

**Strong Neighbourhoods  
A Call to Action...  
2005**



**strong** neighbourhoods



## **A Call to Action...**

**A Report of the Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force**



**United Way  
of Greater Toronto**



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*The Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force wishes to acknowledge with gratitude the financial support of the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario.*



# Foreword

The Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force is pleased to release its report – ***Strong Neighbourhoods – A Call to Action***. This report is the culmination of a year’s work that focused on an issue which is vital to the future health and prosperity of our city – namely, how to restore the strength of our city’s neighbourhoods.

Our Task Force was comprised of civic leaders from the private, labour, voluntary, and public sectors in the City of Toronto. Together, we recognize the importance of strong neighbourhoods to Toronto’s standing as a world-class city, and together, we are committed to mobilizing the attention and the resources that are necessary for Toronto to regain its reputation as a city of great neighbourhoods.

When we began our work a year ago, United Way of Greater Toronto had just released *Poverty by Postal Code* – a report which revealed dramatic growth in poverty in neighbourhoods in the City’s inner suburbs. A year earlier, the Toronto City Summit Alliance report *Enough Talk* drew attention to neighbourhood ‘hot spots’ of high need and low infrastructure, and the City of Toronto report *Cracks in the Foundation*, revealed a serious inability of community organizations to meet growing needs in their communities. It was these trends – growing neighbourhood poverty and inadequate community infrastructure – that provided the driving force for our work.

The goal of the Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force was to develop a strategy for revitalizing the neighbourhoods impacted by these trends. The plan which we have developed identifies nine neighbourhoods for immediate investment, but as we move forward, there will be others that will require attention. Our vision of Toronto is one where all neighbourhoods have the community services and facilities that make them good places to live.

Our vision is also one where neighbourhoods foster civic participation and inclusion. Neighbourhood revitalization must start from the ground up – with the residents who live and work in neighbourhoods and who have a vested interest in what happens in their communities. Building local capacity to lead neighbourhood change is critical, and our strategy provides a means for making this a reality.

We call on all governments to respond quickly to our proposed *Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy*. We urge them to implement the key components of the strategy: an intergovernmental agreement to ensure coordinated investment; a commitment for new targeted resources and mechanisms to support local resident leadership and participation.

Strong neighbourhoods mean safer streets, engaged, active residents, and ultimately, a more prosperous economy. This benefits everyone in Toronto. The responsibility to strengthen Toronto neighbourhoods does not rest exclusively with governments. Business, organized labour and community agencies all make important contributions to building a stronger city, neighbourhood by neighbourhood.

The neighbourhood strategy we are recommending addresses one of the most deeply troubling developments in Toronto: patterns of social exclusion based on geography that constitute a threat to the health, well-being and prosperity of everyone in our City. We are driven by an ultimate vision of Toronto neighbourhoods where no one is disadvantaged by where they live. We must all work in partnership to make this vision a reality.

The time to act is now.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Harding".

Bob Harding



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shirley Hoy".

Shirley Hoy



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Frances Lankin".

Frances Lankin

# Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force

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## Our Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal

**"Neighbourhoods are what make this city great. We must value what is distinct about our neighbourhoods and recognize that which has value beyond its cost."**

Mayor David Miller  
Inaugural address, December 2, 2003

**"Healthy neighbourhoods are the hallmark of Toronto's civic success. Their strength comes from the rich mixture of cultures, safe streets, abundant green space, diversity of shops and cultural amenities, and the social infrastructure of community services and programs."**

Frances Lankin, President and CEO, United Way of Greater Toronto  
*Poverty by Postal Code, 2004*

In April 2003, the Toronto City Summit Alliance released its report, *Enough Talk*, which called upon the Prime Minister and Premier to implement a new fiscal deal for municipalities, and to immediately address the need for new physical infrastructure in the Toronto area. It also pressed government to address the urgent need for more affordable housing, improved access to post-secondary education, quicker economic integration of newcomers, and **new social infrastructure in the City's poorest neighbourhoods.**

This call for renewed investment in community services and facilities reinforced the central message of the City of Toronto's *Social Development Strategy* adopted by City Council in 2001. It recognized that neighbourhood playgrounds, community centres, libraries and services for newcomers, the unemployed, and seniors are just as important as roads and sewers.

If our city is to remain strong, vibrant and competitive in the years to come, then its neighbourhoods must be places where people want to live. Parents must feel that neighbourhood streets are safe for their children to walk, and that local parks are safe places for their children to play.

They must be assured that there are places for their teenagers to meet and get involved in sports and social events. They need to be confident that the shops and services that are a necessary part of daily life will be nearby and accessible. And they want to know that they will be welcomed and have a connection to their neighbours. Where we live matters to all of us.

The state of Toronto's neighbourhoods demands attention today because many are beginning to show signs of distress, putting at risk Toronto's long history as a city of great neighbourhoods. To understand what is happening at the neighbourhood level, it is necessary to consider the major socio-economic trends and population shifts that have taken place in the City over the last twenty years. Since 1981, Toronto's population has grown rapidly. Much of this growth has been due to the almost 60,000 newcomers who make Toronto their home each year. At the same time, the cost of living in Toronto has steadily climbed.

Many residents have suffered from the disappearance of well-paid manufacturing jobs, stagnating minimum wage rates, declining social assistance rates, limited access to employment insurance, and the extraordinary difficulty many recent immigrants are having entering the labour market. The combination of these factors helps to explain why finding affordable housing has been such a great challenge and why the rate of family poverty in Toronto grew from 13% in 1981 to almost 20% in 2001.

Thousands of families caught in the squeeze between the high cost of living and low incomes have chosen the only route possible – to move to areas of the city where housing costs are cheapest, causing a dramatic increase in the concentration of poverty within certain neighbourhoods. Many of these new areas of highly concentrated poverty are in the former suburban municipalities of Scarborough, North York and Etobicoke – in areas originally built for lower densities and for middle-income households. As these neighbourhoods grew with an influx of poorer residents, community

social services have proved inadequate to meet the needs of these "inner suburbs." These are what *Enough Talk* referred to as Toronto's neighbourhood 'hot spots' – those areas of high population density, broad population needs but with few social services and facilities to meet the requirements of the families, children, youth and seniors who live there.

If the experience of neighbourhood distress in cities in other parts of the world tells us

anything, it is that we cannot afford to ignore these trends.

The history in the United Kingdom and the United States of America tells us that the concentration of neighbourhood poverty is an early warning sign of neighbourhood decline.

Having few local services and supports to deal with the impact of concentrated poverty only makes the situation worse. Unless there is a concerted effort to address the root causes of decline and to improve local conditions, then further decline is highly likely.

*Enough Talk* called upon the three levels of government to enter into an agreement to address the need for community services in these neighbourhood hot spots. But before that could happen, a detailed plan of action was required to form the basis of such an agreement.

*We need strong neighbourhoods all across Toronto, for both humanitarian and economic reasons. For example, with a shrinking labour pool, we need programs and services that promote labour market attachment. The economy needs everyone.*

Don Drummond, Senior Vice President & Chief Economist,  
TD Bank Financial Group, in a presentation to the  
Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force,  
April 8, 2004

The Strong Neighbourhood Task Force was formed in April 2004 to take up the challenge of *Enough Talk*. A joint initiative of United Way of Greater Toronto and the City of Toronto, and with the support of the Government of Canada and the Province of Ontario, the goal of the Strong Neighbourhood Task Force is to build an action plan for revitalizing Toronto neighbourhoods.

As a Task Force comprised of individuals from three orders of government, the private and voluntary sectors, and organized labour, we are united in a common belief that Toronto's health and prosperity are closely tied to the well being of its neighbourhoods. We also believe that investing in services and facilities is key.

We believe that the trends playing out at the neighbourhood level are serious, and that if left to continue, will lead to further decline and the exclusion of these neighbourhoods from the mainstream of society. As has happened in other cities around the world, the life chances of children and youth growing up in these neighbourhoods will be negatively affected. The City, Province and country will bear the cost.

The only way that our strategy for Toronto neighbourhoods can work is through the concerted efforts of all orders of government. But government investment is only part of the equation. The voluntary sector helps to organize local communities, is a critical source of local knowledge and leadership, and can contribute expertise to supporting neighbourhood development. Organized labour plays a key role by providing opportunities for worker involvement and community participation. Businesses are instrumental to the vitality of local neighbourhoods, and every business in Toronto benefits from the prosperity that results from a strong regional economy. All three sectors have resources to contribute to neighbourhood investment.

We are driven by a vision of Toronto neighbourhoods where no one is disadvantaged by where they live. It is a vision of inclusion, of opportunity, of community cohesion, and of neighbourhood pride. It is also a vision where neighbourhood residents have the opportunity to influence and shape how their communities evolve. It is a vision supported by a full range of accessible neighbourhood services and facilities, and broader social programs that benefit all residents no matter where they live. We want to ensure Toronto's reputation as a city of great neighbourhoods, where people, regardless of income, can live healthy and productive lives.

*“Place-based policy targets specific neighbourhoods or communities for integrated interventions that respond to location-specific challenges, and engage fully the ideas and resources of residents. The aim is both better government policy and more community capacity.”*

Neil Bradford, 2005



Photo by Veronica Henri © United Way of Greater Toronto

## The goals of our Task Force were clear:

- Articulate a vision for strong neighbourhoods in Toronto;
- Identify the principles, scope and purpose of an agreement among all orders of government, setting out a structure for mobilizing investment in community services and facilities in Toronto neighbourhoods;
- Identify the neighbourhoods in Toronto that face the greatest challenges, conduct an audit of existing community service and facility gaps and develop a plan for investment to close those gaps; and
- Advocate for change.

***Strong Neighbourhoods: A Call to Action*** is our blueprint for neighbourhood change to assist our political leaders to realize the potential of Toronto's neighbourhoods. The strategy has two main elements:

- Targeted investments in specific neighbourhoods to ensure a responsive system of services and accessible community space; and
- A neighbourhood perspective to evaluate and reshape government policies, programs and funding mechanisms so that they better support all neighbourhoods.

## Our report contains the following sections:

- **Section 2, Strong Neighbourhoods Matter**, describes why strong neighbourhoods matter to individuals, cities, and their economies. It describes why some neighbourhoods are struggling, and provides the Task Force's vision for strong neighbourhoods.
- **Section 3, Investment to Strengthen Neighbourhoods**, examines the approaches that have been used to coordinate public and voluntary sector investments to strengthen neighbourhoods, and describes the principles on which our strategy to strengthen Toronto neighbourhoods is built.
- **Section 4, Identifying Neighbourhoods for Investment**, provides a fact-based approach to identifying a preliminary set of neighbourhoods for targeted investment.
- **Section 5, Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy**, describes the Task Force's strategy to strengthen neighbourhoods across Toronto.
- **Section 6, Moving Forward**, summarizes our conclusions and recommendations, and provides a timeline for action to strengthen neighbourhoods.

## Strong Neighbourhoods Matter

Canada's cities are central to the country's social and economic well being. As Canada's largest urban region, the Greater Toronto Area alone produces nearly 20 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product, is home to almost 40 percent of Canada's business head offices, and has one of the most highly diversified economies in the world (Drummond et al, 2002). And at the heart of Toronto's success is its neighbourhoods.

These are the places where people live and pursue the many routines of everyday life such as shopping, school, work, religious observance, visiting, and recreation of all kinds. Neighbourhoods are the place Torontonians identify as "home" and where they build a sense of identity and pride. Their diversity and vitality are what makes Toronto a unique place to live.

Neighbourhoods underpin our democratic and multi-cultural society. One of the strengths of Toronto's neighbourhoods has been the interaction between residents of different socio-economic and ethno-racial backgrounds. The interaction that takes place in mixed neighbourhoods helps build the linkages among groups and individuals that promote co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit. It provides an opportunity to build collective values, trust, support networks and a sense of belonging. Ultimately, interaction within neighbourhoods contributes to the development of social cohesion. Inclusive, grassroots approaches to neighbourhood development increase people's confidence and capacity to participate in the community. As a result, a broader and more diverse group of people is able to contribute to local decision-making and engage in the democratic process.

### **Toronto neighbourhoods are struggling**

Despite their critical importance to Toronto's social and economic success, many of the City's neighbourhoods are facing difficulties. The potential consequences are serious. Distressed neighbourhoods have been identified by the private sector as a significant threat to the region's economic competitiveness. The TD Bank Financial Group's *The Greater Toronto Area (GTA): Canada's Primary Economic Locomotive in Need of Repairs*, identifies persistent, "deep pools of poverty" as one of the five major impediments that threaten the longer-term economic performance and quality of life in the GTA (Drummond et al, 2002).

The difficulties faced by neighbourhoods have several dimensions and causes.

**More people are living in poverty than ever before.** In spite of the economic recovery of the late 1990s, Toronto continues to experience a higher rate of poverty than the rest of Canada, Ontario and the Greater Toronto Area. According to the 2001 Census, 552,300 or 23% of all city residents had incomes below the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO)<sup>1</sup>.

The number of families living in poverty grew considerably between 1991 and 2001. During this period, the number of Toronto families living in poverty increased by 36.1%, and the poverty rate for families rose from 16% to almost 20%. In 27 of Toronto's 140 neighbourhoods, this poverty rate grew to at least 50% higher than the City average (29.1% or higher).

The number of individuals living in poverty also increased during this period. Between 1996 and 2001, the number of individuals living in poverty grew by 5.3%, and the poverty rate for individuals grew to 37.5%. In nine neighbourhoods, the poverty rate among individuals grew to at least 50% higher than the City average, or more than 56.3%.

**Poverty is geographically concentrated.** The growing concentration of poverty in Toronto was documented by United Way of Greater Toronto and the Canadian Council on Social Development in their 2004 report, *Poverty by Postal Code: The Geography of Neighbourhood Poverty, 1981 – 2001*. Their analysis of Census data over a 20-year period found a striking increase in the number of neighbourhoods with concentrated poverty.<sup>2</sup>

In 1981, 17.8% of low-income families lived in higher poverty neighbourhoods. By 2001, this had grown to 43.2% of all low-income families. Over this same period, the number of higher poverty neighbourhoods approximately doubled every ten years, from 30 in 1981, to 66 in 1991, to 120 in 2001.

### **Economic restructuring has broadened the income divide.**

The economic restructuring of the 1980s and 1990s has increased income polarization among Toronto families. During the 1990s, the proportion of low-income families rose from 16.8% to almost 20%, while higher-income families rose from 18% to 23.2%. Not surprisingly, middle-income families decreased as a percentage of all families from 65.2% to 56.9% (United Way of Greater Toronto et al, 2002).

This growing gap is also reflected in the City's neighbourhoods. During the 1990s, the median income in Toronto's 12 poorest neighbourhoods fell from \$43,600 in 1990 to \$36,800 – a loss of \$6,800 in real income over the decade. Conversely, the median income in Toronto's 12 wealthiest neighbourhoods increased from \$114,200 in 1990 to \$125,600 in 1999 – an \$11,400 growth in real income over the ten-year period. (United Way of Greater Toronto et al, 2002).

<sup>1</sup> Although there is no official measure of poverty in Canada, the Statistics Canada Low Income Cut Off (LICO) measure is probably the best known. Low Income Cut Off levels are the income levels where families spend 20 percentage points more of their pre-tax income on food, shelter and clothing than the Canadian average. Different levels are established for different sizes of families and different sizes of urban and rural areas. The levels are updated annually based on the Consumer Price Index.

<sup>2</sup> *Poverty by Postal Code* used the Statistics Canada Low Income Cut Off as its measure of poverty. For the purposes of this study a "neighbourhood" was defined as one Census tract.

**Income support programs have been reduced.** While there have been some recent, modest increases to social assistance rates and the minimum wage, income support programs have not kept pace with inflation and have left many residents struggling to make ends meet. Social assistance rates have fallen by 40% in real terms over the last decade; employment insurance benefits have fallen by 7%, and today only 40% of the unemployed qualify for benefits; and the purchasing power of the minimum wage has fallen by 10%.

**Social services have not kept pace with demographic changes and need.** Community-based service providers have not received the resources they need to keep pace with the increased demand for their services. They have also been hampered by increasingly restrictive government funding and reporting requirements. In a recent survey of human service organizations in Toronto, one multi-service organization reported having to file 170 different funding and evaluation reports in a single year. Without adequate funding to deliver services, community organizations must direct their efforts to fundraising rather than their core business. Many have had to scale back or close programs that meet neighbourhood needs. (City of Toronto, 2003).



**Funding practices make it difficult to invest in neighbourhoods with significant needs.** Since the 1990s it has been virtually impossible to establish new community organizations, even when there is a demonstrated need for them. Most funders now provide short-term project funding, and do not help organizations pay for core costs such as rent, program development, volunteer development and management, and strategic planning. As a result, funders are sometimes unable to invest in essential programs and community capacity building in high need areas because of the lack of local neighbourhood organizations.

**Neighbourhoods lack access to the most basic resource: community and public space.** In recent years access to affordable public space for community programs and meetings has been severely reduced by changes in provincial, municipal and school board policy. While recent funding decisions by the Province have improved public access to school facilities, the lack of space available for community use continues to limit recreational, cultural and skill-building activities.

## The time to act is now

Neighbourhood decline is characterized by the out-migration of better-off families, overall depopulation, low income levels and dependency on income support programs, high crime rates, high substance abuse rates, high mortality rates and loss of businesses. The fact that Toronto neighbourhoods are exhibiting the concentration of low income levels documented in *Poverty by Postal Code* and increases in violent crime addressed in the City's Community Safety Plan are clear warning signs that the time to act is now. Without action, the short-term prospect for some of Toronto's distressed neighbourhoods is bleak, and the longer-term prospects for the city poor.

We must take action now because a single declining neighbourhood has an impact on all neighbourhoods. Declining neighbourhoods increase the cost of basic municipal services. For example, deteriorating housing and an inability of residents to invest in fire prevention increases the cost of fire services (Joassart et al., 2004). Once neighbourhood decline has reached a certain point, it is very difficult and expensive to turn this process around (United Way of Greater Toronto and the Canadian Council on Social Development, 2004).

Research from the UK, the US and Canada confirms that neighbourhood conditions affect the health, school readiness, educational attainment and employment of their residents. When neighbourhoods are struggling without the preventative supports that improve outcomes in these areas, individuals must live with reduced opportunities, and society as a whole must pay for more expensive remedial services to address the situation.

*Without local institutions that draw families and young people together around common interests and activities – religious, social, and recreational organizations, effective schools, safe and well-used public spaces – even the most heroic child-rearing is likely to fail (Rothman, 2005)*

## Neighbourhood services make a difference

Skilled workers are not drawn to cities simply because of economic opportunities; they are drawn to locations with amenities such as health and education programs, appealing natural environments and vibrant neighbourhoods (Florida, 2000, Donald, 2001). Ensuring our neighbourhoods are healthy and provide a good quality of life is critical to Toronto's continued success.

**Neighbourhood social services are cost-effective and critical to improving outcomes.** Research has demonstrated that strong neighbourhoods with appropriate community programs and facilities can have an extremely positive effect on the health and well being of their residents as well as the success of the city. For example, supportive neighbourhoods can have a positive influence on the school readiness of children. Support provided by neighbours and the sense of community felt within the neighbourhood contribute to children's competence and well being, allowing them to build the confidence necessary for school (Social Development Canada, 1999).

Equally important in preparing children for school is the presence of neighbourhood based programs and facilities. A study conducted in North York suggests that schools in neighbourhoods with fewer resources have more children who perform poorly on measures of cognitive, social and physical development than schools situated in communities richer in facilities including libraries, parks and family resource centres (HRSDC, 2001).

Work done by the Systems-Linked Research Unit at McMaster University demonstrates the cost-effectiveness of community-based services as well as their profound impact on improving health and well being. The Unit's findings demonstrate that:

- Single parents on social assistance who were offered a co-ordinated package of services that included child care and recreation for their children, employment training, and visits by a public health nurse, were more likely to leave welfare for work than those offered one piece of the package or those left to fend for themselves. This package cost no more than the services consumed by those fending for themselves and was associated with a \$300,000 savings within one year for every one hundred people served.
- People with chronic illness, poor adjustment and poor problem-solving capacity who struggled with depression and loneliness on their own were less able to cope with their situations, and cost the health system 10 times more than those who received counselling and support (\$40,000 per year per person vs. \$4,000).
- Seniors over 75 years of age, living alone and suffering from loneliness and isolation who received support showed some social/emotional improvement and consumed less than a third of the health care resources used by similar seniors.

The Task Force believes that significant investment in services and facilities will help stabilize struggling neighbourhoods and contribute to the health and prosperity of the entire City.

## Our Vision for Strong Neighbourhoods

**Only cities that become home to innovation and inclusion will rise to the top in the global age. The diversity of the city will not drive innovation if those who are different or poor find themselves increasingly marginalized.**

Neil Bradford, 2004

Canada is urbanizing at a rapid rate. Cities are where Canadians are moving and where our new immigrants make their homes. The future of our cities rests on the investments we make today to ensure that they are welcoming and safe places to live.

It is the Task Force's overarching vision that no one – no family, no child, no senior – should be disadvantaged by where they live in the City; that no one should have to accept inadequate services or limited opportunities because of the neighbourhood in which they reside.

The Task Force believes that there must be broader recognition that strong neighbourhoods are important pillars of city health and prosperity and should be a public policy priority.

The Task Force also believes that there needs to be broader recognition that community services and facilities are a vital contributor to strong, vibrant neighbourhoods.

### **Inclusive and Welcoming Neighbourhoods**

The interaction between residents that takes place in Toronto's diverse neighbourhoods has been the key to its success. The City's growth and prosperity depend in large measure on its ability to ensure its neighbourhoods continue to welcome people from diverse backgrounds, including the many newcomers who choose to make Toronto their home.

The Task Force vision of the City's neighbourhoods is one of inclusion, of places where diversity is celebrated and respected. It is a vision of neighbourhoods where families and individuals from all walks of life are welcomed, whether they are newcomers or long term residents. It is a vision of neighbourhoods in which people feel a sense of pride and belonging, irrespective of their level of income, physical and intellectual ability, ethnic, cultural and racial heritage, religious beliefs, and gender or sexual orientation.

### **Building Neighbourhood Cohesion and Participation**

Community participation lies at the heart of successful neighbourhoods. Neighbourhoods are strengthened when their residents work together to achieve common goals and aspirations, and develop a common vision. Strong and positive relationships must be built, leadership skills developed, and opportunities provided for influencing and shaping the future of neighbourhoods. Community cohesion and participation go beyond inclusion, and provide real opportunities for civic engagement and local influence.

Our vision is of neighbourhoods where residents have the opportunity to participate in and shape community life, where people have places to meet, the capacity to lead, and the ability to make plans and identify neighbourhood priorities, based on sound knowledge of their neighbourhoods.

### **Strong Neighbourhood Infrastructure**

Over the years, Toronto has built up an impressive network of neighbourhood services and facilities. Yet the socio-demographic changes of the last ten to twenty years have outstripped our ability to match infrastructure to emerging needs. Today, we have neighbourhood 'hot spots' that are much more densely populated than in the past, have higher levels of service needs, but few community services and facilities.

Our vision is of a city where all neighbourhoods, regardless of the income levels of the people living there, will have a responsive mix of services and facilities that meets local needs and corresponds to both the size and characteristics of the population living there.

### **Strong Social Programs**

Neighbourhood services and facilities alone are not sufficient to fulfil our vision of welcoming, inclusive, cohesive and participatory neighbourhoods. Strong national and provincial social programs are also required, programs that meet the needs of the City's residents no matter where they live.

Our vision for strong neighbourhoods includes well-designed income support programs that provide all residents with quality of life and personal dignity. It includes a comprehensive affordable housing program that creates an income mix within neighbourhoods and reverses the trend of income polarization between rich and poor neighbourhoods. It is a vision where residents are not marginalized by their income level, and are not forced to live in pockets of highly concentrated poverty that are considered undesirable or unsafe.

## Investment to Strengthen Neighbourhoods

One of the Task Force's objectives was to identify the most effective approaches to investing in neighbourhoods. To do this, we conducted research into a wide range of neighbourhood revitalization strategies that have been used in the UK, the US and Canada.

### International experience

The United Kingdom and the United States have been the two key leaders producing research on the importance of neighbourhoods and in the development of neighbourhood-focused policies, programs and funding mechanisms. This leadership was necessary in part because of the severe decline faced by some neighbourhoods in these countries. With the loss of key industries and changes in urban policy, many neighbourhoods suffered from high rates of poverty, abandoned housing, high rates of unemployment, the flight of businesses, the out-migration of more affluent residents, and rising rates of violent crime (Carter and Polevychok, 2003).

### National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal

The UK's neighbourhood-focused policies, programs and funding mechanisms are perhaps the most comprehensive in the world. The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit was established in 2001 by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to address the issues faced by the nation's most distressed neighbourhoods. In establishing the Unit, the government set out a bold vision for the country's neighbourhoods:

**... to narrow the gap between deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the country so that, within 10 – 20 years, no one should be seriously disadvantaged by where they live. People on low incomes should not have to suffer conditions that are failing and so different from what the rest of the population receives.**

Social Exclusion Unit, 2001

To achieve this vision, the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal co-ordinates efforts at the national and local levels, provides substantial funding, and includes a commitment to meet 10 to 20-year targets. The strategy links local and national policy by recognizing that economic prosperity and social health can only be advanced with co-ordinated national strategies and neighbourhood-based initiatives.

Drawing on the experience of the UK, the European Union established the URBAN initiative in 118 European cities to build inclusive communities and to support citizen participation in decision-making.

### **American Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities**

A focus on neighbourhoods began in the United States in the 1960s as a part of the US government's War on Poverty. The focus produced important information about the effects of neighbourhoods on individuals and families. Although neighbourhood revitalization efforts lagged in the 1970s and 1980s, renewed interest both in neighbourhoods and broader urban policy was generated by the introduction of the Empowerment Zone and Enterprise Communities Program (EZ/EC) in the early 1990s.

As in the UK, the US government recognized that general policies that address the needs of individuals no matter where they live (such as income support programs), and policies that target specific geographical areas (such as neighbourhood revitalization efforts), are both critical to the nation's health and prosperity. The introduction of the EZ/EC programs helped to fill a void in the government's geographically targeted approaches.

### **Canada uses collaborative approaches to strengthen neighbourhoods.**

Although Canada has not developed broad neighbourhood-focused programs of the kind found in the US, the UK and Europe, interest in neighbourhoods and their importance has been growing. Winnipeg and Vancouver both have formal agreements with their provincial governments and the federal government to work together to revitalize distressed

neighbourhoods. Over the past 20 years, tens of millions of dollars have flowed into these neighbourhoods as a result of urban development agreements among the three orders of government.

The Winnipeg Development Agreement, the third in a series of inter-governmental agreements, pools \$75 million for 700 projects which focus on downtown revitalization, neighbourhood renewal, community development and safety, labour force development, and strategic and sectoral investments. The agreement has levered \$77 million from the private sector and another \$49 million from other complementary government programs.

The Vancouver Agreement addresses the needs of the city's Downtown East Side which has been beset by problems including drug use and dealing, HIV infection, prostitution, and crime. Under the Agreement, funding is sought from existing government programs, community and private agencies and foundations for projects that are priorities under the Agreement. When such funding is limited or not available, the \$30 million dedicated to the Vancouver Agreement is used to bridge the funding gap or support the project in full.



Other neighbourhoods have also benefited from inter-governmental funding agreements. Toronto's St. Lawrence neighbourhood and Vancouver's False Creek, for example, have been developed with the support of all three orders of government, using approaches that help promote economic progress and social inclusion.

The City of Toronto is currently working with the provincial and federal governments on the development of a formal framework agreement to guide these governments as they: achieve shared objectives; align and orient programs and services; coordinate, facilitate and streamline approvals and legislative changes; and focus funding and other resources in Toronto.

The powers and financial capacity of municipalities are limited. By themselves municipalities cannot hope to address all the social and economic challenges their neighbourhoods face. The experience in other countries and other parts of Canada strongly suggests that it is through inter-governmental co-operation that sustainable solutions can be found for the needs of urban neighbourhoods.

## Neighbourhood Investment Principles

Based on our review of successful neighbourhood revitalization strategies, the Task Force recommends that neighbourhood investment be guided by the following principles:

- **Well-linked neighbourhood, municipal, provincial and federal programs:** Effective neighbourhood revitalization strategies use neighbourhood-level knowledge to improve the effectiveness of national, provincial and municipal programs. Improvements in these broader programs help strengthen all neighbourhoods.
- **Strategic and coordinated:** Neighbourhoods are not seen in isolation. Investments take advantage of the opportunities that are available within the broader city region.

- **Politically led:** Strengthening neighbourhoods requires political leadership at the highest level, inter-governmental collaboration, and a willingness to improve public policies, programs and funding mechanisms based on learnings from neighbourhoods.
- **Holistic:** Neighbourhood-building investments combine elements of social, economic and urban planning. They must include both people and place-focused strategies.
- **Collaborative and inclusive:** Neighbourhood-building strategies include the concerns of both geographic communities and communities of common bond. They are developed with a wide range of stakeholders who are involved from the project start. They focus funding on the priorities they work to identify together.
- **Neighbourhood driven and asset-focused:** Neighbourhood investment plans are built on local strengths and assets rather than deficiencies, and create opportunities to build on these strengths. They focus funding on the priorities and strategies identified by the neighbourhood.
- **Accountable and sustainable:** Investment strategies include performance accountability mechanisms and monitor neighbourhood health and well being. They use accountability measures to improve programs, policies and funding mechanisms, and neighbourhood monitoring systems to build local knowledge and the capacity for action. They include longer term plans to sustain gains and prevent future decline.

## Identifying Neighbourhoods for Investment

A plan to strengthen Toronto neighbourhoods must recognize the fundamental requirements of every neighbourhood in our City. All Toronto neighbourhoods need the local services that make them good places to live – things like libraries, community centres, recreation services, and children’s programs. They also need services that respond to the changing needs of neighbourhoods, such as settlement services for new immigrants. This combination of services makes an invaluable contribution to strong community life and social cohesion for everyone in Toronto.

In some Toronto neighbourhoods, public investment in local services has not kept pace with demographic shifts, population increases, and growing social need. Part of the reason that Vancouver and Winnipeg have been able to develop inter-governmental agreements to strengthen neighbourhoods is because there has been clear consensus on the neighbourhoods in which investments have not kept pace with community change.

Vancouver’s Downtown East Side has struggled with high levels of illegal substance use, prostitution, HIV infection, and loss of businesses that were far greater than in any other neighbourhood. Winnipeg’s downtown core faced a loss of businesses, dilapidated housing stock, and high rates of unemployment and poverty among the Aboriginal population that were not characteristic of the City as a whole.

Because the circumstances of Toronto neighbourhoods are so varied, it has been difficult in the past for the various orders of government to reach a consensus on where to begin to invest. We know that some neighbourhoods face significant challenges, such as high levels of poverty and significant unemployment. Other neighbourhoods struggle with a lack of services for their children, youth, seniors and recent immigrants. One key element of the mandate of the Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force was to examine these challenges, and to develop a method for prioritizing neighbourhoods for investment. This method is described in the following sections.



## What are Toronto's neighbourhoods?

"Neighbourhoods" can be understood to be different things by different people and in different contexts. They can be defined in terms of the functions that take place there, including the provision of community services, shopping, and social gathering. They can also be defined by people's perceptions, and may reflect their sense of pride or their connections with their neighbours.

For planning and program implementation purposes, neighbourhoods defined by fixed boundaries are most suitable. The Task Force has based its research and recommendations on the neighbourhood boundary system developed by the City of Toronto which identifies 140 distinct neighbourhoods across the city. These boundaries were established by combining adjacent census tracts with similar income characteristics, while taking into account existing service boundaries for community agencies, natural boundaries (rivers), and built-form boundaries (streets, highways, etc.). Neighbourhood populations range between 7,000 and 51,000. A map of all neighbourhoods is provided in the appendices.

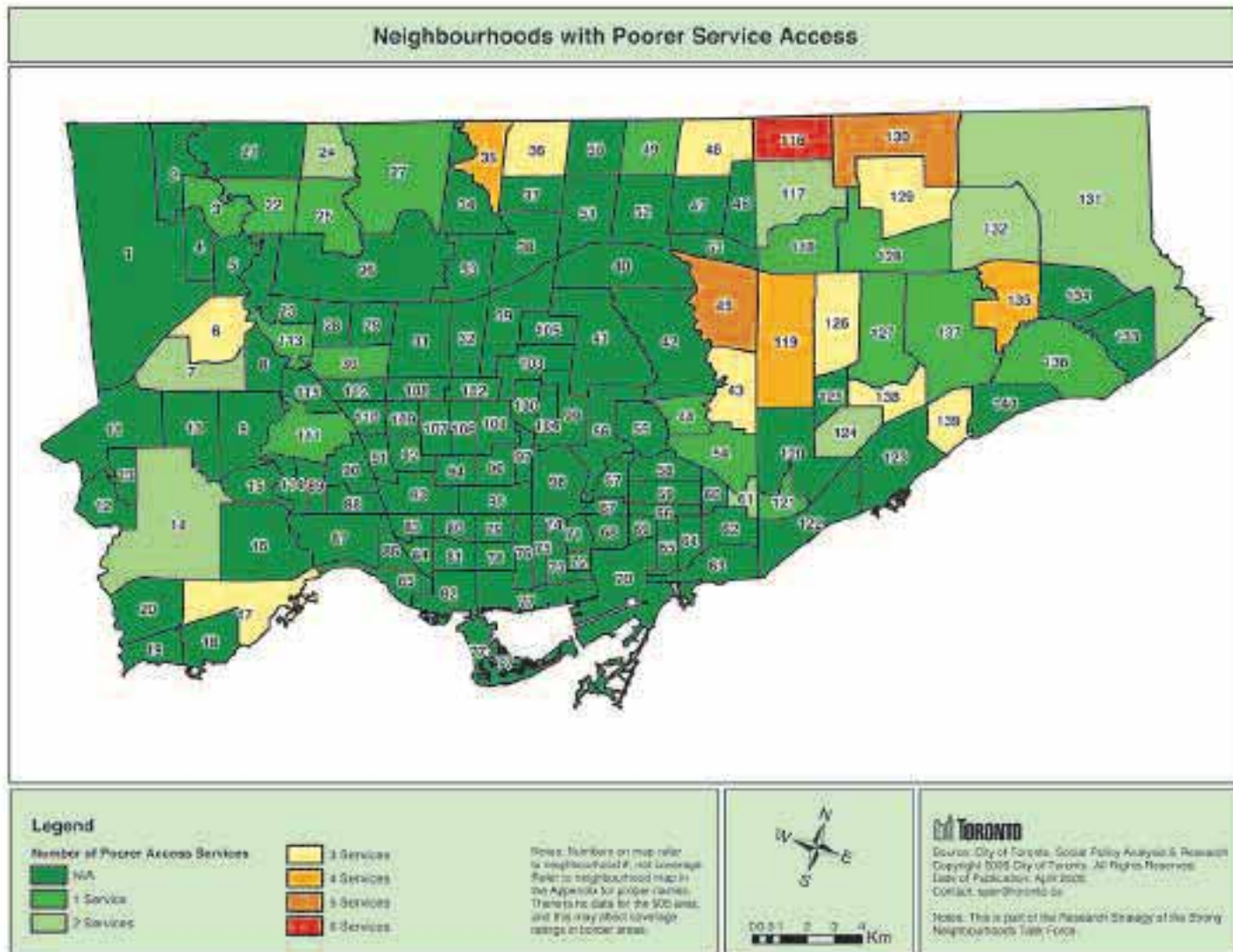
### **Measuring neighbourhood services and facilities**

A key element of the Task Force's vision is that all neighbourhoods will have a responsive mix of services and facilities that meets local needs and corresponds to both the size and characteristics of the population living there. To begin to identify neighbourhoods where community services and facilities have not kept pace with demographic changes, the Task Force analyzed whether neighbourhoods have the services and facilities they most need nearby. To develop this picture, the distribution of the following 11 key services within Toronto's neighbourhoods was analyzed:

- Recreation and community centres;
- Libraries;
- Schools;
- Community health centres and hospitals;
- Community-based children's services;
- Community based services for youth;
- Community-based services for seniors;
- Settlement services;
- Community-based employment services;
- Food banks; and
- Community kitchens, gardens and markets.

For each of these services, the Task Force analyzed whether they were near the residents who would need them most. For example, the distance of settlement services from recent immigrants in the neighbourhood was analyzed, and the distance of youth services from neighbourhood youth aged 15-24 was examined. To determine the relative importance of poor access to a community service or facilities between neighbourhoods, the Task Force identified those neighbourhoods where there was a 20% larger than average population for the service.

When the number of services that each neighbourhood has poor access to and a 20% larger than average population for are counted, the following picture of neighbourhood service coverage emerges:



This map identifies neighbourhoods where community services and facilities have not kept pace with population changes, and shows several distinct patterns in location of the affected neighbourhoods. Twenty-three of the thirty-eight neighbourhoods with poor service access and higher population sizes are located on the eastern side of the city, either east of Victoria Park Ave. or immediately west of Victoria Park Ave. The remaining neighbourhoods are clustered near the City's northern boundary, or in the central-west and in the south-west areas of the City.

## Measuring Neighbourhood Challenges

To identify the neighbourhoods most in need of investment, we must be able to objectively determine where the gaps in community services and facilities identified above will have the greatest impact. To do this, we must be able to identify the neighbourhoods that face the greatest challenges, where these services and facilities will play a critical role in improving outcomes.

To identify these neighbourhoods, the Task Force commissioned a review of academic literature and international practice on the measurement of neighbourhood vitality, need and potential decline. From this work, we learned that a broad set of measures must be used to understand the challenges faced by neighbourhoods, and the unique strengths that they have to build on. There is no typical “distressed” neighbourhood, nor a typical “strong” one, and no single measure that can accurately represent their overall health.

Based on this work and the availability of neighbourhood-level data in Toronto, the Task Force used the following 11 measures to determine the challenges faced by Toronto neighbourhoods.

## Indicators of Vitality

### Economic:

- Median household income;
- Percentage of population spending 30% or more on shelter costs;
- Percentage of population aged 25+ who are unemployed.

### Education:

- Percentage of students passing the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test;
- Percentage of population with college or university qualifications;
- Percentage of population aged 15+ attaining less than grade nine education.

### Urban Fabric:

- Percentage of occupied private dwellings requiring major repairs.

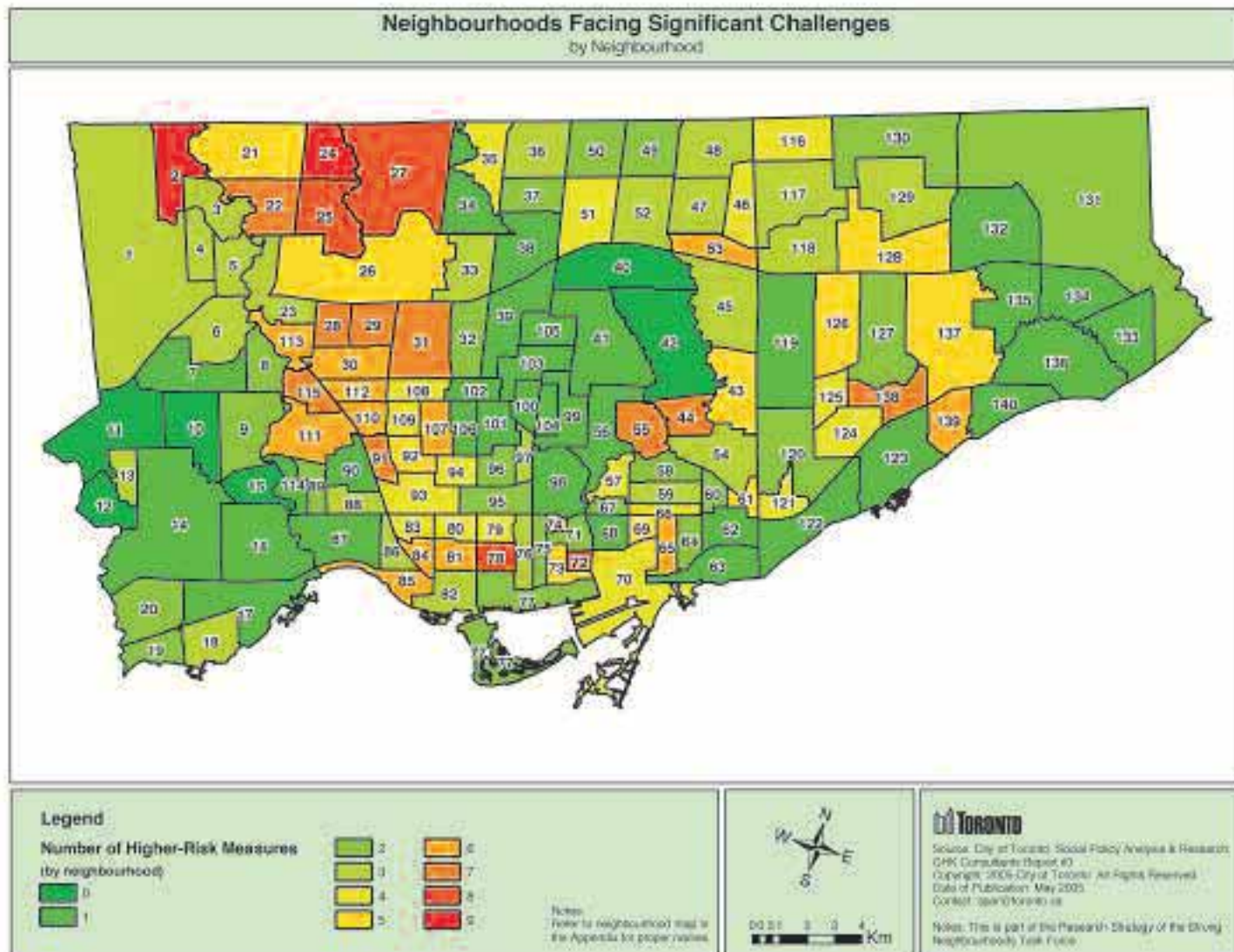
### Health:

- Number of low birth weight babies per 1,000 live births.

### Demographics:

- Percentage of population with no knowledge of English or French;
- Percentage of population who are recent immigrants;
- Percentage of population by mobility status one year ago.

When the number of times a neighbourhood measures 20% worse than the City average on each of these indicators is counted, the following picture of neighbourhood challenges emerges:



This map shows that the neighbourhoods facing the greatest challenges lie in a familiar “U”-shape that runs south from the north-western corner of the North York/Etobicoke boundary, through the downtown core of the city, and north again through the East York area and central Scarborough area.

## Investment Neighbourhoods

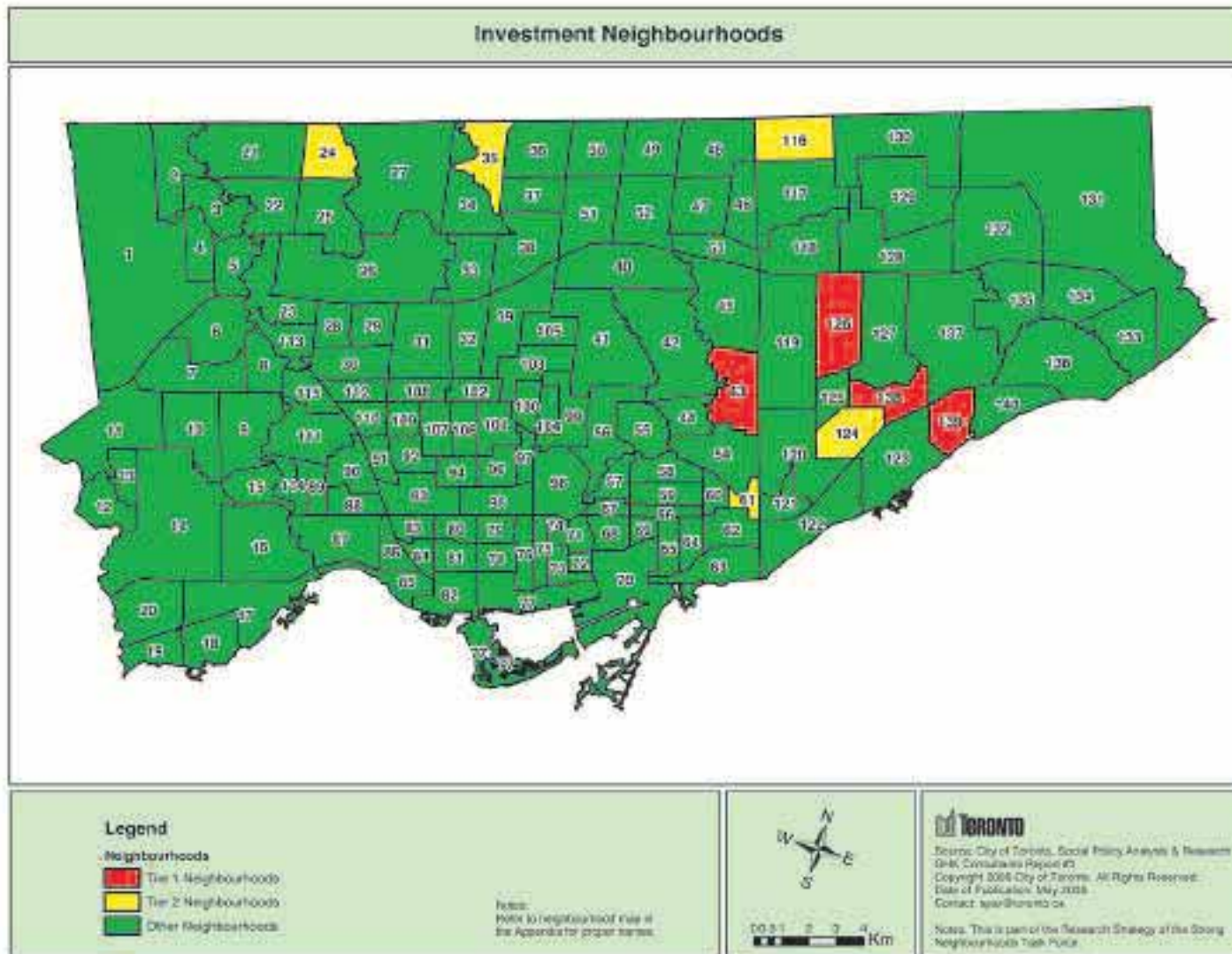
When neighbourhoods where community services and facilities have not kept pace with demographic changes are compared with those that face the greatest challenges, a new picture emerges to guide targeted investment. Undeniably, there are many neighbourhoods across Toronto that would benefit from enhanced community services. We recommend that all governments and other funders use a neighbourhood perspective to monitor the ability of services to meet evolving community needs. Nevertheless, the Task Force was mandated to provide governments with a clear method to determine where community investments are most immediately required.

The Task Force recommends that the first phase of a *Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy* focus on nine neighbourhoods that have poor and very poor access to services and face significant challenges:

- Victoria Village (43)
- Dorset Park (126)
- Eglinton East (138)
- Scarborough Village (139)
- Black Creek (24)
- Westminster-Branson (35)
- Crescent Town (61)
- Steeles (116) and
- Kennedy Park (124)

All nine investment neighbourhoods are highlighted on the map on page 24.





While these nine neighbourhoods are the most in need of immediate and focused investment during the first phase of the *Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy*, other neighbourhoods will require investment as the implementation of the *Strategy* progresses. Neighbourhoods are not static, and the challenges they face will change as the *Strategy* is implemented, and as demographic shifts continue. To keep abreast of these changes, evaluate the impact of investments, and continue to identify the neighbourhoods most in need of investment during subsequent implementation phases of the *Strategy*, Toronto will need a coordinated approach to monitoring neighbourhood health. This system is discussed in the next section.

## Monitoring Neighbourhood Strength

Toronto has a wealth of data held and developed by different organizations that could be used to evaluate the impact of *Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy* investments and monitor the changing health of neighbourhoods. There is a significant opportunity under the *Strategy* to bring these organizations together and develop a comprehensive picture of the health of Toronto neighbourhoods.

*Toronto is behind comparable cities and countries in terms of developing a neighbourhood indicator system... It is not possible for citizens, researchers or community organizations to get information at a meaningful geographic level across a range of important issues.*

GHK International, 2005a

A Toronto neighbourhood monitoring system should build on the process for selecting neighbourhoods for investment identified in this report, and on the additional neighbourhood monitoring work under development by the City of Toronto and the Federation of Canadian

Municipalities. It should draw upon knowledge of governments, research institutions and voluntary sector partners. And it should pursue the opportunities for additional research we identified during our work that would have a significant impact on our ability to measure and monitor neighbourhood strength.

During our research, we identified a need for measures that reflect neighbourhood strengths and challenges, as well as the cumulative strengths and challenges of their residents. We found that widely used measures of income, education, and health provide important information about the neighbourhood, but are based on the individual income, education and health levels of residents. Measures of neighbourhood strength should also focus on opportunities for resident interaction, neighbourhood decision-making capabilities and the inclusiveness of neighbourhoods.

In our consultations, neighbourhood residents highlighted the need for measures of the qualitative strengths of neighbourhoods. Knowing whether residents feel strong bonds to their neighbours and their neighbourhood, and whether they think their neighbourhood is improving or declining provides valuable insights into the unique challenges they face. The City of Amsterdam collects this kind of information from its residents, and there is an opportunity to use this as a model to develop a relevant tool for Toronto. (City of Amsterdam II, 2003)

Measures of the strength of neighbourhood services and facilities could also be expanded under a comprehensive monitoring system. The Task Force's method for measuring neighbourhood services could be enhanced to consider arts and cultural programs, and services in the municipalities bordering on Toronto. It could also include a wider range of accessibility factors, including hours of service, service languages, physical accessibility and waiting lists. It could be adapted to match the locations of more specific population groups, such as children aged 0-6, with individual services, such as day-care.

Based on our own research and our review of international neighbourhood revitalization efforts, we believe Toronto needs a neighbourhood information system coordinated by the City of Toronto that:

- Includes measures of neighbourhood strengths and challenges, such as neighbourhood decision-making abilities, in addition to measures of the cumulative strengths and challenges of its residents;
- Includes qualitative measures, including measures of residents' perceptions and attitudes;
- Includes comprehensive measures of the strengths and challenges of neighbourhood services and community organizations;
- Provides measures across social, economic, cultural and environmental areas;
- Provides "one-stop", easy access to information for a wide range of partners, including neighbourhood residents and organizations; and
- Includes training for neighbourhoods so that they can use this information to build their problem solving and decision-making capabilities.



## Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy

The Task Force has developed the *Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy* (TSNS) to help realize our vision of a city where no one is disadvantaged by where they live, and where neighbourhoods are safe, inclusive, cohesive and vibrant. Its goal is to ensure that all neighbourhoods, regardless of the income levels of the people living there, have a responsive mix of services and facilities that meets local needs and corresponds to both the size and characteristics of the population.

The *Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy* will be **enabled** by a five-year renewable agreement among the three orders of government to strengthen Toronto's neighbourhoods; **implemented** by a four-level governance structure working at different levels to strengthen neighbourhoods; and **achieved** with a combination of targeted investments in identified neighbourhoods, and broader program, policy and funding changes that strengthen all neighbourhoods.

Consistent with the Task Force's mandate, the *Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy* addresses the gaps in services and facilities in the neighbourhoods that face the greatest challenges. While it provides a means by which broader programs, policies and funding mechanisms that impact neighbourhoods may be improved, it does not directly address the more systemic changes required in areas such as income support programs, affordable housing policy, and the economic integration of newcomers that also support our vision for neighbourhoods.

As we saw in section 4, there are neighbourhoods that face significant challenges across the City of Toronto. Progress in areas such as income security and affordable housing will make all neighbourhoods stronger, particularly those with high levels of low income and core housing need. These important issues are the focus of other task forces, including the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council, and the Task Force for Modernizing Income Security for Working Age Adults of the Toronto City Summit Alliance. Links to their work and its relationship to strong neighbourhoods are discussed in Section 6, **Moving Forward**.

## An Agreement to Enable Strong Neighbourhoods

The Task Force recommends that the three orders of government enter into an agreement that **enables** the implementation of the *Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy*. The agreement should be based on the principles for effective neighbourhood renewal as described in section 4 of this report, and should include the following commitments:

- A commitment to target investments in the identified neighbourhoods to build neighbourhood capacity, and ensure a responsive mix of services and facilities that meets local needs and corresponds to both the size and characteristics of the population; and
- A commitment to use a neighbourhood perspective in evaluating and reshaping government policies, programs and funding mechanisms to better support all neighbourhoods.

The Task Force recommends that the three orders of government commit to an initial implementation period of five years under the agreement. This agreement should be renewable, with subsequent commitments based on the evaluation of the implementation of the *Strategy* after the first five-year period.

## Implementing the Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy

The *Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy* is **implemented** by four inter-dependent governance and staff structures that build on the strengths and resources of neighbourhoods, the voluntary sector and governments. Each structure has a diverse membership, and tackles the problems faced by neighbourhoods at a different level:

- A *Local Neighbourhood Investment Partnership* in each investment neighbourhood that will develop solutions to the neighbourhood's unique issues;
- An *Inter-Governmental Table* that will commit the public resources necessary to implement the *Strategy*, and recommend changes to government policy, programs and funding mechanisms to strengthen all neighbourhoods;
- A *Strong Neighbourhoods Investment Board* that will bring together a broad set of stakeholders to increase the resources available to strengthen neighbourhoods, and to guide the implementation of the *Strategy* across Toronto; and
- A *Strong Neighbourhoods Unit* that will link and support work done at both the local and the broader policy, program and funding level.

Each of these bodies is described below.

### **Local Neighbourhood Investment Partnership**

The *Local Neighbourhood Investment Partnership* lies at the heart of the *Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy*, and ensures that revitalization efforts are neighbourhood-driven. Through its work, the *Partnership* will build neighbourhood capacity for decision-making, and will generate the knowledge necessary to build locally responsive, effective programs and services.

One *Partnership* will be established for each neighbourhood selected for investment. The size of the *Partnership* will depend on local conditions, but it will involve stakeholders from a wide range of sectors, including local businesses, community service providers, resident and faith groups, government service providers, school boards, community funders, and neighbourhood residents.

The *Partnership* will develop a *Neighbourhood Investment Plan* that identifies local priorities and addresses diverse community needs. This *Plan* may include people-focused strategies that generate local employment opportunities, as well as place-focused strategies such as physical improvements to a local park. It may highlight opportunities to improve the use of existing resources and identify the need for new resources. It may propose new ways for the private sector, governments, the voluntary sector and organized labour to work together to strengthen the neighbourhood.

The *Partnership* will work with staff of the *Strong Neighbourhoods Unit* to identify a detailed timeline for the implementation of the *Neighbourhood Investment Plan* and to secure the required resources. It will take an active role in the monitoring and evaluating of the *Plan*, and will report to the *Strong Neighbourhoods Investment Board* on any issues that arise during implementation.

### **Inter-Governmental Table**

The *Inter-Governmental Table* provides the overarching governance for the *Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy*, and ensures that the *Strategy* is politically-led and publicly accountable. It is a forum in which all orders of government can work together, and will consist of one senior elected representative from each order of government.

The *Inter-Governmental Table* will determine the level of public resources required to implement the *Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy* across the investment neighbourhoods, and will commit them for this purpose. The *Strategy* cannot be implemented without the commitment of new public resources from all orders of government. While there are opportunities to focus investments for greater impact under the *Strategy*, realigning existing investments alone cannot address the need of neighbourhoods where

services have not kept pace with the rate of change. And ultimately, withdrawing the resources that enable strong neighbourhoods from one place to strengthen another defeats the purpose of the *Strategy*. The *Inter-Governmental Table* will also establish the broad goals and objectives for the *Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy*. It will learn from the experience of the *Local Neighbourhood Partnerships*, and will consider changes to existing government policy, programs and funding mechanisms to better support all neighbourhoods.

### **Strong Neighbourhoods Investment Board**

The *Strong Neighbourhoods Investment Board* provides a new way for governments, the voluntary sector, the private sector, organized labour and Toronto residents to work together to strengthen neighbourhoods. It is the key body that guides the implementation of the *Strategy* across investment neighbourhoods.

The *Investment Board's* composition balances the need for broad leadership with the need for public accountability. It also recognizes that while the initiatives of the government will be paramount in strengthening neighbourhoods, there are also key roles to be played by non-governmental players, including the voluntary sector, the business community and labour. Bringing these groups together will help to ensure that these interventions are coordinated for maximum impact.

The *Investment Board* will have fifteen members selected as follows:

- One senior representative from each order of government;
- One senior representative from each of Toronto's publicly-funded school boards;
- One representative from both United Way of Greater Toronto and the Ontario Trillium Foundation; and
- Six community members, two appointed by each of the three orders of government.

The Task Force recognizes that community members charged with allocating public funds must be appointed by governments and accountable to them. The credibility of the *Board* also depends on finding community members who are knowledgeable and who represent the broad diversity of Toronto's neighbourhoods and communities. For this reason, we recommend that United Way of Greater Toronto and the Ontario Trillium Foundation play a facilitating role in nominating skilled community members from a range of backgrounds and perspectives.

The *Investment Board* will be responsible for managing the use of *TSNS* resources to meet the broad goals and objectives of the *Strategy*. It will:

- Expand *TSNS* resources beyond those committed by the *Inter-Governmental Table* through negotiations with the private sector, voluntary sector, organized labour and governments; and
- Approve the allocation of *TSNS* resources to *Neighbourhood Investment Plans*.

To maximize the resources available to strengthen neighbourhoods, the *Investment Board* will work with the *Strong Neighbourhoods Unit* to identify potential funding for neighbourhood priorities from existing government programs, community and private agencies and foundations. When such funding is limited or unavailable, the *Investment Board* may allocate dedicated *TSNS* resources to these neighbourhood priorities.

The *Investment Board* will also play an important role in ensuring that neighbourhood-focused strategies and broader efforts by governments and the voluntary sector are mutually reinforcing. The *Board* will analyze learnings from *Local Neighbourhood Investment Partnerships*, and will recommend opportunities for improvements in policies, programs and funding mechanisms to the *Inter-Governmental Table*.



## Strong Neighbourhoods Unit

The *Strong Neighbourhoods Unit* is a staff-support body that will work closely with both the *Local Neighbourhood Investment Partnerships* and the *Strong Neighbourhoods Investment Board*. It will be established as a part of the City of Toronto, and will provide community development support, research and policy development, and evaluation and monitoring for the implementation of the *Strategy*.

At the local level, the *Strong Neighbourhoods Unit* will provide community development support to investment neighbourhoods as they develop their *Neighbourhood Investment Plans*.

The *Strong Neighbourhoods Unit* will work with the *Investment Board* across neighbourhoods to ensure the *Neighbourhood Investment Plans* are strategic and coordinated, and take advantage of the opportunities that are available within the broader city region. In conjunction with the *Investment Board*, the *Unit* will work to resolve conflicts between *Neighbourhood Investment Plans* and broader service planning processes, and propose changes to government and voluntary sector policies, programs and funding mechanisms to enhance their support for all neighbourhoods.

The *Strong Neighbourhoods Unit* will support the monitoring and evaluation of the *Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy* by:

- Monitoring the strength of Toronto neighbourhoods on an ongoing basis;
- Supporting the evaluation and monitoring of *Neighbourhood Investment Plans*; and
- Recommending changes to the *Strategy* that will increase its impact in neighbourhoods.

## Strengthening Neighbourhoods

The goals of the *Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy* will be achieved with actions along two inter-connected paths:

- Targeted investments in identified neighbourhoods to build neighbourhood capacity, and ensure a responsive system of services and accessible community space; and
- A neighbourhood perspective to evaluate and reshape government policies, programs and funding mechanisms to better support all neighbourhoods.

Both sets of actions are described below.

### **Targeted Investments: The Neighbourhood Investment Fund**

The *Neighbourhood Investment Fund* will be used in investment neighbourhoods to build the capacity of individuals, groups and community organizations to identify and address community needs. Its shorter-term objective is to build the neighbourhood's capacity for inclusive, effective needs identification, priority-setting, planning and program development. Its longer-term goal is to ensure that neighbourhoods can sustain this capacity and operate community social programs that meet local needs on an ongoing basis.

Using the *Neighbourhood Investment Fund*, neighbourhoods will undertake activities that build the capacity of residents, faith and community groups, businesses and community organizations to participate in the work of the *Local Neighbourhood Investment Partnership*, and in the implementation of the *Neighbourhood Investment Plan*. Activities will be unique to each neighbourhood, but may include community planning forums, outreach to isolated groups, training for community leaders, self-help initiatives, and learning opportunities for the neighbourhood. The funds may be used to cover costs such as childcare that allows parents to participate in meetings, room rental and publicity, translation and interpretation, or printing a community newsletter. The fund will play an important role in ensuring the participation of groups with extensive local knowledge but few resources, such as smaller local service delivery organizations.

To maintain this capacity over the longer term, and to operate community social programs on an ongoing basis, neighbourhoods must have local non-profit organizations that “anchor” the community and:

- Are controlled by local, community-based boards;
- Address the needs of their area in a multi-purpose, holistic way;
- Are committed to the involvement of all sections of their community, including marginalized groups; and
- Facilitate the development of diverse communities in their area.

Organizations with these characteristics can become a focal point and hub for community action by offering accessible community space, facilitating the development and operation of community programs, and providing links to organizations and resources outside of the neighbourhood.

*“The findings from the research in Henry Farm, Roncesvalles and Woburn highlighted the importance of a hub, focal point or community “centre” to the strength and vitality of a neighbourhood... A physical focal point in a neighbourhood helps foster a sense of neighbourhood identity.”*

*Arundel 2005*

Depending on local conditions, the *Neighbourhood Investment Fund* may be used to bolster the capabilities of existing community organizations or to support the development of new ones. Activities and costs funded will include core operating costs such as volunteer development and management, staff development and management, development of governance capacity, facility costs, and administrative costs. The fund will also support the development and operation of community-identified and delivered programs that meet the needs of neighbourhood residents.



## Targeted Investments: A “Neighbourhoods First” Approach to Community Space

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Accessible community space is a basic prerequisite to building strong neighbourhoods. Without this space, neighbourhoods struggle to provide the programs, self-help initiatives and learning opportunities required to meet their needs. In spite of this, governments and public sector institutions have been disposing of facilities and real estate to reduce operating costs and generate one-time revenues. In the process, neighbourhoods have lost valuable community assets that are the product of long-term public investments.

The *Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy* uses a “Neighbourhoods First” approach for community space to stop this disinvestment process in investment neighbourhoods. Under such an approach, all publicly owned facilities and real estate located in investment neighbourhoods would be considered for neighbourhood-strengthening purposes, including the development of affordable housing and the provision of community space, before being deemed surplus. To facilitate this process, *Local Neighbourhood Investment Partnerships* will develop an inventory of community space and determine if the development of additional community space is a neighbourhood priority.

A “Neighbourhoods First” approach to community space should take advantage of the opportunity to enhance the use of school space as a community resource. Virtually every resident of Toronto is within one kilometre of a school, and any broader community space policy should take advantage of these valuable public assets. Investment neighbourhoods provide an ideal setting where enhancements to existing school space use policies could be piloted, refined and possibly extended to a broader set of neighbourhoods.

## Targeted Investments: Public Programs and Facilities

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It is our belief that the *Neighbourhood Investment Fund* and the development of *Neighbourhood Investment Plans* must work in a coordinated way with government program and resource planning. During the course of their work, we expect that *Local Neighbourhood Investment Partnerships* will identify a need for new or increased investments in public programs and facilities in order to address local priorities. To ensure that these local priorities inform broader program and facility planning processes, the priorities will be identified to the appropriate order of government or public institution for consideration.

These public bodies will consider local priorities in their program and facility planning processes, make changes to plans where this is appropriate, and report on the outcome of their considerations to the *Strong Neighbourhoods Investment Board*. Where local priorities cannot be addressed within existing program and facility planning processes, the *Investment Board* may recommend a change in these planning processes to the *Inter-Governmental Table*.

## A Neighbourhood Perspective

Public programs and facilities, including those of school boards, the City, the Province, and the federal government, represent a significant investment in neighbourhoods. The *Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy* will analyze these investments from a neighbourhood perspective to bring their impact on neighbourhoods into focus, and to identify changes that will strengthen all neighbourhoods.

This analysis will be undertaken with a series of questions that may include the following:

- How will this policy, program or funding mechanism increase or decrease the public and community services available in the neighbourhood?
- How will this policy, program or funding mechanism increase or decrease opportunities for participation in decision making in the neighbourhood?
- How will this policy, program or funding mechanism increase or decrease access to resources for marginalized groups in the neighbourhood?
- How will this policy, program or funding mechanism increase or decrease the accessible community space in the neighbourhood?
- Is this impact a result of local conditions only, or might it exist in many neighbourhoods?
- Will changing this impact increase or decrease the resources required within the affected program areas? Over all program areas?
- Will changing this impact require a change in existing programs, policies and funding mechanisms?

Using questions such as these, a neighbourhood perspective can help to identify opportunities to enhance the use of existing public investments, a need for improved co-ordination among programs or governments, conflicts between existing government policies, or the need for new programs. It may reveal the intended and unintended impacts of government programs and policies and funding mechanisms on individuals, resident groups, diverse communities, and the neighbourhood's overall system of social supports.



## Moving Forward

The Task Force is convinced that the energy, creativity, and resolve to bring about change for Toronto's neighbourhoods exist at the neighbourhood level, in the voluntary and private sectors, in the labour community and among all orders of government. The **Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force** is itself a positive sign that all sectors are concerned about neighbourhoods. Its work demonstrates that diverse stakeholders are willing to commit their energy and resources to strengthen Toronto neighbourhoods.

There are many other promising signs that the three orders of government are ready to take action on neighbourhoods. The City of Toronto has identified strengthening "at-risk" neighbourhoods as one of its priorities for this Council term. The Province of Ontario "Strong Communities" agenda is intended to ensure that communities "grow smarter" and are "more liveable, safer and stronger." And the Federal Government is advancing its "New Deal for Cities and Communities" agenda, which commits to ensuring Canada's cities and communities are environmentally, economically, culturally and socially sustainable.

In May 2005, the three orders of government agreed to enter into the Canada-Ontario-Toronto Agreement proposed by the City of Toronto. The agreement will establish a common vision and shared goals for urban sustainability to facilitate government decision-making and negotiations on complex issues. It formalizes their intention to find ways for the three governments to achieve shared objectives, align and orient programs and services, coordinate, facilitate and streamline approvals and legislative changes, and focus funding and other resources. The *Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy* is consistent with this Agreement, and we encourage the three orders of government to make it a focus of the new Agreement.

Toronto's largest community funder, United Way of Greater Toronto, has also identified neighbourhoods as a priority, and is taking action to strengthen them. United Way began to test new approaches that strengthen services in Toronto's suburban neighbourhoods in 2000 when it launched its *Strong Neighbourhoods, Healthy City Strategy*. United Way will also act as the Toronto lead on the recently-announced *Action for Neighbourhood Change*. This national, five city, federally-funded initiative will test new ways to revitalize neighbourhoods.

## Recommendations

Toronto has an incredible opportunity to learn from the experience of other countries, and take action to enhance its reputation as a “city of neighbourhoods.” We must seize this opportunity, and ensure our struggling neighbourhoods do not slip into decline. Toronto can be a city of inclusive, welcoming, cohesive and participatory neighbourhoods, a city where no one is disadvantaged because of where they live. We are confident that the will to act on this vision exists at all levels, and that a formal commitment to strengthen Toronto’s neighbourhoods can be won. To this end, we offer the following recommendations:

### **Recommendation 1:**

The Task Force recommends that the three orders of government enter into a five-year renewable agreement to implement the *Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy*, and commit senior elected representatives to establish the *Inter-Governmental Table* as the first action under the implementation of the *Strategy*.

### **Recommendation 2:**

The Task Force recommends that the *Inter-Governmental Table* designate the nine Investment Neighbourhoods for targeted investment under the *Strategy*.

### **Recommendation 3:**

The Task Force recommends that the *Inter-Governmental Table* identify and commit the resources required to implement the *Strategy* in the neighbourhoods selected for investment. These resources will support the *Neighbourhood Investment Fund*, and the *Strong Neighbourhoods Unit*. *The Strong Neighbourhoods Unit* will develop and maintain a comprehensive monitoring system incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data for use by *Local Neighbourhood Investment Partnerships*.

### **Recommendation 4:**

The Task Force recommends that the *Inter-Governmental Table* establish the *Strong Neighbourhoods Investment Board*, and work together to identify community representatives for this Board.

### **Recommendation 5:**

The Task Force recommends that a *Local Neighbourhood Investment Partnership* be established in each of the neighbourhoods selected for investment, and that *Neighbourhood Investment Plans* be developed and implemented for each of these neighbourhoods.

### **Recommendation 6:**

The Task Force recommends that the three orders of government establish a “Neighbourhoods First” approach to the disposal of surplus public facilities and real estate in investment neighbourhoods.

### **Recommendation 7:**

The Task Force recommends that the three orders of government use a neighbourhood perspective to identify opportunities to enhance the use of existing public investments, a need for improved co-ordination among programs or governments, conflicts between existing government policies, and the need for new programs.

### **Recommendation 8:**

The Task Force recommends that all orders of government address systemic issues affecting Toronto’s neighbourhoods through consideration of the recommendations of the Task Force on Modernising Income Security for Working Age Adults, the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council, and through a long-term commitment to increasing the supply of affordable housing.

**Recommendation 9:**

The Task Force recommends that United Way of Greater Toronto work with neighbourhood agencies, the private sector, organized labour, charities, charitable foundations and individual donors to facilitate investment in community services in the neighbourhoods identified in this report in a manner that is consistent with *Neighbourhood Investment Plans*, and coordinated with government investments in these neighbourhoods.

**Recommendation 10:**

The Task Force recommends that the three orders of government commit to the following timeline for implementation of the *Toronto Neighbourhoods Strategy*:

By December 2005, governments will have:

- Established the *Inter-Governmental Table*
- Confirmed the neighbourhoods for initial investment
- Identified and committed resources to implement the *Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy*
- Established the *Strong Neighbourhoods Investment Board*
- Established the *Strong Neighbourhoods Unit*
- Established the *Local Neighbourhood Investment Partnerships*.

By December 2006 and every year thereafter, governments will issue annual reports under the *Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy*.



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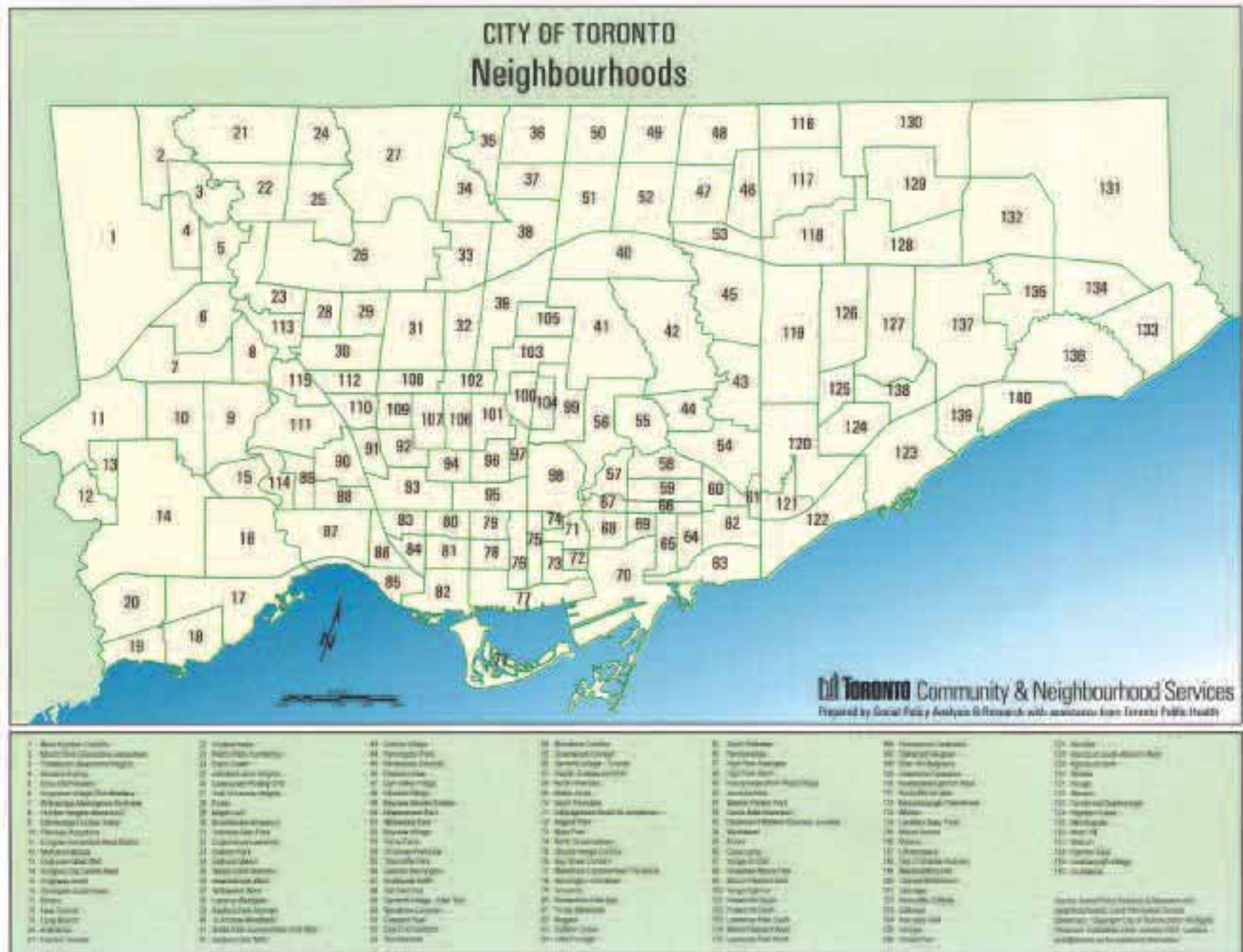
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# Appendix 1: Toronto Neighbourhoods Map



## **Appendix 2: List of Background Research Papers Commissioned by the Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force**

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1. **Why Strong Neighbourhoods Matter** (Christa Freiler, Public Policy Consultant).
2. **The Role of Community Infrastructure in Building Strong Neighbourhoods** (Laurel Rothman, Family Service Association)
3. **Assessing Neighbourhood Vitality** (GHK International)
4. **Neighbourhood Social Infrastructure in Toronto** (Social Policy Analysis and Research Unit, City of Toronto)
5. **Putting Theory into Practice: Asset Mapping in Three Toronto Neighbourhoods** (Caryl Arundel and Associates)
6. **Multi-Partner Funding for Neighbourhood Revitalization in Toronto** (GHK International)

