

Section 2: Themes and Strategies for Healthy Apartment Neighbourhoods By Design

Themes and Strategies

Theme 1: Natural Environment

Theme 2: Built Environment

Theme 3: Transportation

Theme 4: Housing

Theme 5: Employment, Income and Opportunities

Theme 6: Education and Learning

Theme 7: Food Security

Theme 8: Community Health

Health Strategies Summary Chart



Section 2: Themes and Strategies for Healthy Apartment Neighbourhoods By Design

Themes and Strategies

The following are a series of strategies related to health themes in achieving more healthy and well-served communities in apartment neighbourhoods throughout Toronto. A summary analysis of each of these strategies is provided in a summary chart on page 92.

Theme 1: Natural Environment:

- 1.1 Improve Microclimate and Outdoor Comfort
- 1.2 Provide Access to Green Space, Parks and Natural Areas
- 1.3 Reduce Negative Impacts to Air and Water Quality

Theme 2: Built Environment

- 2.1 Improve Opportunities for Gathering
- 2.2 Improve Sense of Security and Lighting
- 2.3 Reduce Hazards such as Traffic Blind Spots
- 2.4 Animate Spaces

Theme 3: Transportation

- 3.1 Remove Physical Barriers to Active Transportation
- 3.2 Integrate Transit stops and Stations with Apartment Towers
- 3.3 Improve Cycling Networks and Infrastructure
- 3.4 Enable Access to 'Green Fleet' Carshare Programs
- 3.5 Reduce Parking Requirements to Allow Conversion to Alternative Uses

Theme 4: Housing

- 4.1 Provide Amenities to Support Diverse Households in High-rise Living
- 4.2 Adapt units for Growing Families and Changing Households
- 4.3 Build Resident Social Capital through Organizations and Associations
- 4.4 Expand Housing Choice, New Tenure Options
- 4.5 Expand Housing Choice, Infill Housing

Theme 5: Income, Employment and Opportunities

- 5.1 Introduce Outdoor Vending in Apartment Neighbourhood Open Spaces
- 5.2 Allow for Home-Based Businesses
- 5.3 Incubate Local Enterprise Through Support and Training Services
- 5.4 Introduce or Expand Ground Floor Retail

Theme 6: Education and Learning

- 6.1 Introduce extra-curricular and education for children and youth
- 6.2 Introduce Newcomer Settlement Support and Adult Education Programs
- 6.3 Introduce Preschool and Family Resource Services

Theme 7: Food Security

- 7.1 Provide Facilities for Collective Cooking
- 7.2 Introduce Outdoor Fresh Food Markets
- 7.3 Expand or Introduce Green Grocers
- 7.4 Introduce Community Gardens / Urban Agriculture

Theme 8: Community Health

- 8.1 Promote Public Health Education
- 8.2 Provide Multi-Purpose Health Services Clinics
- 8.3 Provide Programs and Facilities for Physical Fitness

Theme 1: Natural Environment

How does the natural environment affect health?

Factors in the natural environment such as air quality, water quality, the climate, and green space can have a significant impact on health. The natural environment can affect:

- **Air Quality** – Air pollution associated with the transportation sector, the heating of homes, the generation of electricity, and other sources, can have a significant impact on public health. In 2004, Toronto Public Health estimated that the five common air pollutants contribute to approximately 1,700 non-traumatic deaths and between 3,000 and 6,000 hospital admissions each years in Toronto" (TPH, 2004).

- **Physical Activity and Mental Health** - Parks, gardens and other public green spaces play an important role in community health. These areas provide opportunities for exercise, physical activity and relaxation. Studies suggest that contact with nature can produce health benefits such as lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels, enhanced survival after a heart attack, more rapid recovery from surgery, fewer minor medical complaints and lower self-reported stress. In children with attention disorders and in teens with behavioural disorders, contact with nature has resulted in significant improvement (Frumkin, 2001; Croucher, 2008; Maas,2006).

- **Social Cohesion** - Parks also build healthy communities by contributing to stable neighbourhoods and strengthening community development. Research shows that residents of neighbourhoods with greenery in common spaces enjoy stronger social ties (Gies, 2006). Increasingly, parks are also being used for community gardens which provide residents with healthy, affordable food and opportunities for physical activity and socialization (TPH, 2011).

- **Extreme Heat** – Trees, grass, shrubs and other vegetation also provide benefits to health by mitigating the health impacts of climate change. Based on historical analysis over five decades, extreme heat contributes to 120 deaths on average per year in Toronto. This number is expected to increase as Toronto experiences hotter days and longer heat episodes with climate change. Certain populations, such as the frail, elderly and isolated, are more vulnerable to heat than others (TPH, 2011a).

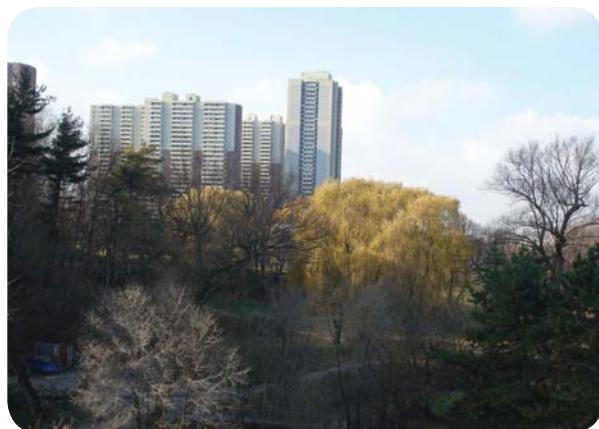


Image:

Top: Crescent Town from Taylor Creek, Toronto, 2006

Bottom: Community gathering in ravine near apartment neighbourhood, Scarborough, 2012,
courtesy of Holly Pagnacco

The Opportunity in Apartment Neighbourhoods

The form of Toronto's apartment towers generally consist of towers and slab apartment buildings located within large open spaces. The provision of large areas of green open space was considered a key feature in the planning underpinning the development of these neighbourhoods. Many apartment neighbourhoods are in areas of considerable green open space, often having mature trees and vegetation, and are commonly set next to ravines, natural features and public parks.

Apartment neighbourhoods often enjoy a strong visual or physical connection to the natural environment. However, the current relationship of the natural environment with many apartment neighbourhoods is subject to several barriers. These are a result of both their original design and changes within neighbourhoods over the last decades. These include:

- Fragmented neighbourhood sites, divided by fences and served by discontinuous, indirect walkway systems preventing access to ravines, public parks and other outdoor natural amenities;
- Large percentage of surface parking occupying open space;
- Poor usability of available open green space because of a lack of amenities such as playgrounds, benches or trails, programming, or maintenance;
- Harsh micro-climate due to wind tunnels, urban heat island effect, and lack of shading in areas suitable for amenities and outdoor activity;
- Inefficient and outdated building systems that waste energy resulting in the high production of emissions that contribute to air pollution and climate change and the over-use of water resources.

The following are strategies for optimizing the relationship between apartment neighbourhoods and the natural environment:

- 1.1 Improve Microclimate and Outdoor Comfort
- 1.2 Provide Access to Green Space, Parks and Natural Areas
- 1.3 Reduce Negative Impacts to Air and Water Quality

1.1 Improve Microclimate and Outdoor Comfort

Context

Microclimate refers to localized environmental conditions that affect human comfort. It can be affected significantly by built form and landscape features.

In the case of apartment neighbourhoods, the massing and open spaces around buildings can create microclimatic conditions that are uncomfortable or hazardous. Wind tunnels can cause persistent snowdrifts blocking walkways, making outdoor walking uncomfortable and difficult. Large paved surfaces that characterize much of the outdoor environment within apartment neighbourhoods can exacerbate summer heat – creating heat island effects. Large open spaces with little shade can become inhospitable for walking, relaxation and play, and leave people vulnerable to direct and prolonged UV exposure.

These microclimatic conditions affect the ability to use existing open space. Improved conditions could encourage outdoor physical activity such as walking by mitigating inhospitable sunlight, heat, wind or snow accumulation.

Solution

Microclimate in apartment neighbourhoods can be optimized through a series of interventions such as introducing windbreaks and sun shading. These interventions can be done through a variety of measures, including increasing the tree canopy, plantings and hedges; the provision of shade structures, such as covered decks or canopies; and the introduction of new buildings to mitigate extreme and uncomfortable wind and sun exposure (see Built Environment). Additional measures to improve microclimate include the use of ‘green’ permeable paving to reduce heat island effects, as well as the use of radiant paving to prevent snow and ice accumulation.

Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Supportive

These solutions would generally be supported by current Official Plan policies.

Zoning by-laws: Limiting

‘Soft’ landscaping such as planting trees or shrubs would not be prohibited by current zoning. However, projects introducing a new structure or affecting existing setbacks, such as a covered deck, could require a variance from the zoning by-law, approved through the Committee of Adjustment specifically if the deck is enclosed.

Other considerations

The solutions could be subject to site plan approval.



Image:

Plantings to reduce sun exposure on community open space and buildings, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2009

1.2 Provide Access to Green Space, Parks and Natural Areas

Context

Apartment neighbourhoods were designed as ‘towers in the park’ where an abundance of green space would provide a respite from urban living. Tower clusters were often built to provide views overlooking the city’s many ravines and valleys. Despite this vision, large green spaces surrounding apartment properties are often sterile, inaccessible and under-utilized. The many parks and ravines adjacent to apartment neighbourhoods are often difficult to access due to fences that surround apartment properties and a lack of formal pathways and access points.

Solution

Making the green spaces in and around apartment neighbourhoods more welcoming, and better able to meet the original intention of providing a natural respite for urban residents, can be done by naturalizing areas of existing open space, introducing community gardens, and better defining green spaces by planting trees. Likewise, apartment tower residents could be connected with adjacent natural ravine lands by installing walking paths and entry points.

Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Supportive

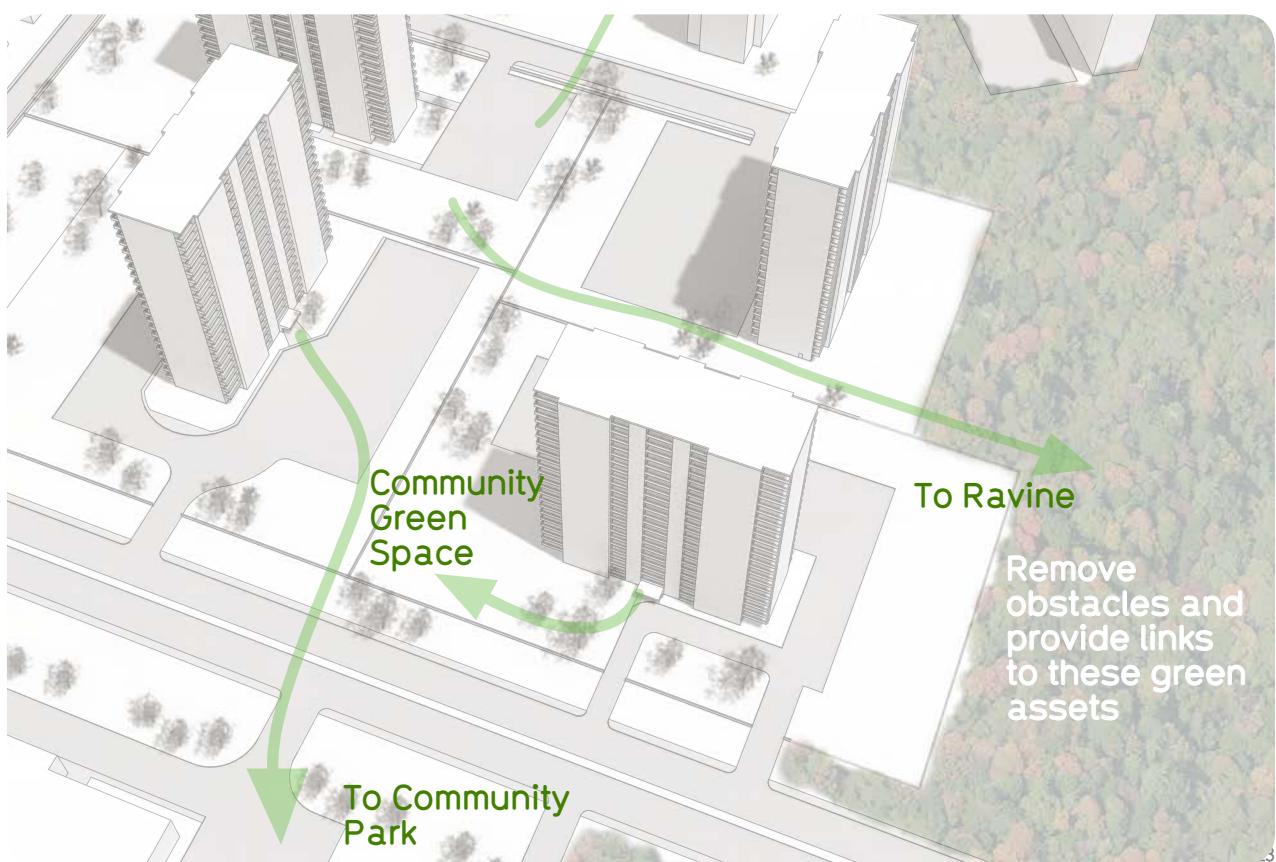
These solutions would generally be supported by current Official Plan policies.

Zoning by-laws: Neutral

Green space naturalization and introduction of new pathways would likely not be constrained by current zoning.

Other considerations

Approvals may be required from the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority for new access points to conservation areas, and cooperation would be required amongst neighbouring landowners concerning access and rights-of-way.



1.3 Reduce Negative Impacts to Air and Water Quality

Context

Buildings making up apartment neighbourhoods consume considerable energy and water in their daily operations. They use more energy per square metre than a single family home for daily operations. (TNRGGH 2010). Collectively, Toronto's apartments are estimated to produce several megatons of carbon each year. Improving the efficiency of aging apartment towers could contribute substantially to reducing emissions of air pollutants and greenhouse gases.

Solution

A wide variety of solutions exist for refurbishing post-war apartment towers to make them more energy efficient, and significantly reduce environmental impact. These solutions include:

- introducing measures for energy conservation, including the installation of low flow fixtures, smart meters and in-suite monitoring, and tenant awareness programs;
- isolating the building envelope by overcladding, installing high performance windows, and introducing heat recovery systems; and
- utilizing clean energy systems, such as solar water heating, geothermal heating and cooling, and cogeneration systems.

Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Supportive

The Official Plan generally supports energy efficiency and measures to mitigate environmental impacts of land use.

Zoning by-laws: Limiting

Due to an amendment passed in 2008, current zoning would permit uses, such as co-generation, which were not anticipated at the time the by-laws were drafted. Minor variances may be required for over-cladding, if the wall system was to substantially reduce side yard setbacks or add to the height of the building.

Other considerations

Costs and access to financing for capital improvements are common challenges facing property owners who want to introduce environmental retrofits to their buildings.

Notes:

A compilation of international precedents for green refurbishment can be found in the report *Tower Neighbourhood Renewal in the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (2010), and solutions suited to the local condition have been analyzed in the report *Tower Renewal Guidelines* (2009) and *Tower Renewal Community Energy Plans* (2010).



Images:

Top left: Thermal over-cladding of residential tower, Guelph, Ontario, 2009

Top right: 'Solar house' renewal of apartment blocks, Göteborg, Sweden, (Gårdstens Bostäde 2007)

Middle left: Thermal over-cladding of tower blocks, Manchester, 2009

Middle right: Green waste management building within apartment neighbourhood, Göteborg, Sweden, 2009

Bottom left: Sun-shading to reduce solar gain, Rotterdam, Netherlands, 2009

Bottom right: Solar wall tower retrofit, Berlin, Germany, 2009

Theme 2: Built Environment

How does the built environment affect health?

A growing body of evidence indicates that the built environment affects the health of the community by influencing factors such as levels of physical activity, nutrition, risk of vehicle-related collisions and social cohesion (CDC, 2011). Development patterns that favour low-density populations and a narrow range of land uses, where residential land uses are separated from commercial services and employment areas, have increased reliance on automobiles for transportation to work, shops and other daily needs. This pattern, has in turn had a substantial impact on factors that affect health.

The built environment can affect health by influencing:

- **Access to Services** - For many people living in apartment neighbourhoods in Toronto, there is poor access to jobs, services and recreational facilities because their neighbourhoods have generally been designed to support a narrow range of land uses. And yet studies have shown that residents living in these neighbourhoods are also less likely to own automobiles, which means that they will have a difficult time accessing jobs, healthy foods, services and recreational facilities (Hess, 2011).
- **Safety** - A greater percentage of collisions with vehicles occur among cyclists and pedestrians in the suburbs in Toronto, predominantly in low-income areas (TPH, 2012b). In a Toronto study, 28% of residents in high-rise neighbourhoods indicated that they don't feel safe from traffic when walking; 29% feel they don't have safe places to cross streets (Hess & Farrow, 2010).
- **Levels of Physical Activity** - The health-related costs associated with physical inactivity in Canada have been estimated to be \$5.3 billion per year (Katzmarzyk & Janssen, 2004). Studies have found that individuals who live in more walkable areas, with a greater mix of land uses, higher population densities, and greater street connectivity, are more likely to be physically active than those who live in less walkable neighbourhoods (Dunn et al., 2009; Saelen et al., 2003; TPH, 2012a). Studies have also shown that people are more likely to walk when streetscapes and walking routes are safe, appealing and welcoming (HSF, 2010).
- **Social Cohesion** - Walkable neighbourhoods have also been associated with higher levels of social interaction and community engagement, factors which have been associated with an increase in positive health outcomes (Leyden, 2003).

The Opportunity in Apartment Neighbourhoods

While the built environment of some apartment neighbourhoods include attractive areas that are well used and maintained, many include large areas of open spaces that are vacant, unappealing, and unused by local residents or the larger community.

These under-used open spaces are well suited to interventions such as landscaping, walking paths, and pedestrian facilities such as benches. They could also be used for other activities that could enhance the built environment around the apartment towers and improve the neighbourhood as a whole.

The strategies below consider ways of adding to or modifying the existing built environment with the aim of improving public health.

While these strategies overlap those found in other chapters of this report, the focus here is optimizing spaces between apartment towers to give residents a sense of convenience, usability and security when engaging in these spaces.

- 2.1 Improve Opportunities for Gathering**
- 2.2 Improve Sense of Security**
- 2.3 Reduce Hazards such as Traffic Blind Spots**
- 2.4 Animate Spaces**

2.1 Improved Opportunities for Gathering

Context

Apartment neighbourhoods are home to thousands of people of all ages and diverse ethnic origins. Each tower commonly houses several hundred people, with some having over one-thousand residents (TNRGGH 2010). However, residents are rarely seen making use of the open spaces around their buildings. Spacing around buildings seem to be poorly suited to the incidental meeting, playing, and casual gatherings that animate successful neighbourhood spaces.

Animated and well-used neighbourhood spaces are those that have a diversity of meeting spaces, characterized by a hierarchy of perceived exposure. These can range from clearly delimited spaces for intimate conversations or small groups, to open fields suited for large group gatherings.

Typical apartment neighbourhoods offer very little definition to spaces around tower blocks. Rather, towers are often surrounded by continuous open space of undefined lawn and paved surfaces.

Solution

A variety of intimate to community-scaled gathering spaces, connected by well-defined path systems, could help build a robust and functional open space framework within clusters of apartment towers.

A well planned open space framework could be animated by new features; children's play spaces, gardens, markets or new buildings, that would generate a vibrant public realm and foster social capital, engagement and a sense of belonging.

Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Supportive

These solutions would generally be supported by current Official Plan policies.

Zoning by-laws: Neutral

A landscape intervention not involving a structure or hard surfaces would likely not be affected by zoning. If a structure – such as a pavilion or an outbuilding – was proposed, the project would likely require a minor variance from the zoning by-law or a zoning by-law amendment if it was deemed to add gross floor area to the site.

Other considerations

A change to the landscape could be subject to site plan review if it involved, for example, grading or changes to drainage, or if driveway circulation and parking was affected.





Images:

Opposite: New public space and commercial area, Halle, Neustadt, Germany, 2006

Top left: Gathering spaces, shops and walking paths, Crescent Town, Toronto, 2006

Top right: Public space and shopping area, near transit hub within Vällingby apartment district, Stockholm, Sweden, 2009

Middle, left: Community barbecue, North Etobicoke, Toronto, courtesy of TRO

Middle right: New public gathering space and commercial area, Brunswick House, London, UK, 2006

Bottom left: New public gathering area and commercial district, Markisches Viertel, Berlin, Germany, 2006

Bottom right: Meeting area, Barbican, London, UK, 2006

2.2 Improved Sense of Security and Lighting

Context

The largely undefined open spaces surrounding apartment neighbourhoods can be associated with a sense of alienation and insecurity, particularly at night. Poor lighting, lack of activity and ‘dead end’ areas are frequently identified as factors affecting the sense of security. As apartment neighbourhoods tend to have an abundance of open space, much of it ill-suited to neighbourhood needs, residents perceive some parts of the neighbourhood as being unwelcoming or unsafe because they are isolated, and vacant (United Way 2011).

Solution

Several solutions are available to improve areas around towers perceived to be unsafe or uninviting. Among these are solutions discussed in other chapters of this report, such as creating walking paths, at-grade housing, and shops and services to maintain what Jane Jacobs calls ‘eyes on the street’. An improved sense of safety could also be accommodated through the provision of a concierge, as discussed elsewhere in this report (see Housing).

One solution with widespread possibilities is to improve lighting. Well-designed lighting not only helps surveillance, but can also define safe comfortable spaces and make a positive aesthetic contribution to neighbourhood identity (Kvarterløft 2007). Lighting can also create a sense of bounded spaces by illuminating paths, open space networks and plantings. The night-time environment in the apartment neighbourhood then becomes coherent, occupied and visible rather than simply an area lit for security purposes.

Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Supportive

These solutions would generally be supported by current Official Plan policies.

Zoning by-laws: Supportive

A neighbourhood lighting program would not be limited by current zoning.

Other considerations

Property owners would have to understand the value of investing in lighting beyond minimal requirements. A neighbourhood lighting program may be developed with other partners, including the City, and in coordination with neighbouring property owners. Neighbourhood lighting programs would also require ongoing maintenance and stewardship planning. Property standards for lighting across property lines could be addressed to allow light sources from one property to provide needed lighting on a neighbouring lot.



Images:

Top: Community lighting safety and public art, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2009

Opposite: Drive ramps in area where children often play, typical apartment, Toronto, 2011

2.3 Reduced Hazards

Context

The site design of apartment neighbourhoods has led to several unintentionally unsafe conditions, particularly for children. Two particularly unsafe conditions include the location of waste bins in unprotected open areas, and lack of pedestrian walkways in drive areas, creating areas dangerous for pedestrians. An additional hazard involves debris falling from balconies to areas at the base of building.

Solution

Unsafe Drive Areas:

The provision of pedestrian zones within drive areas can reduce the potential for collisions, particularly in blind areas, such as at the base of ramps and at corners. The largest concern in this case is the use of drive areas by children for recreation. This danger can be limited by the addition of recreation, seating and children's play areas elsewhere on apartment properties (See Natural Environment and Housing).

Waste Storage

As regulations and procedures for waste storage and collection, and the amount of household waste has changed in the decades since their construction, older apartment properties are now unable to accommodate waste within existing spaces in their buildings. As a result, waste bins are often found in driveways and parking areas, open and accessible to children.

Waste can be accommodated in enclosed and separated outdoor areas, in purpose built waste storage buildings and sorting structures, and even, as in the case of Sweden, channelled through underground systems to central storage and sorting areas.

Falling debris:

Covered awnings, planted buffers, and podium additions are all possible solutions to providing increased safety at the base of buildings. A solution unrelated to the built environment may include an awareness campaign of the dangers of storing loose items on balcony areas.



Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Supportive

These solutions would generally be supported by current Official Plan policies.

Zoning by-laws: Limiting

Reductions of parking areas could require a variance from current zoning standards. New structures or building additions for garbage and recycling would likely require a minor variance.

Other considerations

Cost, stewardship and design issues would be among the other considerations for projects to reduce hazards. The reduction of hazards may support or be driven by an interest in reducing exposure to insurance liabilities. Site Plan approval may be required.

2.4 Animate Spaces

Context

Apartment neighbourhoods are often characterized by single-use zoning, which allows for residential uses with few exceptions for a narrow range of commercial and community uses. The introduction of new uses has been advocated to improve access to essential services and to provide an ability to engage in community and social enterprise and entrepreneurial endeavours.

The introduction of new uses can animate neighbourhoods by providing cultural and commercial uses relevant to local residents and the larger community. The careful placement of these uses can greatly contribute to the definition of open space, facilitating gathering and an improved sense of security.

Solution

The flexibility of apartment properties lends themselves to a variety of interventions to accommodate new uses, including temporary structures, conversion of spaces in the base of existing apartment towers, and the introduction of new infill buildings.

Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Supportive

The Toronto Official Plan states that small-scale retail, service and office uses that serve the needs of area residents and infill projects are permitted within apartment neighbourhoods. The Official Plan also promotes a broader mix of uses along the animation of major avenues where many apartment neighbourhoods are located. However, if the project is deemed to be beyond the scale envisioned by the Official Plans' apartment neighbourhood land use designation, the Official Plan would need to be amended by City Council to permit the project.

Zoning by-laws: Limiting

Zoning Bylaws for apartment buildings, with few exceptions, allow for no commercial activity or at most a small tuck shop. The addition of floor area to the building, and/or any impacts on setbacks, would also likely conflict with the zoning by-law and require an amendment.



Images:

Top, left: Market area within apartment neighbourhood, Tower Hamlets, London, UK, 2006

Top, right: Public square near older and newer apartment housing, Port Credit, Mississauga, 2010

Middle: Public space, with shops and seating at base of tower block, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2009

Bottom left: Community festival, North Etobicoke, Toronto, courtesy of TRO

Bottom right: Community movie night, Scarborough, Toronto, 2012, courtesy of Paul Dowsett, Sustainable T.O.

Theme 3: Transportation

How does the transportation systems affect health?

The transportation system can affect health by influencing: the levels of physical activity among residents, the rates of vehicle-related injuries and deaths, levels of air pollution and noise, access to services and social cohesion. Numerous studies have demonstrated the benefits of active transportation such as walking and cycling for health (TPH, 2011; TPH, 2012a; TPH, 2012b).

Transportation systems can affect health by influencing the:

- **Levels of Physical Activity** - Studies have found that individuals who cycle or walk to work are more fit, less overweight, and have a reduced risk for cardiovascular disease, than those who use motorized modes of transportation (Gordon-Larsen et al., 2005; Pucher et al., 2010; Oja et al., 1991; Hamer & Chida, 2008). Studies have also found that people who use public transit have increased levels of physical activity as a result of accessing the transit services (CIHI, 2006). A Toronto study has estimated that current levels of walking and cycling in Toronto for utilitarian purposes prevents at least 120 deaths per year from chronic diseases, producing health benefits worth approximately \$130 to \$478 million per year, and saving about \$110 to \$160 million per year in direct medical costs (TPH, 2012b).
- **Risk of Vehicle-Related Collisions** - On average, 2200 pedestrians are involved in collisions with vehicles each year in Toronto. On average, 189 of those pedestrians will experience major injuries while another 26 will be killed (TTS, 2012a). It has been estimated that pedestrian-vehicle collisions in Toronto cost over \$53 million per year in medical costs, indirect costs, and human costs (TPH, 2012b). On average, 1160 cyclists are involved in collisions with vehicles each year in Toronto. On average, 41 of those cyclists will experience major injuries while two will be killed (TTS, 2012c). It has been estimated that cyclist-vehicle collisions in Toronto cost over \$9 million per year in medical costs, indirect costs, and human costs (TPH, 2012b). Studies suggest that a much smaller proportion of pedestrians and cyclists are injured or killed in countries that have invested in walking and cycling infrastructure (Pucher & Kilkstra, 2003; Jacobsen, 2003).
- **Access to Opportunities and Services** - Convenient and affordable public transit enables residents to access jobs, schools, health and social services, cultural and recreational opportunities, and stores that sell fresh and affordable foods (WHO, 2011). Accessible transit systems are particularly important for individuals who live on low incomes, the elderly, people with disabilities, and young people, who cannot drive or do not have access to an automobile (TPH 2011). In Toronto, the neighbourhoods with the greatest percentage of people living on low incomes are concentrated in the inner suburbs which tend to have less access to public transit (FCM, 2010; Hulchanski, 2010).

The Opportunity in Apartment Tower Neighbourhoods

Apartment neighbourhoods offer many potential opportunities for promoting healthier, non-auto modes of transportation such as walking, cycling, and public transit.

In Toronto's apartment neighbourhoods, public transit, walking and cycling are proportionally more common than in other types of neighbourhoods, according to a recent study by the Province of Ontario.[GGH] As well, residents of apartment neighbourhoods already consider walking, cycling and transit as central to their daily routines and lifestyle, according to findings of a study by Jane Farrow of Jane's Walk, and Paul Hess of the University Toronto. [Hess and Farrow, 2010].

While many residents in apartment neighbourhoods rely on active transportation, pedestrians and cyclists in these communities contend with considerable barriers and deterrents to safe and convenient travel.

Many stores, services and other daily conveniences upon which residents of apartment neighbourhoods depend are situated away from residential towers, along major roads at the periphery of apartment neighbourhoods or beyond. While these facilities are well placed for car travel, they are poorly situated for those who walk, cycle or use public transit for transportation. This is particularly true for children and the elderly and when weather conditions are poor. Walking through apartment neighbourhoods, residents face deterrents in the form of fencing and large open spaces that have no sidewalks or pathways. Connections with adjacent neighbourhoods are often limited by fencing that demarcates property lines.

Because these fences have been installed in response to issues of security, liability and maintenance, it can be difficult to have them removed. As a result, walking routes within apartment neighbourhoods can be indirect and much longer than necessary, making neighbourhood destinations considerably less convenient and accessible.

The following solutions promote health by reducing barriers to healthy modes of transportation in apartment neighbourhoods:

- 3.1 Remove Physical Barriers to Active Transportation**
- 3.2 Integrate Transit stops and Stations with Apartment Towers**
- 3.3 Improve Cycling Networks and Infrastructure**
- 3.4 Enable Access to Carshare Programs**
- 3.5 Reduce Parking Requirements to Allow Conversion to Alternative Uses**

3.1 Remove Physical Barriers to Active Transportation

Context

In apartment neighbourhoods, walking is a common way for residents to access local amenities, such as schools, transit stops and shopping destinations. Many apartment neighbourhoods had been originally designed with pedestrian walkways linking apartments to one another and to local amenities. Today, however, many of these connections have been severed by fencing that demarcates property boundaries of individual towers sites. As a result, walking trips must now follow indirect routes which make nearby amenities inconveniently more distant.

In addition, the pedestrian environments in and around apartment neighbourhoods have been neglected or maintained in a marginal condition, which discourages walking by making it uncomfortable and unenjoyable. Walking conditions are often worse in winter.

Solution

Establishing more direct and well maintained pathways through apartment sites, as well as the provision of gates in fences, could improve the efficiency of neighbourhood pedestrian networks. It can also reduce walking and cycling distances to shops, services and transit stops. Improving the overall pedestrian environment could provide more positive experiences for pedestrian travel and thereby encourage more active transportation.

Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Supportive

The Toronto Official Plan supports improvements to local walking networks. Expanding path networks or removing fences and other barriers would likely not require amendments to the Official Plan.

Zoning by-laws: Supportive

Adding pathways and gates would likely not require amendments to zoning by-laws or applications for minor variances. Due to some site-specific zoning by-laws, variances may be required due to specific landscape and setback provisions.

Other considerations

Establishing walking paths for residents connecting multiple buildings may require property owners to jointly establish rights-of-way across private land. The parties involved would also have to establish protocols for maintaining the pathways and for addressing issues of liability. The City or other third parties could help to facilitate such agreements.



Images:

Top, left: Footpaths through typical apartment site blocked by fences, Toronto, 2009

Top, right: Limited access to walking, typical apartment site, Toronto, 2006

Bottom, left: Public walking path between apartment blocks, Marzahn, Berlin, Germany, 2006

Bottom, right: Pedestrian paths and plantings through apartment neighbourhood, Göteborg, Sweden, 2009

3.2 Integrate Transit Stations with Apartment Towers

Context

Transit is a vital part of travel within and beyond apartment neighbourhoods. As discussed above, residents of apartment neighbourhoods rely on transit more than the average Torontonian. Apartment neighbourhoods also provide nodes of population density, and therefore transit ridership, in Toronto's inner suburbs which help make frequent public transit service more economically viable.

All of Toronto's apartment neighbourhoods are serviced by at least a bus route, and many are near subway stations. Funded LRT lines will connect even more of these neighbourhoods to high-order transit in the near future. However, transit stops and stations have yet to be directly integrated into apartment neighbourhoods.

Solution

Improving access from apartment properties to existing and planned transit stops and stations can be achieved by building direct pathways through apartment neighbourhoods (as discussed above), as well as improved cross-walks, priority signalling, and larger and more comfortable waiting areas at transit stop locations.

Access to public transit can be further facilitated by relocating or providing new stops within, or directly adjacent to apartment neighbourhoods. These transit stops, if incorporated with well planned waiting areas, could also become 'hot spots' for social gathering, local commerce, and local vitality.

Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Supportive

These solutions would generally be supported by current Official Plan policies.

Zoning by-laws: Neutral

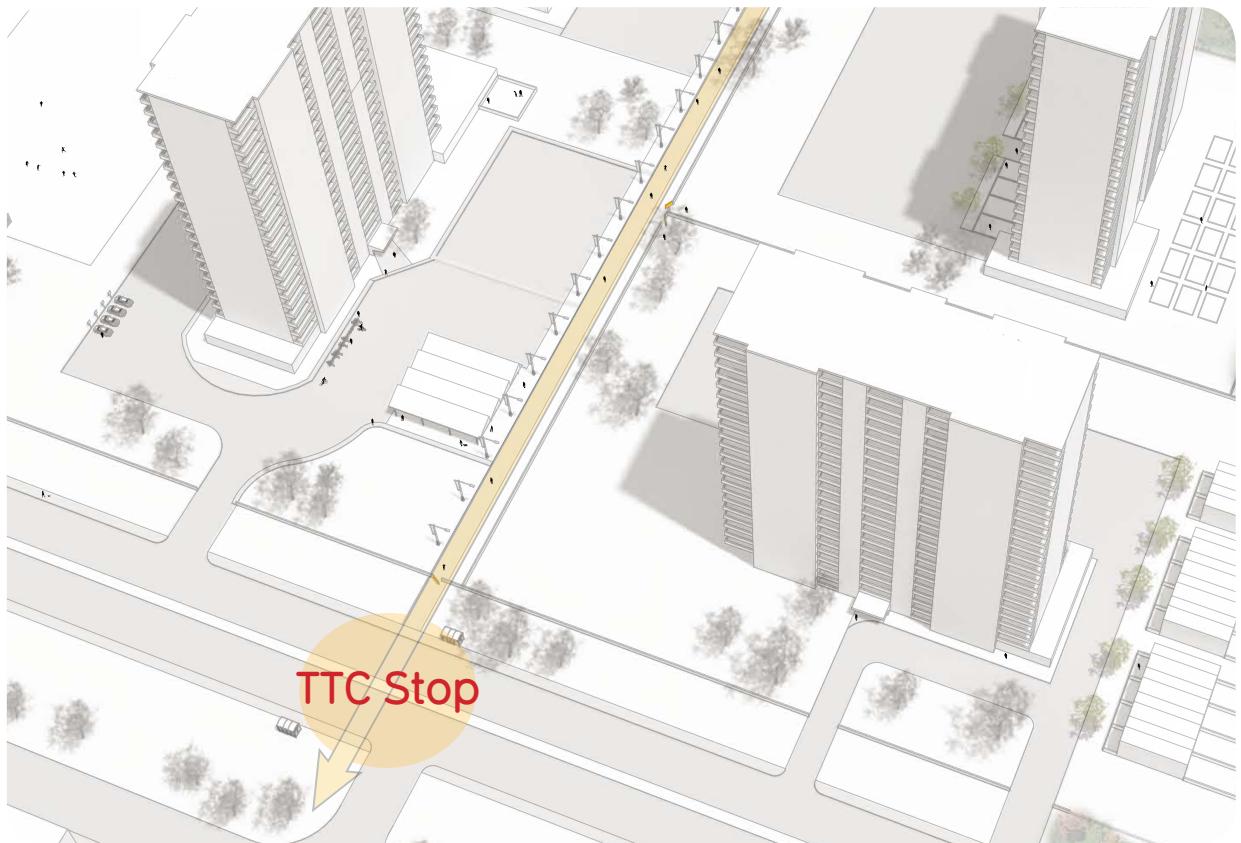
Adding pathways and gates to improve transit access would likely not require amendments to zoning by-laws or applications for zoning variances. Some site-specific zoning by-laws may trigger variances due to specific landscape and setback provisions.

Introducing a waiting area within an apartment property adjacent to a public transit stop may involve a reduction in parking which could be contrary to site specific zoning by-laws. The introduction of new uses, such as temporary vending on private property next to a transit stop, would likely require an amendment to the zoning by-law.

Other considerations

The coordination and cooperation of various property owners would be critical in improving access to transit stops. The City could serve as an agent in facilitating this cooperation.

Direct improvements to public space would require investment by the city and its agencies, such as the TTC. New special 'Apartment Improvement Areas', modelled on the City's various Business Improvement Areas, could be a mechanism for funding the integration of transit with apartment neighbourhoods.



Images:

Top Diagram: Path connecting apartment properties to TTC waiting area

Left: Covered transit waiting area integrated into apartment district, Stockholm, Sweden, 2009

Right: Light rail integrated into apartment district, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2009

3.3 Improve Cycling Networks and Infrastructure

Context

Apartment neighbourhoods have the potential to integrate cycling as a convenient and prevalent mode of transportation. Residents who now cycle in apartment neighbourhoods often feel unsafe using arterial roadways, and at times must resort to using sidewalks [Hess and Farrow, 2010]. Lack of convenient bicycle storage and fear of bicycle theft have been indicated as further deterrents to cycling.

Solution

Apartment neighbourhoods often contain informal cycling networks made up of ad hoc trails in local parks and ravines, informal routes across apartment properties and parking lots, and sidewalks and shoulders along local and arterial roadways.

These networks could be formalized by introducing dedicated cycling or multi-use paths which could provide convenient and safe access to neighbourhood destinations such as schools and shops, and to other neighbourhoods and city districts. The ample open spaces associated with apartment neighbourhoods could provide ideal areas to expand and formalize future cycle networks.

In addition, safe, long term bicycle storage, such as bike locker sheds on parking lots, could be added to apartment properties to make biking more secure and convenient.

Likewise, apartment neighbourhoods may offer suitable locations for bicycle share stations, similar to the *Bixi* system found in downtown Toronto.

Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Supportive

These solutions would generally be supported by current Official Plan policies

Zoning by-laws: Neutral

Some variance from current zoning by-laws could be required if bike routes were to alter the site in a significant manner. However, routes would be generally permitted, as they involve no construction of new buildings or structures.

In the case of bicycle storage, such a use had not been commonly anticipated in the site-specific by-laws for older apartment sites. As such, a zoning by-law amendment or variance may be required if the number parking spaces on the site are reduced.

Other considerations

Bicycle network infrastructure would involve both public and private investment. Financial resources dedicated for such initiatives would need to be identified.

By addressing right-of-way and access concerns, bike route networks could expand to extend across apartment sites, commercial sites, and connect informal routes on the side streets. Forming these networks would involve the co-operation of both City departments and landowners. Extending bike networks to ravines and parks would involve the City's Parks and Recreation Department and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority.

Providing structures dedicated to bicycle storage could require site plan approval.



Images:

Top, left: Cycle paths alongside roadway, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2009

Top, right: Cycle path within apartment neighbourhood, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2009

Bottom, left: Cycle path within apartment neighbourhood, Berlin, Germany, 2006

Bottom, right: Cycle Storage within apartment neighbourhood, Göteborg, Sweden, 2009

3.4 Improved Access to 'Green Fleet' Carshare Programs

Context

Beyond walking, cycling and transit, residents of apartment neighbourhoods often still rely on driving to get to work, for regional travel, and for some local trips. With the costs of car ownership rising, and many residents only requiring auto use for a short-term basis, alternatives to full car ownership are becoming more attractive.

Solution

Apartment neighbourhoods may be suited to support a carshare service. Such services could allow residents access to cars without the burden of full ownership. A carshare program operating from an apartment building site could utilize surplus visitor parking spaces, and include more sustainable models of auto transport such as a green fleet of electric or hybrid cars.

Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Neutral

The current Official Plan recognizes the value of alternatives to private owner-operator automobile transportation, such as carpooling. The current OP however, was established before carshare programs became widespread. The Plan provides no policy direction specifically about car sharing in apartment neighbourhoods.

Zoning by-laws: Limiting

Zoning by-laws establish the number of parking spaces required at each apartment site. Replacing tenant or visitor parking spaces with carshare spaces could reduce the number of spaces below what is required by the site's zoning. Even if an apartment site has spaces in surplus, a carshare program may require an amendment to the zoning bylaw.



Images:

Top: Carshare station in apartment neighbourhood, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2009

Opposite: Parking lot, typical apartment site, Toronto, 2010

3.5 Reduce Parking Requirements to Allow Conversion to Alternative Uses

Context

Apartment neighbourhoods built in the 1960s and 1970s were designed to include a generous supply of parking with an expectation that residents would use cars for much of their daily needs. Surface parking lots covering 30% to 60% of the total site area were not uncommon. Today, however, as more residents walk or take transit, the historic supply of surface parking is no longer needed. Without the same parking needs, apartment neighbourhoods may consider other uses for paved areas originally set aside for car parking.

Solution

Parts of parking lots could be reclaimed for new community or commercial uses by reducing the number parking spaces to reflect current needs and parking supply standards. Surplus parking spaces could be used for a range uses, including carshare programs (as noted above), community gathering spaces, children's play and sports areas, or other uses discussed elsewhere in this report.

Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Supportive

These solutions would generally be supported by current Official Plan policies.

Zoning by-laws: Neutral

Parking requirements are typically set out in site-specific zoning by-laws for each site. Small reductions in these parking requirements could be considered as a minor variance from the established zoning by-law for the site, while larger reductions could require a zoning by-law amendment. In either case, a parking study could be required to support the application.



Surface Parking lots often more than 40% of site area

Theme 4: Housing

How does housing affect health?

Housing and homelessness are important determinants of health. Housing is more than just shelter. It is based on multi-dimensional factors that include: the physical structure, design and characteristics of the home; the social and psychological aspects; the immediate physical area around the building; and the social characteristics and range of services in a neighbourhood (Moloughney, 2004).

The United Way's *Vertical Poverty* report documented the geographic concentration of poverty in high rise buildings in poorer neighbourhoods of Toronto (United Way, 2011). A report from the Canadian Council on Social Development found that low-income children in Canada are more than twice as likely to live in substandard housing as children in higher-income families. Stable, safe and secure housing is associated with positive child outcomes in areas of health, development and well-being (Cooper, 2001).

Housing can affect health by:

- **Limiting Financial Resources for other Necessities** – Housing affordability is closely linked to poverty and income insecurity. People who spend a significant amount of their income on housing have little money available for healthy foods, child care, educational opportunities, and other health promoting opportunities (TPH, 2011).
- **Presenting Biological and Chemical Hazards** – Poor housing conditions are associated with a wide range of health conditions, including respiratory infections, asthma, lead poisoning, injuries, and mental health (Krieger & Higgins, 2002; Bashir, 2002). A United Way study found that nearly 60% of the tenants in high-poverty clusters have vermin, such as cockroaches, bedbugs and/or mice, in their buildings, compared with 42.4% of tenants in neighbourhoods with a low rate of poverty (United Way, 2011). Indoor air quality can also be a problem in high-rise buildings due to issues such as poor air flow in dwellings and improper ventilation of vehicle exhaust from underground parking (HIP, 2005).
- **Presenting Access Issues** – Tenants in low income apartment neighbourhoods have identified frequent elevator break-downs as a source of stress, isolation and physical strain. With unreliable elevator services, routine and recreational activities can become a struggle and a source of anxiety (United Way, 2011).
- **Placing Residents in Poor Built Environments**
 - People who have inadequate income are often forced to live in neighbourhoods that can expose them to higher levels of air pollution, heavier traffic and greater safety hazards. These neighbourhoods can also be lacking in services and amenities such as stores that sell fresh foods, recreational facilities, and health and social services (TPH, 2011; United Way, 2011).
- **Placing Residents in Neighbourhoods with Social Problems** – Concerns about violence can increase stress, restrict social interaction, and prevent health-promoting activities such as walking, cycling and playing in parks (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2011).

The Opportunity in Apartment Neighbourhoods

The modern apartment tower block is in large part the outcome of public health concerns about the state of housing in cities. Originally developed in the context of the housing crisis of inter-war Europe, modern European apartment blocks were designed to be an efficient way to provide mass housing that had access to fresh air, sunlight, and modern conveniences. In the 1960s modern urban planners in Toronto adopted this approach and advocated this form of apartment tower housing as a responsible way to meet demands of housing during Toronto's post-war economic boom (Faludi 1963).

Today, apartment towers house over one million people in the Toronto region. Having experienced a remarkable demographic shift in the past several decades, apartment neighbourhoods now include wide range of households made up of children and young families, elderly, singles, and both established and new Canadians. The mix of households in apartment neighbourhoods is a reflection of how the city grows and changes. As such, apartment neighbourhoods provide a form of housing that has generally performed well over the past half century.

Aging apartment towers can certainly have identifiable deficiencies, such as inefficient heating systems or elevators in need of upgrading (United Way 2011). However these buildings were robustly constructed and have structures that will continue to be sound even as other components degenerate and age. These towers also sit on large areas of open space, which, as noted elsewhere in this report, can be adapted to meet future community needs. They are also homes of communities that are youthful, dynamic and growing. For these reasons, Toronto's apartment towers are well positioned to be re-conditioned and modernized to meet housing needs for the decades to come.

The following solutions would help apartment towers better respond to current housing needs in a way that better supports public health.

- 4.1 Provide Amenities to Support Diverse Households in High-rise Living**
- 4.2 Adapt units for Growing Families and Changing Households**
- 4.3 Build Resident Social Capital through Organizations and Associations**
- 4.4 Expand Housing Choice, New Tenure Options**
- 4.5 Expand Housing Choice, Infill Housing**

4.1 Building Amenities for High-Rise Living

Context

Apartment towers were originally designed for the lifestyles of small households who were enjoying the growing affluence of the late 1960s. To attract tenants, towers were built with amenities such as pools, saunas and tennis courts, which appealed to the sensibility and interests of the target demographic.

The priorities and interests of today's apartment neighbourhood residents do not match the interests of tenants in the 1960s and early 1970s. New Canadians, multi-generational households, or seniors who make a home in apartment towers seek amenities that were not considered when the towers were originally designed and constructed.

The extensive amenities originally built into many apartment towers are in a wide range of conditions. In a few buildings, amenities have been well-maintained and well-used. In most, some or all of the original amenities have been closed, are in disrepair or have been decommissioned.

Solution

A variety of new amenities for apartment neighbourhoods are discussed throughout this report, such as fresh food and shops and community kitchens (see Food Security), daycare services (see Education and Learning) and health services (see Health Services). In the context of this chapter, the following scenarios relate to the physical infrastructure in apartment towers in addition to these uses:

Children's Play Area

A common feature of Toronto's apartment neighbourhoods is an ample open space surrounding tower blocks. However, these open spaces rarely include places designed for children's play. Such amenities could serve a variety of age groups, including play areas for toddlers, play equipment for children, or courts and sports fields for teenagers and youth. These areas could also include seating and shelter for adults supervising their children.

Concierge Service

Concierge or doorman services have become common elements in newly built high-rise housing in Toronto. However, among the city's older apartment complexes, this service is rare. A concierge or doorman working in an apartment tower could help enhance the community's social capital by providing a common and routine point of contact for residents, enhancing the sense of security by providing 'eyes on the street', and providing a direct contact to emergency services. [Church 2005]

Multi-Purpose Rooms and Community Programs

Community groups and organizations are a critical component of Toronto's apartment neighbourhoods. They reflect and support the wide array of affiliations, backgrounds, and interests of residents. However, the lack of access to meeting rooms and community spaces in apartment neighbourhoods presents a barrier to the functioning of these vital agents of enhanced social capital. Providing more space for gathering could help sustain and foster group affiliations. Flexible space suitable for meetings, activities or classes could help groups to build social capital, foster community organization, and reinforce social bonds within apartment communities. Programs operating from such spaces could include yoga, dance classes, cultural practices, homework groups or community meetings.

Furthermore, flexible spaces could accommodate a rotating series of programs from partners outside the building, offering services for residents of the wider community, such as a local service agency office, language training classes (See Education and Learning), public health education (See Health Services), and cooking classes (See Food Security).

Images:

Opposite, top: Community centre addition to apartment block, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2009

Opposite, middle: Community meeting and activity room, Delft, Netherlands, 2009

Opposite, bottom left: Upgraded lobbies and concierge service in older apartment, Berlin, Germany, 2009

Opposite, bottom right: New children's play area under construction, Etobicoke, Toronto, 2011,

courtesy of HIGHRISE.nfb.ca at The National Film Board of Canada



Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Supportive

These solutions would generally be supported by current Official Plan policies.

Zoning by-laws: Limiting

Interior alterations to buildings to accommodate new amenities are unaffected by the zoning by-law. However, the running of programs such as a cooking class or homework group, may be permitted. However, replacing space for commercial or institutional purposes are in some cases prohibited and would require a zoning by-law amendment.



Other considerations

Interior alterations to buildings to accommodate new amenities are unaffected by the zoning by-law. Furthermore, the running of programs such as a cooking class or homework group, may be permitted. However, replacing space for commercial or institutional purposes are in some cases prohibited and would require a zoning by-law amendment.

Site plan approval may be required under certain conditions depending on the type and size of the amenity proposed.



4.2 Adapt Units for Growing Families and Changing Households

Context

Many older apartment towers in Toronto provide an important supply of affordable rental housing for families, containing relatively large units of two, three and four bedrooms. These buildings have the flexibility to adapt new internal and external arrangements in response to changing needs. However, the floor plans of apartment buildings have generally remained unchanged since they were constructed.

The following solutions explore options for adapting units to provide more usable space to better accommodate families.

Solutions

Balcony Enclosures:

Nearly all apartment tower units have balconies. While balconies can provide important outdoor space, their use fluctuates with the seasons. To increase the usability of these spaces, balconies may be converted to solariums with operable enclosures to accommodate year round use. If greater indoor space is desired, balconies could be fully enclosed and converted into interior space.

Ground Floor Terraces:

Many units are located on the ground floor. As demand for family housing grows, these units may be provided with outdoor private space in the form of enclosed gardens suited for children's play.

Larger Units

A way to address demand for family housing and the formation of multi-generation households is to combine smaller units to form larger family flats. The form of combination may include units that are side-by-side or units overtop one another. Ground floor units, for example, could be combined vertically and include a ground floor entrance in the form of a townhouse.

Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Supportive

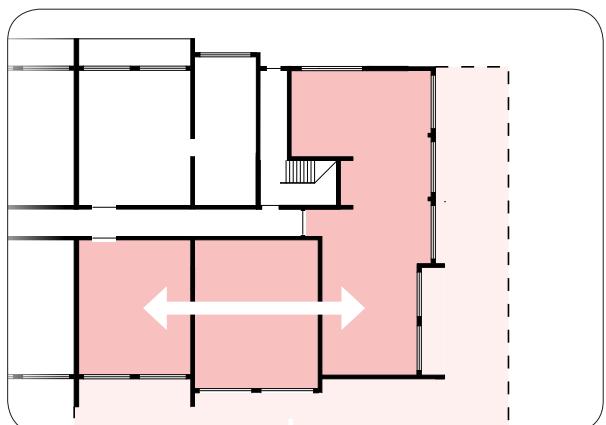
The Toronto Official Plan supports flexibility of housing to accommodate current and future needs of the community. Reconfiguring housing is common practice in areas that the Official Plan identifies as residential.

Zoning by-laws: Limiting

Creating larger suites through the combination of units would change the number of units within a building. This may be contrary to site specific zoning by-laws. As such, it would require a minor variance or zoning by-law amendment. Similarly, enclosing balconies would increase gross floor areas of buildings beyond the limits set by the site's zoning by-law.

Other considerations

A loss of affordable rental units is contrary to affordable housing policies of the City. Reconfiguration of units may be more appropriate in combination with infill housing development to ensure the net number of affordable units is maintained or increased.



Images:

Top, left: Newly enclosed balconies for more living space, Göteborg, Sweden, 2009

Top, right: Private outdoor space on ground floor unit facing common area, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2009

Middle, left: Diagram, creation of larger units through vertical expansion

Middle, right: Private outdoor space on ground floor unit facing common area, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2009

Bottom, left: Greenhouse addition at base of apartment block, Göteborg, Sweden, 2009

Bottom, right: Diagram, creation of larger units through horizontal expansion

4.3 Build Resident Social Capital

Context

Studies have found that security of housing is highly linked to a sense of connectedness and social capital in a neighbourhood. (United Way 2011)

Across Toronto, many neighbourhoods have residents' groups that represent the needs and interest of local communities. They can promote community events, community identity, and engagement in local planning issues. Yet, while apartment neighbourhoods are well-established communities that include hundreds of people, with a few exceptions, these neighbourhoods rarely form residents' groups and social capital is often weak.

Solution

Establishing tenant and resident associations could provide a forum for discussion, create a sense of belonging and accountability, promote improvement projects and enhance neighbourhood stewardship.

Robust community organizations have been found to reduce turnover in buildings, attract residents to neighbourhoods, increase a sense of safety, and foster pride in place.

At the scale of apartment neighbourhoods, organizations can be formed that include residents, buildings owners, local business owners, and institutions to engage in long term planning and investment in the neighbourhood. Similar to Business Improvements Area (BIA) groups found elsewhere in the city, these organizations may facilitate capital projects and negotiate cost sharing and implementation.

Such organizations are common throughout Europe in high-rise housing where they have been instrumental in facilitating positive transformation of neighbourhoods.

Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Supportive

The functioning of community organizations is beyond the purview of the Official Plan.

Zoning by-laws: Supportive

Organizing a community group would not be affected by zoning by-laws. In limited cases, use of a multi-purpose room is restricted to residents of the building. Also, there may be restrictions providing meeting space in an apartment building for a fee.

Other considerations

The establishment of effective resident or neighbourhood associations requires carefully planning and organization. Outside partners, such as the United Way and other agencies may play a crucial role in facilitating organization as associations are established.

At both the building and neighbourhood scale the City of Toronto may provide tools in the establishing such organizations.



Image:

Community neighbourhood visioning meeting in apartment neighbourhood, Toronto, 2008, courtesy of Jane Farrow

4.4 Expanding Housing Choice, New Tenure Options

Context

The inclusion of Apartment Towers in Toronto's suburban neighbourhoods was originally intended to help provide a mix of housing tenure. Towers provided affordable housing options to residents of various income levels and at different stages in life.

However, in apartment neighbourhoods themselves, there are few options except renting. It has been found that residents of apartment neighbourhoods wish for options to establish equity in their housing (United Way 2011).

With very few ownership options in these neighbourhoods, and with single family home ownership often beyond financial reach, residents face the choice of either forgoing an expectation to build equity or leaving the neighbourhood to seek affordable home ownership elsewhere in the region. This leads to neighbourhood turnover, the loss of established community members, a sense of temporariness, and a lack of long-term investment.

Equity share in housing can also improve community social capital, housing security and long-term commitment to the neighbourhood.

Realizing the benefits of other tenure options would have to be considered in ways that also maintains or expands affordable rental housing. As first homes for many people who move to Canada, expanding Toronto's affordable rental housing stock is important not only for existing tenants but also for future residents to the city.

Solution

Expanding affordable tenure options in Toronto's apartment neighbourhoods may provide opportunities for residents to develop an equity stake in their housing. Tenure options could include collective models such as co-operative housing and co-housing, as well as models for affordable ownership.

Other jurisdictions, such as the UK, provide alternative tenure options in apartment neighbourhoods such as partial ownership models. An example of partial ownership is the 'rent-to-own' model, in which a portion of monthly rent is allocated to an equity stake in the property, which gradually builds over time.

Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Limiting

The Toronto Official Plan would be generally supportive of housing which supports people at all stages of life. The Official Plan identifies small-scale retail, service and office uses and compatible infill development as appropriate for apartment neighbourhoods. However, it does not identify these areas as places for population growth. This could deter support for a project that would add more people to the neighbourhood.

Zoning by-laws: Supportive

There would not be an impact on zoning if a change in tenure is not accompanied by a change in building form or new buildings.

Other considerations

As stated in the Toronto Official Plan, the preservation of affordable housing is of primary importance to the City of Toronto. The introduction of alternative tenure models may strengthen neighbourhoods by expanding affordable housing choice. However, models would need to be developed to protect overall affordability and ensure that current tenants directly benefited from such changes. This requires further study.

4.5 Expanding Housing Choice, Infill Housing

Context

Toronto's apartment neighbourhoods are home to increasingly diverse households, including growing families, multi-generational households and the elderly. Despite this diversity, high-rise apartment towers are the dominant, if not the only type of housing available in many of these neighbourhoods.

An opportunity exists to diversify the housing mix in apartment neighbourhoods with the significant areas of open space that surround most apartment towers. In many apartment neighbourhoods, properties are larger than one hectare and more than 80% of the site is unoccupied. Groupings of towers create even larger parcels of several hectares. Introducing infill housing in these spaces could add choices for residents while still leaving an appropriate amount of air and light between buildings.

Solution

The open space within apartment neighbourhoods is able to accommodate a variety of housing alternatives to high-rise living. Mid-rise and grade-related housing, for example, could be designed to meet the needs of two key groups within apartment neighbourhoods – families with young children and the elderly. If carefully positioned using thoughtful urban design, infill buildings could improve the outdoor amenities and built environment (See Built Environment) of apartment neighbourhoods. They could also accommodate new activities, such as shops and services that support an active and thriving neighbourhood.



Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Neutral

The Toronto Official Plan would be generally supportive of housing which supports people at all stages of life. The Official Plan identifies small-scale retail, service and office uses and compatible infill development as appropriate for apartment neighbourhoods. However, it does not identify these areas as places for population growth. This could deter support for a project that would add more people to the neighbourhood.

Zoning by-laws: Limiting

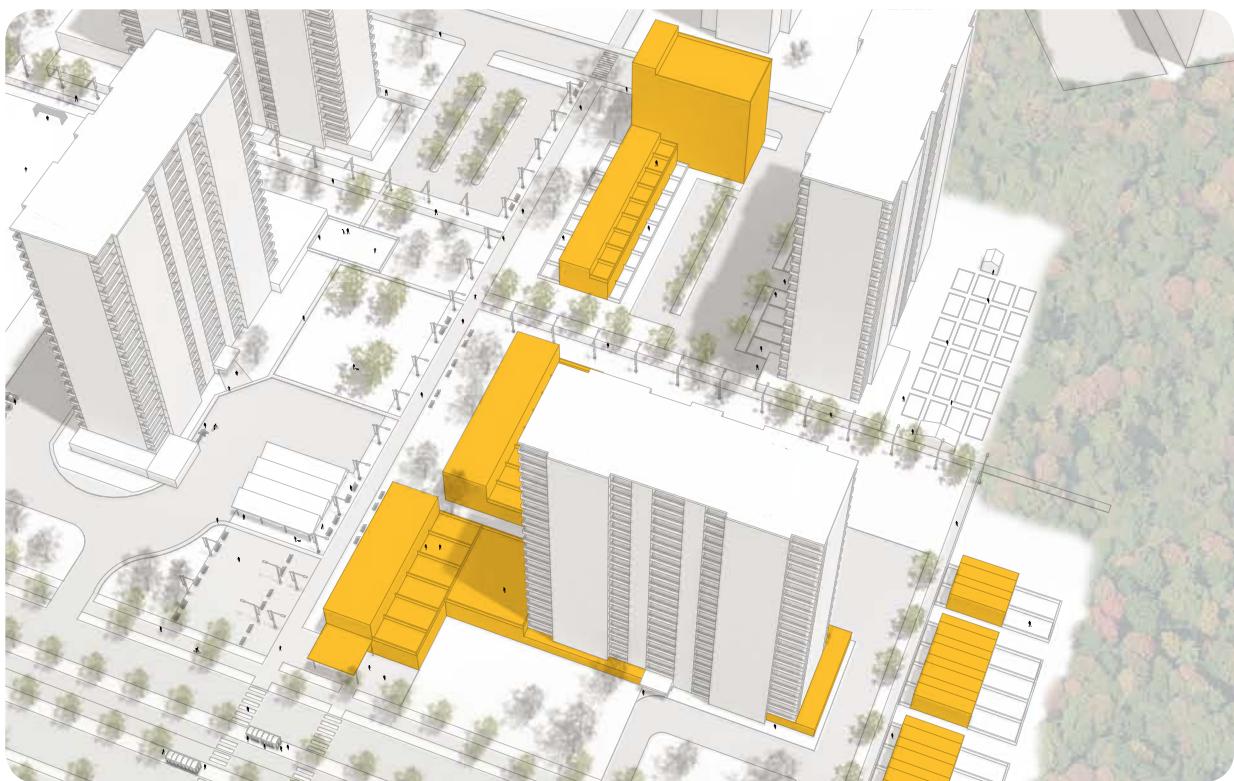
Current zoning by-laws would most likely prohibit infill housing. The addition of new housing to these neighbourhood would likely conflict with zoning by-law standards regarding building setbacks, total floor area, and provision of open space. Certain housing types, such as seniors housing, may not even be a permitted use under the zoning by-law, and the amount of parking proposed for new infill development would likely not meet standards set by the original zoning.

Other considerations

The provision of infill housing in Apartment Neighbourhoods requires the development of procedures to ensure maximum benefits accrue to existing residents, including:

- design guidelines to ensure the placement of buildings 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.

Toward Healthier Apartment Neighbourhoods: A Healthy Toronto by Design Report



Images:

Opposite: New infill low-rise housing at base of apartment block, London, UK, 2009

Top, middle left: Diagram, infill housing of various types within typical apartment neighbourhood, Toronto

Middle right: Infill mid-rise mixed-use development, Parkway Forest, Toronto, 2010

Bottom right: Infill mid-rise housing and mixed-use development in apartment neighbourhood, London, UK, 2009

Bottom left: New mid-rise housing and commercial addition to apartment block, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2006

Theme 5: Employment, Income and Opportunities

How does employment and income opportunities affect health?

While Toronto's apartment neighbourhoods were originally constructed to accommodate middle-income singles, couples and small families, these neighbourhoods currently house close to one half of Toronto's low income households (United Way Toronto, 2011). The United Way report, *Vertical Poverty*, indicates that from 1981 to 2006, incomes among renter household fell by over \$6,000, about double that of all households in Toronto, while average rents increased over the same time (United Way Toronto, 2011).

In 2008, the Toronto Public Health report, *The Unequal City*, demonstrated that those areas of the City that have a greater proportion of people living on low incomes have higher rates of illness, disease, and death at an earlier age, than those areas with a smaller proportion of people living on low incomes (TPH, 2008).

The relationship between income and health in Toronto exists for a wide range of health indicators and is consistent with the trends found in other jurisdictions. People who live on lower incomes have higher rates of lung cancer, higher rates of diabetes, and lower rates of preventive dental care (TPH, 2008). While income is one of the most significant indicators of health, there are other social factors such as race, immigration status, and education, that also contribute to health inequalities in Toronto (TPH, 2008).

These health inequalities are not just about the extremes in wealth and poverty. The Toronto report demonstrates that there is a continuous gradient of health in relation to income with health status improving with increasing levels of income. Toronto residents who live in the high income areas of the City are healthier than those who live in the middle income areas, and those who live in the middle income areas of the City are healthier than those who live in the low income areas (TPH, 2008).

By working to reduce health inequities, to make everyone as healthy as those with the high incomes, significant reductions in a number of negative health impacts can be realized for the population as a whole (TPH, 2008).

Income, employment and business opportunities influence health by:

- **Enabling Access to Resources** -Income and employment have an impact on many elements of life which affect health including access to quality housing, a safe neighbourhood, high quality food, clothing, transportation, higher education and quality childcare (TPH, 2011).
- **Affecting Personal and Social Relationships**
 - Economic hardships can have a negative impact on family and social relationships, parenting and self-esteem. They can also limit an individual's ability to participate in social, cultural and recreational activities (Kahn & Pearlman, 2006).

The Opportunity in Apartment Neighbourhoods

Neighbourhoods which provide income opportunities build social cohesion by stimulating participation in social, cultural and recreational activities. Local business activity contributes to the social capital of a neighbourhood, which in turn creates conditions for improved health. Apartment neighbourhoods, with their diverse and dense populations, have great potential to become places that support and attract entrepreneurs and social enterprise. Today however, there are few businesses or services present in Apartment Neighbourhoods because of the zoning by-laws that restrict commercial and institutional activity.

When originally designed, apartment neighbourhoods were conceived primarily as areas for residing, with commercial, entrepreneurial and social activity provided for off-site through local shopping plazas and community centres located within convenient driving distances. As a result, the majority of apartment neighbourhoods are zoned for residential use only with a small number providing for a small local tuck shop.

The more recent demographic changes in these neighbourhoods, and the resulting changes in travel behaviour (see Transportation) and community needs, demonstrate a growing need for neighbourhood shops, services and institutions. The solutions discussed below consider how existing social networks and diverse community needs within apartment neighbourhoods can support local entrepreneurial and social enterprises, increase neighbourhood social capital, support the local economy, and improve general neighbourhood well-being.

- 5.1 Introduce outdoor vending in apartment neighbourhood open spaces
- 5.2 Allow for home-based businesses
- 5.3 Incubate local talent through support and training services
- 5.4 Expand or introduce ground floor retail

Notes:

A recent report by the Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office, 2009, found “widespread interest in various aspects of self-employment – small business development, social enterprise, training for home workers,” Further, the Office noted “a recognition that there are opportunities to form stronger relationships with local businesses to support local hiring and other collaborative initiatives, business development, social enterprise, training for home workers, ...”

5.1 Introduce Outdoor Vending in Apartment Neighbourhood Open Space

Context

Apartment neighbourhoods are home to thousands of Torontonians yet few allow opportunities to sell goods and services. Providing goods and services within apartment neighbourhoods could open up opportunities for local residents who are entrepreneurial and community minded.

Solution

The large open spaces around apartment towers offer places for temporary or mobile commercial activity such as markets, food trucks and yard sales.

Outdoor vending would allow low-overhead, entry-level opportunities for entrepreneurs while animating open spaces and encouraging social engagement.

One approach would be to establish weekly markets that provide tables available for rent at modest rates. This could encourage the participation of local residents while expanding the range of goods and services available in a neighbourhood.

Another model, developed at the Scadding Court Community Centre, provides modular kiosks to house longer-term operations such as fresh food vendors, and initiatives suited to indoor environments, such as a bicycle repair shop (Scadding Court 2012). Kiosks operate year round. Operating on a timeshare basis, businesses could set up in response to customer needs and preferences while forming a mutually supportive grouping of business.



Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Supportive

The Toronto Official Plan generally supports neighbourhood-centred activities such as local markets. The Official Plan may require the proponent to show that the market would provide benefits to neighbourhood residents. On the other hand, the Official Plan may be understood as limiting commercial activity in primarily residential areas especially if the activity could draw customers from outside the neighbourhood.

Zoning by-laws: Limiting

Outdoor vending would generally be prohibited under zoning by-laws for apartment tower sites. Approval of a market would require either a minor variance to the current zoning or a zoning by-law amendment in many cases.

Other considerations

Site Plan Approval and a building permit would be required if the new use involves construction of structures over a certain size.

Outdoor vending would be subject to the same licensing, health and safety inspections as operations elsewhere.

A successful outdoor market venture would require institutional support in the form of a non-profit corporation, agency or other existing organization.



Images:

Opposite: Venders kiosk and seating in apartment neighbourhood, Stockholm, Sweden, 2011

Top, left: Market in public space in apartment neighbourhood, Vallngby, Stockholm, Sweden, 2009

Top, right: Market in apartment neighbourhood, Berlin, Germany, 2009

Middle, left: Market, Tower Hamlets, London, UK, 2006

Middle, left: Visualization of shops and markets in typical apartment neighbourhood, Toronto

Bottom, left: Scadding Court Modular Market, Toronto, 2012

Bottom, right: Venders market, Swiss Cottage, London, UK, 2009

5.2 Allow for Home Business

Context

Newcomers with professional training who reside in apartment neighbourhoods can find it a struggle to establish themselves in the local economy. Locating opportunities and leveraging local social and familial connections can be especially difficult when little business or employment occurs in the immediate neighbourhood.

Solution

Working from home could provide small start-up professionals in apartment neighbourhoods a place to develop local business skills, expand social and business networks, and establish an initial client base. Although there are challenges to operating home offices in apartment buildings, such as matters of noise and access, a number of new economy businesses (such as translating, editing, and web development) and small-scale professional services (such as accounting or legal advising) would cause little adverse effects on neighbours, and are generally considered appropriate home-based business uses in residential areas.

Home-based businesses could operate from a suite anywhere in the building, or in a live-work office of ground floor units. The latter condition could allow clients to visit with minimal disturbance to neighbours.

Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Supportive

The Toronto Official Plan provides little discussion with respect to live-work areas in apartment neighbourhoods. However, the Plan supports a mix of locally focused uses in neighbourhoods and it identifies a trend of live-work spaces becoming more prevalent.

Zoning by-laws: Limiting

Home-based businesses would generally be prohibited by current zoning by-laws. Commercial activity is commonly restricted on apartment sites to small tuck shops. To permit such uses, a minor variance or zoning by-law amendment would likely be required.

Other considerations

Any home-based business could be subject to municipal business licensing.

Security, liability and access may be a key consideration if clients are to visit the home office. This would have to be considered in consultation with the building management.

5.3 Incubate Local Enterprise

Context

Residents of apartment neighbourhoods, many of whom are New Canadians, can face a steep learning curve in understanding the procedures, opportunities and challenges for employment or starting an entrepreneurial initiative in Toronto. Both perceived and real barriers can impede potential entrepreneurs from pursuing new businesses or individuals from pursuing employment opportunities. Local employment counselling and business incubation services can help foster and guide nascent initiatives and provide a supportive place for them to grow.

Solution

Apartment properties include spaces amenable to hosting business incubation services, such as those now operated by agencies and community centres throughout the City. Incubators generally provide communal office spaces, or hot-desks, and shared office equipment and services. Services they offer include employment counselling, accounting expertise, and other business support useful to new entrepreneurs.

A business incubation centre in an apartment building could connect local residents to jobs while also allowing small start-up businesses and non-profits to develop. It could foster opportunities for residents with business and organization acumen to build networks and act as a bridge to resources outside the immediate community. Such a program could introduce greater economic opportunity, wellbeing, and health outcomes.

A small-scale incubator could be inserted in existing space on the ground floor of an apartment tower. Renovating ground floor space or building additions could allow larger scale centres in a tower. Otherwise, a centre could operate from a new infill building developed in an apartment neighbourhood.

Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Supportive

The Official Plan generally supports local business and organizational development in neighbourhoods. There is however, little recognition of land uses similar to business incubators which blend education, commercial enterprise and community services.

Zoning by-laws: Limiting

A business incubation centre would generally be prohibited under current zoning by-laws. Such a project would require approval from City Council to amend the zoning by-law to permit the use.



Images:

East Scarborough Storefront: A Multi-purpose service delivery and enterprise incubator in the Kingston-Galloway Neighbourhood in Scarborough, Toronto. Image Courtesy of East Scarborough Storefront

5.4 Introduce or Expand Ground Floor Retail

Context

Retail is largely absent from apartment neighbourhoods. A small number of apartment buildings include small retail spaces that provide tuck-shops on the ground floor. However, they operate under certain constraints. Access is generally only permitted through the apartment building lobby, with no direct external entrance to the store. Store signage and visibility is often restricted, and shopkeepers are typically prohibited from displaying goods outdoors. For example, vegetable stands commonly found in front of neighbourhood corner stores elsewhere, are not permitted.

Solution

The ground floors of apartment towers provide an opportunity to introduce new commercial enterprises and expand existing tuck shops so they can provide a broader variety of goods and services to serve the needs of the neighbourhood.

Through an addition to the base of an apartment tower, existing or new commercial initiatives could also operate at a larger scale. Such local commercial operations could allow more options for entrepreneurs, local employment, and convenience for the neighbourhood community as a whole.

Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Supportive

While the Official Plan provides little discussion specifically about the outdoor sale of goods, the Plan promotes the animation of public spaces and the localization of shopping. Additions to apartment buildings are contemplated by the Plan in apartment neighbourhoods subject to criteria, including “providing ground floor uses that enhance the safety, amenity and animation of adjacent streets and open spaces” (Section 4.2 Policy 2g).

Zoning by-laws: Limiting

The introduction or expansion of commercial space, as well as the outdoor display of goods, is currently prohibited under apartment neighbourhood zoning by-laws. A minor variance or zoning by-law amendment would be required.

Other considerations

A proposal for greater retail activity would likely require site plan approval and building permits, and would be subject to municipal business licensing, as well as existing health and safety regulations.

Commercial waste collection would need to be accommodated.





Images:

Opposite: Ground floor café in apartment block, Berlin, Germany, 2009

Top, left: Ground floor shops in apartment block, Berlin, Germany, 2006

Top, right: New ground floor shop addition to apartment building, Berlin, Germany, 2006

Middle, left: Ground floor shops and services, Crescent Town, Toronto, 2006

Middle, right: Ground floor shops, Moscow, Russia, 2006

Bottom, left: Ground floor shopping arcade at base of apartment block, Stockholm, Sweden, 2011

Bottom, right: Storefront addition to apartment tower, Toronto, 2012

Theme 6: Education and Learning

How do education and learning affect health?

There is a strong relationship between education, health and economic development. Education has an impact on health by:

- **Influencing income, employment and working conditions** – A good education increases the chances that an individual will do work that provides greater control in decision-making, has increased job security, higher income and safe and non-hazardous working conditions (TPH, 2011).
- **Increasing healthy behaviour** – Individuals with higher levels of education have greater access to, and understanding of, information regarding healthy behaviour. They also have the ability to optimize their use of available health services (Davey-Smith et al., 1998).
- **Producing Social and Economic Spin-offs**
– Investments in education are associated with higher graduation rates, greater employment earnings, better health outcomes, reduced reliance on social assistance, lower crime rates, greater government revenues and lower government expenditures (Lynch, 2004). Evidence indicates that children who participate in high-quality early childhood education and care programs experience a range of short and long-term health and educational benefits as well (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2008).

The Opportunity in Apartment Neighbourhoods

Apartment neighbourhoods tend to be home to large communities of children, youth and young adults. They are also communities that accommodate people new to the city and who are seeking to make improvements to their life and that of their families. In these ways, the City's apartment neighbourhoods are places where education – both formal and informal – is a valuable good.

The following strategies can be used to further access to education in apartment neighbourhoods:

- 6.1 Introduce Youth Extra-Curricular and Education Programs
- 6.2 Introduce Newcomer Settlement Support and Adult Education Programs
- 6.3 Introduce Preschool and Family Resource Services

6.1 Introduce extra-curricular and education for children and youth

Context

Apartment neighbourhoods were generally not designed to include spaces for extra-curricular and educational programs for youth, such as dance, music, art or tutoring and homework groups. While many of these services are offered in surrounding communities, the lack of existing space, as well as the zoning restrictions prohibiting institutional and commercial uses, limits these activities in apartment neighbourhoods.

Solution

Space in the ground floors of apartment buildings is often well-suited for conversion to multi-purpose rooms that could accommodate extra-curricular and educational activities. Space for these uses could also be incorporated into building additions, and new mixed-use infill buildings.



Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Supportive

These solutions would generally be supported by current Official Plan policies.

Zoning by-laws: Limiting

Use or programming of multi-purpose rooms for extra-curricular and education is permitted generally. However conversion and leasing of multipurpose spaces for separate use, such as to a not for profit group, may require a minor variance or amendment. Current zoning by-laws would likely not permit private classes offered as a commercial service. A zoning by-law amendment would likely be required.

Images:

Top: New playing field in apartment neighbourhood, Copenhagen, Denmark (Kvarterløft 2007)

Opposite, left: Idea Store, community services and resource centre, addition to tower block, London, UK, 2006

Opposite, right: Community resource centre interior, London, UK, 2006

Bottom: Wellesley Library and Community Centre, St. Jamestown, Toronto, 2011

6.2 Introduce Newcomer Settlement Support and Adult Education Programs

Context

Home to large communities of new Canadians, access to newcomer support services and adult skill training is critical in apartment neighbourhoods. Newcomer support and adult career centres can connect residents with education programs across the city, as well as offer specific courses to improve skills. Locating such services in apartment neighbourhoods provides these services where there is an identified need.

Solution

English as a Second Language (ESL) training, newcomer settlement services and other adult skills training could be located in the base of existing apartment towers, in additions to buildings, or as a part of new mixed-use infill development.

Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Supportive

These solutions would generally be supported by current Official Plan policies.

Zoning by-laws: Limiting

As an institutional use, an educational service would likely be a prohibited use under current zoning by-laws. Existing zoning by-laws restrict the construction of new buildings, due to limits on setbacks and floor areas. Introducing such uses in apartment neighbourhoods would likely require a zoning by-law amendment.



6.3 Introduce Preschool and Family Resource Services

Context

Apartment neighbourhoods are home to disproportionately large numbers of youth and new parents compared to other neighbourhoods in the city. [TNRGGH 2010]. Daycares can be found in some apartment neighbourhoods, but they are not widespread. Less common still are centres providing parenting education and support. Such centres, including Ontario's Early Years Centres, can offer early learning and literacy, parenting programs and workshops, as well as health information, referrals and outreach activities.

Solution

An Early Education Centre could be located in the base of an existing apartment tower, in an addition to the base of a tower, or as a part of new mixed-use infill development.

Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Supportive

These solutions would generally be supported by current Official Plan policies.

Zoning by-laws: Supportive

The use of an apartment tower site for community parenting education is generally a permitted land use under current zoning by-laws. Earlier reforms to apartment zoning, through the 1970s and 1980s made childcare generally a permitted use within apartment towers across Toronto.



Images:

Top: Children's toys and activities mobile container, run by local community, within apartment neighbourhood, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2009

Bottom, left: Childcare facility addition to apartment tower, Toronto, 2012

Bottom, right: Children and youth centre, Delft, Netherlands, 2009

Theme 7: Food Security

How does food security affect health?

A nutritious diet and adequate food supply are central for good health. Food security means having the physical, social and economic ability to access sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet dietary needs and food preferences that allow for an active and healthy life (FAO, 2003).

In Canada, food insecurity is more prevalent in urban areas compared to rural areas (Health Canada, 2011). In Toronto, 10.8% of households reported moderate or severe food insecurity (TPH, 2011). Poor access to healthy foods has been associated with:

- **Poor Physical and Mental Health** – Individuals who experience food insecurity have a greater chance of developing multiple chronic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, food allergies, and major depression and distress (Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003). Poor nutrition in childhood has also been associated with a range of behavioural, emotional and academic problems (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010).
- **Increased Use of Health Services** - Food insecurity has a negative impact on health services because individuals with nutritional deficiencies tend to be less resistant to infections, recover more slowly, have more diseases, longer hospital stays, and incur higher health care costs (Che & Chen, 2001).
- **Vulnerable Populations** – Food insecurity is higher in households: with children led by female lone parents; with lower incomes; receiving social assistance, worker's compensation, or employment insurance; with low levels of education; of Aboriginals and recent immigrants; and in which the dwelling was not owned (Health Canada, 2011).
- **The Design of the Built Environment** - Many people living in Toronto's inner suburbs find it difficult to access healthy foods because of distance, physical barriers such as highways, lack of access to public transit, as well as poverty (Martin Prosperity Institute, 2010). Many of the apartment neighbourhoods in Toronto are located in areas considered "food deserts" with little options for healthy and affordable food within walking distance.

The Opportunity in Apartment Neighbourhoods

Apartment neighbourhoods have the potential to provide opportunities to foster a healthy food culture. Communities in apartment neighbourhoods, much like other well established city neighbourhoods, have the potential for creating a healthy food culture through informal gatherings, community kitchens, community gardens, fresh food shops, cafes and restaurants and local knowledge transfer. These activities can produce a variety of health and social benefits:

- They can make fresh and healthy foods more accessible to people in apartment neighbourhoods;
- They provide jobs and economic opportunities for members of the community;
- They can make culturally appropriate foods more readily accessible; and
- They can build social cohesion by giving people places to interact socially.

However, at present, there are a number of challenges that are preventing these opportunities and limiting these activities:

- There are few places set aside for outdoor events and community gatherings despite the substantial amount of open space that is typical of apartment neighbourhoods. The current zoning by-laws do not permit the sale of food in apartment neighbourhoods with the exception of small convenience stores.
- While a small percentage of Apartment Towers contain tuck shops, these stores, like convenience stores elsewhere, do not sell the volume of produce needed to maintain affordable prices, or are not well equipped to carry fresh food items. As a result less healthy pre-packaged food is a more affordable, accessible, option.

The following solutions examine options in fostering healthy food culture in apartment neighbourhoods throughout Toronto.

- 7.1 Provide facilities for collective cooking**
- 7.2 Introduce Outdoor Fresh Food Markets**
- 7.3 Expand or Introduce Green Grocers**
- 7.4 Introduce Community Gardens / Urban Agriculture**

7.1 Provide facilities for collective cooking

Context

The social networks of apartment neighbourhood communities can be a source of mutual support, and an aid in developing a healthy food culture. Living in close proximity, food preparation (and enjoyment) can be shared among neighbours. While opportunities for collective cooking, such as barbeques, picnics, and backyard dinner parties, exist elsewhere in the city, they are generally rare in apartment neighbourhoods.

Solution

The large outdoor grounds of apartment neighbourhoods provide several opportunities for collective cooking, including barbeques, pizza ovens and tandoori ovens. Paired with banquet tables and other seating, these outdoor features could facilitate regular community events and meals.

The provision of an indoor community kitchen could accommodate year round collective cooking, facilitating cooking groups and cooking classes. A commercial grade kitchen could allow residents to run catering companies and other food-related commercial enterprises.

Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Supportive

These solutions would generally be supported by current Official Plan policies.

Zoning by-laws: Limiting

Minor modifications to landscaping to allow outdoor cooking would generally be permitted. Current zoning by-laws would likely prohibit construction of larger structures, such as covered cooking areas or ovens, especially if the structure is enclosed.

Other considerations

Business licensing and health and safety regulations would have to be addressed for food preparation and storage if food was being prepared for sale.





Image:

Opposite: Community kitchen, Toronto, courtesy of Recipe for Community

Top: New Community Kitchen, public cooking demonstration and community festival, East Scarborough Storefront, 2012. Courtesy of Paul Dowsett, Sustainable T.O.

7.2 Introduce Outdoor Fresh Food Markets

Context

Local outdoor markets, specializing in fresh food, are common features of many local communities, villages and neighbourhoods throughout Toronto. Furthermore, a resurgence of fresh food trucks and delivery, such as those by Toronto's Food Share organization, provides home delivered seasonal local fresh food. Today these activities are largely absent from apartment neighbourhoods.

Solution

Apartment neighbourhoods contain large surface parking lots which may be converted to accommodate fresh food markets on a monthly, weekly, or daily basis. Similarly, existing surface parking could accommodate food trucks for scheduled visits.

By providing seating, shade, and access to a ground floor washroom within the apartment building, food sales in parking lots could provide access to fresh food and create an enlivened market atmosphere at the base of existing towers. To further support the market, small auxiliary structures providing storage and additional infrastructures may be considered.



Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Supportive

These solutions would generally be supported by current Official Plan policies.

Zoning by-laws: Limiting

Current zoning would not permit commercial activities such as fresh outdoor food markets. If vendor stalls were limited in size (such as removable tables) they likely would not be subject to zoning. However any auxiliary building added to a parking lot to support food sales would likely violate provisions typical of apartment neighbourhood zoning.

Other considerations

A fresh food market would require business licenses and would be subject to other regulations, such as those as relating to health and safety.

Commercial waste collection would need to be accommodated.

The logistics of a market would need to be managed by property owners, particularly the temporary loss of parking spaces. Community partners could help in management planning and organization.



Images:

Opposite: Fresh food kiosk in apartment neighbourhood, Halle Neustadt, Germany, 2006

Top left: Fresh food market, Tower Hamlets, London, UK, 2006

Top right: Fresh food market, Stockholm, Sweden, 2011

Bottom left: Outdoor fresh food market, St. Jamestown, Toronto, courtesy of TRO

Bottom right: Swiss Cottage farmers' market in apartment neighbourhood, London, UK, 2009

7.3 Expand or Introduce Green Grocers

Context

Access to fresh produce through local green grocers or grocery stores as is common in Toronto's older neighbourhoods and newer tower communities such as City Place, Regent Park or Liberty Village.

In contrast, older tower apartment neighbourhoods lack convenient, walkable access to fresh food shops, largely due to current zoning by-laws prohibiting commercial activity in these neighbourhoods.

The bulk of apartment neighbourhoods are served by malls or plazas located beyond comfortable walking distance on roads that are often intimidating to pedestrians. [Hess 2011]. As many residents walk or take transit as their primary means of travel, this condition presents a daily barrier to accessing to healthy and fresh food.

Solution

A fresh food shop or grocer could be introduced in the base of existing buildings, an existing tuck shop could be expanded, or a new standalone building could be constructed as part of a new mixed-use housing development (See Housing).

Paired with outdoor food stands and seating, fresh food shops could also contribute to social exchange and community vibrancy.

Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Neutral

The Toronto Official Plan would support small-scale local services and commercial activity in apartment neighbourhoods. A larger scale store may not be supported.

Zoning by-laws: Limiting

Existing zoning by-laws would most likely not permit a proposal for a retail store such as a green grocer. A grocery store use may not be permitted in most apartment neighbourhood by-laws. The associated parking requirements and any new building footprint would also not be permitted currently.

Other considerations

A new green grocer would be subject to the building code, and other relevant health, business and safety regulations.

If a new structure is proposed, the project could be subject to site plan approval to address landscaping, access and specifics of the building.

Commercial waste collection would need to be accommodated.



Images:

Top and bottom left: New grocery store at base of apartment block with outdoor vending, Moscow, Russia, 2006
Bottom, right: Green grocer at base of tower block, London, UK, 2006

7.4 Introduce Community Gardens / Urban Agriculture

Context

Small-scale urban agriculture has been found to increase social capital as well as provide a yield of healthy food for the local community. Gardening, both for food and pleasure, is practiced in neighbourhoods throughout this city. However, apartment neighbourhoods provide few opportunities for gardening or allotments for planting vegetables.

Solution

The tower in the park format of apartment neighbourhoods provides opportunities for small-scale urban agriculture using small-scale community gardens and allotments.

Several apartment neighbourhoods in Toronto are already engaging in small-scale projects. These efforts could be expanded through the provision of auxiliary garden sheds to allow for tool storage, infrastructure for irrigation, local markets to sell yields, and a more robust network of community organizations to facilitate partnerships within the neighbourhood and beyond.

Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Neutral

The Toronto Official Plan has little discussion on small scale local food production. It does recognize the importance of ensuring “adequate amounts of safe, nutritious, culturally acceptable food are available to all (page 1-4)”. It also recognizes the importance of preserving high quality farmland as part of re-urbanizing to accommodate regional growth, and addressing food scarcity when upgrading neighbourhoods (pages 2-2, 2-22).

Zoning by-laws: Limiting

While small scale food production would not be affected by zoning, the provision of new structures for food production and the sale of produce on site is likely be prohibited by current zoning bylaws.

Other considerations

Site plan approval may be needed to address issues such as drainage and grading. Community organization and neighbourhood partnerships would also be central to an agriculture program. Other considerations include security, waste, logistics and coordination with property owners, residents and partners



Images:

Top: Greenhouse addition at base of apartment block, Göteborg, Sweden (Gårdstens Bostäde 2007)

Bottom left: Community garden in apartment neighbourhood, London, UK, 2006

Bottom right: Community garden at East Scarborough Storefront, Toronto, 2012

Theme 8: Community Health

What is the role of Health Services and Promotion in Neighbourhoods?

Health services, particularly those intended to maintain and promote health, prevent disease, restore function and contribute to health. Community health services improve health by:

- **Improving access to health care services**
- Access to health services can affect health as much as the quality of those services. Although Canada has a publicly funded health care system, there are physical, geographic and socio-cultural barriers that can prevent all members of the community from making use of those services (Butler-Jones, 2008).
- **Improving access to a full range of services that impact health** - Many Canadians with low to moderate incomes have limited, or no access, to health services such as eye care, dentistry, mental health counselling and prescription drugs which are not typically covered by Canada's health care system (TPH, 2011).
- **Improving access to health promotion and disease prevention activities** – Community health programs include programs directed at preventing disease and promoting health. These programs, which are provided primarily by public health units, are directed at encouraging healthy lifestyle choices, promoting policies and environments that foster health, reducing infectious diseases with vaccinations, and preventing outbreaks of food-borne and vector-borne diseases such as West Nile Virus (TPH, 2011).
- **Providing Multi-Purpose Public Spaces** – The health of the community can be improved by providing multi-purpose public spaces that encourage physical activity, recreation and socializing in public spaces that are designed for a variety of purposes. The United Way's Vertical Poverty report found that residents in apartment neighbourhoods want to "see health or other services for adults available in the building common rooms". At the top of this list were programs directed at health, well-being and exercise (United Way, 2011).

The Opportunity in Apartment Neighbourhoods

Because of their physical size and population base, apartment neighbourhoods could accommodate a range of services, programs and facilities related to fitness, nutrition, health services and health education. Currently, however apartment neighbourhoods are serviced with health services that are located at the periphery or outside of apartment neighbourhoods. This is, in part, the legacy of land use patterns dating from the years when apartment neighbourhoods were first developed. As a result, residents must generally travel outside their neighbourhoods to seek routine medical and health advice and treatment.

If community health services were re-located inside apartment neighbourhoods, they would become more accessible to residents and could foster closer relationship between service providers and the community.

While all solutions discussed in this report relate to community health, the following solutions particularly examine the opportunities for the delivery of health care and preventative health services.

- 8.1 Promote Public Health Education**
- 8.2 Provide Multi-Purpose Health Services Clinics**
- 8.3 Provide Programs and Facilities for Physical Fitness**

8.1 Promote Public Health Education

Context

The large communities in apartment neighbourhoods could benefit from access to health education services offered by Toronto Public Health, including children and youth, the elderly, and newcomers. Currently these services are not operating widely within apartment neighbourhoods.

Solution

Space in the ground floors of apartment sites could be well-suited for rotating public health education programs for targeted demographic groups in a given community, such as youth, new parents, or the elderly. Health education could also be provided through outdoor venue space or in facilities located in new additions to apartment buildings or in new mixed-use infill buildings.



Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Supportive

These solutions would generally be supported by current Official Plan policies.

Zoning by-laws: Limiting

The delivery of public health education program could be permitted within a multi-purpose room in an apartment neighbourhood. The zoning would have to be addressed if the public health education program became a permanent use of space and required a building permit to renovate a space inside an apartment building.

8.2 Provide Multi-Purpose Health Services Clinics

Context

Key to the high quality provision of health care is accessibility, both in terms of the convenient location of services, and removal of cultural barriers to services, such as translators, in providing care for new Canadians.

Currently, the full range of health services is often dispersed beyond apartment neighbourhoods. The associated cost and travel time may be a barrier to accessing care.

Solution

Many apartment neighbourhoods contain the population density and diversity to justify a multi-purpose health clinic. With the aim of increasing accessibility, locating a clinic within an apartment neighbourhood would provide services within walking-distance to these communities, reducing the cost and nuisance of car travel or transit to seek care.

A multi-purpose clinic may include several primary care providers (family doctors), as well as a rotating series of clinics with specialists addressing health themes relevant to the neighbourhood demographics, such as women's health, geriatric and paediatric care, or diabetes.

Medical care could be tied to preventative health measures such as dietary and nutrition services, as well as providing culturally specific health education relevant to new Canadians and diverse resident groups.

Such a clinic could be incorporated into the base of an existing apartment tower, as a new stand-alone building, or as a part of new mixed-use infill development.

Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Neutral

The Toronto Official Plan does include provision for community services within apartment neighbourhoods, but is not specific about provision of health service offices.

Zoning by-laws: Limiting

A medical clinic is not a use permitted under the zoning by-laws of most apartment neighbourhoods. A zoning by-law amendment would, in that case, be required.

Other considerations

Medical offices would be subject to professional and licensing requirements. Consideration about building access, signage and parking would also have to be accounted for, and could trigger the need for site plan approval.



Image:

Opposite: Healthy eating workshop, Toronto, courtesy of Recipe for Community

Top: Wayfinding to health services within apartment neighbourhood, London, UK, 2009

8.3 Provide Programs and Facilities for Physical Fitness

Context

Residents of apartment neighbourhoods often have limited access to affordable physical recreation facilities. When originally built, apartment towers often provided a series of fitness amenities such as tennis courts and pools. Today however, many of the original facilities have fallen into various states of disrepair, with many permanently closed. Furthermore, amenities that do exist often do not address the needs of the current resident community, particularly children, youth, new Canadians and the elderly.

Solution

The tower in the park configuration is highly amenable to the introduction of facilities for physical fitness. In addition to playgrounds, playing terrains and sports courts, outdoor areas could also provide community fitness equipment and fitness areas for the elderly.

Interventions discussed in other chapters of this report could also provide opportunities for physical fitness, such as improved paths to existing recreational trails (see Natural Environment), and community recreational facilities (see Transportation). Indoor fitness areas for yoga, dance (see Education and Learning), and elderly fitness, among other activities, can be incorporated into existing buildings, as well as in new structures.

Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

Official Plan: Supportive

These solutions would generally be supported by current Official Plan policies.

Zoning by-laws: Limiting

Bylaws for apartment sites generally allow for dance and exercise studios as part of resident amenity spaces, but prohibit using those spaces as commercial businesses or to serve residents of nearby buildings. Changes to the landscaping of buildings to accommodate new fitness amenities may also violate by-law provisions for hard and soft landscape surfaces as well as limits on the gross floor area. The addition of a new fitness structure could violate coverage and setback requirements. Each of these situations could require a minor variance or zoning by-law amendment.



Image:

Top: New basketball court in apartment neighbourhood, Toronto, courtesy of Recipe for Community Appendices (Below): Apartment neighbourhood as healthy and active communities, Drawing by William MacIvor, ERA Architects

Health Strategies Summary Chart

Solutions

Official Plan

Zoning By-law

Other Considerations

Theme 1: Natural Environment

- 1.1 Improve microclimate and outdoor comfort
- 1.2 Provide access to green space, parks and natural areas
- 1.3 Reduce negative impacts to air and water quality

Supportive	Limiting
Supportive	Neutral
Supportive	Supportive

Site Plan Approval

TRCA approval, right of way / access over private property and TRCA managed lands

Financing, and capital expenditure

Theme 2: Built Environment

- 2.1 Improve opportunities for gathering
- 2.2 Improve sense of security and lighting
- 2.3 Reduce hazards such as traffic blind spots
- 2.4 Animate spaces

Supportive	Neutral
Supportive	Supportive
Supportive	Limiting
Supportive	Limiting

Site Plan Approval, financing, stewardship, design issues

Coordination with neighboring property owners

Financing, stewardship, design issues, and insurance

Financing, stewardship, waste collection, urban design guidelines

Theme 3: Transportation

- 3.1 Remove physical barriers to active transportation
- 3.2 Integrate transit stations with apartment towers
- 3.3 Improve cycling networks and infrastructure
- 3.4 Improved Access to Carshare Program
- 3.5 Reduce parking requirements to allow conversion to community uses

Supportive	Neutral
Supportive	Neutral
Supportive	Neutral
Supportive	Limiting
Supportive	Neutral

Coordination with neighboring property owners

Costs, Coordination with neighboring property owners, public investment

Right of ways/access issues, public and private investment, coordination with Parks Dept, TRCA, as well as liability

Site Plan Approval

Planning new community uses

Theme 4: Housing

- 4.1 Provide amenities to support diverse households in high-rise living
- 4.2 Adapt units for growing families and changing households
- 4.3 Build resident social capital through organizations and associations
- 4.4 Expand housing choice, new tenure options
- 4.5 Expand housing choice, infill housing

Supportive	Limiting
Supportive	Limiting
Supportive	Supportive
Limiting	Supportive
Neutral	Limiting

Investment and additional ongoing costs, min. cost downloading to tenants, site plan

Protect affordability

Partnerships with groups outside neighborhoods, support to develop resident/landlord dialogue

Protecting overall affordability

Financial incentives, approvals, design standards, community support

Solutions

Official Plan

Zoning By-law

Other Considerations

Theme 5: Employment, Income and Opportunities

- 5.1 Introduce outdoor vending in apartment open space
- 5.2 Allow for home-based businesses
- 5.3 Incubate Local Enterprise
- 5.4 Introduce or Expand Ground Floor Retail

Supportive	Limiting
Neutral	Limiting
Neutral	Limiting
Neutral	Limiting

Site Plan Approval, Business licensing and health inspection, waste, parking and signage
Business licensing, building security, parking and signage
Business licensing and health and safety
Access, signage and parking, licensing, building permit approvals waste management

Theme 6: Education and Learning

- 6.1 Introduce extra-curricular and education for children and youth
- 6.2 Introduce Newcomer settlement support and adult education programs
- 6.3 Introduce preschool and family resource services

Supportive	Limiting
Neutral	Limiting
Neutral	Supportive

Building permits, health and safety, cost, rent levels
Access, signage and parking, as well as building permit approvals, cost, rent levels
Access, signage and parking, building permit approvals, license for daycare operation, cost, rent levels

Theme 7: Food Security

- 7.1 Provide facilities for collective cooking
- 7.2 Introduce outdoor fresh food markets
- 7.3 Expand or introduce green grocers
- 7.4 Introduce community gardens / urban agriculture

Supportive	Limiting
Neutral	Limiting
Neutral	Limiting
Neutral	Limiting

Building Permit, Business and Health permits/licensing
Cost, business and health permits/licensing; cooperation with property owners
Site plan approval; Business and Health permits/licensing
Community organization, Neighborhood partnerships, Security, Waste

Theme 8: Community Health

- 8.1 Promote public health education
- 8.2 Provide multi-purpose health services clinics
- 8.3 Provide programs and facilities for physical fitness

Supportive	Limiting
Neutral	Limiting
Supportive	Limiting

Costs, building access, signage and parking, as well as building permit approvals
Costs, site plan approval and building permit, professional licensing, access signage and parking
Costs, site plan approval and building permit, partnerships

September 2012

