

# Weston Historic Context Statement

## THEME: Indigenous Communities

For time immemorial, Toronto has been home to Indigenous peoples. Ojibway oral histories speak of Ice People, who lived at a time when ice covered the land.<sup>1</sup> Following the retreat of glaciers approximately 13,000 years ago, small groups of Indigenous peoples moved from place to place, hunting and gathering the food they needed according to the seasons. Over millennia, they adapted to dramatically changing environmental conditions, developing and acquiring new technologies as they did so. Waterways and the lake were vital sources of fresh water and nourishment, and shorelines and nearby areas were important sites for gathering, trading, hunting, fishing, and ceremonies. Long-distance trade moved valuable resources across the land.

After maize and squash were introduced to Southern Ontario, by approximately 500 CE, horticulture began to supplement food sources. By 1300 CE, villages focused on growing food became year-round settlements surrounded by crops. These villages were home to ancestors of the Huron-Wendat Nation, who would continue to occupy increasingly larger villages in the Toronto area and beyond. These villages were connected to well-established travel routes which were part of local and long-distance trail networks, including the Carrying Place trails on the Don, Rouge and Humber rivers that connected Lake Ontario to Georgian Bay. Beads made from seashells from the eastern seaboard were found at the Alexandra site in North York, which was a community of 800-1000 people in approximately 1350.

By 1600, the Wendat had formed a confederation of individual nations, and had concentrated most of their villages away from Lake Ontario, in the Georgian Bay area.

Following contact with French explorers and missionaries in Southern Ontario in the early 1600s, European diseases decimated First Nations. Competition for furs to trade with Europeans and the desire to replenish numbers through absorption of captives, among other factors,<sup>2</sup> contributed to the Beaver Wars, which after 1640, saw the Haudenosaunee Confederacy expand into Southern Ontario, dispersing the Wendat. Within the boundaries of today's Toronto, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy then occupied villages on the Carrying Place trails on the Humber and Rouge Rivers from approximately the 1660s to the 1680s.

In the late 1680s, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy chose to leave their villages in the Toronto area and returned to their homelands in upstate New York. As evidenced by the 1701 Great Peace of Montreal, the 1701 Nanfan treaty, and the Dish with One Spoon Treaty, the Haudenosaunee continued to have an interest in the resources of the area. Anishinaabe people from the Lake Superior region then moved in the Toronto area. While the Wendat and Haudenosaunee people lived in year-round villages surrounded by crops, the Anishinaabe people continued to live primarily by seasonally moving across the land to hunt, fish and gather resources that were available at a specific time, including migrating birds and maple syrup. To the west of Toronto, the Anishinaabe people became known as the Mississaugas of the Credit. To the east, they became known as the Chippewas of Beausoleil, Georgina Island and Rama and the Mississaugas of Alderville, Curve Lake, Hiawatha, Scugog Island.

In 1787, as the British began to prepare for an influx of colonists into the area following the

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<sup>1</sup> With thanks to Philip Cote for the references to Benton-Banai, Edward, *The Mishomis book: The voice of the Ojibway* (Indian Country Press, 1985), p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Gary Warrick, "The Aboriginal Population of Ontario in Late Pre-history," in Munson and Jamieson, eds. *Before Ontario: The Archaeology of a Province* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), p. 72.

American Revolution, the British Crown negotiated the Toronto Purchase with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation to obtain title to the land. The flawed and poorly documented agreement was invalidated, and Treaty 13 was negotiated in 1805 for lands now including much of the City of Toronto. In 1923, the Governments of Ontario and Canada signed the Williams Treaties for an area including portions of eastern Toronto, with seven First Nations of the Chippewa of Lake Simcoe (Beausoleil, Georgina Island and Rama) and the Mississaugas of the north shore of Lake Ontario (Alderville, Curve Lake, Hiawatha and Scugog Island).

The Mississaugas, Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, or the Wendat did not traditionally regard land as a commodity to be sold or owned. Following the Toronto Purchase, the British government quickly set out to survey the land into lots which were either sold or granted into private ownership of settlers.

The City of Toronto's Archaeological Management Plan identifies approximately 60% of the Weston in Gear Planning Study Area, including the banks of the Humber River, as retaining archaeological potential. Much of this archaeological potential is related to the Indigenous history of the area, including its connection to the Carrying Place Trail, an Indigenous trail that followed the Humber River from Lake Ontario to the Holland River near Lake Simcoe. The Carrying Place trail is part of a centuries-old network of Indigenous travel routes that once covered Southern Ontario, including the area now known as Toronto.<sup>3</sup>

There are currently three registered archaeological sites within the boundaries of the Study Area, two of which are related to Indigenous communities. The Scarlett site (AkGv-5) is registered with the Province as an Indigenous campsite east of the Humber River and south of Lawrence Avenue. The site was registered by Victor Konrad at York University in 1972 based on historical accounts and

confirmed through limited survey of the area. Konrad also noted that the Scarlett site could represent an Indigenous village approximately three to six acres in size but that it was likely that the majority of the site had been destroyed by 20<sup>th</sup> century development.

The Weston site (AkGv-6) is recorded as a collective burial site near the intersection of Weston Road and Bellevue Crescent, and was also registered by Konrad in 1972 based on historical accounts, including newspaper articles in 1911 when the burial site was accidentally disturbed by construction activities. The burial site was located on level ground near the east bank of the Humber River and may represent a 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> century Wendat ossuary. Unfortunately, very little information exists about this site beyond the 1911 newspaper articles, including the number of individuals represented in the collective burial or where the ancestral remains are today.

Today Weston is home to Eshkiniigjik Naandwechigegamig Aabiish Gaa Binjibaaying (ENAGB), an Indigenous youth-led and youth-focused organization, which has a community space at 1911 Weston Road. To the south of the study area in the Mount Dennis neighbourhood, ENAGB has a ceremonial lodge, sweat lodge, gardens and land-based educational programs on a site near the Humber River.

The City of Toronto remains the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinaabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. Weston is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit.

## **THEME: Governance and Civic Administration**

### ***Sub-theme: Early Settlement***

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<sup>3</sup> Toronto Carrying Place. About the trail. <https://www.torontocarryingplace.ca/about-the-trail>

The Mississaugas, Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, or the Wendat did not traditionally regard land as a commodity to be sold or owned. Shortly following the first signing of Treaty 13 in 1787, surveyors in Upper Canada began to survey land into legal lots to be granted or sold by the Crown to settlers. In 1793, the Weston area was surveyed into a grid of 200 acre lots, except where the grid was interrupted by the Humber River or other boundaries, and the area became part of York Township within York County. Concession road allowances formed the foundation of today's Lawrence Avenue West and Jane Street, both of which followed fairly straight grid patterns reflective of the rectangular surveyed lots.

Lots in the study area were considered attractive due to the proximity to the Humber River which hosted a number of prime sites for water-powered mills, as well as vast stands of timber which water-powered sawmills could turn into valuable lumber. Additionally, access to the area was facilitated by important Indigenous trails, including the Toronto Carrying Place trail, with connections to a trail leading to Fort York.<sup>4</sup>

Much of the early settlement of the area was associated with mills that were constructed on the banks of the Humber River, with many being located on the west side in what was then Etobicoke Township, and outside of the Study Area. Two prominent milling families, the Fars and the Wadsworths, likely gave the community its name - the Farr family came from Weston, Hertfordshire and the Wadsworths from Weston-Mare, both in England.<sup>5</sup> The small community grew as water-powered mills continued to be erected on both sides of the Humber River. The area also became an important hub for the surrounding rural communities, with an early post office established in the area by 1820.<sup>6</sup>

In 1850, a disastrous flood profoundly shaped the future of the community. The flood destroyed most of the buildings on the low west

banks of the river, which was then a concentrated area of settlement. Following the flood, villagers chose to rebuild their homes and businesses on the east side of the river, which was higher and less vulnerable to flooding. The small settlement on the east side of the river further formed into a village with Weston Road as its central organizing feature. Buildings stretched out primarily along the road, with a hotel, school, post office, and church clustered on Weston Road close to Lawrence Avenue West. This would become the main intersection of the growing community.

By 1878, the community was slowly growing along the Weston Road spine, with its core stretching from Lawrence Avenue West in the south to Coulter Avenue in the north. Further north and south along Weston Road, the village dissipated into a rural landscape.

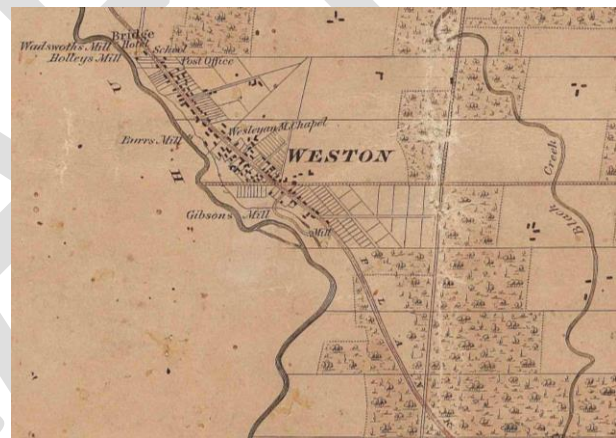


Figure 1: 1851 Map of the Township of York in the County of York Upper Canada (Brown, City of Toronto Archives).

<sup>4</sup> Archaeological Services Inc., "Technical Report, Appendix B., Humber River Corridor Historical Overview", B4.

<sup>5</sup> Documentation provided by Weston Historical Society.

<sup>6</sup> County of York Gazetteer and Directory for 1870 -71 and 1881



Figure 2: 1878 Illustrated Historical Atlas of the County of York (Miles & Co., Toronto Public Library).

### **Sub-theme: Village**

By 1881, the small community of Weston had reached a population of 1200 residents, large enough to become an incorporated village with its own municipal government.<sup>7</sup> Weston Road became known as Main Street during this time, reflecting the centrality of the street to the community. Following incorporation, a civic centre began to form around Little Avenue and King Street on Weston Road, led by the construction of a new Town Hall (demolished) at the northwest corner of the intersection in 1883. Other civic or institutional buildings followed, including the Methodist Church (1887), the Public School (1892, demolished), a firehall (1907, demolished), and the Weston Public Library (1914). The Town Hall, also known as Dufferin Hall, was designed by William Tyrell, a prominent local architect, landowner, and builder, and became the centre for community activities, including the Mechanics Institute and briefly the village's library prior to the construction of a stand alone library building. The Weston Library Branch was constructed in 1914 with the support of a grant of \$10,000 from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.<sup>8</sup>

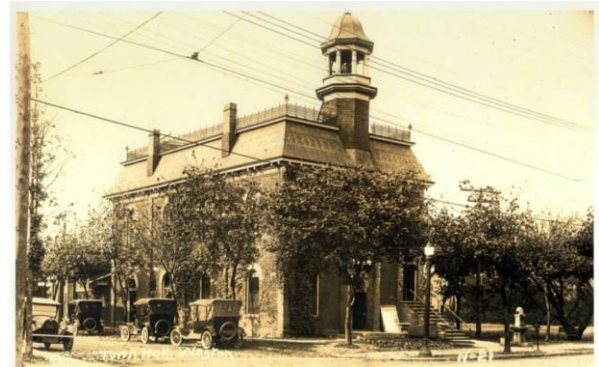


Figure 3: Weston Town Hall on the northwest corner of Weston Road and Little Avenue (demolished), no date (Weston Historical Society).

The 1907 publication, "Souvenir of Weston" notes that "considered as an industrial, residential or educational centre, Weston can more than hold its own. It has had no great boom, but its growth has been substantial".<sup>9</sup> The growing community was being supported by an expanding commercial core along Weston Road (then Main Street) between Little Avenue, two blocks north of Lawrence Avenue West, and Centre Street, one block south of Lawrence Avenue West. This core was also a drawn for people in the surrounding rural communities, whether to do shopping or stop at one of the hotels before continuing onto Toronto. The commercial core of the village included one-to-three storey main street commercial buildings, which included grocers, banks, bakers, hotels, and barbers among other businesses to support the village's residents and surrounding area.



Figure 4: Portion of an aerial view of the study area looking north along Weston Road from around Lawrence Avenue West, c. 1917. The approximate location of the institutional core is outlined in red (Weston Historical Society).

<sup>7</sup> County of York Gazetteer and Directory (Toronto: W.H. Irwin & Co., 1881), p.224.

<sup>8</sup> Carnegie Library – Weston. Toronto Public Library.

<sup>9</sup> Souvenir of Weston, Times and Guide, 1907.



Figure 5: Weston Road (Main Street), looking south north of King Street, c. 1910. The Central Church (left) and Town Hall (right) are visible (Toronto Public Library).

### **Sub-theme: Town**

In 1915, Weston became incorporated as a Town, and recorded a population of 2200<sup>10</sup> – an increase of 700 people over 20 years. Its growth then began accelerating. Over the next 7 years, Weston would grow by another 1300 residents to 3569 in 1923. By 1929, the town had reached a population of 4425<sup>11</sup>. As a sign of the impact of the growth on the small community, Weston Town Council installed its first signs indicating the name of streets in 1916<sup>12</sup>. Numbering on houses followed. In 1927, the town installed its first stop signs to manage traffic.<sup>13</sup>

The civic and commercial core of the study area continued to be centered around Weston Road between Lawrence Avenue West and King Street. In 1936, Toronto architecture firm Horwood and White were hired to construct a new post office building (demolished) for the Town of Weston on the southeast corner of Elsmere Avenue and Weston Road, across the street from the Town Hall.<sup>14</sup> The one-storey, brick Masonic Temple was also constructed in 1924 slightly north of King Street on the west side of Weston Road, adding to the civic core of the study area. Shortly after, in 1925, the Weston Theatre opened directly to the north of the Masonic temple.

<sup>10</sup>"Weston a Town", *The Globe*, October 3, 1914, 6.

<sup>11</sup>"Weston's Progress is Shown by Clerk", *The Globe*, May 22, 1929, Pg. 17

<sup>12</sup>Town of Weston Council minutes, March 14, 1927.

<sup>13</sup>Town of Weston Council minutes, March 14, 1927.

<sup>14</sup>Toronto Historical Society. Weston Post Office / Dominion Public Building.

The Town of Weston continued to largely maintain its small-town character until the post-war period, as depicted in a 1942 image of the entrance to Weston (likely around Lippincott Street).



Figure 6: Town of Weston's Post Office, c. 1938 (Weston Historical Society).



Figure 7: Entrance to Weston, 1942 (Toronto Public Library).

### **Sub-theme: Amalgamations (Metropolitan Toronto/York/Toronto) and Planning Weston**

In 1953, Weston, along with the other towns and villages in York, North York, East York, Etobicoke and Scarborough, became part of Metropolitan Toronto. Metropolitan Toronto was created by the Provincial government as a second tier, regional government that would

address the rapid suburban expansion that occurred after the Second World War and ensure consistent planning across municipalities in its area.<sup>15</sup> Metropolitan Toronto was responsible for many large-scale infrastructure projects and initiatives, such as constructing new sewers and roads, and was critical in advancing new forms of housing, such as tower apartments, in order to meet growing housing needs and density requirements. Metropolitan Toronto also took control over a regional park system and turned the Humber Valley ravine into public park land.

Local governments such as Weston were still responsible for local planning initiatives, such as site-specific land use regulation, local roads and services. For much of its history, Weston had no formal planning apparatus and formed gradually as a village and then a town with the centre of the community running along and sprouting off Weston Road. With the formation of Metropolitan Toronto, the Provincial government required all municipalities to develop an Official Plan and appoint a Planning Board to guide growth in the area.<sup>16</sup>

By 1954, Weston was experiencing significant development pressure with the number of building permits issued by the end of June 1954 almost triple the number of permits from 1953.<sup>17</sup> The post war boom brought with it demand for new residences, commercial and office spaces, and municipal buildings, which began to change the character of Weston from a quaint industrial town to an urbanizing suburban centre. In 1954, Weston's Town Council appointed members to the newly formed Weston Planning Board which immediately recommended freezing bylaws be put in place as a stop gap measure given the development pressure and no Official Plan or comprehensive zoning was in place to control it.<sup>18</sup> The freezing bylaws would require developers to get approval from Council through a bylaw

amendment for any proposed redevelopment, providing Council some control over growth.



*Figure 8: The Metropolitan Toronto Planning Board's proposed form for the urban region with existing urban area in solid grey and projected future urban area in diagonal hatching. Weston is identified as an existing urban area. Approximate location of Weston outlined in red (White, Planning Toronto).*

The Town of Weston, however, never adopted comprehensive zoning bylaws or an Official Plan. A draft Official Plan was presented to the public in 1965 but never adopted, and Council quickly disbanded the first Weston Planning Board within two years of its formation. As a result, much of Weston's planning during the 1950s and 1960s was done on an application-by-application basis generally through amendments to the freezing bylaws by Town Council. This piecemeal planning process resulted in no clear planning guidance well into the 1960s.

In 1962, Weston Town Council reinstated a Planning Board with its mandate being to develop an Official Plan, zoning bylaws, and to approve new developments. In 1963, the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB), a Provincial body to review and make decisions on local planning matters, wrote a letter to the Weston Town Council ordering it to speed up the adoption of an Official Plan. The OMB noted that "for as long as the freezing bylaw remains, and in the absence of an official plan, neither

<sup>15</sup> White, Richard. *Planning Toronto: The Planners, the plans, their legacies, 1940-80*. UBC Press, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> White, R. *Toronto's Inner Suburbs Through the Lens of Planning History*. *Zeitschrift für Kanada-Studien* 38, 2018.

<sup>17</sup> *Times and Guide*. Note Big Jump in Town Building. July 22, 1954.

<sup>18</sup> *Times and Guide*. Million Dollar Building Increase: Weston Council Would 'Freeze' Construction of Multiple Buildings. September 1954.

builder or their neighbours are sure of their bulk, density and coverage right or protection under zoning”<sup>19</sup>. The OMB continued that due to the freezing bylaws and lack of Official Plan, Weston with a population of 9651 tendered more zoning amendments than Windsor (114,550), Sudbury (80,523), and Kitchener (77,190).



Figure 9: Topographic map of Weston, 1963. Shaded areas indicate developed land (Surveys and Mapping Branch, Department of Energy, Mines and Resources).

During this period, the concept of progress was fundamental for the Town Council. Significant nineteenth-century landmark buildings in the community were demolished and replaced with new, contemporary structures that spoke to Weston’s transition from a small town to part of the metropolis. In 1956, for example, Town Council argued that the 1883 Town Hall had outlived its usefulness to the community and that the “present appearance and facilities of the town are not something of which the town can be proud”<sup>20</sup>, and voted in favour of demolishing the old town hall building. The Town Hall was demolished a year later, after the new Weston Municipal Building was completed next door. The 1907 Fire Hall was replaced by a new Fire Hall in 1949, and demolished in 1961. The 1892 King Street Public School was replaced by a new school in 1957, while the 1936 Post Office at Elsmere

Avenue was demolished c. 1977. The 1912 Westminster Presbyterian Church at Weston Road and Bellevue Crescent was demolished in 1956 for a parking lot and then an apartment tower. The wave of modern civic and institutional construction in the post-war period that redefined Weston included the 2-storey modern brick Weston Federal Building at 2050 Weston Road (1963) which housed Weston’s new Post Office.



Figure 10: Weston’s old Town Hall (left) and new Municipal Building (right) prior to the demolition of the old Town Hall in 1964 (Weston Historical Society)



Figure 11: Sketch of the proposed Weston Federal Building, c. 1962 (Weston Times)

In 1967, the Town of Weston was amalgamated with York Township to become the Borough of York, which took over planning controls for Weston. The merger sparked another building boom in Weston with the Weston Times noting in October 1966 that “the unprecedented, massive building boom should give Weston a skyline which should match downtown Toronto’s”.<sup>21</sup> With still no Official Plan or comprehensive zoning to guide development, the Borough of York reinstated another set of freezing bylaws that would freeze land that was

<sup>19</sup> Weston Times, September 19, 1963.

<sup>20</sup> Times and Guide. Approve Plans for New Town Hall. October 6, 1955.

<https://vitacollections.ca/westonnews/3532399/1955-10-06/issue>

<sup>21</sup> Weston Times. York-Weston merger Sparks Massive Development Boom. October 13, 1966.

not zoned (the majority of Weston) until the proposed building was deemed acceptable by the Borough of York. The freezing bylaws remained in place until 1971 when the Borough of York adopted The Weston Zoning Bylaw (No. 1000) “to regulate the use of lands and the erection, use, bulk, height, spacing of and other matters relating to buildings and structures, and to prohibit certain use of lands and the erection and use of certain buildings and structures in that area of the Borough of York comprising of the former Town of Weston”.<sup>22</sup> It was the first time Weston was comprehensively zoned and clear policies developed for future growth and development, including residential, commercial, industrial uses.

In 1994, a Secondary Plan, and Urban Design Guidelines (UDG), were developed for Weston to “establish a framework for future redevelopment that will maintain the unique characteristics of the Weston area”.<sup>23</sup> The UDGs emphasized the need to recognize Weston as a distinct and significant community rooted in its history. The vast change experienced in Weston through development is captured in the UDGs as it notes that “the current challenge is to recapture Weston’s unique character of the past within a greatly changed urban area and reality”.<sup>24</sup> The UDGs proposed to bring back character through revitalizing retail and community activity along Weston Road, the maintenance of low-density residential activities, new residential development along Weston Road, new employment opportunities in industrial lands, and enhancing the Humber Valley as a recreational and environmental asset.

Since Weston’s amalgamation with York, Weston’s administration moved from the municipal building near Weston Road and Little Avenue to the York Civic Centre at 2700 Eglinton Avenue West and weakened the need for a civic core in Weston. Weston’s municipal building was demolished in 1996 and replaced

with a parking lot which it remains today. The fire services moved to a new building on the former CCM site near Lawrence Avenue West and Pine Street, and a funeral home took over the former fire hall building.

## **THEME: Transportation and Infrastructure**

### ***Sub-theme: Indigenous Travel Routes***

An important Indigenous trail now known as the Toronto Carrying Place passes through Weston’s west side. It was part of an inland route that connected Lake Ontario to the upper Great Lakes via the Humber and Holland rivers to Lake Simcoe and then Georgian Bay. The Toronto Carrying Place trail comprised the long, overland portage routes between navigable sections of the Humber and Holland rivers. It generally followed along the top of the river valley to avoid steep rises or falls in the land.

Part of a continental Indigenous transportation network, the Carrying Place trail also served Indigenous communities travelling locally between villages and harvesting or hunting grounds. In the 1670s, Haudenosaunee villages were established at the Lake Ontario terminus of the Rouge and Humber rivers. The village on the Humber took the strategic site now known as Baby Point, and was an Onondawahgah (Seneca) settlement named Teiaiagon. The Humber route then appears to have taken on primary importance over other portage routes following the Don and Rouge rivers for European travel and trade. French explorers used the Humber trail in the 1680s as a shortcut from Lake Ontario to the Upper Great Lakes.

In the 1690s, the Mississaugas replaced the Haudenosaunee in the area, calling the Humber River Kabechenong meaning 'gathering place to tie up'. The French chose the Humber Carrying Place trail as the location

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<sup>22</sup> Borough of York. The Weston Zoning Bylaw (No. 1000). 1971. City of Toronto Archives.

<sup>23</sup> City of York. Weston Secondary Plan Official Plan Amendment – Staff Report. August 24, 1994. City of Toronto Archives.

<sup>24</sup> City of York. Weston Secondary Plan Official Plan Amendment – Staff Report. August 24, 1994. City of Toronto Archives.

for their first trading post in the Toronto area c.1720, and when they built a second post near the mouth of the Humber in 1750.

When the British began acquiring land for settlement following the American War of Independence, the trail and its shortcut to the Upper Great Lakes was a major impetus for the original Toronto Purchase in 1787 and the establishment of what is now the City of Toronto in 1793. In that year, Upper Canada Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe travelled the Toronto Carrying Place trail to assess its suitability as a military route. Although the precise route of the Toronto Carrying Place is unknown, Jones' records suggest the trail crossed Eglinton Avenue several hundred metres west of Jane Street near present Emmet Avenue.<sup>25</sup> In the end Simcoe chose to establish Yonge Street as a major military road to the north, and the Toronto Carrying Place trail lost its strategic importance to the British. Portions of the trail, however, may have been widened into roads by settlers, including the portion of Weston Road that runs through Mount Dennis and Weston.

The Carrying Place trails continued to be used throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as an overland connection between the lower and upper great lakes, with some portions of the trail along the northern reaches in the Georgian Bay area recorded as still being in use in the early twentieth century.<sup>26</sup>

The Humber River was designated as a Canadian Heritage River in 1999 due to its “outstanding human heritage and recreational values, and its contribution to the development of Canada” primarily connected to the Carrying Place Trail.<sup>27</sup> A Canadian Heritage River Systems bronze plaque for the Carrying Place Trail sits near the corner of Little Avenue and Weston Road.

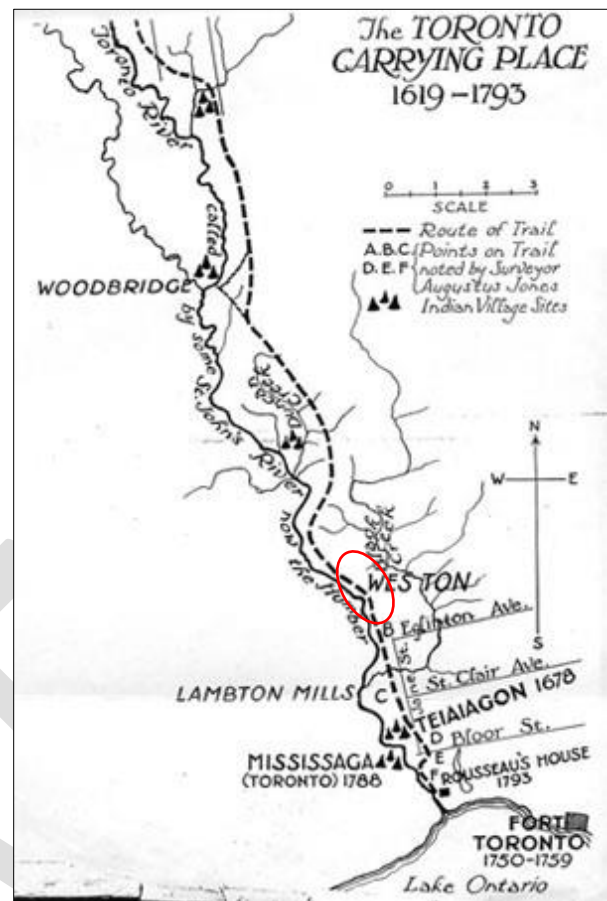


Figure 12: A map of the Carrying Place Trail as it appeared from 1616 – 1793. Approximate location of the study area outlined in red (The Canadian Encyclopedia, courtesy of Taiiako'n Historical Preservation Society).

### Sub-theme: Colonial Roads

Likely following portions of the route of the Toronto Carrying Place Trail, Weston Road is presumably the earliest road in the Study Area. It was followed by today's Lawrence Avenue West and Jane Street, which were surveyed by the British as concession roads which allowed access to 200 acre farm lots. Weston Road, Lawrence Avenue West, and Jane Street, therefore, have provided the core transportation infrastructure for the Study Area for over 225 years.

<sup>25</sup> Glenn Turner, *The Toronto Carrying Place: Rediscovering Toronto's Most Ancient Trail*, (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2015), 140-141.

<sup>26</sup> Veilleix, A. 2011. *Knowing Landscape: Living, Discussing, and Imaging the Toronto Carrying Place*.

<sup>27</sup> Toronto and Region Conservation Authority. *The Humber River – A Canadian Heritage River Story Map*. <https://apca.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=24ae9d1bc91a48c6805f5061072cc77a>

Throughout at least the first half of the nineteenth-century, roads were dirt tracks that were slow and difficult to travel with wagons, particularly during wet weather. This made it difficult to move produce or flour from the mills along the Humber River to other markets, such as Toronto to the south. Indicating the significance of Weston Road even in this early period, the Weston Plank Road Company was created in 1841 to make Weston Road more accessible by covering the dirt road with pine planks and constructing three toll houses along the route to pay for the upkeep of the road.<sup>28</sup> Around 1846, the Weston Plank Road Company constructed their headquarters in a two-storey brick building on Weston Road near St. Phillips Road, which is still extant at 2371 Weston Road.



Figure 13: Weston Road Plank near St. Phillip's Road (Heritage Planning, 2025)

The coming of the railway in the 1850s greatly improved access to other markets and the cost of upkeep of the plank road was too extensive to be covered by tolls. The Weston Plank Road Company was shuttered by 1870 and the roads were often turned to gravel surfaces, which were easier to upkeep.

The local streets running east and west off Weston Road were developed primarily from the 1840s through the early twentieth-century as plans of subdivision opened lands for development. From the Humber River to the rail corridor, streets are largely irregular and often not continuous in response to both the irregular path of Weston Road and the river and later, the railway. East of the rail corridor, early plans of

subdivision in the 1850s laid out Rosemount Avenue parallel to the railway corridor, and Elm Street running nearly parallel to Jane Street. Between Rosemount and Elm, streets ran perpendicular to Rosemount. East of Elm Street, streets were laid out perpendicular to Elm Street. Plans of Subdivision continued to alter the street layout in the area between Rosemount and Elm Street until the second decade of the twentieth century.

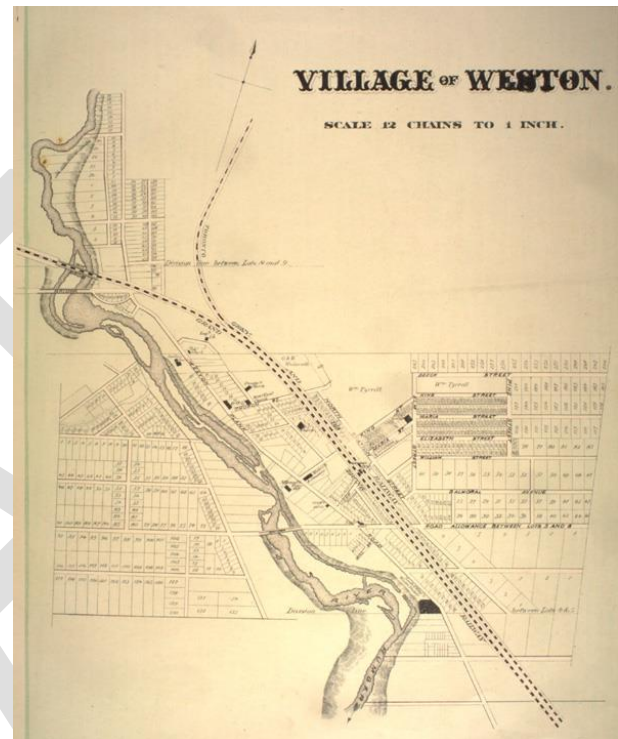


Figure 14: Map of the Village of Weston, 1878 (McGill University).

On many of the local residential streets north of Lawrence Avenue, a distinctive type of stone retaining wall was used to assist in separating grades in the right of way in the early twentieth century. Many of those walls were constructed by a stone mason named James Gove, who used stone gathered from the Humber River. James Gove and his stone work are commemorated by a plaque in Memorial Park on Little Avenue, and the stone walls are considered a distinctive and important feature of Weston. The stone walls were identified as a heritage attribute in the Weston Phase I Heritage Conservation District.

<sup>28</sup> Etobicoke Historical Society. Grubb Farm "Elm Bank".

South of Lawrence Avenue, the large agricultural lots on either side of Weston Road began to be subdivided in the early-twentieth century into a grid-like street network working with the curves of the Humber River, including Denison Avenue, Lippincott Street, and Sykes Avenue. In the same fashion as the older residential in the north of Weston, many of the residences in this area feature Humber River stone walls. Further development of the street grid in this portion of the study area would continue into the 1920s, particularly with the redevelopment of the former Weston Woolen Mill site into Wilby Crescent.

After the Second World War, the use of the car grew exponentially in Weston, as it did elsewhere. The increase in car use had a direct impact on Weston's built environment and small-town character. Between 1948 and 1950, Weston Road was widened slightly to accommodate four lanes of traffic. In 1951, construction began on the Highway 401 extension between Weston and York Mills, known as the Toronto Bypass, just to the north of the study area. The Highway ended at Weston Road which began to change the character of the street from a Main Street that supported the town to a busy thoroughfare. Conflict over this matter spilled into the newspapers, with an article in 1957 noting that the Town had "undertook a few years ago to improve our Main Street at considerable expense to make this a first class town in which to live. Now it is a thruway according to Metro to send people to other areas".<sup>29</sup> Weston Road was renamed from Main Street in 1960.

Metropolitan Toronto also undertook two large scale road infrastructure projects in Weston on Lawrence Avenue West. The first was the widening of Lawrence Avenue West to four lanes between Little Avenue and Weston Road in 1956, followed by the construction of the Lawrence Avenue West underpass to the east of Weston Road in 1959.



*Figure 15: Lawrence Avenue West with newly constructed underpass, looking east from Weston Road, 1960 (City of Toronto Archives).*

### **Sub-theme: Railways**

The existing character of Weston was greatly shaped by the extension of the railways across it. The Grand Trunk Railway (GTR) was first to complete construction in 1856, with its line generally running parallel to the east of Weston Road and curving across the Humber River north of St. Phillip's Road.<sup>30</sup> The Toronto Grey and Bruce Railway (TGBR) followed in the early 1870s and shared a line with the GTR until curving slightly northeast north of Rectory Road.<sup>31</sup>

The coming of the railways meant a great deal to the future of the small milling community on the Humber River. While it would continue to serve its surrounding agricultural communities as a resource and service centre, Weston now had easy and efficient access to markets much further away. That easy access drew industries to the area which would play a major role in the development of the Town for the next 100 years. Only in the second half of the twentieth century, as industry turned more towards highway transportation than rail, would the rail corridor in Weston lose some of that importance.

<sup>29</sup> Times and Guide. "What is Metro Monster to do Next to our Weston? Business Men Irked with Parking Laws". June 6, 1957. <https://vitacollections.ca/westonnews/3556153/page/2>

<sup>30</sup> This line ran from Queen Street West in Toronto to Guelph

<sup>31</sup> The first sod was turned at Weston by Prince Arthur on 3 October 1869, and by 1 May 1871, the track had been laid to Orangeville. The line from Orangeville to Owen Sound was completed in 1873.



Figure 16: Birds Eye View of the Belt Line Railway showing Weston's connection to the railway network, 1891. An arrow points to Weston (Old Maps Toronto).

### **Sub-theme: Commuter Transit**

The railways supported both the transportation of goods and people. As a result, they led immediately to the construction of buildings and infrastructure to support them. The first station may have been constructed by the GTR was located near Oak Street and Weston Road near the northern limits of Weston.<sup>32</sup> The TGBR station was constructed in 1875 and was located at the northwest corner of Rosemount Avenue and John Street, near the commercial and civic centre of Weston. By 1884, the GTR opened a new station on the opposite side of John Street as a means to compete with TGBR being more centrally located. The TGBR shortly fell under ownership of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). In 1908, the CPR constructed a new station for Weston in the same location on John Street.

With the growth of car dependency and construction of Highway 401 in 1951 to the north of the study area, ridership on the railways significantly declined after the 1950s.<sup>33</sup> As a result, the CPR station was closed to the public in 1957 and demolished in 1973. Similarly, the GTR station (then operated by the Canadian National Railway) was demolished in 1966.



Figure 17: CPR Station near Rosemount Avenue and John Street, 1953 (Toronto Public Library).

In 1974, GO Transit started a new service along their route between Union Station and Georgetown and included a stop in Weston.<sup>34</sup> This was largely due to the decline of ridership on the railways which passed through Weston, allowing GO Transit to repurpose the rail lines. The initial GO Transit station near John Street was demolished in 2013 due to the anticipation of the Union Pearson (UP) Express passing through Weston. A new station was constructed south of Lawrence Avenue in 2015 to support both GO Transit and the UP Express. Since the opening of the new combined UP Express and GO Transit station, the Weston area has been experiencing significant growth and development activity, including 13 active tall building development applications proposed in the area since 2019.<sup>35</sup> Toronto's City Council adopted Site and Area Specific Policy 695 which delineated Weston as a Major Transit Station Area which plans for a minimum combined population and employment target of 200 residents and jobs per hectare, continuing the redevelopment of the area.

Distinct from the railway corridor, in 1894, the Toronto Suburban Railway (TSR), an interurban electrified street car service, reached Weston from West Toronto Junction, where commuters could connect to the City of Toronto.<sup>36</sup> With better commuter transportation, Weston became a more attractive place to live, work, and shop.

<sup>32</sup> Toronto Railway Historical Association. Weston Station (Canadian Pacific Railway).

<sup>33</sup> IBID

<sup>34</sup> Daniel Garcia and Sean Marshall, "Go Transit's Kitchener Line," accessed on 24 October 2019, at

<sup>35</sup> City of Toronto. Weston in Gear Planning Study – Status Report. October 7, 2024.

<sup>36</sup> James V. Salmon. 1958. Rails from the Junction : the story of the Toronto Suburban Railway.

The Weston Route of the TSR ran between the West Toronto Junction at Keele and Dundas streets and the village of Weston. The TSR originally stopped south of Lawrence Avenue West before expanding north to a stop near Church Street on Weston Road and then north to a stop near St. Phillip's Road at the northern edge of the village. The streetcar ran along the centre of Weston Road. By the early 1900s, another TSR line was constructed connecting Weston to the village of Woodbridge to the north (now Vaughan).

The Toronto Transportation Commission (TTC) was formed in 1921 to take over all streetcar services in the City of Toronto. Shortly after its formation, the Township of York negotiated a contract with the TTC that would extend streetcar services from Dundas Street West in the Junction through the Town of Weston. The streetcar service opened in Weston on November 28, 1925, with new streetcar tracks running along Weston Road. The streetcars in Weston would be replaced by buses in 1948, after which the streetcar tracks were removed.



Figure 18: Toronto Suburban Streetcar on Weston Road near Little Avenue, c. 1910s (City of Toronto Archives)

## **THEME: Economic Activity and Industry**

### **Sub-theme: Early Milling**

The first recorded industrial use in Weston was directly associated with the Humber River, where strong currents provided a significant

source of water power. Beginning in the early nineteenth century, water powered mills were established along the low river flats on the west side of the river, in what was Etobicoke Township. Saw mills were vital to the processing of forests into lumber. Grist mills were essential for processing grain into flour. Mills and their associated industries became central elements of Weston's early economy, and a magnet for settlement. Milling also influenced the social structure of the town, with leading millers and their families taking leading positions in the community. The success of the mills was furthered by the railway as goods could be more easily transported to other markets.

By the 1870s, milling was still very much part of the local economic structure, but its influence was waning. The 1870 *County of York Gazetteer and Directory* noted the importance of water powered industry, and noted in particular a woollen mill and several flour and saw mills in the community.<sup>37</sup> With timber stands dwindling, however, the water-powered mills were hit with a disaster. In 1878, another major flood wiped out water-powered mills in the Toronto area, including some of those in Weston. Wadsworth's Mill survived, but was by then running at least partly on energy provided by steam.<sup>38</sup> As water power became increasingly erratic due to the decline of forested lands, industry was leaving the rivers behind and turning to steam and coal as more stable sources of power.

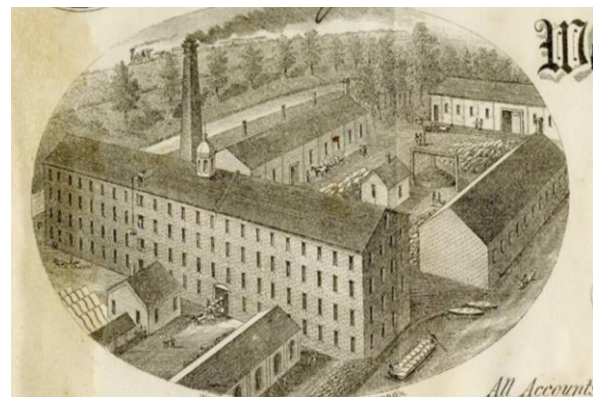


Figure 19: Weston Woollen Mill near the Humber River, 1879 (Toronto Public Library)

<sup>37</sup>*County of York Gazetteer and Directory for 1870-71, Including a Full Business Directory of the City of Toronto* (Toronto: McEvoy & Co., 1870), p.161.

<sup>38</sup>Fisher, 151.

In 1895, the small community was dramatically impacted by the failure of the Weston Woollen Manufacturing Company. Writing in the 1930s, F.D. Cruickshank noted that the Company was considered the "largest and most important local industry," and its closure threw over 100 people out of work and "a great many families moved away."<sup>39</sup> The site of the Weston Woollen Manufacturing Company became a racetrack, the Weston fairgrounds and eventually the Weston Lions Park, which it remains today.

### **Sub-theme: Industry**

A new wave of industrial development, no longer tied to the rivers, was spurred by the arrival of the Grand Trunk Railway in 1856 and the Toronto, Grey and Bruce Railways in 1869. Small manufacturing industries had been established in Weston around the mid-nineteenth century prior to the railway, such as Cruickshank Wagon Works manufacturing business and the Weston Pump works, both located on Weston Road.<sup>40</sup>



Figure 20: Cruickshank Wagon Works building on Weston Road, no date (Weston Historical Society)

By the late nineteenth century, manufacturing became the primary type of employment in Weston. Large factories situated themselves close to the railway tracks at the north and

south ends of the Town, replacing what was once agricultural land. An early industry to the area was the Moffat Stove Company which opened its plant in 1892 on the east side of the rail corridor south of Denison Avenue. Originally established in Markdale, the company's move to Weston gave it distinct advantages. An article/advertisement in the *Globe* in 1894 reported on the factory's modern amenities but also noted its "close proximity to the City of Toronto" and its enjoyment of "the best possible railway facilities"<sup>41</sup>. Weston promoted itself heavily as a new hub of industry which was close to Toronto, had eligible sites for manufacturers with access to the railways, with good schools and homes for workers.<sup>42</sup>

Weston saw industrial growth well into the twentieth century. By 1910, several companies opened factories in Weston, including the Barron Brick Company, Weston Tool and Novelty Company, the Reliable Bedstead Company, and the Sanitary Packing Company of Weston, and the Eastman Kodak Company in nearby Mount Dennis. In 1916, one year after Weston became a town, the Massey-Harris Company, one of Toronto's most significant companies, opened a tractor factory in Weston, employing nearly 200 people by 1920. Shortly after in 1917 the Canada Cycle and Motor Company (CCM) moved their factory from the Toronto Junction to Weston and built a large factory on Lawrence Avenue West east of the railway tracks. According to a 1923 article in the local newspaper, *Times & Guide*, building activity was moving full steam ahead in Weston in the 1920s. The newspaper urged residents to "become acquainted with the growth and development of [their] town and tell it out...that [they] are bringing people to reside and do business in [the] Town of Weston."<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup>Cruickshank, 16.

<sup>40</sup> The Cruickshank Wagon Works site was located at 2062 Weston Road. In 1945, the Cruickshank family converted the wagon works into a Ford Motor dealership known as Cruickshank Motors Ltd. The business remained in the Cruickshank family until 2006 when it was sold (Weston Historical Society. [Weston History. History | Weston Historical](#))

<sup>41</sup>The *Globe*, July 7, 1894, pg. 12.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>"Big Progress Made in Weston Bldgs," *York Times & Guide (Weston, Ontario)*, 15 August 1923, p.1

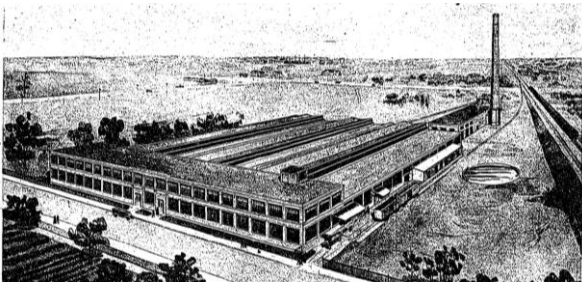


Figure 21: Canada Cycle and Motor Company plant in Weston, 1918 (Construction Magazine)

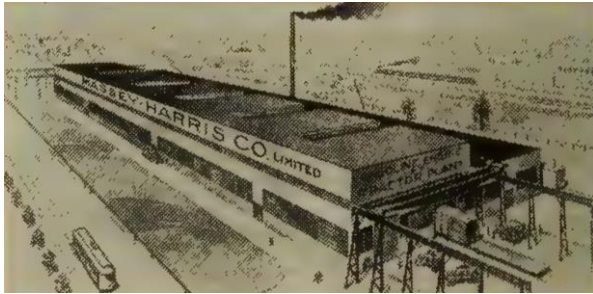


Figure 22: Massey-Harris Company plant in Weston, c. 1920 (Massey-Harris: An Historical Sketch, 1847 – 1920)

The influx of industry spurred further residential development in Weston to support the labour force and their families. The residential area west of Weston Road on Sykes, Denison, Victoria Avenue, and Lippincott Street experienced a boom in development between 1910 and 1924 likely supporting workers from the nearby factories. The streetcar system in Weston also brought workers from the Junction and more rural areas to work in the many factories springing up along the rail corridor.

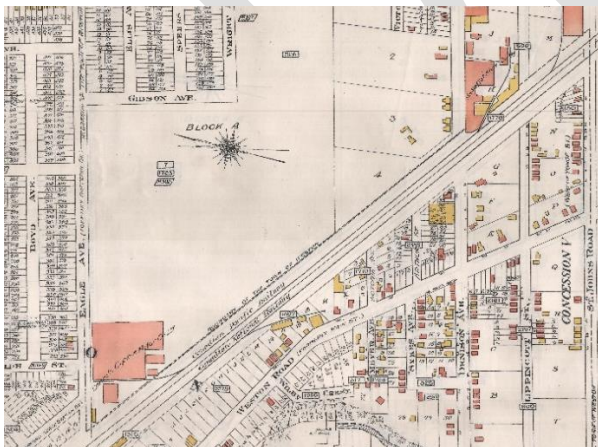


Figure 23: 1924 Fire Insurance Plan showing the CCM and Moffat Stove Company factories south of Lawrence Avenue West and the neighbouring residential development (University of Toronto).

Industry continued to grow in Weston through the 1950s and 1960s as Metropolitan Toronto encouraged industry to cluster along rail corridors and highways in the inner and outer suburbs. Metropolitan Toronto promoted the clustering of industries in these areas partially to reduce workers need to travel to work and therefore less pressure on roads and transit systems.<sup>44</sup> The construction of Highway 401 in 1952 drew several new industries to the north end of Weston (north of the study area) around the Highway, including a new T. Eaton Company warehouse, Maple Leaf Plastics, and George Weston Bakery.

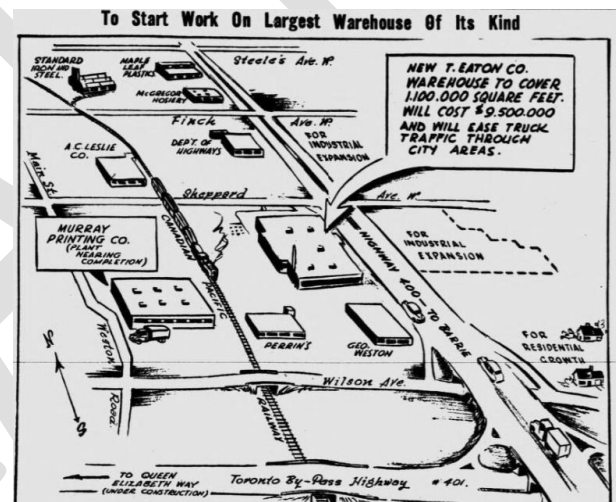


Figure 24: Industrial development near Highway 401 north of the study area, 1954 (Times and Guide).

Industry began to decline in Weston beginning in the late 1970s as businesses closed or moved their factories to the outer suburbs or offshore. By the early 1980s, CCM, Massey-Harris Company, and the Moffat Stove Company had all closed their factories in Weston with more closures continuing into the 1990s.

Many of the factory buildings were demolished and replaced with large-format retail stores and strip malls given the properties large footprint. The site of the CCM factory, for instance, is now

<sup>44</sup> White, R. 2018. Toronto's Inner Suburbs Through the Lens of Planning History. Zeitschrift für Kanada-Studien 38.

home to a contemporary Fire Hall, a large shopping plaza, and residential subdivision in the south portion of the lot. Some factories, including the Irving Tissue Corporation, continue to operate directly south of the study area, in the Mount Dennis neighbourhood and north of Highway 401.

## THEME: Commerce

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the successful milling economy in Weston attracted more people to settle in the area, and supported the development of Weston as a resource and service centre for the surrounding agricultural community. As the local and surrounding population grew, commercial stores were established to cater to the community primarily around the intersection of Lawrence Avenue West and Weston Road, and at Weston Road and St. Phillip's Road, a major connecting road to Etobicoke Township and close to the early railway station. Commerce on Weston Road was also supported by travellers through the area. Hotels, in particular, were established near the commercial centres in Weston, including the Eagle Hotel (1870) near Lawrence and Weston, the Central Hotel (1879) at Weston and John, and the Weston Hotel (also known as Burke's Hotel) near St. Phillip's Road (date unknown).



Figure 25: Eagle Hotel on the northeast corner of Lawrence Ave W and Weston Rd, c. 1900 (Weston Historical Society).

The main commercial core of Weston formed around Weston Road and Lawrence Avenue West. By the time Weston was incorporated as a village in 1881, the area around the intersection featured grocery stores, general

stores, two hotels, and other businesses to support the community. One of the buildings that would come to define the area was the Rowntree dwelling and store on the northwest corner of Weston and Lawrence. The building was designed by prolific local builder and Reeve, William Tyrell, in 1883, and was designed with a curved corner to reflect the odd angles of the intersection created by Weston Road's irregular path.

By the turn of the century, one to two-and-a-half storey brick and wood commercial buildings lined Weston Road between Bellevue Crescent to the south and Little Avenue to the north. The densest rows of commercial buildings were on the east side of Weston Road between Lawrence and John, and on the west side of Weston Road between Lawrence and Bellevue Crescent. Much of the other buildings on the blocks within the commercial core were generally spaced further apart.

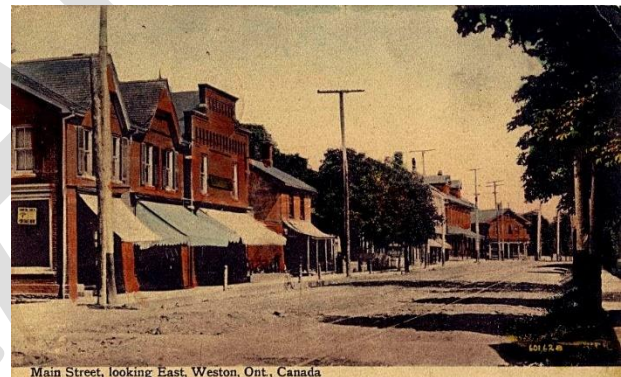


Figure 26: Weston Road looking south from John Street, 1904 (City of Toronto Archives).

The growth of the Town of Weston in the early twentieth century fueled further commercial development. As early as 1904, nineteenth century wood commercial buildings in the commercial core were being renovated with new brick facades that reflected main street commercial architecture in more urban areas like the West Toronto Junction. Evidence of this trend is still visible on the commercial buildings at 1894 Weston Road where the gable roof of the nineteenth century building is still extant behind the brick facade. In the same period, three impressive bank buildings were constructed between John Street and Lawrence Avenue West, and some nineteenth century commercial structures were replaced

with more contemporary brick main street commercial buildings, such as the buildings on the southeast corner of John and Weston.

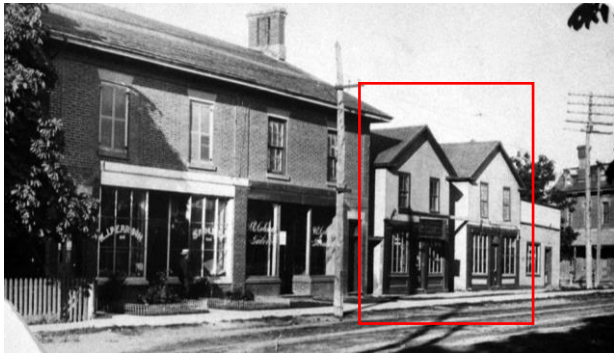


Figure 27: Weston Road south of Lawrence Avenue West looking north, c. 1910. Note the stores with gable roofs prior to brick facades being added. The Rowntree building is visible in the background (Weston Historical Society)



Figure 28: Weston Road south of Lawrence Avenue West, 2019. The gable roof is visible behind the brick façade on the property at 1894 Weston Road (Google Streetview)



Figure 29: Weston Road looking south from around John Street showing the new brick structure on the southeast corner, 1925 (Toronto Public Library)



Figure 30: Weston Road looking north from north of Lawrence Avenue West, 1948 (Weston Historical Society)

While the commercial core of Weston remained fairly stable through the 1930s and 1940s, it experienced dramatic change between the 1950s and 1970s which altered the character and built form of the area. During this period of economic growth, nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings were replaced with modern buildings, which included larger format stores and shopping plazas designed for the age of the automobile. The construction of a new Loblaws store in the early 1950s, with its 200-car parking lot at the rear, required the demolition of several buildings on the west side of Weston Road near John Street. The Times and Guides newspaper noted that “the many existing retail merchandising establishments in the Main Street area are being congratulated on the fact that the big grocery chain has chosen this shopping centre as a progressive and expanding one and suitable for the location of one of its largest stores”<sup>45</sup>. In 1959, the Bank of Montreal on the northeast corner of John and Weston Road was replaced with “an ultra-modern” bank building designed by Toronto architect, Douglas Kertland. By the early 1960s, the Central Hotel at Elsmere and Weston Road was demolished for a large store, and the Bank of Nova Scotia at the southeast corner of Lawrence Avenue and Weston Road was demolished and reconstructed in a modern style by prominent architects Page and Steel.

<sup>45</sup> Times and Guide. Big Loblaws Supermarket Opens Today in Weston Great Asset to the Area. May 1955.



Figure 31: The Loblaws and Kresge stores on Weston Road, looking north towards Little Avenue, 1965 (Weston Historical Society).

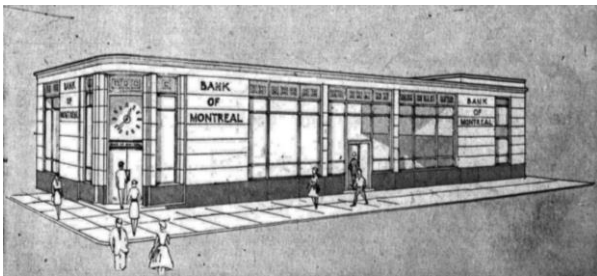


Figure 32: Drawing of the new Bank of Montreal building at John Street and Weston Road, 1959 (Times and Guide).

Even more drastic change came to the built form of the commercial core by mid-1960s when the one and two storey stores at the northwest corner of Weston Road and Lawrence Avenue West were demolished and replaced with a 13-storey apartment tower with commercial and office uses on the lower levels. The building, known as the Westlaw Building, was designed similarly to the former Rowantree store as its rounded street-level façade curved to follow the corner of the intersection. Across Weston Road, the 100-year old Eagle Hotel and neighbouring buildings were also replaced by a large mixed used development, including a residential tower. Another large tower was constructed just east of Weston Road between Elsmere and King Street. South of Lawrence Avenue West, new apartment towers replaced previous buildings in the 1960s and 70s.



Figure 33: Northwest corner of Lawrence Avenue West and Weston Road, 1967 (City of Toronto Archives)

Notwithstanding all these changes, Weston's early-twentieth century main street character remained legible and important to the community. The small scale, older retail buildings have provided opportunities for new businesses to serve the changing communities in the area, while others have valued their tangible connection to Weston's past. In 1994, a new Secondary Plan and Urban Design Guidelines for the area highlighted a key objective to revitalize the retail activity along Weston Road, the "strong and attractive heart of Weston". The commercial core area was defined as the Weston Village character area and guidelines were proposed to increase landscaping, sidewalk width, and tree planting to improve the pedestrian experience. Additionally, the UDGs proposed the development of a facades and signage improvement program that would use the theme of Weston Village and its historic attributes, and notes that "individual improvements within the historic Weston Village theme shall be encouraged at the time of redevelopment, especially on buildings with architectural or historic interest..."<sup>46</sup>.

<sup>46</sup> Weston Secondary Plan. Urban Design Guidelines. 1994. City of Toronto Archives.



Figure 34: Weston Road south of John Street with several late nineteenth and early twentieth century commercial building still extant (Heritage Planning, 2025)

### **Sub-theme: Commercial Spaces and the Car**

After the Second World War, the use of the car grew exponentially in Weston, a trend happening across Canada. New forms of commercial spaces were popularized that provided ample space for cars to park and were often constructed outside of historic commercial centres due to space limitations. By the mid-1950s, Weston's commercial core was losing business to shopping plazas on the outskirts of the town and the Business Association for the area blamed the issue on not enough parking for cars. The Business Association raised money around this time to make changes to Weston Road, likely narrowing the sidewalks, to provide on-street parking to attract customers. An early parking lot in the commercial core was the 200-car parking lot constructed at the rear of the newly opened Loblaws store (now 1966 Weston Road).



Figure 35: Weston Plaza at Church Street and Weston Road, 1971 (City of Toronto Archives).

By 1957, Town Council passed a bylaw noting that any building which is erected for commercial, or office use must provide permanent parking spaces at least equal in

area to the total floor space of the new building. The commercial core area on Weston Road generally between Bellevue Crescent and King Street was exempt from the bylaw, likely given the dense concentration of commercial structures already in place. This bylaw shaped the form of new commercial buildings as can be seen with the Weston Plaza, a strip plaza on the southeast corner of Church Street and Weston Road, which was constructed in the early 1960s set back from Weston Road with a large parking lot in front. Another early 1960s addition to the commercial core was the two-storey modern commercial building at 2079 Lawrence Avenue West which is set back from the road to provide parking in front of the building.

Parking in the commercial core remained a critical issue for Weston Town Council, the Business Association and residents who wanted to maintain the businesses in the area. By 1965, large swaths of land generally located behind the commercial buildings on Weston Road had been cleared and paved over as parking lots. This clearance resulted in the loss of trees, green space, and buildings on many of the side roads around the commercial core, particularly South Station Road, and along Lawrence and Weston Road. Several parking lots around the commercial core were redeveloped in the second half of the twentieth century and early twenty-first century with large towers that could accommodate underground and above ground parking garages.



Figure 36: Aerial photo of the intersection of Weston Road and Lawrence Avenue West with no visible parking lots, 1947 (City of Toronto Archives).

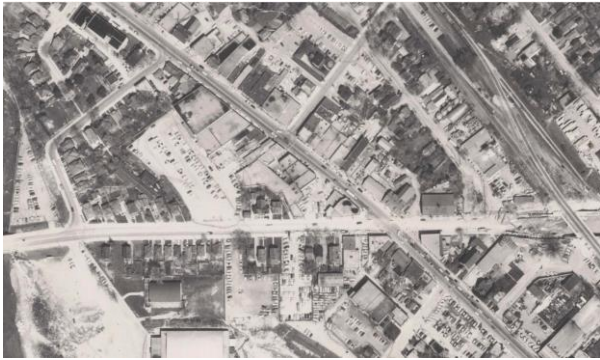


Figure 37: Aerial photo of the intersection of Weston Road and Lawrence Avenue West with several parking lots visible, 1960 (City of Toronto Archives)

## THEME: Residential Development

### Sub-theme: Detached and Semi-Detached Houses

Weston has a rich and varied housing stock that includes houses constructed in early nineteenth century to the present. Joseph Holley, a successful miller, constructed a house that still stands today at 6 Humberview Crescent circa 1835–45. Over the course of nearly 200 years, the area of Weston has been subdivided numerous times to support residential development.

The first registered subdivision plan for Weston, Plan No. 5, was registered in 1846, shortly after the Weston Plank Road Company was incorporated, and signalled the early development of the community. The plan primarily laid out a series of long and narrow lots stretching back from Weston Road with the only east-west road visible on the Plan being Church Street, which ran perpendicular to Weston Road.

By the 1850s, several residences dotted Weston Road and the streets to the east. Residences were often spaced out with land around to support agricultural activities. The area of Weston Road between St. Phillip's Road and King Street was primarily residential. Between the 1850s and 1880s, significant subdivision continued in Weston primarily north of Lawrence Avenue West. Land to the east of what would become the rail line was subdivided in the 1850s which spurred early residential development in the area. Much of the existing

street network between the Humber River and the rail corridor was surveyed by 1878. The area south of Lawrence Avenue West was slower to develop than the area to the north. Although subdivided by the 1870s, the area remained primarily agricultural with large milling operations along the Humber River.

Weston's residential growth was steady between the mid-nineteenth century and approximately the 1940s with no large development boom occurring. The 1910 Goad's Fire insurance Plan for Weston provides the first detailed map showing buildings existing in the area, and confirms how gradual the residential development of the area was. By this time, much of Weston Road between King Street and Coulter Avenue was lined with single family homes. The area appeared distinct from the commercial and civic core to the south, as the streets were lined with a thick tree canopy, wooden fences, Humber River stone walls, and green lawns fronting onto Weston Road. Another concentration of residential development was to the east of the rail corridor on Rosemount Avenue, King Street, Maria Street (now Queen's Drive), John Street, and William Street.

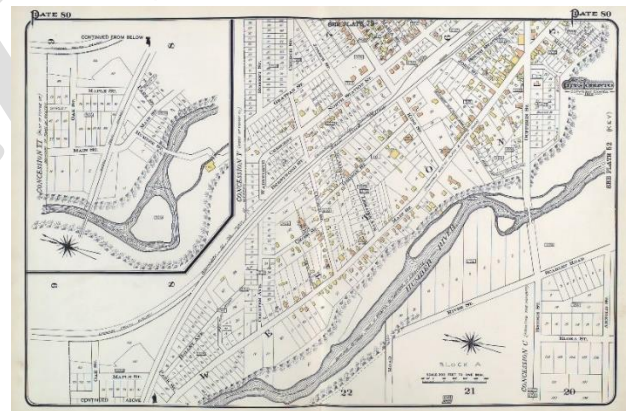


Figure 38: Fire Insurance Plan depicting the residential development along Weston Road between Lawrence Avenue West and St. Phillip's Road, 1910 (City of Toronto Archives)



Figure 39: Weston Road looking north from King Street, c. 1910 (Weston Historical Society)

The area south of Wright Avenue (south of Lawrence Avenue West) was only just developing around 1910 with the surveying of Meyer Avenue (now Victoria Avenue), Sykes Avenue, Denison Avenue, and Lippincott Street. Some nineteenth century residences were present on Weston Road or close to the Humber River in this area. By 1924, several residences are extant in this area. Much of the housing stock in this area was likely constructed for an influx of workers into Weston spurred by the nearby Moffat Stove Company, and then Massey-Harris Company and the Canadian Cycle and Motor Company.<sup>47</sup> Residences also lined Weston Road between Victoria Avenue and Lippincott street. Wilby Crescent appears for the first time on the 1924 Fire Insurance Plan with lots for residential development. The street was carved out of land that once supported the Weston Woolen Mill. The residential area south of Victoria Avenue continued to develop into the 1940s.



Figure 40: Aerial photo of Weston looking north from around Lippincott Street showing the slow residential development of the south portion of

*Weston Road with more density north of Lawrence Avenue West, c. 1910s (Weston Historical Society)*

The residential area of Weston Road north of King Street remained relatively stable into the early 1950s. In 1952, the Toronto Bypass of Highway 401 was completed and linked the Highway exit to Weston Road north of the study area. This spurred a change in character of Weston Road from a small-town Main Street to a main thoroughfare, with the street being renamed from Main Street North to Weston Road on April 1, 1960. The introduction of apartment buildings as new house form in Weston also initially lead to the destruction of much of the single family homes on this portion of Weston Road. Further erosion occurred with the development of shopping plazas and stores, office buildings, and townhomes. When Weston received its first comprehensive zoning bylaw under the Borough of York, the east side of Weston Road was zoned primarily as an R1 and R2 Residential Districts which allowed only single-family and semi-detached houses to be constructed in those zones, as well as C1 and C2 Commercial Districts which allowed some commercial uses. Much of the west side of Weston Road allowed zoning for R4 Residential Districts which allowed for apartment towers. This was likely done as much of the west side of Weston Road was already apartments by the time the bylaw came into force in 1971.



Figure 41: Weston Road looking south from around Church Street, c. early 1950s (City of Toronto Archives)

In 2007, City Council adopted the Weston Phase I Heritage Conservation District (HCD)

<sup>47</sup> Based on the 1917 Voters List for the Town of Weston, many of the residents in this area appear to be labourers, such as mechanics, blacksmiths, moulders, bricklayers, and contractor.

Plan which primarily covers some of the oldest remaining residential streets near Weston Road, including King Street Crecent, Little Avenue, George Street, Cross Street, part of Church Street, and Fern Avenue. The HCD Plan was put in place to manage change in the area while conserving the cultural heritage of the district after concern was raised over several historic properties were demolished. The Plan provides guidance on alterations, additions, and new construction that will maintain the heritage character of this primarily residential area.

In 2024, a Staff Report was brought to the Toronto Preservation Board recommending a Heritage Conservation District Study not move into the Plan Phase for the residential area bounded by Rosemount Avenue, Church Street, Elm Street, and Macdonald Avenue. While the Study Area was determined to not meet the Provincial criteria required for Heritage Conservation Districts, the Staff Report did identify 18 individual properties for further evaluation.

### ***Sub-theme: Residential Apartments***

The residential landscape of Weston began to shift in the mid-1950s with the introduction of apartment buildings, particularly along Weston Road. By June of 1954, Weston Town Council had received two building permits for apartment buildings at 50 John Street in the residential area east of the rail corridor and for the Westlyte Apartments at 2275 Weston Road to the north of Coulter Avenue. At the time of its construction in late 1954, the four-storey Westlyte Apartments was said to be the largest apartment building in Weston and required the demolition of the Weston Grammar School building (former Pump Works building, constructed 1850).<sup>48</sup> Around the same time, Weston Town Council approved a freezing bylaw that would provide Council more control over where apartment development would occur, and prevent further encroachment of apartments into the residential area east of the rail corridor and north of Lawrence Avenue West. By 1959, two additional four-storey

apartment buildings (2278 and 2263 Weston Road) were constructed near the intersection of Coulter Avenue and Weston Road.



*Figure 42: The Westlyte Apartment building at 2275 Weston Rd was the first constructed in this area (Heritage Planning, 2025).*

By 1965, the low-scale, tree lined residential stretch of Weston Road north of Church Street was nearly unrecognizable as apartment buildings sprang up along the west side of the road. The residential lots on the west side of Weston Road north of Church Street were much deeper than lots on the east side due to the Humber Valley ravine and the curve of Weston Road, and some were significantly wider than those on the east side. In order to construct large apartment towers, developers assembled the large lots on the west side of the street as the length of the lots provided ample space for the apartment towers footprint. Given this lot formation, many of the apartments on the west side of Weston Road are generally long and narrow. Weston Town Council also began to require 100 percent parking (i.e. one parking space for each unit) be provided as well as landscaping requirements. This resulted in some surface parking lots to the side or rear of the apartments, underground parking lots, and shallow front yards with grass and some additional landscaping.

The height of the approved apartment buildings continued to climb in the 1960s. Many of the apartments constructed in the early 1960s, such as 2220 and 2360 Weston Road, are around 6 to 7 storeys, while the apartment building constructed at 2304 Weston Road circa 1964 is 13 storeys, and the apartment at 2240 Weston Road constructed in 1967 stands at 19-storeys.

<sup>48</sup> Times and Guide. November 25, 1954.

In order to make way for the apartment buildings, many nineteenth and early twentieth century single family homes were demolished particularly on the west side of Weston Road. Foster Rowantree, a member of Weston's early Rowantree family, sold his nineteenth century family home along with the two neighbouring residences constructed by his father to a developer for an apartment. Remnants of this once low-scale residential street can still be found in the few early twentieth single-family homes that remain on the west side of Weston Road.



*Figure 43: Remaining early twentieth century single family houses with apartments in the background on Weston Road, looking south from Coulter Avenue (Heritage Planning, 2025)*

Apartment towers were constructed in significantly less numbers outside of the concentration on Weston Road north of Church Street. A smaller cluster of apartment towers was constructed near the intersection of Weston Road and Lawrence Avenue West, which was seen as the Town's centre. Unlike the apartments constructed north on Weston Road which were entirely residential, many of the apartments constructed near the town centre were mixed-use with commercial storefronts at street level. This includes the towers on the northwest and northeast corners of Weston Road and Lawrence Avenue West, and the tower at 2088 Lawrence Avenue West. The apartment tower development in this area was concentrated between Wright Avenue to the south and King Street to the north, with the majority of the buildings constructed between the late 1960s and early 2000s.

The area of Weston around Weston Road and Lawrence Avenue West is on the verge of experiencing significant change once again

given the area's designation as a Major Transit Station Area and density expectations.



*Figure 44: North portion of Weston Road with mostly single-family homes on the west side of the road, 1959 (City of Toronto Archives)*



*Figure 45: North portion of Weston Road with significant apartment tower development on the west side, 1965 (City of Toronto Archives)*

The trend of constructing apartment buildings was promoted by Metropolitan Toronto which saw apartment buildings as being an efficient way to manage the population increase, promote density in inner and outer suburbs, offer new forms of housing, and support social and economic diversity in communities, particularly with the increase of immigration to the Metropolitan area. Weston was not alone with its increase in apartment construction as noted by the 1967 Apartment Study undertaken by Metropolitan Toronto. The study found that the apartment stock in Metropolitan Toronto increased by 70 percent between 1959 and 1965, with apartments in Weston multiplying by 100 percent during this same period growing from 424 units in 1959 to 1077 in 1965.<sup>49</sup> The

<sup>49</sup> Metropolitan Toronto Planning Board. The Study of the Apartment Distribution and apartment Densities in the Metropolitan Toronto Planning Area. 1967.

study notes that Weston is one of the most active apartment centres in the York area stating that “most of the apartments in the area are associated with occupancies which are above average for the inner urban area and which reflect relative isolation of the area and the availability of industrial employment”<sup>50</sup>.

A goal of Metropolitan Toronto was to support social mixing in communities through the construction of apartment buildings. Aligned with the construction of apartment towers were changing immigration policies of the 1960s and 70s, which resulted in Weston experiencing a significant influx of immigration. The apartment towers offered more affordable housing options, and Weston had a strong industrial and commercial centre to support the new communities. Weston continues to be a hub for newcomers and supports a diverse population.



Figure 46: Map showing factor affecting apartment development in Metropolitan Toronto. Weston Road approximately north of Church Street is noted as an area of apartment concentration. The approximate location of the study area is outlined in red (Metropolitan Toronto Planning Board, 1967).

## THEME: Communities and Culture

After the Second World War, the Metropolitan Toronto area witnessed high levels of immigration. Municipalities near Toronto were an attractive reception area for newly arrived immigrants, given the lower costs of living than found in the City of Toronto, access to more affordable housing, transportation options, and manufacturing jobs. By this time, Weston

already had in place infrastructure, such as sewage, water services, and roads, that could support growth in the area.

Through the 1940s and 1950s, immigrants to Canada were almost exclusively European due to restrictive and discriminatory immigration policies. Prior to the 1960s, European immigrants predominated among newcomers settling in Weston. They were often drawn to the area by the nearby manufacturing jobs, which continued to thrive with the coming of Highway 401 in the early 1950s.<sup>51</sup> Italian and Portuguese newcomers settled initially in Weston with some eventually migrating north to Woodbridge.<sup>52</sup>

In the late 1960s, major changes were made to Canada’s immigration policies, which placed more emphasis on education and occupational skills for selecting immigrants, and began to remove explicit racial and national barriers in the immigration selection process.<sup>53</sup> The population of Toronto has increased nearly 20 percent since the early 1970s, and the City’s neighbourhoods have changed to reflect significant demographic changes, including Weston.<sup>54</sup> Between 1981 (the first year this data was captured on the Census) and 2001, the percentage of people who identified as visible minorities in Weston increased from 12.4 percent to 38.9 percent. The percentage of people who identify as visible minorities continues to be high in Weston at 64.5 percent compared to 55.7 percent for the City of Toronto.<sup>55</sup> The 2006 Canadian Census demonstrated that much of the population that identified as a visible minority in Weston were concentrated along Weston Road, and extending along Lawrence Avenue West, settling in the area’s many apartment towers.

<sup>50</sup> IBID

<sup>51</sup> Government of Canada. Cultural Diversity in Canada: The Social Construction of Race.

<sup>52</sup> Zucchi, John. 2007. A History of Ethnic Enclaves in Canada.

<sup>53</sup> Government of Canada. Cultural Diversity in Canada: The Social Construction of Race.

<sup>54</sup> Hulchanski, David. 2007. The Three Cities within Toronto.

<sup>55</sup> City of Toronto. Neighbourhood Profile Data: Weston.

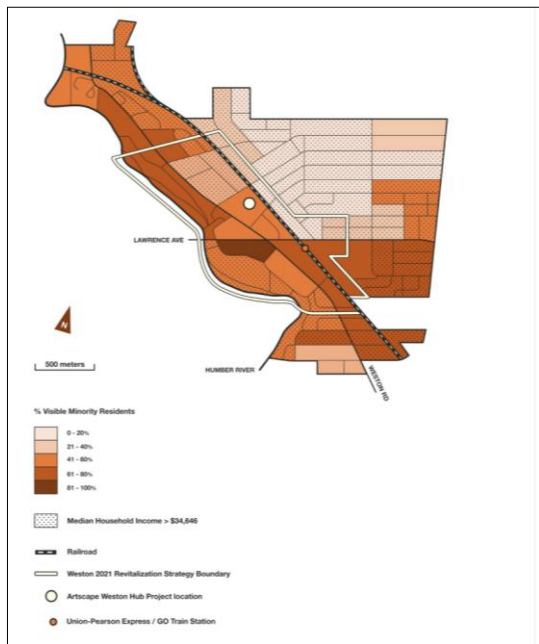


Figure 47: Map of Weston demographics (2006 Census of Canada; City of Toronto)

Much of the increased immigration to Weston in the second half of the twentieth century came from Jamaica, which provided nearly 40 percent of Canada's immigration between the end of the 1960s and 1980s, with nearly 83 percent of Jamaican's living in Canada settling in Toronto.<sup>56</sup> Jamaica remains the top place of birth for immigrants in Weston (7.14%), followed by other places of birth in Americas (6.45%), Somalia (5%), Philippines (3.82%), and Portugal (2.52%). Somalians represent the highest percentage of recent immigrants (5%), followed by other places of birth in Americas (2%), Nigeria (0.75%), Jamaica (0.7%), and other places of birth in Africa (0.51%).<sup>57</sup> Immigrants make up 47.7% of Weston's population compared to 46.6% for the City of Toronto as a whole.



Figure 48: The Windows of Time mural by Christiano De Araujo on the side of 1969 Weston

Road showing the cultural evolution of the area (Heritage Planning, 2026)

The cultural diversity of Weston is reflected in the businesses, institutions, organizations, and public art in the area, particularly along Weston Road, with many of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century store fronts now housing small scale businesses and organizations that provide goods and services to the many immigrant communities living in the area. Several organizations that provide settlement and community services also have a strong base in Weston, including Weston Area Emergency Support (WAES), UrbanArts, COSTI Employment Services, and the Somali Immigrant Aid Organization. Changes to the cultural makeup of Weston can also be seen outside of the commercial core. In particular, the church building at 2125 Weston Road which was constructed as a chapel in 1856 to serve the growing milling community, was converted to Bin Abbas Mosque in 2023, reflecting the evolution of Weston's cultural communities.



Figure 49: 2125 Weston Road, formerly St. John Anglican Church, now Bin Abbas Mosque (Heritage Planning, 2025)

<sup>56</sup> Wilson, Jason. 2020. King Alpha's Song in a Strange Land.

<sup>57</sup> City of Toronto. Neighbourhood Profile Data: Weston.

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