TE22.9.1

Planning South Riverdale

RESULTS OF CONSULTATIONS ABOUT LOCAL DEVELOPMENT ISSUES WITH MARGINALIZED COMMUNITY MEMBERS

CONDUCTED BY PLANNING SOUTH RIVERDALE
Winter & Spring 2014

SUBMITTED BY: MAGGI REDMONDS

RESULTS OF CONSULTATIONS ABOUT LOCAL DEVELOPMENT ISSUES WITH MARGINALIZED COMMUNITY MEMBERS

CONDUCTED BY PLANNING SOUTH RIVERDALE
Winter & Spring 2014

Background:

Planning South Riverdale (PSR) is an independent group whose members (most of whom are volunteers) live and work in South Riverdale. The goal of the group is to promote a healthy, inclusive future for the area, to support the neighbourhood to continue to house, employ and serve a broad mix of people and a broad range of businesses, and to ensure that the people who are often missed in decision-making processes have a say in the changes that are occurring in the neighbourhood.

In June 2013, Toronto City Council directed the City Planning Division to initiate a study of Queen Street East from the railway overpass at Jimmie Simpson Park to Leslie Street. The purpose of the Study is to create urban design guidelines that are consistent with the policies of the Official Plan, support vibrant, high-quality mixed-use development along Queen Street East, and provide direction for future development that will respect the area's built character, taking community objectives into account. The study was specifically directed to address the development of "strategies that help maintain an inclusive, diverse, mixed-income community with affordable homes, shops and local jobs". As part of the City's process, a stakeholder advisory group was established and four community consultation meetings were held to elicit feedback from local residents.

Unfortunately, there are numerous barriers to participation in the community consultation meetings. Community members who are marginalized (for lack of a better term) are not, in the first place, very likely to have access to the particular information sources through which the consultations were publicized. If they do become aware of it, the format and language of such information would be unlikely to encourage their attendance. And should any such person actually make it to one of the consultations, the demographic overwhelmingly represented by the other attendees (middle-class, professional, articulate, confident) would likely present a significant barrier to feeling comfortable to participate. Therefore, in keeping with its goals noted above, PSR decided to undertake a series of focus groups with marginalized community members. The purpose of these focus groups was to gather input similar to that being solicited from those residents who do not face the same barriers to offering their ideas, and present it to those involved in holding the consultations (that is, the consultants, City staff, and the local Councillor).

Method:

It was clear to PSR that the best approach to organizing the focus groups was to work through & with organizations that provide services to marginalized people in the neighbourhood. We further understood that holding focus groups at the site at which people receive services (during already existing meetings when possible) would encourage involvement. Presenting the information and soliciting responses in an accessible manner and allowing for various styles of input would increase comfort levels and yield greater participation and results. Five different service organizations were contacted with requests to hold focus groups with eight different user-groups.

The results of the initial contacts were more challenging than anticipated. Despite PSR members having personal links to staff in the service agencies, prompt responses were not always forthcoming. Some agencies, understandably, had research protocol concerns in order to protect their clients and this involved additional work on PSR's part plus multiple levels of approval. The work involved for agency staff in organizing the focus groups (however minimal) was one more task on their already impossible "to-do" lists, and was undoubtedly not a priority for them. In addition, PSR members conducting the groups also had significant other responsibilities, so did not always follow-up as quickly or thoroughly as might have been desired.

Ultimately, five focus groups were arranged. Each was organized and conducted by a member of PSR with, in some cases, a second member attending to act as recorder. In addition, staff of the service-provider organizations were welcome to be present and some participated by providing language interpretation, refreshments, supporting participants to speak and/or asking questions. This proved to be helpful as the staff members are familiar with their client groups and could encourage attendance and support the safe sharing of ideas. At the beginning of each focus group participants were informed about PSR and its work, the planning study process, and the purpose of the focus group discussion. In addition participants were told they could leave the meeting at any time, and assured that their names would not be recorded and that all information would be collected into one report with no identifiable details. They were also offered additional information about the on-going planning study consultation process.

The set questions asked at each focus group were:

- In your opinion what are the most important positive things about living in this community?
- What things in this community do you think should be improved or changed?
- How do you think the neighbourhood might be made more welcoming?
- What services and stores do you use most in the neighbourhood?
- What kind of stores and services would you like to have that are NOT in the neighbourhood?

(NB: The final 2 questions were asked partially in order to solicit information for a project on Queen St E retail that PSR has also undertaken.)

At the end of each group, participants were thanked for their input, introductory information was re-emphasized, and a promise was made to ensure the agency received a copy of the final report for participants to see if they wished.

Results:

In total, four focus groups were held with 41 different people participating. (The fifth group was arranged but no participants attended.) These comprised a newcomer group (that required interpretation), residents of supportive housing, and residents in in 2 different transitional housing settings. Participants included men and women of varying ages, ethnicities & backgrounds, people new to the area (and sometimes to the country), long-standing residents, parents of young children, and people with disabilities. The input from these diverse individuals and groups was remarkably consistent.

It is important to note that participants were interested and engaged in the focus groups; many commented that they were very pleased to be asked for their input, some suggested all agencies' clients should have the same opportunity, and a couple of people indicated an interest in attending one of the community consultation meetings. In each group, there was lively discussion that sometimes explored areas outside of those prompted by the questions; some groups went longer than the time allotted as participants had so much to say.

For the purposes of this report, the aggregate comments are grouped into two main categories: Community Assets and Community Improvements.

Community Assets:

- There was general agreement among focus group participants that South Riverdale is a welcoming and inclusive neighbourhood where people are generally friendly and accepting of diversity. A number of individuals commented that they did not feel judged in this community (although this was not a universal opinion).

- The presence of support services and community amenities that meet participants' needs (including those of newcomers) was noted. Local social service agencies --South Riverdale Community Health Centre (SRCHC) and Nellie's were particularly mentioned-- were seen to be key assets and are frequently used by respondents. The importance of having access to parks/green spaces, libraries, schools, day cares and churches within walking distance was identified. The community's "harm reduction focus" was also noted positively.

- Pharmacies, banks, medical clinics and other commercial services that are accessible & welcoming to low income people, including Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) clients, were highlighted as very important. Some people noted that if just one of these local services disappears and they therefore have to go out of the neighbourhood to access this amenity, they end up conducting all their business in the more distant area.

- An important asset mentioned many times was the proximity of the neighbourhood to frequent, easy-to-access TTC service (although some respondents indicated that increased service would be helpful). In addition, some residents said that having bicycle lanes was an important feature in the community as they do not own cars and some used bicycles as their main mode of transportation.

Community Improvements:

- All focus groups identified the dramatic increase in the number of expensive shops and restaurants in South Riverdale as an important concern to them. People agreed that there were fewer and fewer places for lower income people to shop. A need for more affordable grocery stores, clothing stores, restaurants and coffee shops was consistently mentioned. As noted above, there seemed to be a trend toward marginalized people having to leave the neighbourhood to get day-to-day needs met.

- Importance was given to the need for affordable housing, a major issue for many respondents. Several people mentioned their concern that South Riverdale is becoming "like Parkdale". (Increasing numbers of Parkdale's low-income residents have become displaced as a result of the closure of their building or the deconversion of rooming houses to make way for higher-income homeowners[1].) Some of the focus group participants currently living in transitional housing stated that they want to continue to live in this neighbourhood (where they & their children have been putting down roots) but feel they won't be able to afford to do so.

- The absence of places where low income people can meet and socialize was identified as limiting opportunities to connect with friends and neighbours. The conversion of a specific parkette to an off-leash dog area and especially the closing of the Coffee Time at Dundas & Broadview were specifically mentioned as losses of community space in which participants felt comfortable to "hang out".

- Unfortunately, focus group members perceived the neighbourhood as unsupportive to people with disabilities. Poor quality sidewalks with too many obstructions prevent people who use mobility devices from being able to access neighbourhood resources. Increasing the number of services for people with disabilities was also seen as an important improvement that could be made in the community.

- Although parks and green spaces were considered an asset, it was felt that the quality of parks could be improved. Providing more opportunities for young children to play was specifically mentioned as a need. Increasing the number of benches and garbage containers and ensuring enforcement of the no smoking in parks policy were suggested as improvements by various people. More free community activities such as cultural events and celebrations were also recommended.

- A lack of health professionals in South Riverdale who will take ODSP clients was mentioned. (Participants noted that SRCHC provides this service, but that they are at capacity.)

- Additional ideas presented included: more frequent garbage pick-up so the sidewalks would be less cluttered with bins; more bike lanes; more frequent TTC service and better transit shelters; additional amenities for children; and establishing services for transsexual people.

- The need to maintain the welcoming atmosphere and village feel of the neighbourhood was highlighted by many. Examples were cited of expensive housing replacing more modest buildings, with tension developing among the new purchasers and longer-term residents due to differing expectations of appropriate street activities and public behaviors.

---

[1] Slater, Tom (2005). Toronto's South Parkdale Neighbourhood: A Brief History of Development, Disinvestment, and Gentrification. *Centre for Urban and Community Studies, Research Bulletin #28,* University of Toronto. Accessed on May 13, 2014 from: http://www.urbancentre.utoronto.ca/pdfs/researchbulletins/CUCS-RB-28-Slater-Parkd.pdf

Conclusions:

Marginalized people in S Riverdale welcome the opportunity to participate in community consultations, but these must be accessible (i.e., tailored to their needs) in order to facilitate their involvement. Marginalized people have informed and useful perspectives and ideas to contribute, and their viewpoints should be sought by decision-influencers and makers as actively as those of other community members.

Projects such as this one could be completed more effectively and quickly with dedicated resources to focus fully on the work involved, rather than through volunteer initiatives. But to be successful, the work must be carried out by those who truly understand how to ensure the process is accessible to these community members. In addition, co-operation/collaboration with local service providers is essential for success; the more support they provide, the higher the participation rates.

Recommendations:

In light of the input offered in the focus groups, PSR makes the following recommendations for the current and any future planning studies:

- Genuine efforts should be made to consult with all sectors of the community, not just those who can easily respond to the traditional consultation approaches. The interests of those who are unable to participate in conventional processes should be as equally represented in planning recommendations as those of more influential community members.

- Priority should be given to identifying policies that can help to ensure affordable retail spaces and social services providers remain in the community.

- Policy solutions should be identified to ensure affordable housing is available in the community for a wide mix of residents, including families, elderly people, low-income people, and people with disabilities.

- Various types of public spaces should be developed to meet the needs of diverse community members, particularly considering those with limited private space in which to conduct their social lives.

- Focus should be given to improved accessibility of the neighbourhood, including "walkability" for people using mobility devices.

- Ideas that help maintain the inclusive, "village feel" of the area should be recommended.

PSR thanks:

- The focus group participants who generously shared their opinions and experiences with us;
- The agencies that hosted the groups and the staff members who so ably assisted with them;
- Those who carried out the focus groups on behalf of PSR and gave input to this report: Kristie Daniel, Maggi Redmonds, Rebecca Rogers, Mariana Valverde and Paul Young.

Planning South Riverdale

We are an independent group whose members live and work in South Riverdale; our goal is to promote a healthy, inclusive future for the area. We see the neighbourhood is changing, and we are not afraid of change. But we want this neighbourhood to continue to house, employ and serve a broad mix of people and a broad range of businesses. And we want to make sure that the people who are often missed in decision-making processes have a say in these changes.

Our roles include:

- Sparking conversation about a healthy, inclusive South Riverdale
- Speaking up for inclusion whenever changes are considered
- Promoting community engagement approaches to reach people who are rarely consulted, building on and supporting existing networks wherever possible
- Engaging the broader community in discussions about how local development benefits can be equitably distributed
- Calling upon all public officials to uphold the Official Plan's commitment to "diversity and opportunity"

SUPPORTING A MAIN STREET FOR EVERYBODY

A report on the loss of inclusive & affordable retail on Queen St E.





Planning South Riverdale

Fall 2015

SUBMITTED BY: MAGGI REDMOND

Introduction

Planning South Riverdale (PSR) is a small, independent group whose members live and work in South Riverdale and experience the neighbourhood on a day-to-day basis. The group was formed in early 2013 following two local "Community Matters" events that had discussed the increasing gentrification in the area and the potential social exclusion effects of the resulting changes. The goals of the group included promoting a healthy, inclusive future for the area, supporting the neighbourhood to continue to house, employ and serve a broad mix of people and a broad range of businesses, and ensuring that the people who are often missed in decision-making processes have a say in the changes that are occurring in the neighbourhood.

Brief history

PSR members have participated in various local planning consultation meetings to support neighbourhood inclusivity. Most notably PSR participated in the community meetings and the Stakeholder Advisory Group of the *Queen St E/Leslieville Planning Study*, conducted by the City of Toronto in 2013/14. This study had been specifically directed by the City of Toronto to address the development of "strategies that help maintain an inclusive, diverse, mixed-income community with affordable homes, shops and local jobs". Due to our concerns that the structure of the consultation presented too many barriers for participation of more marginalized community members (who would be also be concerned with the defined issues and had the most to lose from gentrification) PSR held a series of 4 focus groups with 41 people in the immediate area who live in supportive housing or used local social services. The focus groups enabled these participants to provide input on the questions that were being asked of the residents who were able to attend the conventionally organized meetings. Focus group participants spoke frequently of their appreciation at being consulted and indicated their opinions about local planning issues are not usually (if ever) solicited.

A report on the information gathered from the focus groups[1], including recommendations, was submitted to the consulting firm conducting the consultation, to City Planning Dept. staff, and to the local Councillor who had originally requested the Planning Study.

Why a Retail Study?

It seemed obvious to PSR's members as we observed local retail changing and upscaling that a broad mix of businesses was vital to maintaining a healthy, livable and inclusive neighbourhood. Research such as Toronto Public Health's *Active City: Designing for Health* report[2] (2014) confirms that having everyday destinations within walking distance (e.g., grocery stores, banks or credit unions, pharmacies, places to eat and places to socialize) is an important measure of a healthy neighbourhood. This is also supported by *Creating Walkable and Transit-Supportive Communities in Halton*[3] by the Halton Region Health Department (2009) which makes a strong case that a healthy and "complete" community should offer the needed daily goods & services within an 800 m radius of residents, highlighting the important roles of grocery and produce stores. It further emphasizes that ensuring proximity of affordable and inclusive stores and services would be one measure that would alleviate some of the economic pressures and stresses experienced by low-income people.

---

[1] *Results of Consultations About Local Development Issues with Marginalized Community Members*, Planning South Riverdale, Winter & Spring 2014

[2] http://www1.toronto.ca/City%20Of%20Toronto/Toronto%20Public%20Health/Healthy%20Public%20Policy/Built%20Environment/Files/pdf/ActiveCityReportMay292014.pdf

[3] www.halton.ca/common/pages/UserFile.aspx?fileId=18644

In addition, a diversity of inclusive retail can produce a strong economic foundation for a neighbourhood, creating opportunities for local jobs and keeping money circulating within the community. The millions of small interactions that result from people using local businesses & services, such as greeting familiar faces on the street or being known as a regular patron of the same shop, create a sense of social cohesion. Having a socio-economic diversity of retail gives people of all income levels the opportunity to access these small actions, which leads in turn to stronger, more resilient communities. [4]

PSR wondered how more marginalized residents (that is, people with low cultural capital[5] and low incomes) felt about these changes. If they cannot afford or do not feel welcome to get their daily needs met in their own neighbourhood, what message is the community sending to them? It was therefore decided to include some questions about retail use in the 4 focus groups we conducted. These groups comprised 41 diverse individuals, including newcomers (some just to the neighbourhood and some also to Canada), long-standing community residents, adults of varying ages, people with disabilities, parents of young children. Many of the participants have secure housing so will likely continue to reside here; others in more temporary housing situations said they have established roots here and would like to stay, but will not likely be able to afford to do so. The responses to the questions gave us much useful information.

A. Focus group findings

As part of the focus groups, participants were specifically asked: "What services and stores do you use most in the neighbourhood?" and "What kind of stores and services would you like to have that are not in the neighbourhood?" These simple questions generated conversations that went far beyond the precise answers and gave a nuanced look at how participants experience the changing retail environment.

All of the groups identified the dramatic increase in the number of expensive shops and restaurants in South Riverdale as an important concern to them. Participants clearly felt unwelcome in their own neighbourhood due to the proliferation of high-end restaurants and specialty shops. There was general agreement that there were fewer and fewer places for lower income people to shop, and the need for more affordable grocery stores, clothing stores, restaurants and coffee shops was consistently mentioned.

Recorded comments of participants included:

- *It's all high-end!*
- *More development means rich in and poor going out.*
- *A lot of stores are changing and becoming fancier.*
- *There are no [affordable] coffee shops and few convenience stores. Mr. X tells a story about going to a new restaurant, thinking it would be affordable, and being charged $22 for a meal with a drink and dessert.*
- *There is nothing for clothes and shoes.*
- *It costs $20 to $40 for a pair of shoes but quality is suspect and even at Value Village it is becoming too expensive.*
- *I don't agree with a lot of the changes..... You can get a coffee at the store but you can't sit there.*
- *We don't have enough [affordable] coffee shops where we can get a cup of coffee.*

---

[4] See Stacey Mitchell's *Top 10 Reasons to Support Locally Owned Businesses* https://ilsr.org/why-support-locally-owned-businesses/

[5] The term *cultural capital* is a sociological concept that refers to social assets other than financial means. Having a good education, knowing the rules of etiquette, being stylishly dressed, and other traits that give one prestige in our society all contribute to having high cultural capital.

- *Value Village is becoming more expensive.*
- *Too many upscale restaurants. We wouldn't go there because $100 to sit and have dinner is too expensive. They are not welcoming. Many people have a budget to stick to and can't go to these types of stores.*
- *Instead of so many restaurants we should have places for lower income people.*
- *Less high end stores and boutiques [are wanted].*
- *There are very few health services [e.g. dentists, podiatrists, vision care] in the area that will take ODSP clients.*
- *So many homeless but nothing for them.*

A trend of people leaving the neighbourhood to meet day-to-day needs was identified. Discussions in two separate focus groups suggested that the loss of only one particular local store or service that is essential to people's lives (e.g., pharmacy, bank, health service) because it closes down or becomes more upscale might end up having a snowball effect. Low-income people may then end up conducting all their business in the more distant area where they must go for the required service. In one group, for example, people mentioned going across the Don River and as far west on Queen as Sherbourne St. or north-west to Regent Park (each destination is approximately 2 km away from the south-western edge of S Riverdale) to access shops.

- *Sherbourne or Parliament and Queen are places where people can go because it's not affordable in this neighbourhood.*
- *X grocery store in Regent Park has cheaper, better quality food and they provide a price match.*
- *Some people use X pharmacy [in the area] but it is basic and doesn't have everything. A few use the Y pharmacy at Queen and Parliament. Z pharmacy at Parliament delivers.*
- *Uses stores on Broadview near Danforth (walks there [about 2 kms] though it's a good 20 minutes).*
- *Many use X clinic on Broadview [north of Danforth] for medical care; South Riverdale CHC [local] is good – but it is packed and past capacity.*
- *Taking TTC is expensive and nothing is handy walking distance.*

The businesses & services that the focus group participants would like to see multiplying in the neighbourhood were very consistent across the groups. Affordable coffee / donut shops were mentioned constantly (often by brand name) as places to which people would like to have more access. Inexpensive restaurants or fast food places and reasonably priced grocery stores also topped this list.

Also noted were:

- *Businesses and services that are accessible & welcoming to low income people, including Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) clients*
- *Pharmacies, banks, medical clinics*
- *Places that are safe for Trans people and accessible to people with disabilities.*
- *More harm reduction services*
- *Drop-in spaces*
- *Affordable housing*
- *Job opportunities*
- *More affordable stores would be welcome*

The loss of places where people with low incomes and less cultural capital can meet and socialize was identified as limiting opportunities to connect with friends and neighbours. The conversion of a specific parkette to an off-leash dog area was a heated topic in one group; a participant noted that he used to go there to meet with friends, but the new users objected to them smoking and, he felt, just "being there". The closing of low cost donut / coffee shops were specifically mentioned as losses of community space in which participants felt comfortable to hang out. "*You can sit with your friends and talk about your issues.*"

B. Retail Survey

In light of the information gained from the focus groups, and in order to confirm the extent to which the local retail environment does or does not serve the wide range of community members, PSR decided to undertake a store-by-store survey on Queen St E to determine the diversity of businesses and assess their accessibility to different socio-economic groups in the neighbourhood. The initial survey was conducted late in 2013 and early 2014 by a PSR member and a university student who briefly assisted us and the findings were reviewed by the rest of the PSR group. In addition, PSR members conducted some informal interviews with business owners or managers to solicit their responses to the changes in the neighbourhood. Thanks to financial support from the *Grants for a Healthy Community Program* of the South Riverdale Community Health Centre, PSR was able to hire someone in the spring of 2015 to review the original survey area and document changes in business types and ratings, and conduct a few more interviews.

It was decided to survey Queen St E, from the Don River to Jones Ave, covering the 2 areas which had recently been the focus of Queen St E Heritage District Study and the Queen St E / Leslieville Planning Consultation.

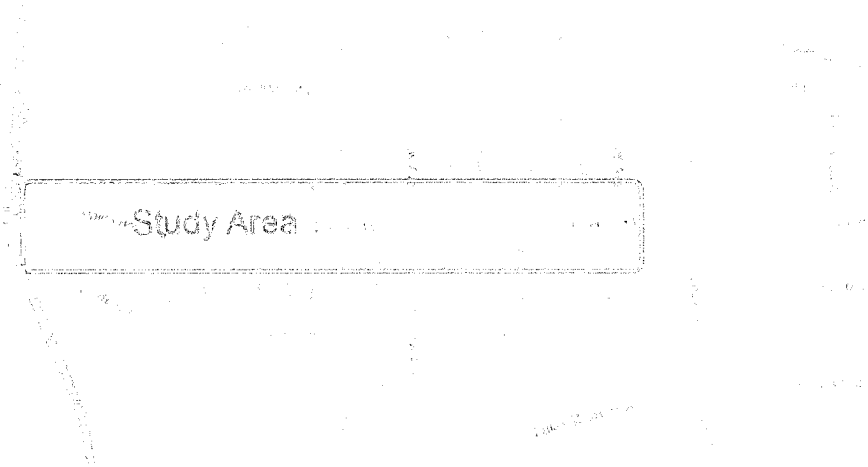

Figure 1 SURVEY AREA

A simple survey form was developed to capture information on types of businesses or other building uses and a rating of socio-economic accessibility/inclusivity.

Codes were assigned for 25 different business "categories" (e.g., auto-related, coffee shops, restaurants, housewares/décor). This list of categories was created prior to doing the survey, and some

small adjustments were made (e.g., adding a couple of categories) once work was underway. Each business could be assigned up to two codes that best described and accounted for the services provided to the neighbourhood (though this later proved challenging when calculating results).

Assessments of socio-economic accessibility and inclusivity were based on "business status" ratings of 1 to 6, with 1 being most economically and culturally accessible and 6 being least accessible. Initially, the ratings were determined by price-checking some standard items in various business categories and comparing them. In practice, however, checking particular prices was too labour-intensive for a volunteer effort, so assessments were ultimately made based on an appraisal of each business's prices/affordability, "approachability" and the socio-economic status of clientele who patronize it or who would likely feel comfortable to do so. The ratings were reviewed by others to ensure they were as fair as possible.

The survey form also included some basic details such as name of the business, the location, building status.

C. Retail Survey Findings

In total approximately 315 businesses and establishments (at about 290 individual addresses) were surveyed. The actual numbers varied slightly in the 2 surveys as both businesses and actual addresses were removed from or added to the street (e.g., through sub-division, new construction, demolition).

Results of First Survey (conducted late 2013 & early 2014)

An analysis of the information gathered in the first survey found:

- 37% of the total number of stores (the largest group) were in the '6' category – including not just high-end restaurants and bakeries but also a range of other shops -- organic butchers, a specialty bicycle store, some home décor shops, personal training facilities, etc.
- 26% (the 2nd largest group) were rated '5', making it clear that even though the ratings given to some businesses could be contested or changed slightly, 63% of all the businesses on the study portion of Queen Street East cater specifically to higher income people.
- Businesses rated 3 or 4, meaning they were either moderately affordable or catered to a mixed clientele, made up 26% of the total. These included modest restaurants and cafés, some take-out/delivery food businesses, an independent hardware store, a small food & vegetable market, and some assorted businesses in utilitarian settings.
- 11% of the businesses were rated as either 1 or 2, that is, accessible to the sector of the population that was represented by our focus groups (low income but also low cultural capital). Examples are some very inexpensive restaurants, a pharmacy that serves those on provincial benefits, auto body shop, and a couple of convenience stores selling pop, cigarettes, and packaged snacks.

Figure 2 illustrates the relative numbers in each category. In order to make it easily readable, the chart is labelled in relation to cost, but these classifications also include social accessibility. Even if one has the funds available, businesses may be unwelcoming or intimidating due to the amount of cultural capital required to feel welcome and be comfortable in any setting. So in this case, "expensive" for example means both money and cultural capital are needed.

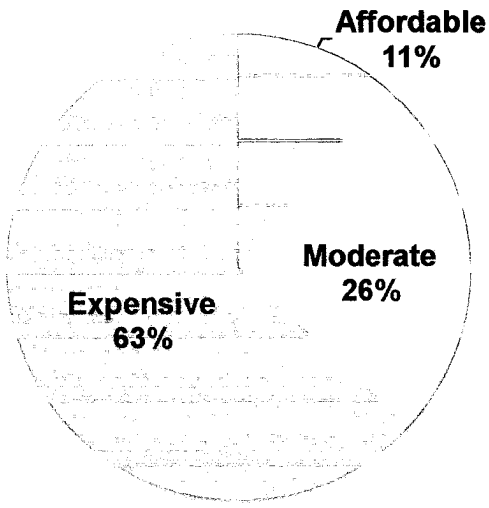

Figure 2: AFFORDABILITY / INCLUSIVITY RATINGS
First Survey, Winter 2013-14

Even as the original survey results were being processed, PSR members were noticing on-going transformations in the retail composition of the street. Businesses were changing, selling, moving, upgrading, sub-dividing and just closing. PSR members also noticed successive "waves" of businesses. For example, a number of dog-related businesses on Queen St E had all but disappeared by the time the first survey was undertaken and it seemed that there had been a sudden upsurge in cupcake stores. But within 12 months cupcakes had largely been replaced by a new wave of manicure/ pedicure/wax bars. A second survey, to document the further changes on Queen St E was made possible by a small grant from the South Riverdale Community Health Centre's *Grants for a Healthy Communities* fund. In the spring of 2015 a recent graduate was contracted on a part-time basis to re-visit the survey and identify changes.

Results of Second Survey (conducted Spring, 2015)

The second survey found:

- In total, there were 30 new businesses in the survey area.
- Within the earlier 63% of businesses rated 5 or 6, there had been 15 enterprise changes. All but one of these new establishments remained within the most expensive ranking. The one that changed categories was a particularly upscale restaurant that had closed and been replaced by a more modest and moderately priced café which was rated a 4.
- 3 moderate businesses changed, 2 of which now were in the more expensive, less accessible category, and one of which stayed in the moderate range, though towards the "higher" end of it.
- Only 1 lower-end business changed and was now ranked in the moderate category.
- Of 11 previously unrated locations (places that had been vacant or were unidentifiable businesses that were impossible to rate) 10 were now businesses rated as 5 or 6 and one as a 4.
- 12 newly vacant store fronts were documented.

The updated survey showed an increase in the number of high-priced, low accessibility merchants, raising that group to over 70% of all businesses in the survey area. Even though the number of "accessible" (rated 1 or 2) shops has not changed significantly, it clearly now represents a lower proportion of the total businesses.

Examples of the tallies of businesses in the second survey (counting those newly opened since the previous one), included 10 home décor shops, with 3 having closed; 8 coffee shops, again with 3 having closed; 53 restaurants, 5 having closed; and 17 "personal care" businesses (e.g., hairstylists& barbers, dentists, fitness venues, and the aforementioned wax bars) with 6 having closed. The loss of the venerable, and only, hardware store in the area was also noted with regret.

The number of vacant storefronts was unexpected. PSR's interviews with some business owners (see below) and some informal conversations with others clearly indicated that significant rises in rents were driving some businesses out.

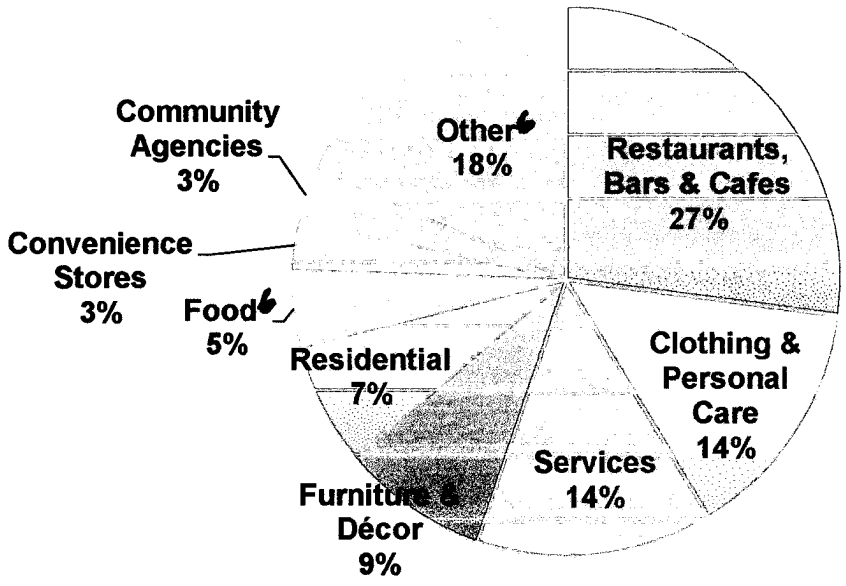

Figure 3: TYPES OF BUSINESSES[6]
Second Survey, Spring 2015

An interesting aside is that during the time the 2nd survey was being conducted, PSR became aware that the Health & Strength Action Committee, a group at South Riverdale Community Health Centre, had done an exercise to identify 4 types of local locations: "Places I would like to go but do not because they are too expensive and/or I feel unwelcome"; "Places I have to go to make ends meet/survive"; "Places I like and feel comfortable going to"; and "Places I liked but are now gone", some of which correlated to our findings. This demonstrates that the concerns identified through PSR's focus group were shared by others in the community.

D. Interviews with Business Owners

In order to gain insight into the experiences of local businesses owners facing the challenges associated with rapid commercial gentrification in S. Riverdale, PRS interviewed local business owners or managers. While not supplying any quantifiable new information, these interviews, along with some

[6] "Food" in this chart does not generally mean grocery stores. The majority of businesses in that category are expensive speciality food shops, often selling just one type of edible. "Other" includes shops not in any of the larger categories such as a paint store, computer shop, adult toy store, etc.

additional informal conversations with local business people, provided additional insights and enriched the data from the retail survey.

Thought was given to insure a diversity of the type of businesses, their longevity in the area, and the "accessibility rating" they'd been given. Some of the selected owners declined to be interviewed but 7 interviews were carried out. Businesses interviewed comprised 2 quite different furniture/home décor stores, a hairdresser, a barber shop, a restaurant, a "fast food" shop and a wax bar. These businesses ranged from having been in the same location for less than one year to more than 50 years, and included those rated by PSR in each of the 3 main categories of accessibility. There was no selection process for the informal conversations – these were just serendipitous.

Findings:

Gentrification is seen as improving business (even in the face of evidence to the contrary).

- *"The neighbourhood is getting better; condos are bringing in more people, which brings more business."* was the opinion expressed by a long-time business (& building) owner, whose store has been observed to be emptier & emptier over the past decade. He thought people with better jobs help businesses but *"when poor people come in [to the neighbourhood] it doesn't help."* This old-style shop was rated as a 2 by PSR; the same type of business close by, rated 6, appears to be consistently busy.
- Another long-term owner of an often nearly empty restaurant thought the area has been "*cleaned up*", with *"more professional types with more money to spend eating out".* He felt the neighbourhood is safer than it used to be and there's now *"lots of money"* which is good for the local economy.
- *"Instead of seeing drug addicts, it's now dogs & strollers."* said the man who owned his business and its building. He felt the impact of gentrification has been positive on his business, though he is stated that his volume of business has not changed much and has been doing well for years.
- The owner of a long-standing and unpretentious business expressed disappointment that his anticipated increase in customers due to the advent of new condos in the immediate area had not come to fruition. In spite of updates made to his marketing approach, potential patrons appeared to be gravitating to the nearby, newly-opened competition.

Concern about rents being too high was expressed by some.

- One business owner, in a prime location in the area for about 4 years, said he was paying $8,000 per month, and *"that's a lot of [merchandise] just to break even."* This store is now gone.
- Another said they were paying "*a stupid amount of money"* for a 5 year lease on a store towards the eastern end of the study area.
- One owner of an inexpensive restaurant that had a "closing" sign in the window angrily said she was getting pushed out by a rent increase to make way for a fancy shop.
- Other anecdotally reported rents were $12,000 per month for a large space close to Broadview and $4,000 for a small space slightly further east.
- Business people who owned their buildings or who had long-term leases negotiated some time ago were not concerned about rents, although there was acknowledgement that they are increasing.

Other information

- Some retailers thought their customers mainly live or work in the area. Others maintained that many of their customers came from much further away because they have a loyalty to that business or merchant.
- There were several mentions by business people on Queen St. of various current or former business owners who own multiple properties in the study area.

F. Overall Conclusions

- As evidenced in this report and in PSR's previous paper, people of lower socio-economic means have informed perspectives on planning issues; their voices deserve to be heard.
- Businesses gentrify as fast as housing stock, and with the similar outcome of excluding more marginalized people who continue to live in the neighbourhood.
- Businesses in South Riverdale have become increasingly expensive and exclusive; the area does not provide a diverse socio-economic mix of businesses.
- A modicum of inclusive & accessible businesses is essential to marginalized residents feeling at home in their communities.
- Restaurants and bars make up the largest proportion of any one type of business in the study area, followed by clothing & personal care businesses. There is a dearth of local businesses providing the necessary daily goods & services required for a healthy community.
- If one essential neighbourhood business disappears and low-income people have to go elsewhere for it, they may take all of their business out of the area.
- Rising rents create survival issues for lower-end businesses and can drive them out.
- Some business owners see gentrification as being positive even when it is hurting their businesses.
- Insufficient attention is paid by City planners and politicians to maintaining a broad range of retail. They may not have sufficient legislative or planning tools to help shape the retail mix.

G. Recommendations:

- As with housing, priority should be given by City staff to identifying policies that can help to ensure affordable retail spaces. These might include tax incentives to support retail uses that are affordable and inclusive. Revising the current policy of tax rebates for vacant store fronts, which might be a disincentive to lowering rents, should also be considered.
- The City should seek ways to encourage social services providers to remain in the community.
- Non-profit agencies on Queen St. E., especially those with large street front locations, should consider setting up non-institutional coffee shops or other enterprises to meet the expressed needs of marginalized community members.
- City staff should work with non-profit agencies to find ways (such as zoning variances) to encourage the creation of the aforementioned retail spaces.
- A wider variety of retail and public spaces should be legislatively encouraged (e.g., by commercial rent controls) to meet the needs of diverse community members.
- Social agencies and the City should investigate opportunities to work with local B.I.A.s to educate shop owners on making their business more welcoming for all income groups.
- Genuine efforts should be made to consult with all sectors of the community regarding planning issues. The interests of more marginalized people should be represented in planning decisions.

Acknowledgements:

PSR thanks:

- The focus group participants who generously shared their opinions and experiences with us, and the agencies that hosted them;

- The business owners and managers who shared their stories and insights in the interviews.

- Kristie Daniel, Mel Patenaude, Maggi Redmonds, Mariana Valverde, and Paul Young, all of whom contributed greatly to the content and creation of this report. Heather McLean and Isia Cullhaj also contributed to the content.

- South Riverdale Community Health Centre's *Grants for a Healthy Communities* fund for providing the funds that allowed for the completion of the survey and the organization of a community meeting to share the initial results.

- Ward 30 Councillor Paula Fletcher and City Planning staff for welcoming input from P.S.R and the focus groups to the consultation processes, and for their genuine interest in maintaining an inclusive, diverse, mixed-income community.