

Little Jamaica and Oakwood Vaughan Cultural Heritage Resource Assessment

Community Story Gathering Event

Sunday, December 7, 2025, 11:00 am – 4:00 pm

Meeting Summary

Participants:

Consultant Team:

- BUTO – Romain Baker, Dane Williams, Anyika Mark, Jahmira Lovemore, Ruth Belay
- ERA – Sharon Hong, Zeina Ahmed, Rachel Ward

City Staff:

- Heritage Planning – Gary Miedema, Tatum Taylor Chaubal, Jhamela Stapleton
- Development Review – Sipo Maphangoh, Janani Mahendran

Community Members: Adal Tesfay, Arthur Gron, Carlo Basilone, Akeem McPhee, Jacqueline Dwyer, Kamala Jean Gopie, Gloria Ramsey, Prophetess Reid

Meeting Agenda:

The project team for the Little Jamaica and Oakwood Vaughan Cultural Heritage Resource Assessment (CHRA), including the consultant team (BUTO and ERA) and City staff, held a Community Story Gathering event as part of the CHRA engagement process. The purpose of the event was for participants to help identify specific places that are important to the study area's heritage. Participants were invited based on their deep knowledge, experience, or personal memories of Little Jamaica and/or Oakwood Vaughan. In identifying potential participants, the project team prioritized including representatives from across the study area's geography and from different eras of the area's recent past. Some invitees declined to participate, citing frustration with a perceived lack of City action and responsiveness to community priorities. Some participants expressed similar concerns, which were noted as important input for this engagement process. Participants were provided with honoraria and refreshments from local businesses during the story gathering event.

The event covered the entire CHRA study area by organizing it into four smaller walks centred around key intersections: Eglinton Avenue West & Oakwood Avenue, Eglinton Avenue West & Dufferin Street, Eglinton Avenue West & Keele Street, and Oakwood & Vaughan Road. A chartered TTC bus transported participants between walking areas, enabling coverage of the large study area and providing an accessible mode of travel. Community participants were organized into small groups of 2 or 3 and were paired with facilitators/note takers. At each stop, upon exiting the bus, participants walked the nearby streets and led conversations on their community, identifying places and spaces of cultural importance. Participants were also asked to recall memories of people and characteristics of the community.

Discussion Summary:

The following is a high-level summary of participant reflections from each stop on the tour.

Stop 1: Eglinton Avenue West & Oakwood Avenue

Participants noted that in the 70s through 90s it felt like you could get whatever you needed in this part of the community. Some participants highlighted memories of first arriving here and seeing their culture reflected in the businesses they saw. The area was also noted as more populated due to its proximity to the Eglinton West (now Cedarvale) station - people coming from other parts of the city via transit would take the subway and arrive directly here. Several participants characterized this as the walkable and accessible main hub with access to daily needs - you could find grocers, barbershops, hair salons. They highlighted the scale and visual interest in signage, colour, etc. as being reflective of LJ in it's "prime." One participant referred to the area as feeling much like Kensington Market, were memories of a bustling night economy (that is still somewhat present) characterized the area.

Community members noted:

- The diversity of the community is reflected in this stretch of the Study Area
- Memories of barbershops and salons (much more than today)
- Early presence of Jewish communities followed by Italians, Portuguese; has continued to include other demographics and businesses (Turkish, Filipino, Mexican); however more prominent is Caribbean demographic
 - Businesses from different cultures including East African, Italian, Filipino
 - Long-standing Caribbean-owned and operated businesses that remain until this day
- Memories of busy sidewalks
- Other businesses highlighted:
 - Monica's Cosmetics - reflective of the multi-use nature of spaces; a community space where people perfected their craft (music, journalism, hair, etc.)
 - Jimmy Wisdom's Barber Shop - shop and community gathering place, where people would be outside the shop to discuss the latest news, politics, community, etc.
 - RAPS
 - Randy's – memories of walking through the snow to get here
 - Spence's Bakery - regular line-ups outside in the morning
 - Caribbean Farm Fresh and memories of Gus, Fancy's – Caribbean grocery stores that have since been displaced by LRT station
 - Anthony's Men's Wear - Italian-owned department store; opened in late 60s; prominent Italian long-standing business that interfaced with Caribbean culture as many would rent tuxedos for weddings in Jamaica in return for bringing back local Blue Mountain Coffee
 - Maria A. Shuka Library - community space, includes Black and Caribbean heritage collection on ground floor
 - Reggae Lane

Stop 2: Eglinton Avenue West & Dufferin Street

At this stop, participants made connections to places of worship, with many religious institutions in the area. Additionally, the concentration of medical services in this part of the Study Area was highlighted with reference to building typology variation in this area (medical offices, residential typologies like residential tower at St. Hilda's Senior Community). The area was also emphasized as an area that seems to cater to a larger senior population in the area. The intersection of Eglinton Avenue West and Dufferin Street was also identified as a key area to shop with big-box stores like

Shoppers and Dollarama. With the wide variety of shops and culturally-catered businesses, some participants characterized this area as reflecting the culturally diverse community.

Community members noted:

- Many senior residents; also many medical service buildings still in the area; participants noting it as helpful because they could have healthcare providers of Caribbean descent
- A previously vibrant and bustling nightlife scene
- A lot of cultural interaction amongst the various communities living in the area was happening in places like churches, food stores, butchers, etc.
- West of Dufferin, the demographic includes more Italian and Portuguese residents and businesses; newer wave includes Turkish and Mexican stores as well
- Other businesses highlighted:
 - BME Church - community institution with long-standing history; hosted community dinners and events
 - Eritrean Orthodox Church - (note, may be out of boundary)
 - Centre Latino Cultural - foodbank, English classes offered
 - St. Hilda's Anglican Church – a site where much of the Caribbean, Italian, and Portuguese cultures of the area interacted
 - St. Hilda's residential tower
 - Jamaican Canadian Association - used to be on the second floor of building near Dufferin and Ramsden (note, may be out of boundary)

Stop 3: Eglinton Avenue West & Keele Street

The bus stopped in front of York Memorial Collegiate Institute, where many participants started by discussing memories of the school and the immediate surrounding area including the growing Caribbean student body in the 80s. It was also noted that since its closure, the foot traffic to surrounding businesses has been reduced - the school helped sustain this part of the community. It was also noted that this area can feel disconnected from the east with grade changes (incline as you move east), wider streets, and geographic proximity from the rest of the LJ hub and that this part of the community tends to feel "quieter." Participants also noted a lack of community space in the area, noting the use of the Keele Street laneway east of Trethewey Drive as an area occasionally used for events, and the desire for the open space near the Keelsedale station to be put to public use.

Community members noted:

- Area is a mix of small and large lots, as well as unused space that could be utilized for community
- Many long-standing businesses and services (medical, dental) were identified and stories were shared about this area
- Community spaces including places of worship, community centres, etc. Other businesses highlighted:
 - Sunlight Bakery - longstanding business
 - Tinnel's Patties - long standing business still open
 - Irie Veggie
 - Natural Vybes Juice Bar - used for community events
 - Emeye Injera and Mini Mart - open for over 10 years; East African food and goods
 - Smile Back - open for over 30 years
 - Moorish Science Temple of America

- Zac's Convenience - longstanding shop with Caribbean goods
- West Side Mall - used to go and hang out there after school
- Smile Back Bed and Breakfast

Stop 4: Oakwood Avenue & Vaughn Road

As this stop, participants referred to changing nature of the area with many businesses coming and going as well as buildings being bought by developers. A handful of long-standing businesses near the intersection were noted. As a main street flanked by residential areas to the east and west, participants noted the higher concentration of students and young community members in the area. Participants again reflected on the shifting demographics over the years - Italian and Portuguese, with a growing Caribbean and East African population in the 80s. Some community members noted that this part of the community can also, like Stop 3, feel geographically disconnected due to proximity from many businesses along Eglinton Avenue West, however it was highlighted as a travel node between Eglinton Avenue West and the Black and Caribbean community at Bathurst and Bloor. Several participants also noted several former clubs, dance halls, and pool halls in the area.

Community members noted:

- Newer businesses in this area and newer waves of immigration; some participants noted particularly further south towards Rogers Road / St. Clair area
- The Oakwood / Vaughan area feels like an ever-changing space; unique mix of housing and shops
- Some shops along the block of Oakwood Avenue (between Amherst and Ashbury) have closed fairly recently
- Other businesses highlighted:
 - Gary's Barbershop & Beauty Salon - owner and shop have been community staple, opened in 90s
 - NIA Centre for the Arts - community art space, opened in 2010s
 - Bethel Restoration Ministries - used to be club/pool hall in the 90s
 - Share Newspaper - founded in the late 70s
 - Sam's Grocer and Kera Market - key grocery in the area
 - Sunshine Bar and Coffee

Through this engagement session, we heard stories of places, spaces, and the people who animate them. The following table includes places and spaces identified by community members. Some of the businesses identified by community members are no longer extant or are outside of the Study Area boundary but have been included here for completeness.

Summary – Community Story Gathering

Business or Place	Address	Notes
Arawak Business Centre	538 Oakwood Avenue	Business centre with available office space and various business services for local professionals, noted as present in the community for years.
Accordions Canada	1608 Eglinton Avenue West	Noted as long-standing family business that has been passed down from father to son.
All Season Food Market	1555 Eglinton Avenue West	Popular grocery store selling goods and meat.
Always Fresh Caribbean Cuisine	620 Vaughan Road	This business has been a gathering space and is considered a community hub at the Oakwood/ Vaughan intersection. The owner has been a mentor to many young people in the area.
Anthony's Men's Wear and Imported Shoes / Formal Rental	1560 Eglinton Avenue West	Noted as one of the first Italian department stores in the area, first opening in the late 60s, when the neighbourhood had a higher Italian population. It has fostered cross-cultural community connection. Participant noted father used to rent tuxes for weddings in Jamaica on the condition that they bring back Jamaican “Blue Mountain Coffee” for him.
Barbers of Eglinton	1565 Eglinton Avenue West	Noted as one of the longest running barbershops today.
Black Diamond Art Gallery	1944 Eglinton Avenue West	Store for jewelry, framing, vintage items. Includes seating for community to gather and chat.
Black Urbanism TO (BUTO)	1016 Eglinton Avenue West	Black-led community advocacy organization working to support businesses and residents in the community.
Canadian Caribbean Restaurant	620 Vaughan Road	24-hour restaurant noted as a community staple.
Caribbean Farm Fresh	1596 Eglinton Avenue West	Relatively new but popular grocery store and butcher with Caribbean items including spice mangos, oxtail, plantain, etc. Noted as formerly a hair salon.

Summary – Community Story Gathering

Chocolate City	2611 Eglinton Ave West	Formerly a popular nightclub in the 80s.
Cy Townsend Park	455 Winona Drive	Small park noted as an important hub for East African youth and seniors.
Eglinton Grill	2609 Eglinton Avenue West	Popular family-owned diner and convenience store in the area that has been around for years, was once a video store before shifting to a restaurant - still sells videos.
Elegance Barber and Salon	1850 Eglinton Avenue West	Long-standing barbershop that participates in the "More than a Haircut" program run by Macauley Centres for Children.
Emye Teff Injera And Mini Mart	2514 Eglinton Avenue West	Restaurant and market for Ethiopian cuisine and goods, coffee, etc that owners mentioned has been open for about 10 years.
Fairbank Memorial Community Centre	2213 Dufferin Street	A space for Black youth in the neighbourhood to play basketball and was formerly facilitated by a Community Police Officer from 13 Division.
For Youth Initiative	1652 Keele Street #108	Community space for Black and racialized youth - various programming and support.
Freta Foods	#2 1721 Eglinton Avenue West	East African grocery and meat store noted as providing a lot of cultural staples.
Gary's Barber & Beauty Salon	479 Oakwood Avenue	Barbershop noted as a long-standing business and community staple that Gary has owned for years.
Green P Parking Lot	1609 Eglinton Avenue West	More recently been used for the Little Jamaica Night Market, like Reggae Lane, is a public space used by community for cultural events.
Gus's Tropical Foods	1582 Eglinton Avenue West	Now-closed Caribbean grocery store noted by community members. Was formerly at the location of the current Oakwood Station.
Hazel Burns Hospice	2562 Eglinton Avenue West	Community based non-profit volunteer organization / community health service centre that provides support through various programs and services.

Summary – Community Story Gathering

Irie Veggie Takeout	2593 Eglinton Avenue West	Noted as a restaurant in the area that opened in the 90's with vegetarian and plant-based Caribbean cuisine.
Jamall Caribbean Custom Tailors	611 Oakwood Avenue	Tailor run by Vernon Smalls, noted for historically providing services to local and visiting artists prior to shows and present in the community for years.
Keptah Temple	2409 Eglinton Avenue West	Noted as a relatively new temple.
Kera Fresh Meat	621 Vaughan Road	Noted by community as an important butcher with many East African grocery items.
Kingston 12 Patty Shop	1808 Eglinton Avenue West	Relatively new, but well-known Jamaican patty shop in the area.
Macauley Centres for Children	2010 Eglinton Avenue West #400	Runs the More than a Haircut program and others such as community programming and events at local barbershops.
Maria A. Shchuka Branch Library	1745 Eglinton Avenue West	Noted as one of maybe four Toronto libraries with an extensive Black and Caribbean Heritage Collection. Noted as similar to what Monica's used to be, functions as a place where community members work on their respective skills, used as a community meeting point, centrally located.
Masjid El Noor Mosque	277 Scott Road	Noted as a mosque that has been there for years and is one of the oldest Muslim organizations in Toronto. Building noted as once a church.
Massawa Resturant	1610 Eglinton Avenue West	Relatively new Eritrean restaurant noted as a hub for East African community to gather and eat injera.
Miss Unity	2174 Eglinton Avenue West	Local hair salon noted.

Summary – Community Story Gathering

<p>Monica's Beauty Supplies Ltd.</p>	<p>1553 Eglinton Avenue West</p>	<p>Among earliest Black-owned business in area owned by Monica Lewis in the 60's. First started as a record and electronic store, becoming a community music hub that also had DJ'ing classes for youth. In the 80's it became a salon and supply store (that still sold music). Community members recall getting their hair done as kids. Also noted as selling candles, herbs, incense, etc. Noted by community as more so a hub where people would hone their respective crafts and skillsets. The basement was leveraged as a place for gathering, parties, etc. Business no longer operating, but space in use by community.</p>
<p>Moorish Science Temple of America</p>	<p>2530 Eglinton Avenue West</p>	<p>This location is relatively new. Community members refer to this type of knowledge centre as culturally important. The walls share stories of pre-slavery, indigenous Black history. Noted as important space for historic education and understanding as well as a gathering space fostering discussion.</p>
<p>Natural Vybes</p>	<p>2637 Eglinton Avenue West</p>	<p>Vegan juice/smoothie place that hosts regular open mic nights.</p>
<p>Nia Centre for The Arts</p>	<p>524 Oakwood Avenue</p>	<p>Formerly a public health building and also noted to have previously been a club called The Cave – now an arts centre and community space.</p>
<p>Parking area / laneway</p>	<p>2626 Eglinton Avenue West</p>	<p>The front-end parking and laneway area on the Keele Street jog (south of York Road) was noted as a place where TTC drivers would take their break or where performances and gatherings have previously been held.</p>
<p>Pizza Pizza</p>	<p>1601 Eglinton Avenue West</p>	<p>Noted as a place people meet up at, as it is centrally located and has indoor seating.</p>

Summary – Community Story Gathering

Randy's Take-Out	1569 Eglinton Avenue West	Noted as a community staple, known in and outside the community for its Jamaican patties. Community members recall various memories at Randy's including getting patties everyday after school.
RAP'S	1541 Eglinton Avenue West	Opened in the 80's and founded by musician Horace Rose (musician), noted as community staple and possible first Jamaican restaurant in the area, serves traditional Jamaican breakfast. Closed in 2022, reopened in 2024.
Reggae Lane	Oakwood Avenue and Eglinton Avenue West	Laneway at public surface parking lot that includes murals that celebrates area's reggae history. Hosts various community gatherings including the Afro Caribbean Farmers Market.
Sam's Food Store	620 Vaughan Road	Noted by community as an important local grocery store, with many Caribbean food options.
Share Newspaper	658 Vaughan Road	Location of weekly community newspaper serving the Black and Caribbean community in the larger Toronto area for years.
Sheryl's Authentic Caribbean Cuisine	1720 Eglinton Avenue West	Noted as a popular and well-known and frequented restaurant by community members and visitors alike.
Sidewalk and benches	1886 Eglinton Avenue West	Noted that the benches outside of TD bank are an area where sometimes people gather.
Smile Back Bed and Breakfast / Smile Back Mattress and Furniture	2547 Eglinton Avenue West	Local bed and breakfast founded by Caleb and Beryl Japaul. Owners also have a furniture store next door that was noted as having been around for years.
Spence's Bakery	1539 Eglinton Avenue West	Long-standing community staple owned by Florizel Spence, bakery that community members recalled either working at or lining up in the early morning hours for soup.

Summary – Community Story Gathering

St. Hilda's Anglican Church	2353 Dufferin Street	Reconstructed in the 90s, but noted as a place "where worlds collided" and people of both Caribbean and Italian worshippers shared space and socialized. Apartment towers contain affordable seniors housing.
Starbank Convenience Store	1736 Eglinton Avenue West	Convenience store and grocer with the Jimmy Wisdom mural painted on the side.
Studio M	1672 Eglinton Avenue West	Multipurpose studio and recording space. Reggae artists historically used to record in the basements.
Sun-Light Bakery	2512 Eglinton Avenue West	Well-known long-standing bakery mentioned by multiple community members as a place to go and get baked goods, especially on Sundays.
TD Bank	2623 Eglinton Avenue West	Closed TD bank noted as central opportunity in the Eglinton and Keele area that should be put to community use.
The British Methodist Episcopal Church/ St. Cuthbert's United Church	1828 Eglinton Avenue West	Noted as important in history of Black communities in Toronto. Original BME was downtown and one of earliest Black churches in Toronto with connections to the Underground Railroad, moved to this location in late 1880s. Noted as busy and lively intersection on Sundays.
The Entertainment Kitchen	1561 Eglinton Avenue West	Noted as long-standing Caribbean restaurant that is also used as a performance and event venue many flyers for fetes and parties there.
TinNel's Patties	2517 Eglinton Avenue West	Well-known patty shop that has been in the community for years in the Eglinton and Keele area.
Town Talk	616 Vaughan Road	Used to be a popular nightclub in the area and had cultural importance to the neighbourhood.

Summary – Community Story Gathering

TreJah Isle	1514 Eglinton Avenue West	Well-known and long-standing shop founded by Nana McLean. Served as a community hub for decades, was a recording studio and reggae landmark, items in the shop (books, CDs, clothing) showcase Rastafari and Jamaican culture. More recently provides health and beauty products, apparel, natural remedies, and Caribbean flavored ice cream
Westside Mall	2400 Eglinton Avenue West	Originally a mall built in the 60's, community members noted parking lot as a place people go there to hang out, particularly after school let out. Has since been redeveloped.
Wisdom's Barber & Beauty Salon	1754 Eglinton Avenue West	Noted as a community institution that provided services to intergenerational clientele and fostered community and connection for decades. Recollection of the interior and exterior of the shop as a constant gathering place for daily conversations. Wisdom's shop is now closed, but it remains a salon (Ther's Beauty Salon).
York Civic Centre	2700 Eglinton Avenue West	A social service hub with City of Toronto programs in the arts and culture sector, recreational sports, etc.
York Memorial Collegiate Institute	2690 Eglinton Avenue West	The school offered a gifted program which staff of African and Caribbean descent encouraged students from across the TDSB to attend. Several Black staff offered extracurricular academic supports for students. Noted as having a large population of Caribbean students in the 70s-90s. Currently closed following a fire, which was noted as having negative impact on the businesses in immediate surrounding area.
Zac's Convenience	1977 Keele Street	Store that provides Caribbean items that has been in the community for a long time.