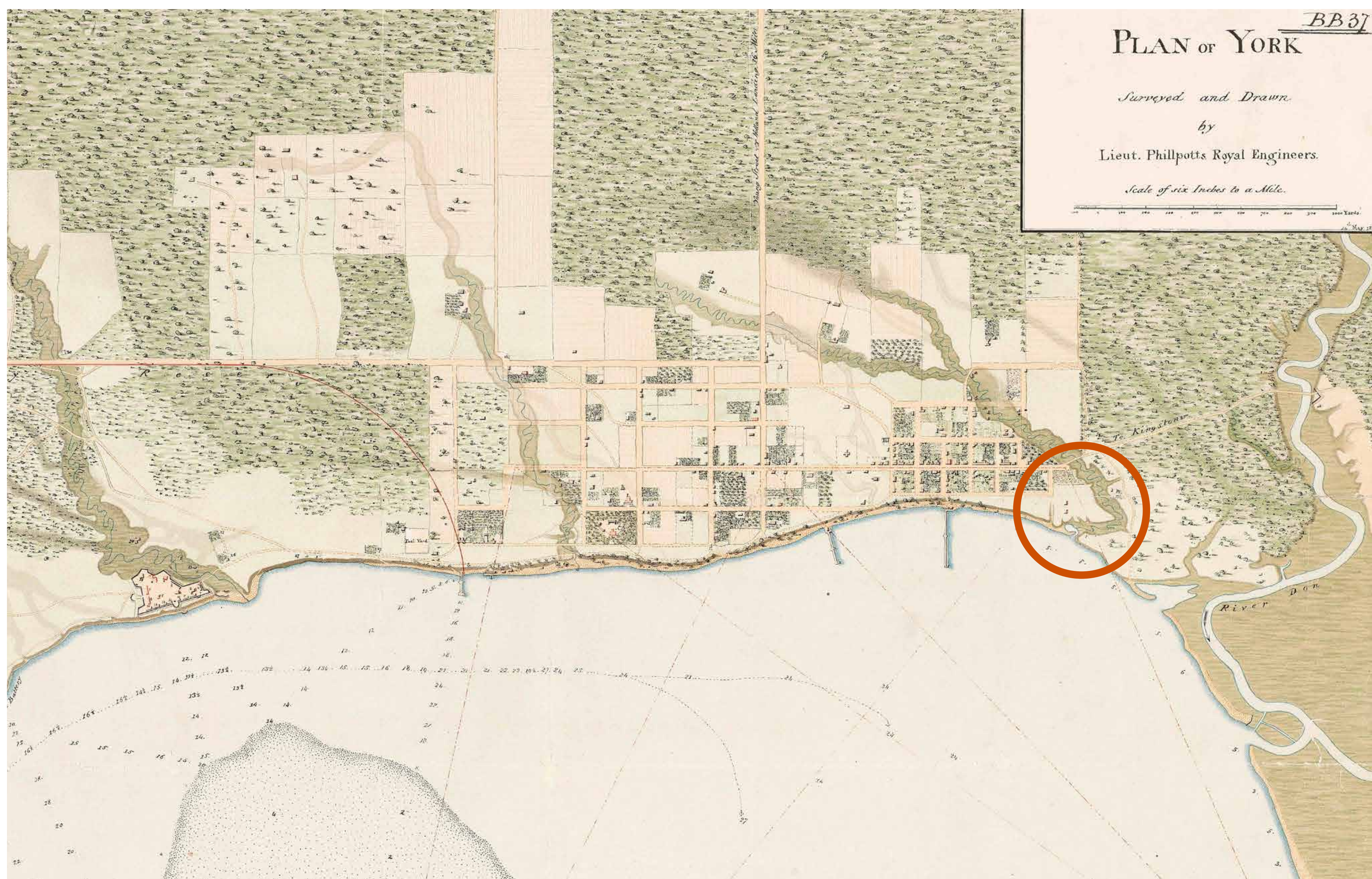


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# THE FIRST PARLIAMENT PROJECT

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Town of York (Phillipotts 1818)

The First Parliament site (located at Front and Parliament) is one of Toronto's most important heritage resources. The site was known to Indigenous peoples, and played a vital role in the governance of Upper Canada and the development of the City as a vital focus of industry, commerce, culture and government.

The First Parliament Project is sponsored by the City of Toronto in partnership with the Ontario Heritage Trust. The project includes two phases. Phase 1 is the preparation of a Heritage Interpretation Strategy, which identifies the historical narratives and how they will be told. Phase 2 is the preparation of a Master Plan for the site that sets out the primary interpretive features as well as other uses important to the community.

Local community groups and the general public are important participants in the Project.



# STUDY PURPOSE

The First Parliament Project will develop a Heritage Interpretation Strategy that will later inform the preparation of a Master Plan for the site.

## What is Heritage Interpretation?

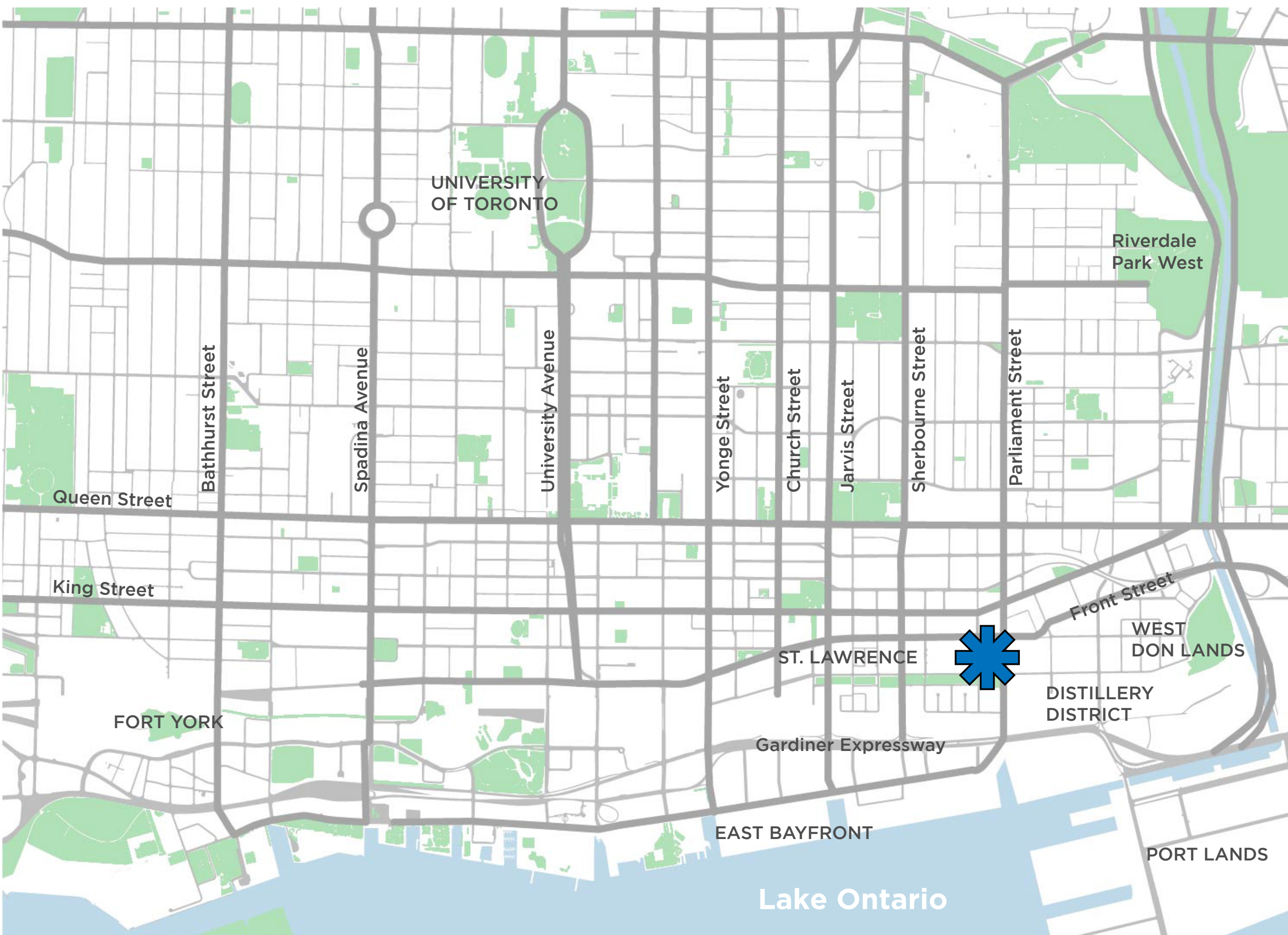
Heritage Interpretation uncovers and develops the stories that are part of the site. This can help to identify how audiences will interact with the site, and how best to define the media (or tools) through which the stories will be told.

## What is a Master Plan?

The Master Plan builds on the heritage values laid out in the Heritage Interpretation Strategy, creates a vision and guiding principles, and finally develops a plan for proposed uses. The Master Plan illustrates what the site might ultimately look like and provides guidance for future implementation.

## Process

Public and stakeholder consultation will be central throughout the project. The Project Process and Schedule (to the right) identifies key project milestones and consultation events.



**Site Location.** The First Parliament site is located at the intersection of Front and Parliament Streets, in the heart of what was once the Town of York. It is a full city block, bounded on the west by Berkeley Street and on the south by Parliament Square Park.



Project Process and Schedule



# RESEARCH AND BACKGROUND

This panel summarizes and illustrates the information gathered from archival research and on-site investigation.

## NATURAL HISTORY AND EARLY SETTLEMENT

The First Parliament site is located at the former mouth of the Little Don River (Taddle Creek) at the edge of Lake Ontario. It has been the site of human activity for many centuries.

Approximately 13,000 years ago the last ice age glaciers melted northward and left an ancient meltwater lake known as Lake Iroquois. Lake Iroquois water levels stood some 40 meters higher than the current Lake Ontario. The winding Davenport Road and a rocky outcrop south of St. Clair Avenue mark the former shoreline of Lake Iroquois.

Early Indigenous communities settled along the north shores of Lake Ontario and used the waterways as trade routes, linking settlements to each other.

The 1600s brought European contact with the Indigenous people of the lower Great Lakes. In 1763 the Royal Proclamation established government of these territories.



The painting titled 'Looking West from About Mouth of Don River' is an example of the natural environment of the area around the town of York. (Elizabeth Posthume Simcoe, 1793)



1904 Map showing an overlay of the ancient Lake Iroquois shoreline overlaid on the 1904 shoreline of Lake Ontario. Present day Toronto is highlighted. (Coleman, 1904)

## CONSUMERS' GAS

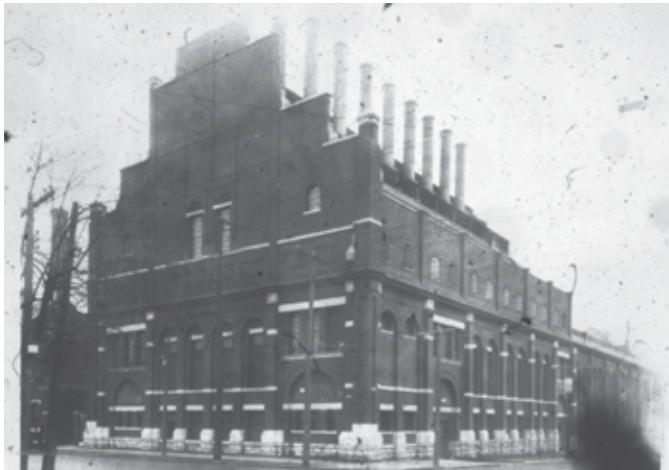
Gas produced on the First Parliament site by the Consumers' Gas Company helped to fuel the industrial growth of Toronto.

Following the closure of the Gaol, no dedicated uses were located at the First Parliament Site. Around 1879, Consumers' Gas acquired the property to expand their gas manufacturing for a burgeoning Toronto. The Consumers' Gas complex encompassed over two and a half city blocks. The First Parliament property included a brick coal shed, the retort house, central courtyard, auxiliary buildings and rail spurs.

The Consumers' Gas Company sold the property in 1964. Today, the remaining century old gas-purifying buildings are home to the Canadian Opera Company and the Toronto Police Service's 51 Division.



Aerial view of Consumers' Gas looking southeast, 1950s



Retort House, after renovation. (Consumers' Gas 1925)



Coal Conveyor, Consumers' Gas, 1923



Coal Drop, Consumers' Gas, 1923

## ARCHAEOLOGY

The physical evidence of the site's multi-layered history has been glimpsed through archaeological investigations.

### Traces of History

Archaeological research and on-site investigation has definitively confirmed that this site was the home of the First and Second Parliament Buildings, the notorious Home District Gaol and the dynamic Consumers' Gas operations. The locations and outlines of previous buildings and features have been reconstructed on the present site and, in most cases, confirmed through archaeological testing



### Features and Artifacts

On-site investigations uncovered extensive building remains and artifacts from the Consumers' Gas era. The physical evidence of the First Parliament Buildings and the Home District Gaol is much more subtle, sometimes even ephemeral.



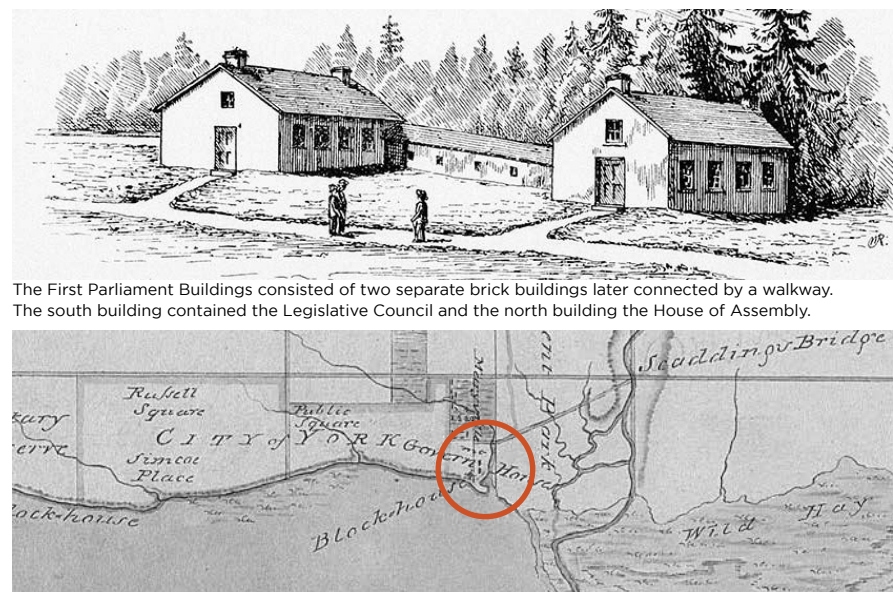
## FIRST AND SECOND PARLIAMENTS

Between 1795 and 1824, the First and Second Parliament Buildings of Upper Canada were located at the intersection of modern-day Front and Parliament Streets in the former Town of York, now Toronto.

### First Parliament Buildings

The First Parliament Buildings were used by Upper Canada's Legislative Council and the House of Assembly to govern Upper Canada. They were also used for government and public events, as temporary housing for immigrants, and as a congregation space for the Anglican Church.

During the War of 1812, the buildings were burned down by American soldiers in the 1813 invasion of York.



The 1802 Plan of the 36th Acres in the Township of York in Upper Canada shows the First Parliament Buildings and Blackhouse just southeast of the emerging 'Town of York' at the mouth of Taddle Creek.

### Second Parliament Building

The Parliament Buildings were reconstructed and were back in use by 1820. In 1824, the Second Parliament Buildings accidentally burned down, likely the result of an overheated chimney flue.

Following the destruction of the Second Parliament Buildings the Legislative Assembly moved to the Toronto General Hospital at King and John Streets, then to the York Courthouse, and eventually to Simcoe Place. Today, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario sits at Queen's Park.



1820-1824, (John Ross Robertson, c1900)



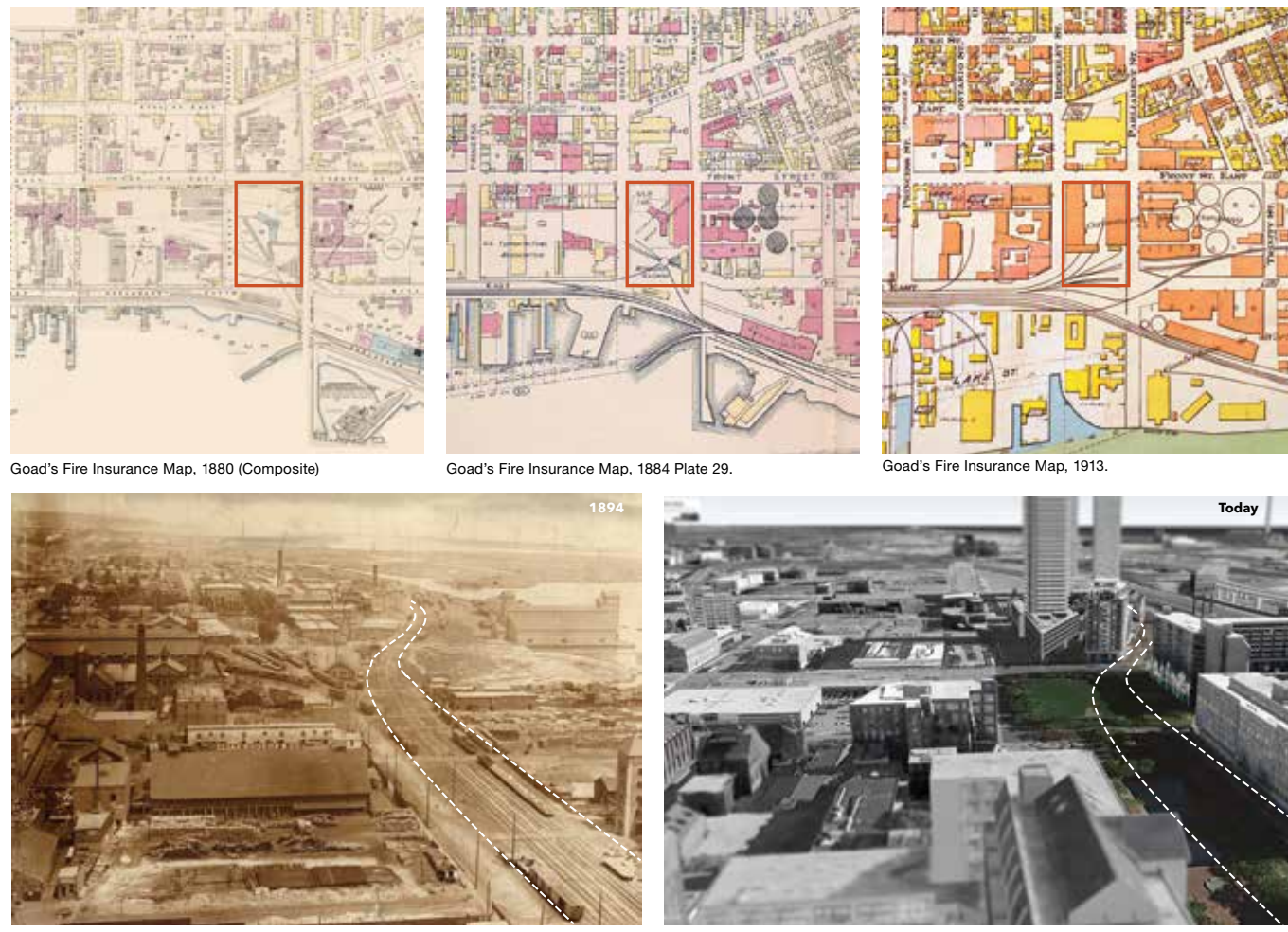
1830, J.S. Chewett Plan showing the survey of lands east of the Town of York. The Second Parliament Building is located south of Palace Street in the same location as the first buildings.

## THE RAILWAY ERA

The First Parliament site was an important juncture along the corridor of railway lines that transformed Toronto's waterfront and supported the rapid growth of the City.

Until the late 1920s, the primary railway corridor through Toronto lay along what is now the Esplanade. The First Parliament site was an important terminus that featured a turntable, depot and spur lines, which in turn serviced the Consumers' Gas Company and other industries in the area.

With the creation of the St. Lawrence neighbourhood starting in the mid-1970s, the Esplanade was eventually transformed into the linear series of community parks that we see today. Parliament Square Park was redeveloped on the former rail yards in the early 2000s.



The Esplanade extended from the Don River to Spadina Avenue, a distance of approximately 3.5 km (2.1 miles). The Grand Trunk Railway, led its tracks stop and to the rear of the shore wall. The line great spans making up Basil's Creek Park and Parliament Park, south and west of the Parliament site, preserve the alignment of this railway corridor. Image above left: Toronto Harbour, Looking Along Esplanade, (Joseph Bruce, 1994). Image above right: present day Esplanade (Google Maps)

## CONNECTIONS TO OTHER SITES

Throughout Toronto and beyond, there are a number of present day places that are closely associated with the history of the First Parliament site.



## HOME DISTRICT GAOL

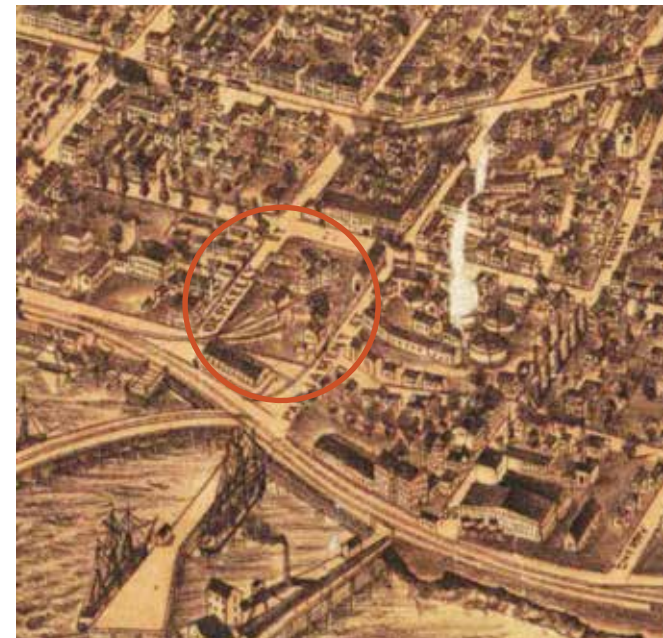
From 1837-1864 the property was the site of the city's first purpose-built prison — the Home District Gaol (Jail).

In 1837, a call for designs to construct the city's third jail on the vacant First Parliament site was initiated. John Howard's winning plans consisted of a central five-storey octagonal tower with three three-storey high radiating wings, influenced by the panopticon concept of prison design. The Home District Gaol was opened in 1840, although only two wings were completed.

The jail was used by the British Crown to incarcerate convicted felons, the mentally ill, and debtors, and also hold people awaiting trial. Men, women, and children shared the same space. The Home District Gaol was occupied until 1860 when all its functions were moved to the newly built Don Jail in 1864. The vacant building remained standing until 1887.



1880 Water colour view of the Gaol by Frederic Victor Poole.



1870 Bird's Eye View of Toronto, 1870 showing the growth of the City around the Gaol. (P.A. Gross 1874)



Toronto in 1849 by Edmund Wily Grier. The Home District Gaol is encircled.

## THE SITE TODAY

Located in the heart of the Old Town of York, the First Parliament site is historically significant, representing the political, cultural and industrial forces that helped shape Toronto and the Province.

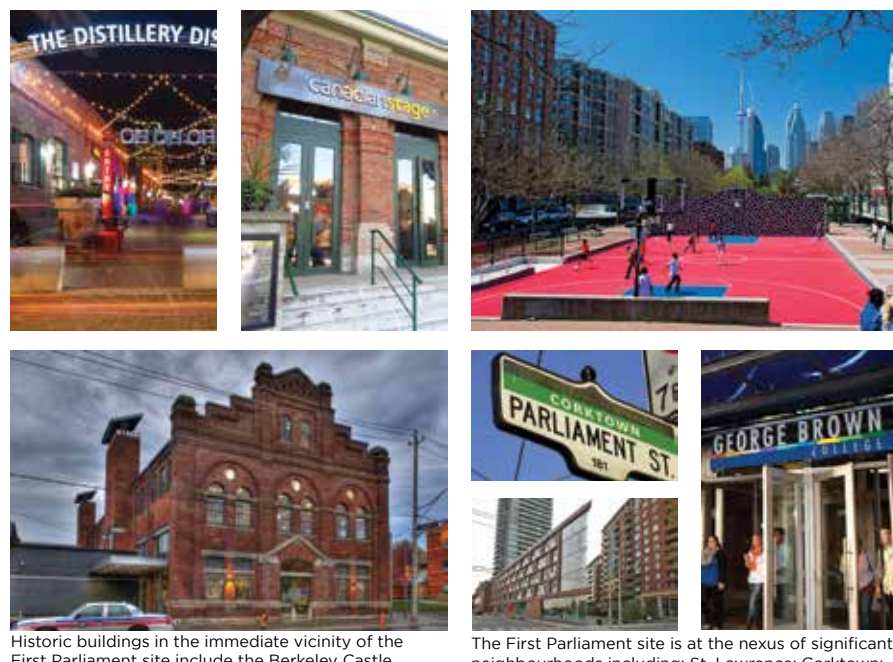
Since the demolition of the Consumers' Gas facilities in the early 1960s, the site has been occupied by automobile-related commercial activities. What archaeological features and artifacts still remain today have been protected by these low-intensity uses.

Over the past 10 to 20 years, the area has witnessed a rebirth as a mixed-use community. Many historic buildings have been converted into offices and studios, and former parking lots are rapidly being redeveloped for commercial and residential purposes.

The evolution of the area will place the First Parliament site at the centre of vital and lively neighbourhoods. These include the St. Lawrence Community, Distillery District, Central Waterfront, West Don Lands, Portlands, East Bayfront, and the newly announced Sidewalk Labs project.



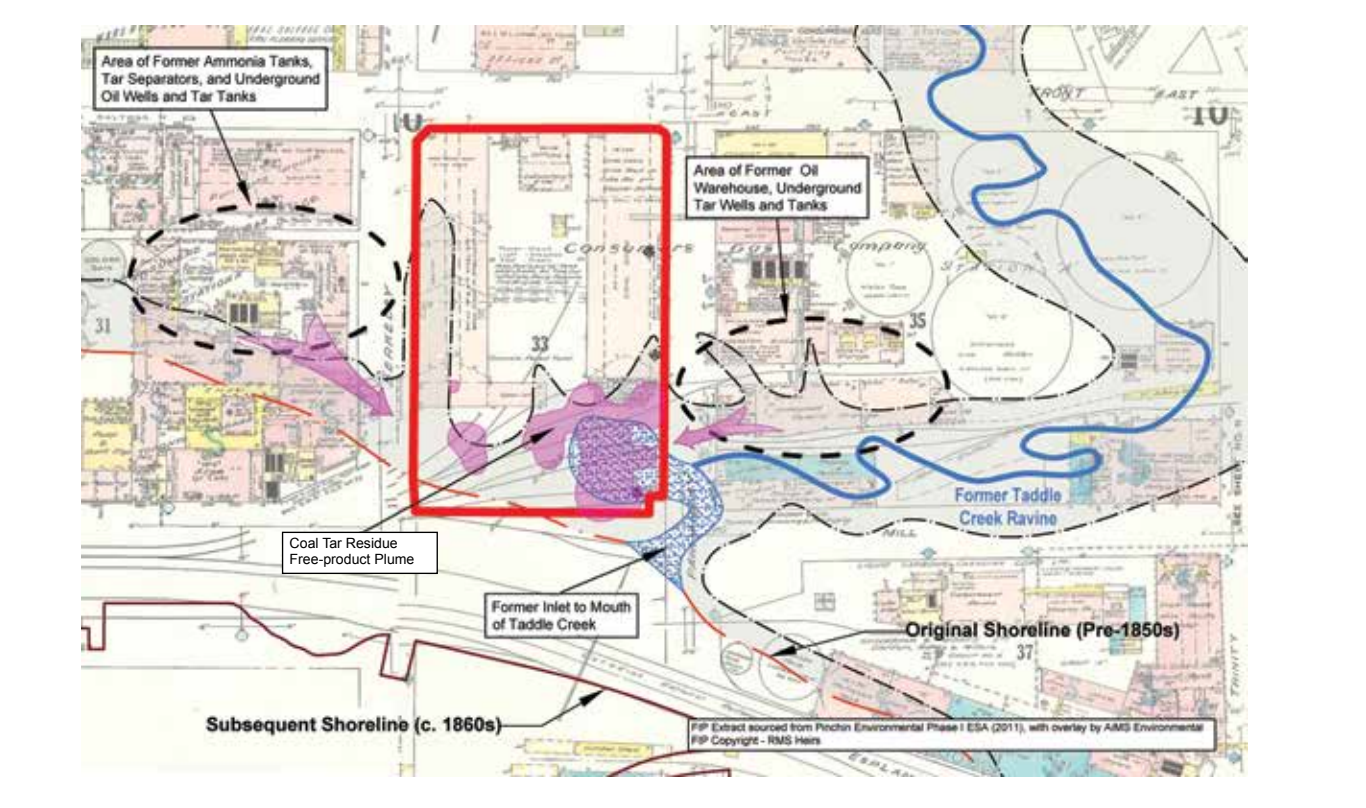
The Province of Ontario, through the Ontario Heritage Trust, owns the northwest quadrant of the site (205, Front Street East). The City of Toronto owns the other three properties that make up the First Parliament site (277 Front Street East, 44 Parliament Street and 25 Berkeley Street).



Historic buildings in the immediate vicinity of the First Parliament site include the Distillery District, Gooderham Works buildings (Distiller District), Gooderham Works, the Imperial Oil Opera Theatre and Toronto Police, Esplanade at Parliament.

## ENVIRONMENT

Previous industrial uses, both on the site and within the surrounding area, have resulted in severe environmental degradation.



Various historic, contaminating activities both on the site and within the larger surroundings.

### History and the Environment

Between lake-filling, the railways and the Consumers' Gas Company, much of the past 150 years involved activities that dramatically changed the First Parliament site. In particular, the Consumers' Gas Company produced toxic materials that entered the atmosphere as well as local soils and groundwater. While significant, these site conditions are not uncommon throughout post-industrial urban centres, including downtown Toronto.

### Environmental Considerations

Planning for the Historic Interpretation and use of the First Parliament site will need to take these conditions into consideration. Fortunately, various technical measures have been developed over the years for dealing with these kinds of conditions. The development of contaminated sites is now tightly controlled by legislation emanating from both the provincial and municipal levels of government.



# HERITAGE INTERPRETATION STRATEGY

The Heritage Interpretation Strategy becomes one of the pillars of the Master Plan and informs future interpretive planning.

The Heritage Interpretation Strategy is the first stage in interpreting the site. Built on research and public engagement, it identifies the stories and narrative themes to be presented, and defines the means of communication. The goal is to ensure that all stories are accessible, relatable and engaging.

The First Parliament site will be a dynamic place inviting all people to interact and contribute to a shared history. Employing both high and low-tech means of interpretation, the First Parliament project will celebrate the site’s long history, peeling back the layers of time to reveal the site’s many stories.

### The Core Message:

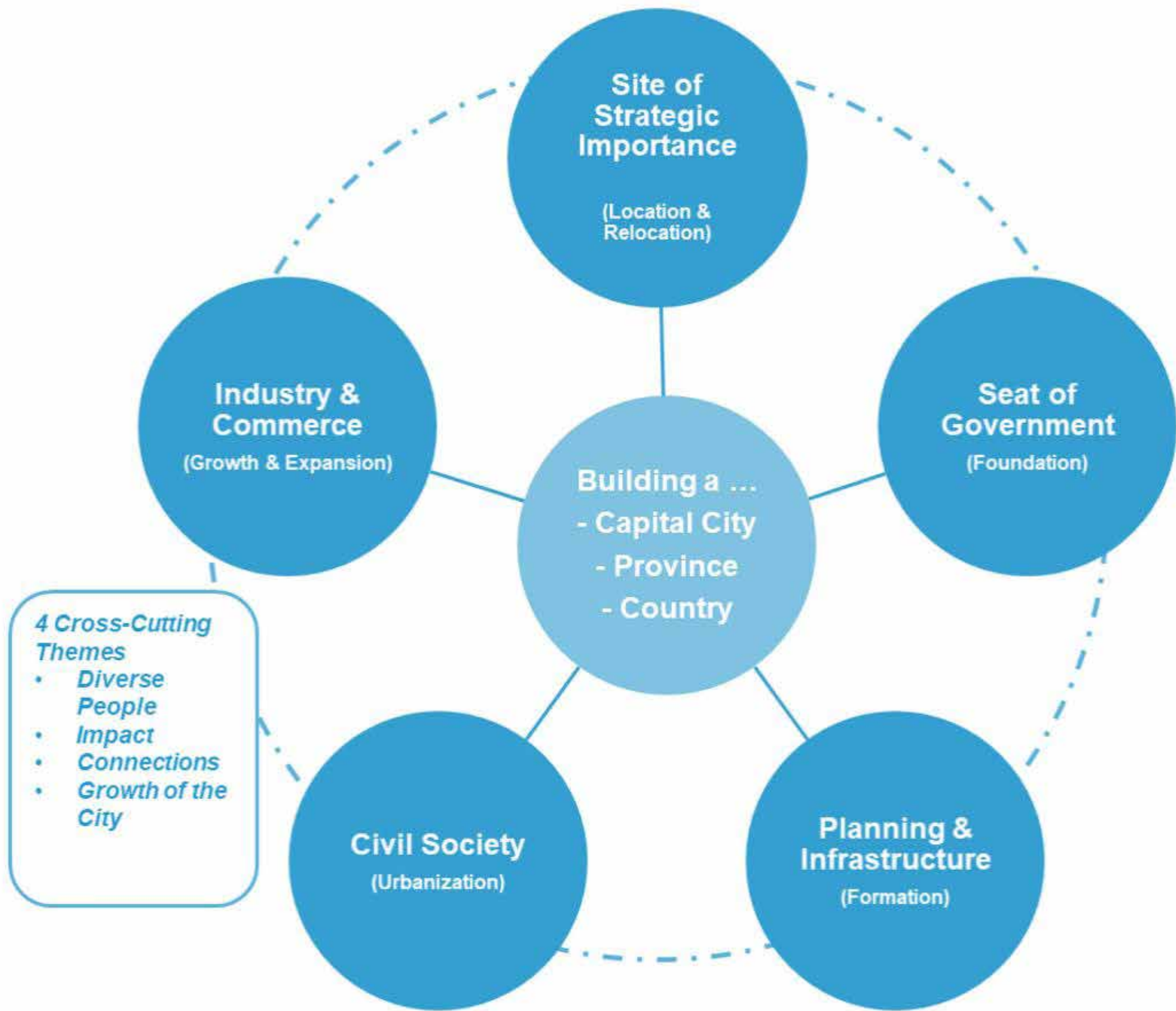
*This site and its evolution helped establish Toronto (York) as a founding capital city and directly impacted the formation, development and growth of the Province of Ontario and Canada. Toronto became the home of Upper Canada’s first dedicated parliament buildings. The diverse people, decisions and events associated with the site link the past with the present.*

The Core Message recognizes that:

- The history of this site and Canada begins with its First Peoples;
- Formalizing and establishing Upper Canada’s administrative headquarters at this strategic site was the first step in building York (Toronto) as an early capital city in what would become Canada;
- While the Parliament era is significant, other eras of occupation, both before and after, have also supported its role as a capital city over time;
- People, impact and connections are central to the story.



Phase 1 Engagement - The Public Lecture



### Interpretive Framework - Building a Capital City, Province, Country

The **interpretive framework** is the intellectual organization of the story underpinning an interpretation of a site. The interpretive framework employs a thematic approach, using key themes, sub-themes and connecting themes to tell the story and reinforce the core messages. The bubble diagram above articulates and structures the relationship between themes and subthemes, helping planners organize and present the relevant information. The key themes include:

**A Site of Strategic Importance** - This theme would examine the strategic importance of this site, including its early history as a gathering place, why it was chosen as the location for the capital of Upper Canada, and the competition for the capital in the lead up to a united Province of Canada and Confederation.

**Seat of Government** - This theme interprets how the parliament for Upper Canada was established as a legal entity and the seat of government, what early proceedings took place, who made the decisions, how those decisions came about, and the impact they had then and continue to have now.

**Planning and Infrastructure** - This theme would interpret construction of the first and second Parliament, how this was part of the wider urban planning of York (Toronto), how its presence made the city a target for attack and how many of the decisions regarding land made here impacted how the rest of the province (and the country) developed.

**Civil Society** - This theme would interpret how capital city status began to attract people to York (Toronto), who these immigrants were, how they lived, and how Toronto (York) has become one of the most culturally diverse cities in the world.

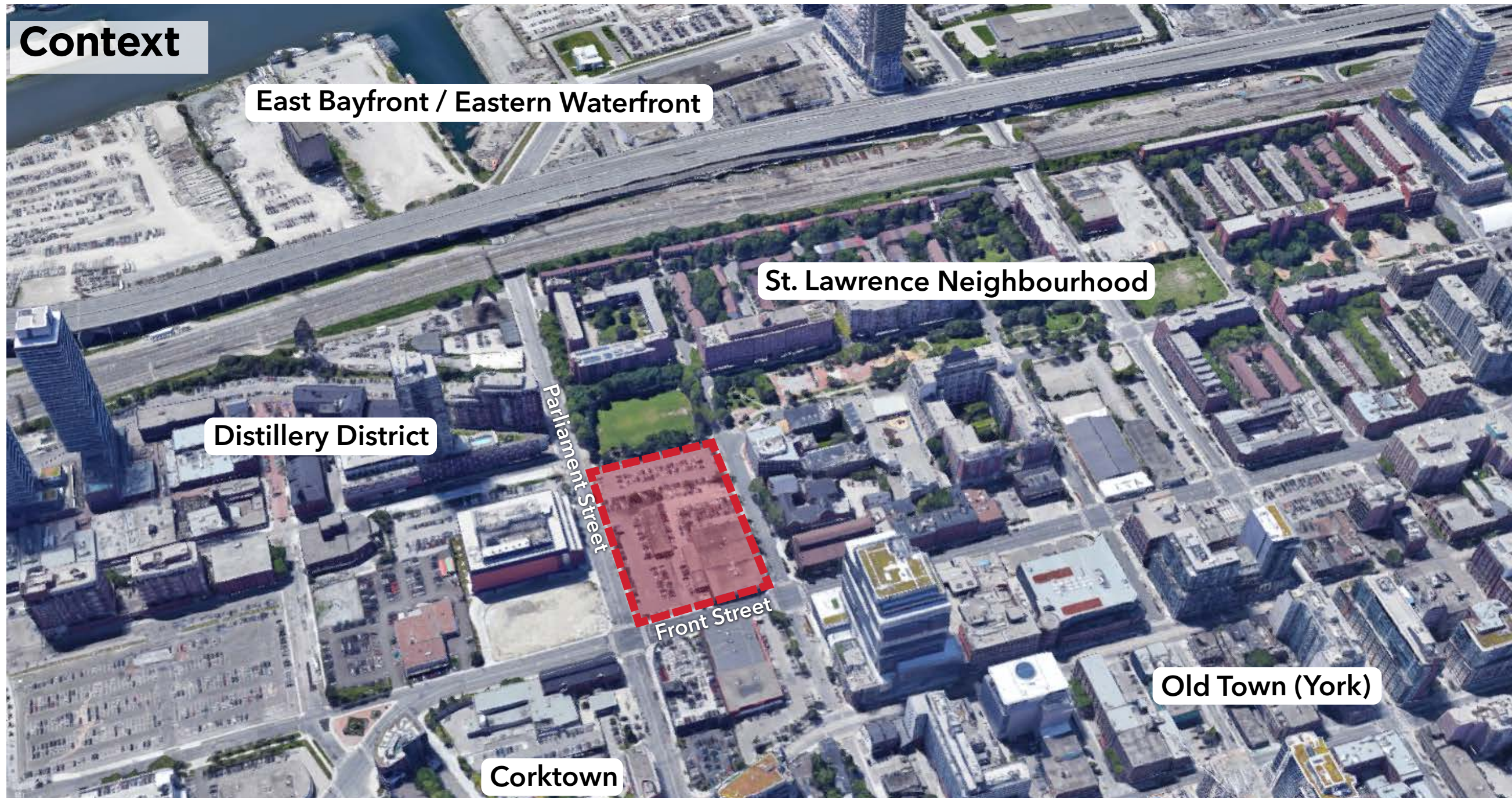
**Industry and Commerce** - This theme would interpret how became an important place for industry and commerce, beginning with Indigenous trade. During the First Parliament era, legislation enacted here helped to establish the Province’s first banking structure. The site later became a hub of industry as the home to Consumers’ Gas Company, the railway and the automotive sector.



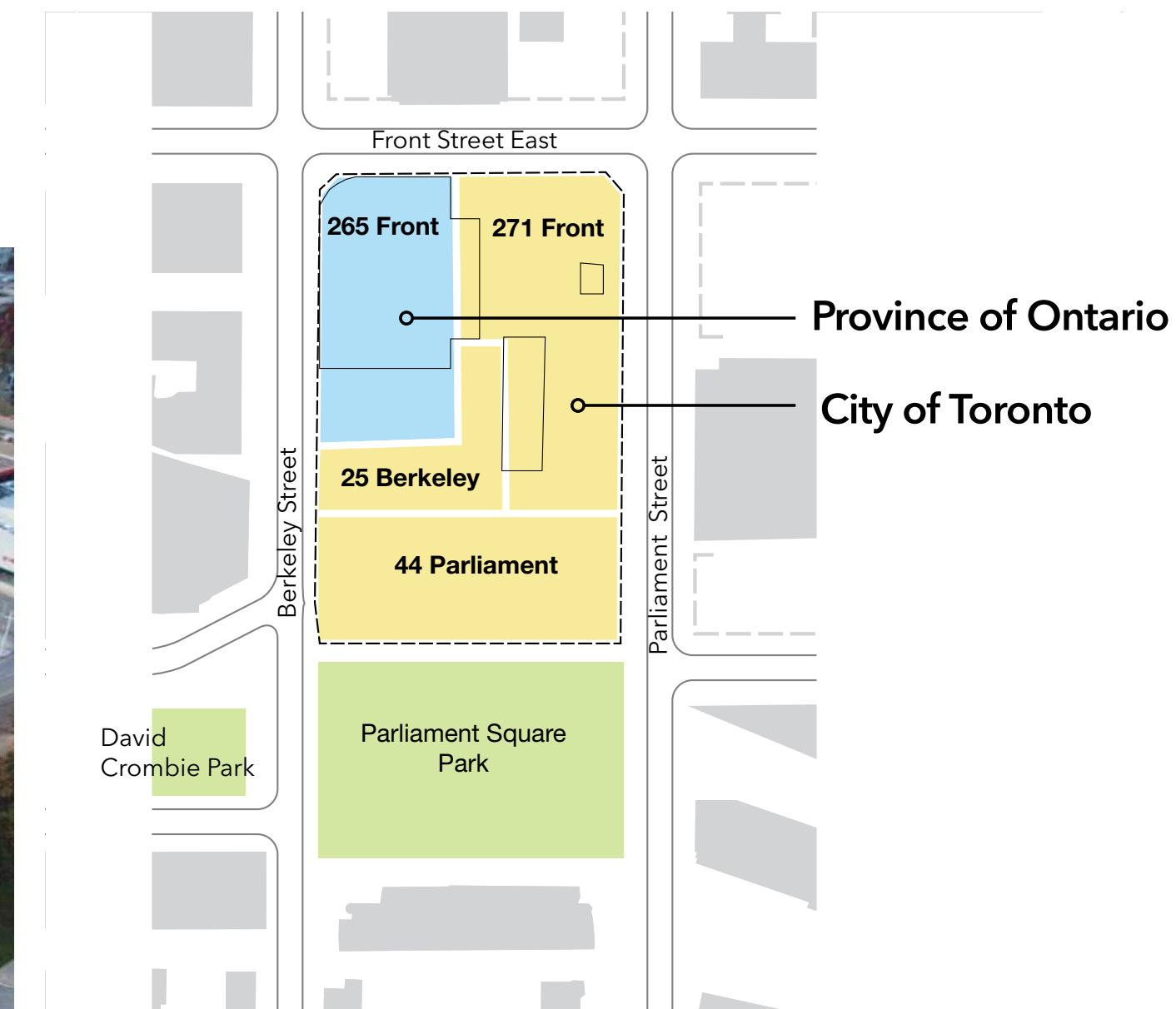
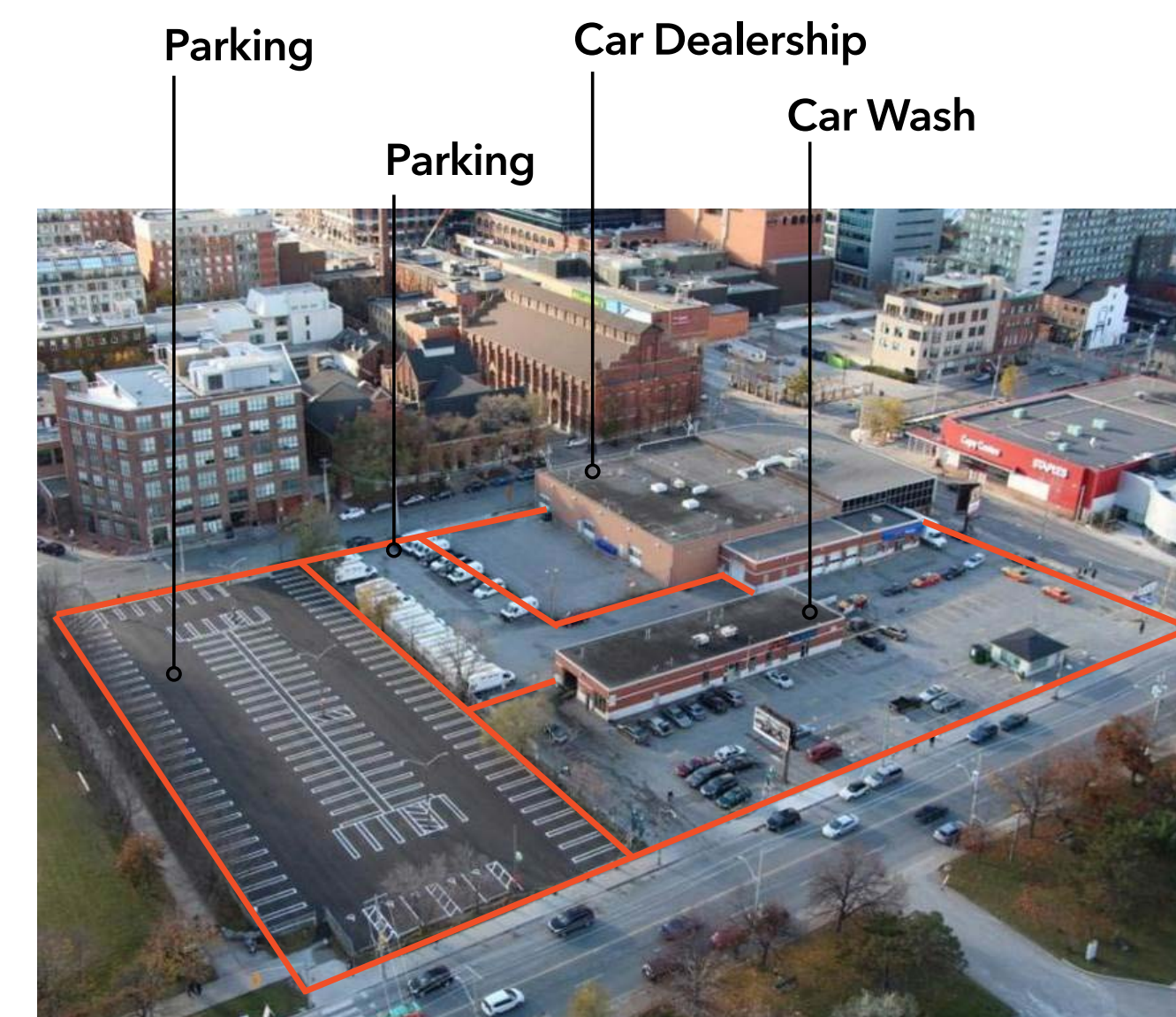
# SITE ANALYSIS

Understanding the context and features of the First Parliament site will influence what uses are selected and how they are best organized.

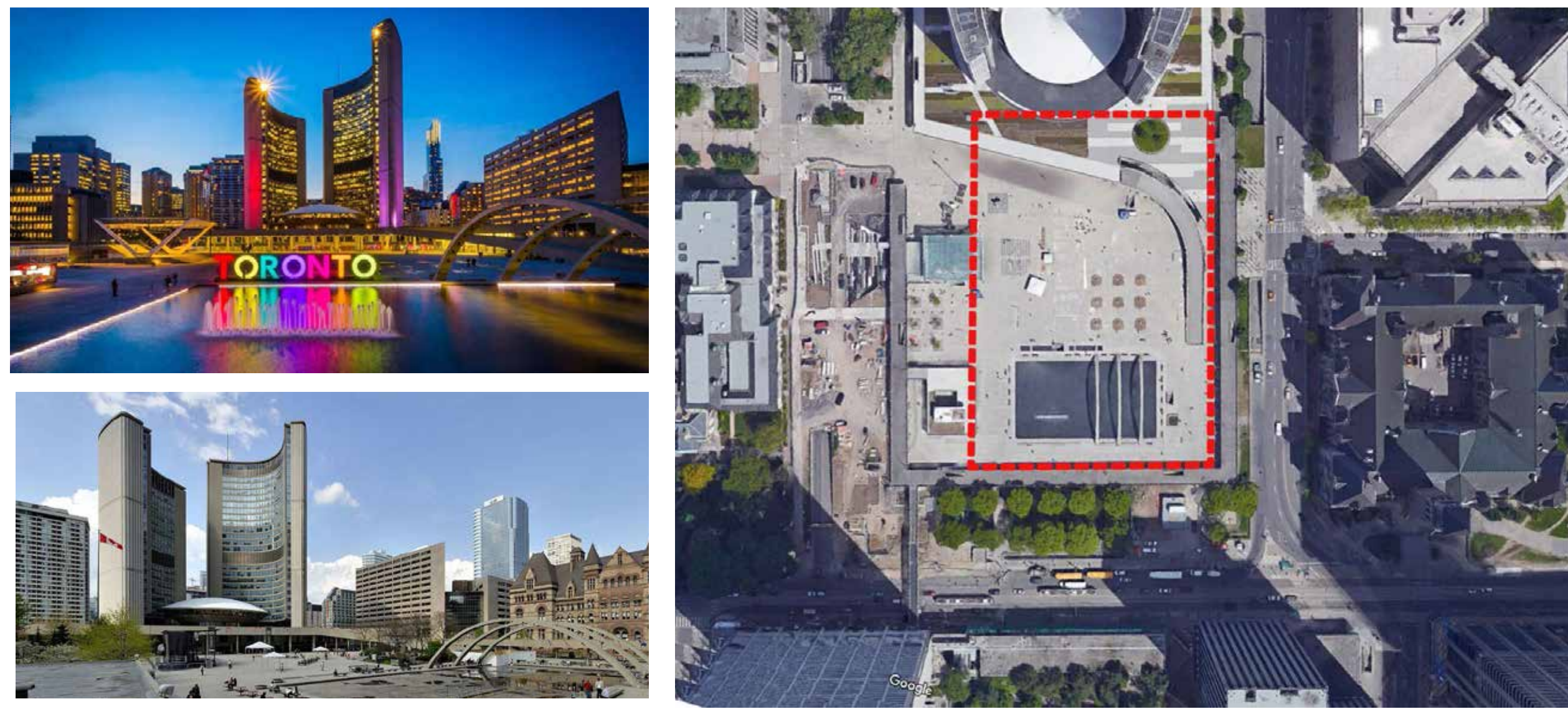
## Context



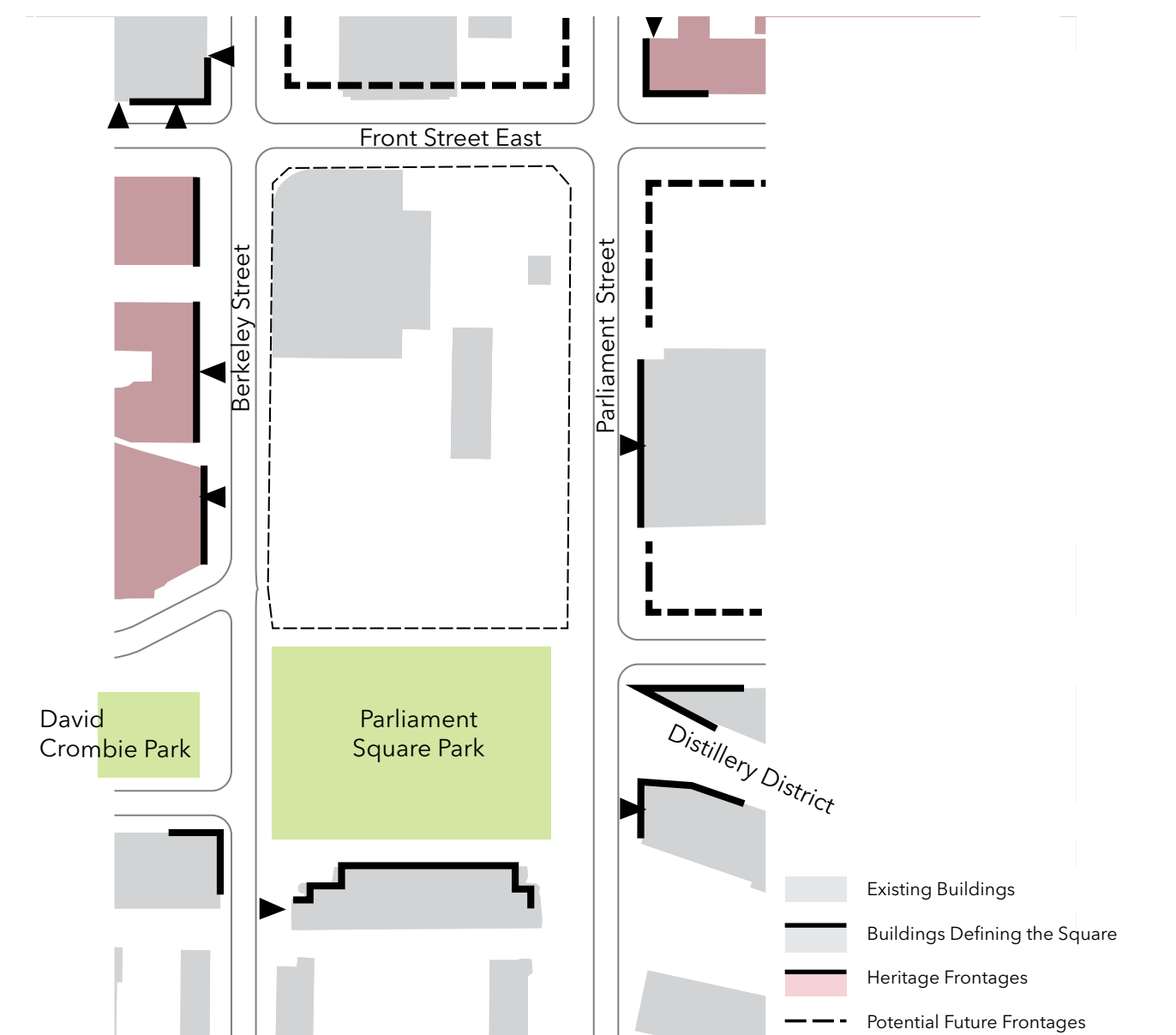
## Current Uses and Ownership



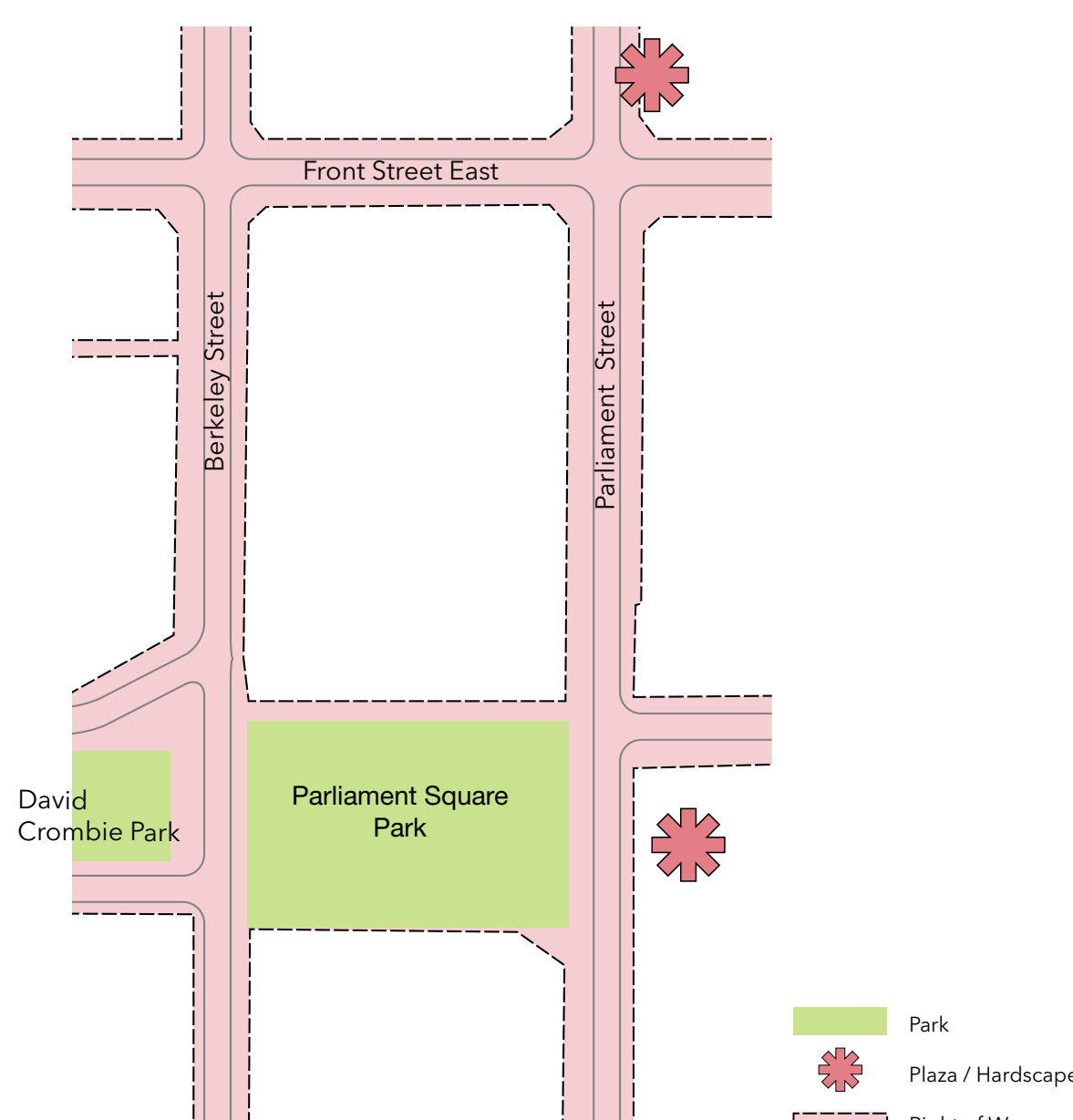
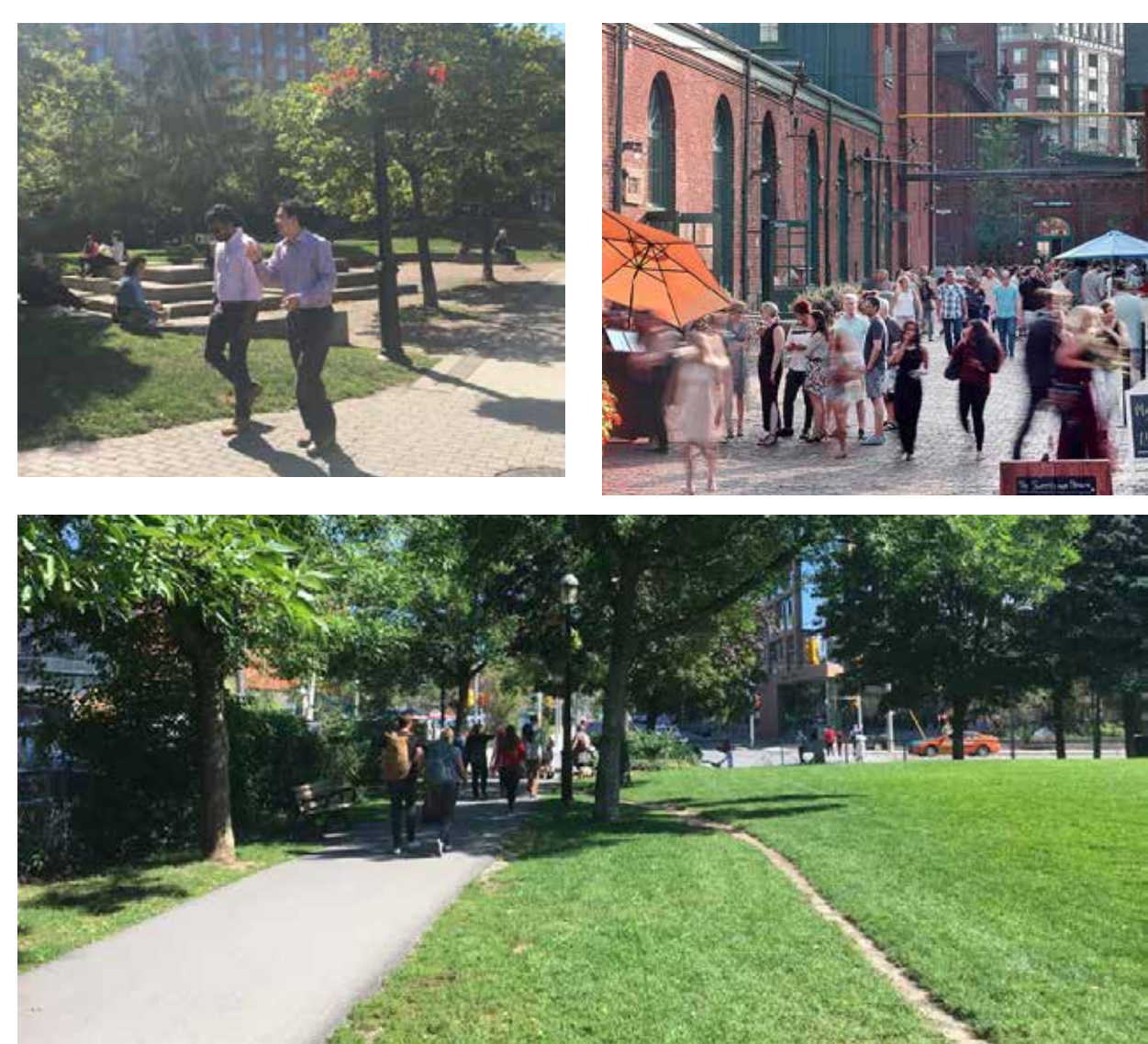
## Nathan Phillips Square



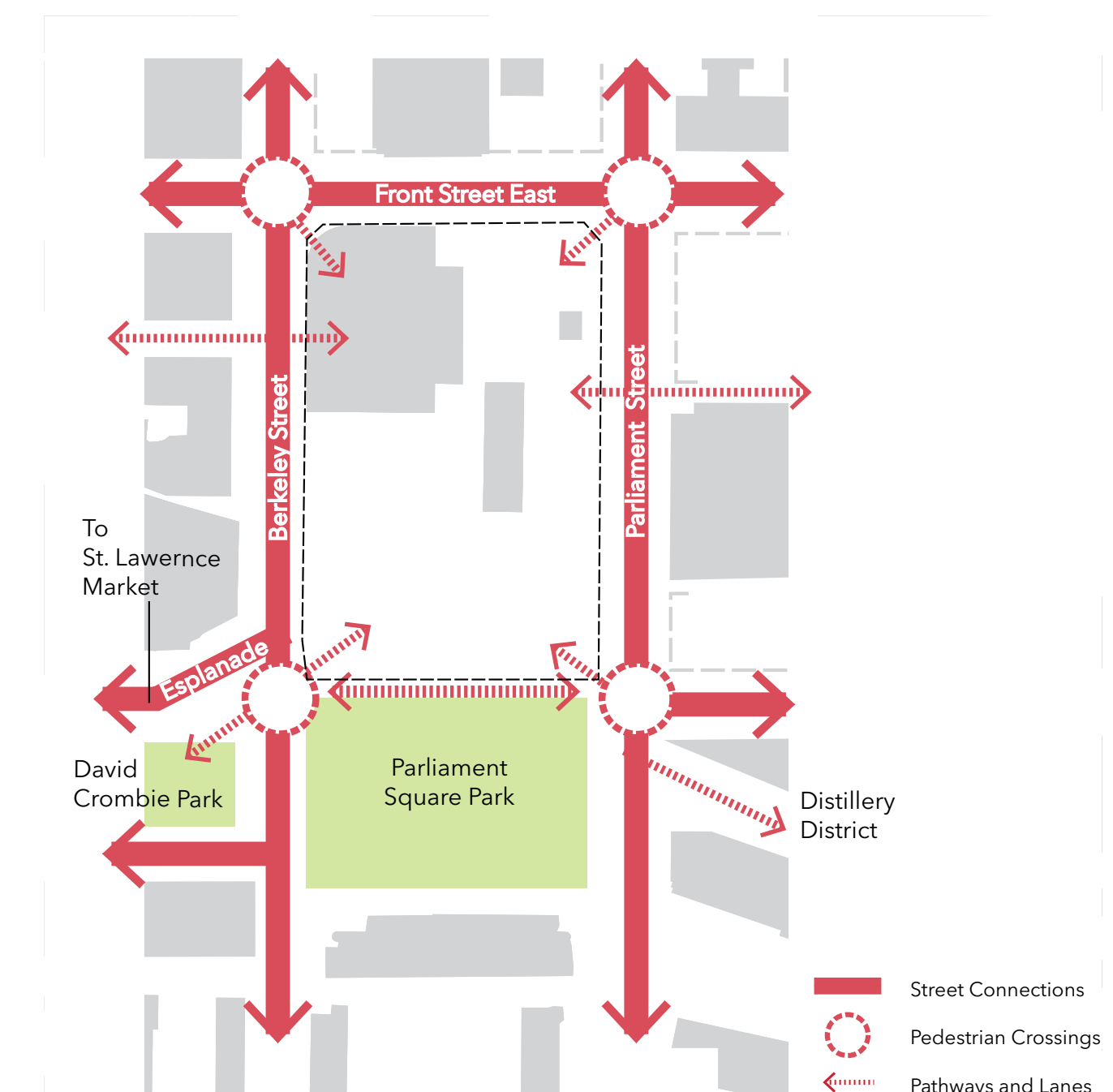
## Built Context



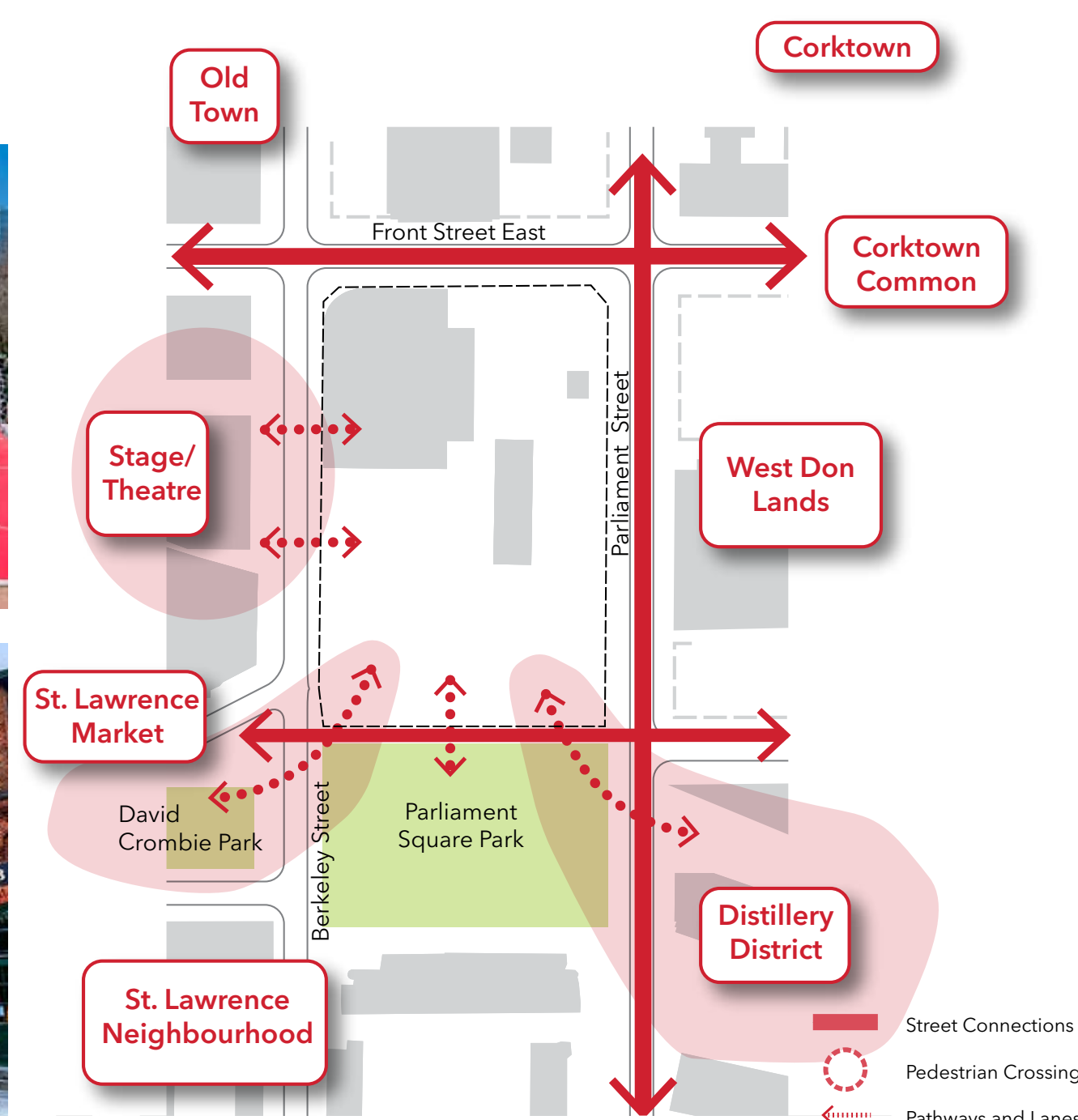
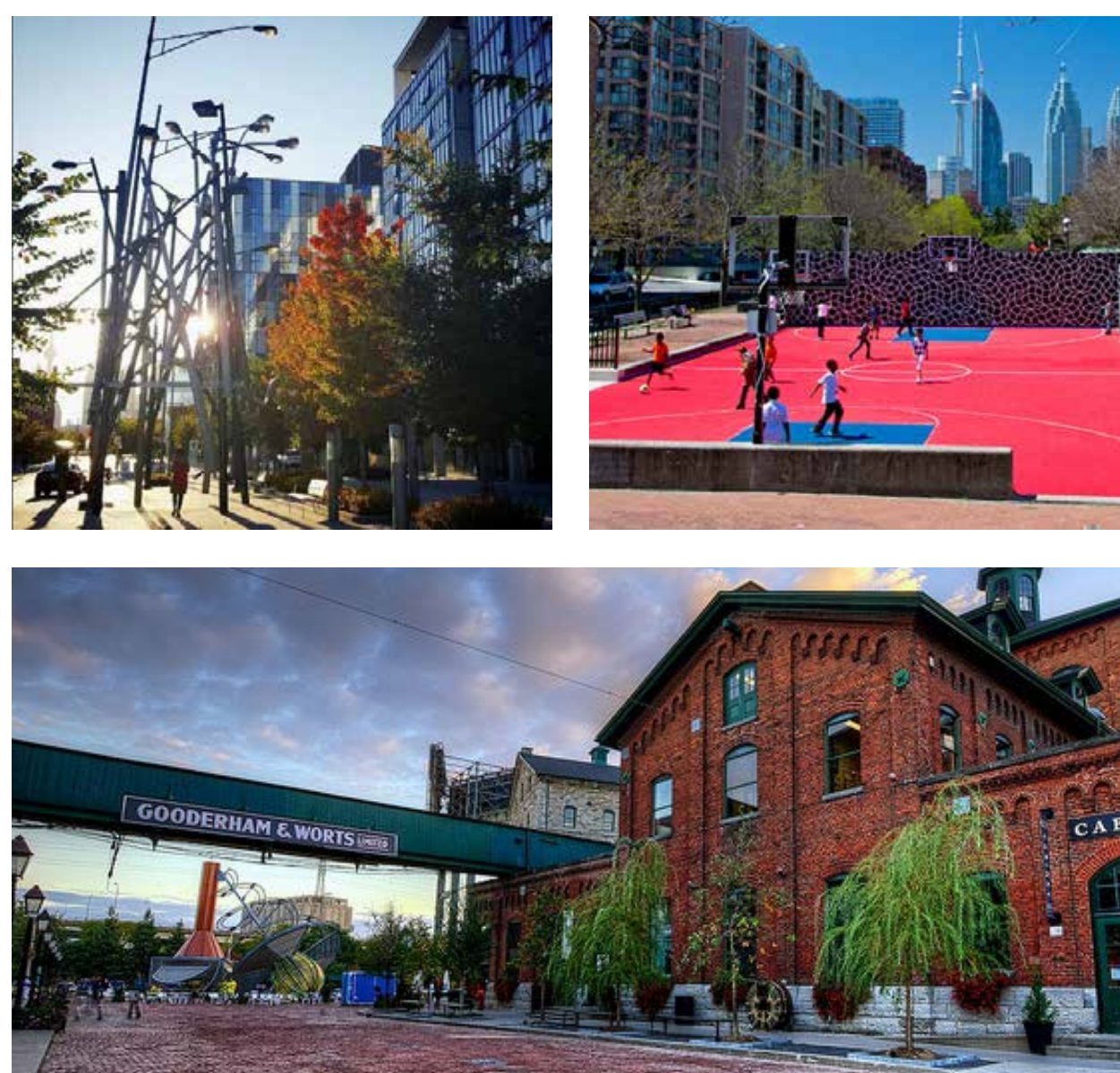
## Open Space Context



## Movement



## Connections



## Four Distinct Edges



### Front

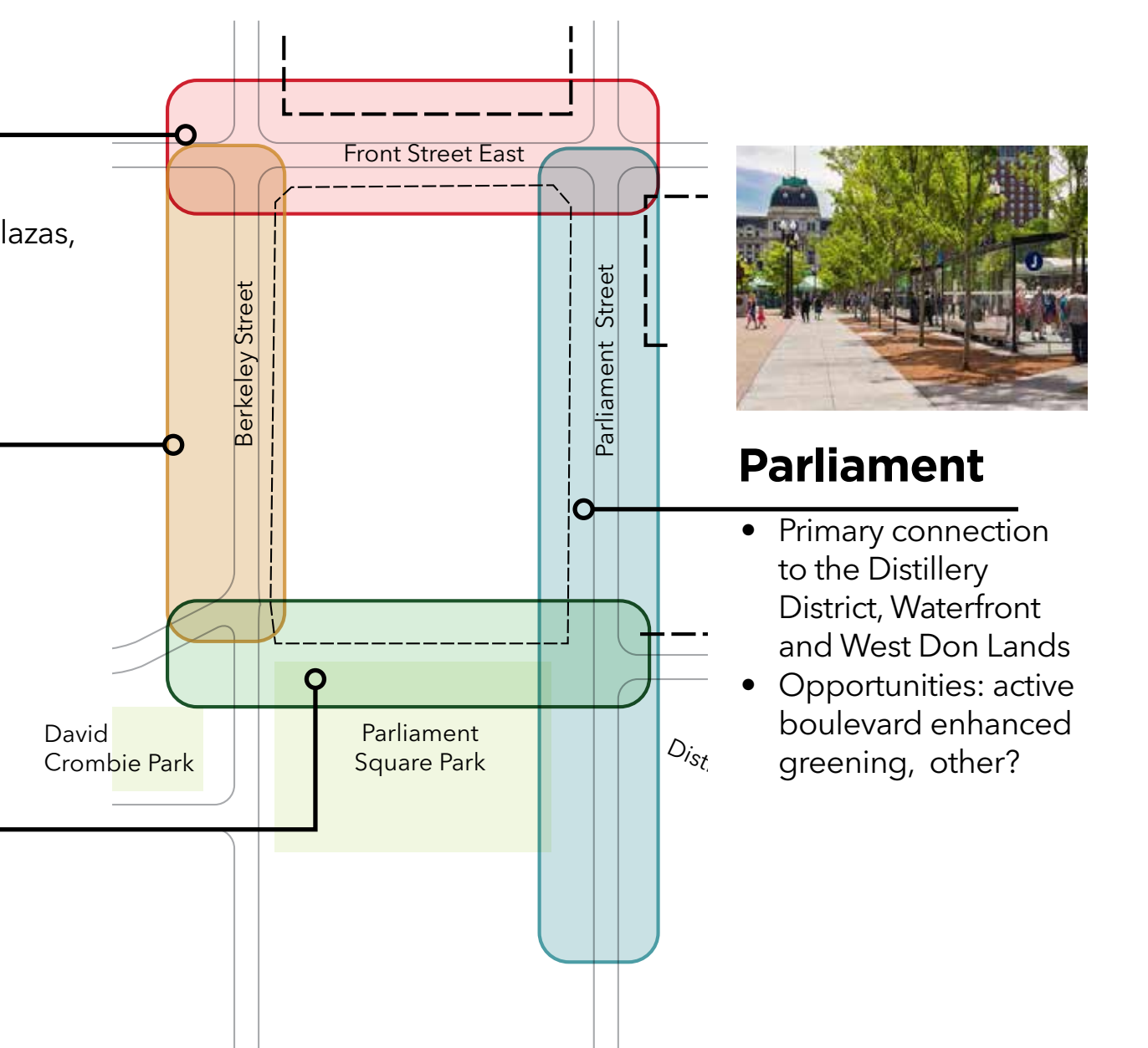
- Connects with Corktown Common
- Potential redevelopment sites
- Opportunities: 'front door', enhanced urban plazas, other?

### Berkeley

- Consistent building language addressing the site
- Collection of theatre uses animate the streetscape.
- Opportunities: theatre spill out activities, 'off-broadway', other?

### Park

- Currently the site is separated from the park
- Opportunities: expand and extend park, strengthen connections to Parliament Square Park and David Crombie Park, Distillery, other?



### Parliament

- Primary connection to the Distillery District, Waterfront and West Don Lands
- Opportunities: active boulevard enhanced greening, other?



# VISION AND FIRST PRINCIPLES

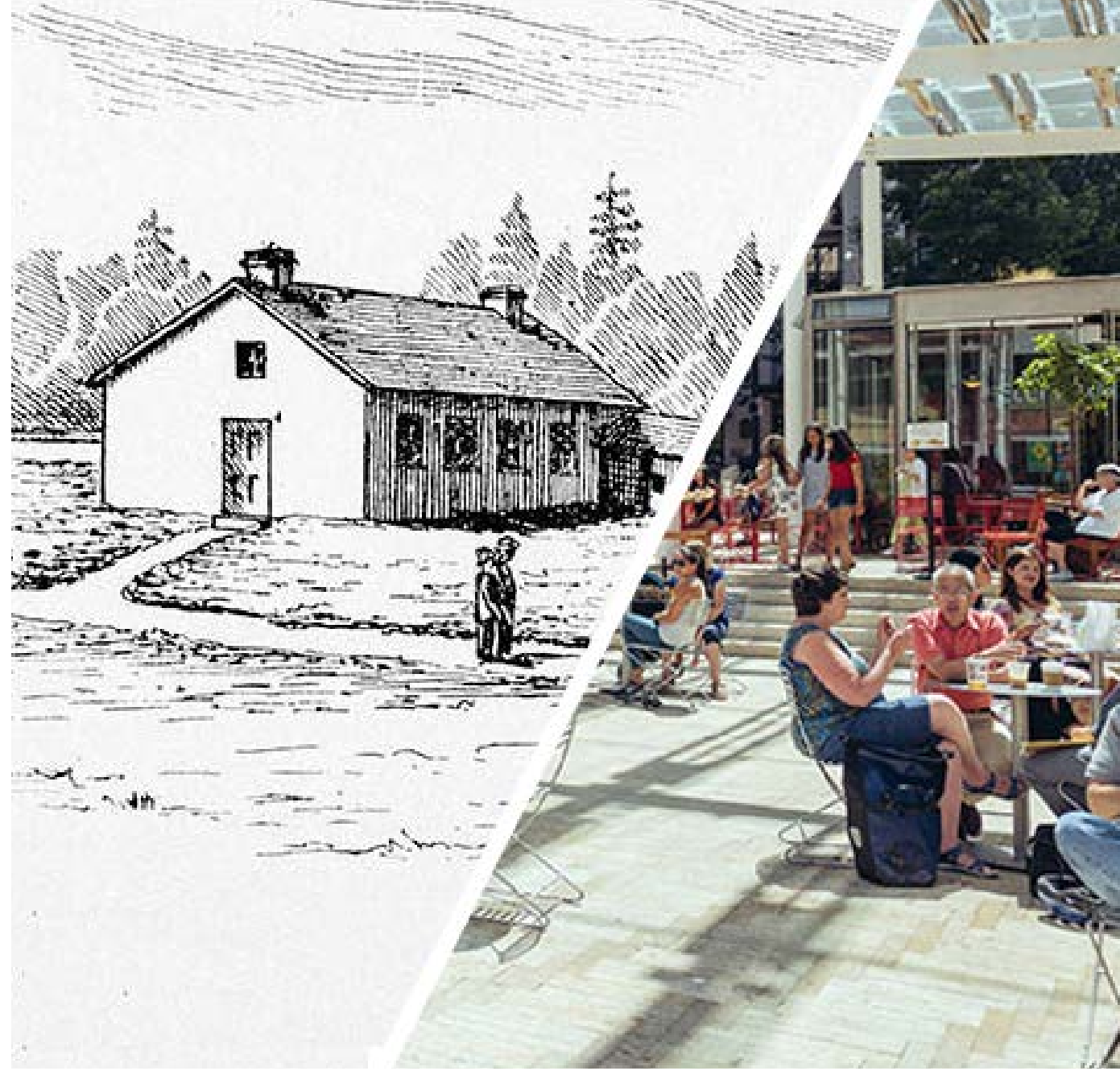
The vision and principles form the basis upon which all planning and design decisions are based and evaluated.

## A Vision for First Parliament

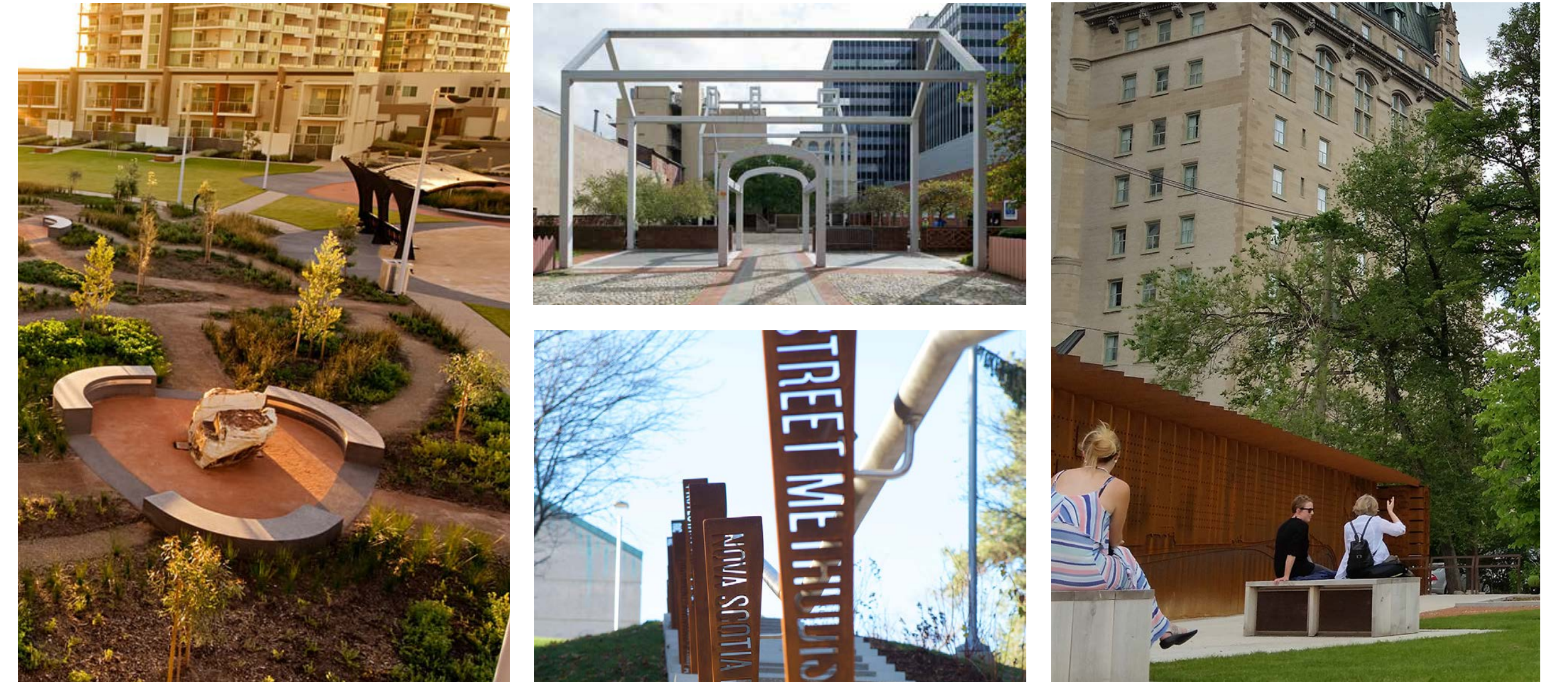
The First Parliament site is **an important historic site**. It will be protected and developed to tell its stories.

The First Parliament site will also become **a vital public/community resource**. The site will be developed to meet the needs of a growing resident, working and visiting population.

- **Authentic**
- **Exciting**
- **Unique**
- **Bold**
- **Visible**
- **Inclusive**



## 1. Prioritize heritage preservation and interpretation.



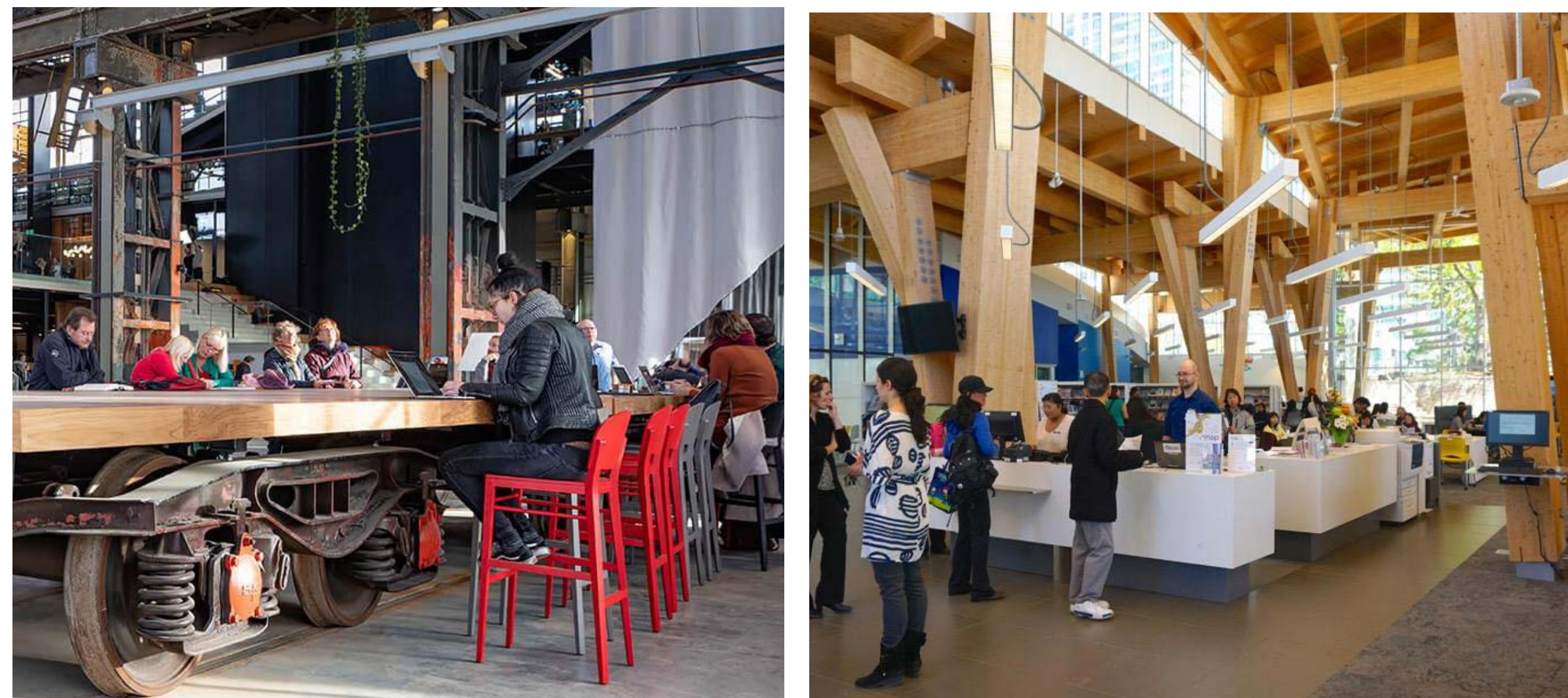
## 2. Respond to the site and its context.



## 3. Recognize the site as a valuable public asset.



## 4. Celebrate the library as the first key piece.



## 5. Develop a vision that can be implemented over time.



Permanent Development

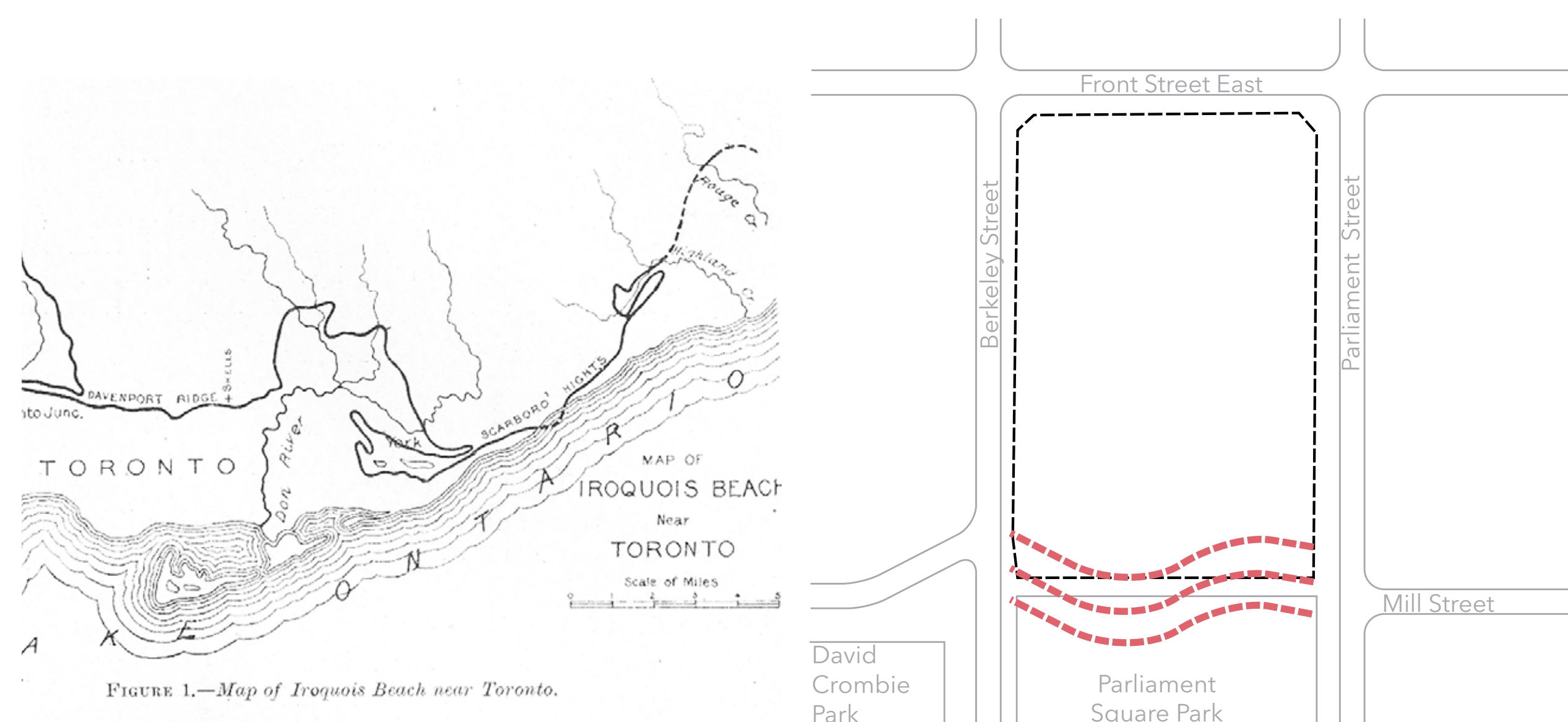
Short-term Opportunities



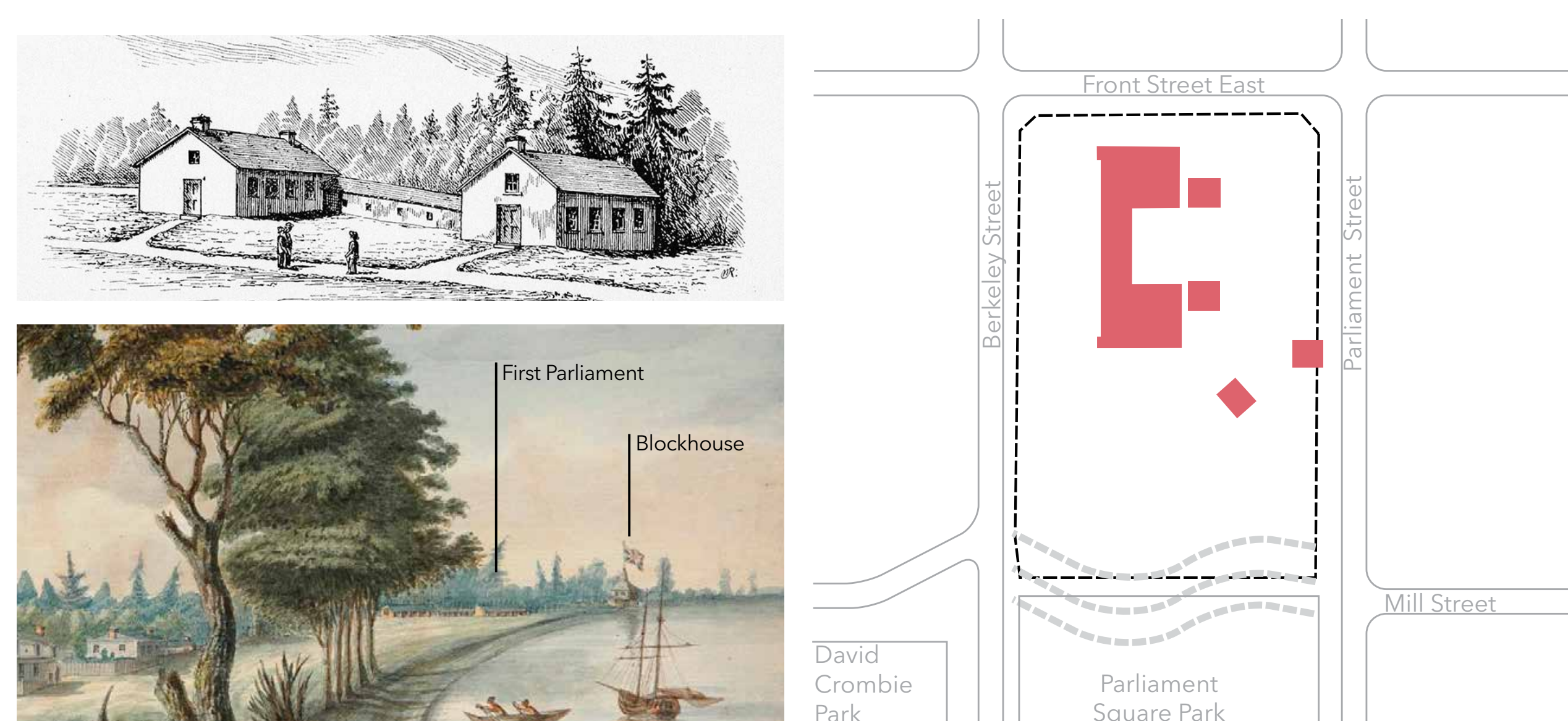
# KEY PLAN DRIVERS - HERITAGE

The protection of the archaeological resource and the interpretation of the site's history will help direct the planning and organization of the site.

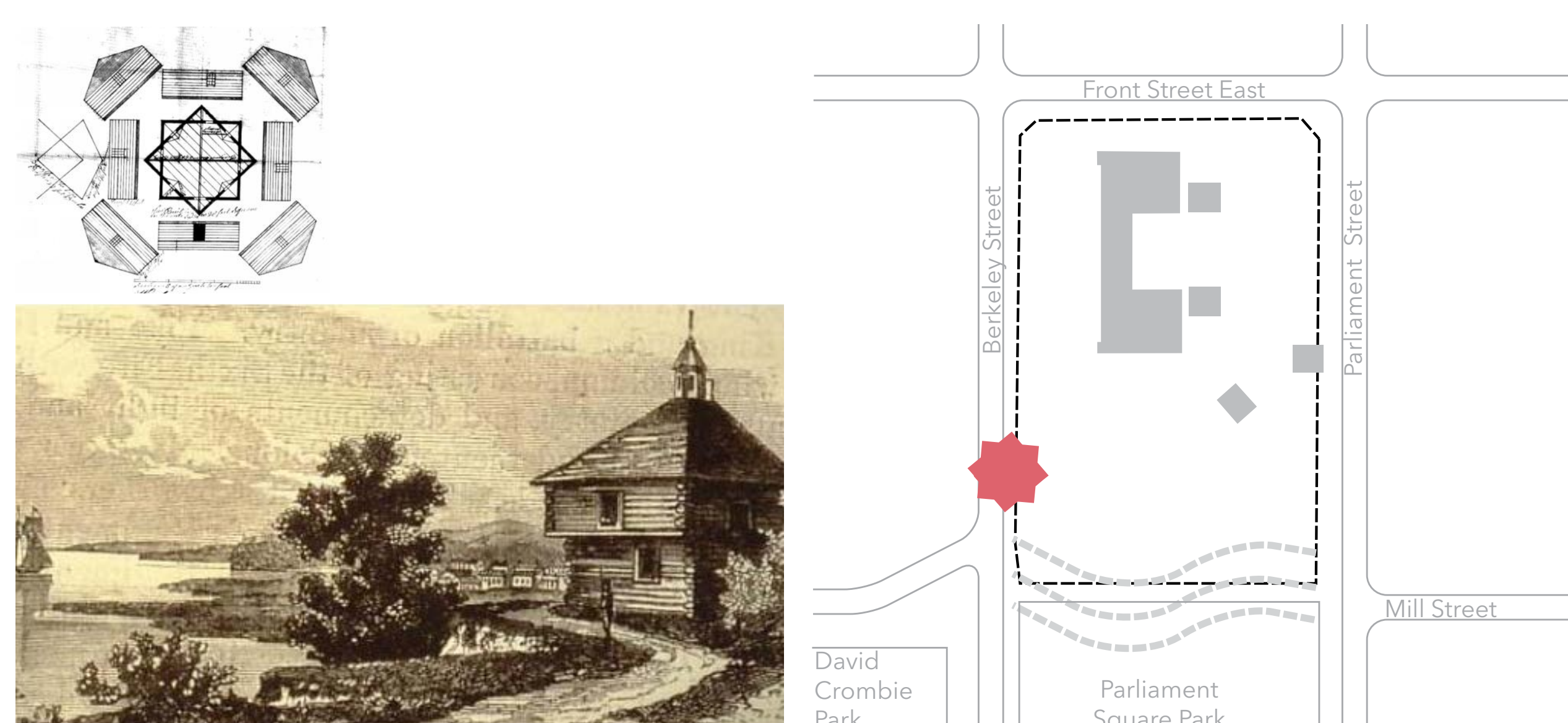
## Traces of History: Natural History and Pre-Settlement



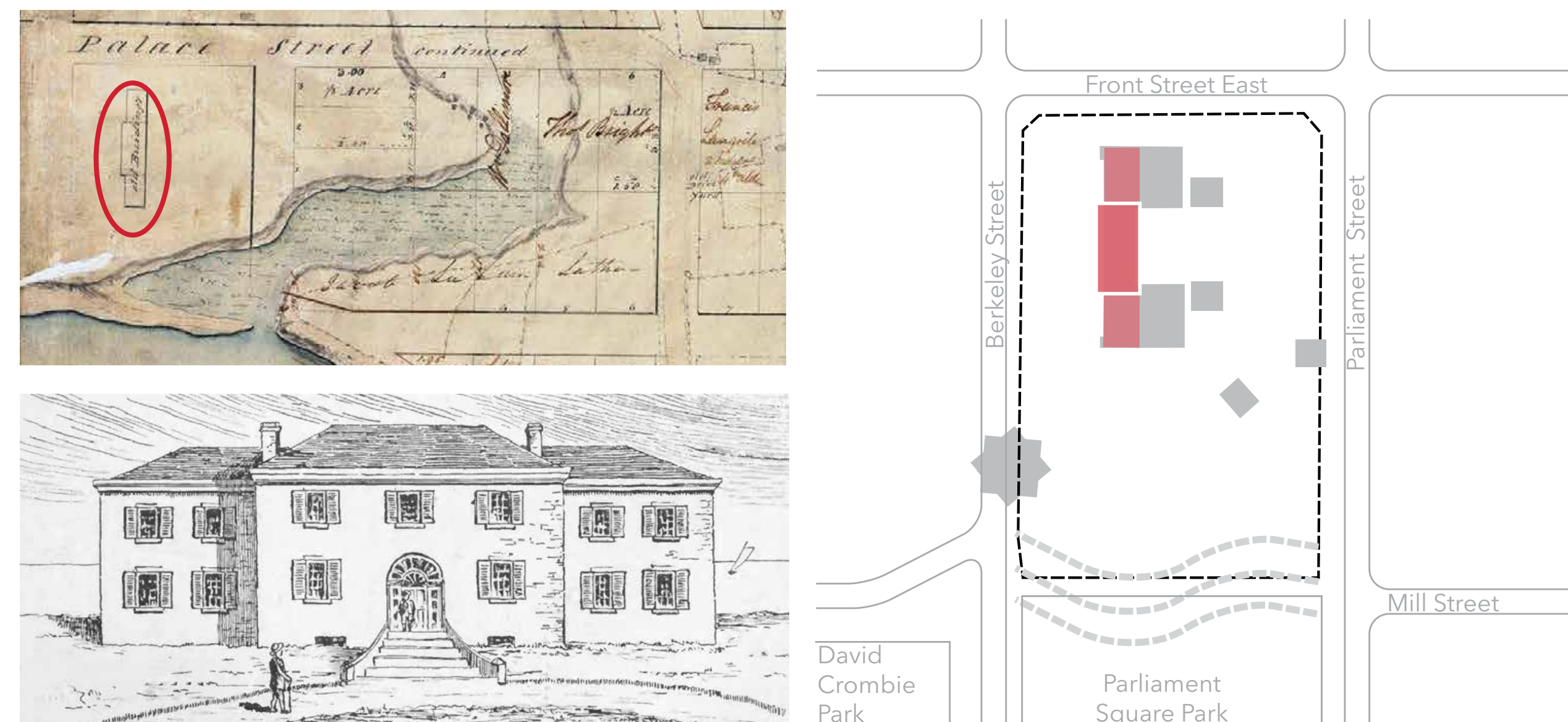
## Traces of History: First Parliament (1794 to 1820)



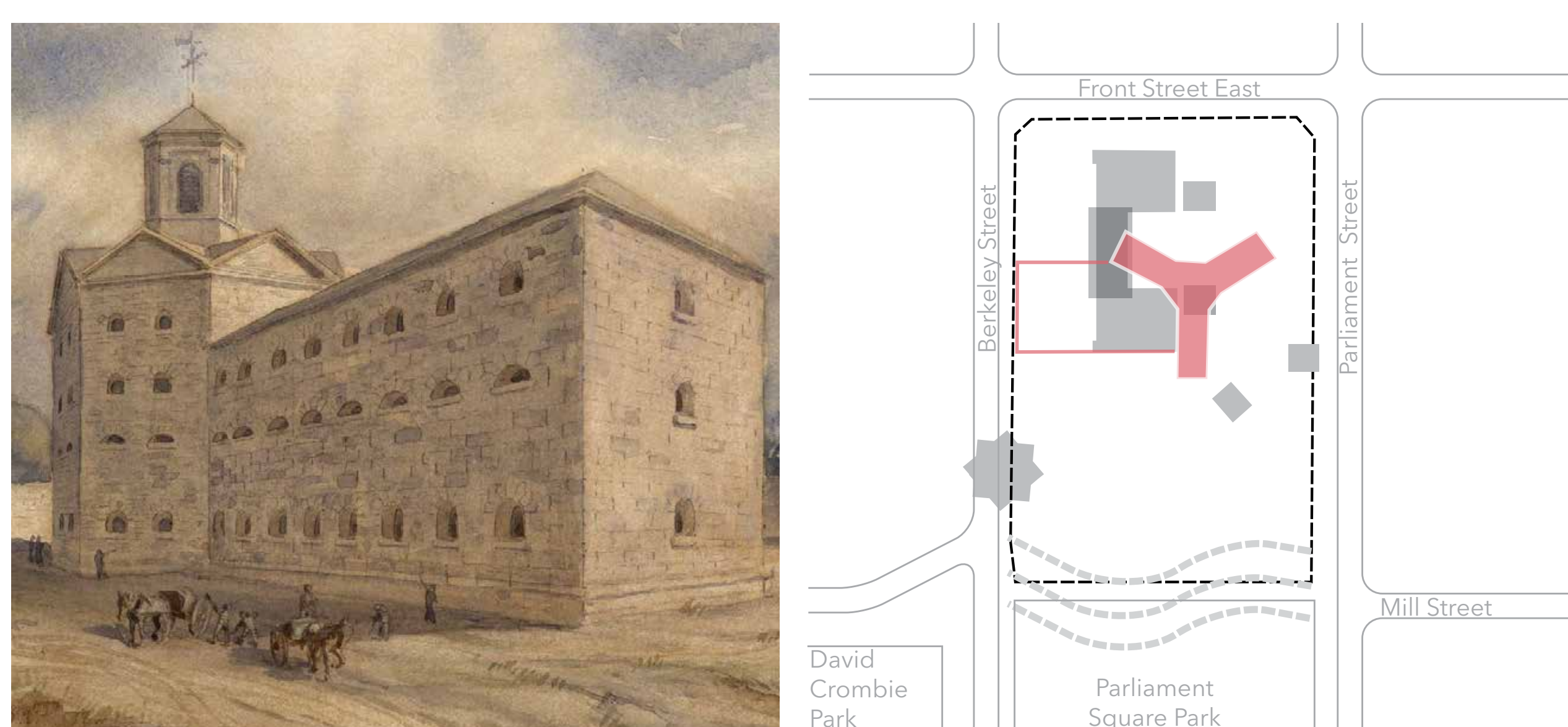
## Traces of History: The Town Block House



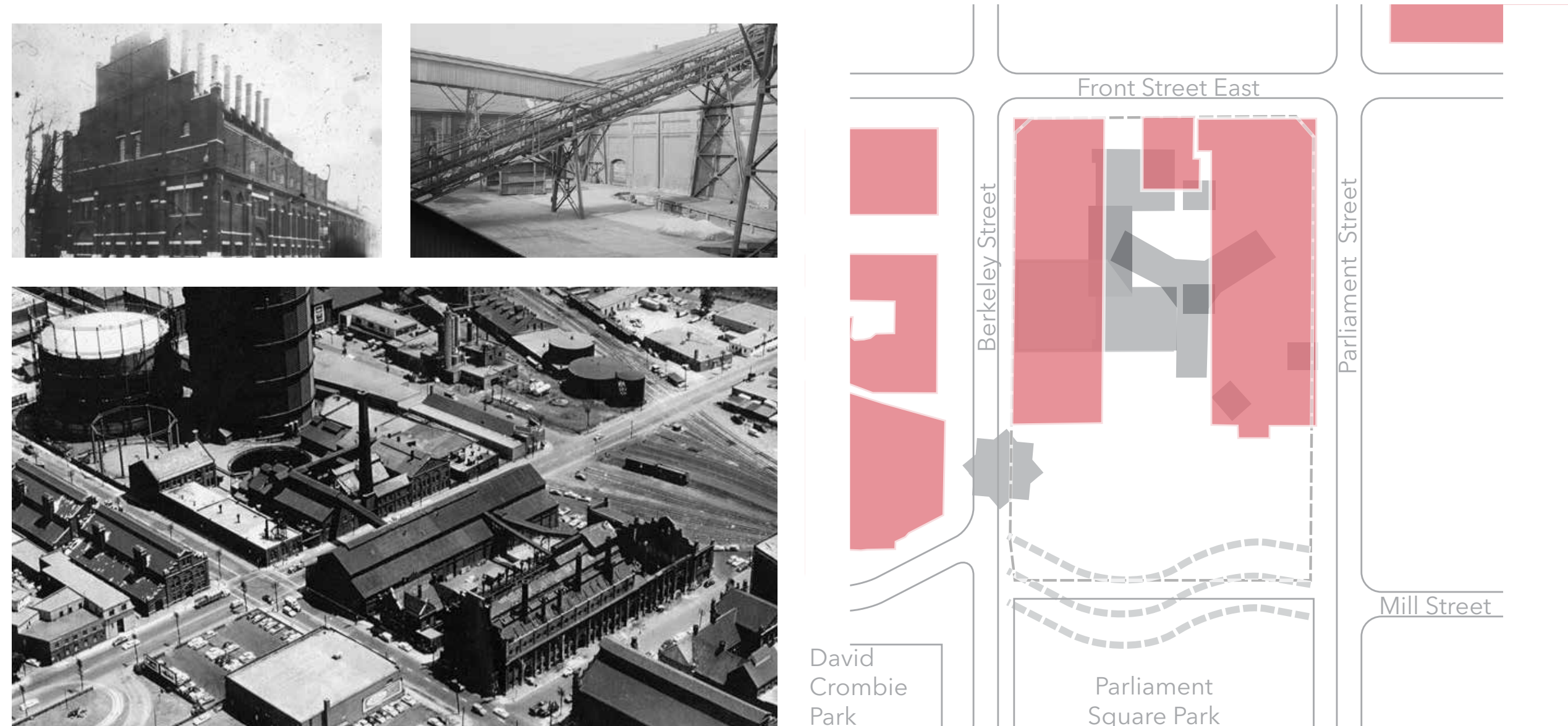
## Traces of History: Second Parliament (1820-1824)



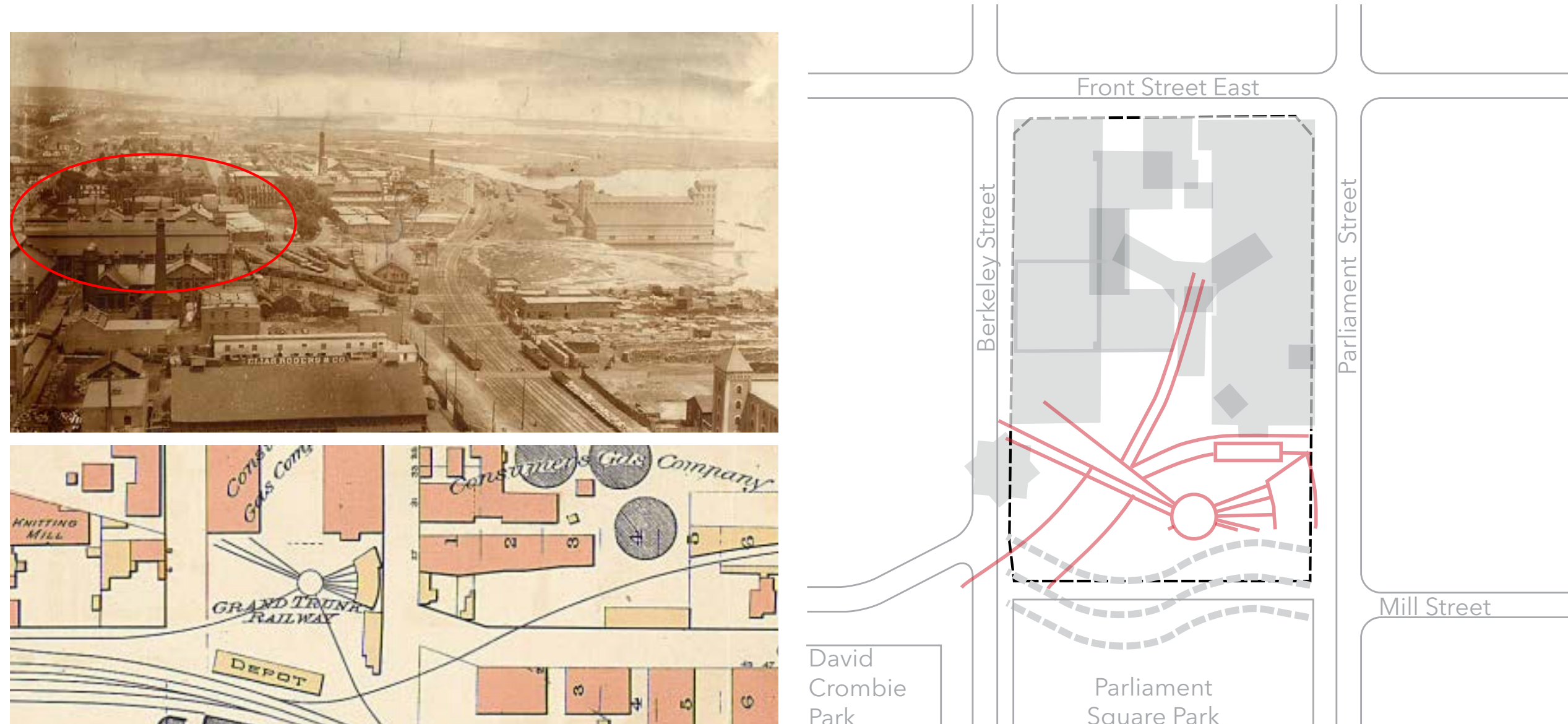
## Traces of History: Home District Gaol (1837-1864)



## Traces of History: Industrial Era (1879 to 1955)

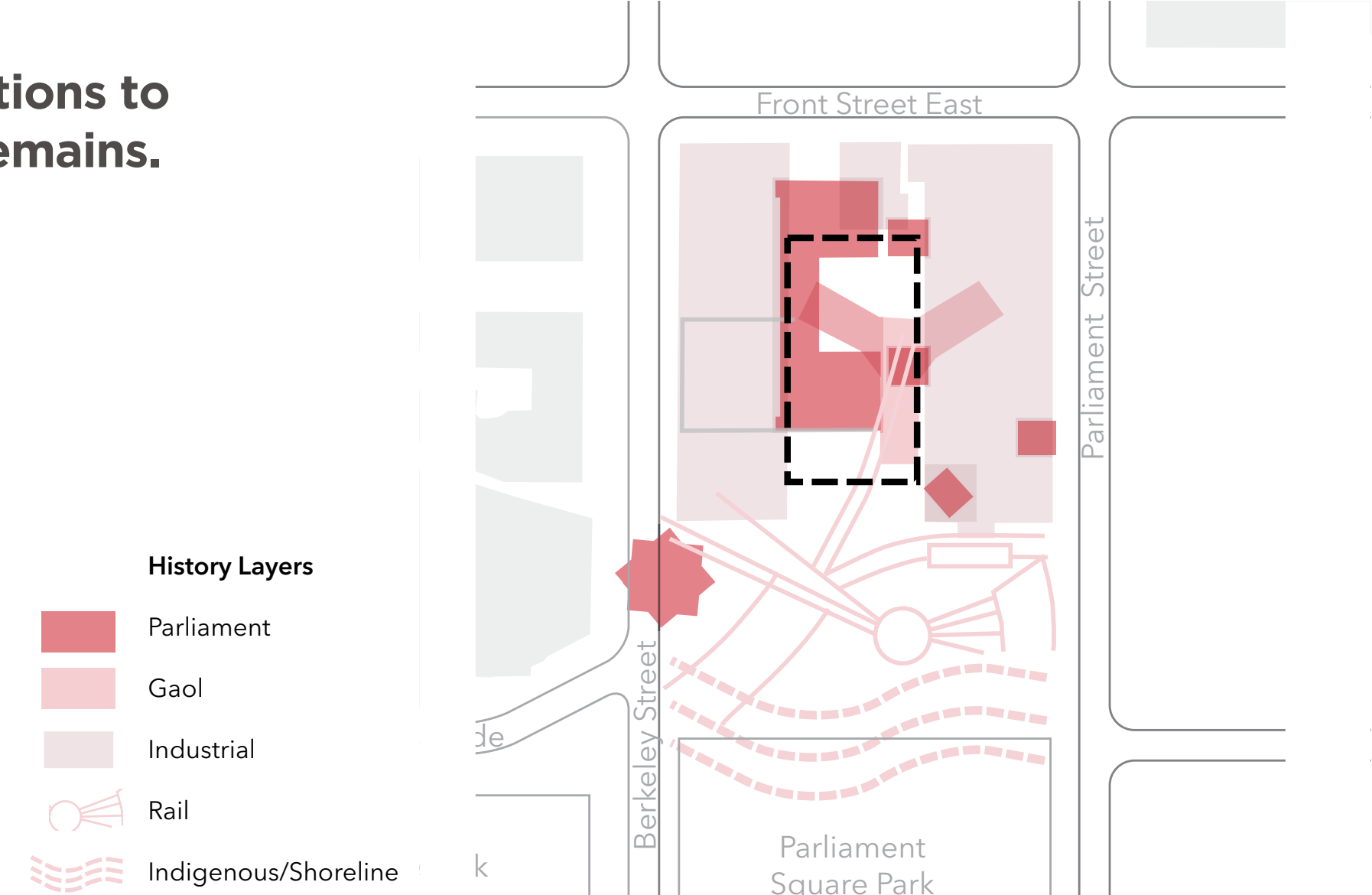


## Traces of History: Railways



## Zone of Archaeological Potential

Avoid impacts or alterations to the surviving physical remains.



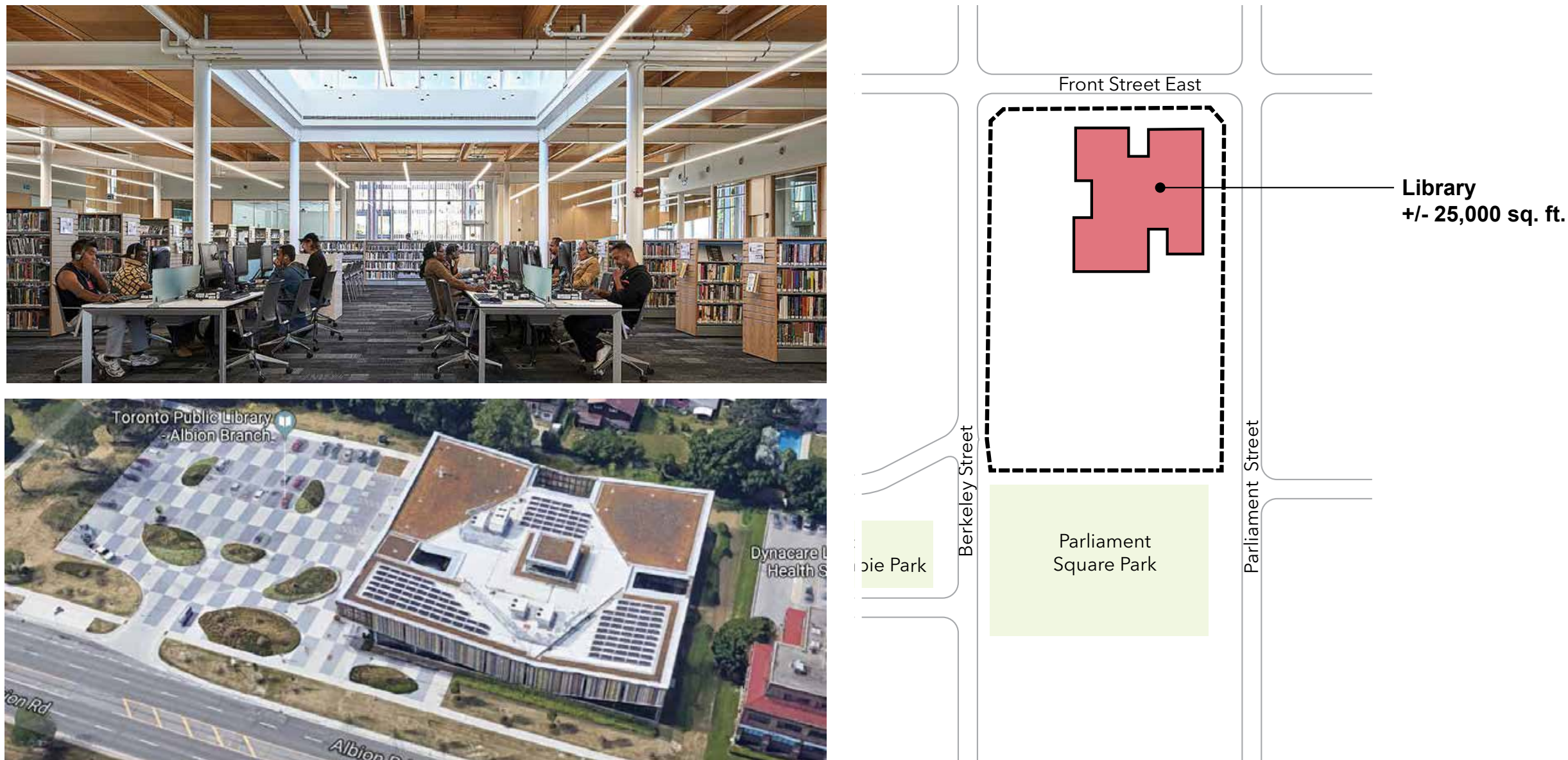


# KEY PLAN DRIVERS - SITE PROGRAMMING

The only approved use for the site is a new district library. Other compatible uses will be selected to meet community-based needs.

Site Programming

Example: Albion Library - 25,000 sq. ft.



2/ Site Programming

Block House Lookout?

Children's Play?

Supportive Housing?

Fire Pit?

"Shoreline" Water Feature?

Community Gardens?

Skateboard Park?

Sports Fields?

Passive Park?

Community Services?

Library

Daycare Centre?

Entertainment Venue?

Health Centre?

Native Plant Garden?

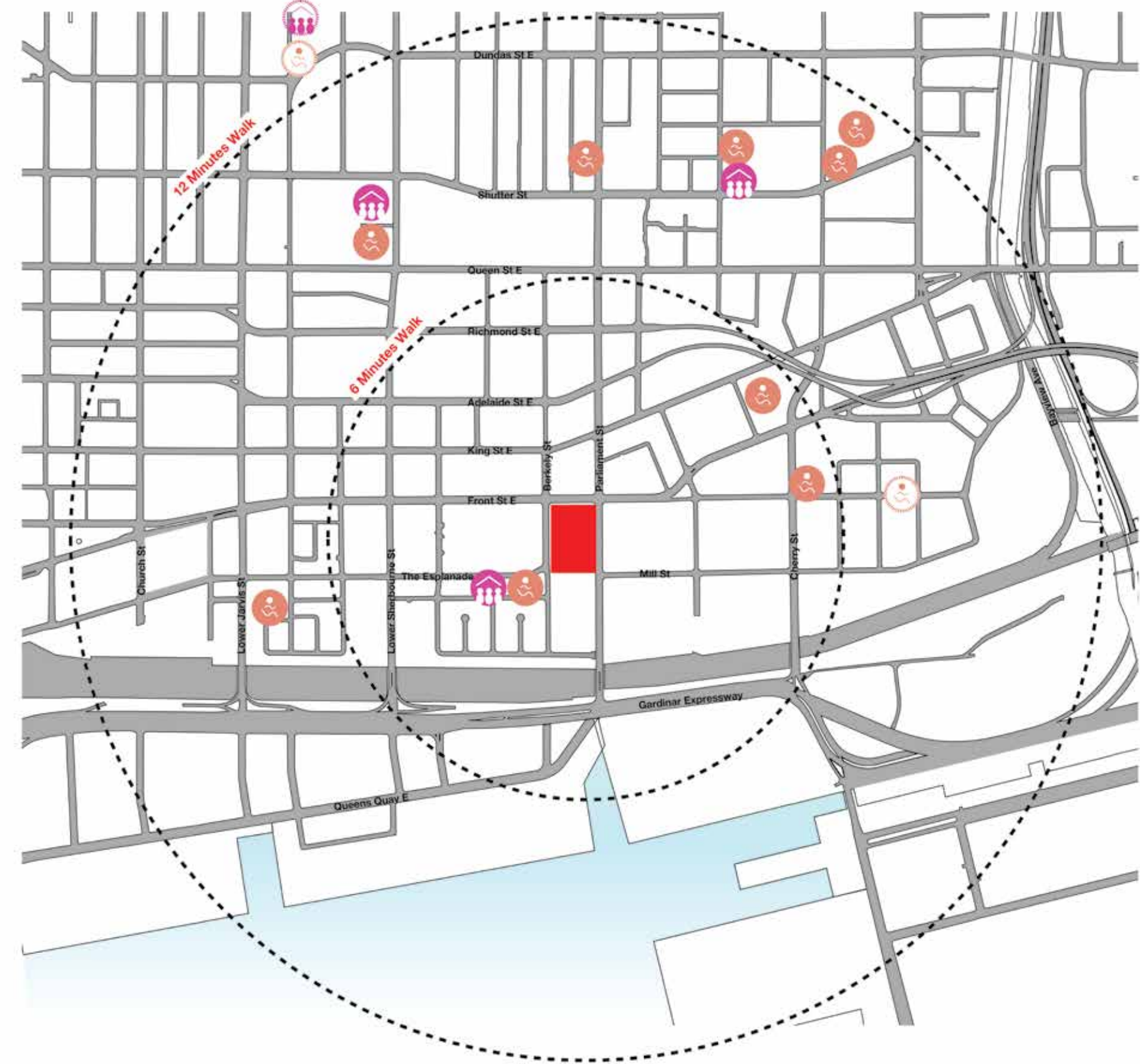
Interpretive Centre?

Archaeological 'Reading Park'?

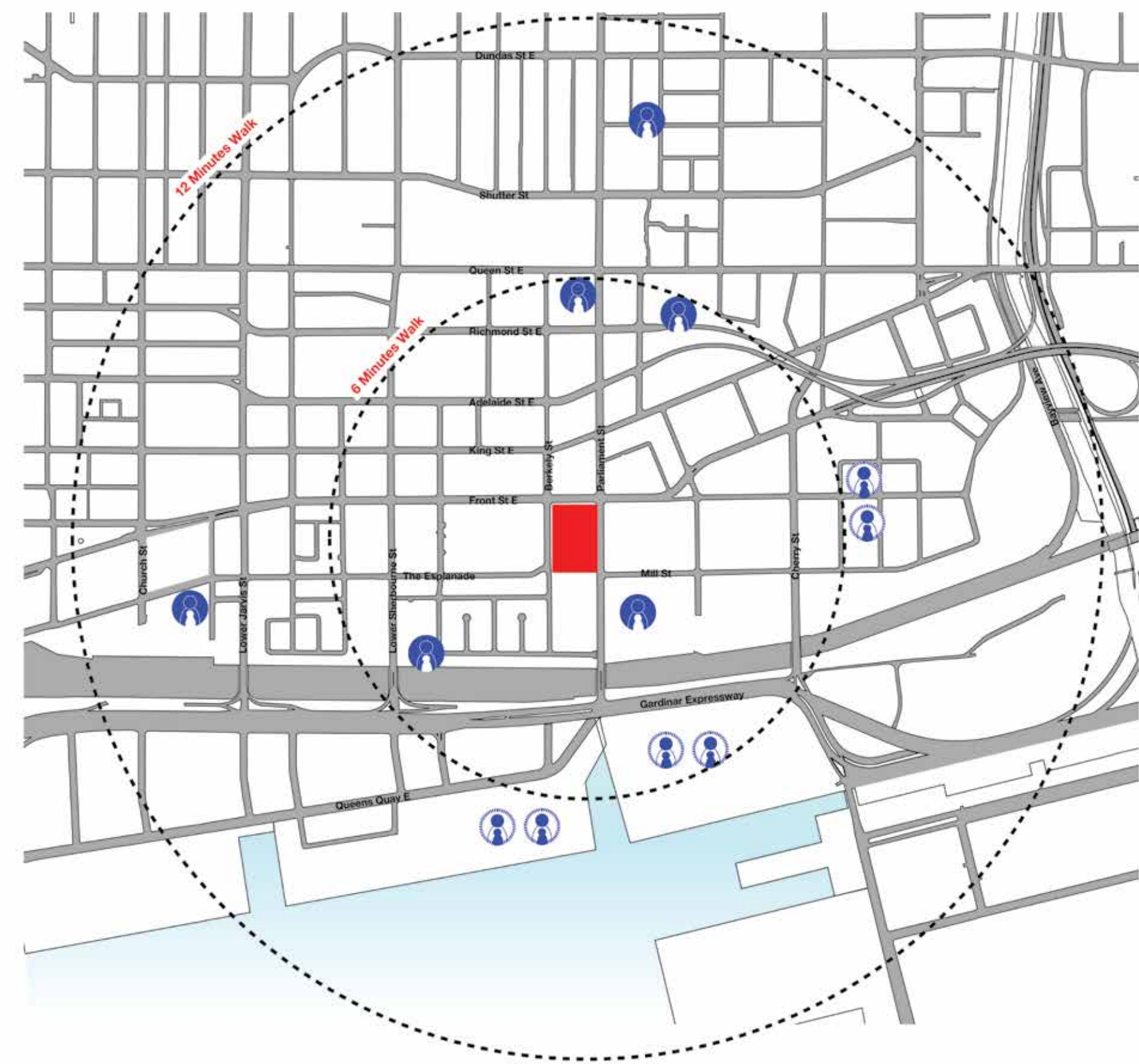
## Existing Parks and Open Spaces



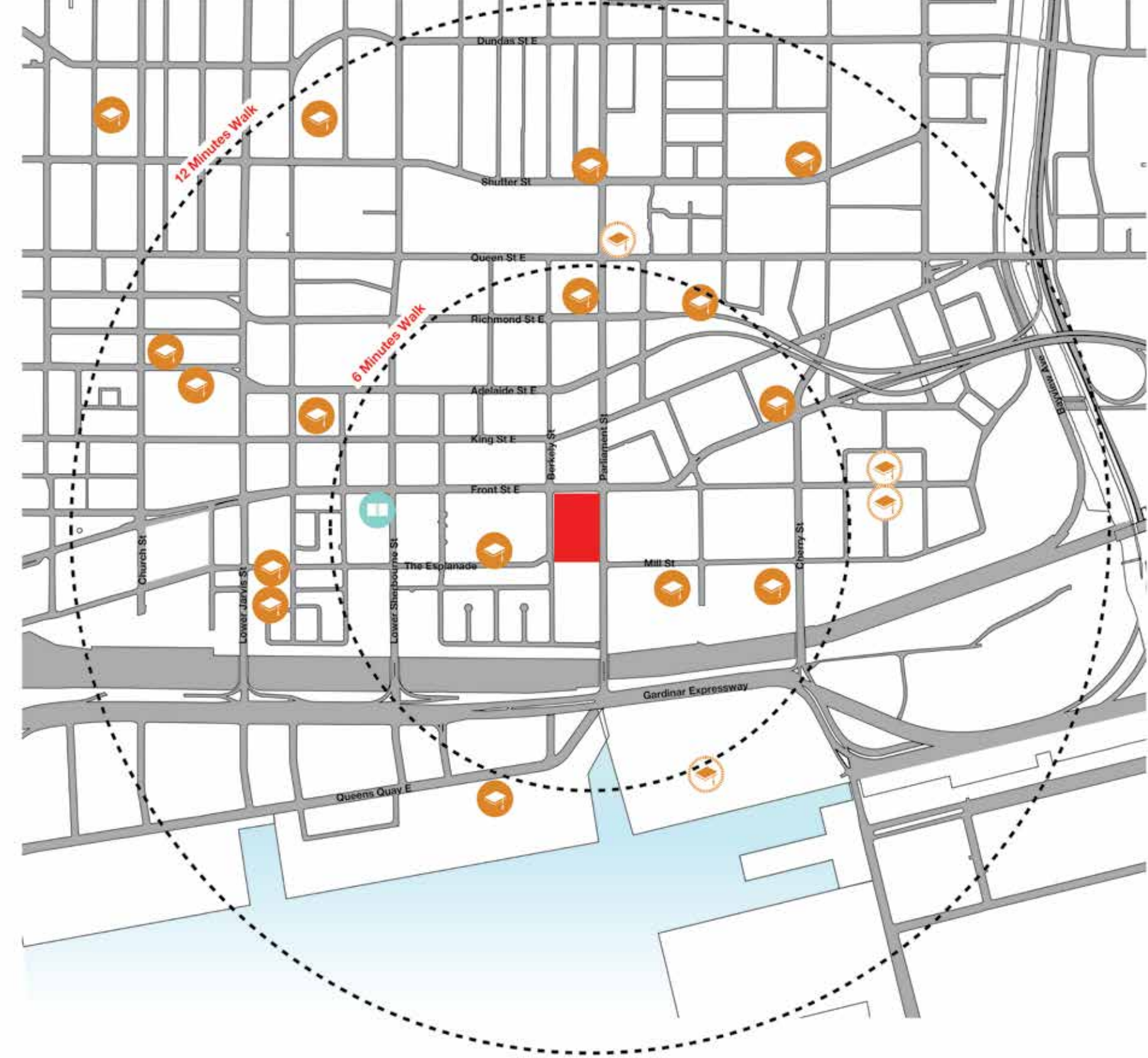
## Community and Recreation Centres



## Child Care Centres



## Schools and Libraries





# KEY PLAN DRIVERS - ENVIRONMENT

Like many downtown sites, the First Parliament soils are contaminated. The solutions for dealing with this will influence the final form and character of the site.

## Areas of Concern

### Moderate Contamination Zone

- Shallow soil impacts / deep ground water impacts / no measurable free-phase product
- Moderate contaminant management

### Zone of Archaeological Potential

- Minimize impact to archaeology

### Area of Gross Contamination

- Deeper soil impacts / ground water impacts / multiple types of free-phase product
- Extensive contaminant management

### Park Zone

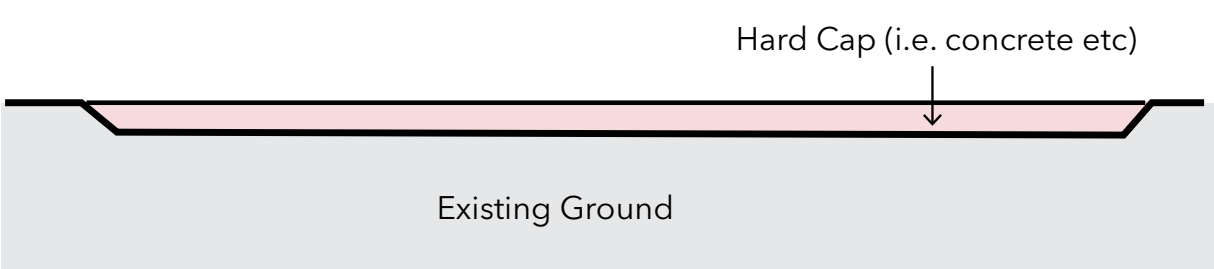
- Previously capped, but to older standards



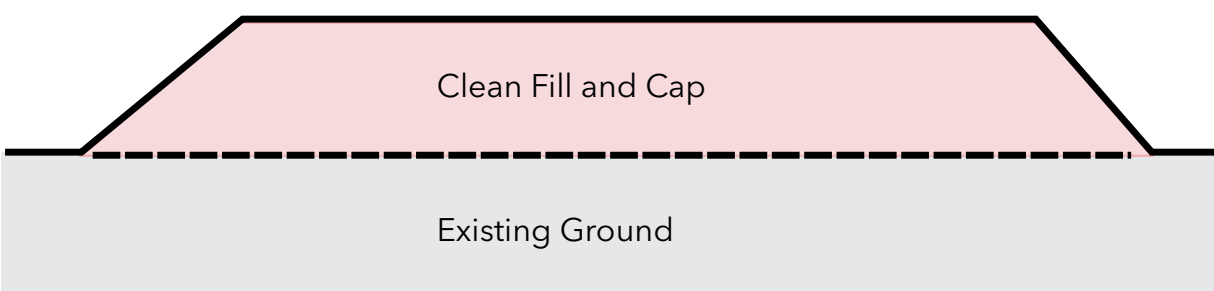
## Possible Approaches



1. Remove & Replace \$\$\$\$\$\$



2. Hard Cap \$\$\$\$



3. Soft Cap \$\$\$

## Precedents



Corktown Common



Fort York / The Bentway



HTO Park



# SITE PLANNING - FIRST THOUGHTS

Exploring possible locations and arrangements for the library (in conjunction with other possible uses) is a first step in developing a cohesive master plan approach.

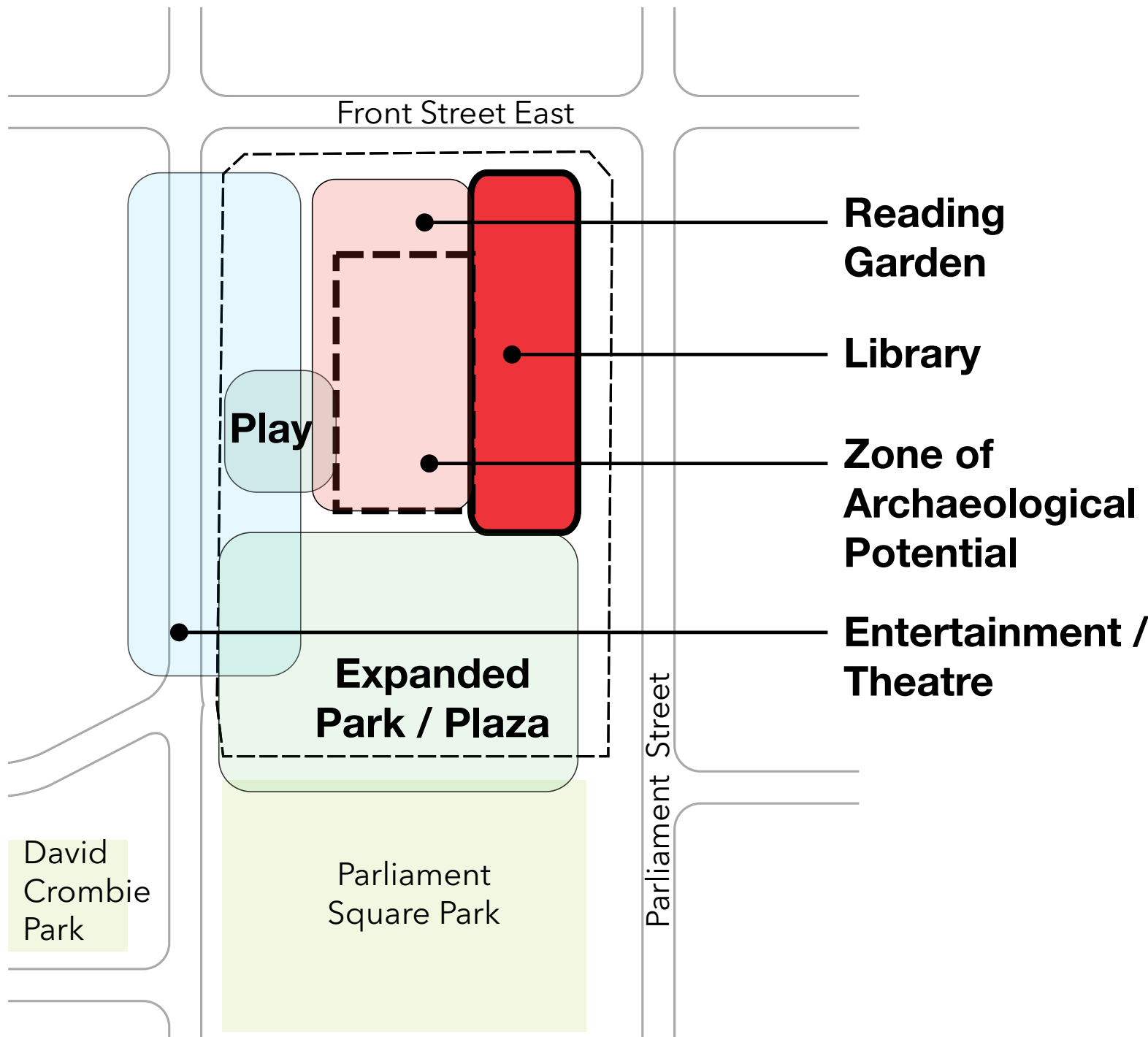
## First Principles

- 1. Prioritize heritage preservation and interpretation.
- 2. Respond to the site and its context.
- 3. Recognize the site as a valuable public asset.
- 4. Celebrate the library as the first key piece.
- 5. Ensure that the site is always complete and viable.

## Key Plan Drivers:

- 1. Heritage Interpretation
- 2. Site Programming
- 3. Environmental Conditions

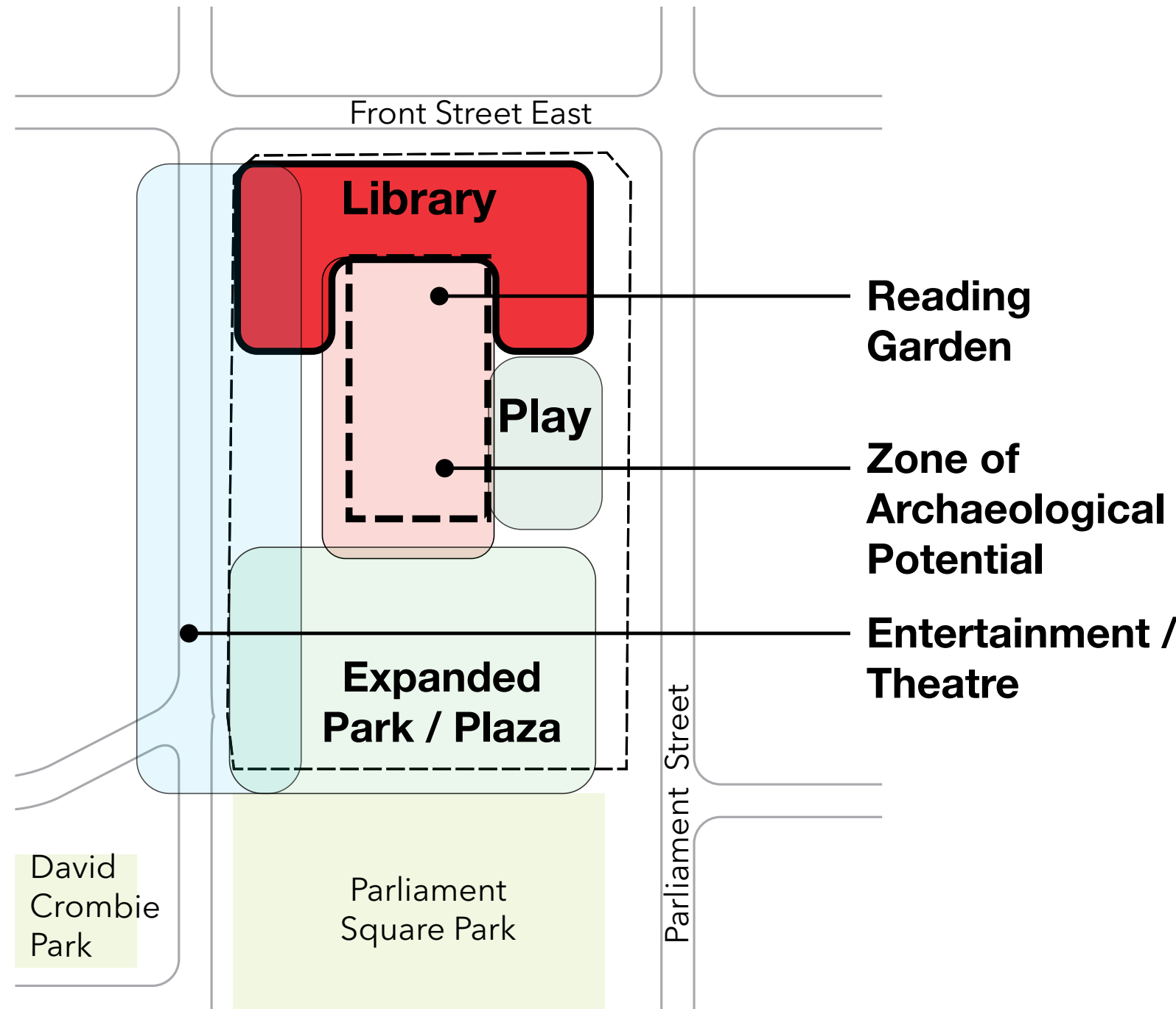
Site Option 1  
Parliament Street



Library enjoys a prominent address at the corner of Front and Parliament, and a direct relationship with the zone of archaeological potential.

New public open space connects directly with Parliament Square Park and Davide Crombie.

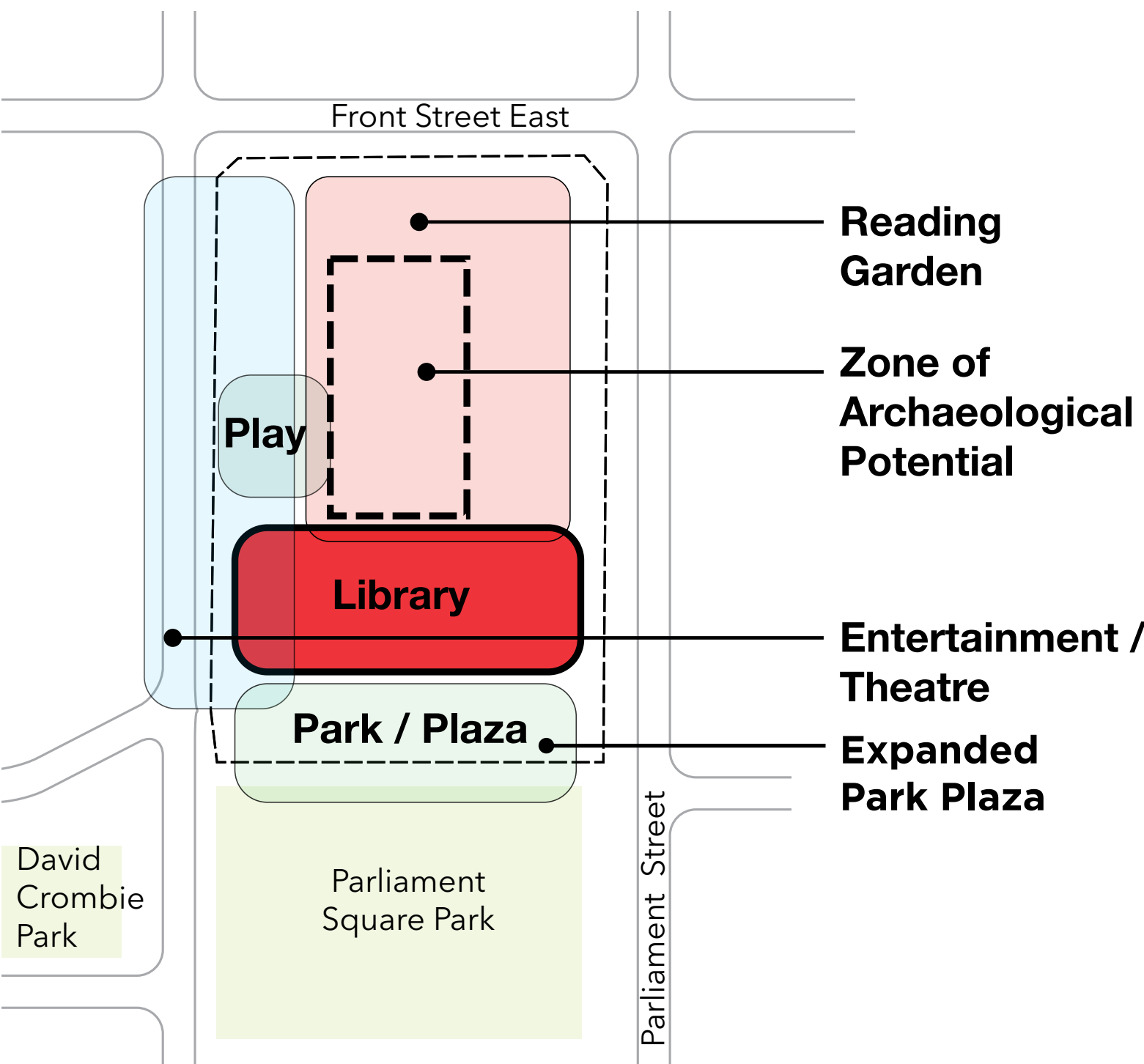
Site Option 2  
Front Street



Library enjoys a prominent address on Front Street, and embraces the zone of archaeological potential.

The library occupies the OHT property, which may not be desireable in the first phase of the site’s development.

Site Option 3  
Mid-block



Library enjoys a direct relationship with the zone of archaeological potential and with Parliament Square Park and David Crombie.

A building in this location may be a good way to deal with the severe contamination at the south end of the site.



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# NEXT STEPS

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**There will be many opportunities for neighbourhood organizations and the general public to participate in the First Parliament Project. Please watch the project website for upcoming consultations and updates.**

We have developed a comprehensive public and stakeholder consultation plan that will take place over the next several months. The information and advice that you provide will inform the Heritage Interpretation Strategy and the Master Plan.

Visit the website often: [firstparliament.ca](https://firstparliament.ca)

For further information please contact:

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**Real Estate Services, Program and Policy Management**  
**City of Toronto**  
**Metro Hall, 2nd floor**  
**55 John Street**  
**Toronto, Ontario**  
**M5V 3C6**

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## Coming Up:

- The Heritage Interpretive Strategy is being wrapped up by the project team. This material will shortly become available on the website.
- The Master Plan Phase has commenced. Additional engagement events will be scheduled for later in the year. Watch the website for details.