncliffe Park: Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office needs assessment report. Toronto Ontario: Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office.

Toronto, City of (2012). Private sector housing roundtable: Housing makes economic sense. City of Toronto Affordable Housing Office. Toronto: City of Toronto.

Toronto, City of. (c. 2005). How does your city grow? Toronto: City of Toronto. Retrieved from <http://www.toronto.ca/planning/planning101.htm>

Toronto, City of (1962). [Unveiling of Apartment Project] Archives Fonds 217 Series 249 File 9 Item 1, City of Toronto Archives.

Toronto, City of. (2008) 2006 census update on social risk factors in the city's 13 priority areas. City of Toronto Social Policy Analysis and Research Section, Social Development Finance & Administration Division. Toronto Ontario: City of Toronto).

Toronto Public Health (2005). Addressing Indoor Air Quality in Toronto, Final Report. Toronto: Toronto Public Health.

Toronto Public Health (2011). Healthy Toronto By Design Report. Toronto: Toronto Public Health.

Toronto Public Health (2012). The Walkable City - A Healthy Toronto By Design Report. Toronto, Ontario: Toronto Public Health.

United Way of Greater Toronto and the Canadian Council on Social Development (2004). Poverty by postal code; The geography of neighbourhood poverty 1981-2001. Toronto, Ontario: United Way of Greater Toronto. Retrieved from <http://www.uwgt.org/downloads/whatWeDo/reports/PovertybyPostalCodeFinal.pdf>

United Way of Greater Toronto (2011). Poverty by postal code 2, vertical poverty: Declining income, housing quality and community life in Toronto's inner Suburban high-rise apartments. Toronto, Ontario: United Way of Greater Toronto. Retrieved from www.unitedwaytoronto.com/verticalpoverty/downloads/Report-PovertybyPostalCode2-VerticalPoverty-Final.pdf

Policy, By-laws, and Legislation

Provincial

Ontario. Planning Act, R.S.O. 1990, CHAPTER P.13

Ontario, Ministry of infrastructure. The Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. 2006. Office Consolidation, January 2012

Ontario, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (2005)

The Ontario Public Policy Statement, 2005 (2005)

Municipal

East York, Borough of: By-law Leaside No. 1916 – Consolidated

East York, Borough of: By-law No. 10 (02-08-1967)

Etobicoke, Borough of: By-law No. 0894-320

North York, City of: By-law No. 7625

North York, Borough of: District 12 Plan. North York Planning Board. (1965)

Scarborough, Township of: By-law No. 10327 (05-07-1963)

Scarborough, Borough of: By-law No. 14066, (13-02-1970)

Scarborough, Township of: By-law No. 10768 (11-02-1963)

Toronto, City of: Toronto Official Plan. Office Consolidation, January 2010.

Toronto, City of: Toronto Bike Plan, Shifting Gears (2001)

Toronto, City of: Toronto Walkability Strategy (2009)

Toronto, City of. Toronto's Food Charter (2001)

Toronto, City of: By-law 438-86

Toronto, City of: By-law 328-68

York, Borough of: By-law No. 865 (1970)

York, Borough of: No. 1-83 (1983)

May, 2012

CENTRE FOR
URBAN GROWTH
AND RENEWAL



www.cugr.ca CUG+R