

Date: Nov. 25, 2024

To: Economic and Community Development Committee

Re: **EC17.2 - A Partnered Approach to Inclusive Economic Development**

Dear Councillors,

The most recent version of the staff report gives a resonant definition of IED, written after the meeting of non-profits called by Councillor Bravo on Sept.13. However, I could find almost no reference in the EC17.2 document to the city's own employment practices. My particular focus for many years has been researching the actions of Parks and Recreation. This division employs around 10,000 part-time workers most years. That means it offers a good chance to show that the City can walk the walk of IED, not just talk about changes that might be tried.

Before IED can be better integrated into what happens at Parks and Rec, it's necessary to look clearly and in detail at the P&R practices that support IED and those that block it. I therefore submit an unsolicited, quite condensed report, attached here, of four "case studies" our organization has done for four different public spaces administered by the city: Thorncliffe's R.V.Burgess Park, Sorauren Park, Dufferin Grove Park, and Alexander Park/Scadding Court (this last case study is longer, to show the step-by-step moves that were made by staff to stop an unsolicited community-and-neighbourhood centre project).

In each case, Parks and Recreation management is shown to have actively obstructed the economic efforts of neighbourhood people and non-city-staff organizations, as often as supporting them (though support happened too). The policies behind these blockages are often confusing to the public and – just as much – to city staff. The confusion shows, even though city staff try to put a brave face on the problems that arise.



Beyond that, the four case studies give some clues to better ways to get to the “quality jobs,” or “decent work,” also mentioned in the IED report. Allowing more quality jobs would need a change of practices by Parks and Rec. The majority of Parks and Rec part-time/youth jobs are now really fairly low-level security guard functions. A thicket of training sessions are mandated for part-time workers to underline the requirement to stay in line, know the rules, keep your mouth shut. These are not quality jobs. Youth who get their first job with Parks and Rec have tried to persuade me that having a city job, where you don’t have to do much except sit, is a privilege. No it isn’t.

Parks and Recreation’s approach to IED needs to change, the sooner the better. And it must start with public discussion. We’re not there yet.

Sincerely,

Jutta Mason  
Research Lead, CELOS



# **Four Park Case Studies**

**Presented to City Council's Economic and  
Community Development Committee**

**By Jutta Mason  
The Center for Local Research into Public Space (CELOS)**

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## The Thorncliffe Park Women's Committee Case Study

In the summer of **2008**, some members of the **Thorncliffe Park Women's Committee (TCPC)** came to Dufferin Grove Park to talk with rec staff and CELOS researchers about **R.V.Burgess Park**, which is their neighbourhood park. They were already connected with the non-profit **Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office** for social services, and the **Leaside Rotary Club** for small park improvements, but they wanted help in getting their playground rebuilt (most of it had been removed in the great "playground safety" purge of 2001-2, and very little had come back to replace it). Meetings started about the playground. Then in early June **2009**, the friends asked **CELOS** for help in starting a weekly Friday bazaar in the park. They had been asking the city for permission for a while but nobody was responding.

Then on June 22, city workers went on strike, so there was no one to contact in the permit office, and no bylaw officers either. So the women just started the bazaar. It was successful from day one, and therefore, when the strike was over, it had to be allowed to continue.



August 2009

The bazaar amplified the small, diverse economic activities already going on inside the apartment buildings, including food. The next step the women wanted to take was to add an open-air community tandoor, on the same basis as the bake ovens at various other parks in the city.

**March 2011:** the women tracked down a workable open-air tandoor from **Mainra Traders** in Oakville, and started raising funds to pay for it, plus seeking permission to put it in the park. To test the idea, they borrowed a portable tandoor from CELOS and held some public baking events, which were very popular. The city was positive to the idea, funds were put together, and a concrete pad was poured for the Mainra Traders tandoor.

**November 2011:** Then a series of blocks appeared, delaying installation for almost two years. From a **TPWC** deputation Nov.21, 2011:

<https://www.publicbakeovens.ca/wiki/wiki.php?n=ThorncliffePark.SabinaPolicyDeputation2011>

*"TPWC put a lot of volunteer time into raising money, doing bake oven programming with the portable oven in the meantime to make sure activities are happening for community. We were waiting for lease agreement until last week. But this lease agreement makes the future of bake oven programming in RV Burgess Park look bleak. After fundraising for the oven, we are now expected to pay \$500 annual lease fee which makes use of bake oven inaccessible for women's committee. We are also supposed to pay to install it which is a huge challenge as we do not have money for this. We are also asked to agree to oven becoming city property but then still absorb costs of maintenance and repairs."*

The women's committee joined with others who were running into the same barriers in other city parks, and made a video to show the Parks committee in 2012: [Preview YouTube video Public Bake Oven Policy](#)

Parks management resistance decreased for a time, and the tandoor oven was installed at R.V.Burgess Park in **2013** and first used regularly in **2014**. Here is a short [Youtube video](#) showing naan bread being made at the park in September 2014. And here is a copy of the original tandoor oven [lease](#) agreement drawn up by the city's lawyers.

By this point the women's committee had made friends all over town and beyond. Their activities had multiplied. There were not only the open-air tandoor oven and the summer markets/bazaars. There was also a winter carnival, and arts and fitness programming, and advocacy for playground equipment and for a picnic shelter and more seating. There was a big community garden, and a thriving youth component to almost every activity.

But working with the city didn't get easier. Soon after the tandoor was installed, the PFR general manager of the time summoned TPWC member Sabina Ali to come to his office by herself. Six of his staff confronted her with the wrongness of what the TPWC was doing (mainly re the Friday market). A **Foodshare** staffer had accompanied her, uninvited, and the head of **Park People** got involved too. The staff backed off. From the TPWC: *"We didn't have to go through the permits to use the oven as we were issued a [license](#) for five years. There were negotiations with the City and our group with the annual fee, and Toronto Food Strategy played a key role in navigating this. My deputation for Tandoor at City hall was to get a fee waiver for our volunteer group."* The requirement for a permit fee was paused in 2014, when Thorncliffe Park was designated as a **Neighbourhood Improvement Area**.

There was now support from three non-profits: Foodshare, the **Metcalf Foundation** and Park People. In **2015** The Metcalf Foundation published a booklet <http://metcalffoundation.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/TPWC-FINAL.pdf> about Thorncliffe (2015) titled ***The Power of Civic Action***. This was the final report of Metcalf's three-year "Resilient Neighbourhood Economies" project with TPWC.

The report's conclusion: *"The Women's Committee bazaar, by leading the way, has made it easier for the city to accept socially sustainable enterprises in parks, such as container cafes. 'Their efforts illustrate the kind of on-the-ground work that is required to effect neighbourhood change and the extraordinary outcomes that can emerge as a result,' explains Adriana Beemans, Metcalf's Inclusive Local Economies Director. 'It is exactly what bottom-up community planning is meant to be: a grassroots group influencing policy and decision-making for the betterment of the city. It's more than neighbourhood resiliency, it's inclusive city building.'"*

The Women's Committee learned more about the shipping container cafes at Scadding Court Community Centre and, with significant help from both Metcalf and Foodshare, they started working to get one. In March 2017 their grant application to buy a container was turned down. But on Oct.12, **2017**, Sabina Ali sent out an invitation: "Our container Park Cafe was delivered this afternoon. It is now sitting in the park. We have decided for the launch this Friday October 13."

**2024:** The Thorncliffe Park Women's Committee has achieved a lot. But the waves of city staff resistance mean that the group didn't live happily ever after. Of the founding group of friends, all except Sabina have left and been replaced by others who are, Sabina says, "very passionate and committed to community building." The tandoor lease is in a limbo called "overhold." Sabina says she's told every time she asks, that "they are still working on it." That means there's no oven permit charge, but only Parks staff are allowed to have the oven key in their possession. So every market day the bakers hope the Parks staff don't forget to come by and unlock the oven – and that afterwards they don't forget to come back and lock it again at the end. But they do forget, and not infrequently.

There are blocks everywhere. Sabina writes: *"For our Winter carnival I was asked to apply for a noise exemption permit to use a small bluetooth speaker to play recorded music. I tried to explain to the permit officer that we are not using an amplified sound. She said that we have to apply for the noise permit (\$100.00). We have also been charged a permit fee of \$ 159.49 for a 5hr event (3hrs +2hrs for setup & tear down). As this event is a volunteer run, we do not have money to cover the extra cost of the noise permit so I decided not to*

*play music at our event.” And sometimes the campfire is not allowed at all.*

*The community centre only allows each organization 2 indoor events a year, but Sabina says “this is a South Asian community, these events are important for celebrating the festivals. TPWC is the only organization that holds these bazaars, so the capping of the spaces for these events in the community is a barrier. Along with the high permit fees, there is no city staffing support to help with the programming /activities.”*

For the other TPWA park events, the fees this past year (not including other expense such as insurance, flyers, volunteer food etc) were:

Women’s Day Bazaar \$678.06

Eid Bazaar (indoors in Winter) \$1,448.94

Eid Bazaar summer: \$858.29

Farmers Market \$2,464.13

**Total: \$5449.42**

These are all payments that involve little or no work by park staff. They *skim off* the economic activities of these women’s work and redirect them into general city funds rather than to the local participants. That’s not local economic development.

From the Metcalfe Foundation’s Thorncliffe booklet: *“The city had no rules for allowing pop-up markets in parks. ‘We had to find a way for the Women’s Committee to have commercial activity,’ says [former Parks and Rec general manager] Patterson. ‘But how do we do this without ending up with flea markets or a big box store having discount sales in parks? One of my frustrations was there was no framework for decision-making that applied across the city in a way that was fair to all groups.’ ”*

But the one-size-fits-all-groups framework that Parks and Rec put in place more than a decade ago is not workable even yet. High-level managers haven’t figured out how to recognize and support what comes to them from their citizens rather than being devised in city hall meeting rooms. Jane Jacobs wrote: *“A city has to be responsible for keeping its own society endlessly involved with maintaining a city its own people can feel at home in and be proud of.....The more that cities can make of their own ordinary people’s capacities for economic and social invention and experiment, the more useful and valuable cities become – not only for their own people but also for their nations.”*

That means handing over keys to the tandoor bakers and reliable permission for the bazaar, but more than that. Jane Jacobs also wrote that “stagnation” in cities is caused by (among other things) *“unwillingness of local government to purchase experimental and innovative goods and services (e.g. for parks...)”*

In other words, Parks and Rec should be refining the tool they already use for paying contractors for building, training, inspecting, and more – service contracts – to pay the Thorncliffe Park Women’s Committee for the specific, innovative work they do.



## Sorauren Park Case Study

Sorauren Park, on Wabash Avenue, exists because of an intense community lobbying effort, beginning in the 1980s, to convert an old TTC garage into a park, with a former linseed mill at its south end to be renovated as a community centre. The park was opened in **1995**. There was also a small two-story building at the south end of the park that had been the office of the linseed mill, renamed the fieldhouse. From the “Friends of Sorauren Park” website <https://soraurenpark.wordpress.com/history/>:

*“In **2006**, a community group borne out of the Roncesvalles-Macdonell Residents’ Association formed to become the Wabash Building Society, a non-profit corporation dedicated to restoring the Wabash property to community use. As part of a “baby steps” campaign, the WBS focused on developing the Fieldhouse to quickly provide washrooms, storage space and meeting space for the park. Over the years, the children’s sports league in the park has grown from about 100 kids to more than 750 registered each season [ed.note: that was pre-covid – now smaller and still rebuilding].....Thanks to the efforts of the community, a fundraising campaign, grants from the Evergreen Foundation, in-kind donations, “Section 37” development fees from nearby condo and loft developments, and City support, Fieldhouse construction began in October 2007. The building opened in May 2008.”*

Even before the field house opened, some kids’ soccer parents had started talking at sidelines while watching their kids play, about starting a food coop in Parkdale, partly modelled on Karma Coop (a longtime good-food source located in the Annex). When the fieldhouse opened in **2008**, the group started a farmers’ market there, to be part of the coop, focusing on locally-grown (within 100 miles), affordable food. Start-up help came from the nearby non-profit *Foodshare* through their brokering of connections with the *Greenbelt Foundation* and the *Toronto Farmers’ Market Network*. Ayal Dinner, one of the founders, who was working at Foodshare at the time, says the market had a “radical” focus, and tried to work together with other markets to keep prices affordable. They found funding to try a “voucher” program allowing low-income people to buy more at the market. And since it was a Monday market, it was often running on a holiday weekend, meaning that many special events were added in. The market became a lively centre of the community.

The West End Coop covered the market’s insurance and administration, but during the decade when the coop existed, it ran into the same problems as do many other alternatives to the mega-food industry. Those difficulties formed part of the background of the market story during that time. Also part of the market story were the growing restrictions that Parks and Rec placed on the use of the field house building. Although much of the funding for making the field house usable had come from direct on-the-street community fundraising, after a few years the market supporters were discouraged from having keys to the building even though they had worked to set it up. Parks and Rec assigned a “building attendant” who held the keys so he could clean the building and monitor its use. On cold winter market days this staff person would sit in the locked building and make the farmers wait outside if they arrived even a few minutes early. He also made his displeasure – at all the hubbub – clear to market participants. His job, as he apparently saw it, was to look out for permit rules being broken, even ones he thought up – but rarely to give any help to the market.

People involved at that time say they think he stayed in that role for about 10 years. They say that after him, it got better, with some friendly and even helpful building attendants. But the wonder is: how could such a person have the power to make things miserable for so many people for so long without Parks and Rec management noticing – or if they did notice, taking any action?

The market coordinator from that time writes: *“through all those years, those running the market plus the vendors and the community were constantly trying to compromise and work with what the City was asking of us and it kept changing. From not using any grass space, to the amount of amplification a solo musician was using, to everything involving the field house, to parking permits that didn’t guarantee us any parking, to permit fees, to access to electricity, etc. We always bent to what was being asked of us to keep things*



agreeable.”

In **2017**, a community bake oven was built by park neighbour and contractor Joel Campbell and other friends of the park. In 2018, the market separated from the food coop, which closed its doors that year. The market continued to be a lively community gathering place, with the new oven as an asset. But there were new clouds on the horizon. From the market manager, March 3, **2020**: *“I am concerned they are going to try to squeeze all the joy out of our activities. In the past I got a simple permit for the bake oven and transferred this to the vendor who was then able to make a few bucks selling pizza.....Now when I talk with [the permit officer] she talks about the cost of the permit being “attendance driven” and describes the permit that we received in the past as “the type of permit you would use for a few friends or a gathering of your board directors”... If I were to increase the cost to the vendor to around \$150? for the permit + vendor fee + wood + all their costs to run = no more pizza for the market.”* So although the oven was not built by Parks and running it didn’t involve any work by parks staff, Parks and Rec felt they should get more income from it.

But before this could be put in place, in **mid-March 2020** the market shut down for the covid lockdowns and didn’t reopen until **July 2021**. Even then the market reopening announcement said there would be difficulties, including a requirement for outdoor masking and distancing:

*“After many months of closure due to the pandemic, the Sorauren Farmers Market got the green light and will reopen in Sorauren Park at the usual time, 3-7 pm on Mondays on the Town Square. COVID-19 means farmers’ markets will look and feel a little different with special physical distancing and hygiene protocols. You might not be able to see the smile on your favourite vendor’s face because of their mask, but please know they have missed you and are very happy to see you!*



Sorauren oven, Dec.17, 2022

*To comply with Public Health recommendations please note the following:*

- *Shop quickly, ideally one person per household*
- *If you are unwell, stay home*
- *Wear a mask*
- *Maintain a safe distance from others, be patient and kind – this is challenging for everyone*
- *Please pre-order with vendors online -- this way you can visit the pre-order pick-up window for a speedy visit*
- *Follow the one-way direction of the Market*
- *Please do not touch the food – your vendor will pack for you*
- *No eating in the Market area – take your food and eat at home or in the park.”*

Remarkably, the farmers and the townies who had part-time market jobs selling for the farmers did not go under. And market customers came right back.

The permits problems came right back too. In February of **2022** the market manager wrote to oven users in other parks: *“This year when I spoke to the City, they were requesting a \$350 fee for a commercial entity to use the oven which means no one will use it for the market because by the time you factor in wood, labour, the market fee and everything else, it just wouldn’t be worth it.”*

An even bigger trouble was the uncertainty of the city’s market permit fee. Despite inadequate washrooms and the lack of an elevator to get to the market vendors on the second floor of the cramped field house, it looked like the winter indoor permit fees were going up. In August 2022, the market manager wrote: *“Our*

weekly rental for the winter (7 markets) is looking like a magical number which I thought I knew but now it is elusive and I don't know what they will be charging.....I think it may likely come back as closer to \$1200 per month now. And I was hoping to have the pizza oven going too - what were we thinking?!"

The fieldhouse problem took a different turn the following year. In the fall of **2023**, three weeks before the market was due to go inside the field house, the market manager found out by chance that Toronto Public Health had sealed the field house against entry. Their inspectors had declared it unsafe because it had a great deal of mold. For an unknown length of time, the basement dehumidifiers, which used to be carefully monitored by the Friends of Sorauren Park, hadn't been emptied. The park friends had their keys taken away so they couldn't do that task any longer, but the Parks staff had forgotten and didn't do it either. What to do?

It turned out that Henderson Brewery, a few blocks to the north, had space in its warehouse/pub and was able to accommodate the farmers' market on Mondays for the winter. There was ample indoor space all on one floor, so it was accessible. There was plenty of parking, there was craft beer, there was a music stage and tables to sit and eat market snacks. The market did well there.

In summer the market moved back outside into the park, but this winter the market manager didn't even apply for an indoor fieldhouse permit. The Henderson Brewery was eager to have them back. The rental was reasonable. The nearby art gallery wanted to partner on some events. The market manager said that what made all the difference was that Henderson "really wanted to welcome us."

Whereas Parks and Rec often seems to be saying to people "go away." No fun.

In **April 2024** the market manager wrote a letter to Cathy Vincelli, at that time the acting director of Recreation:

*We have faced challenges with permits for the past 5 years. Each year we are curious to know what surprises the City has in store for us!*

*The permitting process is laborious and difficult to navigate and I know I am not alone in this as I communicate with approximately 10 other Toronto Farmers Market Managers.*

*Having access to washrooms, losing access to washrooms, having to rent our own porta potty, being charged for a washroom permit, being told we didn't have to pay for a washroom permit, getting charged different amounts for permits, not having a Parks Supervisor come to see us in 4 years and the confusion that ensued when we abruptly lost access to an area of the park we had always permitted through PFR because we were informed it now came under the purview of Community Recreation who were going to use it at the same time as our permit, are examples of challenges we think could be avoided through improved communication and collaboration with groups like ours which seek to animate public spaces.*

*It's wonderful to hear that the ECDC is considering a report related to community benefits of city-supported economic activities and I do hope this leads to the ECDC committee and PFR being open to talking with groups like our farmers' market and the Friends of Sorauren Park to improve relationships and the permit system.*

What's the chance?

## Dufferin Grove Case Study: a strange story (short version)

**From Jutta Mason:** In 1993 the manager of the Dufferin Mall called me and said the Mall wanted to donate \$20,000 to Dufferin Grove Park, and could I ask around to see what neighbours might want to do with that money? I called around, then there was a public meeting with Parks and Rec staff, then we got a sandpit, a basketball court, and some funds to hire a few local artists to do fun things with kids. Our interest was in free drop-in activities, not registered programs. Some local kids spent the next two summers basically living at the park all day every day. Which was good, because many of their parents worked double jobs, cleaning banks and office buildings in the evenings, to get a start after arriving in this country.

What happened over the next 20 years was lots: a sandpit adventure playground, snack bars with cheap PWYC food at the outdoor rink in winter and the playground in summer, two outdoor bake ovens, a farmers' market, an outdoor kitchen, Friday night PWYC community suppers, community gardens, cheap skate lending and PWYC skate lessons, all-ages shinny hockey lessons, extended rink hours and a renamed "rink clubhouse", supervision of court-ordered community service for youth, campfires as "eyes on the park," music and art shows, outdoor theatre and dance festivals, a resident theatre company, clothing swaps, many small and medium-sized neighbourhood events, and more. The main income to support these activities with staffing came from PWYC food money at the beginning (counted as *donations*, because voluntary – nobody went hungry or without skates if they couldn't pay), and then augmented by the park staffing budget; also there was occasional income from small private donations and small grants from funders. We put up a frieze of names at eye-height on the rink clubhouse walls – people who helped in one way or another – until we ran out of room and gave up. In 2005 we assembled a neighbourhood board and incorporated as a non-profit which we called **"The Centre for Local Research into Public Space"** (acronym: **CELOS**, pronounced **see-loss**). In 2009 we applied to be a registered charity and were approved.



The food income that was collected paid the artists and play leaders and cooks through service contracts when they first started working with us. If they liked the work, they applied to Parks and Rec – and having proved their abilities were often hired, as part-time recreation workers. Many (but not all) these workers were young and went off to a range of occupations afterwards, with reference letters from CELOS and the city (which often opened doors). And there was always new talent arriving and starting with new service contracts. In this way hundreds of people had a stint working at the park over the years.

**The research we were doing was trying to see *what worked* in public parks.** By 2010 we (CELOS *plus* city rec staff) had raised over \$1 million from the time we began in 1993, and it seemed clear that the approach that we had researched over time was working. We told Parks and Rec management that year that it was clear their staff were fully competent to run the park and the programming without CELOS. But Parks and Rec management proposed that, instead, CELOS should lease the park spaces to run the programs that had

developed there, as external licensees, severing the *de facto* partnership that had developed with rec staff. Licensing, with fees, was a new thing they were promoting all over the city. (They had already switched to calling people who came to parks or community centres “customers.”)

But leasing park space to run programs didn’t work within our charity’s definitions. We said no – our research has been completed. Parks and Rec should take it over. Their front-line part-time staff had developed and carried out local programming. They had learned all levels of running public space, including how to closely collaborate with community park users, with a particular focus on youth and newcomers. With support from all levels of Parks and Rec management, including especially their Recreation supervisor, they had been encouraged to try things, see what works, learn from mistakes; had learned budgeting, and fundraising, had applied their skills to three nearby rinks and done liaison with recreation staff in other parts of the city.

**What happened next:** The recreation supervisor, who had supported all this excellent research, was demoted to a different part of the city to supervise the city’s building caretakers. A new recreation supervisor was assigned to Dufferin Grove Park. She summoned the park’s recreation staff to several long meetings during which she wanted them to outline exactly who does what, in fifteen-minute increments. But the park was a very busy place, and breaking down everyone’s responsibilities into finite bits with clear boundaries didn’t really match reality. When the staff’s answers didn’t satisfy her, the supervisor soldiered on by herself. She spent many hours writing lists and reallocating staff, in a way that made more sense to her than the work schedule that had been developed by trial and error at the park. Then she reported her findings to her managers.

Dufferin Grove Park is doing things all wrong, management said. The way it is run leaves the city “vulnerable and open to major risk factors.” Moreover, the staff were told that their collaboration with CELOS to expand park programs over all those years had been a conflict of interest, and indeed could be interpreted as fraud. One example management gave was -- if a lot of people came to Friday Night Supper and it took an extra two hours of work to clean up after a particularly busy Friday Night Supper, and there was no city budget allocation to pay for those extra hours (the budget for Dufferin Grove was meagre), then staff were paid -- for the extra time they worked -- from the supper donation money. Management says that counted as fraud, and the auditor could get involved. It didn’t matter if the staff took off her/his park staff hat and put on her/his “CELOS contract” hat; nor that all those transactions were in the CELOS public financial statements, and all service contract income was reported to Canada Revenue and taxed; nor that this was the simplest way to make Friday Night Supper work; nor that the park supervisor insisted staff must stay within their pre-approved city hours even if the cleanup was left undone: using two hours of donation funds to get the dishes done still counted as fraud, at Parks and Rec.

The new supervisor’s task was to return the park to the core activities that the City has traditionally run, dissecting out the traditional activities from the many “programs that represent anomalies for PFR.” She downgraded most Dufferin Grove work to minimum wage (to be applied to any new/replacement staff).

Undoing things that work takes less time than growing things. But it still took years. During the next ten years, food income gradually shrank. Committed staff left, programs started wilting, and a phrase never heard before: “not my job” came into common usage by new part-time staff. Summer or winter job applicants who said they wanted to work specifically at Dufferin Grove, because they had grown up there and said they wanted to be part of making it so good, couldn’t get an interview, or were told all part-time jobs available were at distant locations.

Staffing costs actually went up, even as income went down.

All this was happening in an increasingly siloed Parks and Rec management scheme across the city. In 2016 it was announced that the Capital Projects section of Parks and Rec had determined Dufferin rink to be in need of replacement. The Recreation program staff had never heard of it until then. Apparently, money had been

found in the budget to renovate the rink clubhouse at the same time as rebuilding the rink, and a consultant was hired to run public consultations. This ran into many meetings, partly to overcome the initial reaction from many neighbours: *"If it ain't broke, don't fix it!"* But a committee was established and the consultant eventually brought most of the members on board.

And then in March 2020 came the covid lockdowns, shutting down *everything* for what was first announced as two weeks and then turned into a year, then shutting down *almost* every element of public space for another year. Construction on the rink and the former rink clubhouse, however, was able to begin and continue the whole time. The result: a very different building, two rink pads facing in a different direction, and a bill of \$8 million.

The former clubhouse now has spaces that can be privately rented out during most of the year, during the hours when registered after-school and holiday school-aged child care programs aren't running there. There are big windows to let in lots of light, but most of the blinds are drawn most of the time. The summer and winter cafes are gone. The main oven and the outdoor kitchen are in need of repair but there's no plan. The part-time recreation staff at both the building and the summer wading pool – mostly youth – are directed to act more or less like low-level security guards. That means that much of the time they sit in the staff office, or beside the wading pool in the summer, and endure the boredom of their shifts until they can go home. Meantime the park has 40+ tents in it, and neighbours debate about whether they should be moved out, and to where? Parks maintenance staff don't know the Rec staff who don't know the Encampment Outreach staff who don't know the rink staff. Oh dear.

But there are still some sparks in the coals of the mostly-extinguished campfires of Dufferin Grove. The community gardens never went away, even during the lockdowns. The resident theatre company came back as soon as they were allowed, and despite the cramped spaces that they got instead of the Arts building they were promised, they continue to make giant puppets, teach stilt-walking, and put on pageants at Dufferin Grove and other parks. Children continue to make rivers and dams and new friends in the sandpit. These remainders are good surprises.

It turns out that when CELOS told Parks and Rec management back in 2010 that our research at the park was done, that wasn't quite true. The task at hand now is to bring the current direction of the Parks and Rec Division into public discussion. Inasmuch as the path they're on seems to be a blind alley, are there ways to turn it around? CELOS is trying – with all help welcome – to make a contribution.

## Scadding/Harry Gairey Rink Case Study: the step-by-step details of how to block community proposals

November 2023

The Harry Gairey outdoor ice rink, operated by Parks and Rec, sits near the southeast corner of Bathurst and Dundas. Right at the corner, just north of the rink, is the Scadding Court Community Centre (Scadding CCC), not run by parks and rec. It's one of eight "Neighbourhood Centres" that switched to being run by local neighbourhood boards starting in the 1980s, when there was a lot of public disaffection with how city hall ran public spaces. The horse trading that went on during that separation process means there's a big overlap in management. The neighbourhood centre *buildings* are owned and maintained by the city, but the *staffing and programs* are run – and mostly funded – by the individual centres, often with the help of grants they have to apply for.

The outdoor rink and the swimming pools (one outdoor and one indoor) at Bathurst and Dundas stayed with Parks and Rec. They also kept the large Parks and Rec one-story building that houses the skate change room in winter and turns into the swimming pool change room in summer. That double purpose means the change rooms are unusually spacious. In the middle of the building is a large windowless room formerly used for parks and rec equipment storage but now rented out to Scadding CCC. In 2023 Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment created a "youth lounge" there, with a lot of bells and whistles including some high tech games and a huge screen to watch them on.

The rink changeroom on the other side of the middle room has two part-time city staff plus a Zamboni driver watching it from 11 am to 9 pm on weekdays and 9 am to 10 pm on weekends. So: 15 feet from where they sit, there's the SCCC youth lounge, also staffed when it's open. There's a wall with a locked door in between, and no contact. There are youth in both places, and there could be more, with some help and cooperation between the two institutions.

That's what CELOS wanted to explore. In November 2023, we thought: if skate lending and snack food could get set up in the skate change room, and good staff could be shared between the rink and the youth lounge to make a rink "clubhouse," Dufferin-Grove style, wouldn't that be something?

We knew that in 2019, Parks and Rec had done some weekend "pop-ups" in a partnership with the Evergreen Foundation, that they called "Rink Socials." In consultation with a Montreal group called La Pépinière, the city had bought elegant outdoor furniture and fire-stands and blankets and propane heaters to warm people, and games and crafts materials, and set them up at four outdoor rinks on four different weekends. They had invited food trucks, and borrowed loaner skates from CELOS. We wondered – what had happened to all that furniture? So we contacted the Parks and Rec Partnership office.

**Nov.27, 2023:** from the Partnership Office: *"At the end of the placemaking event the equipment was divided up to a variety of locations re: communities centres indoors. We did leave some of the equipment at Mel Lastman [rink] as they did have storage, but all the other locations did not. The metal colourful furniture....went to Douglas Snow Aquatic Centre; they have a gather space above the pool where they host birthday parties so most of it went there as well as furniture for the front entrance lobby. Some of it went to Earl Bales Community Centre and so on, shared among the centres that had uses for it."*

**Nov.27, 2023,** from CELOS: *"[So] it's used mainly indoors, not outdoors as was its original purpose, i.e. for expanding the use of outdoor rink spaces?"*

**Nov.27, from the Partnerships staff:**

"I completely agree that its primary purpose was to enhance the outdoor spaces around the rink area....



Unfortunately, without overnight security or staff support to manage these items re: put then away end of day in storage, there have been instances of public misbehavior, theft, and vandalism in the past”.

**Nov.29, 2023:** Elizabeth Antczac, one of our CELOS team and a recent masters of architecture graduate, went to Harry Gairey Rink changeroom to look around and do some measurements, so she could do a drawing that we could use to explain our suggestion. But she looked around a corner that was apparently off limits. The rink attendant told her to get out, so she did.

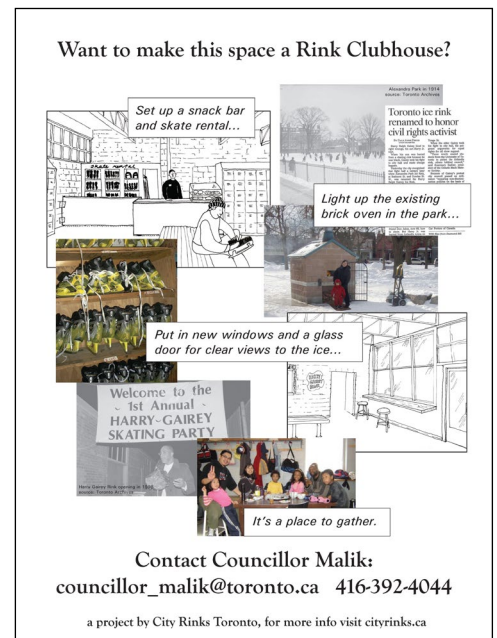
### December 2023

We visited other outdoor rinks and drew up plans for a few other possible locations for a “rink clubhouse.” A friend who was making a lot of money blogging about videogames told us he might want to donate a chunk of money to CELOS to do these “rink clubhouses,” but he needed to find out more.

### January 2024

We wrote to the Partnership office: *“We’d like to explore with you whether there is, or potentially can be, a kind of “community partnership” that has the same legitimacy for PFR as do corporate partnerships....We want to talk with you about the winter-focused partnerships that have already happened. Can we meet with you?”*

And then we sent letters, with diagrams and illustrations, to four city councillors about possible “rink clubhouses” in a rink in each of their wards. But only Councillor Bravo ever answered. We met with staff from the “Visitor Economy” (tourism) office to find out if they had thought about the benefits of making the outdoor rink spaces more welcoming. (They said: not part of their job.) The Parks and Rec rinks supervisor who came to the tourism meeting said, actually, she would worry – if cheap skate lending was offered – that people would try to learn without taking lessons, and there would be injuries. She clearly thought it was a bad idea.



When we told our wealthy blogger friend afterwards, he just shook his head, *oh dear*. We agreed that he should put his money somewhere else. And besides, Dufferin Rink had never needed outside funding to run their skate lending or their snack bar or their rink campfires or their winter community suppers or their staff’s hosting of a friendly social space. It worked because the rink staff did it in the daily course of running the rink. That seemed a better way to go.

Poster, January 2024

### February 2024

**Feb.8, 2024:** We met with the Partnership Office. They said that rink clubhouse would need to make a business case and also that we would have to make a Freedom of Information application to find out any details of the partnership contracts for Rink Social and two others.

The next day they clarified a bit more: *“We understand from our meeting that you are asking the City to establish a new rink operating model as a pilot, funded by PFR (not through our established Partnerships process). At this stage there is no funding allocated for this type of programming, and further program conversations should take place with Community Recreation around what is feasible for operations as well as capital in terms of the proposed building alterations.”*

**Feb.22:** We submitted a Freedom of Information request about the Rink Social and the two other winter-related partnership programs.



## March

We started talking to skaters, and rink guards, and “community recreation programmers,” and Rec supervisors, and rec managers, and Zamboni operators – anybody who would talk to us – about rink clubhouses. Some of those conversations were at Harry Gairey rink. And it turned out that the head of Scadding CCC, Herman Ellis, was interested. So we set up a meeting to talk about the possibilities, right in the rink change room. The city councillor for that ward is Councillor Malik, and her assistant came. Jason, the Rec supervisor for the west part of the city, said he’d come but didn’t show. But Herman came, and he was eloquent. He had grown up in the buildings beside the community centre, he said, and it was rough. He could remember how good he felt when he got skates and started playing shinny hockey with the other guys. He liked the food idea, especially because there were all those shipping container cafés backing onto the rink already, offering really good snack food from different cultures. They could supply the rink snack bar. And the youth cooking skills program could get involved, cooking in the centre’s well-equipped certified kitchen and bringing it over.

After the meeting, when we got in touch with the Rec supervisor, he said actually there was no point in talking to him, we would need to talk to a different supervisor, he was no longer the right one. So we wrote to the person he named, asking her to meet, and asking her also to give us the name of a “Minor Capital” staff person, so that we could find out the cost of the small building changes that Elizabeth was proposing – cutting a new window, putting in triple sinks and a counter in an unused alcove. But the supervisor didn’t answer.

A recreation programmer, one step below the supervisor, had come to the rink clubhouse meeting. The next day we sent him a list of practical follow-up questions: what was his rink staffing budget, what kind of kitchen equipment and chairs and tables were already on hand in the storeroom? Were they interested in making a rink clubhouse? At the end of the email I wrote that we hoped “at least to get to the point where we can get a definite no, or a yes, let’s make it happen.”

No response, so a week later I wrote again, to the programmer and the supervisor: *“I’m hoping you got my list of questions in my email from last week, below. If the hold-up is that you’re still waiting for one or two details, maybe you can send what you have and we can go from there?”*

But there was still no answer.

## April

**April 23:** A few partnership details from the Freedom of Information office arrived, about the “Rink Socials” plus the two other partnerships we had asked about: with Nike and Desjardins. But they said that most of what we wanted to know would be delayed for another month to give the donors time to appeal on the grounds of trade secrets, if they wished. Meantime we had asked for a meeting with Recreation director Cathy Vincelli, which was set for the end of April.

**April 27:** Herman Ellis to Cathy Vincelli: “I recently caught wind of your upcoming meeting with Jutta Mason. I couldn’t be more thrilled about the potential discussions surrounding the “rink clubhouse project” in connection with the Harry Gairey Rink.

Reflecting on our meeting on March 20, it was a pleasure to discuss this exciting concept with Andrew Taylor from your recreation team, Jutta, and other passionate advocates, including a representative from Councillor Malik’s office. As the Executive Director of Scadding Court Community Centre, where our youth lounge operates from the same premises as the rink change room, I’ve eagerly anticipated opportunities to enhance our collaborations.

Just envision the possibilities of skate lending and food services being seamlessly integrated into the

recreation program at Harry Gairey Rink, following in the footsteps of the successful Dufferin rink model. Such an initiative holds immense promise for empowering our youth through entry-level economic opportunities, and I'm genuinely enthusiastic about the positive impact it could have on our community.

I'm genuinely excited about the prospect of rekindling and strengthening our bonds between city staff and Scadding CC through tangible projects like this one."

**April 29:** The meeting with Rec director Cathy Vincelli and six of her management staff was mainly about Dufferin Grove. When asked about the rink clubhouse project, Ms. Vincelli said that any plan involving Scadding would need a business case to be made, and that we should meet with the rink manager to talk about that.

## May

**May 1:** the Freedom of Information material arrived. It contained the partnership agreements with Nike and Desjardins, but none for the "Rink Socials." The cover letter said that no partnership agreement for "Rink Socials" was available because it was "a city run program." The information package included a *final report* about the program, though, which made recommendations about how it could be improved in future – to amplify what was already deemed a big success. The food truck thing was the main problem they mentioned – the event needed better food.

The FOI package also included the city's original 2019 "rink socials" press release, announcing that "Toronto in partnership with national charity Evergreen and Montreal-based place-making firm La Pépinière" is doing some "place making pilots." I wrote to FOI: "My FOI request asked about "partnership agreements or contracts." Does the city's FOI response, "no partnership agreement exists" mean that the place-making pilots were carried out on a handshake only, with neither a written agreement nor a contract?"

**May 6:** The FOI office must have sent the question right back to Parks and Rec. A two-sentence response arrived from FOI: "The City of Toronto worked in collaboration with Evergreen and La Pépinière to produce the 2019 "rink social" series as a pilot. The City paid to contract this work, as a supplement to its typical winter programming. A detailed invoice outlining the costs has been attached." There was an invoice for \$110,739.96 to Evergreen "For Placemaking services for four City of Toronto skating rinks over a five-week period," signed off by the Parks and Rec general manager herself. The details had no cost breakdown. No mention of a business case. And no answer to my questions either.

## June

Two city Rec rink managers said they could make time to meet with Herman and us, at Scadding CCC, but not until the end of the month. We sat in a corner of the hallway because all the rooms were in use – the place was hopping. Herman told the managers about his memories of skating at Scadding, the music on the P.A., the "community feeling." He said he wanted to *"advocate for an inclusive environment where everyone has skates"* as well as make a strong economic argument for the neighbourhood. He asked the managers: *"what issues would we run into if Scadding could secure some grant funding for the program?"* The managers were not sure. The project was complicated – there would have to be involvement from Minor Capital, and from Partnerships as well as Programming. The next step would have to be for the managers to take the idea back to their city colleagues to develop the "business case." To help with the details, CELOS was to send them information about how the skate program was run at Dufferin and Wallace rinks.

I sent them the details later that afternoon, but there was no acknowledgment that they ever got them.

## July

CELOS put together a list for staffing and materials that would be needed, for when the managers asked:

“It needs a coordinator to work at least 20 hours a week Oct-November (more as needed)/- Will need keys to both buildings/ - The coordinator needs to be introduced to all the relevant staff/- to be involved in hiring and training for rink season staff/ - will want to clearly lay out parameters of programming for the clubhouse and how to incorporate that into the rink staff job but also to hire a few more staff ( in some cases with extra skills)/- need to be able to buy or source things like tables, serving utensils and more/- need to connect with a vendor and figure out kitchen space/ -- need to sort out storage for skates, books, games/ - Communication to schools, neighbourhood groups/ - Plan an opening party, weekly programs and different ways to engage people.”

All the stuff we did at the other rinks. But no more word from the rink managers.

Still no answer from Freedom of Information or city staff about the “rinks social” puzzle.

**July 24:** I (as the CELOS administrator) wrote to the director of Client Services, Christina Iacovino, who was apparently in charge of partnerships. I asked her to explain what the term “partnerships” meant to the City, and more specifically: “The Evergreen invoice for this program rolls the “rink social” into one “deferred account” signed off by the GM for \$110,739.76. **So was the Evergreen involvement actually a service contract?**”

**July 26:** The director’s email response complimented me on my “keen interest and thorough observations.” She wrote: *“The term “partnership” within the Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PFR) context is often used as a broad term to describe various collaborative efforts between the City and external organizations.....Regarding the Rink Social program, the involvement of Evergreen and La Pépinière is indeed a collaborative effort, hence the term “partnership” in public announcements. The term here reflects the cooperative nature of the project rather than a formal legal partnership.”*

But she hadn’t answered my question. So on July 28 I asked the question again, as clearly as I could, the main bits highlighted in purple:

*“Was the \$110,739.96 Rink Social invoice (attached), a service contract between Evergreen and the City?*

*If not, what was it?*

*My interest, as you may realize already, is in the question of how much flexibility PFR management has, when there’s a project that interests you.*

*Since the amount was over \$50,000, did the approval go through Council? How would I find that discussion?*

*– was the “rink socials” program actually a service contract that the city paid?”*

Silence on her side.

On the same day there was a note from Rec director Cathy Vincelli’s admin assistant, offering a WebEx meeting with the Rec director, and rink manager Terri, on three different dates near the end of August. Two dates offered half an hour and one an hour.

**July 26:** I sent back a snippy response:

*“We’ve been working on this rink clubhouse proposal for quite a while, as well as making a well-known Dufferin Grove clubhouse happen for 20 years. In 2019, PFR spent \$110,700 for four weekend pop-ups to apparently reinvent the wheel, and then didn’t follow up.*

*Now you are offering either of two 30-minute or one hour-long virtual meeting.*

*I find this response kind of rote, on the border of insulting. Also a waste of everybody’s time, yours and ours.*

*I would prefer to be taken seriously, and meet in person. If this half hour or hour screen meeting is mostly to say this can't be done, please ask Cathy and Terri to say it up front. Then we will add that to the negative side of the ledger of what PFR can do re inclusive economic development, youth work, social spaces etc. Sadly, that list is getting longer.*

*Please clarify and let me know if that seems best in the circumstances.*

*I have added Councillor Bravo to this thread since she asked to be copied."*

*An hour later there was an answer: "I'm very sorry if you were offended by the times offered; I was working within the times available in Cathy's calendar. Of course, we do understand your commitment to Dufferin Grove clubhouse and your interest in growing this work elsewhere in the city. That said, we will reconnect with you the week of August 12, once Cathy and Terri are back."*

Another email from the Manager of Standards & Innovation (Business Readiness), suggested a meeting with the Rec director and the rinks manager in the week of August 19 "when both are back from respective vacations," also including the manager of "the team responsible for partnerships."

I wrote back: "What's needed is a face to face working meeting with [the rinks manager] to discuss a draft business plan. The idea is to move a step ahead in this process, outlining the practical elements that are needed, listing existing resources, and realistically evaluating costs -- still without any commitment but at least not blue-sky hypothetical. It appears that PFR may have a strong commitment to not moving ahead, in which case it would be good to say that now."

But there was no answer to my invitation for Parks and Rec to drop out.

## August

**August 11:** A response arrived to my July email to from Christina, the director of Client Services:

*"Regarding your specific question about the \$110,739.96 Rink Social invoice, it was indeed a collaborative initiative rather than a traditional service contract between Evergreen and the City, as indicated in my email of July 26th. PFR operating funds were not used to finance these projects. While I appreciate your interest in the City's collaborative projects, this is the extent of the information I am able to provide on this matter."*

Clear as mud. We would have to assume that in the case of collaborative initiatives, no record is required.

The August meeting to talk details about the rink clubhouse proposal didn't happen either. The rink manager wrote that they had already submitted last November's CELOS proposal to Capital Projects to review and cost out. And she couldn't meet with us until September "due to prescheduled vacation."

After some more back and forth about dates, the four of us working on the rink clubhouse issue met and decide that the clubhouse could be started without any changes to the building. Now the proposal was even simpler. We made a list of minimum requirements:

**Rentals:** minimum: skates, helmets, skate aids

- additional: hockey sticks, pucks, tape
- minimum: rolling shelves (in storage at Mel Lastman and West Mall rinks)
- additional: rental counter (but could just be a folding table)

**Food:** minimum: basket with muffins and apples, juice boxes, urns of hot chocolate + coffee

- medium: countertop display case (could be temperature- controlled) with food from Market 707 (the shipping container cafés)
- more developed: Cooking program through Scadding Court that employs and involves local youth

**Kids Corner:** (is this really a requirement? or should it be lumped into "social seating")

- Low table and chairs with colouring and books

**Social Seating:** Bistro or other small tables with chairs, Muskoka chairs from the MLSE storage area

**Point of Sale:** (POS or cash setup needed for food and rental skates)

**Opportunities coming out of that:**

- Programming, for Scadding youth, for rec staff
- Scadding youth baking/cooking program to supply rinkhouse café or community meals
- Youth, rec staff can help kids at the rink: tying skates, taping sticks
- Employment: skate rental, food sales, help with kids corner
- Rec staff can mentor Scadding youth
- Learn to skate programming could have roles for Scadding youth: example: “rink buddy” assistance for kids who are learning
- More extensive programming as imagined above will require a coordinator and training

**Aug 21:** we wrote to the rink manager: *“The changeroom is so large and well-situated that the “rink clubhouse” program and PFR/Scadding partnership proposal could fit in there quite well for the moment, in time for this coming rink season. We have a list of practical steps that would be needed, which we’ll send you as soon as Herman has had a chance to go over them.*

*Our proposal is to build on*

1. *the experience of Dufferin Rink clubhouse from 1995 until 2019*
2. *the “Summary of insights” and “Recommendations” contained on p.20 and 22 of the “Rink Social Report” prepared for the City of Toronto by Evergreen in 2019.*

*Since Herman can’t meet before Sept.10, could you propose a couple of dates later that week or the following week, when we can talk about this, and work through what would be needed?”*

The meeting is set for September 20.

## September

**Sep 11,** from CELOS to city staff:

*“We think this project is a test case to see if Rec can*

- a) respond to one ongoing city initiative (IED -- Inclusive Economic Development) and*
- b) pick up the dropped thread of one recent Rec-Evergreen collaboration (Rink Social, 2019).*

*....in order to succeed, this test case needs to run this year, starting on the first day of the 2024 rink season, Nov.23. To make this test case real, we need to have the following people at the meeting:*

- a) the management person where the buck stops*
- b) Jutta Mason, since I’m keeping this going at least up to the end of this meeting*
- c) Herman Ellis, since he manages the whole SCCC*
- d) The SCCC youth worker with whom we’ve met once*
- e) Part-time rec staff Mayssan Shujauddin, since she co-ran all aspects of the Dufferin Rink program when it was at its height, and trained many others*
- f) The Community Rec Programmer who was directly in charge of Harry Gairey last year and hopefully will be again this year*
- g) The current rec supervisor in Etobicoke, with strong past experience of collaborating with SCCC and with Herman*
- h) Isabel Perez, a long-time Indigenous CELOS associate who worked for Dave Hains doing food at John Innes years ago, as well as doing food at Wallace Emerson CRC and again at Dufferin Grove Park.*

*If they are there, we could talk practicalities, to make a list of what would be needed when this goes up the rec director. I think a decision to go ahead, or abandon, this test case is needed by Sept.30 at the latest, to put together the necessary pieces.”*

**Sep 13:** from the rinks manager:

*“I’d like to get the proposal properly documented so I can begin the process of identifying the financial framework required to support it. Part of this work will include discussions with City staff, and I will ensure [the Recreation manager’s] Skate team and [the Etobicoke supervisor] are among those consulted.”*

**Sept.13,** from CELOS:

*“I see that your plan is to talk to Rec staff separately, not in this meeting. But the proper documentation you mention requires face to face conversation among people who would be actually hands-on, or who have had that direct experience in the past, gathering to look at the practicalities of how to make this collaboration happen. That’s the meeting we’ve been asking for since last February or longer. Could you bend your approach to honour my agenda and include the people I’ve asked for in this meeting? If that’s not a possibility, I think we need to conclude that this “test case” is not going to happen at this moment in time. So there would be no point in going ahead with Sept.20.”*

**Sept. 17:** the rinks manager wrote back that the staff I had asked for would not be available. *“Please let me know if you’d still like to meet Friday.”*

Reply from CELOS: *“Considering the amount of practical experience, insight, and Scadding CCC good will that are already in place in this proposal, this case may be an illustration of the old saying “you can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink.” PFR is the reluctant horse, in many more ways than this one. Horses are beautiful but seeing one that won’t sustain itself is very sad.”*

## October

At the October meeting of the Economic and Community Development at city hall, staff guidelines for “unsolicited proposals” from non-city-staff were outlined and approved by the councillors:

### 1.4 Staff Guidelines

....Division staff are precluded from engaging in the following activities:

- i. acting as “sounding boards” for quotations or proposals;
- ii. delivering advice on project design;
- iii. advising on the selection of resources;
- iv. coordinating or participating in the collection and/or analysis of data;
- v. helping to refine quotations or proposals; and
- vi. participating in the preparation of any documentation

Really? City staff are hamstrung, in other words, unable to support unplanned approaches from outside their own circle.

We wrote to the committee: *“We’d like to point out that with rules and policies of this kind – and there are many – it’s much less likely that city government will be able to do what the APTE [Action Plan for Toronto’s Economy] recommends: “foster small businesses, improve infrastructure, and create vibrant, inclusive communities.... [unlock] Toronto’s latent economic potential....unlock new opportunities for meaningful employment and entrepreneurship, ultimately enhancing socioeconomic mobility and reducing urban inequities.”*

*Not without opening the doors a lot wider.”*