



# Introduction

## 2024 Parkdale Community Planning Study

Parkdale People's Economy is a network of over 30 community-based organizations and hundreds of community members that combines neighborhood planning, collective action, mutual aid, and community-based research to build shared visions for Parkdale's future. Our collaboration aspires towards achieving economic, racial, and climate justice.

In 2016, the first Parkdale Community Planning Study was published. Parkdale People's Economy activated the document by hosting Working Groups of community members on a bi-monthly basis to strategize on how to advance key directions in the plan. A major victory of this approach was the creation of the *Parkdale Community Benefits Framework: Guide for Development Without Displacement* (2018) which paved the way for material gains through coalitions and campaigns pushing back against profit-driven development. The past eight years have seen massive wins that showcase the impact of community care and advocacy, and the collective power that fosters systems changes.

We believe that communities should have agency over their development. In Parkdale, displacement pressures from increasing gen-

trification, the commodification of housing, and planning that puts the interests of developers first has endangered the assets that keep Parkdale affordable. The ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the crisis in the shelter system have been especially challenging, revealing how stretched the social services in this neighborhood have become. By building a community-driven future, we can tackle these issues in their individual and systemic manifestations.

While change results in a mix of wins and losses for communities, we must remember that history is shaped by collective action. Parkdale has been successful in building community power in the past through initiatives like tenant organizing and community land trusts. Community planning offers a framework for future action, which is vital to achieving our shared goals.

This plan was built through four years of in-depth community engagement. We aim to set in motion a community plan for Parkdale that was created through sustained community-led visioning, strategizing, and organizing to dream of a future where displacement is not inevitable and instead the people of Parkdale unite to build collective power.

The 2024 Parkdale Community Planning Study is divided into six themes that aim to describe a shared vision of economic, racial, and climate justice:

- 1. Housing Justice:** Preserve, protect, and expand affordable, safe, and permanent housing for all through tenant power, community stewardship, and equitable development without displacement.
- 2. Solidarity Economy:** Build a just and sustainable economy in Parkdale where community members have collective ownership and decision making power over resources, decent work,

and shared wealth.

**3. Community Health and Safety:** Practice new forms of care and support in moments of crisis that radically reimagine community safety through abolition and transformative justice, and that center community health and wellbeing.

**4. Climate Action:** Transform towards a just transition and sustainable economy by supporting green jobs, building retrofits, and community-based climate solutions grounded in righting relations.

**5. Food Systems:** Enhance affordable and equitable access to healthy food by building a sustainable local food economy.

**6. Social Infrastructure:** Support a collaborative social infrastructure of services, programs, spaces, and networks in Parkdale to enhance the overall wellbeing of community members, community organizations, and grassroots groups in the neighbourhood.

Community members engaging in outreach activities outside of Edmond Place.



# Housing Justice

## 2024 Parkdale Community Planning Study

### Assets (3)

1. Tenant organizing networks
2. Community stewardship
3. Community benefits organizing and advocacy for development without displacement

### Needs (3)

1. Rent control and tenant protections
2. Affordable, community-owned housing
3. Development without displacement

### Directions (8)

1. Pursue and support the development of new affordable and supportive housing
2. Promote public education on tenant rights through a Tenant Resource Centre
3. Establish a proactive eviction prevention framework across Parkdale
4. Build solidarity with tenant-led organizing and grassroots encampment support in Parkdale
5. Provide community-based education and advocacy for the expansion of the co-operative housing sector and community land trusts

6. Reclaim vacant units and properties through expropriation for social housing
7. Decommodify housing such as rooming houses, small rental buildings, and tower rentals through community-led acquisition
8. Revise and update the *Parkdale Community Benefits Framework* and sustain community benefits campaigns across new developments

Housing unaffordability is a mounting challenge in Parkdale. 74% of Parkdale residents are renters, with many living in high-rise apartment buildings. As of November 2023, the average advertised rent for a one bedroom in Parkdale is \$2,298. Annually, this rent amounts to over 76% of the average income (\$36,090) of a South Parkdale resident. For those residents who are on social assistance it is even more dire.

The escalating commodification of housing is the main cause of these rent increases. Large corporate landlords and real estate investment trusts, each motivated to increase the profit they make from renters, own 71% of privately held apartment towers in the neighbourhood as of 2022. Housing policy enables the profit-seeking behavior of these landlords. Vacancy decontrol, the ability of landlords to set any price on new leases, incentivizes landlords to evict or push out long-standing tenants who are left without affordable alternative housing. Above guideline rent increases allow landlords to raise rents higher than the annual allowed increase set by the province, giving landlords a tool to raise rents faster than they otherwise would. Changes made to provincial policy under the Ford government have further contributed to trends of increasing gentrification and unaffordability, endorsing a supply-based approach to providing housing which makes no provisions to keep housing affordable. The result of such intense financialization of housing is residents being displaced from their neighbourhood, dilapidated living conditions, and increasing homelessness.

The experiences of tenants in Parkdale show us what kind of change is needed. Pervasive evictions call our attention to the need for improved protection for tenants and the return of real rent control. The widespread struggle to afford a place to live serves as an imperative to decommodify housing and expand community ownership of land in Parkdale. Members of the Parkdale community have consistently called for development without displacement, emphasizing how developers neglect to invest in the communities they operate in.

Parkdale residents have a vision of a welcoming neighbourhood where people can build community. Though rising rents and gentrification persist, Parkdale has made proven strides in protecting affordable housing and resisting gentrification. Networks of tenant activists work against the power of landlords. The Parkdale Neighborhood Land Trust safeguards affordable housing stock while putting more property into the hands of the community. Collective actions have helped win community benefits, like funding for the Multi-Unit Residential Acquisition program.

Looking to the future, much work remains to be done to strengthen tenant protections, increase the availability of community-owned affordable housing, and ensure new development does not lead to displacement.

A banner created by artist Rocky Zenyk at a Skale development site at Queen and Close, advocating for affordable housing in Parkdale.





# Solidarity Economy

## 2024 Parkdale Community Planning Study

### Assets (3)

1. Worker power and solidarity
2. Local businesses strengthen reciprocity and economic vitality in Parkdale
3. Innovative approaches to building community wealth

### Needs (3)

1. Clear pathways to decent work opportunities
2. Displacement prevention and support for local businesses
3. Anchor institution commitments to the local economy

### Directions (9)

1. Provide community-based education on the solidarity economy and worker co-operatives to assess local expansion
2. Create a local workforce planning strategy for employment opportunities in Parkdale that are sensitive to local workforce needs
3. Mobilize organizations in Parkdale to provide a living wage and commit to a local hiring strategy

4. Provide community-based training and resources to local businesses to strengthen their supportive roles in the community
5. Establish a Social Procurement Framework for Parkdale to boost local economy through local spending and hiring
6. Leverage the economic power of health institutions in Parkdale through coordinated anchor strategies
7. Engage community members in Financial Dreaming to build a Parkdale People's Budget
8. Work with PNLT to preserve affordable commercial spaces through commercial property acquisition
9. Explore alternative financial mechanisms that reflect and serve community needs

The solidarity economy model suggests a shift towards more inclusive, participatory, and community-centric economic practices where local needs are prioritized, community assets are valued, and actions are made with the strategic intention of collective wealth building. Gentrification entails inequitable development and rising costs of living, creating numerous displacement pressures. From 2012 to 2021, South Parkdale's average income only increased by 3.67%, remaining 23.15% lower than the City of Toronto's average income. Residents in the neighborhood struggle to find employment that pays a living wage, provides pathways for career advancement, and offers benefits. The position of those who have child or elder care responsibilities is even more dire.

An alternative to this mounting precarity is possible. Economic practices can be reoriented to value cooperation and community instead of alienation and extraction. Grassroots movements, local businesses, and anchor institutions all have a role to play in working towards these changes. Labour and tenant organizations are key to achieving more just economic conditions in Parkdale. These two movements often work directly with one another, as advocating for min-

imum wage increases, fighting for fair contracts with businesses, and organizing against rising rents all contribute to making a livable neighborhood. The support that local organizations, like Parkdale Community Legal Services, have given to Ontario Food Terminal workers, Nestle workers, and striking Metro workers shows the importance of building strong networks of solidarity. With these examples in mind, we should encourage community-based organizations to continue to support working-class movements.

Many of Parkdale's local businesses offer affordable, inclusive, and culturally relevant goods and services, vital to maintaining Parkdale's unique community identity. These businesses have supported Parkdale's social wellness by holding fundraisers, making charitable donations, and offering their spaces for community use. Unfortunately, rising commercial rents and other gentrification pressures have led to the closure of many local businesses. These small for-profit enterprises represent opportunities for community building that should be protected.

The non-profit sector contributes to Parkdale's economic sustainability by offering employment support and expanding community stewardship of land. Working For Change, a coalition of local social enterprises, provides entry-level employment opportunities and training programs particularly for community members living with mental health challenges. CAMH provides affordable commercial leases to Working for Change, which is vital to the project's success and demonstrates the supportive role local institutions can play in the neighbourhood. The Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust acquires commercial, residential, and public property to preserve their affordability. Expanding the community ownership of land to commercial property could help provide affordable spaces for

local, community-oriented businesses and social enterprises.

Strengthening Parkdale's solidarity economy means facilitating clear pathways to decent work, preventing further displacement of local businesses, and encouraging institutions operating in Parkdale to increase their commitments to building the local economy. By facilitating these changes, we can actualize our shared vision of an economy that distributes resources equitably and creates healthy communities.





# Community Health and Safety

## 2024 Parkdale Community Planning Study

### Assets (2)

1. Responsive community health programming and supports
2. City of Toronto – funded crisis response

### Needs (3)

1. Culturally relevant resources, especially around mental health
2. Supervised consumption sites staffed 24/7 with onsite social service support for harm reduction workers
3. Alternatives to policing and the incarceration system

### Directions (5)

1. Improve existing mental health programs to ensure that they are culturally relevant, responsive, support independence, and do not have extensive wait lists
2. Support the expansion of harm reduction supports and street outreach workers to address the

rise in overdoses

3. Create a co-ordinated neighbourhood-wide strategy aimed at defunding the police and building alternative networks of community care, such as crisis response units and trained mental health teams

4. Expand community-based training and education to support navigating crisis and conflict in areas such as mental health support, crisis intervention, de-escalation, suicide prevention, transformative justice, mindfulness, psychotherapy, and social work aimed at helping the people in the neighbourhood

5. Establish community healing and transformative justice circles to support community members in navigating grief, trauma, and crisis

The Parkdale community has continuously worked to fill gaps in harm reduction, crisis response, and mental health supports that policy and public institutions fail to address. The neighbourhood is home to a number of community health agencies, grassroots and mutual aid organizations, and social housing that provides vital support to residents. Despite the networks of solidarity and care that exist in the neighbourhood, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed a need to envision how we can build more resilient and community-centred systems to support Parkdale residents' health and safety. In particular, community members shared priorities related to mental health, culturally-relevant supports, and harm reduction.

The COVID-19 pandemic drew attention to the systematic gaps that Parkdale residents face when it comes to accessing basic forms of healthcare and feeling safe in their neighbourhood. In Parkdale, 11.67% of people are on social assistance which is inadequate in covering essential needs or protecting health and well-being. Seeking care in Ontario has become more challenging in recent years as the provincial government introduced cuts to public healthcare that continue to deplete an already overworked

and understaffed system. To enhance access to social services, community members pointed to the need to reduce waitlists, increase provision of translation services, and expand programs to be offered in languages community members speak. There is also a need to enhance protections against discrimination and ensure confidentiality when accessing translation.

The pandemic increased experiences of social isolation, which can heighten substance use and further prevent individuals from engaging in social connection. In 2022, South Parkdale had the fifth highest number of suspected opioid overdose 911 calls out of every neighbourhood in Toronto with 118 calls. Engagements with Parkdale residents highlighted the necessity to increase social service funding to hire peer, outreach, and onsite harm reduction workers, keep supervised consumption sites open 24/7, and increase capacity to serve clientele. It is also imperative that community agencies are given resources to provide harm reduction workers with healthcare benefits and access to onsite counselling and mental health supports. Increased opportunities for social connection and mutual care in the neighbourhood would simultaneously help community members navigating grief, trauma, crisis, and social isolation. This includes community health and transformative justice circles, sharing circles designed and led by Indigenous peoples, and accessible social events focused on wellness, music, spiritual practices, and children's activities.

There are strong concerns of policing in Parkdale. Black and Indigenous residents are constantly under threat of surveillance and among those who are over-represented in Toronto's reportable use of force incidents. Not only does the police system contribute to the criminalization and harm of individuals who are in distress,

but it also fails to address the root cause of crime – that certain communities are underserved, and thus lacking supports to tend to their basic needs. Parkdale community members demand that the City of Toronto defunds the police and uses that funding to invest in social services that address poverty, food insecurity, high rents, underemployment, and more. Alternative networks of community care also need to be fostered in Parkdale. We can achieve this through creating a coordinated neighbourhood-wide strategy aimed at defunding the police and building residents' capacity to support neighbours in crisis.

Many issues related to community health and safety are rooted in a lack of communication – including effective translation and communication between different segments of community care and crisis response efforts. Moving forward, approaching community health and safety from a transformative justice lens will mean prioritizing adding resources to harm reduction and community wellbeing strategies and approaches.







# Climate Action

## 2024 Parkdale Community Planning Study

### Assets (4)

1. Local network of community gardens fostering resident engagement with climate action
2. Foundations for equitable and climate-resilient development
3. Community climate actions and funding opportunities
4. Climate-forward political representatives

### Needs (3)

1. Critical, anti-capitalist climate action
2. Protections for tenants and unhoused communities from the impacts of extreme weather
3. Coordinated local climate action efforts through coalition building

### Directions (5)

1. Establish a climate coalition or hub in Parkdale with a focus on organizing and building solidarity with Indigenous-led climate leadership in Parkdale
2. Advocate for climate-resilient and equitable building standard policies
3. Organize and educate landlords on pathways

- for sustainable building retrofits
4. Co-create a local climate emergency response plan
5. Advocate for sustainable transportation options

Climate action is the work of addressing the root causes of the climate crisis. It is well-documented that climate change disproportionately impacts working-class and racialized communities who experience the systemic implications of climate change that cut across housing, food sovereignty, transportation, and exposure to hazardous pollution. Some climate interventions can alienate working-class community members and contribute to displacement. Parkdale is the site of corporate-owned rental properties that are being gentrified by renovations, a tactic used to attract higher income tenants. Investing in retrofits and energy-efficient technologies can be used as part of this tactic to increase rental prices and displace working-class tenants.

To achieve climate justice, Parkdale community members spoke of the need to build new institutions grounded in stewardship and trust that enable the collective ownership of land, labour, and resources. There are existing strategies that local residents and organizations developed that can inform equitable and climate-resilient development processes for new and existing buildings. For instance, the *Parkdale Community Benefits Framework* outlines clear targets and demands for development proposals to consider, including investments in green space and climate retrofits. Another useful resource is Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust's *Social Procurement and Sustainability Action Framework*, which outlines a strategy to achieve community benefits through the management of its portfolio of 85 community-owned properties. It is critical that we outline specific demands for the percentage of decent work that should be allocated towards Parkdale residents when installing energy-efficient technologies in Parkdale properties.

The highest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in Toronto are buildings (57%) with transportation (33%) coming in second. A majority of these transportation emissions (70%) comes from fuel-powered personal vehicles, indicating that trips taken in personal vehicles must transition to walking, cycling, or transit as much as possible. Data indicates that better cycling infrastructure in Parkdale, including safer connections to downtown, would increase cycling uptake. Funding for sustainable transportation options like public transit needs to be advocated for, especially free transit for those who need it the most.

Many South Parkdale residents live in older buildings that are unfit for extreme heat. Parkdale can revitalize PARC's Heat Registry of heat-vulnerable members that will enable organizations to reach out to individuals and provide support during heat waves. Risks of extreme cold are also concerning for unhoused communities, with Toronto's lack of safe indoor spaces contributing to risks of violence, poor health outcomes, and death for already marginalized groups, especially during extreme weather events. Developing a climate emergency response plan is a tangible way to build climate resilience.

The new Parkdale Hub at Cowan Avenue and Queen Street West is an opportunity for Parkdale residents to create and convene a climate hub, which can be leveraged to build greater climate action engagement. Community gardens have also been shown to be an easy entry point into climate change work by nurturing resident leadership, fostering climate-related discussion, and offering connections to community, land, and food. An engaged neighbourhood and political representation are key components of working towards achieving an

equitable, climate-resilient city.

Nyara, left, and her daughter, Sauda, right, at their garden plot at West Lodge Park Community Garden.



# Food Systems

## 2024 Parkdale Community Planning Study

### Assets (2)

1. Network of formal and informal organizations addressing immediate food access needs
2. Local food distribution and food production initiatives

### Needs (2)

1. Food security solutions, including those focused on affordability and living wages
2. Resources and funding to support food sovereignty initiatives

### Directions (5)

1. Co-ordinate existing food service programs and mutual aid initiatives to ensure consistent access to food for local community members
2. Expand education, resources, skill-building opportunities, and initiatives that promote food sovereignty
3. Expand community food growing spaces and create a support network for local growers in the neighbourhood
4. Continue to build community food hubs that support food security, health, and economic

development through a shared-use community kitchen

5. Establish an IBPOC-led co-operative or worker enterprise to support the local food system

The COVID-19 pandemic played a major role in driving inflation in food prices - the cost of food bought at major grocery stores has been rising about 9% per year since 2020. Simultaneously, these major supermarket chains and their CEOs are making billions, prioritizing profits and passing costs onto consumers. People in Parkdale face challenges affording nourishing and wholesome meals, as almost 12% of South Parkdale residents over 15 are on social assistance like OW and ODSP. While 38% of food bank users shared that their main income comes from social assistance, an increasing number report being employed. In turn, the Parkdale Community Food Bank has been serving 7,000 to 8,000 families per month, a notable leap from 1,500 families per month during pre-pandemic times.

This dramatic increase in food bank service users underscores the pressing need for comprehensive action to address both immediate food needs and the underlying causes of food insecurity. Parkdale residents and food service providers advocate for support beyond band aid solutions, calling on government and the private sector to address the root causes of food insecurity by implementing a minimum living wage of \$25.05 an hour and raising the rates of social assistance payments. The overarching goal of this community plan is not only to ensure food security through access to food but also to promote food sovereignty, empowering both producers and consumers to transform food systems to be more equitable, community-centered, and locally controlled.

Parkdale already boasts networks dedicated to addressing immediate food access needs, complemented by food production initiatives such as community gardens, the Parkdale Food Network,

Mutual Aid Parkdale, informal mutual aid networks, and nearby proximity to the Ontario Food Terminal for local grocers to buy fresh produce.

To build upon these strengths, Parkdale should aim to promote equitable local food systems by coordinating existing food service programs, supporting food sovereignty initiatives, expanding community gardens, addressing class and racial inequalities in the food system, and supporting local businesses. The community plan's directions call for expanding education, resources, and skill-building opportunities that promote food sovereignty, as well as expanding community spaces for growing and preparing food, including gardens and accessible community kitchens. This could include food production workshops, as well as intergenerational and intercultural knowledge exchanges on food traditions. Affordable cooking classes and food handling certification courses would support this learning. Additionally, community members can organize to demand that developers create or fund community benefits that promote food sovereignty, such community gardens or kitchen spaces.

A holistic approach is needed to address both immediate food needs and the underlying structural causes of food insecurity. By prioritizing food sovereignty and advocating for crucial income supports, we can create a more equitable, resilient, and sustainable food system that supports the health and well-being of all community members.



Zorida inside Mandala Foodstore buying tsampa after learning about it at a 150 Dunn cooking workshop led by Sonam Yangzom.



# Social Infrastructure

## 2024 Parkdale Community Planning Study

### Assets (2)

1. Community care
2. Participatory democracy

### Needs (3)

1. Culturally relevant programming, services, and spaces that foster community connection and care
2. Resource sharing and collaboration across organizations and grassroots groups (such as shared service delivery and space use arrangements)
3. Accessible and widespread avenues for engaging in participatory democracy

### Directions (5)

1. Expand resources and supports for mutual aid and grassroots initiatives across the neighbourhood
2. Meet commitments to support Indigenous sovereignty and racial justice in leadership at the City and community level
3. Strengthen local democracy and resident participation in community-based strategies for

Parkdale through skill-sharing, popular education, and arts-based action

4. Co-design and conduct an equity assessment of existing programming and services in Parkdale, especially those related to housing and food

5. Build a neighbourhood resource and information centre at the new Parkdale Hub to improve access to services and information and address the digital divide

Social infrastructure refers to a variety of spaces, amenities, and services that support community members' connection and wellbeing. The social fabric of Parkdale is a dense network of both formal and informal forms of social infrastructure, many of which serve multiple functions beyond their stated purpose. Public amenities such as parks, libraries, and community centers serve as sites for service provision and for people and grassroots groups to gather and socialize. The well-being of the neighborhood is fostered not only by health, employment, education, food, and other social services, but also by the relationships between residents.

The first years of the COVID-19 pandemic showcased both the strengths and limitations of Parkdale's social infrastructure. Responding to the emergency, the charitable sector moved into action to provide support to the unhoused and provide food to residents who were impacted by the shutdown. The pressure of the pandemic, however, revealed how stretched the resources in the non-profit sector are. Despite being essential workers, many non-profit workers do not receive a living wage, placing them in high-risk situations and devaluing their work. Gentrification pressures, rising costs, and funding limitations have continued to threaten non-profits' ability to secure community space, pay staff adequately, and facilitate programming. The pandemic also illuminated the growing digital divide, as community members without computer access face barriers to accessing programs

and services that have shifted online.

As we try to achieve a just and inclusive recovery, we should invest in existing social infrastructure and community-based systems to strengthen networks of connection, service provision, and care. Parkdale has a strong network of community groups engaged in resource-sharing, and benefits from a culture of collaboration across residents, grassroots groups, and non-profit organizations. The community has led many efforts to distribute resources more equitably, such as when Encampment Support Network Parkdale collaborated with ALAB Clinic to deliver vital supplies to homeless encampments. During the onset of the pandemic, grassroots mutual aid groups like Mutual Aid Parkdale (MAP) grew as a community response to filling service gaps and addressing needs that the charitable sector could not. Residents of the neighborhood have also taken leadership by participating in city-led consultations for the Parkdale Hub and by engaging in activism and grassroots efforts to build a more equitable neighbourhood. Groups like Parkdale Women's Leadership Group, who created wellbeing workshops about mental health and wellness, demonstrate an expansive vision of community care.

This community plan aims to amplify the need for investments in social infrastructure, services, and programming to support community connection and wellbeing. To strengthen Parkdale's social infrastructure going forward, we will need to protect and enhance culturally relevant programming, especially for Black and Indigenous communities; find more opportunities for collaboration across the community-based sector; build more collaborative relationships between grassroots groups, and renew the neighbourhood's efforts at participatory democracy.

Tish, left, and Sonam, right, sitting in the Milky Way Garden and holding posters advocating for a gentrification tax in Parkdale.

Tish used to run an English as a Second Language program at the Toronto Public Library before it lost funding. The community greatly needs this essential program and hopes for its return.

Sonam, a legendary community gardener in Parkdale, sells momos and noodles at local markets using vegetables from local farmers' markets.

