

Re: MM7.5 Living up to the Promise of Regent Park Revitalization: Implementing the Regent Park Social Development Plan

Dear Mayor Tory and Members of Council:

The Regent Park Revitalization has always involved a two-fold approach including the Physical Development Plan along with the Social Development Plan (SDP). The Regent Park SDP was the first place-based SDP for Toronto and was approved and endorsed by City Council in October 2007. The SDP comprised 75 recommendations aimed at efforts to build social inclusion and cohesion, community services and facilities, and employment as the Regent Park community transitioned and changed over time. However, even in the presence of City approval and broad stakeholder acceptance, the implementation of the social elements of the SDP experienced substantial barriers to progress. While significant funding was invested into the built form of the revitalization, the absence of sustainable and sufficient funding to support effective collaboration and implementation of the social elements seriously hampered the community's ability to implement recommendations that addressed larger neighbourhood-wide issues.

Simply summarized, there is an ongoing propensity to plan with good intentions critically needed social interventions without recognizing the necessary ongoing financial investment to operationalize them. The needed investment for the social element of the plan represents a very small percentage of the capital being invested into the built form, but yet represents the Achilles heel to the success of the SDP as a whole.

A decade later, it was decided that a refresh process was necessary in order to highlight the current needs and assets in Regent Park. This process, undertaken in 2017, resulted in various changes including a stronger governance structure with clear roles and responsibilities, greater accountability and overall direction steered by the SDP Stakeholders Table with the support and coordination of the SDP Coordinator. The original recommendations were grouped into four strategic Focus Areas and subsequently, Working Groups: Safety, Employment & Economic Opportunities, Community Building, and Communications. The working groups comprise residents positioned in strong leadership and participation roles and count with the direct support and participation of agencies and grassroots groups. Each focus area/working group has a goal that has been identified by residents and is in the process of developing a robust Action Plan to implement and carry out work with the support of the Stakeholders Table. This will ultimately lead to fulfilling the mandate and goals of the SDP as a whole. Currently, the Regent Park Community Safety Action Plan is a subset of the SDP under the Safety Focus Area. Therefore, one of the components of success for the SDP will also be the implementation of the Community Safety Action Plan. There are ongoing efforts to cost both the SDP and Safety Plan.

Last September 2018, an update was presented to stakeholders in the community who subsequently began the formation and recruitment of the four Working Groups. On March 19, 2019, the first SDP Stakeholders Table meeting of the year was held in which the latest updates of the refreshed SDP were presented to the larger community along with the new governance, accountability, and implementation structure. The stakeholders are moving forward to implement the SDP via the four Working Groups and the overarching Stakeholders Table.

As community leaders we are now faced with an opportunity to learn from our past and to move forward in strength toward the realization of the vision for Regent Park. Council and Toronto Community Housing must choose to fund the resources needed to equip the community to operationalize this plan. The residents and agencies have worked together to learn from the past, develop a focused resident led plan, and to establish meaningful governance and accountability.

Given the increase in violence over the last few years in Regent Park and the downtown east, we are trying to solve a problem through pro-active means. The Regent Park Social Development Plan (SDP) recognizes that it is critical to the success of the revitalization to create sustainable social infrastructure to support a socially cohesive mixed income community. The City of Toronto's Strategic Plan states that social development "encompasses principles of social equity, social well-being and citizen engagement, and is an important determinant of healthy communities and quality of life." SDP research shows that informal activities that attract residents from all socio-economic backgrounds are among the most effective tools in knitting a diverse community together, and that formal service providers play a central role in promoting and facilitating those interactions.

Entering Phase 4 & 5 of the revitalization, this \$349.0 million investment is valued and needed. This next phase represents an opportunity for the City of Toronto to address the lack of funding that currently exists to complete both the physical and social redevelopment of Regent Park. Knowing that a critical element for the success of the Regent Park revitalization is delivering on the SDP mandate, funding for the implementation of the SDP can be established as a priority as Toronto Community Housing (TCH) enters into the RFP process for the last phases of redevelopment. This is an opportunity to work with the City and the future TCH developer partner to formalize sustainable SDP funding that is embedded into the contractual obligations of the next phases.

At this point, the SDP is in the process of being costed. Therefore, moving forward it will be necessary to assign cost to the plan for its full implementation. Funding will need to cover a full-time Coordinator position estimated at \$47,000 annually, resources required by the Stakeholder Table and activities associated to support each of the four Working Groups. At this time, funding for the Coordinator position extends only to July 2019, so it should be high-priority to fund this position as it is integral to implementing the plan. Conditions for minimum funding should be for the duration of Phase 4 & 5, but additionally continue after the physical revitalization is complete to ensure there is follow through on the social impacts of this redevelopment. The Regent Park Executive Directors Network is fully invested in and committed to supporting the SDP, and as decision-makers working in the neighbourhood we recognize that this Plan will offer Regent Park long-lasting positive change. Obtaining funding for the SDP will be the next step to fully launch and execute the plan and we formally ask City Council and Toronto Community Housing to ensure that this is put in place so that our collective investments and efforts truly lead to accomplishing our shared goals.

Respectfully and in partnership,

The Regent Park Executive Directors Network:

Centre for Social Innovation

CRC | Regent Park Community Food Centre
Dixon Hall Neighbourhood Services
Neighbourhood Information Post
Neighbourhood Legal Services
Peacebuilders
Regent Park Community Health Centre
Regent Park Focus Media Arts Centre
S.E.A.S. Centre
St. Jude Community Homes
Street Health
Sumac Creek Clinic, SMH Academic FHT
The Neighbourhood Group / Central Neighbourhood House
The Salvation Army - Downtown Toronto Ministry Unit
Toronto Centre for Community Learning & Development
Toronto Kiwanis Boys & Girls Clubs
Yonge Street Mission