

Executive Summary

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A renewed vision and framework for Mount Dennis

Mount Dennis is set to become one of the most connected neighbourhoods in Toronto. When the Eglinton Crosstown LRT opens in 2022, Mount Dennis will be the western terminus station and a key interconnection point between the subway and commuter rail systems, providing access to the Kitchener GO Line and UP Express.

In anticipation of this connectivity and resultant development interest in Mount Dennis, the Picture Mount Dennis Planning Framework creates a comprehensive vision for the future based on the input of current residents, businesses, local services and non-profit organizations and Indigenous partners. It seeks to protect what is valuable in Mount Dennis today, establish the parameters for new growth to fit into this context and capitalize on new investment to benefit the current and future population.

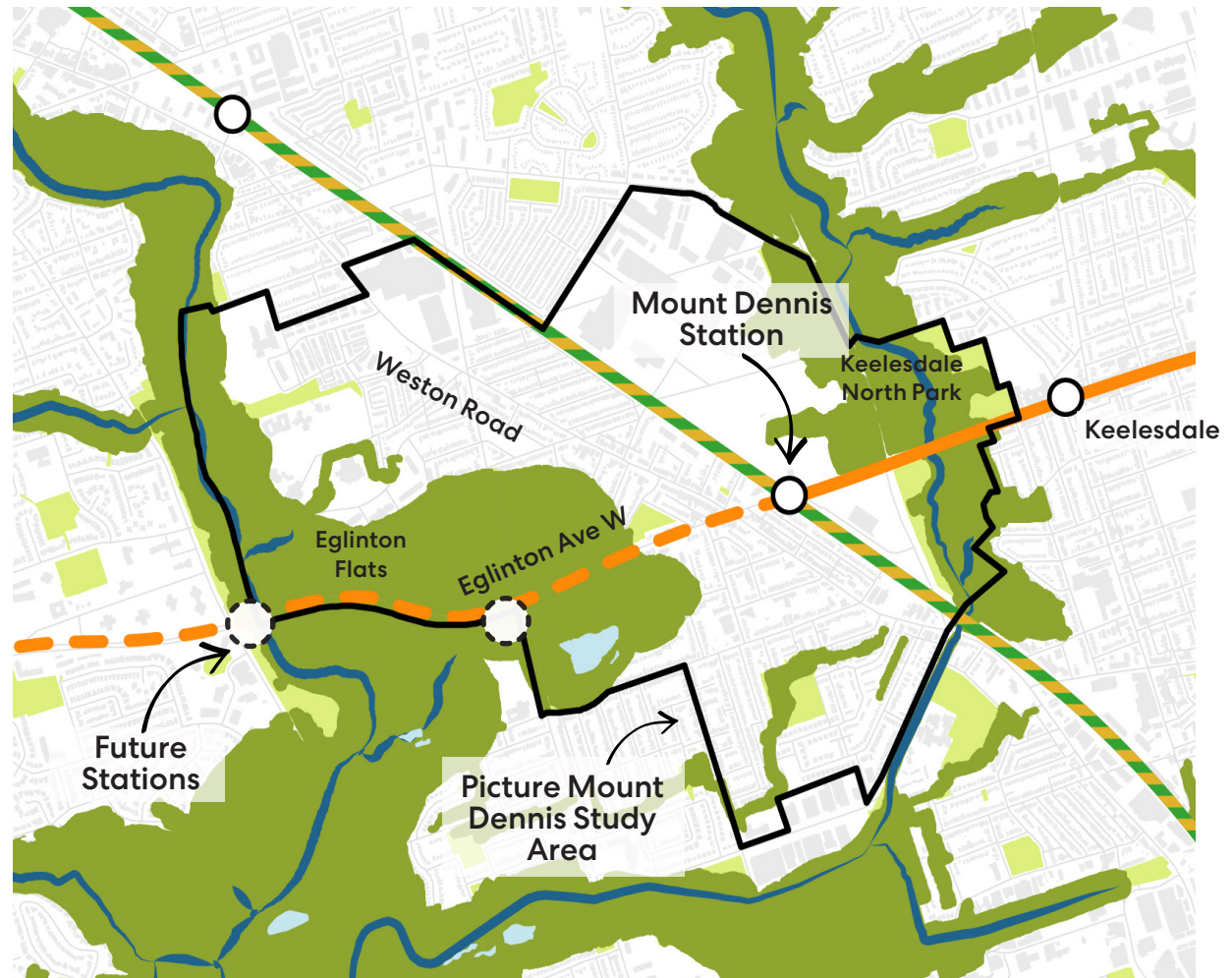


Figure 1. Study Area boundary and context

A History of Mount Dennis

Located in proximity to the notable geographic and topographic feature of the Humber River Valley, the land on which Mount Dennis sits today has been a human settlement area and transportation route for thousands of years. The Mount Dennis neighbourhood, as part of the City of Toronto, is on the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples.

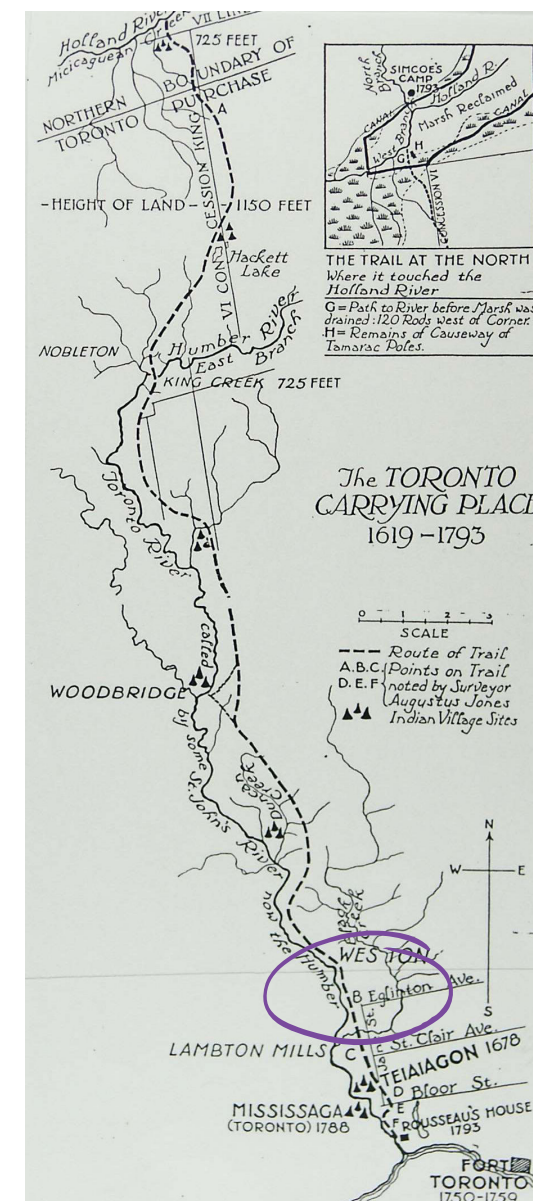
Mount Dennis's growth has been shaped by transportation and industry, including: Weston Road, a portion of which was constructed on the historic Indigenous Toronto Carrying Place Trail; the Grand Trunk Railway; and the Kodak Factory, which became the largest employer in the area following its construction in 1916. Most of the existing built form of the original residential areas developed in the first half of the 20th century, when neighbourhood growth and several major industrial and institutional developments helped establish Mount Dennis as a distinct industrial settlement.

Mount Dennis Today

When compared to the City of Toronto as a whole, Mount Dennis has:

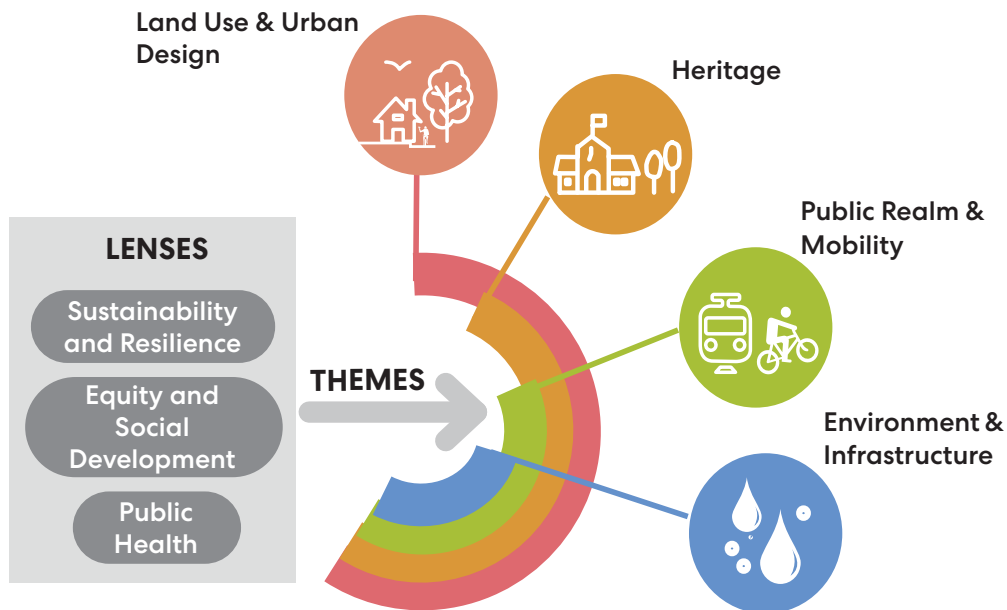
- **A higher proportion of visible minorities and immigrants.** Ethnic and cultural diversity are defining features of Mount Dennis and are reflected in the diversity of its businesses and places of worship.
- **A lower median income.** In 2016 the average estimated median income in the catchment area was \$51,500, 22% lower than the city-wide average of \$65,829.
- **A higher percentage of renters.** Fifty-two percent of households rent their home in Mount Dennis as compared to 46% in the City as a whole.
- **Greater housing affordability:** In 2016 average housing prices in Mount Dennis were significantly lower than in the City as a whole, however they have increased in the past five years. Even with cheaper housing prices, in 2016 40% of households in Mount Dennis spent over 30% of their income on shelter costs.
- **Greater prevalence of chronic diseases.** Public health data shows that prevalence of conditions such as asthma, high blood pressure and diabetes is higher in Mount Dennis than the City as a whole. Mount Dennis also had high rates of COVID-19.

Figure 2. "The Toronto Carrying Place 1615-1793" by C.W. Jefferys (Robinson 1965), with approximate location of Mount Dennis highlighted



Overarching Lenses

Three overarching lenses – sustainability and resilience, equity and social development and public health – are applied across the Picture Mount Dennis Planning Framework. A Planning Framework must be embedded in an understanding of the types of communities we are trying to achieve – communities that actively address the climate emergency, that build and foster equity and inclusion for all and that support the public health of their residents, employees and visitors. The three lenses inform each of the four structuring themes of the plan – land use and urban design, public realm and mobility, cultural heritage and environment and infrastructure.



Vision and Guiding Principles

The vision for the Picture Mount Dennis Planning Framework speaks to the incredible opportunity that is before the community today. It reflects the desire to embrace growth, but on the community's own terms. It articulates what is treasured about the community today and must be maintained as well as the community values that need to be reflected as new development takes place.

The vision was developed from the feedback heard from the community and stakeholders throughout the engagement process. It sets the intention for the Planning Framework and is further elaborated through nine guiding principles.

VISION: "As a future transit hub, Mount Dennis will grow to accommodate and connect new residents, businesses and institutions through sustainable new development and public space improvements while maintaining the diversity, affordability and cultural heritage that define its character today."

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Direct growth and density
- Promote and protect affordability
- Encourage Weston Road's development as Mount Dennis' historic main street
- Honour the historical and contemporary Indigenous presence in the area
- Celebrate the local Mount Dennis character
- Develop complete and green streets
- Promote public health and safety
- Advance Mount Dennis as an eco-district
- Facilitate local job growth

Character Areas

Character areas are a tool to understand the differing existing conditions and future potential of a large and diverse study area like that of the Picture Mount Dennis Planning Framework. Five character areas have been defined in Mount Dennis:

Valleys and Flats encompass the Humber River, Black Creek, Eglinton Flats and associated open space areas.

Employment and Institutional Areas include areas that are devoted to economic activity and jobs, including the Black Creek Business Area, Irving Tissue Corporation and West Park Healthcare Centre.

Residential Areas include both high-rise and low-rise residential areas in Mount Dennis and their supporting parks and amenities.

The **Mixed-Use Main Street** consists of Weston Road and its immediate surrounding areas that feed its activity.

The **Mixed-Use Node** consists of the triangle between the rail corridor, Eglinton Avenue West and Black Creek Drive, which currently houses a No Frills store but is poised to be redeveloped as a high-density, mixed-use development.



Figure 3. Map showing character areas

Transformative Moves

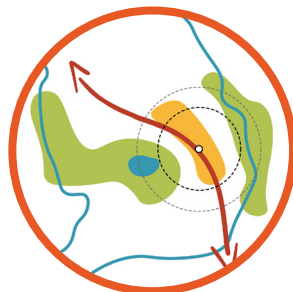
Seven transformative moves encapsulate the big ideas for Mount Dennis that the Planning Framework is designed to accomplish.

Connect People to the Land



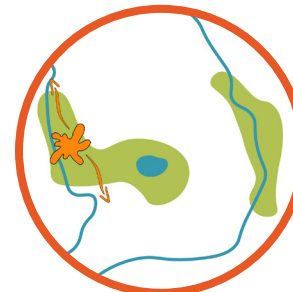
Mount Dennis' location between valleys and flats is to many what makes it special, and the connection to nature becomes even more important with the addition of significant new urban growth. Exposure to nature has well-documented benefits to physical and mental health which have become critical during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Planning Framework includes recommendations to make it easier for people to access the existing greenspace in Mount Dennis and extend nature out of the ravines to permeate all areas of the community.

Revitalize Weston Road



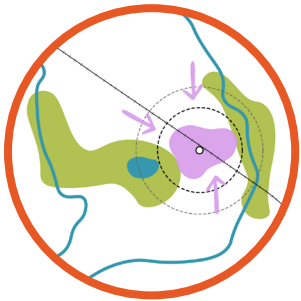
Thriving neighbourhood main streets are an essential part of healthy communities. They support local entrepreneurship and employment, facilitate social interaction and integration and encourage short, local trips using active transportation. Weston Road requires some support to achieve its potential as a true neighbourhood main street for Mount Dennis. There are several components to the revitalization of Weston Road: supporting its businesses, protecting its existing commercial main street built fabric, defining the parameters for when redevelopment takes place and making capital investments to create a complete and green street.

Celebrate Indigenous Culture



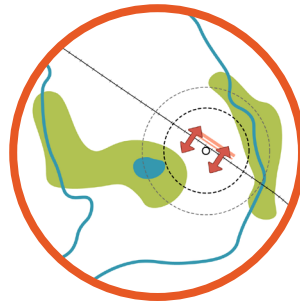
In Mount Dennis the proximity to the Humber River and alignment of a portion of Weston Road along the route of the Carrying Place Trail make the link to Indigenous history very strong. The Mount Dennis community has expressed a desire to honour the historical and contemporary Indigenous presence in the area for some time. The Planning Framework proposes to do this by recognizing and supporting the Indigenous cultural activities that take place today, including ceremonies along the Humber River, continuing to support the local Indigenous community with culturally-appropriate services and community spaces, and bringing awareness to the larger community of Indigenous history and culture in Mount Dennis.

Expand the Community Heart



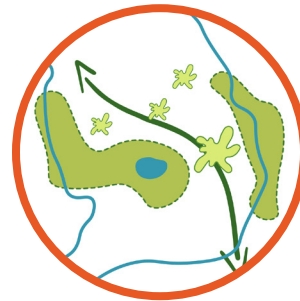
Centrally located within the community, Mount Dennis Station will become a huge centre of activity when it is fully functional as an LRT, GO and UP Express station. There is already a small collection of community uses close to the station: the Mount Dennis Library, York Recreation Centre and Mount Dennis Community Hall. The renovated and repurposed Kodak Building housing the station entrance itself, City-owned land on the Black Creek triangle opposite the station and potential future surplus Metrolinx land offer potential to expand the community heart with additional community and/or institutional uses such as a post-secondary campus. This is also a location for an exceptional public realm with high quality urban public spaces and premium materials.

Connect Across the Rail Corridor



The rail corridor is currently a significant barrier in the neighbourhood. The construction of the Mount Dennis Station adds urgency to the need for better connectivity but also provides the opportunity to piggyback on station access improvements to advance overall neighbourhood connectivity. The ability of the Black Creek Business Area to benefit from the new transit infrastructure is contingent on finding ways to breach this barrier and reduce travel times from the station. There are many opportunities for reducing the barrier of the rail corridor, including creating new connections, improving existing connections and introducing micro-mobility options designed to cross the corridor.

Develop an Eco-Neighbourhood



There has been grassroots interest in pursuing sustainability and resilience at the neighbourhood level in Mount Dennis for many years. The Mount Dennis Community Association is leading the effort with its Mount Dennis Eco-Neighbourhood Initiative that aims to co-design a community-based climate action plan with local stakeholders. This initiative is also aligned with the City's TransformTO climate action strategy. An eco-neighbourhood in Mount Dennis would include both opportunities for climate mitigation (reducing local greenhouse gas emissions) and adaptation (developing resilience to the impacts of climate change).

A Mount Dennis for Everyone



The Mount Dennis of today is a diverse community in terms of income levels, ethnic and cultural backgrounds and family types. Current residents feel that its relative housing affordability and the diverse community who are able to settle in Mount Dennis as a result are some of Mount Dennis' greatest strengths. The Planning Framework aims to ensure that Mount Dennis remains a community for everyone by using every tool available to maintain the diversity and affordability of the housing stock and making recommendations regarding a safe and welcoming environment, equitable employment opportunities and community amenities and supports to ensure everyone feels like they belong in Mount Dennis.

Frameworks and Strategies

The Frameworks and Strategies of the Picture Mount Dennis Planning Framework take the desired future state of Mount Dennis as defined by the vision, guiding principles and transformative moves and translate it into the concrete steps required to make it a reality over the next 30+ years. The four frameworks are derived from the four themes which guided the study.

Each Framework is accompanied by a Healthy and Inclusive Communities Strategy designed to ensure that the three lenses of equity and social development, sustainability and resilience and public health are reflected in the Planning Framework. The Strategies aim to optimize the potential of development in Mount Dennis to advance sustainability objectives and strengthen the social cohesion of existing and new residents through social/economic/environmental recommendations that take an equity lens to development in accordance with a variety of City strategies and action plans.



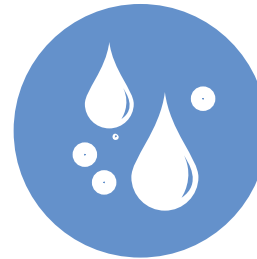
Land Use and Urban
Design Framework



Public Realm
and Mobility
Framework



Cultural Heritage
Framework



Environment and
Infrastructure
Framework

Land Use and Urban Design Framework

The Land Use and Urban Design Framework is intended to guide Mount Dennis' evolution with regard to built form, economic development and community services. It creates an urban structure within which Mount Dennis can accommodate significant new growth - a more than doubling of its population over the next 30+ years - while continuing to develop as a diverse, liveable and transit-supportive community. The Framework defines the areas within which the majority of this growth should be concentrated and the areas that should remain relatively stable with only incremental change. It also establishes urban design guidelines to address how the new growth fits into the existing neighbourhood.

The Healthy and Inclusive Communities Strategy within the Land Use and Urban Design Framework includes recommendations designed to ensure that the growth that is coming to Mount Dennis benefits everyone. It addresses housing diversity, community services and facilities, economic development and skills development

and creating a healthy built environment. These topics require proactive management as new growth comes to Mount Dennis to achieve the healthy, equitable and inclusive future that the community desires.

The image below depicts the future vision for Mount Dennis in a cross section from west to east. The community is nestled between the green lowlands of the Valleys and Flats on either side, providing a direct connection to nature. Residential Areas remain at a similar scale as they are today, growing through incremental change and gentle intensification. Along the Mixed-Use Main Street of Weston Road there is mid-rise development on either side, privileging the pedestrian experience by protecting for sun exposure and skyview from the sidewalk. Heights step up gradually towards the rail corridor, where shadow impacts and overlook issues are negligible. The peak continues on the other side of the rail corridor at the Mixed-Use Node before descending into Black Creek.

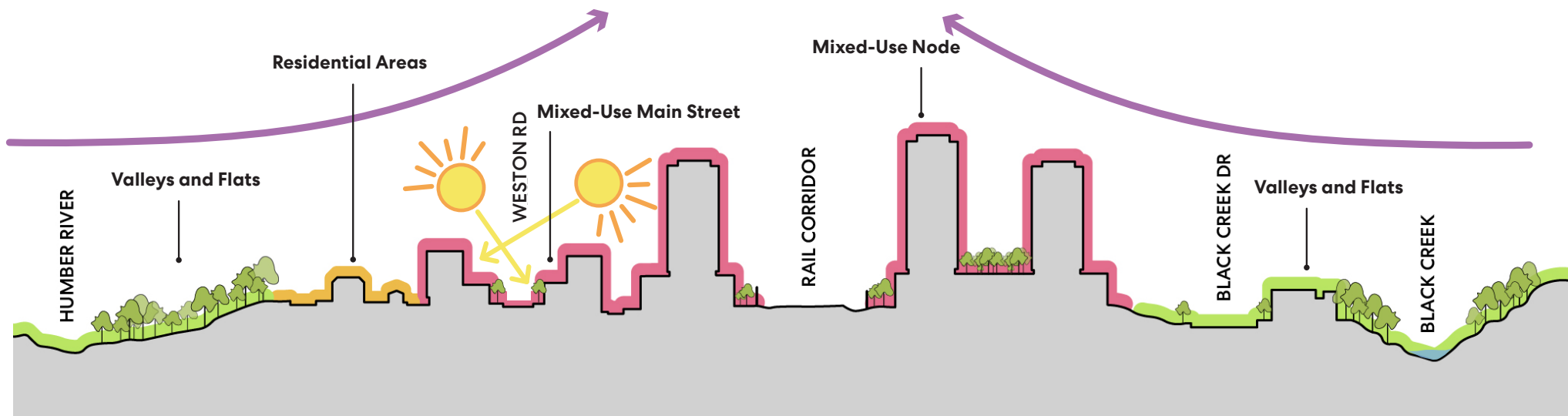


Figure 4. Character areas cross section of Mount Dennis

Public Realm and Mobility Framework

The Public Realm and Mobility Framework will guide the development of the public spaces and mobility system in Mount Dennis. It builds on the introduction of significant new transit infrastructure with the opening of Mount Dennis Station in 2022 to make sure that people in the community are able to safely and conveniently access that transit. It also lays the groundwork for the creation of a public realm - including ravines, parks, plazas, POPS and the streets themselves - that sustains the connection to greenery and nature that residents value in Mount Dennis today while the neighbourhood accommodates significant new growth.

The Healthy and Inclusive Communities Strategy within the Public Realm Framework includes recommendations for the implementation of a public realm and mobility system that meets the needs of all residents of Mount Dennis. It addresses diverse, accessible and inclusive park spaces, cycling connectivity, pedestrian safety and comfort and complete and green streets. Weston Road, Black Creek Drive and Ray Avenue are identified as priority complete streets with conceptual design options for reconfiguration. Opportunities for the introduction of green streets infrastructure such as bioswales and rain gardens are identified throughout Mount Dennis.



Figure 5. Illustration of Rain Garden interventions along Weston Road

Cultural Heritage Framework

The Cultural Heritage Framework is intended to ensure Mount Dennis' history is recognized and commemorated and to promote cultural vibrancy as the neighbourhood continues to grow and change. It is grounded in the Cultural Heritage Resource Assessment (CHRA) for Mount Dennis prepared by Common Bond Collective and the Stage 1 Archaeological Assessment prepared by Timmins Martelle Heritage Consultants. It is also informed by the recommendations regarding culture from previous studies in the area including the Mount Dennis Economic Development Study. The Cultural Heritage Framework is particularly indebted to input from the community through the Heritage Focus Group, interviews with members of cultural communities, the Indigenous engagement sessions and the larger engagement program for the Picture Mount Dennis Study.

The Cultural Heritage Framework identifies heritage potential properties for inclusion on the City's Heritage Register. The Healthy and Inclusive Communities Strategy within the Cultural Heritage Framework includes recommendations that augment the available heritage conservation tools to ensure a comprehensive approach to cultural heritage in Mount Dennis. It addresses celebrating Indigenous culture, naming, interpretation and wayfinding, opportunities for public art, intangible heritage, and workers' housing.

Cultural Heritage Themes



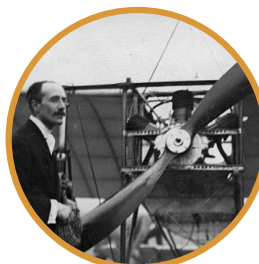
Natural Environment

- Topography
- Water Courses



Urban Environment

- Settlement
- Land Division and Subdivision
- Residential Development



Economic Activity

- Industry & Manufacturing
- Commerce



Civic Institutions

- Education
- Parks and Recreation
- Healthcare
- Public Safety
- Public Housing



Indigenous People and Practices

- Land Use
- Transportation Routes
- Treaty 13



Transportation and Infrastructure

- Early Roads
- Railways
- Commuter Transit



Governance and Civic Administration

- York Township (1793-1961)
- Borough of York (1961-1983)
- City of York (1983-1998)
- Metropolitan Toronto (1953-1998)
- City of Toronto (1998-present)



Community & Culture

- Places of Worship
- Lodges and Halls
- Cultural Communities

Environment and Infrastructure Framework

The Environment and Infrastructure Framework recommends upgrades to municipal servicing infrastructure in Mount Dennis to address existing and future system needs. Its recommendations are based on the Master Servicing Plan conducted by GM BluePlan as part of the Picture Mount Dennis Study, which looks at water, wastewater, stormwater and combined sewer systems. The Environment and Infrastructure Framework builds on the comprehensive recommendations of the City's Basement Flooding Study for Area 45 (Black Creek) which includes Mount Dennis. It takes into account the additional growth that would be permitted in the area by proposed changes to land use, height and density in the Land Use and Urban Design Framework. In general, recommended upgrades to address flooding issues will also meet growth needs. Green infrastructure opportunities outlined in the Public Realm and Mobility Framework also contribute to improved stormwater and combined sewer performance.

The Healthy and Inclusive Communities Strategy within the Environment and Infrastructure Framework includes recommendations to consider social development and equity in procurement for infrastructure upgrades as well as recommendations relating to other aspects of a sustainable and resilient environment. These include the grassroots Mount Dennis EcoNeighbourhood Initiative, renaturalization opportunities and net zero carbon/net zero energy initiatives.



Figure 6. 30 Denarda Street (top) and 15 Oxford Drive (bottom). The two buildings are of the same vintage, however 15 Oxford Drive has been recently reclad.

Implementation

For ease of implementation, each recommendation in the Picture Mount Dennis Planning Framework is categorized based on the actions the City will need to take to implement it.



Planning policy and development review

These recommendations can be implemented by City Planning by making policy changes to the Official Plan, zoning by-law or other by-laws, adding properties to the City's Heritage Register, or through the development review process.



Collaborative effort

These recommendations will need to be implemented by City divisions working together, the City working with other public agencies or the City working with private sector partners.



Community benefit

These recommendations can be implemented through community benefits negotiated as part of the development approval process or as part of Community Benefits Agreements for major public sector projects.



Capital project

These recommendations are capital projects that the City will need to plan for in future capital budgets.



Figure 7. Flexible patio space in Mount Dennis