

A Healthy Toronto By Design Report

# Toward Healthier Apartment Neighbourhoods

September 2012





# About the Healthy Toronto By Design Report Series

Healthy Toronto By Design was released by Toronto Public Health in October 2011 and was the first in a series of reports on how local communities shape the health of their residents. The report noted that healthy cities are cities that are liveable, prosperous and sustainable. They are cities with high quality built and natural environments, public transit, housing, culture, education, food and health care. Healthy cities don't just happen. They result from creative vision, strategic decision-making and thoughtful implementation that respects the needs and challenges of all residents. They happen by design – through intentional investment and provision of infrastructure, programs and services with health in mind.

This report is one of a series which explore what makes a healthy city. Visit Toronto Public Health's website at <http://www.toronto.ca/health> for a list of reports in the series. Some of the topic areas in the series include the following:

- **Toward Healthier Apartment Neighbourhoods** – this report synthesizes zoning barriers and opportunities to promote healthy neighbourhoods, particularly in clusters of residential apartment towers in low income areas and inner suburbs of Toronto.
- **The Walkable City** – this report summarizes the findings of a Residential Preferences Survey that gauges public demand for walkable versus more auto-oriented neighbourhoods, and links this information with travel choices, physical activity levels and body weight.
- **Inventory of Best Practices** – this report showcases examples of innovative practices and policies across city government in Toronto that promote healthy built environments.
- **Active Transportation and Health** – this report synthesizes evidence on health benefits and risks associated with walking, cycling and physical activity related to the use of public transit, as well as economic assessments and specific strategies to increase the use and safety of active transportation in Toronto.
- **Health Impact Assessment Software Tool** – a software tool has been developed to assist policy and decision-makers understand how different approaches to neighbourhood design might impact health-related outcomes such as physical activity levels, body weight and greenhouse gas emissions. A technical report synthesizes information on the development of the tool and results of pilot testing.

## About the Project Partners



Toronto Public Health reduces health inequalities and improves the health of the whole population. Its services are funded by the City of Toronto, the Province of Ontario and are governed by the Toronto Board of Health. Toronto Public Health strives to make its services accessible and equitable for all residents of Toronto.



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



**Reference:**

Toronto Public Health and the Centre for Urban Growth and Renewal. Toward Healthier Apartment Neighbourhoods: A Healthy Toronto by Design Report. September 2012. City of Toronto.

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**Copies:**

Copies of this report can be downloaded at: <http://www.toronto.ca/health>

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## Executive Summary:



# Toward Healthier Apartment Neighbourhoods

## Executive Summary

This report considers how Toronto's several hundred clusters of post-war high-rise apartment buildings – referred to in this report as apartment neighbourhoods – can better support the health of apartment residents and of the residents in the surrounding communities through a series of site specific strategies. Concurrently, it identifies land use regulations that may limit these strategies, through constraining building form and limiting land use mixes, thereby preventing apartment neighbourhoods across the city emerging as economically vibrant, well-served and healthy communities.

As has been demonstrated in numerous studies by the United Way, Toronto Public Health, Wellesley Institute, and St. Michael's Hospital among others, Toronto's inner suburbs are areas where growing poverty has been linked to poor health outcomes. These trends have been found to be acute within older high-rise apartment neighbourhoods in these areas of the city, and are increasingly home to new Canadians, young children, and the elderly. The aim of this study is to expand on research related to citywide health and illustrate how public health objectives can be achieved through design interventions directed at Toronto's most vulnerable populations, where they are concentrated in apartment neighbourhoods. It is hoped that these design interventions can be used as tools that can be applied to apartment neighbourhoods across the City.

This report is based on the notion that healthy cities are cities that are liveable, prosperous and sustainable; that they have high quality built and natural environments; that they provide for the needs of their population in an equitable and sustainable fashion; that they support and foster health and well-being. This report articulates the view that healthy cities don't just happen; that they result from creative vision, strategic decision-making, and thoughtful implementation that reflects the needs and the challenges of all of its residents.

While apartment neighbourhoods face many challenges, they have attributes that make them amenable to healthy changes. They have the high density and diverse populations needed to support local retail businesses and institutions, community amenities and services that would make them more complete and healthy communities. They also have large and often under used open areas providing the space and flexibility to accommodate positive physical, social and economic improvements. While today, many of these activities are hampered by existing zoning regulations, the aim of this report is to assess opportunities for healthier neighbourhoods, as well as identify existing policies and regulations hampering these efforts.

To assess the opportunities of apartment neighbourhoods, this report utilizes the following themes, identified in the Toronto Public Health report *Healthy Toronto by Design*, 2011, and applies them to the scale of the apartment neighbourhood:

1. Natural Environment
2. Built Environment
3. Transportation
4. Housing
5. Income and Employment
6. Education and Learning
7. Food Security
8. Community Health

Using these health themes, thirty-one strategies and design opportunities have been developed that together form a strategic direction to enable positive neighbourhood change, and inform investment into these communities moving forward.

This report presents a range of strategies, both large and small, short and long term, that could be applied to Toronto's numerous apartment neighbourhoods to help them emerge as vibrant and healthy places. These strategies have the potential to improve the

### Images:

Opposite, left: Don Mills and DVP, 2006, courtesy Brendan Martin

Opposite, top right: Market in apartment neighbourhood, Berlin, Germany, 2009

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

Opposite, bottom right: Outdoor fresh food market, St. Jamestown, Toronto, courtesy of TRO

health outcomes and well being of hundreds of thousands of residents who call these areas home. They could also enable apartment neighbourhoods to emerge as community focal points providing social exchange and convenient access to shops and services to adjacent communities and the City of Toronto as a whole.

As with all areas of the city, Toronto's apartment neighbourhoods are complex and diverse. Planning regulations are by no means the sole barrier to reinvestment and revitalization in apartment neighbourhoods in Toronto's inner suburbs. There is no panacea for achieving the opportunities outlined in this report. Rather, progress will be made through a series of incremental and related strategies for the short and long terms. Realizing these opportunities requires the combination of enabling policies, and means of supporting individual and coordinated private, non-profit and public sectors investment towards these ends.

This report does however identify the relationship between the urban planning framework and proposed solutions, specifically with respect to the City's Official Plan and Zoning By-Law as they relate to the strategies presented here for positive neighbourhood change. While many policies are enabling, particularly those of the Official Plan, there are many regulatory barriers, both in the City's Zoning By-law and other municipal regulations. Identifying and removing the barriers in the urban planning framework is a first and crucial step in enabling the strategic direction outlined in this report.

Achieving many of the strategies outlined in this report are relatively straightforward. Others are more complicated. Together, they will help to inform the evolution of these dynamic, diverse and vibrant communities throughout Toronto in the decades to come. As policies are strengthened and capacity builds, the number, sophistication and efficacy of initiatives can grow over time.







## Section 1: Introduction

### 1.0 Introduction

### 1.2 Context: Challenges and Opportunities in Apartment Neighbourhoods





#### Images:

Cover Image: Thorncliffe Park, Toronto, 2009

Inner Cover and Section 1, 2, 3: Visioning Sketch of Neighbourhood Renewal, William MacIvor, ERA Architects

Top: Weston and Finch, Toronto, 2007, courtesy of Jesse Colin Jackson

Opposite: Eglinton Flats, Toronto, 2007, courtesy of Jesse Colin Jackson



## Section 1: Introduction

### Background

In 2011, United Way Toronto released the report, *Poverty By Postal Code 2: Vertical Poverty*, which documented the growing trend of increased concentrations of poverty in Toronto's inner suburbs in general, and specifically in Toronto's many older high-rise rental apartment communities. These apartment neighbourhoods are increasingly challenged by poverty, isolation, lack of economic opportunity, social need, and increased health risks.

The *Vertical Poverty* report identified the lack of a mix of land uses in apartment neighbourhoods in low income areas in Toronto's inner suburbs as a factor which limits service delivery, economic development and access to goods and services, thereby contributing to the challenges that these neighbourhoods are facing. The report further identified policy barriers, such as zoning by-laws, as presenting obstacles to the diversification of land uses that could help address these challenges. The report recommended that actions be taken to encourage economic and social development in these neighbourhoods, that policy barriers be identified, and that alternatives be considered to enable positive changes in these neighbourhoods.

Concurrent to the research conducted for the *Vertical Poverty* report, Toronto Public Health, St. Michael's Hospital, the Wellesley Institute and others have documented the relationship between geography, community health and the determinants of health within the City of Toronto; results which demonstrate the strong links between poor health and poverty.

The geographic areas identified with higher vulnerability to poorer health outcomes are strongly correlated with the apartment neighbourhoods located in the low-income areas of the inner suburbs of Toronto. These patterns suggest that neighbourhood form is contributing to negative health outcomes experienced by those vulnerable populations who live in apartment neighbourhoods.

Collectively these studies reveal that the populations that live in many of Toronto's apartment neighbourhoods, particularly those in low-income, inner suburban locations, have lower incomes, experience higher rates of diabetes, have less access to fresh food, live in less walkable neighbourhoods, and are more vulnerable to extreme heat than other residents in Toronto.

Increasingly older apartment neighbourhoods in Toronto's inner suburbs are home to large families, children and youth, new Canadians, and the elderly [TNRGGH 2010], with trends towards increasing health risks and higher rates of poverty. Toronto's apartment neighbourhoods are areas that require focused attention to improve the health, wellbeing and quality of life of their residents; something that is expected to increase the overall health of Toronto's population.

In 2011, in response to the *Vertical Poverty* report, Toronto Public Health was directed by the Board of Health to: develop strategies to improve the health and well-being of residents of apartment neighbourhood facing low-income and trends towards poor health; and to identify policy barriers that keep these neighbourhoods from becoming healthy communities.

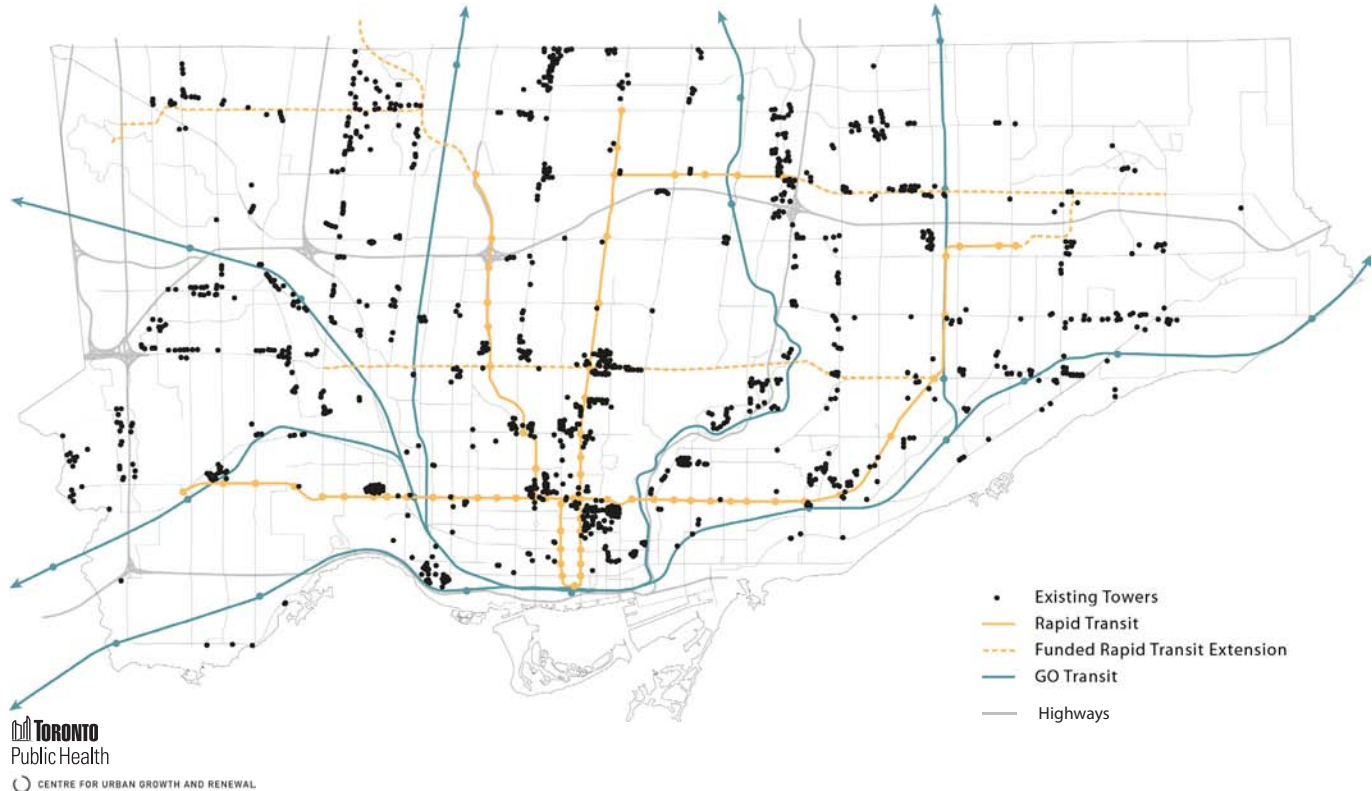


## Section 1: Introduction

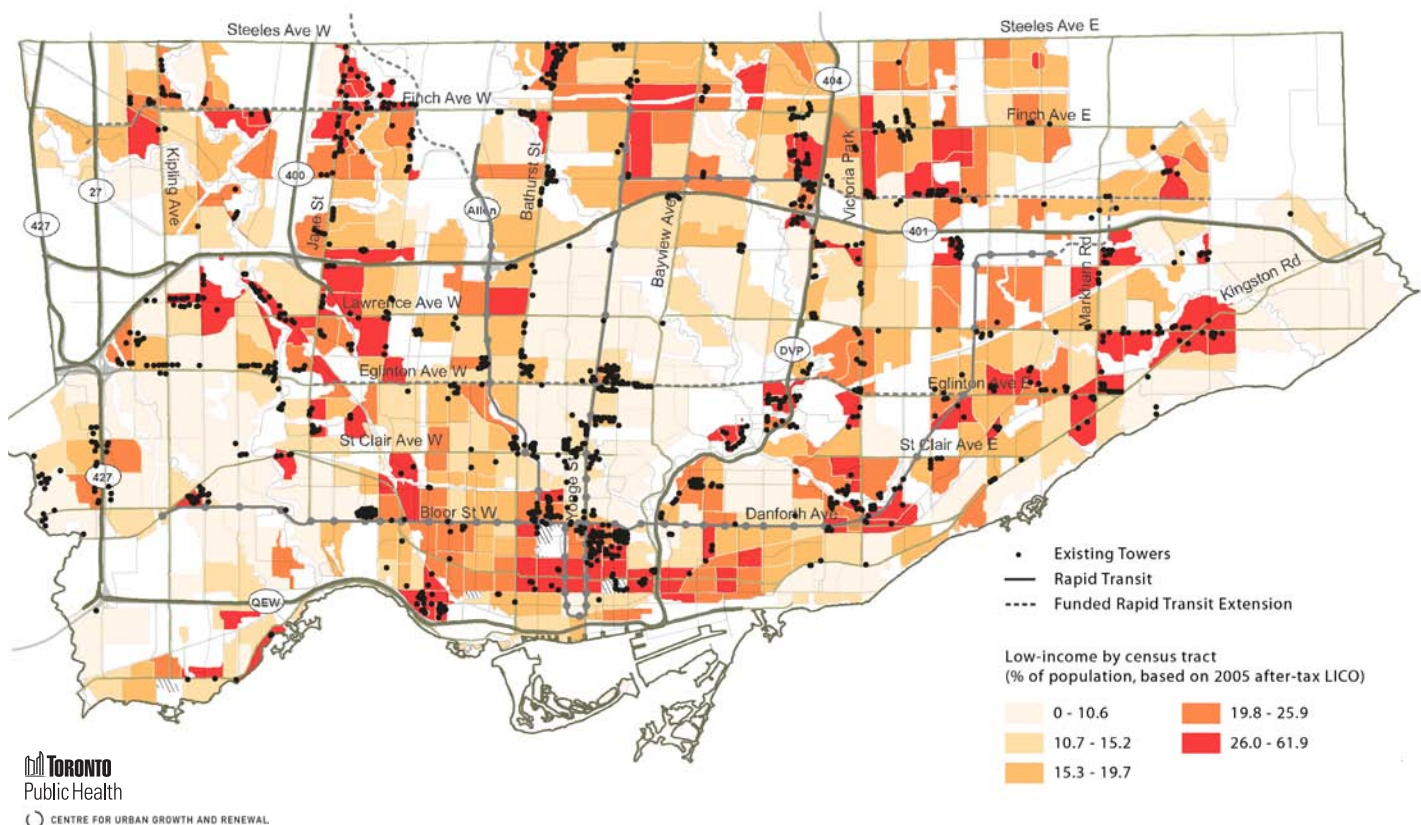
### Mapping: Apartment Neighbourhoods and Health Indicators:

Dots depict post-war apartment towers eight's storeys or higher, built between 1945 - 1984 (1,189 in total)  
Larger version of these maps are available in Appendix B

#### Post-War Apartment Towers + Urban Transportation Systems



#### Post-War Apartment Towers + Areas of Low Income Across Toronto





## Purpose and Scope of Report

This report considers how Toronto's clusters of post-war high-rise apartment buildings – referred to in this report as apartment neighbourhoods – can better support the health of apartment residents and of the residents in the surrounding communities through a series of site specific strategies. Concurrently, it identifies land use policies that may limit these strategies, through constraining building form and limiting land use mixes that may be preventing apartment neighbourhoods across the city from emerging as economically vibrant, well-served and healthy communities.

Apartment Neighbourhoods are areas of the city with unique built form and demographic characteristics from their surroundings. Yet as the apartment neighbourhoods throughout the city are largely consistent in term of built form and policy context, the purpose of this study is to examine their specific opportunities and challenges in becoming more healthy and vibrant places.

While located throughout the city, a large majority of apartment neighbourhoods have been found to be located in areas of the city with trends of lower income, poorer health outcomes, and built form challenges, such as poor walkability.

By identifying the constraints that limit healthy development patterns, this report can identify the policy changes that are needed to remove barriers to enabling complete neighbourhoods that support and foster the health of their residents. This study is based on the notion that a community can be designed to facilitate healthy living by providing natural, built and social environments that support and foster health and well-being.

Building on the work of the United Way, Toronto Public Health, the Centre for Urban Growth and Renewal and the Tower Renewal Office at the City of Toronto, as well as numerous studies related to community health, this report examines the opportunities and challenges related to health in apartment neighbourhoods in Toronto. It also identifies a number of neighbourhood reinvestment strategies that could be used to improve the health and well being of residents in apartment neighbourhoods in the years to come.

The strategies discussed in this report are primarily aimed to address the challenges of apartment neighbourhoods in lower-income areas of Toronto's inner suburbs in a manner related to the specific and unique built form opportunities of these communities. These strategies may also be considered for any apartment neighbourhood of similar built form characteristic throughout the city in which features of a healthy community are lacking.



### Notes:

In a study conducted by the Province of Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure, a full 72% of post-war apartment buildings (eights storeys or more) were found to be in areas of high or very high social needs (TNRGGH 2010).

### Images:

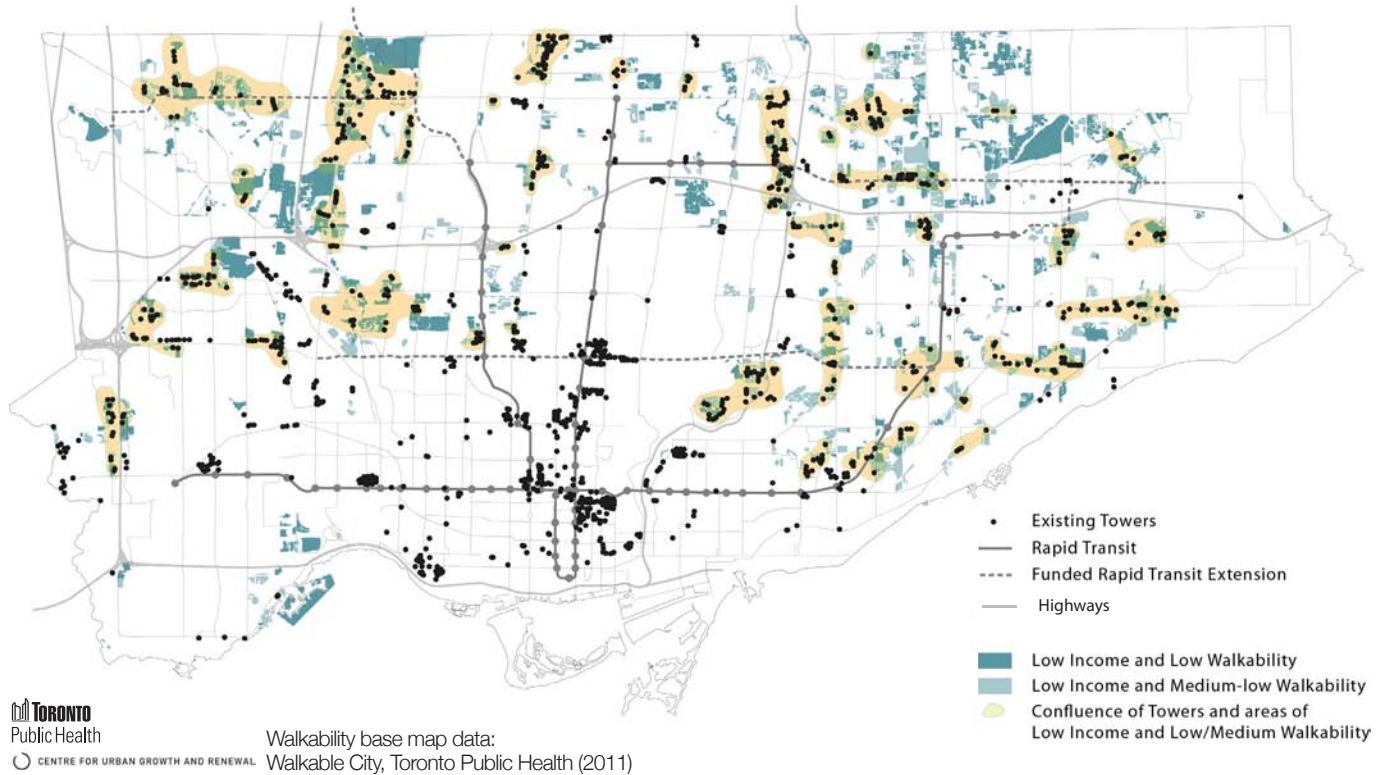
Thorncliffe Park, Toronto, 2009

## Section 1: Introduction

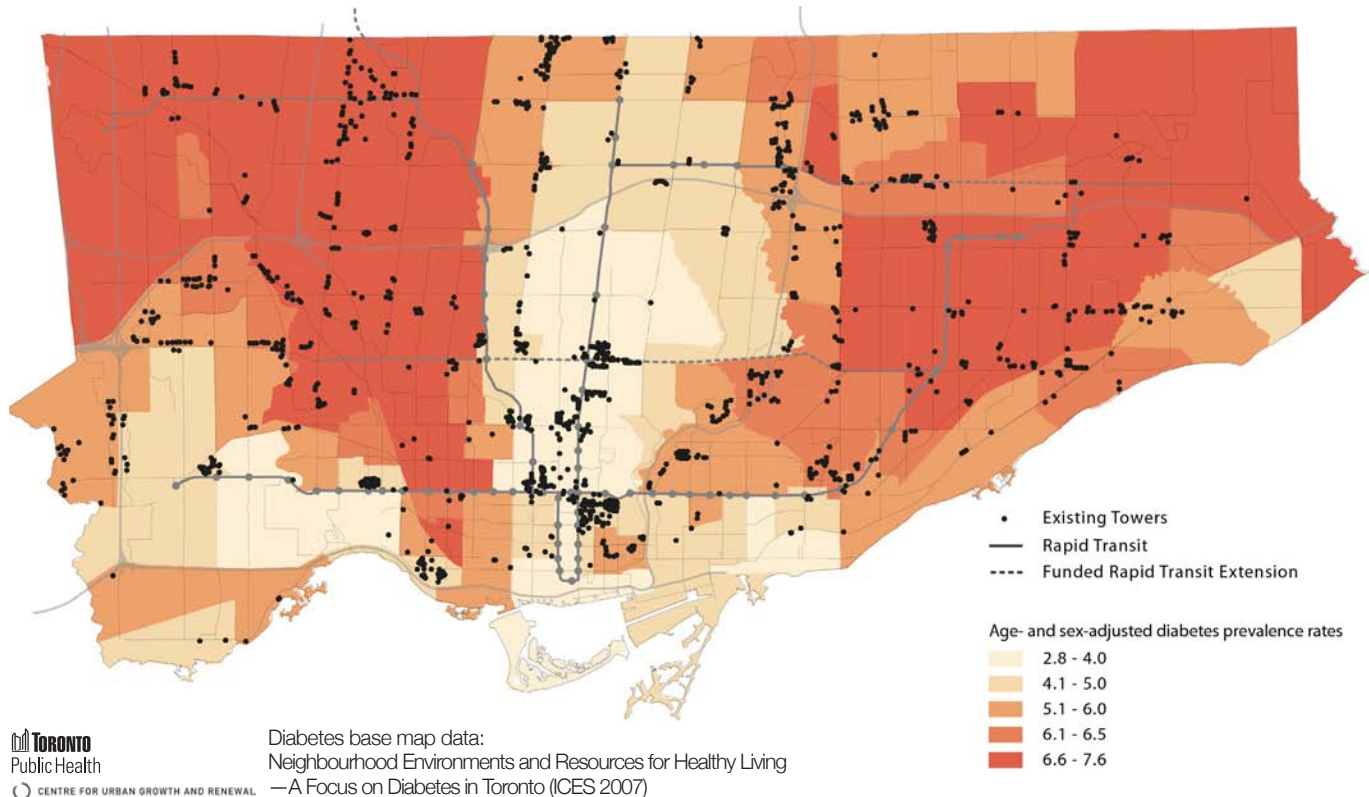
### Mapping Apartment Neighbourhoods and Health Indicators:

Dots depict post-war apartment towers eight storeys or higher, built between 1945 – 1984 (1,189 in total)  
Larger version of these maps are available in Appendix B

#### Post-War Apartment Towers + Areas of High Poverty and Low Walkability Across Toronto



#### Post-War Apartment Towers + Areas of High Incidence of Diabetes Across Toronto



# Toward Healthier Apartment Neighbourhoods: Study Framework

This report is based on the notion that healthy cities are cities that are liveable, prosperous and sustainable; that they have high quality built and natural environments; that they provide for the needs of their population in an equitable and sustainable fashion; that they support and foster health and well-being. This report articulates the view that healthy cities don't just happen; that they result from creative vision, strategic decision-making, and thoughtful implementation that reflects the needs and the challenges of all of its residents (TPH, 2011).

This report utilizes the following themes, identified in the Toronto Public Health report *Healthy Toronto by Design*, 2011, and applies them to the scale of the apartment neighbourhood:

1. Natural Environment
2. Built Environment
3. Transportation
4. Housing
5. Income and Employment
6. Education and Learning
7. Food Security
8. Community Health

The aim of this study is to expand on research related to citywide health and illustrate how public health objectives can be achieved through design interventions directed at apartment neighbourhoods. It is hoped that these design interventions can be used as tools that can be applied to apartment neighbourhoods across the City to help each to become a more 'complete' community that supports and fosters the health and well being of its residents.

In this context, each of the eight themes was considered as aspects of a neighbourhood. This was done with the knowledge that a neighbourhood framework does not capture all of the issues that are related to each theme. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the eight themes examined in the report illuminate the range of opportunities and barriers that can apply to apartment neighbourhoods and their impact on health and well being.

Neighbourhoods can be defined in both geographic and social terms as places in which social networks of communities interact. Therefore, our analysis of neighbourhoods in this study focuses on both the social aspects of health as well as on the physical arrangement of buildings and landscapes, including land uses.

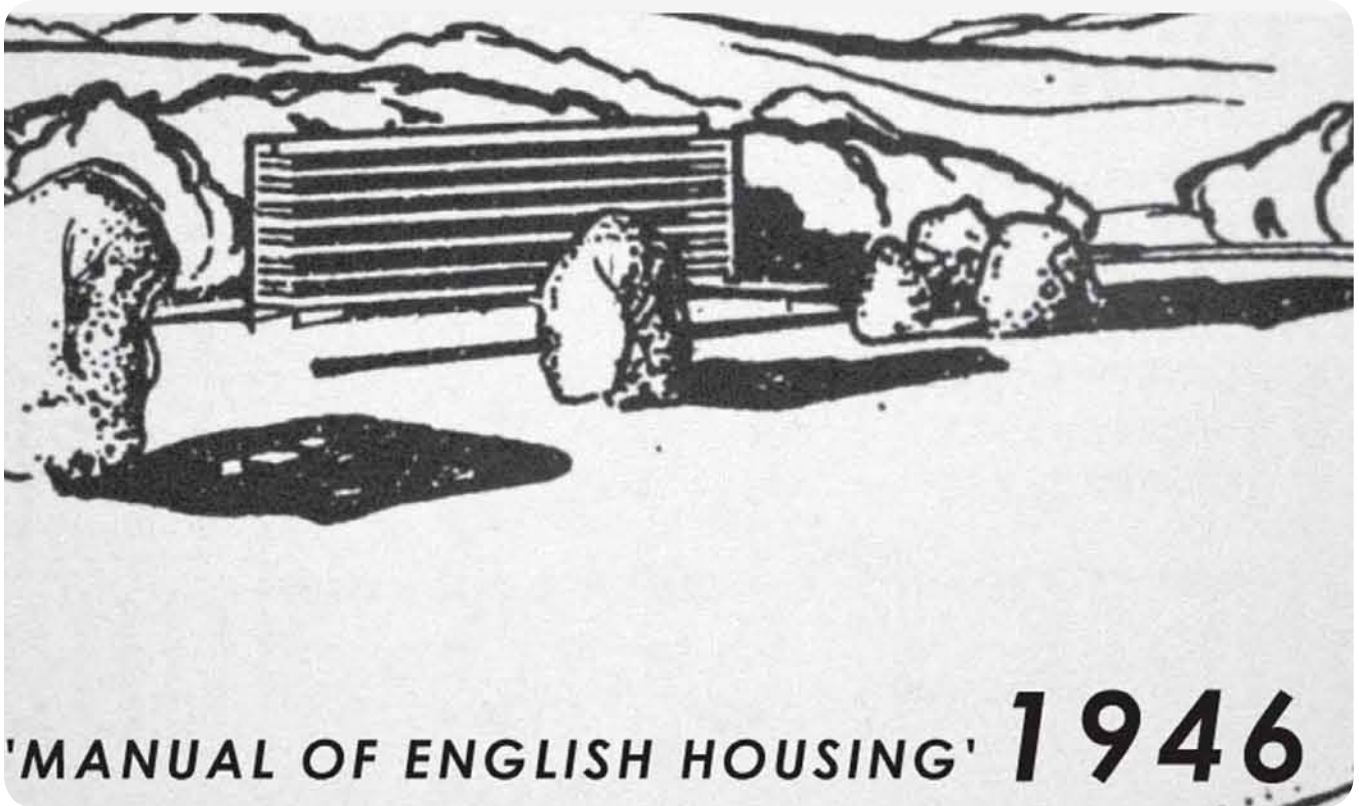
This report identifies a series of opportunities that could allow apartment neighbourhoods to emerge as healthy, vibrant and resilient communities.

While apartment neighbourhoods face many challenges, they have attributes that make them amenable to healthy changes. They have the high density and diverse populations needed to support local retail businesses and institutions, community amenities and services that would make them more complete and healthy communities. They also have large and often under used open areas providing the space and flexibility to accommodate positive physical, social and economic improvements.

The following sections highlight opportunities for changes in use and neighbourhood form that are needed to support and foster healthy living. They address how proposed changes could be affected, in a negative or positive way, by existing land use zoning by-laws and Official Plan policies.

The following sections present a range of strategies, both large and small, short and long term, that could be applied to Toronto's numerous apartment neighbourhoods to help them emerge as vibrant and healthy places. These strategies have the potential to improve the health outcomes and well being of hundreds of thousands of residents who call these areas home. They could also enable apartment neighbourhoods to emerge as community focal points providing social exchange and convenient access to shops and services to adjacent communities and the City of Toronto as a whole.





Images:

Top: Modern Housing and Healthy Living: "Flat in a County Park", from English Town Planning, 1940s

Bottom: Apartment towers under construction, Toronto, early 1960s, courtesy of the Archives of Canadian Architect



### Tower Blocks and Public Health

The geographic areas that are the focus of this report are clusters of post-war multi-residential housing that were developed throughout the Toronto region from the 1950s through to the early 1980s. These groupings of buildings are referred to in this report as apartment neighbourhoods. The Toronto region is unique for its proliferation of these apartment neighbourhoods which largely consist of groupings of tower and slab high-rise buildings often arranged in large areas of open space. Home to hundreds of thousands of people, these apartment neighbourhoods define much of Toronto's urban landscape, particularly in the City's inner suburbs [TNRGGH 2010].

These apartment neighbourhoods were originally envisaged as an innovative type of housing planned and designed with a strong emphasis on health.

In contrast to what was felt at the time to be the crowded, virulent, and often deteriorating conditions of 'central city tenement slums', modern apartment blocks were viewed as a modern housing amenity that provided access to light, fresh air, views of nature, and access to open green space [Shaw 1985].

As housing of this type proliferated globally following the Second World War and were adapted to local conditions, many of these original public health intentions remained at the forefront. In the case of Toronto, the widespread adoption of this housing form was based on the belief that it provided a superior housing amenity [Faludi 1963]. Today, Toronto's tower blocks commonly contain the features associated with the original health-oriented focus that inspired their planning and design.

The purpose of this report is to examine these communities, once again through the lens of public health, a half-century following their construction. This report examines the opportunities for improving the health of those who live in Toronto's apartment neighbourhoods by applying the current-day understanding of healthy communities. The Toronto Public Health report, *Healthy Neighbourhood By Design* [2011], forms the starting point for this analysis.

#### Notes:

##### Apartment Neighbourhoods Defined

Throughout this report, the neighbourhoods under study are referred to as apartment neighbourhoods. The term Apartment Neighbourhoods is also referred to in the Toronto Official Plan as a specific land use designation with a series of policies guiding growth and neighbourhood form. While many areas discussed in this report are located within areas designated as Apartment Neighbourhoods in the Official Plan, this is not true in all cases and these terms are not interchangeable. When the specific land-use designation is referred to in this report, capitals will be used. Official Plan policies are discussed further in section 1.2.

## Section 1.2: Context: Challenges and Opportunities in Apartment Neighbourhoods

### Apartment Towers and Neighbourhood Planning

Toronto region's heritage of post-war apartment neighbourhoods are unique to North America. No other city in North America has suburban areas that include such an extensive set of post-war high-rise towers. Located throughout the City and the Greater Toronto Region, these multi-residential buildings make up an important component of the city and region's housing stock [TNRGGH 2010].

Apartment neighbourhoods were planned under the former Metropolitan Toronto urban planning system as a key feature in the formation of new communities. They were planned and built alongside single-family homes, schools, community centres, shopping centres, low-rise apartments, employment industrial zones, and natural and recreation areas typical of suburban development in Toronto of this era. Rather than creating bedroom communities, Toronto's expanding suburbs, particularly in communities north of the 401, were established to facilitate a relative degree of self-sufficiency, and apartment towers were an important part of that planning [North York 1965].

Apartment towers were included in large numbers to provide options for rental housing in new communities. They were also included to help meet density targets proscribed by the Metropolitan Government for new areas in order to optimize public services such as sewage, water and public transport [North York 1959]. As a result, nearly all communities developed in the post-war era in Toronto include large concentrations of apartment housing.

Apartment towers were generally planned as clusters adjacent to arterial roads, ravines, shopping centres or areas of low-rise housing [TNRGGH 2010]. The result is contiguous areas of high-rise towers that collectively are of a distinct character to their immediate surroundings. Apartment clusters were also developed along subway lines in more central parts of the city as part of urban renewal schemes. Clusters at Yonge and Eglinton, High Park, or St. Jamestown are some of the better known examples.

This legacy has provided the city with an urban form unique to the continent; consisting of the widespread distribution of high-density clusters of high-rise housing from the city's centre to its periphery. The result of the high-rise housing boom of this era is roughly 2,000 towers located throughout the region, home to over one million people, the majority of which are located in the City of Toronto [TNRGGH 2010].

*progress continues . . .*



#### Post-War High-Rise Housing in the Greater Toronto Area:

A study conducted for the Province of Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure by the Center for Urban Growth and Renewal: *Tower Neighbourhood Renewal in the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (TNRGGH 2010) catalogued multi-residential buildings of similar characteristics to those under study in this report, built between 1945 and 1984. The study found **3,080** buildings of this type five stories and over and **1,925** buildings of this type eight stories and over in the Greater Golden Horseshoe Region; **1,763** five stories and over and **1,189** eight stories and over in the City of Toronto.

#### Image:

Above, advertisement, Thonecliffe Park: shopping, light industrial and residential areas, early 1960

### Opportunities and Advantages

Today, five decades after their formation, Toronto's older apartment neighbourhoods remain a vital aspect of the city's housing stock. They represent half the rental housing in the City of Toronto, and a large part of the City's affordable rental housing for families. Apartment neighbourhoods are a vital assets to the overall health of the city.

As has been discussed above, many of Toronto's older apartment neighbourhoods are facing challenges, in terms of neighbourhood vitality and the health and wellbeing of their residents. However, these neighbourhoods also have specific inherent qualities that could be used to foster and support healthy living. These positive qualities form the basis of the strategies outlined in this report and have been summarized as follows:

- They have **under utilized open spaces** that could accommodate a range of new activities, uses and buildings, that could contribute to healthier lifestyles and improved well-being in apartment neighbourhoods.
- **Apartment neighbourhoods are typically large communities consisting of multiple apartment towers often including a population of thousands people, which makes them comparable to small towns.** These neighbourhoods have a dense population of people with diverse backgrounds who can support, and engage in, local enterprises, services and agencies. They have the population and community diversity needed to foster local economic networks, as happens in a village, a small town, or a well-established urban quarter.
- Today, residents of apartment neighbourhoods **walk, cycle, and take transit more than the average Torontonian**, often due to lower rates of car ownership. Physical improvements to these neighbourhoods can further support this trend toward healthier and more active transportation choices.
- Apartment tower clusters comprise of **robust buildings, which can be adapted, modified or expanded** in a way that better supports health and well-being.
- As they were originally planned, apartment neighbourhoods were designed to provide **rental housing close to open spaces, fresh air, sunlight and often natural landscapes**.
- **There is a strong consensus among health professionals about the importance of enabling neighbourhoods to support and foster healthy living.** This consensus extends to all three levels of government, community health advocates, academic researchers and residents of apartment neighbourhoods in Toronto.
- Lastly, as they are largely situated adjacent to areas of low-density single-detached housing, apartment neighbourhoods could, in the future, be **transformative catalysts for making suburban areas more amenable to healthy living**.

Apartment neighbourhoods provide a solid foundation from which to build more vibrant, diverse and healthy communities. Their specific built form characteristics offer a flexible and resilient framework for positive neighbourhood change. The following sections outline strategies for achieving these goals.

## The Policy Context of Apartment Neighbourhoods

As with any complex area of the city, there are a number of challenges to engaging in the range of public, private and community initiatives to enable apartment neighbourhoods to emerge as healthier, better served and more vibrant communities. These challenges include, but are not limited to access to project capital, facilitating organization among key stakeholders, and building capacity for engaging in economic and social ventures which, to date, have rarely been undertaken in these neighbourhoods.

However, one of the areas the City of Toronto can directly address is the state of the land-use planning framework that is in place in these neighbourhoods. An update to land-use planning practices can remove overt policy barriers as well as directly promote and enable initiatives for more healthy and well-served communities.

Two of the elements of this planning framework are the Official Plan, which sets out the overarching land use and development policies for the entire City, and the Zoning By-law, which establishes permitted land uses on individual properties.

### Official Plan:

The City of Toronto recognizes Apartment Neighbourhoods as distinct areas within the City, and has given them a special designation within the Official Plan. This designation has been developed as a result of the distinct physical characteristics of Apartment Tower sites; where the boundaries of Apartment Neighbourhoods have often been defined by identifying the location of existing clusters of high-rise apartment developments.

According to the Official Plan, Apartment Neighbourhoods are considered primarily residential, low-growth areas of the City, which may contain small-scale institutional, commercial and community uses that directly service the local neighbourhoods.

While most multi-residential housing clusters that are the focus of this report are located in areas designated Apartment Neighbourhoods by the Official Plan, many are also located in areas known as 'Mixed-Use'. Multi-residential housing designated as Mixed-Use are often located along major arterials, with some containing more commercial activity and community services than apartment complexes located in areas designated Apartment Neighbourhoods. While the strategies of this report relate to apartment clusters in both land use designations, the analysis of Official Plan Policies in this report relates specifically to Apartment Neighbourhoods.

### Zoning by-laws:

While the Official Plan supports some mixed-use within Apartment Neighbourhoods, the zoning by-laws are often less flexible. Similar to other forms of housing within post-war suburban areas, apartment buildings clusters were generally conceived as exclusively residential areas. Commercial, social and cultural amenities were located within what was considered convenient driving distance, but were not generally incorporated into these Apartment Neighbourhoods.

This concept of separated land uses was codified in the City's zoning by-laws for apartment properties. As a result, the shape and size of the buildings, the number of units and parking spots, and the allowable land uses have remained largely unchanged for the half century since they were originally designed.

The process of amending zoning by-laws is lengthy and costly (See Below). As a result of these 'legacy regulations', Toronto's Apartment Neighbourhoods have been unable to respond to changing concepts of community development or to the changing needs of their residents. (For more information regarding the policy context and barriers, see the forthcoming United Way apartment neighbourhoods zoning study).

### Images:

Opposite, top: Thorncliffe Park, Toronto, 2009

Opposite, bottom: Don Mills and DVP, 2006, courtesy Brendan Martin

Today Apartment Neighbourhoods present the paradox of having changed remarkably little physically, while at the same time experiencing some of the most significant changes in neighbourhood demographics of any neighbourhood type [United Way 2011]. These neighbourhoods have increasingly become home to a diverse population which includes residents with growing families, the elderly, and new Canadians. Often described as arrival cities [Saunders, 2010], these neighbourhoods are characterized by increasing trends for ethnic diversity, low car ownership [TNRGGH 2010], and demand for a broad range of goods, services and amenities that were not conceived in their original planning or design. This report proposes a series of strategies to bridge these gaps to allow these neighbourhoods to evolve to meet the evolving needs of their resident communities moving forward.



### Policy Evaluation

As part of the analysis for this report, features of a healthy community were assessed relative to current objectives in the Official Plan and the Zoning Bylaw. Features were categorized as “supportive”, “neutral” or “limiting” based on the definitions below. Further details for each theme area are provided in the sections that follow, as well as the Strategies Summary Chart on page 92.

#### Scale: Supportive <-> Neutral <-> Limiting

**Supportive:** The solution is anticipated or permitted, or may be allowed subject to minor conditions.

**Neutral:** The solution is unaffected.

**Limiting:** The solution would face significant regulatory obstacles.





Image:  
Above: Don Mills and Sheppard, Toronto, 2010

### Zoning By-Laws in Apartment Neighbourhoods

#### Changing Zoning By-Laws

Zoning by-laws are rules created by the City to control what uses can occur on parcels of land and where and how big buildings can be when constructed. If a landowner wants to do something on the property which is not allowed by the current rules, there are two things that can be done:

1. The owner can ask for a minor exception – called a minor variance – to the zoning bylaw; or
2. The rules can be changed by asking City Council to change, or amend, the zoning bylaw for a specific site to accommodate a proposed project.

A minor variance is reviewed by the Committee of Adjustment, a body appointed by City Council. This process can take up to several months and usually requires drawings of the proposal and may require further information depending on the type of variance requested.

A zoning bylaw amendment requires approval by Toronto City Council that follows a preliminary review by the local Community Council. The process requires the applicant to supply a series of studies about the proposal in addition to architectural drawings. It also involves a public meeting and often additional discussions with stakeholders. This process usually requires a year to complete but often requires an even longer time.

Both processes commonly require the applicant to hire experts, such as a planner, architect or lawyer, which adds substantial costs and delay to the process.

As a result, small-scale projects in apartment neighbourhoods face challenges beyond the usual barriers facing any start-up organizations or business. The effect is seen in how few changes have occurred in apartment neighbourhoods over the last half century.

#### Harmonized Zoning By-Law (Forthcoming):

Apartment neighbourhoods today are governed by a patchwork of zoning by-laws that are a pre-amalgamation legacy, when Toronto was made up of several municipalities each having their own zoning code. The City of Toronto is now undergoing the process of harmonizing these legacy zones under a single city-wide zoning code. While the new harmonized zoning bylaw is meant to generally be consistent with the codes it replaces, the draft “Residential Apartment” Zone related to many apartment neighbourhoods does propose to remove some of the barriers discussed in this report.

In addition, work is currently underway by City of Toronto’s City Planning Division and United Way Toronto to address many of the zoning barriers outlined in this report through the creation of a new zoning framework for apartment neighbourhoods. It is anticipated this work will be completed in 2013.





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

### Themes and Strategies

Theme 1: Natural Environment

Theme 2: Built Environment

Theme 3: Transportation

Theme 4: Housing

Theme 5: Employment, Income and Opportunities

Theme 6: Education and Learning

Theme 7: Food Security

Theme 8: Community Health

Health Strategies Summary Chart



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

## Themes and Strategies

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

### Theme 1: Natural Environment:

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

### Theme 2: Built Environment

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

### Theme 3: Transportation

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

### Theme 4: Housing

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

## Theme 5: Income, Employment and Opportunities

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

## Theme 6: Education and Learning

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

## Theme 7: Food Security

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

## Theme 8: Community Health

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

# Theme 1: Natural Environment

## How does the natural environment affect health?

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

- **Air Quality** – Air pollution associated with the transportation sector, the heating of homes, the generation of electricity, and other sources, can have a significant impact on public health. In 2004, Toronto Public Health estimated that the five common air pollutants contribute to approximately 1,700 non-traumatic deaths and between 3,000 and 6,000 hospital admissions each year in Toronto” (TPH, 2004).
- **Physical Activity and Mental Health** - Parks, gardens and other public green spaces play an important role in community health. These areas provide opportunities for exercise, physical activity and relaxation. Studies suggest that contact with nature can produce health benefits such as lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels, enhanced survival after a heart attack, more rapid recovery from surgery, fewer minor medical complaints and lower self-reported stress. In children with attention disorders and in teens with behavioural disorders, contact with nature has resulted in significant improvement (Frumkin, 2001; Croucher, 2008; Maas, 2006).
- **Social Cohesion** - Parks also build healthy communities by contributing to stable neighbourhoods and strengthening community development. Research shows that residents of neighbourhoods with greenery in common spaces enjoy stronger social ties (Gies, 2006). Increasingly, parks are also being used for community gardens which provide residents with healthy, affordable food and opportunities for physical activity and socialization (TPH, 2011).

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



### Image:

Top: Crescent Town from Taylor Creek, Toronto, 2006

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



### The Opportunity in Apartment Neighbourhoods

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

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

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

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

#### 1.1 Improve Microclimate and Outdoor Comfort

#### 1.2 Provide Access to Green Space, Parks and Natural Areas

#### 1.3 Reduce Negative Impacts to Air and Water Quality

# 1.1 Improve Microclimate and Outdoor Comfort

## Context

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

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

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

## Solution

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

## Making it Happen

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

### Official Plan: Supportive

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

### Zoning by-laws: Limiting

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

### Other considerations

The solutions could be subject to site plan approval.



## Image:

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

## 1.2 Provide Access to Green Space, Parks and Natural Areas

### Context

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

### Solution

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

### Making it Happen

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

#### Official Plan: Supportive

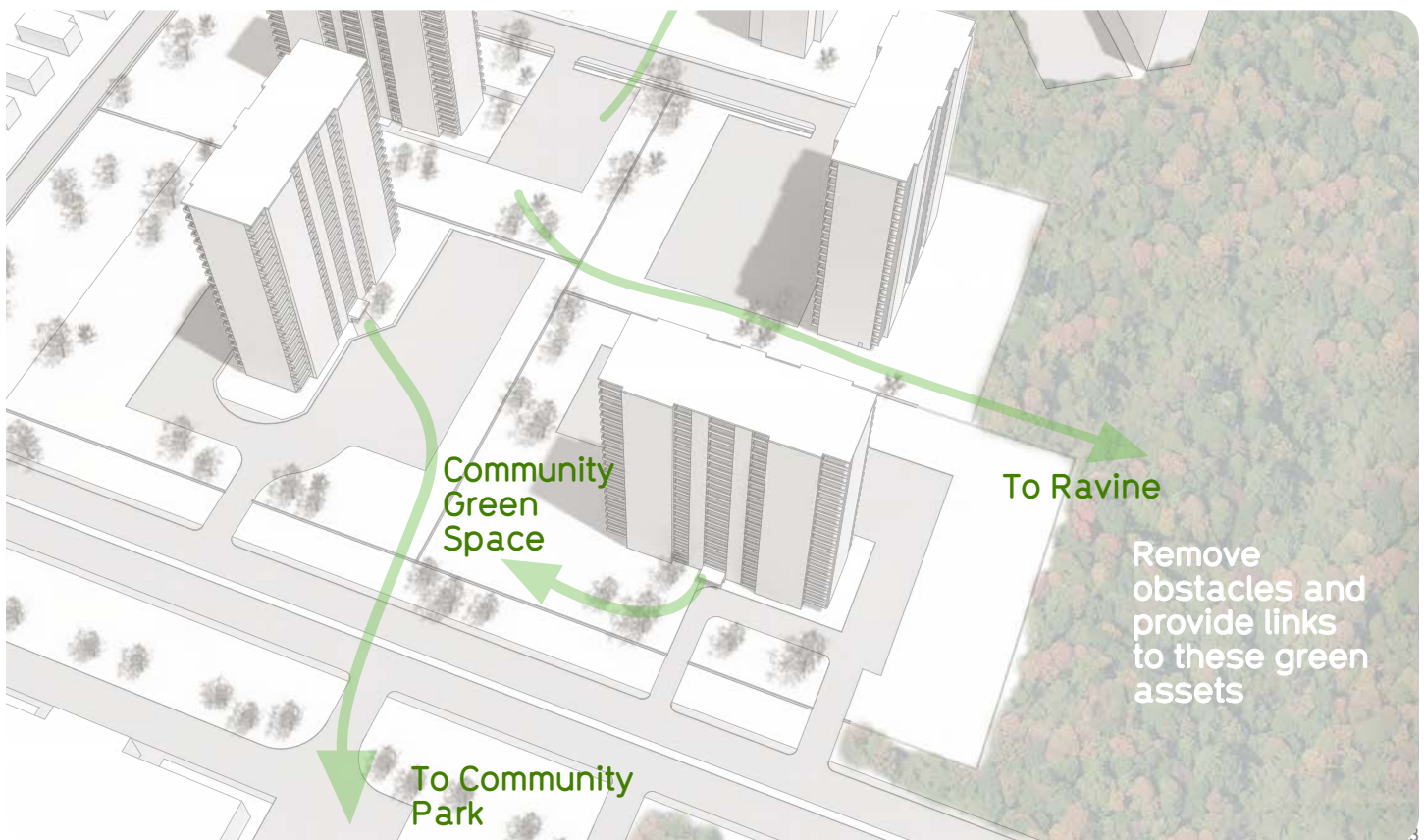
These solutions would generally be supported by current Official Plan policies.

#### Zoning by-laws: Neutral

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

#### Other considerations

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



## 1.3 Reduce Negative Impacts to Air and Water Quality

### Context

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

### Solution

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

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

### Making it Happen

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

#### **Official Plan: Supportive**

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

#### **Zoning by-laws: Limiting**

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

#### **Other considerations**

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

### Notes:

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





### Images:

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

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

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

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

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

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

# Theme 2: Built Environment

## How does the built environment affect health?

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

The built environment can affect health by influencing:

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

## **The Opportunity in Apartment Neighbourhoods**

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

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

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

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

### **2.1 Improve Opportunities for Gathering**

### **2.2 Improve Sense of Security**

### **2.3 Reduce Hazards such as Traffic Blind Spots**

### **2.4 Animate Spaces**



## 2.1 Improved Opportunities for Gathering

### Context

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

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

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

### Solution

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

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

### Making it Happen

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

#### Official Plan: Supportive

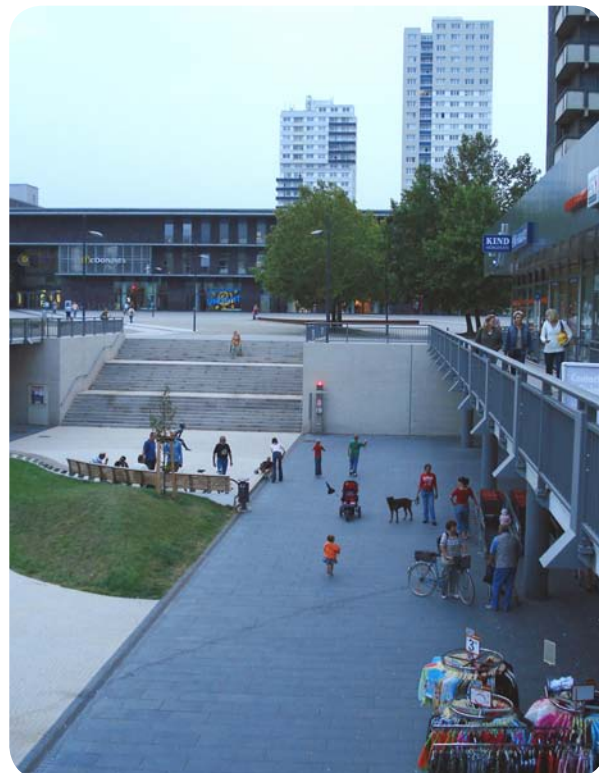
These solutions would generally be supported by current Official Plan policies.

#### Zoning by-laws: Neutral

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

#### Other considerations

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







**Images:**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 2.2 Improved Sense of Security and Lighting

### Context

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

### Solution

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

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

### Making it Happen

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

#### Official Plan: Supportive

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

#### Zoning by-laws: Supportive

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

#### Other considerations

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



### Images:

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

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



## 2.3 Reduced Hazards

### Context

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

### Solution

#### Unsafe Drive Areas:

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

#### Waste Storage

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

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

#### Falling debris:

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



### Making it Happen

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

#### Official Plan: Supportive

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

#### Zoning by-laws: Limiting

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

#### Other considerations

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

## 2.4 Animate Spaces

### Context

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

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

### Solution

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

### Making it Happen

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

#### **Official Plan: Supportive**

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

#### **Zoning by-laws: Limiting**

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





#### Images:

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

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

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

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

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

# Theme 3: Transportation

## How does the transportation systems affect health?

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

Transportation systems can affect health by influencing the:

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

### The Opportunity in Apartment Tower Neighbourhoods

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

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

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

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

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

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

**3.1 Remove Physical Barriers to Active Transportation**

**3.2 Integrate Transit stops and Stations with Apartment Towers**

**3.3 Improve Cycling Networks and Infrastructure**

**3.4 Enable Access to Carshare Programs**

**3.5 Reduce Parking Requirements to Allow Conversion to Alternative Uses**

## 3.1 Remove Physical Barriers to Active Transportation

### Context

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

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

### Solution

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

### Making it Happen

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

#### **Official Plan: Supportive**

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

#### **Zoning by-laws: Supportive**

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

#### **Other considerations**

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





#### Images:

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

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

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

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

## 3.2 Integrate Transit Stations with Apartment Towers

### Context

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

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

### Solution

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

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

### Making it Happen

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

#### Official Plan: Supportive

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

#### Zoning by-laws: Neutral

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

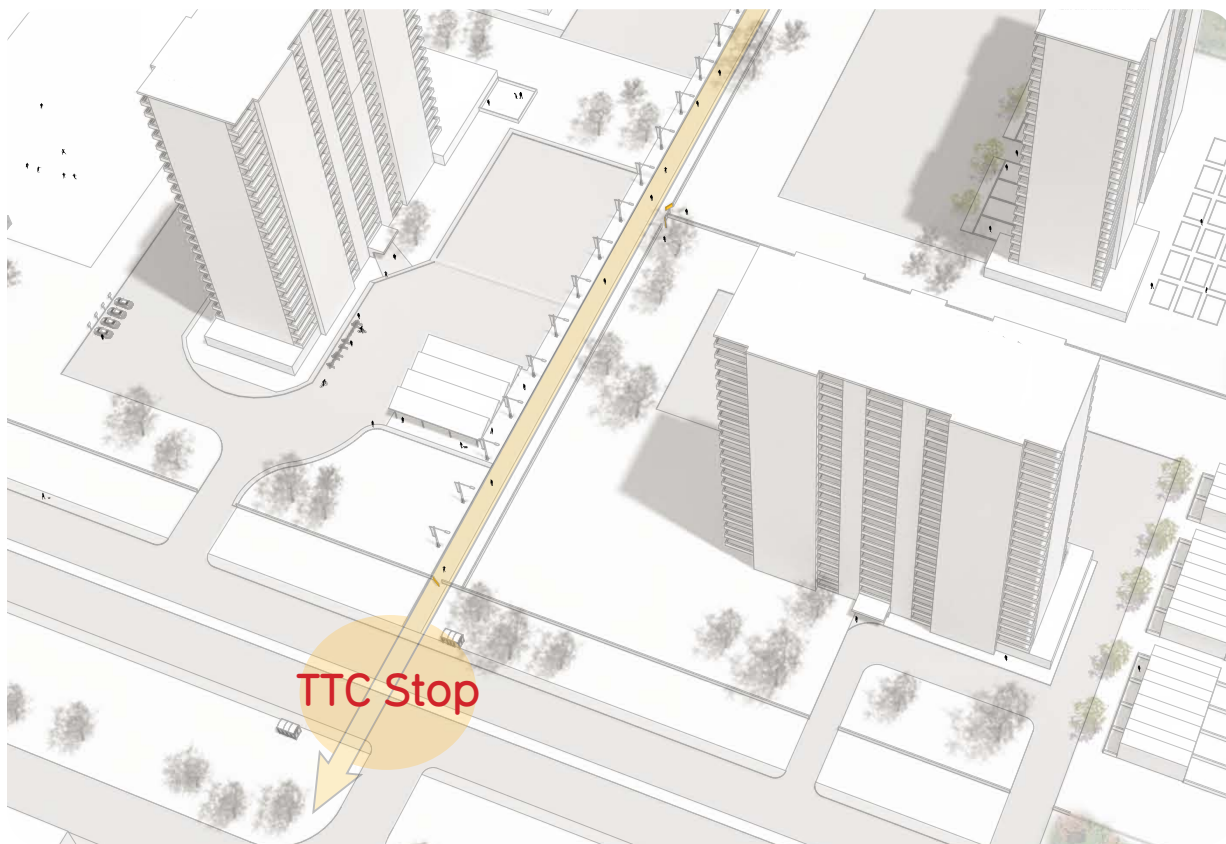
Introducing a waiting area within an apartment property adjacent to a public transit stop may involve a reduction in parking which could be contrary to site specific zoning by-laws. The introduction of new uses, such as temporary vending on private property next to a transit stop, would likely require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

#### Other considerations

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

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





**Images:**

Top Diagram: Path connecting apartment properties to TTC waiting area

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

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

## 3.3 Improve Cycling Networks and Infrastructure

### Context

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

### Solution

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

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

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

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

### Making it Happen

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

#### Official Plan: Supportive

These solutions would generally be supported by current Official Plan policies

#### Zoning by-laws: Neutral

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

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

#### Other considerations

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

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

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





Images:

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

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

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

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

## 3.4 Improved Access to 'Green Fleet' Carshare Programs

### Context

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

### Solution

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

### Making it Happen

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

#### Official Plan: Neutral

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

#### Zoning by-laws: Limiting

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



### Images:

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

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

## 3.5 Reduce Parking Requirements to Allow Conversion to Alternative Uses

### Context

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

### Solution

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

### Making it Happen

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

#### Official Plan: Supportive

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

#### Zoning by-laws: Neutral

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



Surface Parking lots often more than 40% of site area



# Theme 4: Housing

## How does housing affect health?

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

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

Housing can affect health by:

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



### The Opportunity in Apartment Neighbourhoods

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

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

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

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

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

## 4.1 Building Amenities for High-Rise Living

### Context

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

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

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

### Solution

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

#### Children's Play Area

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

#### Concierge Service

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

#### Multi-Purpose Rooms and Community Programs

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

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

### Images:

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

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

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

Opposite, bottom right: New children's play area under construction, Etobicoke, Toronto, 2011, courtesy of HIGHRISE.nfb.ca at The National Film Board of Canada



### Making it Happen

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

#### Official Plan: Supportive

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

#### Zoning by-laws: Limiting

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

#### Other considerations

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

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



## 4.2 Adapt Units for Growing Families and Changing Households

### Context

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

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

### Solutions

#### Balcony Enclosures:

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

#### Ground Floor Terraces:

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

#### Larger Units

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

### Making it Happen

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

#### Official Plan: Supportive

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

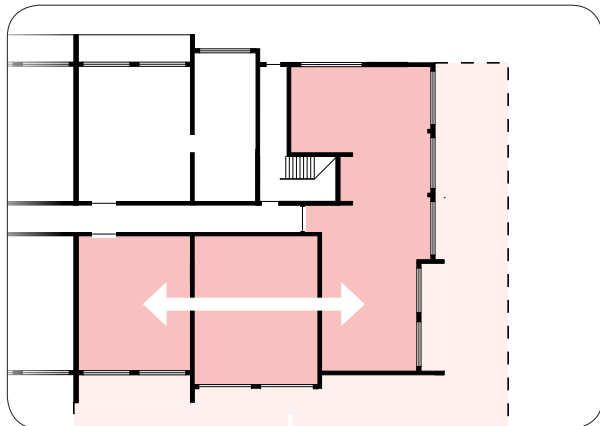
#### Zoning by-laws: Limiting

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

#### Other considerations

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





### Images:

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 4.3 Build Resident Social Capital

### Context

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

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

### Solution

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

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

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

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

### Making it Happen

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

#### Official Plan: Supportive

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

#### Zoning by-laws: Supportive

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

#### Other considerations

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

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



### Image:

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

## 4.4 Expanding Housing Choice, New Tenure Options

### Context

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

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

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

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

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

### Solution

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

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

### Making it Happen

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

#### Official Plan: Limiting

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

#### Zoning by-laws: Supportive

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

#### Other considerations

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



## 4.5 Expanding Housing Choice, Infill Housing

### Context

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

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

### Solution

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



### Making it Happen

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

#### Official Plan: Neutral

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

#### Zoning by-laws: Limiting

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

#### Other considerations

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

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





Images:

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

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

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

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

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

# Theme 5: Employment, Income and Opportunities

## How does employment and income opportunities affect health?

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

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

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

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

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

Income, employment and business opportunities influence health by:

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

### The Opportunity in Apartment Neighbourhoods

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

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

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

**5.1 Introduce outdoor vending in apartment neighbourhood open spaces**

**5.2 Allow for home-based businesses**

**5.3 Incubate local talent through support and training services**

**5.4 Expand or introduce ground floor retail**

#### Notes:

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



## 5.1 Introduce Outdoor Vending in Apartment Neighbourhood Open Space

### Context

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

### Solution

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

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

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

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



### Making it Happen

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

#### Official Plan: Supportive

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

#### Zoning by-laws: Limiting

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

#### Other considerations

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

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

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





### Images:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 5.2 Allow for Home Business

### Context

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

### Solution

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

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

### Making it Happen

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

#### **Official Plan: Supportive**

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

#### **Zoning by-laws: Limiting**

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

#### **Other considerations**

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

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

## 5.3 Incubate Local Enterprise

### Context

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

### Solution

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

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

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

### Making it Happen

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

#### **Official Plan: Supportive**

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

#### **Zoning by-laws: Limiting**

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



### Images:

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