

Developing a Community Wealth Strategy for Regent Park: Assessment, Opportunities and Recommended Next Steps Feasibility Study Interim Report, May 14, 2021

Introduction

Community Wealth Building (CWB) initiatives from across the globe are demonstrating that CWB is a viable, actionable and holistic approach to improve quality of life, build sustainable and equitable economic development, and empower more autonomous and resilient communities.

In January 2021, a working group of Regent Park residents, community agencies, City staff, anchor institutions and local businesses came together to begin to explore the feasibility of using CWB as an approach for building an equitable and inclusive neighbourhood economy in Regent Park.

The Regent Park CWB Feasibility Study was commissioned by the City of Toronto and undertaken by The Centre for Social Innovation (CSI) together with the Yonge Street Mission (YSM), the Social Development Plan (SDP) Stakeholder's Table in Regent Park, and with the participation of the City's Social, Development and Finance Administration (SDFa) division.

Through an inclusive community engagement process (workshops, interviews and surveys), key stakeholder interviews, and research of global, national and local Community Wealth best practices, the Feasibility study explored the relationship between current social, economic, employment and other investments in Regent Park. This research and engagement process, in addition to the deep local knowledge of the study team, identified barriers hindering CWB in Regent Park, at the individual, organizational and neighbourhood or systems levels. It also surfaced several opportunities for strengthening connections, building relationships, weaving together existing programs and engaging residents to build community wealth in Regent Park.

This Interim Report summarises our research findings to date, and provides preliminary recommendations for how to continue to advance the work of building community wealth in Regent Park. Over the next two months, the project team will continue its research and stakeholder engagement to inform our final report, to be released in June 2021.

A New Way of Building Stronger Communities: What is Community Wealth?



Community Wealth (CW) is an intentional systems thinking approach that focuses on designing local social and economic infrastructure to be regenerative, equitable and inclusive.

CW looks at ways in which policy, financial flows, property, enterprise, procurement, workforce development and more can be better connected and reinforced at the individual, organisational and systems levels. Through greater alignment, Community Wealth approaches leverage program, financial and other key infrastructure in ways that minimize “waste” (of social capital, natural resources, economic inefficiency), and maximize the opportunities for recovery, renewal and regeneration. In this sense, CWB approaches are mutually reinforcing and build on the core principles of circular economies.

Examples of effective CW infrastructure include community-based social enterprises, diverse and collective ownership models, community investment funds, land trusts and credit unions, local and sustainable job creation, social procurement plans, policy changes and anchor institutions. Individually, each of these mechanisms can strengthen empowerment, equity, sustainability and resiliency at the individual and organizational level. Collectively, and working in concert through integrated Community Wealth strategies, these mechanisms have the potential to connect individual progress with community progress, and have the power to shift systems that can build lasting community wealth.

Community wealth projects, including the Parkdale People’s Economy in Toronto, the Cleveland model, the Preston model, and many others from around the world¹, are beginning to successfully implement community-oriented approaches to improve social and economic outcomes for equity-seeking groups and the community as a whole.

In some instances, CWB strategies are taking a chapter from well tested and long standing models, such as land trusts and cooperative ownership. The innovation that is occurring is the evolution and adaptation of existing models when applied to the complex and contemporary challenges of growing economic and racial inequality in urban and community settings. Moreover, through intentional design, strategic alignment and coordination among CW mechanisms and the players - grounded in a compelling and inspiring vision - CWB approaches are demonstrating that communities can build equitable and inclusive neighbourhood economies with a strong sense of health, well-being and belonging.

We believe that Regent Park is ready for such a CWB Strategy.

Why Community Wealth? Why Regent Park? Why Now?

Beginning in the 1840s, the east end of Toronto became a destination for Irish immigrants. It was known as one of the most run down parts of the City. In the 1940s, the City made plans to turn the area into the country’s first social housing community, using a new and innovative (for the time) “garden city” model.

Regent Park was reimagined as a “self-contained complex of exclusively public housing among expansive green spaces and little thoroughfare.”² However, by the mid 90s, Regent Park had, once again, become a byword for isolation, stigma and racial marginalization. Regent Park was among the poorest neighbourhoods in Canada, with nearly 70 percent of residents living below StatsCan’s low-income cut-off rate. It was clear that the garden city model had not stood the test of time in Regent Park.

¹ Parkdale, Toronto: <https://parkdalepeopleseconomy.ca/>; New York, NY: <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dca/downloads/pdf/partners/Municipal-Policies-for-Community-Wealth-Building.pdf>; San Diego, CA: <https://www.sdfsa.org/stories/exploring-community-wealth-building-in-san-diego-countys-food-system> Preston, UK: https://www.preston.gov.uk/media/1792/How-we-built-community-wealth-in-Preston/pdf/CLES_Preston_Document_WEB_AW.pdf?m=636994067328930000; Cleveland, Ohio: <https://atlasofthefuture.org/project/the-cleveland-model/>; Mondragon, Spain: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/oureconomy/another-town-possible-community-wealth-building-basque-country/>

²James R (2010) From ‘slum clearance’ to ‘revitalisation’: Planning, expertise and moral regulation in Toronto’s Regent Park. *Planning Perspectives* 25(1): 69–86, p. 70.

In 2003, the City of Toronto approved a massive 12-year, \$1 billion Revitalization Plan for the neighbourhood, designed to replace the old garden city model with a mix of new public and market housing, retail spaces and services. Three of five phases of the revitalization plan have been completed by the Daniels Corporation. In fall/winter 2020, the City selected a new developer, Tridel, to complete phases 4 and 5.

The physical revitalization of Regent Park has the potential to improve the standard of living and the neighbourhood is attempting to improve its position from near the bottom of Toronto's distribution of income. Yet persistent and systemic barriers remain with significant ripple effects attributable in large part, to the growing City-wide polarization of wealth and opportunity between neighbourhoods³, and that is disproportionately facing young and racialized groups. Over the last three decades, these groups have seen almost no socioeconomic gains.⁴

These trends are particularly acute in Regent Park. With one of the highest proportions of visible minorities and Indigenous residents in the City,⁵ the neighbourhood has more than twice the city-average percentage of the population living under the Low Income Cut Off (Li-Co) mark⁶ and the median income in Regent Park remains well below the City of Toronto average (\$42,369 and \$65,829 respectively⁷).

The Social Development Plan

Critical to the ultimate success of the Regent Park revitalization, is the concurrent Social Development Plan (SDP). The SDP was created in deep consultation with Toronto Community Housing, residents and stakeholders of Regent Park, and was designed to preserve and strengthen the proud identity and social infrastructure of the neighbourhood.

The SDP created an innovative strategy to leverage the revitalization to build social and economic wellbeing, targeting the four key areas of community safety, community development, community communications and local employment and economic development. Though the SDP was created in tandem with the launch of the revitalization process, it had never been properly costed nor funded until the 2020 budget when the City committed \$2.5 million over 5 years to fund social and economic development in the neighbourhood.

The SDP Employment and Economic Development Working Group has focused on strategies such as local job creation, revenue generation and means of accessing capital within the community.

³ Hulchanski D (2010) *The Three Cities Within Toronto: Income Polarization Among Toronto's Neighbourhoods 1970–2005*. Toronto: Cities Centre, University of Toronto.

⁴ <https://www.torontofoundation.ca/vitalsigns2019/>

⁵ <https://www.toronto.ca/ext/sdfa/Neighbourhood%20Profiles/pdf/2016/pdf1/cpa72.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.toronto.ca/ext/sdfa/Neighbourhood%20Profiles/pdf/2016/pdf1/cpa72.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.toronto.ca/ext/sdfa/Neighbourhood%20Profiles/pdf/2016/pdf1/cpa72.pdf>

Unfortunately, this work has not been integrated in any substantive way through the first three phases of the neighbourhood Revitalization Plan. Consequently, the opportunities that community economic development presents as an essential component of the SDP have not taken hold and debatably, opportunities for CWB have been lost or remain untapped.

Phases 4 and 5 of the Revitalization Plan provide a window for stronger integration between local employment and economic development and the neighbourhood's redevelopment. More pointedly, by not leveraging this window of opportunity now, we may lose the chance to 'get it right'.

Unlocking the Potential for Community Wealth Building in Regent Park: Research Methodology and Key Findings

Engaging the Community

Our project study team conducted a multi-layered research and engagement process to explore the relationship between current social, economic, employment and other investments in Regent Park, and to begin to assess the opportunity for using CWB approaches to contribute to strengthening the neighbourhood's social and economic development. The community expressed strong appetite to learn more and explore CWB mechanisms, ranging from home ownership models to community dividends, the restrictions of social assistance income, to enhanced collaboration with Toronto Community Housing. These opportunities for greater learning and exploration are discussed further in the recommendations section of this report.

Central to the feasibility study is the involvement of community stakeholders. Through a series of listening sessions, surveys and targeted workshops, the team developed strong working relationships with local residents and organizations, mapped out the current landscape of community wealth assets, levers and tools in Regent Park, and identified central areas of challenge and opportunity for community wealth. To date, our engagement process has included hosting nine workshops engaging over 150 residents, community leaders, local social entrepreneurs and social enterprise experts. We have also conducted 12 in-depth, small group interviews with local entrepreneurs, City employees working from multiple Departments, The Daniels Corporation, Tridel, Buy Social Canada, Toronto Enterprise Fund, and leaders from local organizations

Summary of Research Findings

Building on Assets

Regent Park residents and stakeholders spoke candidly about the current social and economic context in the community, and expressed a strong interest in learning more about CWB approaches. The initial engagement sessions rapidly produced two central insights that became the basis for our subsequent research:

1. Regent Park has a very strong sense of community and a powerful base of active and engaged residents who are already involved in extensive community development work.
2. There is a vibrant existing entrepreneurial spirit in the community, a growing number of aspiring entrepreneurs, and many of the local residents are very interested in becoming part of, or supporting, local social enterprise culture.

“We don’t know what comes beyond starting a social enterprise. We want to know: how do we scale? How can we share learnings? How can we help and enhance each other’s work? That’s where we get stuck.” ~ Regent Park resident

There are a number of projects and organisations doing excellent work supporting local entrepreneurship. The SDP Stakeholder’s Table and the Regent Park Neighbourhood Association’s Community Benefits Coalition, together with the Toronto Community Benefits Network, have done exceptional work expanding the mission of revitalization to include economic, social, and community benefits.

The City of Toronto is engaged in initiatives such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy, Anchor TO, and the Social Procurement Plan, while organisations like Yonge Street Mission, Dixon Hall, the Centre for Social Innovation, the Toronto Centre of Learning and Development, and others all offer a range of resources and supports to strengthen local social entrepreneurs and foster stronger connections. Some neighbourhood-based enterprises and networks include the Regent Park Catering Collective, the Women’s Development Network, and the Show Love Café.

Lastly, the study team has reviewed, and actively participated in several current strategy, planning and programming initiatives underway in Regent Park. Our analysis of CWB in Regent Park is informed by:

- The City of Toronto: Poverty Reduction Strategy;⁸ Urban Indigenous Action Plan;⁹ and Social Procurement Plan;¹⁰
- YSM Wealth Creation Table

⁸ <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/accountability-operations-customer-service/long-term-vision-plans-and-strategies/poverty-reduction-strategy/>

⁹ <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/9737-Urban-Indigenous-Action-Plan-full-report.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.toronto.ca/business-economy/doing-business-with-the-city/social-procurement-program/>

- CSI's Every One Every Day: Toronto and Community Living Room in the Daniels Spectrum.¹¹
- The Regent Park Stakeholders' Table Refreshed Social Development Plan,¹²
- Regent Park Neighbourhood Association's Community Benefits Coalition.¹³
- Regent Park Executive Director's Network.

While each of these processes, plans and projects plays an important role in serving Regent Park, none approach the work through a holistic, Community Wealth building lens. *Note: this will be further discussed in our final report.*

Key Barriers

Our research and community engagement process undertaken to date are revealing core areas of challenge, or barriers, that are impeding stronger local employment and economic development.

- 1) a sense of lacking autonomy and control with regards to the physical assets in the neighbourhood;
- 2) insufficient and uncoordinated supports for entrepreneurs; and
- 3) barriers to maximising the impact of social procurement plans.

1. Autonomy and Control

The community experiences a lack of involvement and decision making participation in the governance of resources and assets in the neighbourhood. Residents will often share, through various channels, the feeling that they don't have a voice, and that they aren't listened to. There is an underlying sense that revitalization has happened *to* them, not *with* or necessarily *for* them. This creates the strong disempowering sense that "everything belongs to the developers or the City", as they have no meaningful autonomy over the core physical infrastructure of their lives.

This is particularly acute with regards to appropriately sized and governed spaces for community and local business projects. For example, a frequently raised issue was that the existing retail spaces are too large for local enterprises, and as a result local entrepreneurs lose out to larger, established corporations with no ties to the community.

"We need shared commercial spaces with shared overhead, to help lean on each other for growth." ~Regent Park resident/entrepreneur

¹¹ <https://socialinnovation.org/offering/everyoneeverydayto/>

¹² <https://www.regentparksocial.org/uploads/b/4d473920-0b41-11ea-8281-9de0ed681911/Refreshed%20SDP,%202018%2012%2012.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.regentparkcoalition.ca/>

This situation is exacerbated by a lack of community representation at the decision making table of community assets, such as the Daniels Spectrum Building, community centres, and public spaces.

2. Lack of Coordinated Support for Entrepreneurs

“Many programs focus only on the early stages but then individuals are on their own. The gap in services is a physical or digital place where entrepreneurs can learn from one another and where there can be opportunities to access funds, and other supports.” ~Regent Park resident/entrepreneur

Regent Park is served by a number of public and nonprofit organizations. However, many of the services are siloed, with each organization offering similar but slightly different programs, with very little communication and coordination between them, making reliable way-finding for people accessing programming challenging. For example, both The Centre of Learning Development, and The Yonge Street Mission offer catering collectives, but a single collective would strengthen each respective program. Dixon Hall and The Centre for Social Innovation both offer entrepreneurial training and support, each with their own strengths, but little coordination to cover existing gaps. These programs offer some, but not all of the required supports for entrepreneurs. There is very little direct support dedicated to growing the connections and capacity for Regent Park social entrepreneurs.

“We already have the business ideas, but we need support with training such as market research etc, business promotion, use of social media. We don’t know who to ask for these things, so we aren’t getting them.” ~Regent Park resident/entrepreneur

In addition to lack of service provider coordination, the most common misalignments result from:

- *A lack of trust in program providers:* Regent Park has a long history of marginalisation, resulting in distrust and rejection of traditional charity style supports;
- *A lack of extended mentorship resources:* Shorter training workshops help, but many interviewees expressed the desire for a trusted, ongoing *ad hoc* advice and training resources that can be casually accessed when challenges arise;
- *Barriers to networking and relationship development:* Systemic barriered access has left residents without the same social capital and networks that many other entrepreneurs lean on for success.
- *A lack of suitable startup and growth financing options:* Aspiring entrepreneurs in Regent Park need smaller, more risk-tolerant investments, access to working capital and other appropriately designed financial instruments than are provided by current financial

institutions. A Regent Park community investment fund would need to be tailored to those that, being newcomers to Canada, may not have access to the traditional friends and family financing, for example.

3. Access to Social Procurement Opportunities: Supply and Demand

Procurement contracts in Regent Park could be an important driver of growth and financial stability for local enterprise. Conversations suggest that this is an area of substantial opportunity, however, local suppliers struggle to qualify for and win contracts. The most predominant barriers are:

- Insufficient information and information dissemination about existing and potential contracts.

“We need a business sharing platform. A virtual bulletin board that we can access any of the goods or services of Regent Park. You can’t buy from someone you don’t know about.” ~Regent Park resident/entrepreneur
- *Inaccessible language*: the contracts are too long and written in a language style that the suppliers struggle to parse;
- *Large and bundled contracts*: the contracts are frequently either of a scale that exceeds what one supplier could take on, or bundled as part of a variety of requirements for which they do not have the scope; and
- *Qualifications and Legal Requirements*: Such as Diverse Supplier Certification or insurance are too onerous, both financially and in terms of expertise, particularly for smaller, start-up entrepreneurs/suppliers.

Procurers of services and supplies including the Toronto Community Housing Corporation and The Daniels Corporation already source a number of services locally and recognise the potential for stronger social procurement in Regent Park. However, two key barriers they experience when seeking local procurement include:

- Difficulties in attracting sufficient viable suppliers to cover their procurement needs as they are currently designed; and
- A lack of community-wide strategy, and coordinated local support to redesign and realign and grow the local procurement pipeline in Regent Park

Individually, each of the challenges presents a barrier to a flourishing local entrepreneurial culture. Taken together, however, they demonstrate a lack of overall alignment, tailored support and strategic coordination that is vital to unlocking the potential of CWB in Regent Park. A coordinated CWB strategy focused on building and strengthening local ownership, control and





autonomy, developing local enterprises and community ecosystem building networks, and creating more accessible social procurement and finance opportunities would help to 'lift all boats', transforming the local economic system while empowering individuals and organisations across the community.

MOVING FORWARD: DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY WEALTH STRATEGY FOR REGENT PARK

Conceptual Framework

As noted, CW is built from the actions and intentional alignment of three distinct levels: individuals, organisations, and systems. At each audience or system level, CWB approaches are designed to build and strengthen social and economic infrastructure across the key areas of: Community Cohesion/Readiness; Entrepreneurship Development; Jobs; Finance; Land & Property; Procurement and Education and Engagement.

This conceptual framework is the beginning of our mapping of some of the existing and proposed program, policy or other infrastructure in Regent Park that when looked at as a whole, can begin to demonstrate the opportunities for connecting and creating the mutually reinforcing social and economic infrastructure required for community wealth development in Regent Park. This framework can serve as the foundation for next steps in developing a Community Wealth Strategy for Regent Park.

|  Community Wealth |  INDIVIDUAL |  ORGANIZATIONS |  SYSTEMS |
|--|--|--|---|
| COMMUNITY COHESION | Pilot: Everyone Every Day: Toronto | Pilot: Community Living Room | Community Information Centre |
| GENERATIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT | Tool: Diversely Owned Businesses | Tool: Social Purpose Businesses | Tool: Intentional Economies Businesses/Procurement |
| JOBS | Lever: Employment Training | Tool: Employment Social Enterprise | Lever: Codify Local Hiring Practices/Embed in Procurement |
| FINANCE | Tool: Right-Sized Finance tools / Low Barrier Lending | Pilot: Community Investment Fund | Pilot: Community Dividend |
| LAND AND PROPERTY | Lever: Affordable Housing Home Ownership | Tool: Community Housing / Co-Living | Tool: Land Trust/ Community Ownership |
| PROCUREMENT | Lever: Sourcing from Local Businesses | Lever: Incubator Support to Convene and Respond | Tool: Anchor TO |
| EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT | Pilot: Education Campaign | Levers: Capacity Building / Program Co-Design | Lever: Strategic directioning |

Preliminary Recommendations: Five Pathways to Action

This interim report on the feasibility of developing a CWB approach for Regent Park, is just the tip of the iceberg for exploring the potential of how community wealth could be strengthened in Regent Park. The conversation is just beginning - there is much yet to do. Between Covid begging us to question what truly matters, and the initiation of Phase 4 and 5 of the Revitalization Plan, this is an opportune moment to ensure there is a cohesive and strategic integration of CWB approaches in Regent Park. This process should continue, beyond this feasibility study in order to embed a cohesive community wealth strategy into the community fabric of Regent Park.

The following are the study team's five preliminary recommendations to support the alignment and opportunities towards that end.

1. Develop a compelling CW vision and actionable strategy
2. Integrate the CW strategy into the next phases of the Regent Park revitalization
3. Build collective capacity for CWB approaches
4. Learn by doing and disseminate insights

5. Advance policy recommendations with the City and across neighbourhoods, beginning with social procurement

1. Develop a compelling CW vision and actionable strategy that strengthens communication and social infrastructure in the community

Continue to support the strengthening of partnerships with community and key stakeholders to weave existing programs, initiate new programs and co-create a more fulsome Community Wealth vision and strategy for Regent Park. This vision and strategy should embody prosperity, regeneration, equity and community empowerment while remaining grounded in the real day-to-day needs of the residents of Regent Park. The CW strategic plan should identify opportunities for:

- Supporting resident capacity building in the areas of community governance, board participation and civic engagement;
- Investing in participatory engagement projects in the community wealth strategy;
- Expanding the reach and partnership with institutions and corporations such as TCH, Daniels and Tridel to engage them more actively in the CWB process; and
- Supporting the creation of an information, communications and referral space (digital and face-to-face) so that residents and aspiring entrepreneurs can find out where to go to get their projects up and running.

2. Integrate the CW strategy into the next phases of the Regent Park revitalization

Embed the Community Wealth strategy development with the Master Plan, Rezoning Application and Community Benefits Agreements that represent Phases 4 and 5 of the Regent Park Revitalization Plan. Work closely with the TCH and Tridel to embed Community Wealth strategies and programs, including social procurement, workforce development and community investment, into Phase 4 and 5 activities.

3. Build collective capacity for CWB approaches

Invest in the design and implementation of a community-wide CW education campaign. Lasting success will ultimately only be achieved through community engagement and knowledge. A more resourced CW education campaign is crucial to empowering residents to engage fully with CWB approaches. This educational work should begin with the development of an interactive community map that enables residents and others to find out what is happening, where in the community, so that they can best engage in a more coordinated ecosystem of support.

4. Learn by doing and disseminate insights

Support a number of prototypes and pilots including: a streamed social enterprise incubator, the community investment fund and other emergent projects that will enable us to ‘get moving’ and experiment with what might best serve Regent Park.

Social Enterprise Incubator

The incubator would be a stable, community-responsive platform providing a continuum of services and resources currently lacking for businesses and entrepreneurs to progress from the explore to the launch phase of development (i.e., early-phase legal and entrepreneurial expertise and mentorship, building a trusted network of relationships; access to appropriate space, IT and accounting support).

The social enterprise incubator would support three development streams of local business: 1) diversely-owned businesses, 2) social-purpose enterprises, 3) intentionally designed enterprises to respond to procurement and community needs. In addition, the incubator would act as a social procurement intermediary by supporting local enterprises in the qualification and application processes for contract bids, and aiding local anchor institutions in realigning their procurement strategies for greater impact in Regent Park.

Community Wealth Investment Fund

Following the established models of community investment funds (i.e., the Vancouver Island Community Investment Fund or the Harvest Impact Fund in Guelph) the Community Wealth Investment Fund builds on the Parkdale People’s Economy’s call for new, blended finance approaches for building community wealth. The Fund envisions a partnership between communities, impact investors, and social enterprises to provide social finance for community enterprises, and to invest in community wealth ecosystem capacity building. Among first steps would be the development of a pilot funding stream to offer *right-sized investment* for local entrepreneurs and businesses: microloans, community-backed lending, micro bridge financing

5. Social Procurement Policy Development and Evolution

There are a growing number of organizations and institutions pursuing stronger approaches to social procurement. The explosive growth and development across the City offers Toronto an incredible opportunity to ensure communities are given a strong seat at the table when it comes to procurement. We propose that a set of policy recommendations for the City to align social procurement policy with community wealth strategies be developed through the applied work of creating the proposed Regent Park Community Wealth strategy and in tandem with several other initiatives that are advancing comparable work. Given the forthcoming revitalization development phases, there’s an opportunity to address some of the barriers to social procurement identified through this research process and to work with and disseminate this work city-wide.