

Growing Mount Dennis: Consultation Summary Report

Prepared for: Learning Enrichment Foundation (LEF) and City of Toronto **Prepared by:**
Untitled Planning

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Executive Summary

The Mount Dennis People's Summit represents an unprecedented model of community participation, uniquely placing local communities at the forefront, distinguishing it from traditional City-led engagement processes. This distinctive full-day event occurred on April 5, 2025, at LEF's site on 116 Industry Street, Toronto, Canada, with 165 participants, including residents, local organizations, advocates, business owners, and government representatives from municipal and provincial levels.

Focused on advancing anti-displacement strategies amid neighbourhood changes, the Summit is integral to the [Mount Dennis for All Community Action Plan \(EC11.1\)](#). It addressed the central question: "How can we ensure Mount Dennis remains an inclusive, affordable, and vibrant community for all?"

The Summit provided a platform for residents to share experiences, learn from experts, and shape their community's future. It featured workshops, panel discussions, cultural activities, interactive sessions, exhibitions, and City information booths, including city resources and the Mount Dennis Index.

Preceding the Summit, a community tour was held on April 4, featuring an opening ceremony led by Indigenous and Black knowledge keepers. This ceremony acknowledged the land and situated the Summit within a history of resistance and stewardship.

On April 5, the event commenced with land and Black ancestral acknowledgements, followed by speakers from LEF leadership, MPP Mohamad Firin, Councillor Frances Nunziata, City managers, and a keynote by Dr. Leslie Kern.

Five simultaneous themed workshops followed. The workshops facilitated community conversations covering five themes namely, housing affordability, inclusive local economies, public space culture and environment, community safety and well-being, and transportation and mobility. These workshops facilitated detailed conversations about community experiences, values, and challenges.

After the workshops, the Summit featured a moderated panel discussion, "Strengthening Communities – Exploring Community-Led Anti-Displacement Strategies." The panel featured a diverse group of planners, researchers, and community leaders, who shared insights and examples of anti-displacement efforts from Toronto, across Canada, and the U.S.

In the afternoon, participants shifted to collective visioning sessions, drawing on the day's conversations and resources to imagine actionable next steps, where they proposed ideas to inform the Mount Dennis Anti-Displacement Strategy and Equitable Development Scorecard.

The Summit concluded with participants anonymously voting via Feedback Frames on four key proposals: 1. Create a Mount Dennis Community Land Trust; 2. Establish a Mount Dennis

Partnership Table to Support the Mount Dennis Community for All Action Plan; 3. Reclaim public space and run the Mount Dennis Community Centre; 4. Create a Mount Dennis Education and Community Defense Fund. Participants also indicated their interest in future organizing efforts, helping shape both policy recommendations and community mobilization.

Community recommendations, categorized by theme, included:

Housing and Affordability: The community emphasized the need to diversify housing options and prioritize mixed-income and mixed-tenure models. They advocated for long-term affordability through non-profit and community-led models such as community land trusts and co-operatives. Attendees also recommended redefining affordability based on neighbourhood-level, rather than city-wide, income data. Additional priorities included stronger tenant protections, improved housing quality, and access to wraparound supports and services. They also called for more inclusive planning through meaningful consultation, coordination across levels of government, greater transparency, and integrating housing into complete communities.

Inclusive and Local Economies: Participants highlighted the need to support local and culturally relevant businesses and to preserve affordable commercial spaces. They stressed the need for stronger support systems—such as grants and municipal programs—to help small businesses thrive and prevent displacement. Participants advocated for policies that promote local hiring in public projects, and to expand training opportunities. They also recommended revitalizing main streets, conducting local needs assessments, and enhancing storytelling and place-branding to strengthen community identity.

Public Spaces, Culture, and Environment: The community pointed out the necessity to make spaces more accessible and inclusive, prioritize local residents, invest in cultural infrastructure, provide sustained funding for programs, and to support youth-led programming. They called for environmental stewardship and to support indigenous-led environmental practices. Also, they recommended increasing access to community gardens especially on TCHC properties, and to strengthen community communications through bulletin boards and digital platforms.

Community Safety and Well-Being: The community proposed to redefine safety by centering it around housing stability, mental health, and community care – not just policing. They expressed the need to improve services responsiveness, build community trust, expand services, improve infrastructure, and to protect sacred and cultural spaces. They called for continuous engagement, and the development of emergency response strategies and supports.

Transportation and Mobility: Improve public transit reliability, safety, and fare integration, support active transportation, address parking concerns related to development, adopt equity-focused transit planning, and employ integrated planning principles linking transit to housing, services, and public spaces.

1. Purpose of the Report

This report summarizes the outcomes of the *Mount Dennis People's Summit*, which took place on April 5, 2025, and was attended by 165 participants. The report captures the collective insights, priorities, and anti-displacement strategies that emerged through extensive community engagement. It presents community needs and recommendations to guide the development of both a framework for an Equitable Development Scorecard and the scorecard itself, with the goal of creating a tool rooted in lived experience, collaborative planning, and place-based dialogue. The report is intended to inform ongoing efforts to prevent displacement and promote inclusive development in Mount Dennis by centering community-defined priorities and offering actionable recommendations for policy, planning, and local organizing as part of the broader *Mount Dennis Community for All Action Plan*.

2. Project Consultant's Methodology

Community Engagement

We adopted a community-centered approach with a focus on equity, inclusion, and accessibility. Engagement activities were designed to build trust, raise awareness, and ensure that local voices shaped both the process and outcomes. Key activities included:

- **In-person outreach** through local events, community organizations, and informal neighbourhood interactions, reaching 110 people and visiting 200 local spaces.
- **Outreach** to 95 organizations via email to share information about the Summit, invite participation, and encourage broader community involvement.
- **Digital engagement** via Instagram, YouTube, and newsletters, which generated 24,249 views, reached 14,925 unique accounts, and resulted in 731 combined interactions across videos, posts, and story prompts.
- **Multimedia content** such as printed posters, short-form videos, carousels, and educational graphics reflecting local history, culture, and concerns.
- **One-on-one meetings** with working group members to create space for candid dialogue and long-term vision-sharing.
- **Community Tour** led by local residents to ground the Summit's themes in lived realities, highlighting opportunities (ex. Housing co-ops), and impacts of current and potential displacement.
- **Mount Dennis People's Summit** featuring a range of participatory and creative methods were used to gather insights and foster connection.

The Summit activities included facilitated sessions and open dialogue to capture community aspirations, a storytelling panel to surface lived experiences, and an interactive exhibition that invited written feedback and creative engagement. The event also celebrated the neighbourhood's history, diversity, and resilience, helping to cultivate pride and a sense of

belonging. Efforts focused on building trust and strengthening connections among local residents, businesses, and external stakeholders. While the Summit prioritized Mount Dennis residents and local businesses, it also included allies and interested participants from outside the community, and was delivered in collaboration with City staff and representatives.

Mount Dennis Working Group Collaboration

A working group of Mount Dennis community members met weekly to co-design the Summit and accompanying community tour. The group included: local residents and grassroots organizers, representatives from the Mount Dennis Community Association, Horn of Africa Seniors Association, The Learning Enrichment Foundation, Mount Dennis Business Improvement Area (BIA), local planning firms, engaged community leaders, and City of Toronto staff.

Site Visits

We conducted 2–3 site visits to Mount Dennis to familiarize ourselves with the physical, cultural, and social fabric of the neighbourhood. These visits informed our understanding of the area's unique character and guided the design of the Summit's themes, branding, and engagement strategies.

Branding and Outreach

The event branding was developed through an iterative and participatory process. Initial concepts were inspired by site visits and community feedback. Multiple branding options were presented to the working group and selected through a voting process. The final visual identity was applied across outreach materials, social media, and printed resources.

Case Studies and Comparative Research

We conducted a review of similar anti-displacement and equity-centered summits across Canada and the United States. These inputs helped us identify best practices and adapt relevant models to the Mount Dennis context. Comparative cases were selected based on their focus on anti-displacement, equity scorecards, or participatory planning in similarly situated neighbourhoods or cities. This included:

- Desktop research on comparable engagements and policy tools.
- Key informant interviews with organizations and municipal teams such as: the City of Boston (Massachusetts), Small Business Assistance Network (SBAN) (Various), Our City Buffalo (New York), City of Austin (Texas), The Alliance (Minneapolis), and NorthSpan (Minnesota).

3. Summit Summary

Mount Dennis People's Summit: Anti-Displacement Strategies for a Growing Community

Date: April 5, 2025 8:30 am – 6:00 pm

Location: 116 Industry Street, Toronto, Canada

Attendance: 165 participants, including residents, local organizations, advocates, business owners, and government representatives

About

The *Mount Dennis People's Summit* was a full-day, community-led event focused on advancing anti-displacement strategies in the face of neighbourhood change. A core component of the [Mount Dennis for All Community Action Plan \(EC11.1\)](#), the Summit created space for residents to share experiences, learn from experts, and shape a vision for an inclusive, affordable, and vibrant Mount Dennis. *The agenda for the event is included in Appendix A of this report.*

Participants engaged in workshops, panel discussions, cultural activities (including a performance by the Lions Steel Drum Band), and interactive sessions that built on both lived experience and formal planning processes. The event centered the question: **“How can we ensure that Mount Dennis remains an inclusive, affordable, and vibrant community for all?”**

Key Themes Explored

The Summit explored displacement through five interrelated lenses:

- **Housing & Affordability:** Preventing displacement while ensuring access to secure, affordable housing
- **Inclusive Local Economies:** Supporting community-rooted economic development
- **Public Spaces, Culture & Environment:** Protecting cultural identity and promoting belonging and sustainability
- **Community Safety & Well-Being:** Centering safety while resisting exclusionary development
- **Transportation & Mobility:** Ensuring mobility improvements are accessible and inclusive

Activities of the Day

Session #1: Community Conversations & Collaborative Planning

In the morning, participants joined small-group breakout workshops focused on five core themes, designed to surface lived experiences, identify shared values, and uncover systemic challenges—each session was facilitated by a subject matter expert, supported by Working Group members, and attended by City of Toronto representatives.

Session #2 – Visioning & Action Planning

In the afternoon, participants shifted to collective visioning, drawing on the day's conversations and resources to imagine actionable next steps.

Key question: *What ideas or actions would you like to see take root in Mount Dennis?*

Through both individual and group discussion, participants proposed ideas that will inform the Mount Dennis Anti-Displacement Strategy and Equitable Development Scorecard.

Feedback Frames – Voting on Community Priorities

At the end of the day, participants used Feedback Frames to anonymously vote on four key proposals:

1. Create a Mount Dennis Community Land Trust
2. Establish a Mount Dennis Partnership Table to Support the Mount Dennis Community for All Action Plan
3. Reclaim public space and run the Mount Dennis Community Centre
4. Create a Mount Dennis Education and Community Defense Fund

Participants also indicated their interest in future organizing efforts, helping shape both policy recommendations and community mobilization.

Shared Learning & Collective Framing

To support a shared baseline understanding among participants, the Summit opened with several speakers. Peter Frampton, Executive Director of the Learning Enrichment Foundation welcomed participants and introduced Amina Yassin Omar, Vice President of Community and Placemaking at the Learning Enrichment Foundation as the moderator for the event. The local city Councillor Frances Nunziata, York-South Weston, spoke about changes in Mount Dennis and her expectations that the Summit support the new *Mount Dennis Community for All Action Plan*. Additional remarks were provided by John Smith, Manager of Community Development at the City of Toronto, MPP Mohamed Firin, and Jag Sharma, the Deputy City Manager of Development and Growth. Dr. Leslie Kern delivered the keynote address titled *“The Right to Stay Put: Why Gentrification Isn't Inevitable and What We Can Do About It”*.

In the afternoon, the Summit also featured a panel discussion, “*Strengthening Communities – Exploring Community-Led Anti-Displacement Strategies*,” moderated by Abigail Moriah of the Black Planning Project. The panel featured a diverse group of planners, researchers, and community leaders including Dr. Prentiss Dantzer (University of Toronto), Shannon Holness (WSP Canada), Keisha St. Louis-McBurnie (Monumental Projects), and Robert Walter-Joseph (Gladki Planning Associates), who shared insights and examples of anti-displacement efforts from Toronto, across Canada, and the U.S.

Key Engagement Tools and Resources

To support meaningful participation, the Summit featured a variety of information and engagement materials developed through the **digital knowledge mobilization campaign** and on-site activities:

- **Growing Mount Dennis Exhibition:** Highlighted community history, planning documents, archival materials, and resident contributions
- **City of Toronto Information Booths:** Offered direct engagement with municipal staff and plain-language resources
- **Mount Dennis Index:** A fact sheet with key community data to support informed dialogue
- **City Resource List:** A curated list of relevant municipal policies and programs to empower resident advocacy
- **Incentives:** A lottery system was used throughout the day to award prizes including Raptors courtside tickets.

Community Tour: Grounding the Summit in Place

Date: April 4, 2025

Location: Mount Dennis, Toronto

Attendance: Out of 33 individuals who registered, 25 participated in the tour.

About

The tour took place on Friday, April 4, from 2:00 PM to 6:30 PM, using a bus route guided by local community activists and leaders. It featured on-site explanations, storytelling, and opportunities for dialogue. As a prelude to the *Mount Dennis People’s Summit*, the half-day community tour was held to anchor Summit discussions in the lived realities of the neighbourhood. The tour began with an opening ceremony led by Indigenous and Black knowledge keepers to acknowledge the land and situate the tour within a history of resistance and stewardship. Led by local residents the tour provided a firsthand view of the five themes that shaped the Summit through the lens of place-based experience and storytelling.

Objectives

The community tour was designed to:

- Ground the Summit’s discussions in the local context by connecting abstract policy conversations with lived community realities.
- Familiarize city staff, partner organizations, and Summit participants from outside Mount Dennis with the neighbourhood’s assets, challenges, and ongoing changes.
- Raise awareness and inspire advocacy by highlighting both community strengths, existing anti-displacement efforts (ex. Local housing co-operatives) and development pressures.
- Engage with Indigenous leaders to understand the cultural significance of local ecological sites and the impacts of urban development on Indigenous and Black communities.

Target Audience

The tour was attended by key stakeholders connected to the Summit, including:

- City staff involved in policy areas aligned with Summit themes
- Summit panelists, speakers, moderators, and facilitators
- Representatives of partner organizations and working groups
- Allies and collaborators from outside the Mount Dennis community

4. Key Findings

Overview: Community Priorities from the Ground Up

At the *Mount Dennis People’s Summit*, residents, workers, and community leaders came together to share their lived experiences, affirm shared values, and identify the systemic barriers shaping life in the neighbourhood. Across five key themes—housing, transportation and mobility, local economy, public space, and community safety—participants painted a vivid picture of both the struggles and the strength found in Mount Dennis.

Experiences

Mount Dennis residents described deep ties to the neighbourhood, emphasizing its walkability, cultural diversity, and strong community spirit. Many highlighted their daily use of local shops, parks, and third spaces like libraries and cafés. Yet, they also spoke of rising unaffordability, neglected infrastructure, inaccessible services, and a lack of meaningful involvement in planning decisions. Many residents are navigating overlapping pressures: housing inadequacy, employment precarity, food insecurity, limited transit options, commercial displacement, and a shrinking supply of inclusive public spaces. Despite new

developments and investments, many feel these changes have not been designed with or for the people who already live there. While some residents felt heard and invested in local change, others—particularly tenants, newcomers, and youth—felt excluded from decision-making and underserved by existing systems.

Community Values

The community emphasized values of equity, dignity, access, and self-determination. Participants envisioned a Mount Dennis where everyone—regardless of income, age, or background—can live with security and joy. They called for housing as a human right, transportation that connects rather than displaces, and economic development uplifts local entrepreneurs and supports Black, Indigenous, newcomer, and youth-led businesses. Public spaces should foster culture, safety, and ecological healing, and safety itself was redefined as relational, preventative, and community-led—built through mutual care, well-maintained and designed spaces, and responsive institutions. Youth empowerment, Indigenous leadership, and environmental stewardship were also named as core priorities.

Challenges

The challenges identified were structural and systemic: exclusion from decision-making, rapid gentrification without safeguards, insufficient youth and mental health supports, and a lack of accountability and transparency from government, institutions and developers. City services are often difficult to navigate or slow to respond. Long-standing residents fear being pushed out by unaffordable housing, inaccessible transit, and redevelopment that prioritizes private gain over public good. Participants highlighted how transit infrastructure is expanding but often without the wraparound services or affordability protections needed to ensure equity. Many noted communication gaps, limited access to essential services, and the erasure of cultural institutions and third spaces—warning that development without local benefit risks deepening inequality rather than addressing it. Participants called for bold shifts—toward inclusive governance, long-term investment in social and physical infrastructure, and community-controlled development.

The following section documents those insights, offering not just a snapshot of current conditions but a blueprint for action grounded in community voice. Residents are not asking for charity or consultation—they are demanding partnership, transparency, and the power to shape their own future.

Housing & Affordability

Core Question: *What does safe, secure, and affordable housing look like in Mount Dennis, and how can we protect residents from displacement as the neighbourhood evolves?*

Overview

Experiences

- Many residents expressed a deep connection to the neighbourhood but felt the housing market is becoming increasingly unaffordable and unresponsive to local needs.
- Long-time residents, seniors, and newcomers are witnessing increased development, rent hikes, and displacement pressures.
- Landlords neglect repairs, and new developments often lack affordability or cultural fit.

Community Values

- Strong belief in housing as a right, not a commodity.
- Commitment to mixed-income, community-controlled housing models (e.g., co-ops, CLTs).
- Preservation of green space, safety, and services embedded in complete communities.
- Desire for housing that meets intergenerational and cultural needs.

Challenges

- Rent-control exemptions, speculative development, and “affordable” units priced above local incomes.
- Inadequate tenant protections, rapid densification, and limited coordination across governments.
- Infrastructure and services lag behind population growth.

Takeaways

1. Build a Diverse and Inclusive Housing Ecosystem

Participants across the housing breakout sessions consistently called for a diverse, affordable, and inclusive housing ecosystem in Mount Dennis. A core vision was to expand mixed-income and mixed-tenure housing that includes rent-geared-to-income (RGI) units, below-market rentals, co-ops, supportive and transitional housing, and rent-to-own options. Residents emphasized the need for non-profit and community-controlled models—such as land trusts and co-operatives—to ensure long-term affordability and flexibility, allowing residents to remain rooted in the community as their needs change.

2. Prioritize Deep Affordability and Local Housing Definitions

Affordability was the most urgent issue raised. Participants urged governments to expand rent control, increase the supply of deeply affordable units, and require private developers to

contribute a higher percentage of affordable housing in new builds. Several called for local definitions of affordability based on Mount Dennis incomes—not citywide averages—and for legislation to protect tenants from displacement, such as the right to return after redevelopment.

3. Ensure Safety, Quality, and Wraparound Housing Supports

Safety, maintenance, and quality of housing were also key concerns. Residents described harassment, neglect by landlords, and unaffordable rent increases—particularly in new, rent-control-exempt buildings. There were also calls for more tenant protections, accessible maintenance supports, and community-led enforcement of housing standards. Beyond housing units, participants emphasized the importance of wraparound services such as mental health supports, youth programming, childcare, and employment opportunities as foundational to housing stability.

4. Center Cultural Relevance and Complete Communities

The need for inclusive, culturally relevant planning was echoed throughout. Residents called for greater transparency, stronger community consultation, and coordination across all levels of government. They stressed that affordable housing must be embedded in complete communities with access to public transit, schools, clinics, shops, and green space. New developments should reflect the neighbourhood’s cultural identity and protect long-standing residents from being pushed out by speculation and gentrification.

5. Advance Community-Led, Rights-Based Housing Models

Residents envision Mount Dennis as a model for equitable, community-led development. They want policy change, sustained public investment, and development frameworks that ensure housing is a right—not a commodity—and that every resident, regardless of income, can live with dignity, safety, and long-term security in their neighbourhood.

Inclusive Local Economies

Core Question: *How can we foster a thriving, inclusive local economy that supports long-time residents and reflects the community’s diversity?*

Overview

Experiences

- Local businesses operate in “survival mode”; many are led by racialized residents and serve vital cultural and economic roles.
- COVID-19 impacted foot traffic and increased digital engagement, but tech barriers remain.

- Youth and newcomers face barriers to entering entrepreneurship or trades.

Community Values

- Support for community-rooted, culturally reflective businesses.
- Importance of local hiring, mentoring, trade training, and youth pathways.
- Desire for vibrant Main Streets with shops, food, and spontaneous commerce.

Challenges

- Commercial displacement due to rising rents and speculative development.
- Limited access to capital, grants, and municipal support for small, for-profit businesses.
- Disconnect between city plans and small business realities.

Takeaways

1. Support for Local, Diverse, and Community-Owned Businesses

Participants envision a thriving, inclusive local economy in Mount Dennis grounded in community ownership, affordability, and cultural relevance. A strong desire was expressed to support locally-owned and operated businesses, particularly those that reflect the community's diversity and history. Many emphasized the importance of sustaining "survival" enterprises—small, family-run shops and services—while providing pathways to help these businesses evolve into long-term, thriving ventures. This included calls for capacity-building support, mentorship, and better access to funding, especially for racialized entrepreneurs, youth, and tradespeople.

2. Invest in Local Workforce and Business Capacity

To strengthen the local economy, participants proposed increasing trade-based training, increasing awareness of employment pathways, and improving access to public procurement opportunities for local businesses. Suggestions included policies for local hiring on infrastructure projects, investment in small-scale incubators, and education tailored to the business realities of marginalized communities. Participants also raised the need to improve access to affordable commercial space, given that rising land values and speculative development threaten existing businesses with displacement.

3. Protect Affordability and Anchor Essential Services

Concerns about affordability, food security, and a declining sense of safety were prominent. Participants worried about gentrification pushing out residents and businesses, and about anchor services like the local No Frills grocery store possibly closing. There was strong interest

in conducting local needs assessments to identify service and amenity gaps, and a belief that the city should do more to support grassroots businesses, not just large-scale developments.

4. Reimagine Mount Dennis as a Vibrant, Walkable Main Street

Participants expressed a desire to create a “Main Street” feel, similar to Bloor West or the Danforth, where people could sit, shop, and gather. A revitalized economy would include mom-and-pop shops, food services, body care, dry cleaners, and cultural vendors—all supported through intentional planning, accessible policies, and equitable funding models. Branding Mount Dennis as a unique, walkable hub and improving both digital and physical infrastructure to support “wandering” and spontaneous commerce were also suggested. Ultimately, residents want Mount Dennis to be a place where people don’t just survive, but build community wealth rooted in equity, ownership, and opportunity.

Public Spaces, Culture & Environment

Core Question: *How can we design and protect public spaces and cultural assets to reflect the community’s identity and foster belonging?*

Overview

Experiences

- Parks, trails, and community centres are well-used but often inaccessible due to design or underfunding.
- Beloved cultural and commercial spaces have closed.
- Residents lament the loss of trees, green space, and events due to development.

Community Values

- Public space should be inclusive, co-created, and culturally reflective.
- Youth programming, intergenerational activities, and ecological connection matter.
- Emphasis on arts, gardens, food security, storytelling, and Indigenous stewardship.

Challenges

- Bureaucratic barriers (permits, exclusive programming) and lack of transparent consultation.
- Hostile design, short-term funding, and inadequate maintenance.
- Climate risks (notably flooding) and environmental degradation tied to development.

Takeaways

1. Create Inclusive and Accessible Public Spaces

Participants shared a unified vision for a more inclusive, accessible, and culturally vibrant Mount Dennis. One of the most consistent recommendations was the need to create public spaces that are accessible and welcoming to all. Participants emphasized that parks, community centres, and green areas must be physically accessible, well-maintained, and inclusive of people with disabilities, families, and residents without formal affiliations. There were repeated calls to remove bureaucratic barriers—such as permit systems or exclusive programming—that restrict access, and to prioritize Mount Dennis residents in the delivery of free public services and recreational programs.

2. Commit to Continuous, Community-Driven Engagement

Another central recommendation was to ensure that engagement with residents is continuous and community-driven. Many expressed frustration with one-off consultations or tokenistic involvement in planning decisions. Instead, they advocated for ongoing processes that include schools, tenants, faith groups, and culturally diverse residents in shaping their neighbourhood. There was a strong desire for community co-design models, where local people can lead program development, evaluate city-run initiatives, and propose uses for community infrastructure. Participants also called for platforms to better communicate what's happening in Mount Dennis, including a community information board and improved digital tools to facilitate feedback and connection.

3. Invest in Cultural Infrastructure and Youth Leadership

Participants also envisioned a more culturally rich and youth-friendly Mount Dennis. They recommended developing new cultural infrastructure—like multi-use community hubs with indoor and outdoor spaces for art, performance, learning, and gathering. Youth leadership and arts programming were seen as crucial, particularly for underserved and racialized communities. Ideas included outdoor theatre spaces, murals, food festivals, eco-education, and more cultural programming that reflects Black, Indigenous, and newcomer stories. Accessibility and outreach were emphasized as key to ensuring these spaces are genuinely welcoming and representative.

4. Advance Environmental Stewardship and Climate Resilience

Environmental stewardship was another key pillar in the vision for the future. Participants called for tree replanting and greater investment in green infrastructure to address flooding and climate-related risks. There was concern about the ecological damage caused by development, particularly along Eglinton, and a demand for the city to support Indigenous-led environmental practices. Access to green space was also seen as a tool for food security and healing, with many calling for expanded community gardens, especially

within TCHC properties. These gardens, when accessible and resourced, were described as vital sites of connection, well-being, and environmental education.

5. Deliver Structural Change Through Policy and Accountability

Finally, there were calls for deeper structural changes at the policy level. Participants recommended that new developments include real community benefits, such as space for local services or arts programming. They urged the city to assign dedicated departments or staff to support neighbourhood-specific needs and track progress on anti-displacement and equity goals using scorecards or similar tools. There was also concern about displacement and the need to protect community spaces under threat, including those currently housing vital programming.

Community Safety & Well-Being

Core Question: *What does a safe and connected Mount Dennis look like, and how can improvements avoid displacing current residents?*

Overview

Experiences

- Feelings of safety vary based on identity, housing, and connection to services.
- Rising violence, poor service response (e.g., 311), and displacement compound insecurity.
- New infrastructure often fails to reach or reflect the needs of vulnerable residents.

Community Values

- Safety is relational, not just about policing—it's about belonging, connection, and access.
- Importance of trusted third spaces, mental health supports, and culturally relevant programs.
- Preservation of traditions, libraries, gathering spaces, and grassroots care networks.

Challenges

- Inaccessible or oversubscribed programs, lack of inclusive communication tools.
- Economic and housing instability as root causes of insecurity.
- Inequitable responses from city officials and lack of accountability.

Takeaways

1. Build Responsive and Transparent City Services

The collective recommendations from participants emphasized the need for more responsive and accessible services—including faster city response times, clear communication platforms, and a centralized way to share community information such as events, programs, and safety updates. Residents expressed frustration with long wait times on 311 and a lack of accountability from elected officials, especially when reporting safety concerns, illegal activity, or infrastructure issues. A key recommendation was the establishment of consistent, transparent systems that allow residents to easily voice concerns and receive timely support, particularly in non-emergency situations.

2. Expand Community Infrastructure and Inclusive Services

There was a strong desire for expanded and improved community infrastructure, including traffic calming measures, stormwater management, clean and walkable sidewalks, and accessible parks and recreation facilities. Residents consistently highlighted the need for youth programs, mental health and counseling services, culturally and religiously inclusive spaces, and support services that meet the needs of diverse groups, including newcomers, seniors, Black and Indigenous residents, and LGBTQ2+ individuals. Many called for policies that prioritize current residents in accessing local facilities and services, particularly at overused recreation centres.

3. Redefine Safety Through Connection and Belonging

The vision for safety extended beyond policing to include community trust, mutual care, and public space activation. Participants saw well-used, well-maintained spaces—like parks with programming, coffee shops with seating, and farmers markets—as essential to a sense of belonging and safety. Safety was framed as relational and preventative: built through strong community ties, reliable institutions, youth mentorship, and accessible third spaces that encourage gathering. Residents called for local leadership in shaping these spaces, with some suggesting scorecards or other tools to measure progress on anti-displacement and community well-being goals.

4. Center Community Leadership in Planning the Future

Fundamentally, residents want to shape the future of Mount Dennis themselves. They called for city departments, elected officials, and developers to meaningfully include community members in long-term planning and decision-making. This includes preserving existing assets—like green spaces, mosques, and local programs—and ensuring new developments support, rather than displace, the people who currently live there. The vision is not just about

protecting the past but enabling a future where relationships, culture, infrastructure, and care systems are grounded in the realities and strengths of the community.

Transportation & Mobility

Core Question: *How can we make transportation in and around Mount Dennis more accessible and affordable in ways that support existing residents and reduce exclusion?*

Overview

Experiences

- High reliance on overcrowded bus routes (Jane St, Weston Rd), with limited support for strollers, seniors, or people with disabilities.
- Walking and biking infrastructure are poor, especially east of Black Creek.
- Mixed feelings about the LRT—some see promise; others worry about gentrification and slow timelines.

Community Values

- Public transit is the most valued mode of travel, followed by walking and biking.
- Equity, safety, reliability, and connectivity are prioritized.
- Active transportation should be safer and better connected.

Challenges

- Unsafe cycling, disconnected pedestrian paths, and uncoordinated parking policies.
- Fear that TOD (Transit-Oriented Development) will drive up rents and displace current residents.
- Limited amenities to support car-free living (e.g., grocery stores, clinics near transit).

Key Takeaways

1. Make Transit Frequent, Reliable, and Inclusive

Participants shared a common vision for a safer, more connected, and more equitable transportation system in Mount Dennis. A top priority was improving public transit—specifically addressing overcrowding on key routes like Jane Street and Weston Road, increasing frequency, and ensuring that buses accommodate seniors, strollers, and mobility aids. There was strong support for rapid transit on Jane Street, fare integration across systems, and 24-hour or on-demand service options, particularly for shift workers.

2. Expand and Connect Active Transportation Infrastructure

Active transportation was seen as underdeveloped. Participants called for physically separated bike lanes, better trail connections to the Humber network, and improved east-west pedestrian links across barriers like Black Creek and the rail corridor. Walking and biking must be made safer, especially in hilly or high-traffic areas.

3. Plan for Parking, Density, and Essential Services Together

Parking and development policies were also raised as key concerns. Residents criticized new developments with minimal parking, noting that many in the area—especially tradespeople and healthcare workers—rely on cars. They emphasized the need for balanced parking strategies alongside dense development, and for all new growth to be paired with essential amenities like schools, clinics, shops, and green space.

4. Prioritize Safety Across All Modes of Travel

Safety on transit was another major issue. Participants described feeling unsafe due to harassment, overcrowding, and poor station environments. They stressed the importance of clean, well-lit vehicles and hubs with visible staff or community presence. Cycling safety also required urgent improvement through protected infrastructure.

5. Integrate Transit with Housing, Services, and Community Voice

The vision is for a transportation system that supports—not displaces—the community. This includes long-term planning that centers local voices, policy tools like inclusionary zoning, and strong partnerships across government and community organizations. Transit must be integrated with housing, services, and public space to create a neighbourhood that is connected, inclusive, and accessible to all.

Recurring Outcomes Across All Breakout Sessions

Several recurring challenges emerged across all breakout sessions—highlighting deeper structural issues in plans, service delivery, and communication in Mount Dennis.

1. Bureaucratic Barriers

Participants repeatedly described how red tape, rigid systems, and inconsistent rules limit access to essential services and spaces. From complicated permit processes that prevent grassroots events to inaccessible funding applications and city programs that exclude small or informal organizations, residents expressed frustration with systems that are designed without the realities of low-income, racialized, and immigrant communities in mind.

2. Poor Communication and Engagement

One of the strongest shared concerns was the lack of meaningful, transparent engagement. Many residents felt decisions were being made *to* the community, not *with* them. Consultations were often viewed as performative, rushed, or dominated by outside voices. People spoke of feeling left out of important updates about housing, safety, infrastructure, and services—especially those without reliable internet or those not fluent in English.

3. Lack of Accessible, Consistent Information

The information gap in Mount Dennis is wide. Residents described a lack of centralized, real-time platforms to share events, developments, programs, or urgent changes. Many called for community-run bulletin boards, digital tools, and physical signage in multiple languages to close this gap. Misinformation and confusion—particularly around developments, evictions, and transit construction—have left many feeling powerless and disconnected.

4. Disconnection Between Policy and Lived Experience

Across themes, participants perceived a clear disconnect between high-level policy decisions and on-the-ground realities. For example, they mentioned that transit investments were initiated by governments and welcomed by the community but they were not matched with affordability protections. Participants mentioned that new housing often excluded those who need it most, and that local services were overstretched and underfunded. Participants emphasized the need for decision-making frameworks that reflect lived experience, local income levels, and cultural context.

5. Desire for Local Control and Accountability

Finally, across all sessions, there was a deep call for more community governance. Whether it was through resident-led advisory tables, neighbourhood scorecards, or co-designed programming, participants want more power over the decisions that affect their lives. There was a shared belief that local knowledge, not just expert opinion, is key to building a resilient and equitable Mount Dennis.

5. What the Community Wants: Summit Recommendations

Caveat on Responsibility for Recommendations: While this report includes recommendations that touch on various aspects of planning, policy, and implementation, it is important to clarify that not all recommendations fall solely within the City of Toronto's jurisdiction or responsibility. The intent is not to suggest that the City must directly enforce or deliver every action item, but rather to highlight areas where the City can play a key supporting role—by facilitating coordination, directing investments, advocating across levels

of government, enabling community leadership, and ensuring that the conditions for equitable development are in place. Effective change will require shared responsibility, partnership, and ongoing collaboration between the City, higher orders of government, other public agencies, community organizations, and residents.

These recommendations are based directly on input from participants at the *Mount Dennis People's Summit*, reflecting their priorities for the future of the community. They are intended to inform anti-displacement strategies and guide the creation of an Equitable Development Scorecard. Additionally, these recommendations can guide partnership development and broader planning efforts. They can help community groups, grassroots movements, and collective initiatives by laying the groundwork for collaborations that resist ongoing and future developments likely to increase displacement risk. The recommendations and findings from the Summit constitute one station in the journey towards developing an equitable development scorecard and anti-displacement strategy, such tools usually require ongoing and authentic community engagement and participation.

Housing & Affordability

1. **Diversify housing options:** Prioritize mixed-income and mixed-tenure models, including RGI, below-market, co-ops, transitional, and rent-to-own housing.
2. **Non-profit and community-led models:** Expand community land trusts and co-operative housing to ensure long-term affordability and flexibility.
3. **Define affordability locally:** Base affordable housing definitions on Mount Dennis incomes, not citywide averages.
4. **Stronger protections for tenants:** Enforce rent control, expand tenant rights, and guarantee the right to return post-redevelopment.
5. **Improve housing quality:** Ensure regular maintenance and establish accessible, community-led enforcement of standards.
6. **Wraparound supports:** Pair housing with services like childcare, mental health care, youth programs, and employment pathways.
7. **Inclusive planning:** Strengthen community consultation, prioritize transparency, and coordinate across all levels of government.
8. **Embed housing in complete communities:** Ensure housing developments include access to green space, transit, clinics, schools, and shops.

Inclusive Local Economies

1. **Support local and culturally relevant businesses:** Provide funding, mentorship, and capacity-building for BIPOC-owned, youth-led, and trades-based businesses.
2. **Preserve affordable commercial space:** Prevent displacement from speculative development and rising land values.
3. **Strengthen business supports:** Simplify access to grants and city programs for for-profit small businesses.

4. **Promote local hiring:** Establish policies that prioritize local hiring on infrastructure and public projects.
5. **Expand training opportunities:** Offer trade-based and entrepreneurship training tailored to the community.
6. **Revitalize main streets:** Foster vibrant streets with diverse shops, food vendors, and cultural spaces; improve digital and physical infrastructure for commerce.
7. **Conduct local needs assessments:** Identify service gaps to better align future investment with community priorities.
8. **Enhance storytelling and place-branding:** Collaborate with the BIA to define Mount Dennis's identity and attract supportive development.

Public Spaces, Culture & Environment

1. **Make spaces accessible and inclusive:** Remove permit barriers, improve maintenance, and ensure spaces are usable by residents of all abilities.
2. **Prioritize local residents:** Allocate free services, recreation programming, and event space to Mount Dennis residents first.
3. **Invest in cultural infrastructure:** Create multi-use community hubs, outdoor theatres, and spaces for art, performance, and learning.
4. **Support youth-led programming:** Develop programs and leadership opportunities designed for youth, particularly racialized and underserved groups.
5. **Environmental stewardship:** Replant trees, expand green infrastructure, and support Indigenous-led environmental practices.
6. **Community gardens:** Increase access to gardens (especially on TCHC properties) as tools for food security, healing, and education.
7. **Strengthen community communications:** Establish community bulletin boards and digital platforms to share updates and foster engagement.
8. **Long-term investment:** Provide sustained funding for programs, simplified booking systems, and political accountability.

Community Safety & Well-Being

1. **Redefine safety:** Center it around housing stability, inclusion, mental health, and community care—not just policing.
2. **Responsive services:** Improve 311 systems, create community service navigator roles, and establish quicker municipal response mechanisms.
3. **Build community trust:** Support third spaces like cafés and libraries as places of connection and safety.
4. **Expand services:** Offer mental health supports, youth mentorship, employment programs, and culturally relevant wellness initiatives.
5. **Improve infrastructure:** Add street lighting, safe pedestrian crossings, traffic calming measures, and accessible parks.

6. **Protect sacred and cultural spaces:** Preserve and fund community institutions like mosques, Indigenous sweat lodges, and public gathering areas.
7. **Ongoing engagement:** Host regular community forums, town halls, and information-sharing events to promote dialogue and accountability.
8. **Emergency supports:** Develop tools like location-sharing markers and community-based crisis response strategies.

Transportation & Mobility

1. **Improve public transit reliability:** Increase bus frequency (especially on Jane and Weston), improve LRT service, and ensure 24-hour/on-demand options.
2. **Fare integration:** Address fare equity and simplify multi-line transfers.
3. **Support active transportation:** Build physically separated bike lanes, enhance pedestrian infrastructure, and improve trail connectivity.
4. **Address development-related parking concerns:** Balance dense development with adequate parking, especially for tradespeople and caregivers.
5. **Improve transit safety:** Maintain clean, well-lit buses and stations with visible staff presence and community oversight.
6. **Equity-focused transit planning:** Ensure transit expansion benefits current residents through affordability safeguards and inclusionary zoning.
7. **Integrate planning:** Link transit with housing, services, and public space.

Emerging Strategies from the Summit: Community Ideas Gaining Momentum

At the end of the Summit, participants were invited to evaluate four potential community strategies using Feedback Frames—a participatory tool that allows for real-time voting and transparent prioritization. These strategies emerged from earlier sessions and working group discussions, and reflect tangible actions that the community believes are both necessary and achievable.

Each proposal received strong support, signaling a collective desire to move these ideas forward. Below are the four top-priority strategies, alongside relevant case studies that offer inspiration, lessons, and practical models for implementation in Mount Dennis:

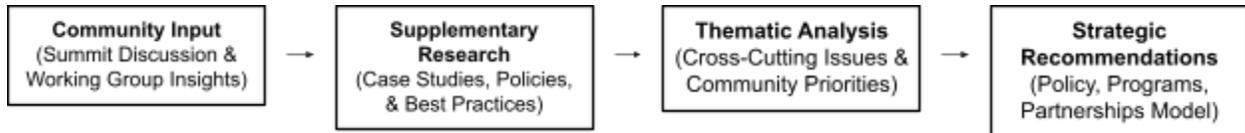
1. **Create a Mount Dennis Community Land Trust:** Support and protect local renters and businesses from displacement due to land and building speculation through the purchase of land and buildings at affordable prices.
 - a. **Note:** Since the Summit, this recommendation is already in motion.
2. **Establish a Mount Dennis Partnership Table to Support the Mount Dennis Community for All Action Plan:** Building a vibrant and happy community in Mount Dennis will require everyone working together as one team. The establishment of *Mount Dennis Partnership Table* would provide opportunities for collaboration, shared

learnings and co-ordinated action to implement the *Community for All Action Plan* and the *Equitable Development Scorecard*.

3. **Reclaim Public Space and Run the Mount Dennis Community Centre:** Organize and plan to reclaim public space and have the City return the Mount Dennis Community Centre to the community to be operated as an active hub for community and local led activities
 - a. **Note:** Since the Summit, this recommendation is already in motion.
4. **Create a Mount Dennis Education and Community Defense Fund:** Assist local homeowners, tenants and businesses deal with the pressures of gentrification by creating a non-profit education and community defense fund.

5. A Path Forward: Strategic Recommendations for Implementation

This section presents anti-displacement strategies rooted in the lived experiences and priorities of Mount Dennis residents, as voiced through the People’s Summit, Tour, and related community engagement efforts. Informed by key informant interviews, and proven models from other cities and neighbourhoods facing similar challenges, these strategies translate community-identified solutions into actionable pathways.



Beyond simply preventing displacement, these strategies are designed to advance **community ownership, economic stability, and long-term resilience**—all grounded in local leadership and a shared vision for an inclusive future. They also serve as foundational lenses for developing metrics and evaluating progress through an **Equitable Development Scorecard**.

To organize these recommendations in a way that is both reflective of community priorities and conducive to action, they are grouped into four interrelated pillars:

1. **Mount Dennis Control:** Support Community Control of Land for Anti-Displacement.
2. **Mount Dennis Invest:** Invest in Entrepreneurship, Procurement & Funding for Local Economic Growth and Community-Wealth Building.
3. **Mount Dennis Connect:** Build Safer, Connected, & Culturally Vibrant Public Spaces for Community Well-Being.

4. **Mount Dennis Power:** Develop Local Power Through Coordinated Partnerships, Participatory Planning, and Metrics.

Each pillar is broken down into three key components to clearly communicate its relevance and implementation:

1. **Why This Matters for Preventing Displacement:** Highlights how each strategy addresses community priorities, root causes of displacement, and promotes stability.
2. **Strategies in Action:** Showcases real-world examples from Toronto and other cities to demonstrate how similar tools have worked elsewhere, providing a foundation for adapting and applying these approaches locally.
3. **Making It Happen:** Identifies what's needed to enable each strategy to succeed.

Together, these pillars offer a clear roadmap for equitable development in Mount Dennis—anchored in community knowledge and designed to create lasting opportunities for current and future generations to thrive.

For the full strategic framework including examples and proposed steps for implementation, please see Appendix C.

6. Conclusion

The Mount Dennis People's Summit set a significant precedent for how community-led engagement can meaningfully inform planning, policy, and development. As a first-of-its-kind event in Toronto, the Summit demonstrated what is possible when local knowledge, lived experience, and community leadership are placed at the forefront of the engagement processes.

The Summit surfaced urgent concerns around displacement, housing, public space, and economic justice—generating rich discussions and actionable ideas. Across all sessions, participants emphasized the need for development that respects and sustains the social fabric of the neighbourhood, rather than displacing it.

Now, the responsibility lies in ensuring these conversations translate into action. The insights shared must inform concrete next steps—policies, investments, and partnerships that reflect the community's vision and uphold its right to shape its own future. Continued collaboration and accountability will be essential to maintaining the momentum sparked by this important gathering.

To build on this momentum, clear and immediate next steps are critical. With sustained community involvement, support, transparency, and dedicated resources, the outcomes of

the Summit can turn into a shared, community-defined vision for Mount Dennis—offering a model of equitable development for neighbourhoods across Toronto and beyond.

Appendices

Appendix A: Mount Dennis People’s Summit Agenda

Time	Item	Participants
8:30 – 9:00 am	Registration & Breakfast	Everyone
9:00 – 9:45 am	Opening Remarks & Welcome Address	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Peter Frampton – Executive Director of LEF ● Amina Yassin-Omar (MC) – VP Community and Placemaking at LEF ● MPP Mohamed Firin ● Councillor Frances Nunziata ● Jag Sharma – Deputy City Manager, Development and Growth Services
9:45 – 10:15 am	Keynote Address: The Right to Stay Put: Why Gentrification Isn't Inevitable and What We Can Do About It.	Leslie Kern
10:15 – 10:25 am	Breakout Instructions	MC
10:25 – 11:55 am	Breakout Session #1 – Community Visions of Change	Everyone
11:55 am – 12:30 pm	Report Back Session	Session Reporter
12:30 – 1:25 pm	Lunch Break & Networking	Everyone
1:25 – 1:30 pm	Next Session Instructions	MC

1:30 - 2:30 pm	Action Panel: Strengthening Communities: Community-Led Anti-Displacement Strategies for Equitable Development	Moderator: Abigail Moriah Panellists <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Prentiss Dantzler • Shannon Holness • Keisha St. Louis-McBurnie • Robert Walter-Joseph
2:30- 2:45 pm	Break	Everyone
2:45 - 2:50 pm	Next Session Instructions	MC
2:50 - 4:20 pm	Breakout Session #2 - Collective Engagement Session	Everyone
4:20 - 4:50 pm	Feedback Session	Everyone
4:50 - 5:00 pm	Closing Remarks & Thank You	Everyone LEF
5:00 - 5:10 pm	Indigenous Closing Ceremony	Everyone
5:10 - 6:00 pm	Networking	Everyone Entertainment

Appendix B: Community Tour Map

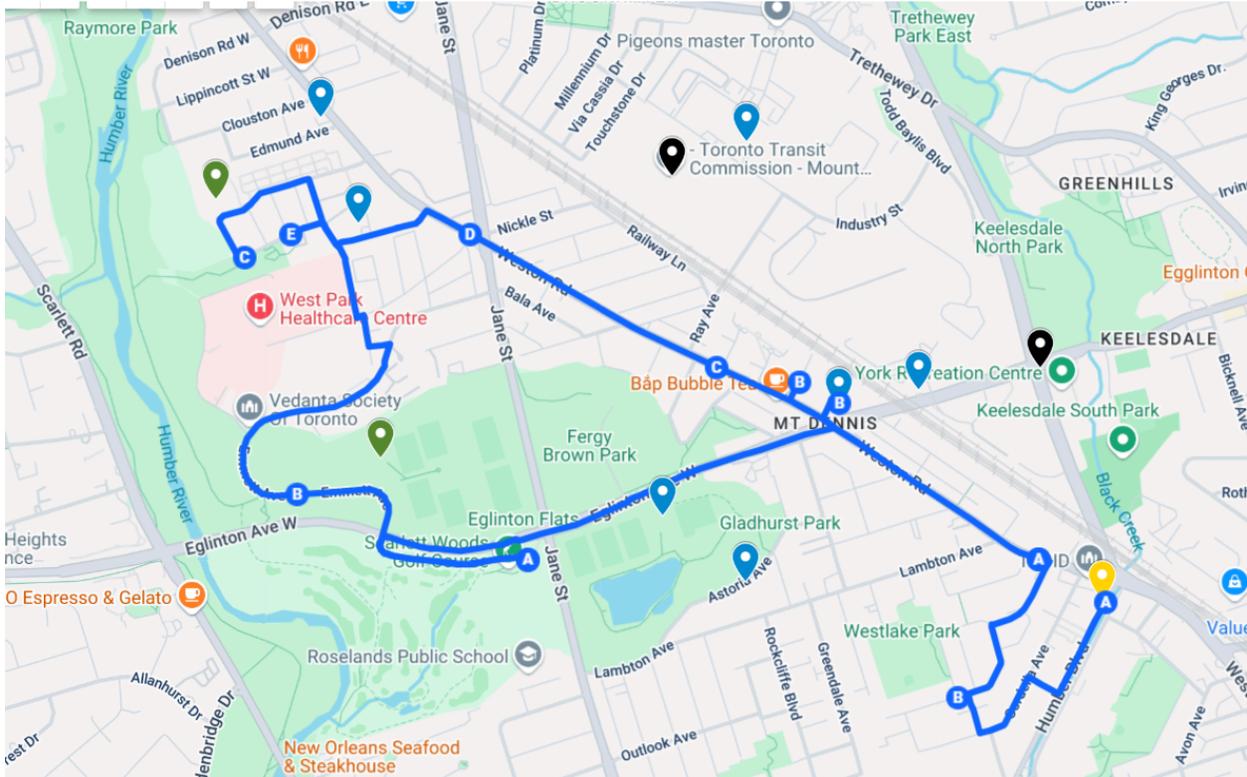


Figure 1. Map of Tour Locations

Appendix C: Strategic Framework for Community Action

This appendix expands on Section 6 of the main report by providing additional detail on the strategic recommendations developed through the Mount Dennis People’s Summit and related engagement activities. These strategies respond directly to community priorities, combining local insights with proven models from other jurisdictions to inform actionable, place-based solutions.

Organized into four key pillars—**Control, Invest, Connect, and Power**—the recommendations are designed to help prevent displacement while building long-term community resilience. For each pillar, this appendix outlines:

- **Why This Matters:** The connection to displacement prevention and community-defined priorities.
- **Strategies in Action:** Examples of similar approaches from Toronto and beyond.
- **Making It Happen:** Key enablers, tools, and partnerships needed for implementation.

Together, these expanded recommendations offer a comprehensive roadmap for equitable development in Mount Dennis—rooted in local knowledge and designed for real-world action

1. Mount Dennis Control : Support Community Control of Land for Anti-Displacement

Focus: Community Stewardship, Land Ownership, and Wealth-Building

Goal: Expand access to land, housing, cultural, and commercial property through community-led ownership models—such as CLTs, co-ops, and community investment vehicles—to ensure long-term affordability, stability, and self-determination for Mount Dennis residents.

Why This Matters for Preventing Displacement

At the Summit, participants raised concerns about rising rents, commercial evictions, and the loss of culturally significant spaces. As outlined in Section 4, many expressed a desire for long-term, community-led solutions that would allow residents and small businesses to remain rooted in Mount Dennis. This aligns with interest in cooperative housing, land trusts, and locally-owned businesses that preserve the area’s diversity and tight-knit social fabric.

By shifting land, business, and property ownership into community hands—through models like Community Land Trusts (CLTs), cooperatives, and Community Investment Trusts (CITs)—residents gain long-term control over development outcomes and generate wealth. This maintains local economic and housing stability by preventing speculative buyouts as CLTs have lower foreclosure rates than market-rate housing.¹ Additionally it also protects retail and residential tenants from being pushed out by private market pressures as studies show that 95% of CLT homes remain permanently affordable to households earning under 80% of the area median income (AMI).² CLTs are also especially effective at serving low-income households, single-parent families, and communities of colour—helping to close the homeownership gap and advance environmental and economic justice.³ Commercial CLTs and co-operatives in particular have been used to stimulate inclusive economic development by supporting BIPOC- and immigrant-owned businesses and creating local employment opportunities.⁴ Beyond affordability, community ownership enables other anti-displacement initiatives by strengthening cultural identity, preserving local businesses, encouraging inclusive placemaking, and promoting social cohesion.⁵

Strategy in Action

Community ownership of residential, cultural, and commercial property has a proven track record in the city already. For example, in Toronto, **CLTs** such as the **Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust** have used the City's *Multi-Unit Residential Acquisition (MURA)* program to acquire a 36-unit apartment building and have received additional sites from the *Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC)*. Similarly, the **Circle Community Land Trust** is stewarding over 600 former TCHC scattered site properties, transferred to ensure long-term affordability and community-led management. Community ownership models are increasingly used to mitigate both cultural and commercial displacement in neighbourhoods like Chinatown and Little Jamaica. For example, the **Little Jamaica CLT** is working to acquire property to protect Black-owned businesses and residents threatened by transit-related displacement from the Eglinton Crosstown LRT.

Across Canada, community investment vehicles such as **Community Development Corporations (CDCs)** and **Community Economic Development Investment Funds (CEDIFs)** also deliver compounding benefits. For example, every \$1000 invested into **Nova Scotia's**

¹ Thaden & Rosenberg, 2010

² Wang et al., 2019

³ Trana et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2023

⁴ Alvarez et al., 2024

⁵ Grannis, 2021; Schneider et al., 2022

CEDIF has resulted in 1.75 local jobs (approximately \$575/job). Ultimately, a less than \$700,000 investment by the province has helped raise \$2 million from everyday investors (who receive tax credits) and funded 116 innovative small businesses and co-operatives in industries ranging from food to solar energy.⁶ The **Edmonton Community Development Company (ECDC)**, born of City Council's 2016 *End Poverty Edmonton Road Map*, retrofits derelict or vacant buildings to provide new affordable residential and commercial properties, create cooperative businesses, and provide job training and services in the city's historically disinvested neighbourhoods. Tools like **Community Investment Trusts (CIT)** also provide additional avenues for community wealth-building and give residents a stake in local development.⁷ For as little as \$10/month, the **East Portland CIT** allows community members to buy shares in commercial or mixed-use real estate projects that host local businesses and residents, provide annual returns, and access to financial literacy programming. With an investment of \$1000, Oakland residents can co-own and co-steward several mixed-use properties managed by the **East Bay Permanent Real Estate Cooperative (EBPREC)**.

Incentivizing investment in equity-deserving neighbourhoods by capturing the value generated by public infrastructure and private industry offers another tool to help fund anti-displacement efforts, affordable housing, and inclusive economic development. For example, **Tax Increment Financing (TIF)** tools such as the City of Toronto's *Economic Development and Growth in Employment (EDGE) Program* offer **Tax Increment Equivalent Grants (TIEGs)** to stimulate local investment. The EDGE program prioritizes Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) like Mount Dennis—tying financial incentives to equity, workforce development, and inclusive economic growth.⁸ For many communities facing gentrification and transit-oriented displacement in the US, **New Market Tax Credits** are designed to stimulate investment in low-income communities.⁹ Local advocates also propose a **Gentrification Tax**, which applies to rapid resale profits and reinvest the proceeds into tenant protections or small business support.

These models demonstrate that when public investment supports community ownership, it unlocks shared prosperity—grounded in local leadership and resilience.

⁶ Karaphillis, 2021

⁷ Community Desk Chicago, 2022

⁸ City of Toronto, 2024a

⁹ Alvarez et al., 2024

Making it Happen

1. **Prioritize Public Land Transfers:** Make surplus or underutilized City-owned land available to community entities—such as CLTs, co-ops, and nonprofits—at below-market rates, particularly for affordable housing and community-serving uses.¹⁰
2. **Provide Flexible Capital:** Offer incentives, seed funding, grants, and/or forgivable loans—potentially in partnership with philanthropy and other orders of government—to enable community entities to acquire residential, cultural, or commercial properties, develop sites, and create community investment vehicles.¹¹
3. **Build Collaborative Pathways to Ownership:** Support and incentivize partnerships and joint development efforts between community organizations, socially responsible developers, landowners, and public agencies—ensuring community-led approaches guide the design, use, and ownership of new residential, cultural, and commercial spaces.¹²
4. **Invest in Capacity Building:** Provide legal, technical, and planning assistance to help emerging land stewardship groups build governance structures, boost investment readiness, secure financing, and navigate development processes.
5. **Institutionalize Community Ownership in City Policy:** Embed and prioritize CLTs, co-operative models, and community investment vehicles in municipal strategies, bylaws, public land disposition processes, and real estate development frameworks to ensure long-term affordability, community control, and development of Social Purpose Real Estate (SPRE) and an inclusive economy.¹³
6. **Advance Enabling Legislation and Financial Tools:** Coordinate with the Province to strengthen the legal and financial infrastructure for community ownership—such as updated legal frameworks for CITs, CEDIFs, and other local investment mechanisms that expand access to capital and equity for residents.
7. **Strengthen and Scale Emergency Housing Assistance:** Continue and strengthen existing financial aid to renters and homeowners to prevent evictions, foreclosures, or unsafe housing conditions. This includes programs such as eviction prevention funds, home repair and modification grants, and lease or mortgage assistance services.
8. **Enable Innovative and Inclusive Community Finance:** Support the growth and accessibility of social finance tools that help residents build credit, access capital, and

¹⁰ Bunce & Walks, 2022

¹¹ Alvarez et al., 2024; Trana et al., 2023

¹² Bunce & Walks, 2022; Enterprise, 2024

¹³ Bunce & Walks, 2022

participate in shared wealth-building. This includes funding, partnerships, and policy alignment to advance models such as community banking, rent-reporting services (e.g., PayFi)¹⁴, and shared-equity homeownership platforms (e.g., Ourboro).

2. Mount Dennis Invest: Invest in Entrepreneurship, Procurement & Funding for Local Economic Growth and Community-Wealth Building

Focus: Inclusive Entrepreneurship, Local Procurement, and Small Business Stability

Goals: Expand access to funding, procurement, and entrepreneurship pathways for local and equity-deserving businesses. Strengthen the capacity of Mount Dennis residents—especially youth, newcomers, and racialized entrepreneurs—to build, sustain, and grow businesses that reflect the community’s identity and keep wealth rooted locally.

Why This Matters for Preventing Displacement

At the Summit, residents expressed concern over commercial evictions, lack of support for small businesses, and the disappearance of culturally reflective enterprises. Many called for more targeted funding, mentorship, and resources to help create jobs, access affordable spaces, introduce youth to career and entrepreneurship pathways, and help existing businesses to scale, pivot, and/or transition.

Locally-owned and culturally reflective businesses play a critical role in stabilizing communities, strengthening local identity, and keeping wealth circulating within the neighbourhood. Every dollar spent at a small business generates significant economic returns—66 cents stays in the community, compared to just 11 cents when spent at a multinational.¹⁵ Diverse-owned and immigrant-owned enterprises, in particular, face systemic barriers to growth and scale. Targeted support through local hiring initiatives, business incubators, and financial literacy programs can help prevent economic marginalization—often a precursor to residential displacement. These businesses are also more likely to hire locally and reflect the cultural fabric of their communities.¹⁶ In the U.S., for example, doubling procurement with women- and diverse-owned businesses from \$1 trillion to \$2 trillion could create 4 million jobs for underrepresented populations.¹⁷

¹⁴ Choi et al., 2024

¹⁵ Canadian Federation of Independent Business, 2023

¹⁶ Sordi et al., 2022

¹⁷ Forgione et al., 2023; Stoll et al., 2001

Strategy in Action

Locally-driven economic development and community owned real estate models are already demonstrating impact in other neighbourhoods facing displacement. In Toronto, the **Community & Cultural Spaces Trust (CCST)** was established through a \$17 million **Community Benefits Agreement (CBA)** settlement secured by residents in the Bloor-Dufferin area. Of that, \$2 million was dedicated to preserving affordable cultural and nonprofit spaces in Ward 9 (Davenport). The trust, formed through grassroots organizing led by the *Building a Better Bloor Dufferin* coalition, now serves as Toronto's first cultural land trust and offers a model for stewarding community infrastructure beyond housing.

In Vancouver, the **Community Impact Real Estate Society (CIRES)** operates a mixed-market commercial property portfolio that provides **below-market leases to nonprofits and social enterprises** in the Downtown Eastside. Income from market-rate tenants subsidizes affordable space for community-serving uses, while CIRES also coordinates broader community economic development initiatives—ranging from affordable grocery stores to supporting the city's *Social Infrastructure Plan*.

As displacement drives up commercial rents and leaves storefronts vacant, communities are adopting innovative ownership, leasing, and programming models to lower barriers for new businesses and retain existing ones. Across Ontario, **co-operative conversions** of closing businesses are creating employee ownership opportunities,¹⁸ while programs like Thunder Bay's **Succession Pathways** provides business owners with **succession planning support**. In Toronto, **pop-up and Meanwhile Use** initiatives—such as those in Danforth East, Kensington Market, **STACKT Market**, and **It's OK* Studios**—have benefited from flexible leasing, funding, and municipal partnerships that activate underused space and incubate emerging entrepreneurs.

Across North America, models like the **Seattle Restored** project repurpose vacant storefronts into arts exhibits, residency spaces, and pop-up retail. Private-public partnerships like the **Cincinnati Center City Development Corporation (3CDC)** integrate inclusive contracting, hiring, and commercial leasing into its affordable housing and retail strategy—extending community benefits in the historically disinvested Over-the-Rhine (OTR) neighbourhood.

Together, these models demonstrate how targeted investment, cross-sector collaboration, and community leadership can drive local economic resilience and safeguard vital community spaces from displacement.

¹⁸ Aczel, 2024; Arnold et al., 2025

Making It Happen

1. **Invest in Local Capacity:** Provide targeted, sustained funding for entrepreneurship training, business stabilization, and financial literacy—especially for equity-deserving groups such as racialized youth, newcomers, and women. Ensure supports are culturally responsive and tailored to different stages of business development (start-up, scale-up, succession).
2. **Strengthen Grassroots Partnerships:** Co-design funding programs and supports with BIAs, grassroots groups, and community-serving organizations that have deep local trust and insight. Prioritize organizations that reflect the diversity of Mount Dennis and have a track record of supporting underrepresented entrepreneurs.
3. **Regularly Track & Report Economic Impact:** Develop transparent tracking tools to monitor and report on local hiring, contract awards, and business participation—such as public Buying Plans or community dashboards. Use these metrics to assess equity outcomes, hold institutions accountable, and help local businesses prepare for upcoming procurement cycles.
4. **Establish a Local Economic Navigator Role and Platform:** Create a dedicated business resource hub or navigator role to centralize and simplify access to funding, mentorship, training, and permit information. This one-stop-shop model helps residents and business owners navigate complex systems and unlock opportunities without being shut out by bureaucracy.
5. **Align City Investments with Local Priorities:** Ensure City funding, infrastructure upgrades, and capital projects align with local economic goals. Integrate these supports across economic development, workforce training, housing, transportation, and planning strategies to create a coordinated, place-based approach in Mount Dennis.
6. **Tie Public Investment to Inclusive Local Economic Outcomes:** Use tools like public infrastructure spending, permitting, and CBAs to require inclusive procurement, local hiring, apprenticeships, and workforce training. Coordinate with local anchor institutions (e.g., schools, hospitals, transit authorities) to prioritize contracts and partnerships with equity-deserving businesses.¹⁹
7. **Build Equitable Procurement Pathways:** Support joint ventures, co-bidding models, and mentorship arrangements between large firms and local small businesses. These approaches help smaller or equity-deserving firms compete for contracts, build networks, and strengthen their long-term capacity.²⁰

¹⁹ Dorazio, 2022

²⁰ Williams et al., 2023

8. **Foster a Regenerative Local Economy:** Incentivize business models that prioritize social value, community wealth-building, and reinvestment—such as co-operatives, social enterprises, and community investment trusts. These models not only create jobs, but also root economic power in the community.
9. **Accelerate Business Retention and Succession Planning:** Partner with local business incubators, BIAs, and community organizations to invest in programs that help long-standing business owners—especially those from equity-deserving groups—transition ownership to local successors. Support zoning and land use by-laws and initiatives that allow new entrepreneurs to test ideas affordably through pop-ups, Meanwhile Uses, and flexible leasing.

3. Mount Dennis Connect: Build Safer, Connected, & Culturally Vibrant Public Spaces for Community Well-Being.

Focus: Public Realm, Mobility Equity, and Strategic Placemaking

Goals: Foster a thriving public realm through complete streets, inclusive placemaking, and community-serving infrastructure that reflects Mount Dennis' cultural identity, improves everyday accessibility, and supports social, economic, and environmental well-being.

Why This Matters for Preventing Displacement

At the Summit, residents shared powerful reflections on how public spaces—parks, trails, basketball courts, community centres, and local shops—make Mount Dennis feel like home. They expressed a strong desire for spaces that celebrate the community's cultural diversity, support youth, and foster a safer, more walkable neighbourhood. At the same time, many voiced frustration over the loss and deterioration of existing spaces due to construction, closures, and neglect. Residents emphasized that public space is not just for recreation—it is where culture, identity, and relationships are expressed, nurtured, and sustained.

Investing in creating complete communities strengthens social cohesion while improving safety, accessibility, and mental well-being.²¹ Strategic Placemaking²² offers a powerful approach to align equitable development goals with improvements to the built environment—helping create vibrant, complete neighbourhoods grounded in community identity. Coordinating arts and cultural initiatives, enhancing green space and mobility access, and supporting safety and inclusive economic opportunity all contribute to dynamic

²¹ Canadian Urban Institute, 2025

²² Wyckoff et al., 2015

public environments that attract residents, businesses, and creatives while encouraging intercultural exchange and intergenerational living.²³

A vibrant public realm delivers wide-ranging benefits—economic, cultural, social, and environmental. Walkable neighbourhoods generate higher economic returns, with office rents earning \$8.88 more per square foot annually, residential rents increasing by \$301.76 per month, and retail sales rising by up to 80%.²⁴

Streets designed for pedestrians and cyclists using features like protected bike lanes have been shown to increase nearby retail sales by up to 49%.²⁵ Meanwhile, every \$1 invested in public park improvements yields up to \$100 in economic benefits, including enhanced community cohesion and local economic activity.²⁶ Well-maintained and culturally inclusive public spaces also contribute to reduced crime and improved perceptions of safety.²⁷

Strategy in Action

Placemaking initiatives are central to supporting economic and cultural recovery—especially in communities facing displacement due to transit-oriented development or broader economic shocks like COVID-19. Across North America, **Cultural Districts Programs** have been used to preserve long standing small businesses that serve as cornerstones of neighbourhood identity and belonging.²⁸ For example, Toronto’s **Little Jamaica Cultural District Plan**—the first of its kind under the City’s *Cultural Districts Program* seeks to “strengthen local culture and communities, supports small businesses and retail, and promotes community-stewarded spaces”.²⁹

In many cities, arts and culture are not only tools for celebration but key strategies in anti-displacement, main street recovery, and inclusive entrepreneurship. Initiatives like **Reconnect Rondo’s African American Cultural Enterprise District** in St. Paul, Seattle’s **Cultural Spaces Agency** and the **Boston Ujima Project**, are leading examples of how cultural infrastructure can support commercial revitalization, affordable housing, workforce development, and community wealth-building in historically underserved areas. Since 2020, Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) across Toronto and Ontario have participated in the **I**

²³ Canadian Urban Institute, 2025

²⁴ Placemaking Europe, 2021

²⁵ Dunne, 2019

²⁶ Stahle, 2018

²⁷ Placemaking Europe, 2021

²⁸ Rodriguez et al., 2023

²⁹ City of Toronto, n.d.

HeART Main Street initiative (also known as *Main Street Art Challenge*), partnering with local artists to create public art that supports local tourism, safety, beautification, and community engagement efforts.

In Toronto's multicultural neighbourhoods, arts and cultural programming, public markets, and informal gathering spaces are vital for fostering innovation, immigrant integration, and social connection—especially in areas lacking green space or formal infrastructure. Projects like **plazaPOPS** and **Corner Commons** demonstrate how community-driven placemaking can support diverse- and immigrant-owned businesses and activate underused public spaces. City-wide efforts such as the **PlazaPOV study**, **RAC (Residential Apartment Commercial) Zoning**, and **Public Markets Action Plan** further emphasize the importance of creating culturally relevant food hubs, strengthening social ties, and expanding economic opportunities in equity-deserving communities through creative, co-located uses of space.

Making It Happen

1. **Co-Create a Placemaking and Public Realm Strategy:** Develop a community-led placemaking plan that brings together residents, artists, businesses, youth, and cultural leaders to shape public space. Coordinate across urban design, safety, programming, and cultural infrastructure to reflect the identity and histories of Mount Dennis and create inclusive spaces for gathering, expression, and economic activity.
2. **Launch a Main Street & Cultural Corridors Strategy:** In alignment with the new *10-Year Action Plan for Toronto's Economy (2025-2035)*,³⁰ partner with local BIAs, businesses, cultural groups, and community organizations to create a strategy for revitalizing key corridors and celebrating the diverse cultures prevalent in the area.³¹ Include investments in lighting, street furniture, cultural programming, safety measures, and storefront activations. Establish a local implementation team to oversee coordination and evaluation.
3. **Implement Complete Streets & Mobility Improvements:** Prioritize pedestrian, cycling, and transit upgrades—particularly near schools, apartment clusters, community hubs, and transit stations. Integrate features like accessible crossings, bike parking, traffic calming, and shaded seating to ensure all residents can travel safely and comfortably.
4. **Design for Intergenerational Inclusion:** Ensure that public infrastructure serves all ages—from child-friendly play features, to senior-accessible benches, washrooms,

³⁰ City of Toronto, 2024c

³¹ Common Bond Collective, 2021

and walking surfaces. Invest in parks and amenities that promote multigenerational connection, social inclusion, and recreation.

5. **Invest in Cultural Infrastructure & Community Facilities:** Preserve, retrofit, and expand access to affordable cultural and community spaces using tools such as CBAs, community benefit charges (CBCs), and surplus public property. Remove administrative barriers that prevent community access to public facilities.
6. **Enable Community Stewardship of Public Space:** Enable nonprofits, grassroots groups, and tenant associations to co-manage space and co-create programs. Establish clear pathways for communities to steward public assets through shared governance agreements and long-term support.
7. **Align with Climate Resilience and Green Infrastructure Goals:** Expand green infrastructure through community gardens, tree planting, rewilding, and climate-adaptive design—especially in flood-prone or heat-vulnerable areas. Use public realm investments to advance climate justice and promote Indigenous land stewardship and youth environmental leadership.
8. **Interconnect the Public Realm:** Improve physical and social connectivity between sidewalks, trails, parks, schools, and housing—particularly in areas fragmented by infrastructure. Strengthen connections to public amenities and retail for residents in rental towers and underserved pockets.
9. **Streamline Permitting and Regulations:** Update local zoning and permitting to enable more flexible, community-led activations of public and semi-public spaces. Simplify processes for markets, cultural events, public art, food vendors, and creative or entrepreneurial pop-ups.³²
10. **Enable Flexible, Multi-Use Public Spaces:** Update zoning to support temporary activations and adaptable spaces. Design and retrofit public spaces for seasonal and multi-purpose use—supporting informal economies, community gatherings, arts programming, and outdoor services. Prioritize infrastructure that can evolve with changing community needs and host multiple activities over time.

4. Mount Dennis Power: Develop Local Power Through Coordinated Partnerships, Participatory Planning, and Metrics.

Focus: Civic Infrastructure, Participatory Governance, Strategic Partnerships, and Accountability Metrics

³² City of Toronto, 2023; City of Toronto, 2024b

Goals: Build systems that shift decision-making power to the community by embedding participation in governance, formalizing cross-sector partnerships, resourcing community-led planning, oversight, and advocacy, and using transparent metrics to track progress, ensure accountability, and measure equity outcomes over time.

Why This Matters for Preventing Displacement

At the Summit, residents repeatedly called for more transparent systems, ongoing dialogue with institutions, and real decision-making influence—not just one-off consultations. When community members lack decision-making power, access to information, or the ability to influence outcomes, they are more vulnerable to displacement driven by outside interests.

Shifting power requires stronger partnerships between the City and trusted local organizations, embedding participatory planning processes, and implementing tools that track progress and equity outcomes. Tools like equitable development scorecards, community dashboards, and data-sharing platforms allow residents to hold institutions, developers, and third-party actors accountable. Tools such as participatory budgeting has shown measurable impact—in some jurisdictions increasing voter turnout by 7% and enabling municipalities to raise additional revenue.³³ For example, municipalities in Brazil using participatory budgeting collected 39% more in tax revenue than those that did not.³⁴

At the same time, long-term operational funding for grassroots and nonprofit organizations is essential to build the local capacity needed for sustained advocacy and systems change. Community coalitions—often key drivers of successful Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs)—can help secure lasting gains, with CBAs returning 1% to 4% of a project’s total value directly to communities.³⁵

By investing in civic and social infrastructure—not just buildings but governance, leadership, and organizing capacity—Mount Dennis can chart a future where residents are stewards of change, not bystanders to it.

Strategy in Action

Participatory governance, community capacity-building, and trust between residents and the City are essential pillars of effective anti-displacement strategies and community

³³ Participatory Budgeting Project, 2018; Wampler et al., 2021

³⁴ Touchton et al., 2019

³⁵ Galley, 2015

wealth-building.³⁶ In Toronto, Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) like Regent Park and Rexdale³⁷ demonstrate how organized coalitions can leverage development to secure tangible community gains. Similar efforts across the U.S.—such as the **Purple Line Corridor Coalition** in Maryland and the **Blue Line Extension Anti-Displacement Project** in Minnesota—show how public-private-community partnerships can deliver local benefits in the face of transit-oriented development. Formalized **community planning bodies**, such as the **City of Canada Bay Policy Panel** in Australia and Victoria, British Columbia’s **Community Association Land Use Committees (CALUCs)**, show how structured resident input can shape rezoning, planning, and the use of public land.

In other NIAs across Toronto, **participatory budgeting** has been piloted as a tool for equitable decision-making, as part of a broader trend seen in cities like Montréal, Vancouver, and Guelph.³⁸ Investments in **civic technology** can further strengthen transparency and engagement—such as Spain’s **Decide Madrid**, residents can propose and vote on policies, or Boston’s **Residential Displacement Risk Map**, which helps target investment in high-risk areas.

Finally, community-defined targets like those developed through **Equitable Development Scorecards**—are helping cities direct resources where they’re needed most. In Austin, Texas the community co-designed **Racial Equity Anti-Displacement Tool**, guides a \$300 million **Anti-Displacement Fund** tied to transit investments as part of their **Project Connect** initiative between the city, local transit agency, and community organizations. It supports land acquisition, affordable housing, and wealth-building, and includes a scorecard to ensure proposals reflect local priorities and address historical inequities.

Making it Happen

1. **Embed Local Leadership in Decision-Making:** Establish new and reinforce any existing formalized governance structures—such as partnership tables, implementation teams, or community advisory councils—that embed diverse stakeholders (e.g., tenant leaders, youth, anchor institutions, grassroots groups, and nonprofits) into planning, development review, and implementation processes. These bodies should have defined mandates, resourcing, and influence over timelines and investments.

³⁶ McKinley & McInroy, 2023

³⁷ Galley, 2015

³⁸ City of Toronto, 2019; Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs, 2019

2. **Coordinate Across Governments and Sectors:** Build alignment across City departments and with provincial and federal partners to streamline investments in housing, transit, education, climate resilience, and health. Use place-based strategies and intergovernmental working groups to coordinate resources, avoid duplication, and centre Mount Dennis' specific needs.
3. **Institutionalize Participatory Tools:** Integrate participatory budgeting, equitable development scorecards, and community review panels into all major planning and investment decisions. These tools must be ongoing—not one-off—and tied to key project phases such as pre-application consultation (PAC), community benefits negotiations, and monitoring of long-term outcomes.
4. **Develop Shared Data and Accountability Systems:** Create a community-driven data strategy with indicators that track equity outcomes like housing stability, access to services, climate targets, and community wealth. Use open data platforms, public dashboards, and community mapping tools to ensure transparency and allow residents to track commitments in real time.
5. **Invest in Local Organizational Capacity:** Support grassroots and nonprofit organizations with multi-year operational funding, governance training, investment readiness, and administrative support. Ensure groups have the capacity to manage public funds, lead planning processes, and deliver community programs at scale.
6. **Strengthen Community Coalitions and Peer Networks:** Foster collaboration between Mount Dennis groups and across sectors (e.g., housing, youth, arts, education) by supporting coalitions and peer networks. These alliances reduce competition, support knowledge-sharing, and amplify advocacy. Enable joint applications for funding, shared staff models, and coordinated campaigns.
7. **Leverage Public-Private-Community Partnerships for Equity:** Facilitate partnerships between community organizations and mission-aligned developers, employers, or investors to deliver shared benefits. Use tools like Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs), social procurement policies, and community investment funds to ensure private development contributes to community wealth, affordable space, and local employment.
8. **Support Civic Tech and Local Knowledge Platforms:** Invest in tools that help residents navigate, influence, and monitor city decisions—like SMS-based updates, multilingual feedback portals, or civic mapping apps. Expand community communication infrastructure such as bulletin boards, e-newsletters, and information hubs to bridge digital and language divides.

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