



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.

