



Portrait: Thorncliffe Park and Flemingdon Park, Toronto

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This portrait was produced by the Toronto Centre for Active Transportation, a project of the Clean Air Partnership in Toronto, Ontario.

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Local Partners:

Flemingdon Health Centre

Toronto Emerging Artists (TEA)

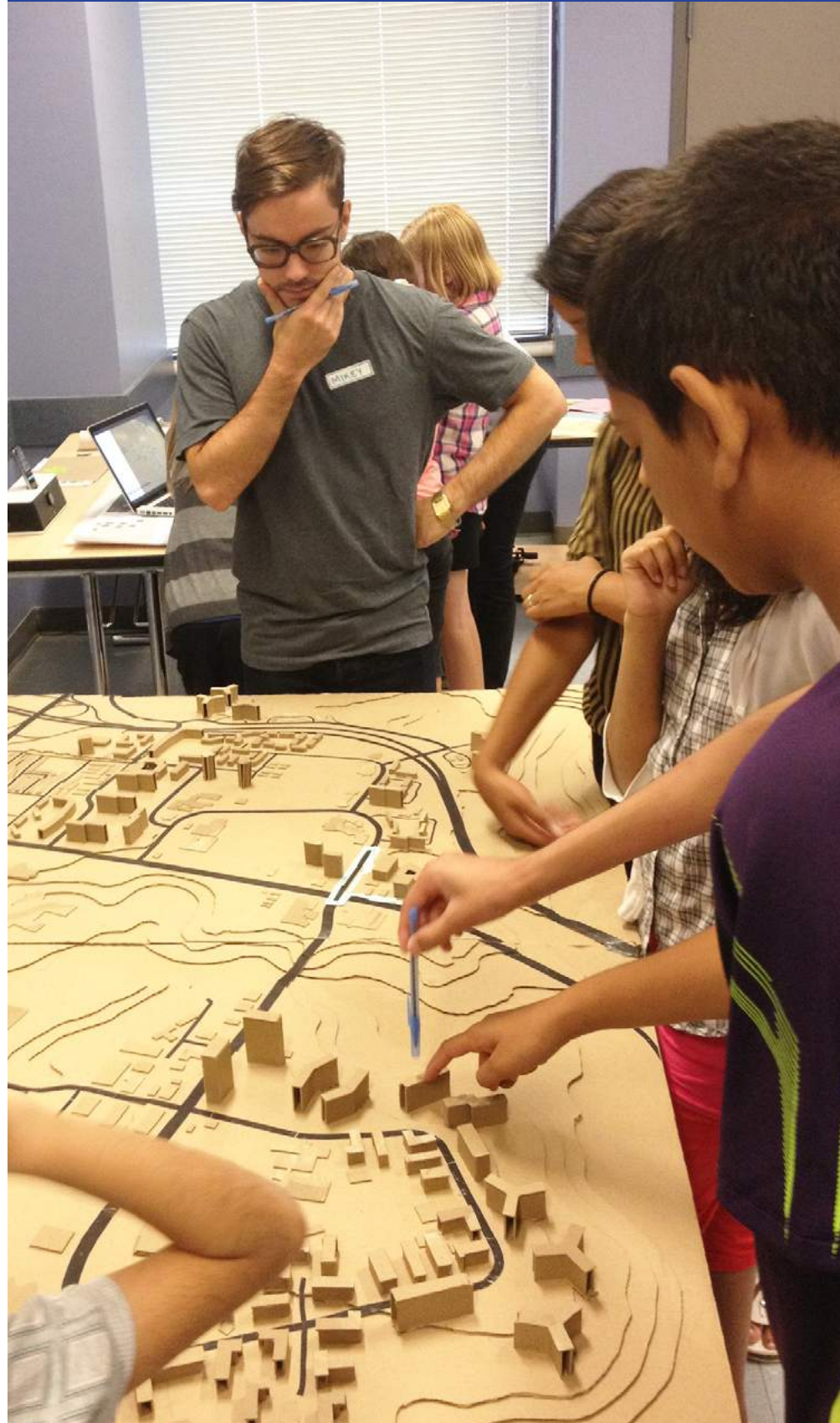
Thorncliffe Park Women's Committee

Evergreen, Health Promotion Department

Toronto International Film Festival, Special Delivery Program

Architecture for Humanity, Toronto Chapter





OBJECTIVES

Raise awareness

about problems associated with inadequate infrastructure

Inform

people about the potential solutions

Demonstrate

the feasibility of participatory planning designing district-level transportation

Encourage

the political will needed for change

Initiate

changes in professional practice

→ To get things going

Active Neighbourhoods Canada (ANC) is a national partnership of organizations bringing participatory planning to 12 communities in Alberta, Ontario and Quebec. We work with local partners in each community towards changes in the built environment that encourage active transportation, active public spaces and active, engaged citizens. This portrait illustrates the first Ontario community to join the ANC project: Thorncliffe Park/ Flemingdon Park. It is a snapshot of the community compiled through events, observations and secondary research.

The Active Neighbourhoods project employs lessons learned from the 'Green Active and Healthy Neighbourhoods' pilot created by the Montreal Urban Ecology Centre and further develops the methods to suit local contexts. Each local project is divided into three phases. Documentation of phase 1 and 2 for Thorncliffe & Flemingdon can be seen on the left.

Phase 1: Understanding

The goal of the first phase is to understand the current context in the neighbourhood in order to identify potential improvements and constraints related to mobility. Different data collection methods are used to create a 'Portrait', including field surveys, documentation and consultation activities.

Phase 2: Exploring

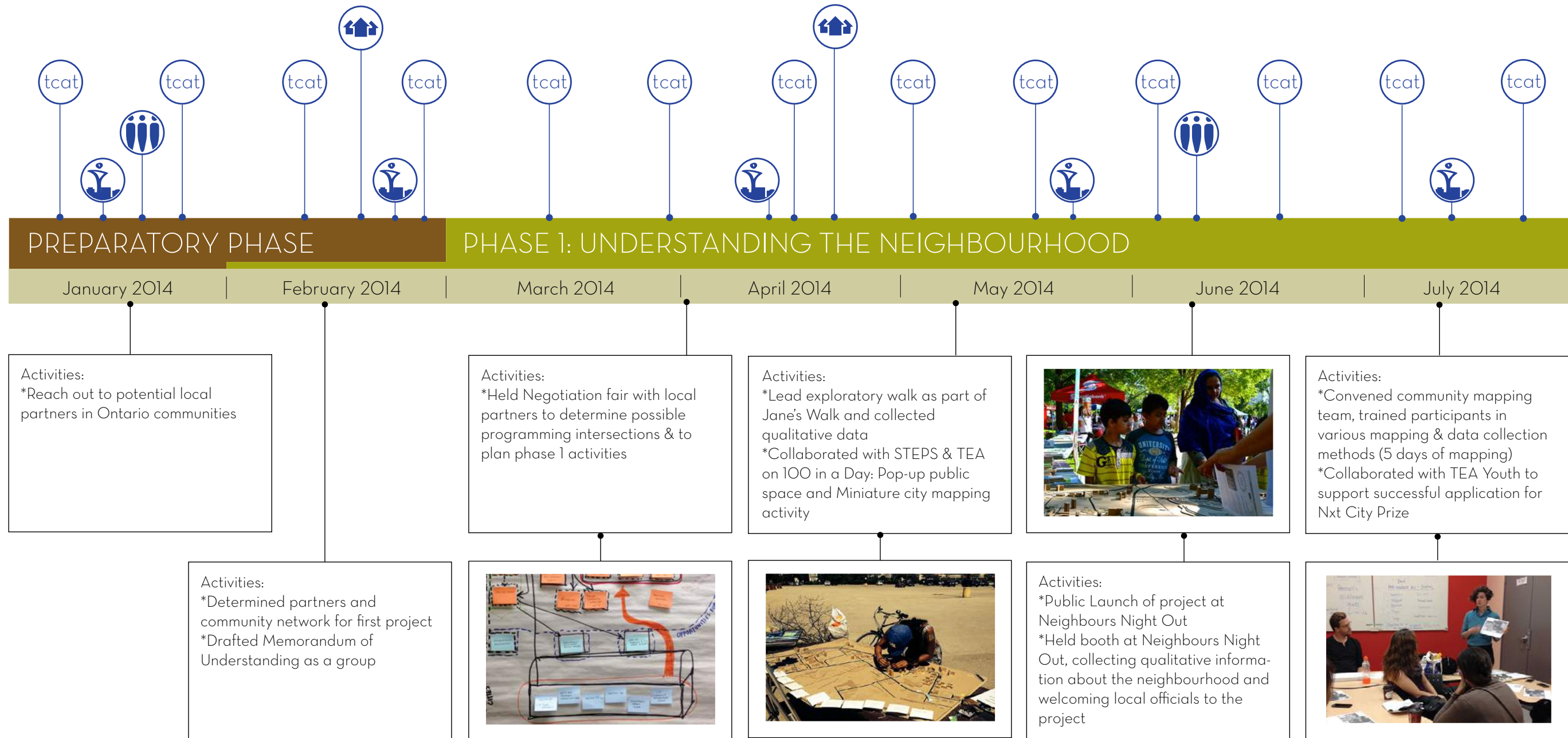
The objective of Phase 2 is to establish a common vision, define priorities for action, and create design solutions that respect the local identity and practices of the neighbourhood. Examples of methods used during this phase include a Citizen's Forum and workshops with professionals.

Phase 3: Building

Local partners collaborate on a Community Plan outlining goals and design solutions. The plan is used as a tool to strategize and partner with local municipal officials, transit authorities, other levels of government, as well as institutions, retailers and individuals towards the incremental implementation of these goals.

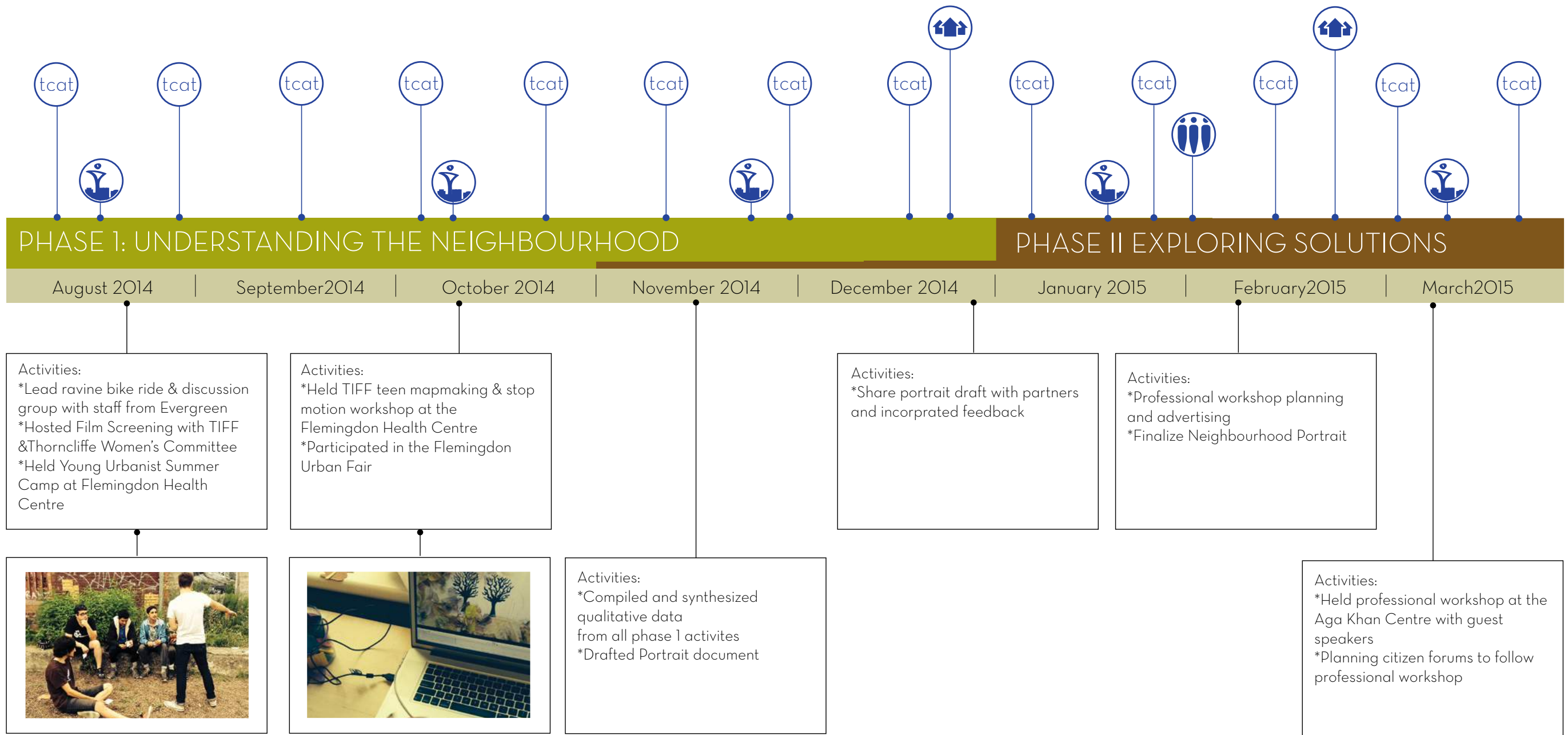


ACTIVE NEIGHBOURHOODS PHASE 1 AND 11 TIMELINE





ACTIVE NEIGHBOURHOODS PHASE I AND II TIMELINE



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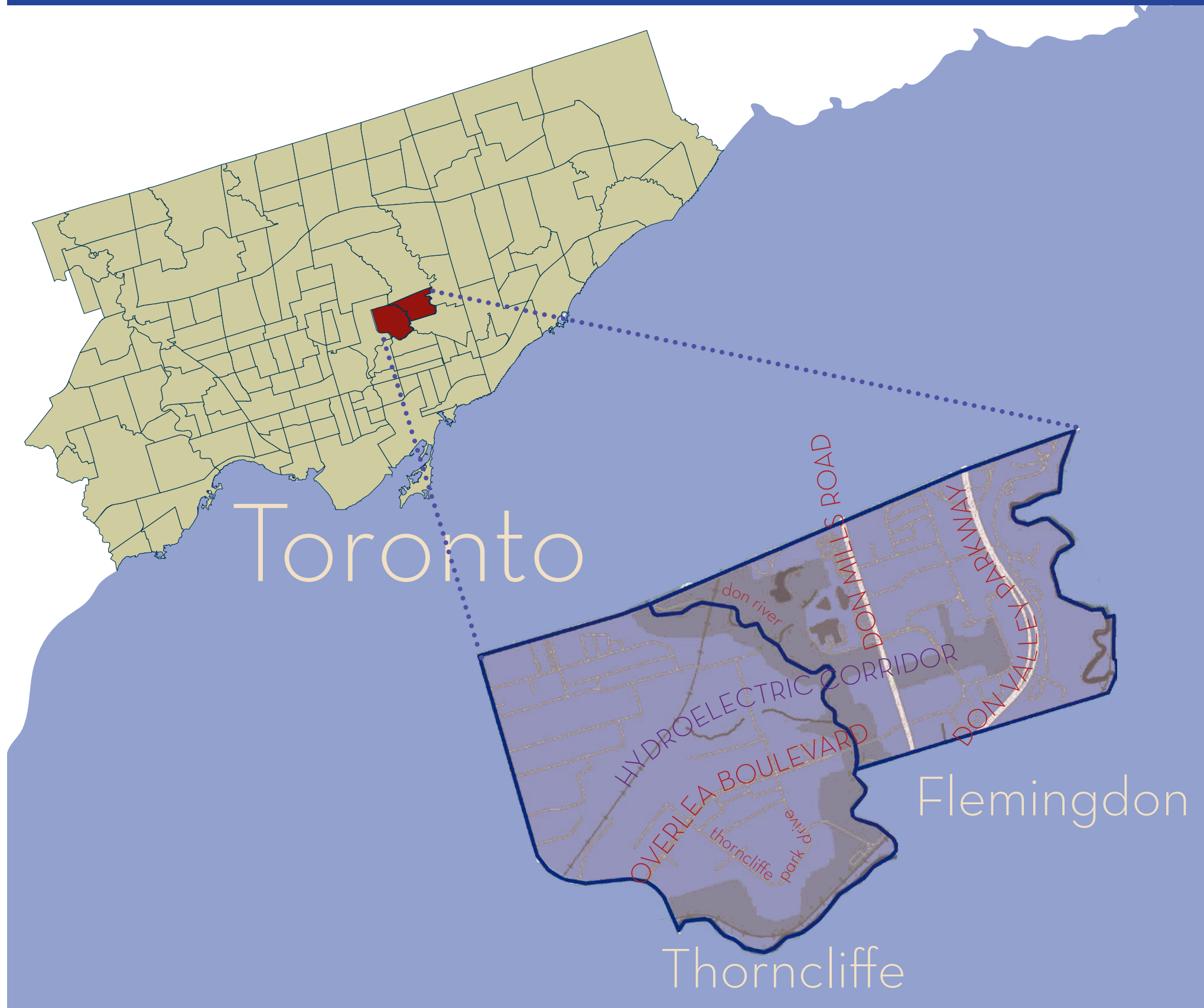
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Introduction

Welcome to Flemington Park and Thorncliffe Park, two vibrant and unique neighbourhoods in Toronto, Ontario. Thorncliffe and Flemington were two of Toronto's first planned communities, completed in the late 1960's. They are considered inner suburbs, lying just North East of the Metro Toronto core and are easily accessible by public transit. The two communities sit on either side of the beautiful Don Valley Ravine and the Don River that runs through it. Most residents live in towers that overlook the greenery and the buildings are a common sight to motorists travelling along the Don Valley Parkway.

Thorncliffe and Flemington are diverse neighbourhoods that serve as landing pads for new Canadians. The typical resident has a lower than average income, a fact common to neighbourhoods of this type: 'Vertical Poverty', a recent study by the United Way shows that "poverty is becoming increasingly concentrated vertically in the high-rise towers that dot the city's skyline" (United Way 2011).

This portrait will serve as a diagnostic tool to understand the local opportunities and challenges towards healthier, more active public spaces that encourage walking and cycling.





Thorncliffe and Flemingdon were developed in the 1960's following urban planning ideals that promoted distinctly separated land uses. The romance of the automobile was in full swing and the assumption that everyone would own a car in these neighbourhoods was prevalent.

The illustrations on the left show us that land uses are clustered, first in a map view and second from photos taken by members of our community mapping team. When uses are clustered like this it takes a long time to walk from place to place, favouring automobile or transit users.

Flemingdon Park and Thorncliffe Park are important areas because they were the first of their type to be built in Toronto, of which approximately 1000 were built in the 20 years following (ERA Architects 2008). Understanding the public realm in these communities could thus be useful for many other communities in the GTA. Recent research into these neighbourhoods has shown that restrictive land use planning is one of the biggest challenges to creating more vibrant public spaces. Through concerted efforts new mixed use zoning guidelines come into effect in the summer of 2015, allowing for new uses to be mixed into residential areas.

Physical and Social Characteristics

Tower in a Park



With some exceptions, the residents of Thorncliffe and Flemingdon dwell in high rise apartment buildings. These modern towers were designed to maximize density while leaving generous amounts of open space for recreation & parking. This typically means that each property has 80-90% open space. (ERA Architects 2010). These planned tower communities were a response to a housing boom after the war and to an influx of immigrants to Toronto. This approach was originally introduced by Le Corbusier in his controversial plan for Paris (shown on the left, unbuilt) as a response to overcrowding and disease in industrialized cities.



Open space can be attractive and vibrant, or it can be desolate and scary. The physical form goes a long way in determining this. On the left we see R.V. Burgess Park in Thorncliffe. It is seen as a community hub and is a well-used, vibrant public space. The park is centrally located, it is overlooked by many towers, it has amenities and has benefited from the events & stewardship of the engaged residents. A central public space of this type does not exist in Flemingdon Park, although a new group, the Flemingdon Urban Fair Committee is now working to create similar events and spaces.



walking and cycling for recreation and exercise are relatively rare in these communities, even though they are situated on magnificent walking and cycling trails in the Don Valley.

This summer, community members gathered to discuss access to the ravines while riding bikes to the Evergreen Brickworks to highlight the rich connections the neighbourhood has to city resources. Clear signage, better seasonal maintenance and dedicated bike lanes were all mentioned as important measures to making the trails more accessible. It was also noted by community members regarding park space within the neighbourhood that even though there is lots of space for recreation, it is often separated by fences, making it less useful and inviting.

The goal of creating accessible connections between residents and ravine trails was a part of the original intention of these communities. Through qualitative research and fieldwork we have seen that the connections today are very limited and uninviting. While walking and cycling rates are relatively high in Thorncliffe and Flemingdon, a recent asset mapping exercise showed that interest and engagement in physical exercise is very low (Wijesuria 2010). It seems that

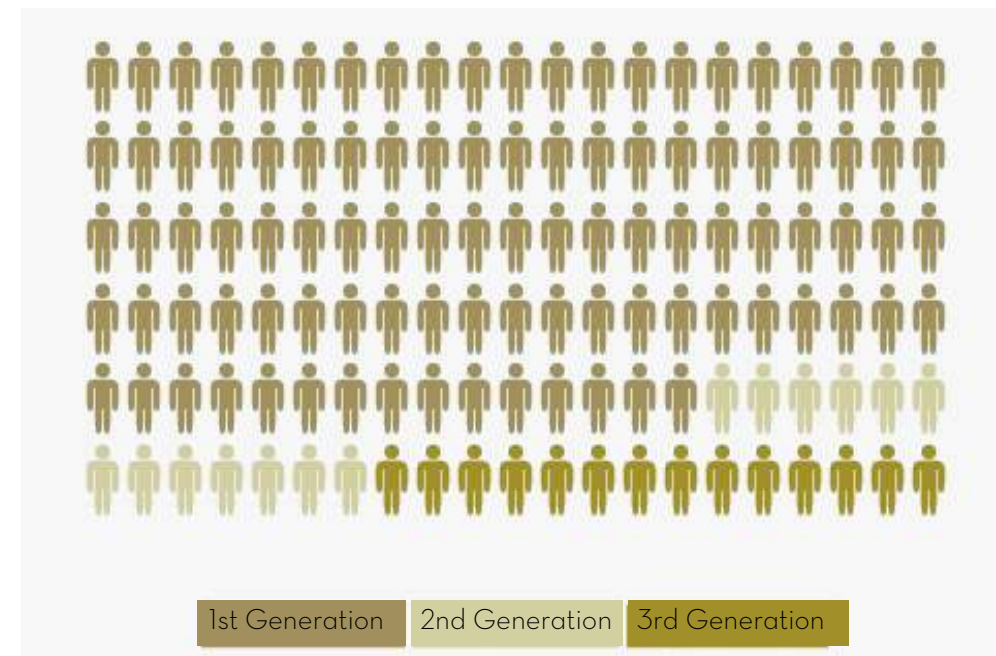


Physical and Social Characteristics

Arrival City

Flemingdon Park Resident Generation Status

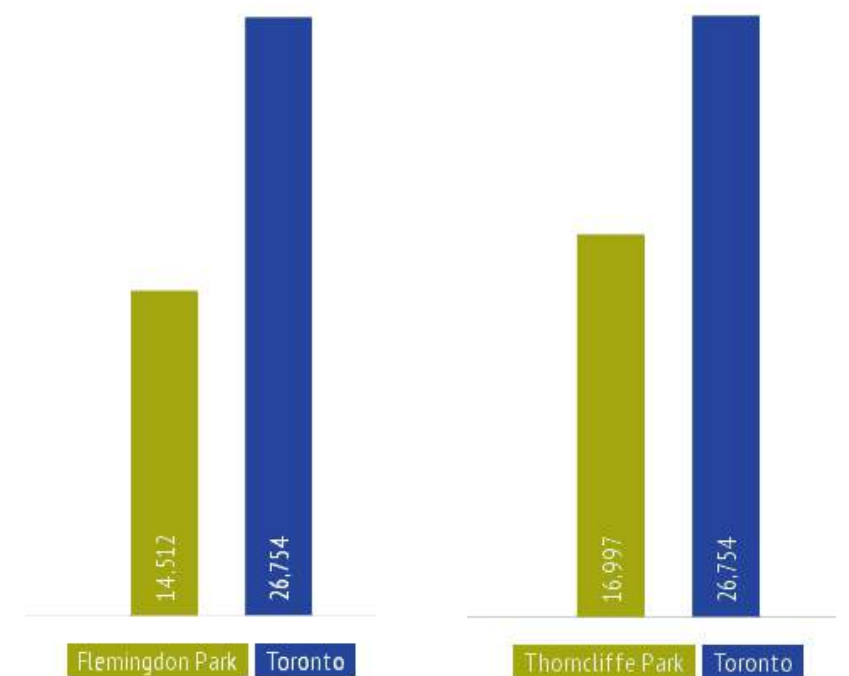
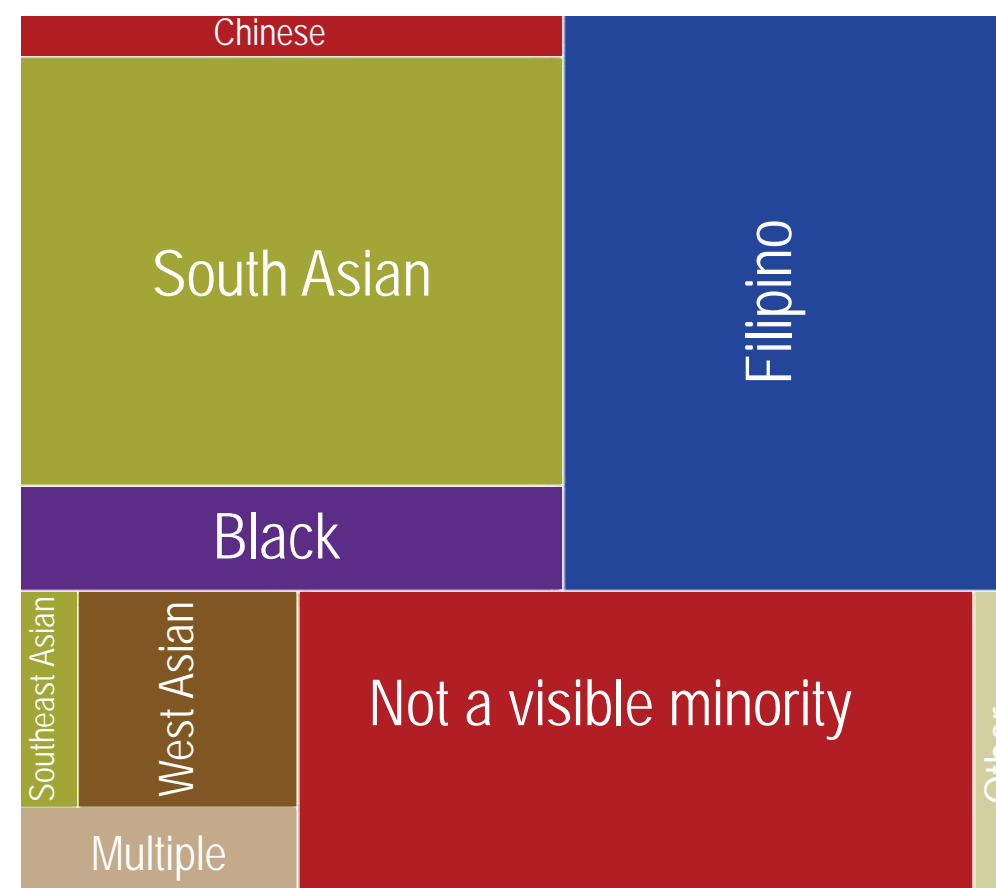
Thorncliffe Park Resident Generation Status



Thorncliffe and Flemingdon are 'arrival cities', they are examples of the neighbourhoods on the edges of cities around the world that are spaces of transition for those migrating from other places. In his book of the same title Doug Saunders describes arrival cities as the future centres of innovation and economic development that will shape our urban existence (Saunders 2010) "Yesterdays villagers and immigrants become today's urban merchants and tomorrows professionals and political leaders" (Saunders 2010).

Flemingdon Park Visible Minorities

Thorncliffe Park Visible Minorities



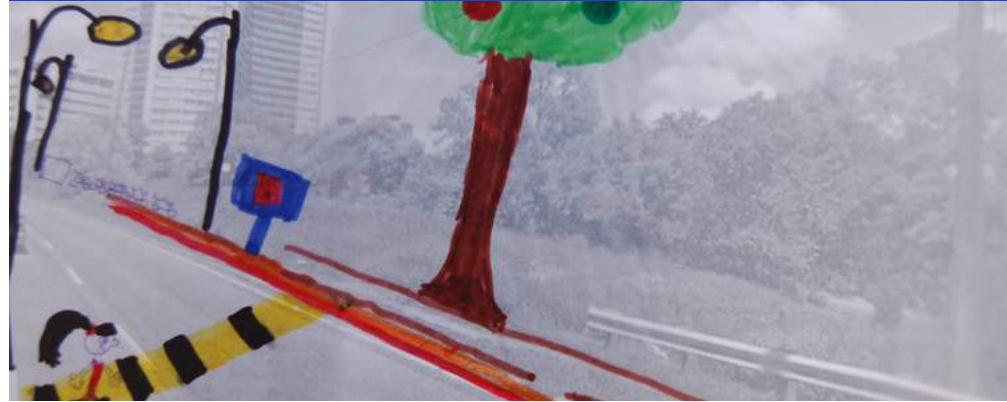
Flemingdon Park Median Income 2005

Thorncliffe Park Median Income 2005

Source (all images on this page): 2006 National Census

Physical and Social Characteristics

Youth Voice



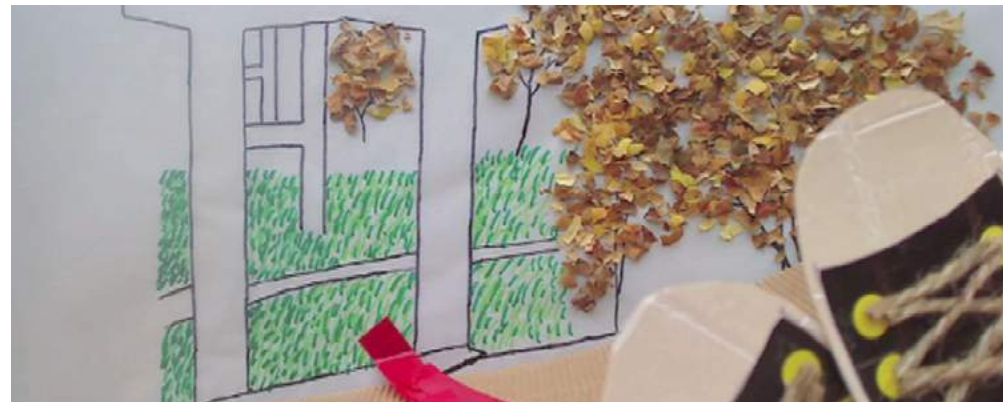
Bike lanes, a new crosswalk on Don Mills and a kiosk in the apple tree that sells apple pies!



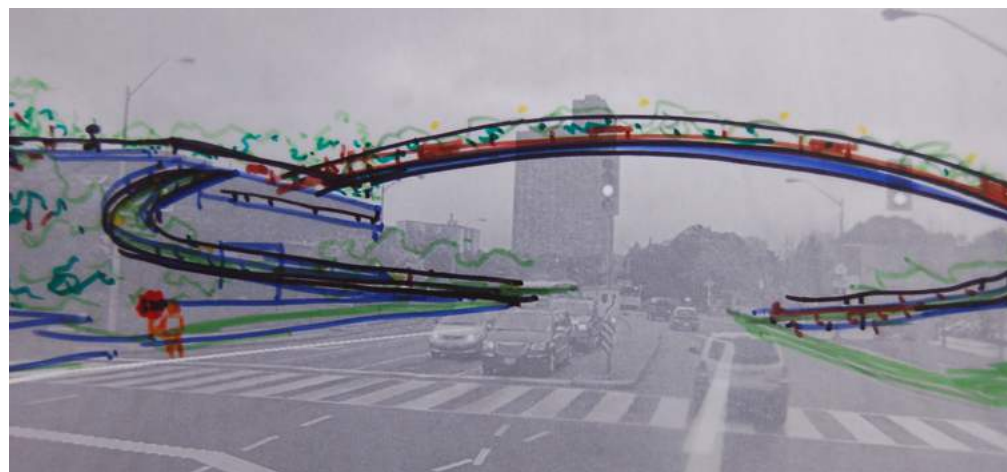
A tree house in the ravine-more safe places to play in the ravine.



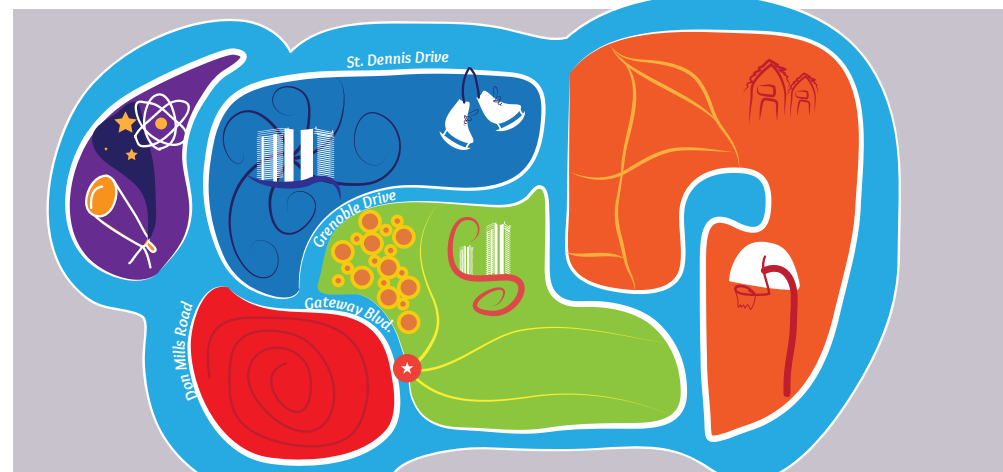
A pedestrian scramble, more street trees and better lighting at Don Mills and Overlea.



A slide under the bridge leading down into the ravine trails-a fun way to travel!

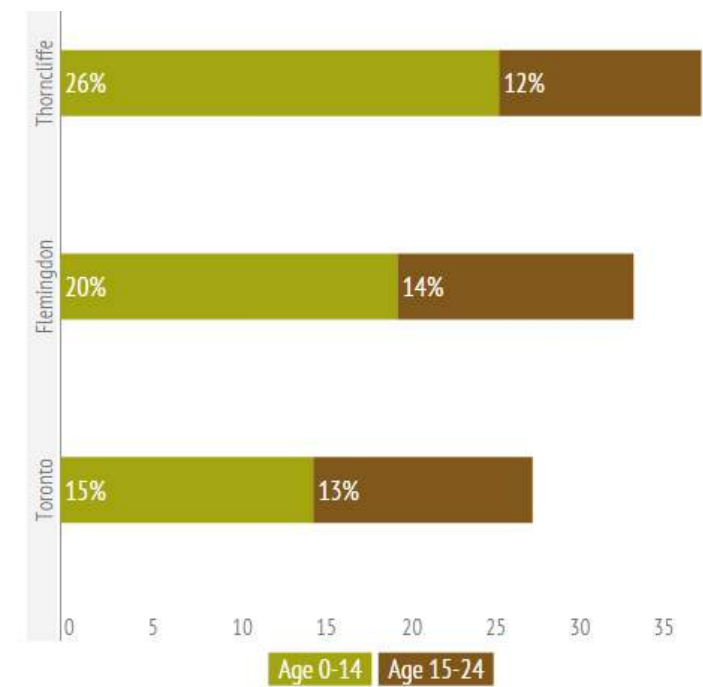


Green roofs on the local schools and green pedestrian paths connecting them.



A wayfinding mosaic in Vendome Place-a part of Flemingdon that is confusing.

There are a lot of young people in Thorncliffe and Flemingdon. Youth make up a disproportionately large share of the population. We have been working with youth in different capacities to try and understand what their concerns and ideas are for the future of their streets. They have a lot of great ideas, some of which are seen on the left. The images on the far left are from the Young Urbanist Summer Camp held at the Flemingdon Health Centre. These images propose ideas for Don Mills and Overlea. The images on the right are from two teen activities, the first two show ideas to activate areas in the ravine, and the third is a wayfinding project that the Toronto Emerging Artists (TEA) are working on Flemingdon.



Percentage of Youth compared to Toronto Average
Source: Toronto Neighbourhood Profiles

CICLOVIA PROGRAM IN THORNCLIFFE AND FLEMINGDON

Ciclovia/Car-free Sundays are programs where the streets are opened to people and closed to cars for a few hours on Sunday

RE-CREATING PLACES: TRANSFORMING EXISTING SPACE INTO GREAT PUBLIC SPACE

Reclaim underused spaces such as empty parking lots & space around the hydro corridor and activate them with amenities and activity spaces

PEDESTRIAN SCRAMBLES AT BIG INTERSECTIONS

Pedestrian scrambles are intersection systems that stop all vehicle traffic and allow pedestrians to cross in every direction

CONNECT THE DON VALLEY TRAIL TO THORNCLIFFE AND FLEMINGDON

The trail is far too hidden when it should be easily accessible, safe and convenient for those of all ages and abilities to enjoy

In 2010 8-80 cities undertook an engagement project in Thorncliffe and Flemingdon to collect ideas towards more livable communities. We have used their recommendations as guides in the ANC project. The recommendations are summarized in the image on the left.

Our observations and conversations allow us to add some updated information to these long term goals. First, the current construction schedule makes Ciclovia programs and street closures unlikely for some time.

Re-creating places is an important goal using short-term easy to implement ideas, the ample existence of open space provides opportunities for such actions.

'Pedestrian scrambles' is a suggestion that deals with a perennial issue in Thorncliffe and Flemingdon: The schools and religious institutions let out large numbers of people, forcing the streets and intersections to accommodate massive increases in volume at certain times.

The connections to the ravine continue to be poor and improvements in this realm would go a long way towards encouraging active transportation.

Physical and Social Characteristics

Great strides forward have been made in Thorncliffe and Flemingdon. Both internal community organizing and policy changes are starting to show improvements in the public realm.

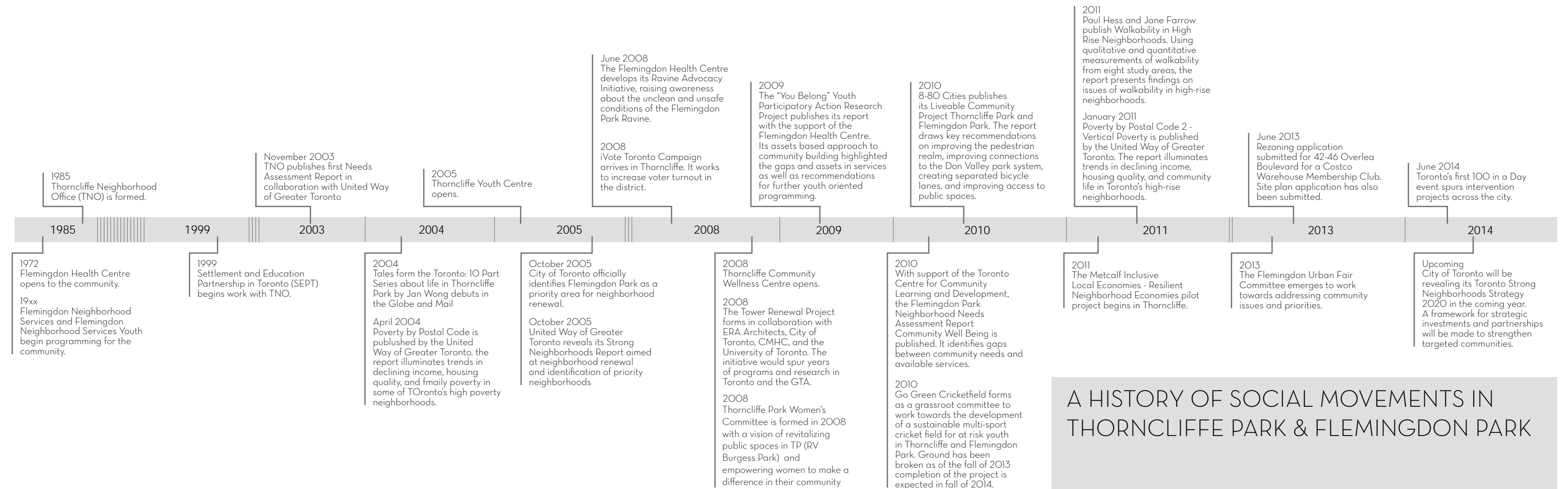
One example of this progress is a sidewalk that was previously a dirt path leading to the food store Iqbals. The city responded to the desires of the community for better pedestrian conditions. This is exactly how positive change happens: through incremental changes in key pieces of infrastructure that effect people's daily travel.

Residents themselves have done great work towards enlivening public space. Over the past 6 years the Thorncliffe Women's Committee has enabled arts and fitness programming, a community garden, park beautification, community engagement and advocacy improving park infrastructure, a very famous Friday community bazaar with local performances, park clean-ups and environmental education. Its advocacy coupled with City commitment has resulted in the park receiving used playground equipment, a renovated splash pad, new swings, benches,

Building on Momentum

bins, lights, picnic tables, and the first of its kind, a permanent outdoor Tandoor bake oven.

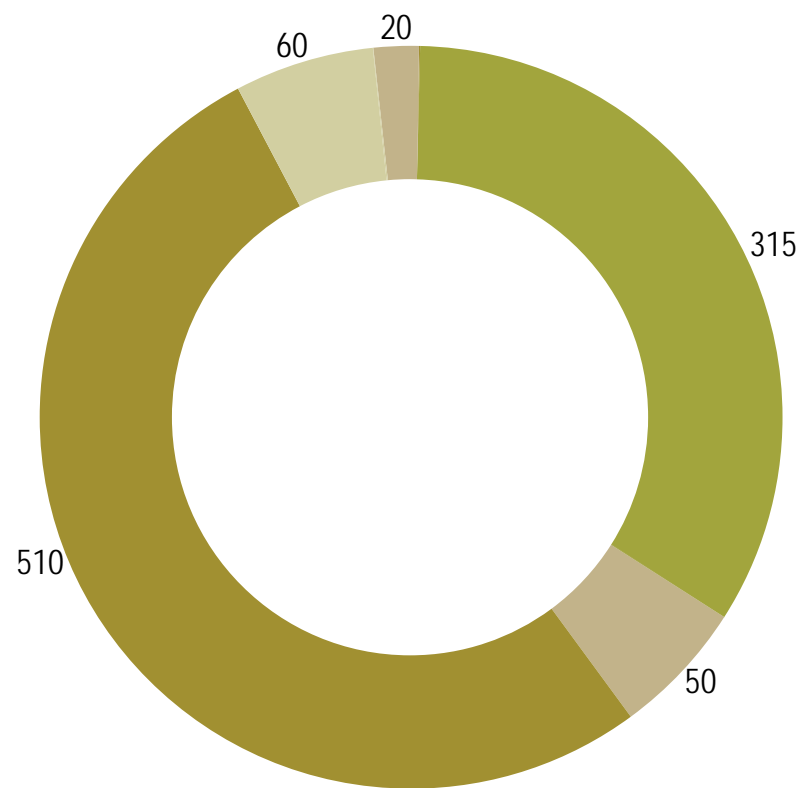
As a tool to complement recent changes in zoning, The Centre for Urban Growth and Renewal recently published a report that offers strategies for improving apartment neighbourhoods some of which provide important guidance for improving active transportation and public space in Thorncliffe and Flemingdon.



A HISTORY OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN THORNCLIFFE PARK & FLEMINGDON PARK

Movement Patterns

Flemingdon Park Mode split

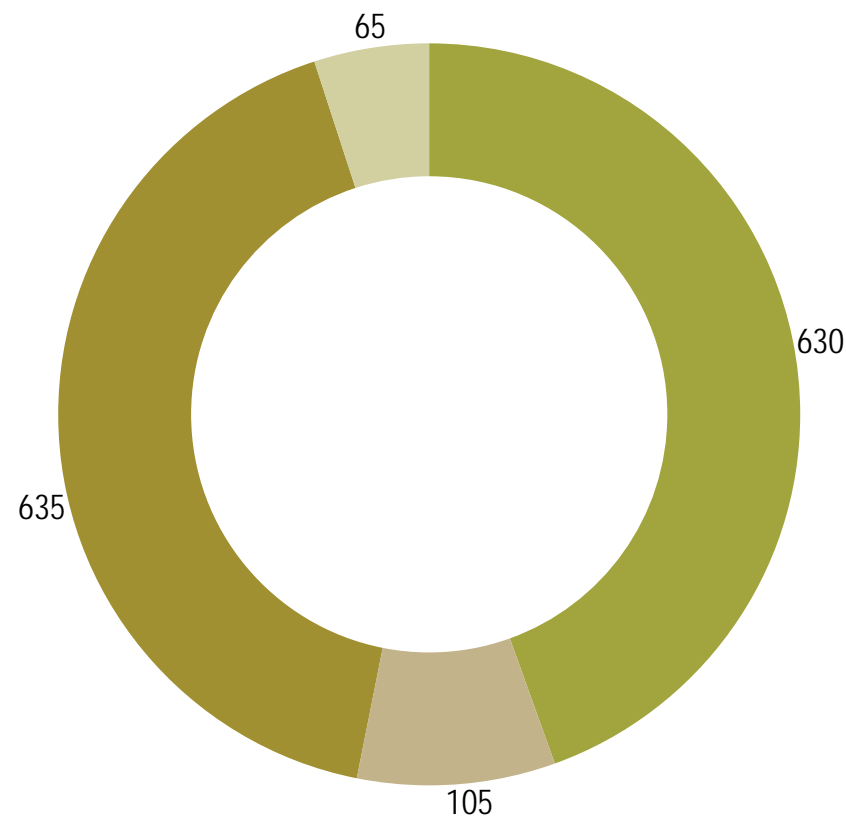


Car, as driver | Car, as passenger | Public transit | Walk, bike | Other

Proximity to downtown and relatively high density ensure excellent transit access for both communities. Buses travelling along Don Mills and Overlea connect with many subway stops or other important destinations.

Recent research on tower neighbourhoods in the Toronto area has shown that these communities generally have lower car ownership rates, higher transit user rates and higher rates of walking

Thorncliffe Park Mode Split



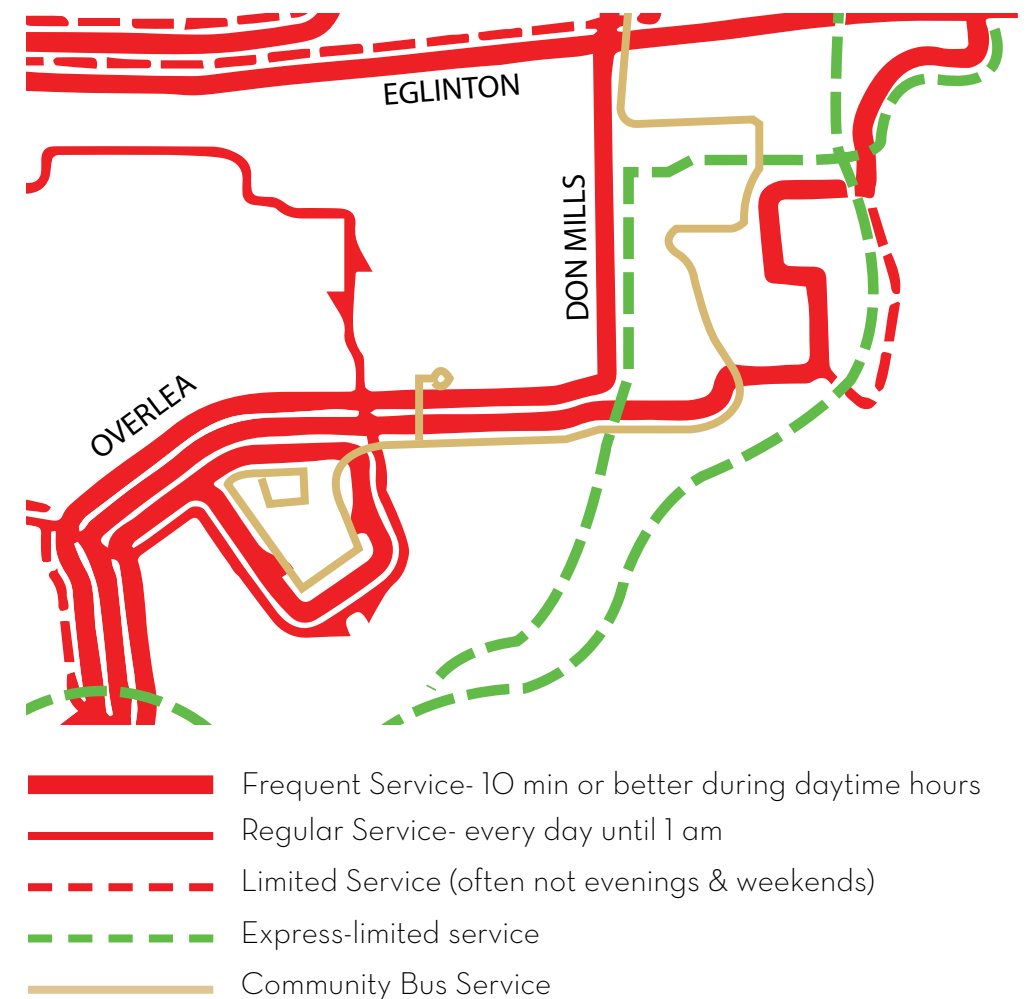
Car, as driver | Car, as passenger | Public transit | Walk, bike | Other

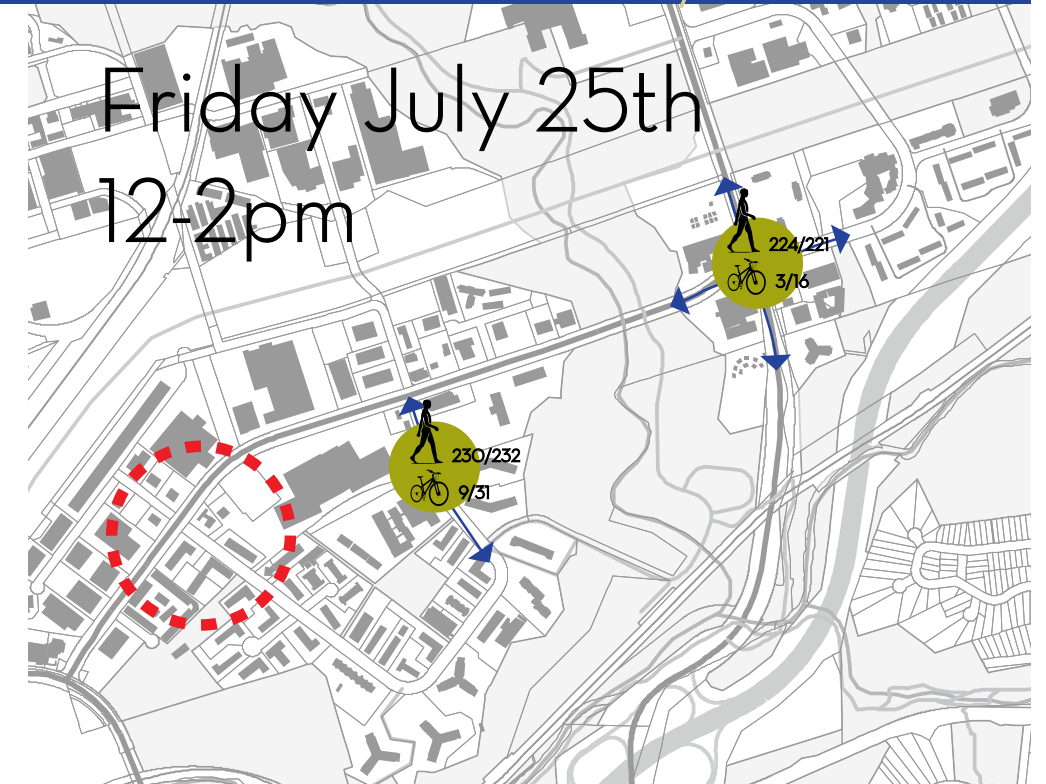
and cycling compared to the GTA average (ERA Architects 2010). Thorncliffe and Flemingdon are no exception to this rule.

A direct consequence of this lower than average car ownership is a large number of underused parking spaces both in buildings and surrounding them. Many community members share the idea that these spaces could be activated in more interesting ways.

Public Transit

Public Transit Service Frequency Map





PEDESTRIAN & CYCLIST COUNTS

FRIDAY

daily average
pedestrians/cyclists

1. Thorncliffe & Overlea: 6018/188
2. Thorncliffe Park West: 2629/165
3. Overlea & Don Mills: 3958/200

SATURDAY

daily average
pedestrians/cyclists

1. Thorncliffe & Overlea: ?/?
2. Thorncliffe Park West: 2553/221
3. Overlea & Don Mills: 2459/105

Flemingdon and Thorncliffe are both neighbourhoods that see a high rate of pedestrian activity. A walkability workshop carried out in Thorncliffe in 2009 showed that walking was the dominant form of transportation within the neighbourhood. Further, 84% of participants reported that most travel to work or school was done within the neighbourhood (Hess and Farrow 2009).

Although cycling is not a major form of transportation within the neighbourhood, it is common to see recreational cyclists connecting with the Don Valley trails especially on weekends.

The graphics above show average rates of pedestrian and cyclist travel counted by the community mapping team in the summer during the hours shown above, and then multiplied by expansion factors to reach daily averages.

One important thing that we observe in the pedestrian traffic is the tendency for it to ebb and flow with the schedules of institutions such as the schools and the Mosque. This has a tendency to overwhelm the sidewalks and intersections.

Walkscore Thorncliffe: 71
Walkscore Flemingdon: 63

Source: www.walkscore.com

Movement Patterns

Thorncliffe and Overlea

- Crossing the street:
- No audible signal
 - Crosswalk paint needs updating
- Sidewalks:
- The sidewalks are not wide enough
 - The sidewalks are interrupted by drives
 - Curbs not marked for visually impaired
- Comfort and Appeal:
- Shade trees are too small and too sparse
 - The landscaping is patchy and poorly maintained
 - Benches and places to sit are needed
 - Some of the bus stops do not have shelters
 - There is trash on the pathways to the restaurants and around the entrance to the mall

Thorncliffe Park Drive West

- Crossing the street:
- No audible signal
 - Crosswalk paint needs updating
 - The median has no curbcut
- Sidewalks:
- The sidewalks are not wide enough
 - Sidewalks are interrupted by driveways
 - Curbs are not marked for visually impaired
 - There are many shortcuts, bumpy curbcuts
- Driver behavior:
- Drivers do not yield to pedestrians, especially at right turns



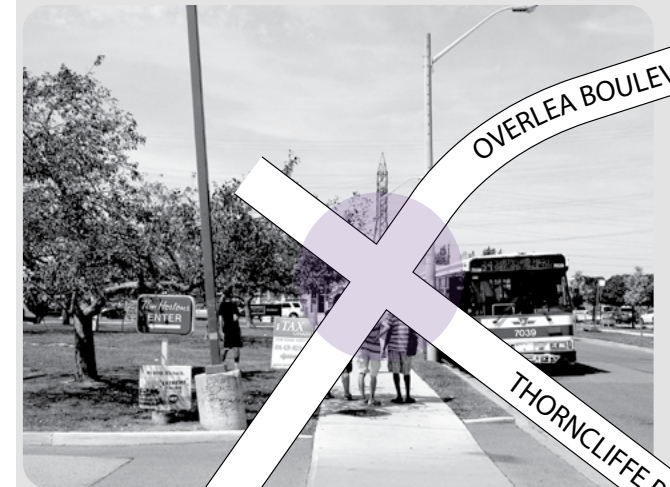
- Comfort and Appeal:
- Benches and places to sit are needed
 - A sidewalk is needed leading to bus stop
 - The bus stop needs better shelter

Overlea and Don Mills

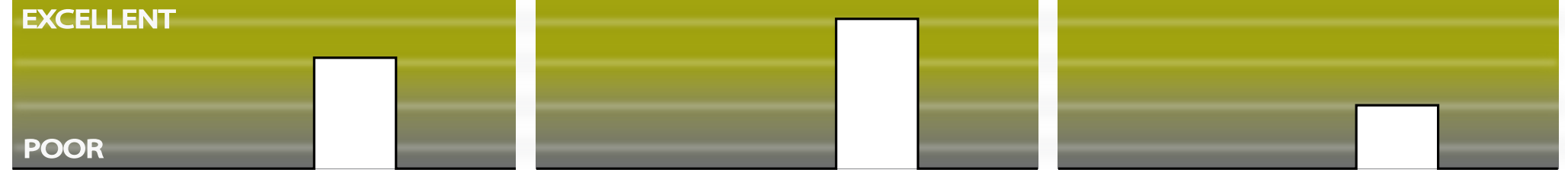
- Crossing the street:
- No audible signal
 - Push to walk signal is not available
 - There are cracks in the intersection
- Sidewalks:
- Don Mills sidewalks not wide enough
 - There is no buffer between sidewalk/traffic
 - Benches are needed



- Driver behavior:
- Drivers do not yield to pedestrians
 - Drivers seem to be speeding
- Safety:
- Car speeds are too fast
 - There is too much traffic
 - Drivers are distracted
 - There is suspicious/criminal activity
 - Signs are not always clear
- Comfort and Appeal:
- Benches and places to sit are needed
 - Bus stops do not have shelter/ benches
 - The bus stop needs better lighting
 - Don Mills is very loud, trees would help



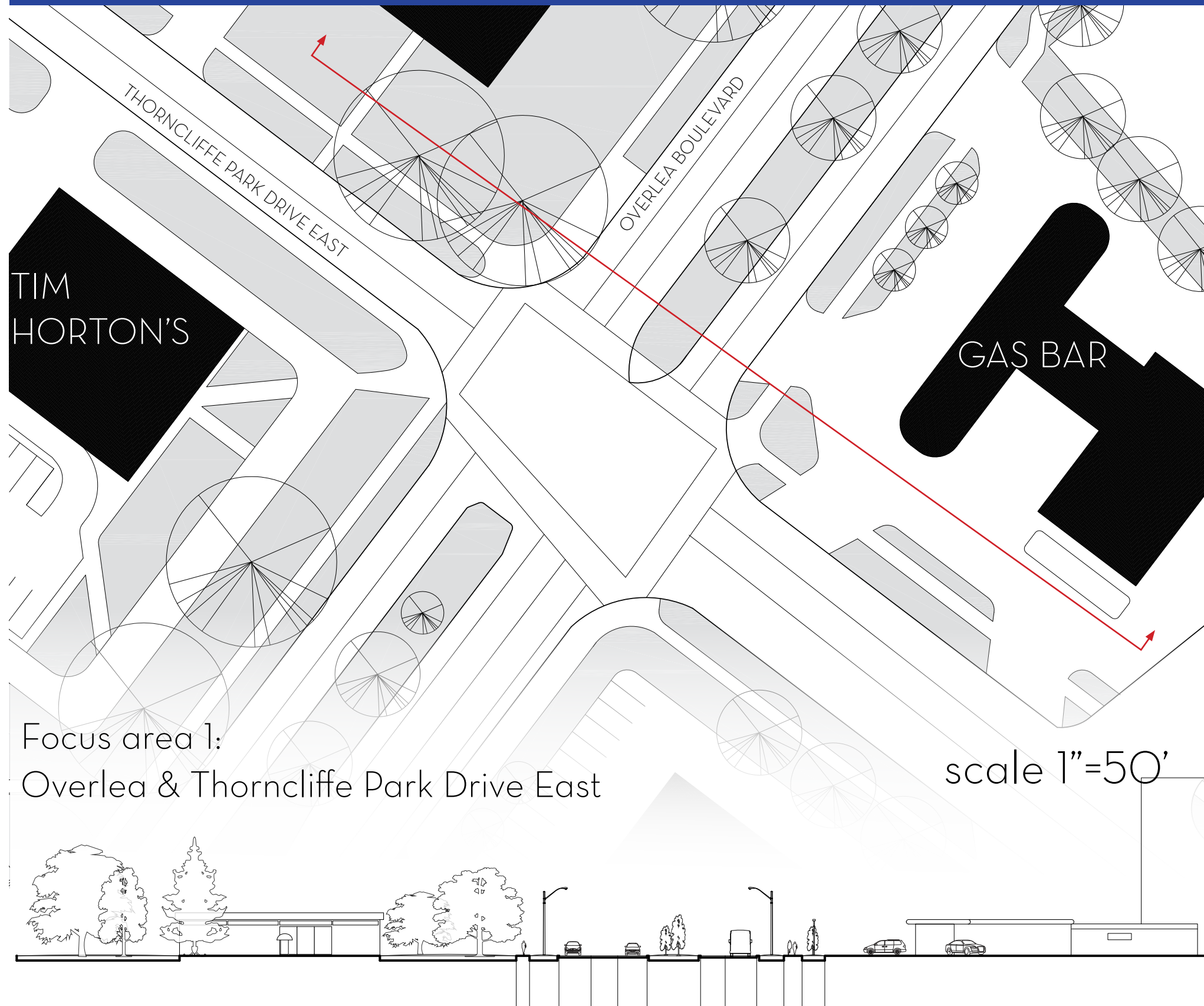
OVERALL RATINGS



Street Audit

On a beautiful summer day we went out with the community mapping team—a team made up of residents and interested volunteers to assess the functionality of the streets near our three focus areas featured on the left. We used a standardized street audit tool created by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). Although there was quite a bit of variation across areas, the two most common comments were about a lack of seating and a need for wider sidewalks.



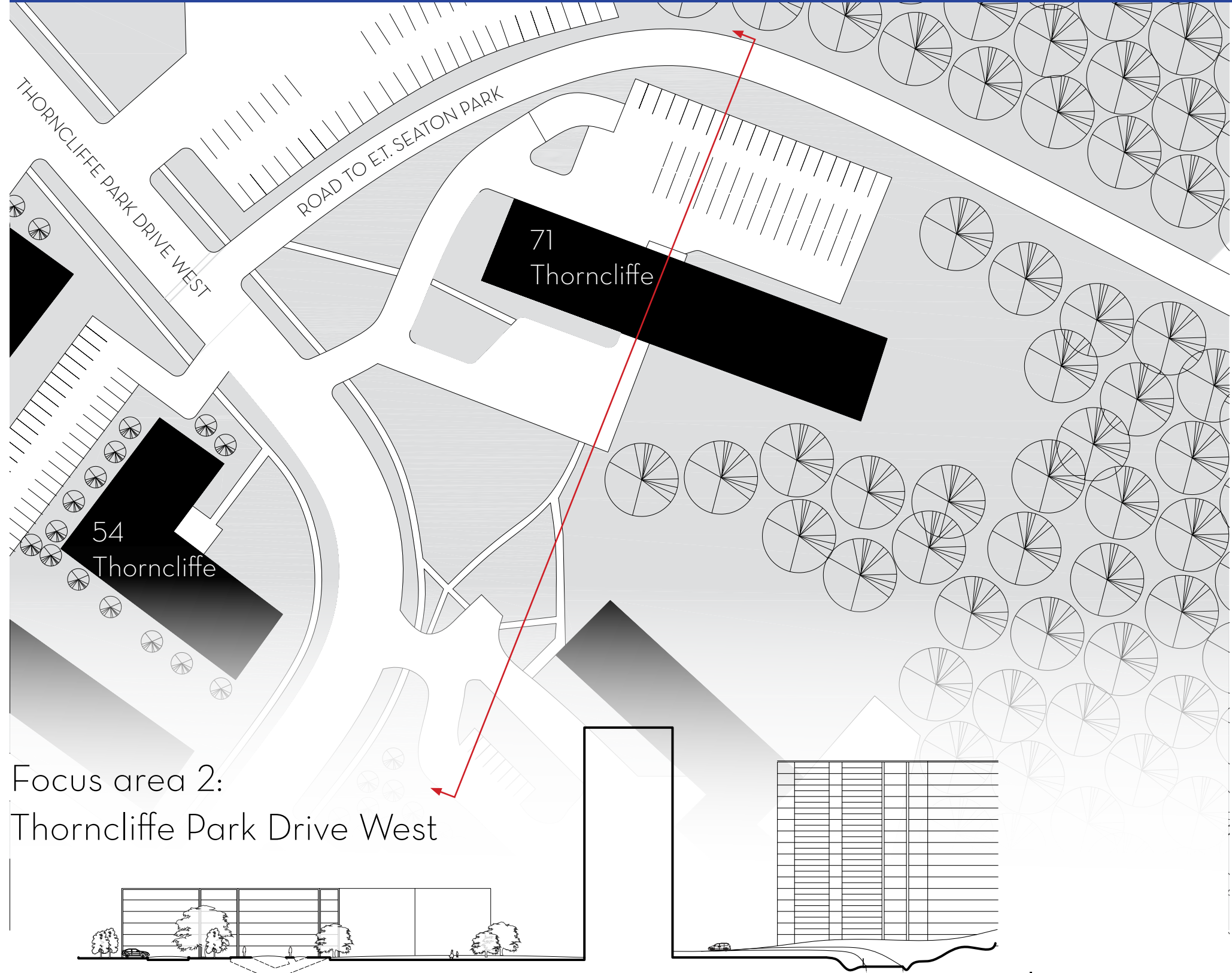


Focus area 1:
Overlea & Thorncliffe Park Drive East

scale 1"=50'

Overlea is considered an attractive street, with Linden trees lining the sidewalks and the median, contributing to pleasant sites and smells. Seating areas can be found nestled in the trees near the Tim Horton's. Through discussions on Jane's walk and other conversations we learned that the imminent redevelopment of the area for a Costco is very controversial. People expressed concerns over the street trees and medians being destroyed in an effort to accommodate more traffic for the store.

The Mosque, located just beyond the bounds, Northeast of this intersection accommodates large groups of people at specific times of the day and week. This critical mass, similar to school traffic creates heavy burdens on pedestrian infrastructure at certain times. Solutions created and validated by the community include a pedestrian scramble at this intersection and widening sidewalks along Thorncliffe Park Drive, where most residents travel from.



Focus area 2:
Thorncliffe Park Drive West

scale 1"=100'

Focus areas 2 and 3 are in need of better signage at minimum, to improve access to the ravine trails. Access to the ravine was brought up in many contexts as a major opportunity for improving active transportation in these communities.

In Focus area 2 the need for more crosswalks on Thorncliffe Park Drive was identified by a number of residents. The 2009 walkability workshops in Thorncliffe also highlighted interest in another crosswalk on Thorncliffe Park Drive West to accommodate all of the current jay-walkers (Hess and Farrow 2009). Similarly, community mappers noticed the tendency for people to cut across paths and make shortcuts-suggesting that the right-of ways do not provide the most convenient paths.



Focus area 3:
Overlea and Don Mills

Focus area 3 encapsulates both an entrance to the ravine and a major intersection with two large schools on either side. Concerns about safety at this intersection were brought up by community members particularly regarding the large volumes when school gets out and also the tendency for young people to run across the road. A fatal car accident in the previous year was brought up as an example of these dangers. Valley Park Middle School was recently ranked by a Global News article as one of the most dangerous schools for pedestrians.

Don Mills is seen as loud and inhospitable by the community members we talked to. Street trees were suggested as a buffer to traffic noise.

scale 1"=75'

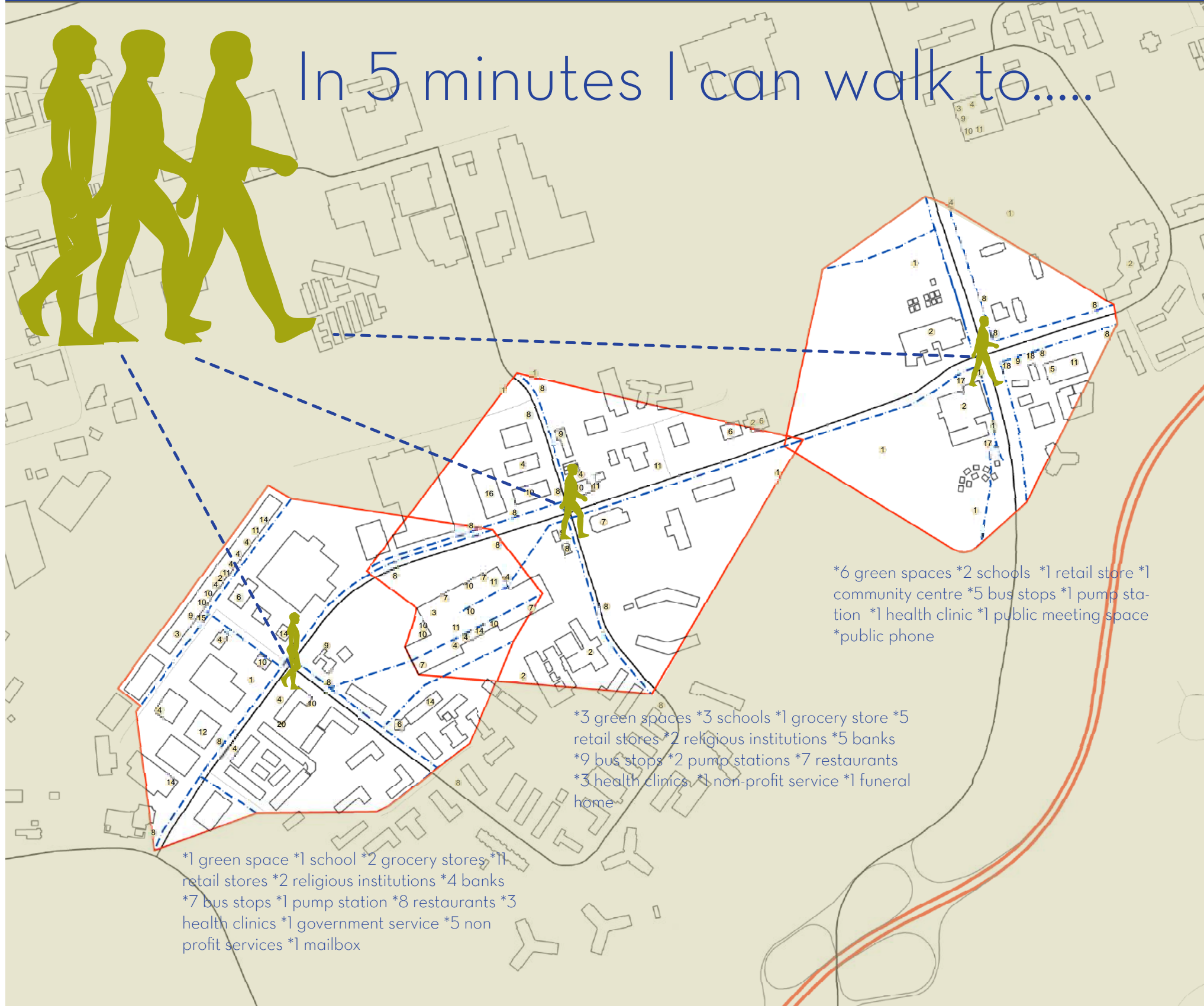
Public Space



Popular Destinations

Thorncliffe & Flemingdon are home to some important destinations of all kinds. The graphic on the left highlights some of the important destinations that came up in mapping activities with community members. Sunny's Food Market is a covered outdoor plaza with a large grocery store and many other shops. The Ontario Science Centre is a landmark and destination for the whole city, bringing families and school groups into the neighbourhood regularly. Don Mills and Overlea is an important intersection with two schools: Valley Park Middle School and Marc Garneau Highschool. The East York Town Centre and R.V. Burgess Park form the central nodes in Thorncliffe and both 'Iqbals' a South Asian grocery store, sweet store and restaurant and the Mosque are found in a small shopping plaza Northeast of Overlea. Two sketches done by the community mapping team of gathering spaces show the relationship between human activity and built form.

In 5 minutes I can walk to.....



This map, created by the community mapping team explores the possible destinations from a given location. We deployed groups to the three focus areas and walked in each direction for five minutes, noting all the publicly accessible destinations on the map. This exercise is based on the idea that most people will choose to walk as a means of transportation when something is 5 minutes away. These maps provide illustrations of the density of amenities and of walking opportunities present in the neighbourhood.

“While Thorncliffe Park is walkable, it is not very sit-able” (Hess and Farrow 2009). A desire for more benches in both Thorncliffe and in Flemingdon was brought up in many of the conversations we had. Benches go a long way in enlivening the public realm. If people are going to spend time in public for anything other than movement, benches are necessary.

While the amenities and destinations in Thorncliffe and Flemingdon may seem plentiful from this map, it is still lacking in diversity of destinations when compared to more compact walkable areas. This is why current changes in zoning that take effect this summer (2015) are so important, as they will allow for the addition of new uses within the strictly residential areas.

Public Space

A recent publication benchmarking the success of Toronto neighbourhoods highlights 4 areas where Flemingdon and Thorncliffe are falling critically behind: unemployment, social assistance, low income and marginalization. While these factors provide many obstacles to the overall health of the neighbourhood, two areas stand out as ranking above average: green space and levels of

municipal voting. In other words, we can infer that the population is engaged and there is plenty of open space that can be activated.

As outlined in the timeline on page 14, it is evident that residents have become active stewards of their local environment, however it is important to engage other institutions for these actions to make

Stewardship

lasting change. It is important to note that much of the open space in Thorncliffe and Flemingdon is privately owned. The maintenance of grounds and landscaping consequently is often varied depending on the practices of each company.

One consequence of private ownership is the presence of fences between properties. The existence of these fences are not necessarily welcome by residents. A discussion with some teens in the neighbourhood made us aware that the use of greens for sports is inhibited by the fences dividing up the space.

On publicly owned land, the community has identified trash as an ongoing issue. This was reported in the needs assessment survey (Wijesuria 2010) as well as in many of our recent engagement activities. It was also noticed by community mappers that the presence of illegal 'dumping grounds' at points of connection between the city and the ravine is prevalent.

Stewardship of the built environment is the responsibility of private landowners, the City of Toronto, and the local resident's who call it home. Finding complementary goals within all of these interests is key to improving shared spaces.



Summary of Opportunities and Challenges

Opportunities

- Ample open space is available
- Proximity to the ravine & recreation trails
- Cultural diversity (as an indicator of innovation)
- Recent changes in land use zoning will allow for new amenities and destinations
- Local examples of great public space such as R.V. Burgess Park
- Socially engaged residents
- Great transit access (less reasons to drive)
- Underused parking lots provide potential for creative uses
- Existing culture of pedestrianism
- Considered a 'strong neighbourhood' meaning the City of Toronto recognizes the importance of investment in these areas

Challenges

- Poverty and Marginalization impacting ability to engage & associated with poor health indicators
- Restrictive land use planning
- Perception of crime in isolated public spaces
- Poor access points to Don Valley ravine
- Unnecessary fences dividing up private property
- Large arterial roads are both barriers to pedestrians & can be dangerous and/or inhospitable
- high differentials in pedestrian traffic flow overwhelms infrastructure
- Flemington Park can be difficult to navigate
- Lack of amenities such as benches and trash bins make public space uninviting

Through engagement activities, as well as primary and secondary research, we found a series of opportunities that exist within the neighbourhood that could have potential to encourage more active neighbourhoods. On the other hand, there are a series of key challenges standing in the way of that path. This is not exhaustive list, but a summary of the most relevant issues.

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