

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



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.

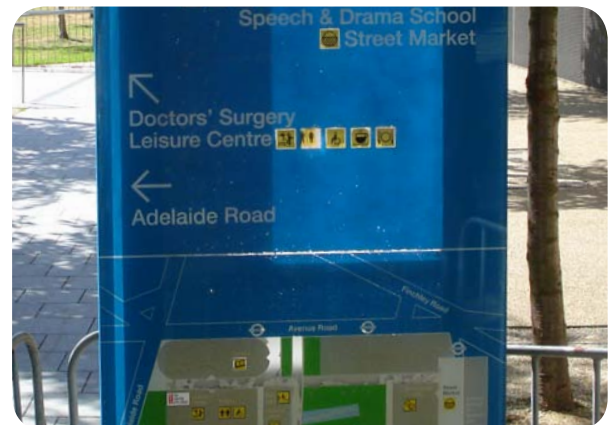


Image:

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

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