

**Toronto City Council
Economic and Community Development Committee**

October 16, 2019 meeting

Resourcing the Regent Park Social Development Plan

Agenda Item 8.5

**Submission by Brent Mitchell, VP Operations
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Yonge Street Mission has great hopes for the potential of the Regent Park Social Development Plan to be a motor for the building of social cohesion across many dimensions of difference in the community, including market and TCH residents. In the aftermath of the refresh of the Regent Park Social Development Plan (SDP) last winter, the Yonge Street Mission decided to align its community development work with the goals and categories of the SDP. We believe that by placing our resources and commitment into this initiative we can most effectively work in collaboration to build up a strong and vibrant revitalized community. The SDP brings people together - residents, agencies, grassroots groups, institutions, local businesses, and the city. A key linchpin in releasing the potential energy brought together so far is the allocation of funding to implement the many ideas that have come forward to date. We strongly support the funding request that has been made today.

Financial support for Regent Park's Social Development Plan is crucial for fostering the best conditions possible for this project to achieve success. The physical side of the whole revitalization, phases 1-5, is currently projected to cost upwards of one billion dollars. The social side also requires detailed attention and funding. This has been lacking in previous phases, and we hope that this lack will be remedied going forward. And if the city demonstrates its commitment to the social revitalization of Regent Park, and puts its money where its mouth is, other funders also will be much more willing to support the community in the ways needed.

Regent Park has gone through a tremendous disruption over the last 10 or more years. Long-time residents have had to move, some never to return. Many new residents have arrived, and many displaced residents have returned. The social fabric has been torn, and this has left a mark on the community. A new one is being knitted together - it will take time, care, and resources to ensure that it is strong enough to bind together people who were once strangers.

Part of this ongoing knitting together is the refresh of the SDP, which provides a framework by which to move forward the work over time. It has led to a renewed coming together of many entities and people across the neighbourhood. Many threads weave together into a complex approach to the complex problem of building up the community during the

disruption of revitalization. The proposed actions have emerged from a community process over the last year to two years that has engaged hundreds of residents, with the support of local agencies and organizations.

Focus areas identified by residents are safety, employment and economic development, community building, and communications. Working groups have been established for each area, and meet regularly. Each group has three co-chairs: one a resident of Toronto Community Housing, another a resident of market housing, and the third is staff from a local agency. The actions proposed by each group will work not only each on their own, but also in concert to improve quality of life in Regent Park. For example, many of the actions in the community building working group involve creating employment for local residents. Not only will local employment be increased, and skill-building occur, but also community capacity will be augmented through the work done.

The central body bringing together the work of the four separate working groups is the stakeholders table. Through this body, composed of residents and agencies, a funding committee has been established that will identify potential funding available to the community and advocate for a strong community voice in structuring of that funding. As well, a benchmarks and evaluation committee has begun meeting to ensure that meaningful processes for tracking and evaluating outcomes are put in place. Accountability all around is a very high value in the community.

Every community partner has a stake in the SDP, including the Regent Park Executive Directors Network, of which Yonge Street Mission is an active member. Across the neighbourhood, agencies have taken a collaborative approach to support the SDP and as decision-makers working within the community, EDs recognize that this Plan will offer Regent Park long-lasting positive change. The initial lack of City support to the SDP encouraged the Network to pressure the City for greater action and funding in April. With success, funding for the SDP Coordinator position for the remainder of the calendar year was achieved. However that is not enough to implement the SDP and keep the momentum going. The Network is fully invested in the SDP. A representative sits as co-chair of the Stakeholders Table, and in addition each member has committed agency staff to support the initiatives.

By investing in the SDP, the City is showing true commitment to listen to community members and to support opportunities for residents to build their own capacity in order to improve employment and economic development opportunities, safety, community building, and communications flow.

Much attention is being paid within the city, nationally and internationally, to the evolution of the Regent Park revitalization. We want to do everything possible to ensure that this revitalization results in a socially cohesive, inclusive, and vibrant neighbourhood. Yonge Street Mission is doing its part to contribute to this outcome. We call on the city to likewise do its part - show the world that Toronto can undertake an urban revitalization that will bear fruit worthy of the term.