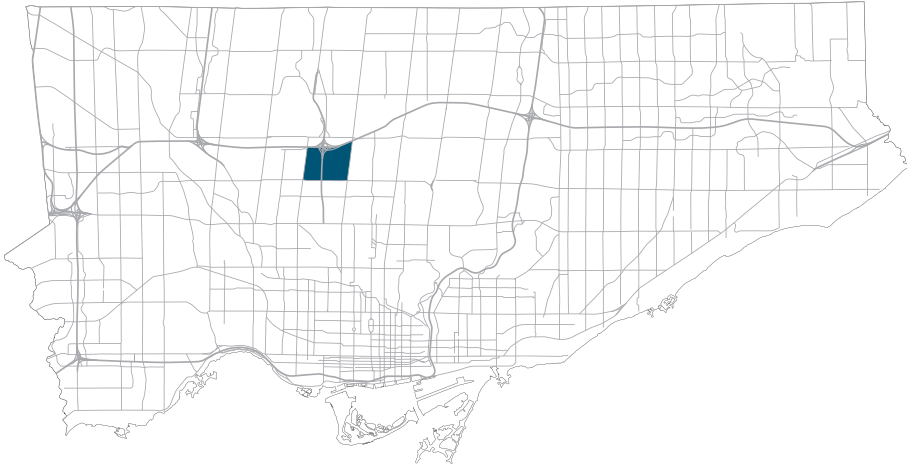


Chapter 1

Lawrence-Allen *in a* Changing City

The neighbourhoods north of Lawrence Avenue West, between Bathurst Street and Dufferin Street, began to emerge from farmland outside of Toronto in the 1930s. Years before the Allen Road bisected the area, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation purchased large tracts of land north of Lawrence Avenue West. CMHC was eager to address Toronto's post-war housing shortage and led development of private single-family homes in Lawrence-Allen in the 1940s. In 1954 CMHC began working with Metropolitan Toronto to build social housing on the area's remaining land – the beginnings of the Lawrence Heights neighbourhood.



While the Lawrence-Allen area was largely built in the post-war era as a suburban community on the outskirts of Toronto, it sits today in the middle of a vibrant urban region. The City of Toronto commenced the Lawrence-Allen Revitalization Study in 2008 to determine a comprehensive planning framework for the Lawrence-Allen area and to establish a planning context for the redevelopment of the Lawrence Heights neighbourhood.

The Lawrence-Allen Study Area comprises about 340 hectares of land, bounded by Lawrence Avenue West, Bathurst Street, Dufferin Street, and Highway 401. At the centre of the Lawrence-Allen area is the Lawrence Heights neighbourhood – a community of social housing owned by Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC). TCHC's lands are interwoven with lands owned by Toronto District School Board and the City of Toronto, forming a resource of over 65 hectares of publicly-owned land.

Revitalization planning is an opportunity to take a comprehensive look at the Lawrence-Allen area and plan for positive change over the long term. Revitalization can harness opportunities by directing public and private investment, planning to achieve city-building objectives, and aiming to ensure a high-quality of life for residents of the Lawrence-Allen area.

This report provides a recommended Lawrence-Allen Revitalization Plan to serve as the basis of a Secondary Plan and a broad strategy for revitalization by the City.



Historical bird's eye photo of Lawrence Heights

I. LAWRENCE HEIGHTS PAST AND PRESENT

Planning for the Lawrence Heights neighbourhood began in 1954. The development reflects a number of ideas that were at the forefront of mid-20th century planning. A contemporary of Don Mills, the community design reflects Garden City planning principles. Houses and apartment buildings generally address open spaces and parking courts rather than public streets, and the plan aims to separate pedestrians from streets by locating pedestrian routes through a mid-block open space network.

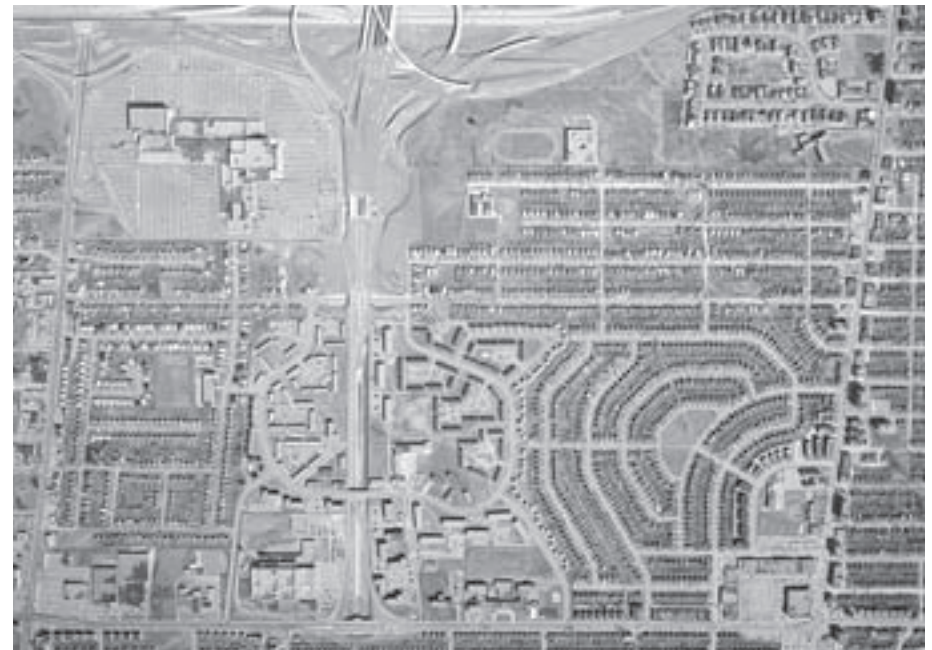
Lawrence Heights is the site of 1,208 rent-geared-to-income social housing units and more than 3,500 residents. When construction was completed in 1958, the public greeted Lawrence Heights with enthusiasm. The development delivered quality buildings and made a needed contribution to the City's stock of affordable housing. Over the years, the neighbourhood has provided homes to thousands of Torontonians who required access to affordable housing. Both then and now, strong community networks have formed in the neighbourhood.

Since 1958, a number of issues have confronted Lawrence Heights and its residents. There has been little investment in Lawrence Heights since its construction. The quality of the housing stock has deteriorated over the years. TCHC determined in 2006 that the housing in Lawrence Heights faced a number of functional issues that make it inadequate to meet the needs of residents, as well as a range of problems related to maintenance, structural and mechanical systems, and cost-effectiveness of repairs.

The neighbourhood has also become disconnected and isolated from the city around it. The public realm of Lawrence Heights, with buildings related to open spaces rather than street frontage, blurs the divisions between public and private spaces and erodes the civic role of the public space. The street network and open space system are difficult for visitors to navigate. While culturally diverse, Lawrence Heights has a limited mix of uses and housing types. The neighbourhood lacks good access to services, and the quality of physical infrastructure is poor. Furthermore, Lawrence Heights has never overcome the physical barrier presented by Allen Road.



1954 aerial photo of Lawrence-Allen Study Area



1965 aerial photo of Lawrence-Allen Study Area



2009 aerial photo of Lawrence-Allen Study Area

II. OPPORTUNITIES FOR REVITALIZATION IN LAWRENCE-ALLEN

The catalyst for the Lawrence-Allen Revitalization Plan is the need for housing renewal in the Lawrence Heights neighbourhood and TCHC's response to that issue. At the same time, housing is just one driver. Revitalization offers a series of opportunities for the Lawrence Heights neighbourhood, the Lawrence-Allen Study Area, and the city.

The housing stock in Lawrence Heights is in poor physical condition and requires replacement or refurbishment in order to provide all tenants with a healthy and sustainable neighbourhood to live in. Revitalization is an opportunity to establish a planning context in which to renew this housing. The Revitalization Plan also revisits the design of the neighbourhood – its street network, parks system, and buildings – and looks to build upon the neighbourhood's strengths, including its strong social networks and proximity to regional transportation infrastructure.

Revitalization also represents an opportunity to achieve many objectives of the City's Official Plan – renewal of social housing stock, intensification along a subway route, sustainable development, improved delivery of community services, improved public realm, and creation of high-quality usable parkland are just a few.

Lawrence-Allen will experience growth with the rest of Toronto over the next decades. The presence of two underutilized subway stations and three Avenues on the edges of the Study Area highlights the local growth opportunities of the area. The revitalization study is an effort to understand how much growth would be appropriate and how it should be accommodated. The Revitalization Plan can manage growth and change by protecting the stability of neighbourhoods adjacent to Lawrence Heights, while creating opportunities to benefit from growth, redevelopment and investment.

Public and private investment will be critical for a successful revitalization – in housing, community facilities, parks, the public realm, transportation, and infrastructure. These investments will support the viability of redevelopment in Lawrence Heights, and community health and quality of life across the Study Area.

Investment is particularly important in Lawrence-Allen because the area lies within the Lawrence Heights Priority Neighbourhood, one of thirteen priority neighbourhoods designated by City Council and targeted for improvements in physical and social infrastructure. The Revitalization Plan is a tool to understand and plan for these improvements and an opportunity to ensure that the new community will be liveable, by providing for an appropriate range of social infrastructure that supports both the existing and future population.



Lawrence Heights, Winter 1960 - Photo by Geoffrey Frazer, Commercial Photography

III. REVITALIZATION CHALLENGES

Just as the opportunities offered by revitalization are tremendous, the challenges are also considerable. Over 3,500 tenants live in the Lawrence Heights neighbourhood and revitalization must manage the impacts of redevelopment on the community. Lawrence Heights is also surrounded by residential neighbourhoods and the stability of these neighbourhoods must be protected.

The scope of revitalization is ambitious. Redevelopment and revitalization must grapple with relatively poor access of Lawrence Heights to the City's road network, a road pattern that does not support intensification, the physical and social isolation of the Lawrence Heights neighbourhood from its surroundings, the impact of the Allen Road that bisects the neighbourhood, and the scale of the Lawrence-Allen Study Area.

These challenges underscore the need for a comprehensive planning framework for Lawrence Heights and the Lawrence-Allen Study Area. A comprehensive planning framework ensures that a full range of planning issues are addressed, that synergies between different public and private investments can be built upon, and that a sustainable approach to neighbourhood planning results in community that balances a broad range of competing public objectives and private interests with reasonable, well-balanced planning policies.



Lawrence Heights townhouses facing Flemington Park

IV. A 20-YEAR VISION FOR LAWRENCE-ALLEN

The starting point of the Lawrence-Allen Revitalization Plan is a Vision statement. The Vision describes the Lawrence-Allen area 20 years from now. Revitalization, renewal, growth, and change will happen over the long-term. The Revitalization Plan expects a 20-year time-frame for the redevelopment of the Lawrence Heights neighbourhood and its associated public investment. The comprehensive planning framework put forward in this report is part of a road map to lead the Lawrence-Allen area to the kind of community described in the Vision.



Illustration of future Lawrence Heights - Rendering produced by Sweeny Sterling Finlayson & Co Architects Inc.

LAWRENCE-ALLEN VISION STATEMENT

The Lawrence-Allen community is a mixed-income, mixed-use community located in central Toronto's urbanizing suburbs. The community is at once distinct, celebrating the area's rich cultural diversity and sense of community, and fully integrated with the broader city.

The community showcases an innovative approach to revitalization, one that prioritizes the development of a complete community through coordinated public and private investment in housing, infrastructure and the public realm. Innovative building and municipal infrastructure technologies ensure the long-term sustainability of the community. As a complete, liveable community, the Lawrence-Allen area offers residents of all ages and backgrounds a range of housing options – including revitalized social housing – as well as a range of employment, social and recreational options.

The Lawrence-Allen community is a beautiful and human-scaled place. New connections across Allen Road and to neighbouring communities provide safe, pedestrian-oriented links between neighbourhoods and to the community commons, where community services, facilities, schools, recreational programming and local retail come together in a park setting. A distributed system of neighbourhood parks offers all residents access to both passive and active recreational programming.

The community includes connections for all modes of transportation in a manner that prioritizes pedestrians, cyclists and transit users over drivers. A fine-grain mix of land uses around Lawrence West and Yorkdale subway stations enables transit-supportive densities, recognizing the unique potential of the community to support intensification around existing transit infrastructure. Access to transit is improved and many residents live within a five-minute walk of a subway station.

V. FOUR THEMES OF REVITALIZATION

The Revitalization Plan for the Lawrence-Allen community ties together four themes that encompass the range of challenges and opportunities to be reflected in a comprehensive planning framework.

These themes have recurred in many forms through the Lawrence-Allen Revitalization Study and appear throughout the Revitalization Plan. They provide lenses to understand the scope of interconnected planning issues that the Revitalization Plan addresses.

Reinvestment

The growth proposed by the Revitalization Plan does not just represent new development and population, but also investment. A comprehensive planning framework creates a context for investment to happen, whether renewal of the social housing stock, development of new private housing, construction of new public infrastructure, or initiatives to cultivate a sustainable neighbourhood.

Mobility

For growth to occur, the Lawrence-Allen area needs to be supported by a strong transportation system. A strong, well-balanced transportation system will connect Lawrence-Allen to other parts of Toronto, enabling residents to access opportunities across the city. It enables residents to get to important places within the community and it allows others to reach the neighbourhood to visit friends and family, to take advantage of employment opportunities, and to enjoy their community.

Liveability

The residents of new housing – whether social housing or market housing – create the community that ultimately inhabits a neighbourhood. A liveable neighbourhood – one with a high-quality of life – is supported by an array of community institutions that foster community health and social networks. Parks, schools, and community facilities all house institutions that support residents of a neighbourhood and foster stronger communities.

Place-Making

The bricks and mortar of a new neighbourhood are built around a structure of new streets, parks, and other public spaces. Public spaces in a neighbourhood provide the setting for civic life and activity and social interaction among residents. The quality of public spaces will contribute to the strengthening of community identity, promoting public safety, and fostering vibrant public activity. The buildings, parks, and streets in the new neighbourhood will define its physical character and the quality of the public realm.

