



January 21, 2025

To the Members of the Budget Committee,

Toronto City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Subject: Investing in Communities Through Increased Funding for the Regent Park Social Development Plan (RPSDP) and Social Development Plans Across Toronto

Dear Members of the Budget Committee,

On behalf of Neighbourhood Pods TO (NPTO), a consortium of grassroots organizations, community workers, and advocates committed to enhancing the economic livelihoods and well-being of low-income communities across Toronto, I write to urge your support for increased investment in social development plans.

We are specifically calling on the City of Toronto to allocate:

1. **\$1 million annually for the Regent Park Social Development Plan (RPSDP) for the next five years (2026–2030);**
2. **\$5 million in funding for RPSDP for 2026–2030; and**
3. **A new dedicated budget line within the Community and Social Services category to support social development plans across all 158 City of Toronto neighborhoods.**

The RPSDP is a proven model of community empowerment and development. With \$2.5 million invested from 2019 to 2024, Regent Park has achieved measurable milestones, including a historic **zero gun-related deaths in 2023**, as credited by community leaders and Mayor Olivia Chow. This success illustrates the transformative power of investing in communities.

Bridging the Gap Between Community Needs and Resources

The City's own **2025 Staff-Recommended Operating Budget** highlights challenges in addressing systemic inequities and community needs. Despite this, the Toronto Police Services has requested an additional \$46 million in funding. Redirecting even a portion of this amount could fund social development plans in all 158 neighborhoods across Toronto, equating to approximately \$292,000 per neighborhood annually.

Budgets reflect our values as a city. By prioritizing community-based initiatives, the City can address the root causes of poverty, inequity, and violence, rather than merely reacting to their symptoms.

The Impact of the RPSDP

The RPSDP has demonstrated significant results across four key focus areas:

1. Safety:

- Celebrated Regent Park's milestone of zero gun-related deaths in 2023.
- Fostered collaborative safety efforts, including "Community Buddy Walks" and safety audits.

2. Employment and Economic Development:

- Supported 80 residents through the Workforce Integrator Program.
- Empowered over 45 entrepreneurs through initiatives like the Night Market and Café Pop-Up, which generated \$11,500 in sales over three months.

3. Community Building:

- Engaged thousands of residents through events like Sunday in the Park and food security initiatives.

4. Communication:

- Connected residents through Regent Park TV and the "Hello Neighbour App," fostering civic participation.

Despite these successes, funding requests from Regent Park reached over \$4 million in 2024, but only \$500,000 was allocated. This disparity highlights the critical need for consistent and increased funding.

A Call for Equitable Prioritization

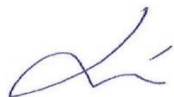
The City's current budgetary constraints demand bold and transformative action. Redirecting investments from reactive enforcement to community-led initiatives ensures a safer, more equitable Toronto for all. Social development plans like the RPSDP provide a replicable framework to foster inclusion, economic growth, and resilience across all neighborhoods.

Conclusion

Neighbourhood Pods TO urges the Budget Committee to approve the proposed funding increases for the RPSDP and create a dedicated budget line for social development plans citywide. These investments will address systemic inequities, foster community cohesion, and ensure all Toronto residents have access to safe and vibrant neighborhoods.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I welcome the opportunity to discuss this further and am available for any follow-up.

Sincerely,



Walied Khogali Ali

Coordinator

Neighbourhood Pods TO (NPTO)

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<https://www.regentparksocial.org/sdp>

Enclosures:

- 2025 Staff-Recommended Operating Budget ([Reference: \[link\]](#))
 - RPSDP Key Accomplishments (2019–2024)
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The Neighbourhood Pods TO (NPTO) embodies a consortium of grassroots organizations, community workers, and advocates, all rallying under a unified mission to bolster the economic livelihoods and enhance the overall well-being of low-income individuals and communities across Toronto.

SDP Accomplishments 2019-2024

Updated Nov 22, 2024

Social Development Plan Background

The Social Development Plan (SDP) is a framework to manage change and a community network in Regent Park. The Social Development Plan has been created to complement the physical revitalization that is ongoing in Regent Park, by addressing the social aspect of it. It consists of community-wide actions that help new and old residents feel part of the community, with a goal of creating an inclusive and cohesive Regent Park. Through assessments and feedback, four focus areas were established as Working Groups. These include safety, employment & economic development, community building, and communication.

The summaries of the focus areas are as follows:

Regent Park Safety Network:

The goal of this pillar is to create the reality and the positive image that Regent Park is a safe space for everybody. Working from a forward-thinking perspective, the group aims to develop and implement a proactive strategy which continuously improves safety and wellbeing in Regent Park.

Employment and Economic Development:

The Employment and Economic Development Working Group continues to work towards increasing sustainable employment rates and entrepreneurial opportunities for local residents.

Community Building:

Creating accessible informal and formal spaces, events and groups that bring residents together by removing social and physical barriers; and, build bridges between market and TCH residents, as well as between residents and agencies/institutions.

Communication:

The mandate of the SDP Communications Working Group is to promote understanding and awareness of the SDP and to make information accessible to residents and members of the Regent Park community.

Regent Park Safety Network

- Held General Meetings every month (except during the summers, and in December) for all Regent Park Residents (via Zoom, in recent years), in which invited speakers from:
 - representatives of municipal and provincial political leaders (Chris Moise' and Kristyn Wong-Tam's offices)
 - TPS (Toronto Police Services) and NCO (Neighborhood Community Officers)
 - CSU (Community Safety Unit)
 - TCH (Toronto Community Housing)
 - City of Toronto, various youth groups, etc.spoke about policing, dissemination of statistics on Major Crime Indicators, health and safety concerns, and related issues.
- Held Training Courses on "Speaking with Confidence", "Stop the Bleed", First Aid, How to facilitate a meeting, Advocacy Training, etc.
- In the process of updating the 2018 "Regent Park Community Safety Action Plan"
- Participated in (and helped organize) community-wide meetings for quarterly presentations by the TPS (Toronto Police Services) / NCO (Neighbourhood Community Officer)
- Participated in neighbourhood-wide Safety Audits and "Community Buddy Walks"
- Youth Empowering Youth - asset map of youth programs and resources
- Celebration of 2023 Safety Milestone
- Annual Summer BBQ celebrating safety

Employment & Economic Development (EED)

- Quarterly meetings focused on entrepreneurship and employment to share information and opportunities.
- Workforce Integrator Project
 - Hired a Workforce Integrator in 2023 who led the project.

- In total 80 participants registered with the Workforce Integrator to receive employment supports. This demonstrates successful outreach efforts undertaken through various platforms and channels.
- 10 partners including Employment Service Agencies, Employer Partners are participating and meeting bi-weekly to develop an employment framework. The goal is for all partners to be able to more easily share information about job seekers and job opportunities, increasing collaboration across the neighbourhood.
- Additional funding (\$89,338) secured to continue the program in 2024.
- Entrepreneurial Pathway Projects
 - Night Market (2022) – focused on supporting Women’s Entrepreneur Group to showcase their goods and services to community members. The program included coaching for early stage equity-deserving women entrepreneurs. In addition, the Night Market promoted street vibrancy and community building opportunities within the neighbourhood.
 - Markets took place in July/August (3X a week)
 - Learning Series (2023) - focused on providing local emerging entrepreneurs with the knowledge and confidence to start, develop and grow their own business.
 - Hired Learning Series project lead in 2023
 - Achievements
 - 5 workshops for regent park entrepreneurs
 - 45 entrepreneurs participated in at least 2 workshops
 - 14 women entrepreneurs were connected with mentors to develop sustainable strategies to grow their businesses in Regent Park
 - Launched a mentorship program where business experts and consultants from Regent Park donate 1-4 hours per month to support local emerging entrepreneurs.
 - Cafe Pop-Up Project (2024) - practicum program for entrepreneurs to learn about taking the next step in their business.
 - Each entrepreneur received a Business Kit including: (1) Health and Safety training, (2) POS Training, (3) Access to commercial kitchen and equipment, (4) Apron with logo, (5) Foam board & easel with their entrepreneurship journey, (6) Business Cards
 - Achievements
 - 10 entrepreneurs signed up for the project, with 7 actively involved in selling in the cafe
 - RS Home Foods
 - Garcia Eats
 - Edible Bliss
 - Rumi’s Cuisine
 - Ceylon Chai
 - BK Catering
 - ZERO Cocktail Bar
 - 30 days of engagement (sales) in the Cafe, and 3 catering opportunities created
 - Sales
 - February \$3,000

- March \$4,500
- April \$4,000

Community Building

- Monthly Meetings - with presentations by community groups, non-profits, and businesses about what they do.
- 2022 and 2023 Sunday In The Park - This annual neighbourhood festival brought together a planning committee of multiple stakeholders. The event included a community BBQ and engaged with residents through entertainment and activities such as games, trivia and raffle prize give-aways. Local vendors also had an opportunity to promote their products and services.
- Community Space Needs Report - The Community Building Working Group led efforts to inform the City of Toronto, of the community's need for office space, recreational space, prayer space, programming and safe activity spaces in Regent Park. The report, published on March 18, 2022, is a resource and space needs assessment. The report contains 30 requests for space submissions.
- Access to Spaces Project - Outreach to residents and agencies around needs and capacity in regards to making space available for grassroots group activities in the neighbourhood. Other space related activities including: designing a policy in March of 2023 for SDP members use of the 3rd Floor of Daniels Spectrum; providing Feedback for Yonge Street Mission building project at 306/310 Gerrard St. East.;
- Support for the UN Habitat Pavilion - Community and Conversations about Regent Park: past, present and future - November 2022.
- Support for the Black History Month Celebration - led by Children and Youth Services, RP Community Health Centre and held at the Daniels Spectrum on
- Support for food security initiatives - In August 2022, the Community Building Working Group hosted the inaugural meeting of the food security coalition to address food insecurity and promote the City of Toronto's food charter. Members of the coalition distributed food boxes filled to hundreds of Regent Park residents.
- 2024 Community Black History Month Celebration
- 2024 Sunday in the Park - led by Neighbourhood Information Post

Communications

- Launch of the Regent Park Monthly on-line newsletter serving Regent Park in February 2021.
- 12 monthly on-line newsletters produced and disseminated on-line, yearly since February 2021 (36 publications).
- Increased subscribers – 700 newsletter subscribers in February 2021 to 2059 newsletter subscribers in December of 2023.
- The 2023 printed publication of two special issues presented at Stakeholder Tables.

- Three Regent Park residents employed yearly (2 residents at 30 hrly and 1 resident at 7 hrs weekly) from 2020 to 2023, to produce content for Regent Park TV (RPTV).
- 492 RPTV YouTube videos are produced. The videos are designed to increase resident awareness of issues, opportunities and resources in the community.
- Regent Park TV Weekly News, a video broadcast news show serving Regent Park, is launched on August of 2021.
- 69 Regent Park TV Weekly News shows are produced. The news shows provide two-week summaries of all the happenings of Regent Park and is designed to increase resident awareness of opportunities and resources in the community.
- A total of 431 new RPTV subscribers from 2020 to 2023.
- 113,543 viewers of RPTV content.
- 35 youth provided with 8-weeks or more of media training related to RPTV
- Four residents provided with part-time (8 to 12 hours weekly) jobs in 2022, to promote SDP.
- Hello Neighbour App, is launched in March 2022. The mobile app is designed to help residents find out more about local community programs and services and engages users to: keep up-to-date with local news; involve themselves in local initiatives; and recognize local businesses and entrepreneurs in the community.
- Cumulated download of the App past 500 by Dec 2022
- Peak page view in Oct 2022, reached 5,464 views
- Tech Library, mandated to reduce barriers related to accessing technology, is launched in August 28, 2023.
- 141 members of the community registered and completed 670 loans with the Tech Library.

There are four on-going project activities of the SDP Communications Working Group.

- Regent Park Monthly Newsletter (also known as Catch da Flava)
- Regent Park TV and RPTV Weekly News
- Hello Neighbour App and
- Regent Park Tech Library.

It is the SDP Communications Working Group's view that the work of the Regent Park Monthly Newsletter, Regent Park TV (along with the Regent Park TV Weekly News, the Hello Neighbourhood App and the Regent Park Tech Library has collectively increased: community knowledge of Regent Park; the understanding of the SDP; participation in the SDP and its meetings; awareness of organizations; awareness of community leaders; and finally awareness of events, resources and opportunities for community members of Regent Park.

Planning Committee

The Planning Committee makes recommendations to the SDP Stakeholders Table on strategic direction and action priorities, inter-committee alignment, coordination, stakeholder and resident engagement.

By:

- Supporting the SDP Stakeholder Table to ensure that the meetings are effective
- Supporting the 4 Working Groups to be prepared to report at the SDP Stakeholder Table meetings
- Address requirements and/or requests that need a quick response
- Identifying information and/or expertise that Stakeholders require in order to make sound and informed decisions
- Developing facilitation approaches that increase the capacity of all stakeholders to engage in discussion and decision making

Many activities are ongoing every year

- Supporting Stakeholders' Table meetings and the Community Reportback meeting
- Updating the planning committee workplan
- Coordinating and supporting the Working Groups and Committees.
- Hiring the SDP administrative assistant
- Discussions with the City about process and funding

2020 and 2021 - Organized community process for allocating Action Plan funding.

2022 - Created a Conflict Resolution process.

Evaluation and Benchmarks Committee

After deliberations amongst SDP members and stakeholders regarding how to measure progress within the SDP, the Evaluation and Benchmarks Committee (EBC) was established to directly report to the Stakeholders' Table. With support from University students, Regent Park Community Health Centre staff, Dixon Hall staff, Yonge Street Mission staff (including evaluations coordinator), TIMES Framework, Regent Park Social Action Group, and the Evaluation Champions, various evaluations were conducted and reported since the 2019 refresh.

TIMES was used to evaluate multiple facets of the SDP to accurately measure components of community development. It addresses topics such as community leadership, collaboration, availability & access of resources, wealth creation and more.

SDP Evaluations were conducted in the years 2021 to 2024, with 2023 being the most comprehensive evaluations with the added support of students and dedicated staff.

In 2023 there were two rounds of surveys conducted; one in late Spring-Summer and one in Autumn. Evaluations were conducted for the SDP as a whole as well as working groups and committees with respective objectives and goals.

To ensure effectiveness of the evaluations, two champions were used from each working group, and with one additional champion being dedicated to committees. Champions were resident members of their respective groups, and were used to relay information, assist and provide feedback throughout the year, to ultimately streamline the overall evaluations process.

During the evaluations process, there were two interim reports and a final report completed. The first was interim reporting to champions and their working groups after the first round of surveys in late Spring. The second was in Autumn which consisted of an interim report and presentation at the Stakeholders' Table on November 27th, 2023. The final report was completed during the first half of 2024 and was available on July 10, 2024.

The Evaluation and Benchmarks Committee measures the SDP's work and generates reports to:

- Show what has been achieved
- Know if the SDP 4 Working Groups are successful and the SDP goals of Social Cohesion and Social Inclusion are being accomplished
- Evaluate what actions are effective
- Make available information we need to be aware of when making future action decisions

Accomplishments/Milestones by year

- 2019 - Recruited volunteers from the Stakeholders Table to create the evaluation and benchmarks committee (EBC) and began developing evaluation plan
- 2020 - Identified and approved 6 process steps that will help us identify where we are and where we want to go and identified use of TIMES Framework
- 2021
 - Training on: the 6 steps, the TIMES Pilot with the City of Toronto, and data collection
 - 6 steps (which included goals, external scan, objectives, measurements), and data collection done.
 - TIMES Pilot Evaluation report published (narrative and powerpoint).
- 2022
 - SDP-wide survey with help from Data Scientist Intern
 - Evaluation process reworked to be 3 steps
 - TIMES Pilot Executive summary approved by Evaluation and Benchmark Committee
 - EBC recommendations and next steps presented to Planning Committee
 - Consultations with SDP working groups
 - Evaluation yearly cycle for the SDP is created.
- 2023
 - YSM and RPSAG provide orientation and training on evaluations and TIMES framework to the SDP
 - March - Part-time evaluations coordinator is appointed
 - Begins outreach for SDP evaluations champions
 - Facilitates six workshops for the champions
 - Data collection: attendance, working group / committee / project results, and surveys (measuring social cohesion & inclusion, collaboration, effectiveness of meetings, resident leadership, support for working group goals, and more)
 - Established partnership with School of Cities (University of Toronto) to identify indicators from past Regent Park research and the UN urban evaluation Framework
 - TIMES Pilot with City of Toronto wrapped up.
 - June & July 2023 Round 1 of surveys

- August & September Round 1 survey early findings shared with champions
- September to November 2023 Round 2 of surveys
- November 27, 2023 Interim report presented at Stakeholders' Table meeting
- December 2023 - Begin working on final analysis of 2023 evaluations and report creation
- 2024
 - Submitted Business Case for funding for 2024 SDP evaluation Champion honoraria
 - Adjusted annual evaluation cycle to fit SDP calendar, and with respect to religious and cultural non-working days
 - Strategize to increase buy-in for evaluations and how to begin without champion funding
 - March 2024 - worked with University of Toronto students to create survey to determine interest for in-person meetings and to assist with analysing 2023 data
 - Meeting with each working group to establish evaluations goals & objectives for 2024
 - Creating draft surveys for working groups
 - July 2024 - release final report for 2023
 - 2024 survey started

SDP Strategic Planning

The 2024 SDP Strategic Plan's purpose is to help the SDP to:

- ✓ be current and relevant
- ✓ be effective
- ✓ be strategic and analytical
- ✓ have practical growth
- ✓ have partnerships and roles

The strategic plan is to cover 3-5 years.

The Strategic Plan process included: the Stakeholders' Table initiating the Strategic Planning process, three Stakeholders' Table meetings, Planning Committee meetings, three meetings with working group members, and weekly working meetings from April - November 2024.

The following proposals are not approved but will be discussed at the November 27, 2024 Stakeholders' Table meeting:

SDP Overall Description and Goals

The Social Development Plan (SDP) is a community plan and a community network. In addition to the physical development of buildings, the revitalization includes a Social Development Plan consisting of community wide actions that engage new and old residents, and help everyone (including new and old residents) feel part of the community.

The Social Development Plan provides for improvements to the social environment, in addition to the physical redevelopment of the buildings, and consists of community-wide actions that help new and old residents feel part of the community, with a goal of creating an inclusive and cohesive Regent Park. The community wide actions revolve around safety, community building, employment and entrepreneurship, and outreach and communication.

The SDP Network has Working Groups and Committees, with residents, grassroots and large organizations as the members (also called stakeholders) of the network.

The SDP has overall goals to

- create a sense of belonging, inclusion and cohesion that brings Regent Park together as one community,
- engage in projects and activities to improve the social environment in Regent Park.

SDP Strategic Directions 2025 - 2028

- Create a sense of belonging, inclusion and cohesion that brings Regent Park together as one community
- Improve the social environment in Regent Park
- Empower residents and residents' groups to set priorities both within the SDP and for Regent Park

- Have equal numbers of TCHC and Market residents

Some Key Proposals – Decision Making

The Planning Committee makes decisions for the SDP, receives updates from the working groups and committees and is responsible for coordination and alignment, resourcing, strategic planning, monitoring, evaluation, data-management and maintaining documents.

The Stakeholders' Table is for all stakeholders including residents and organizations, and its purpose is engagement, consultation and information sharing.

Active resident and organizational members of each Working Group and Committee can be on the planning committee as voting members; at least half of the voting members on the planning committee from each working group or committee must be residents.

Representation from all working groups and committees is required at Planning Committee.

The City of Toronto, TCHC, Developers, Executive Directors Network and residents and organizations who are not active in a working group can also be non voting members on the planning committee.

Some Key Proposals – Working Groups

New Working Groups can be created. Any residents and organizations that operate in RP to improve the social environment in RP and are aligned with social inclusion and cohesion in their many aspects can become a Working Group.

Suggestions for future working group actions are summarized in the Observations section below, and will be referred to the Working Groups for consideration.