

A Healthy Toronto By Design Report

# Toward Healthier Apartment Neighbourhoods

September 2012





# About the Healthy Toronto By Design Report Series

Healthy Toronto By Design was released by Toronto Public Health in October 2011 and was the first in a series of reports on how local communities shape the health of their residents. The report noted that healthy cities are cities that are liveable, prosperous and sustainable. They are cities with high quality built and natural environments, public transit, housing, culture, education, food and health care. Healthy cities don't just happen. They result from creative vision, strategic decision-making and thoughtful implementation that respects the needs and challenges of all residents. They happen by design – through intentional investment and provision of infrastructure, programs and services with health in mind.

This report is one of a series which explore what makes a healthy city. Visit Toronto Public Health's website at <http://www.toronto.ca/health> for a list of reports in the series. Some of the topic areas in the series include the following:

- **Toward Healthier Apartment Neighbourhoods** – this report synthesizes zoning barriers and opportunities to promote healthy neighbourhoods, particularly in clusters of residential apartment towers in low income areas and inner suburbs of Toronto.
- **The Walkable City** – this report summarizes the findings of a Residential Preferences Survey that gauges public demand for walkable versus more auto-oriented neighbourhoods, and links this information with travel choices, physical activity levels and body weight.
- **Inventory of Best Practices** – this report showcases examples of innovative practices and policies across city government in Toronto that promote healthy built environments.
- **Active Transportation and Health** – this report synthesizes evidence on health benefits and risks associated with walking, cycling and physical activity related to the use of public transit, as well as economic assessments and specific strategies to increase the use and safety of active transportation in Toronto.
- **Health Impact Assessment Software Tool** – a software tool has been developed to assist policy and decision-makers understand how different approaches to neighbourhood design might impact health-related outcomes such as physical activity levels, body weight and greenhouse gas emissions. A technical report synthesizes information on the development of the tool and results of pilot testing.

## About the Project Partners



Toronto Public Health reduces health inequalities and improves the health of the whole population. Its services are funded by the City of Toronto, the Province of Ontario and are governed by the Toronto Board of Health. Toronto Public Health strives to make its services accessible and equitable for all residents of Toronto.



The Centre for Urban Growth and Renewal (CUG+R) is a non-profit organization whose objective is to develop research to enhance public policy and promote private initiatives that foster City Regions and local communities that are well planned and designed, economically vibrant, socially diverse, culturally integrated and environmentally sustainable. Founding members of CUG+R are associated with two of Canada's leading architecture, planning and urban design practices: ERA Architects and planningAlliance (pA). CUG+R builds on decades of experience its directors and founders possess in research, architecture, planning and public policy. For more information visit [www.cugr.ca](http://www.cugr.ca).

**Reference:**

Toronto Public Health and the Centre for Urban Growth and Renewal. Toward Healthier Apartment Neighbourhoods: A Healthy Toronto by Design Report. September 2012. City of Toronto.

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**Copies:**

Copies of this report can be downloaded at: <http://www.toronto.ca/health>

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# Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>vii</b>
Executive Summary	viii
<b>Section 1: Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.0 Introduction	3
1.2 Context: Challenges and Opportunities in Apartment Neighbourhoods	10
<b>Section 2: Themes and Strategies</b>	<b>17</b>
Themes and Strategies	18
Theme 1: Natural Environment	20
Theme 2: Built Environment	26
Theme 3: Transportation	34
Theme 4: Housing	44
Theme 5: Employment, Income and Opportunities	54
Theme 6: Education and Learning	62
Theme 7: Food Security	68
Theme 8: Community Health	78
Health Strategies Summary Chart	84
<b>Section 3: Conclusion</b>	<b>87</b>
3.0 Recommendations, Opportunities and Next Steps	88
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>91</b>
Appendix A: Visualizations: Toward Healthy Apartment Neighbourhoods	93
Appendix B: Mapping Apartment Neighbourhoods and Health Indicators	103



## Executive Summary:



# Toward Healthier Apartment Neighbourhoods

## Executive Summary

This report considers how Toronto's several hundred clusters of post-war high-rise apartment buildings – referred to in this report as apartment neighbourhoods – can better support the health of apartment residents and of the residents in the surrounding communities through a series of site specific strategies. Concurrently, it identifies land use regulations that may limit these strategies, through constraining building form and limiting land use mixes, thereby preventing apartment neighbourhoods across the city emerging as economically vibrant, well-served and healthy communities.

As has been demonstrated in numerous studies by the United Way, Toronto Public Health, Wellesley Institute, and St. Michael's Hospital among others, Toronto's inner suburbs are areas where growing poverty has been linked to poor health outcomes. These trends have been found to be acute within older high-rise apartment neighbourhoods in these areas of the city, and are increasingly home to new Canadians, young children, and the elderly. The aim of this study is to expand on research related to citywide health and illustrate how public health objectives can be achieved through design interventions directed at Toronto's most vulnerable populations, where they are concentrated in apartment neighbourhoods. It is hoped that these design interventions can be used as tools that can be applied to apartment neighbourhoods across the City.

This report is based on the notion that healthy cities are cities that are liveable, prosperous and sustainable; that they have high quality built and natural environments; that they provide for the needs of their population in an equitable and sustainable fashion; that they support and foster health and well-being. This report articulates the view that healthy cities don't just happen; that they result from creative vision, strategic decision-making, and thoughtful implementation that reflects the needs and the challenges of all of its residents.

While apartment neighbourhoods face many challenges, they have attributes that make them amenable to healthy changes. They have the high density and diverse populations needed to support local retail businesses and institutions, community amenities and services that would make them more complete and healthy communities. They also have large and often under used open areas providing the space and flexibility to accommodate positive physical, social and economic improvements. While today, many of these activities are hampered by existing zoning regulations, the aim of this report is to assess opportunities for healthier neighbourhoods, as well as identify existing policies and regulations hampering these efforts.

To assess the opportunities of apartment neighbourhoods, this report utilizes the following themes, identified in the Toronto Public Health report *Healthy Toronto by Design*, 2011, and applies them to the scale of the apartment neighbourhood:

1. Natural Environment
2. Built Environment
3. Transportation
4. Housing
5. Income and Employment
6. Education and Learning
7. Food Security
8. Community Health

Using these health themes, thirty-one strategies and design opportunities have been developed that together form a strategic direction to enable positive neighbourhood change, and inform investment into these communities moving forward.

This report presents a range of strategies, both large and small, short and long term, that could be applied to Toronto's numerous apartment neighbourhoods to help them emerge as vibrant and healthy places. These strategies have the potential to improve the

### Images:

Opposite, left: Don Mills and DVP, 2006, courtesy Brendan Martin

Opposite, top right: Market in apartment neighbourhood, Berlin, Germany, 2009

Opposite, middle right: Public square near older and newer apartment housing, Port Credit, Mississauga, 2010

Opposite, bottom right: Outdoor fresh food market, St. Jamestown, Toronto, courtesy of TRO

health outcomes and well being of hundreds of thousands of residents who call these areas home. They could also enable apartment neighbourhoods to emerge as community focal points providing social exchange and convenient access to shops and services to adjacent communities and the City of Toronto as a whole.

As with all areas of the city, Toronto's apartment neighbourhoods are complex and diverse. Planning regulations are by no means the sole barrier to reinvestment and revitalization in apartment neighbourhoods in Toronto's inner suburbs. There is no panacea for achieving the opportunities outlined in this report. Rather, progress will be made through a series of incremental and related strategies for the short and long terms. Realizing these opportunities requires the combination of enabling policies, and means of supporting individual and coordinated private, non-profit and public sectors investment towards these ends.

This report does however identify the relationship between the urban planning framework and proposed solutions, specifically with respect to the City's Official Plan and Zoning By-Law as they relate to the strategies presented here for positive neighbourhood change. While many policies are enabling, particularly those of the Official Plan, there are many regulatory barriers, both in the City's Zoning By-law and other municipal regulations. Identifying and removing the barriers in the urban planning framework is a first and crucial step in enabling the strategic direction outlined in this report.

Achieving many of the strategies outlined in this report are relatively straightforward. Others are more complicated. Together, they will help to inform the evolution of these dynamic, diverse and vibrant communities throughout Toronto in the decades to come. As policies are strengthened and capacity builds, the number, sophistication and efficacy of initiatives can grow over time.





## Section 1: Introduction

### 1.0 Introduction

### 1.2 Context: Challenges and Opportunities in Apartment Neighbourhoods





**Images:**

Cover Image: Thorncliffe Park, Toronto, 2009

Inner Cover and Section 1, 2, 3: Visioning Sketch of Neighbourhood Renewal, William Macivor, ERA Architects

Top: Weston and Finch, Toronto, 2007, courtesy of Jesse Colin Jackson

Opposite: Eglinton Flats, Toronto, 2007, courtesy of Jesse Colin Jackson

## Section 1: Introduction

### Background

In 2011, United Way Toronto released the report, *Poverty By Postal Code 2: Vertical Poverty*, which documented the growing trend of increased concentrations of poverty in Toronto's inner suburbs in general, and specifically in Toronto's many older high-rise rental apartment communities. These apartment neighbourhoods are increasingly challenged by poverty, isolation, lack of economic opportunity, social need, and increased health risks.

The *Vertical Poverty* report identified the lack of a mix of land uses in apartment neighbourhoods in low income areas in Toronto's inner suburbs as a factor which limits service delivery, economic development and access to goods and services, thereby contributing to the challenges that these neighbourhoods are facing. The report further identified policy barriers, such as zoning by-laws, as presenting obstacles to the diversification of land uses that could help address these challenges. The report recommended that actions be taken to encourage economic and social development in these neighbourhoods, that policy barriers be identified, and that alternatives be considered to enable positive changes in these neighbourhoods.

Concurrent to the research conducted for the *Vertical Poverty* report, Toronto Public Health, St. Michael's Hospital, the Wellesley Institute and others have documented the relationship between geography, community health and the determinants of health within the City of Toronto; results which demonstrate the strong links between poor health and poverty.

The geographic areas identified with higher vulnerability to poorer health outcomes are strongly correlated with the apartment neighbourhoods located in the low-income areas of the inner suburbs of Toronto. These patterns suggest that neighbourhood form is contributing to negative health outcomes experienced by those vulnerable populations who live in apartment neighbourhoods.

Collectively these studies reveal that the populations that live in many of Toronto's apartment neighbourhoods, particularly those in low-income, inner suburban locations, have lower incomes, experience higher rates of diabetes, have less access to fresh food, live in less walkable neighbourhoods, and are more vulnerable to extreme heat than other residents in Toronto.

Increasingly older apartment neighbourhoods in Toronto's inner suburbs are home to large families, children and youth, new Canadians, and the elderly [TNRGGH 2010], with trends towards increasing health risks and higher rates of poverty. Toronto's apartment neighbourhoods are areas that require focused attention to improve the health, wellbeing and quality of life of their residents; something that is expected to increase the overall health of Toronto's population.

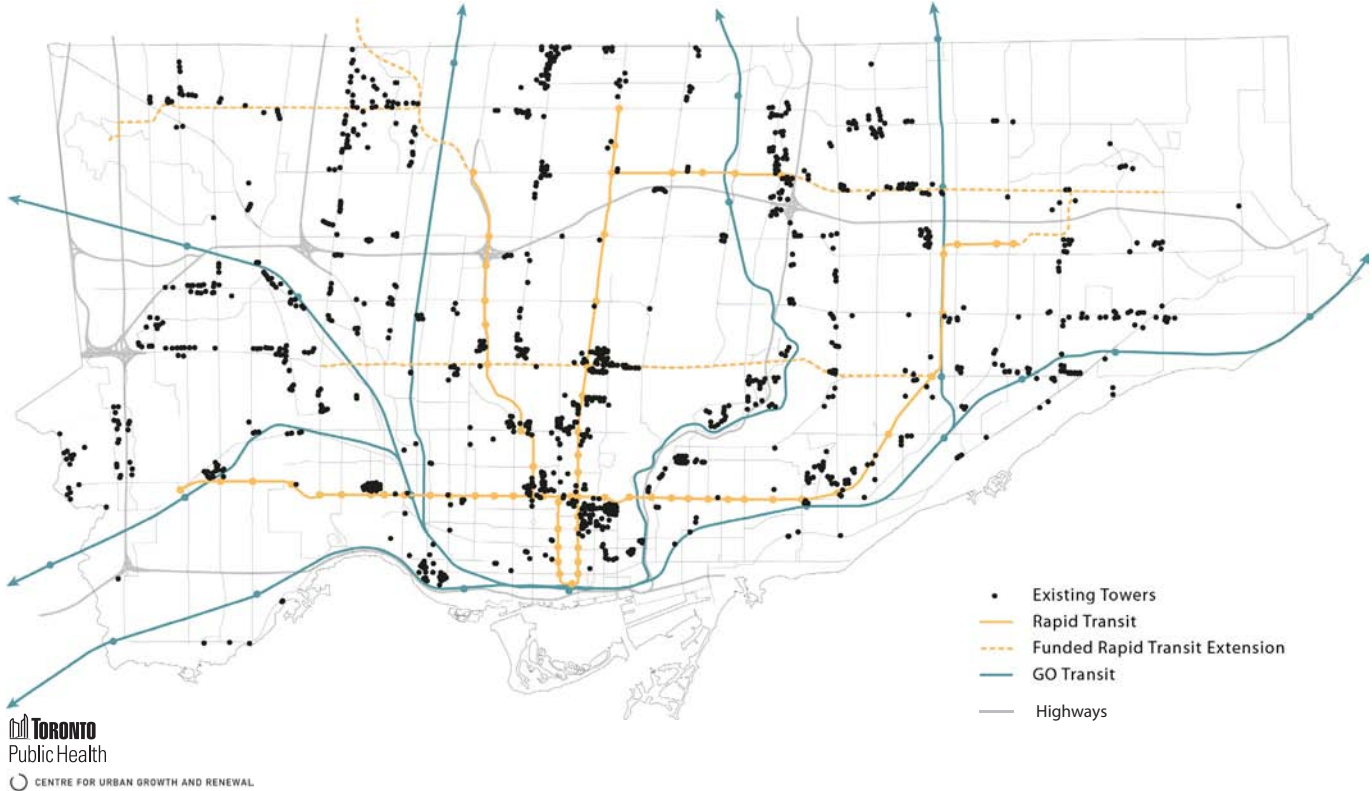
In 2011, in response to the *Vertical Poverty* report, Toronto Public Health was directed by the Board of Health to: develop strategies to improve the health and well-being of residents of apartment neighbourhood facing low-income and trends towards poor health; and to identify policy barriers that keep these neighbourhoods from becoming healthy communities.



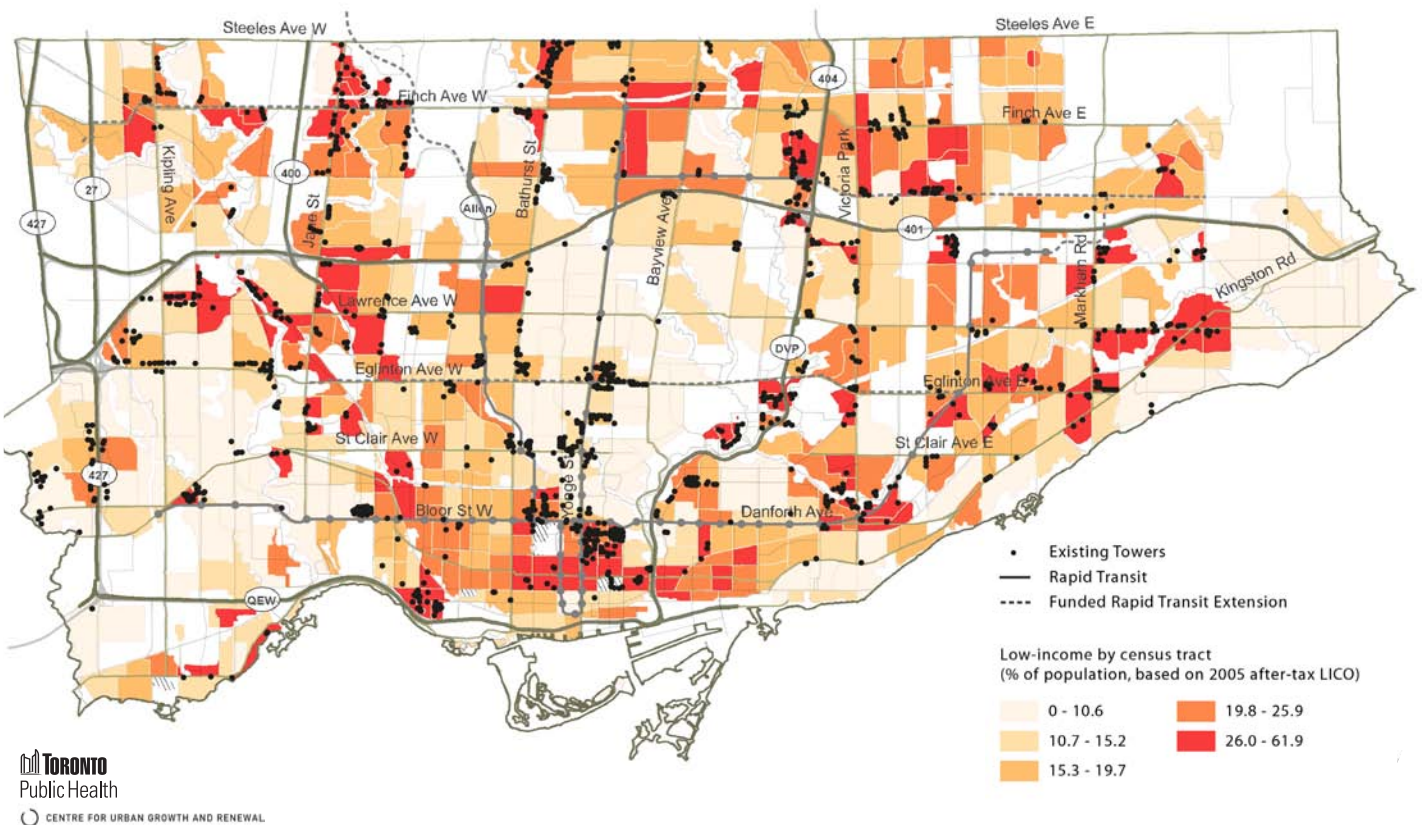
## Mapping: Apartment Neighbourhoods and Health Indicators:

Dots depict post-war apartment towers eight's storeys or higher, built between 1945 - 1984 (1,189 in total)  
Larger version of these maps are available in Appendix B

### Post-War Apartment Towers + Urban Transportation Systems



### Post-War Apartment Towers + Areas of Low Income Across Toronto



## Purpose and Scope of Report

This report considers how Toronto's clusters of post-war high-rise apartment buildings – referred to in this report as apartment neighbourhoods – can better support the health of apartment residents and of the residents in the surrounding communities through a series of site specific strategies. Concurrently, it identifies land use policies that may limit these strategies, through constraining building form and limiting land use mixes that may be preventing apartment neighbourhoods across the city from emerging as economically vibrant, well-served and healthy communities.

Apartment Neighbourhoods are areas of the city with unique built form and demographic characteristics from their surroundings. Yet as the apartment neighbourhoods throughout the city are largely consistent in term of built form and policy context, the purpose of this study is to examine their specific opportunities and challenges in becoming more healthy and vibrant places.

While located throughout the city, a large majority of apartment neighbourhoods have been found to be located in areas of the city with trends of lower income, poorer health outcomes, and built form challenges, such as poor walkability.

By identifying the constraints that limit healthy development patterns, this report can identify the policy changes that are needed to remove barriers to enabling complete neighbourhoods that support and foster the health of their residents. This study is based on the notion that a community can be designed to facilitate healthy living by providing natural, built and social environments that support and foster health and well-being.

Building on the work of the United Way, Toronto Public Health, the Centre for Urban Growth and Renewal and the Tower Renewal Office at the City of Toronto, as well as numerous studies related to community health, this report examines the opportunities and challenges related to health in apartment neighbourhoods in Toronto. It also identifies a number of neighbourhood reinvestment strategies that could be used to improve the health and well being of residents in apartment neighbourhoods in the years to come.

The strategies discussed in this report are primarily aimed to address the challenges of apartment neighbourhoods in lower-income areas of Toronto's inner suburbs in a manner related to the specific and unique built form opportunities of these communities. These strategies may also be considered for any apartment neighbourhood of similar built form characteristic throughout the city in which features of a healthy community are lacking.



### Notes:

In a study conducted by the Province of Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure, a full 72% of post-war apartment buildings (eights storeys or more) were found to be in areas of high or very high social needs (TNRGGH 2010).

### Images:

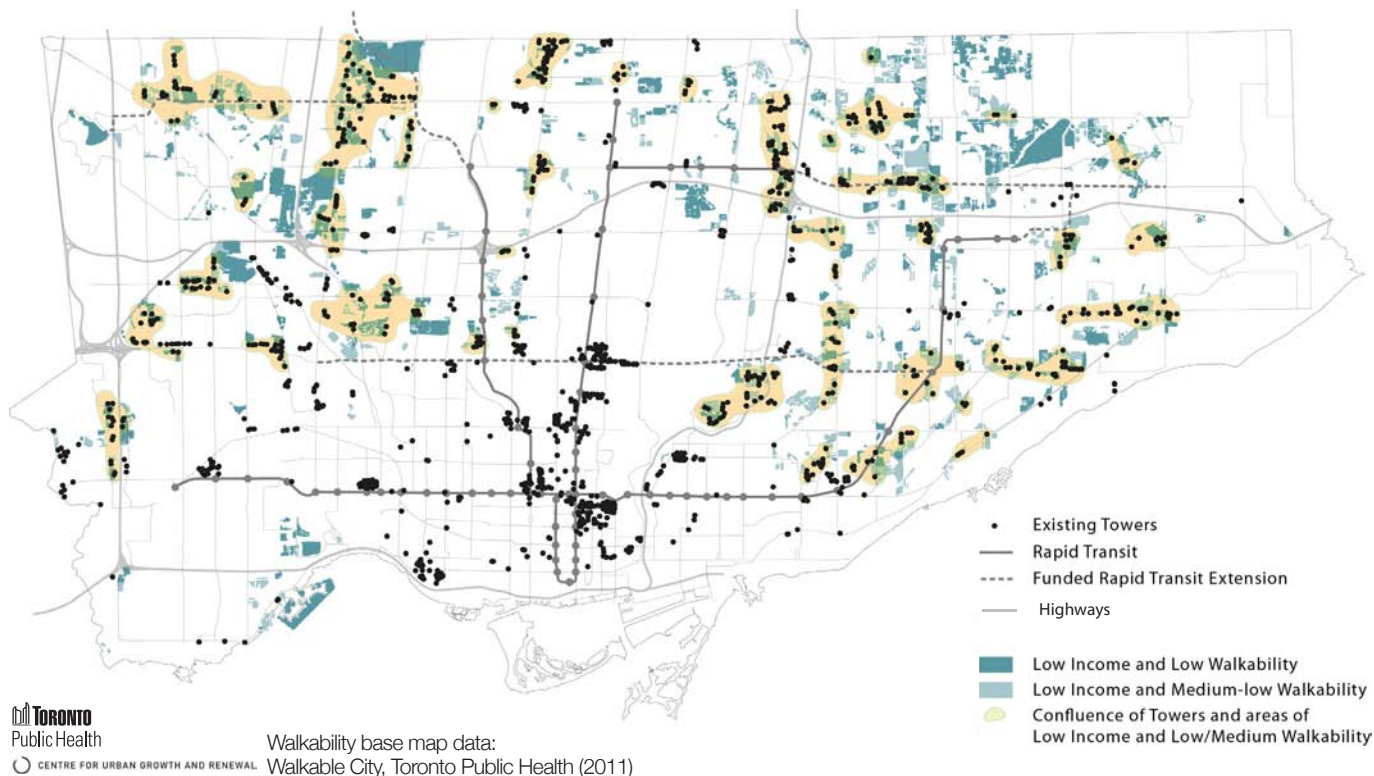
Thorncliffe Park, Toronto, 2009

## Section 1: Introduction

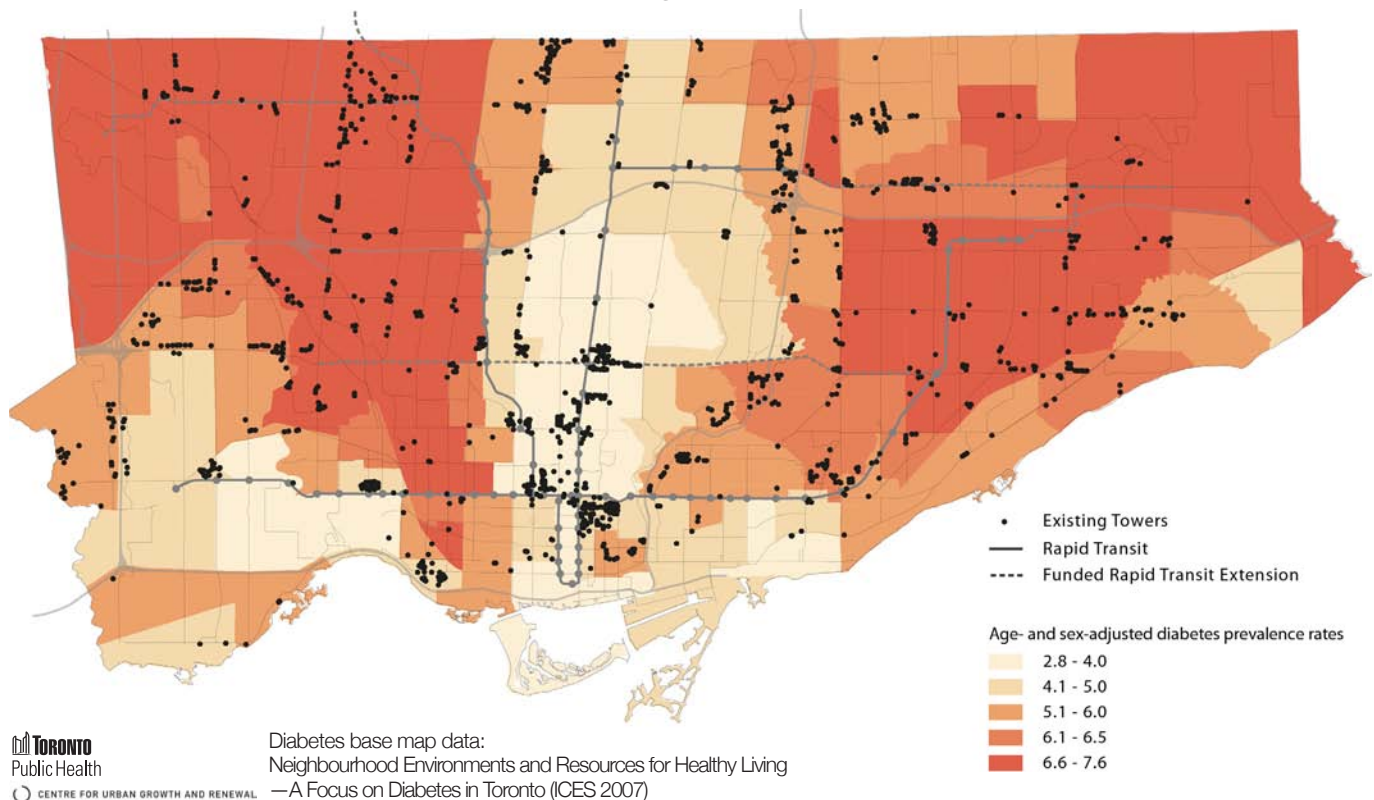
### Mapping Apartment Neighbourhoods and Health Indicators:

Dots depict post-war apartment towers eight storeys or higher, built between 1945 - 1984 (1,189 in total)  
Larger version of these maps are available in Appendix B

#### Post-War Apartment Towers + Areas of High Poverty and Low Walkability Across Toronto



#### Post-War Apartment Towers + Areas of High Incidence of Diabetes Across Toronto



# Toward Healthier Apartment Neighbourhoods: Study Framework

This report is based on the notion that healthy cities are cities that are liveable, prosperous and sustainable; that they have high quality built and natural environments; that they provide for the needs of their population in an equitable and sustainable fashion; that they support and foster health and well-being. This report articulates the view that healthy cities don't just happen; that they result from creative vision, strategic decision-making, and thoughtful implementation that reflects the needs and the challenges of all of its residents (TPH, 2011).

This report utilizes the following themes, identified in the Toronto Public Health report *Healthy Toronto by Design*, 2011, and applies them to the scale of the apartment neighbourhood:

1. Natural Environment
2. Built Environment
3. Transportation
4. Housing
5. Income and Employment
6. Education and Learning
7. Food Security
8. Community Health

The aim of this study is to expand on research related to citywide health and illustrate how public health objectives can be achieved through design interventions directed at apartment neighbourhoods. It is hoped that these design interventions can be used as tools that can be applied to apartment neighbourhoods across the City to help each to become a more 'complete' community that supports and fosters the health and well being of its residents.

In this context, each of the eight themes was considered as aspects of a neighbourhood. This was done with the knowledge that a neighbourhood framework does not capture all of the issues that are related to each theme. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the eight themes examined in the report illuminate the range of opportunities and barriers that can apply to apartment neighbourhoods and their impact on health and well being.

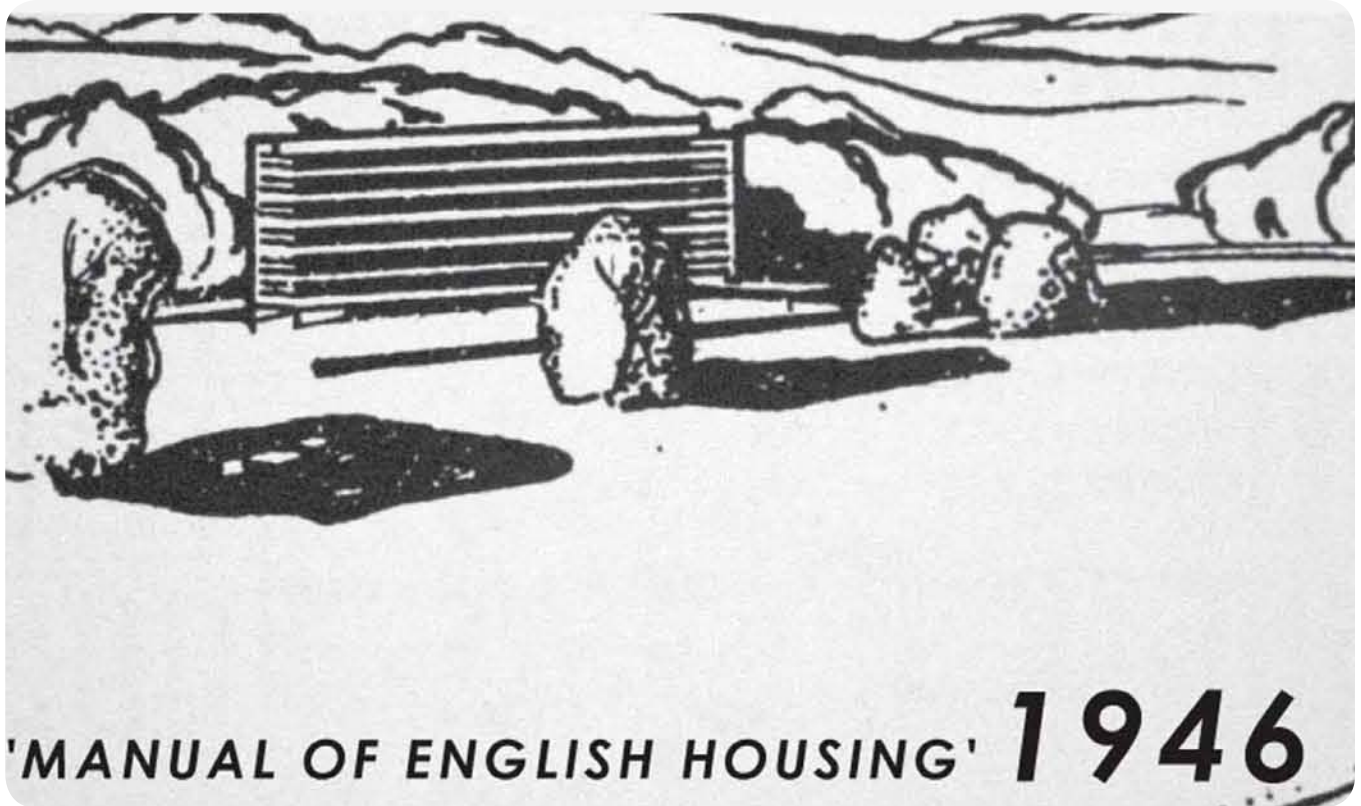
Neighbourhoods can be defined in both geographic and social terms as places in which social networks of communities interact. Therefore, our analysis of neighbourhoods in this study focuses on both the social aspects of health as well as on the physical arrangement of buildings and landscapes, including land uses.

This report identifies a series of opportunities that could allow apartment neighbourhoods to emerge as healthy, vibrant and resilient communities.

While apartment neighbourhoods face many challenges, they have attributes that make them amenable to healthy changes. They have the high density and diverse populations needed to support local retail businesses and institutions, community amenities and services that would make them more complete and healthy communities. They also have large and often under used open areas providing the space and flexibility to accommodate positive physical, social and economic improvements.

The following sections highlight opportunities for changes in use and neighbourhood form that are needed to support and foster healthy living. They address how proposed changes could be affected, in a negative or positive way, by existing land use zoning by-laws and Official Plan policies.

The following sections present a range of strategies, both large and small, short and long term, that could be applied to Toronto's numerous apartment neighbourhoods to help them emerge as vibrant and healthy places. These strategies have the potential to improve the health outcomes and well being of hundreds of thousands of residents who call these areas home. They could also enable apartment neighbourhoods to emerge as community focal points providing social exchange and convenient access to shops and services to adjacent communities and the City of Toronto as a whole.



**Images:**

Top: Modern Housing and Healthy Living: "Flat in a County Park", from English Town Planning, 1940s

Bottom: Apartment towers under construction, Toronto, early 1960s, courtesy of the Archives of Canadian Architect

## **Tower Blocks and Public Health**

The geographic areas that are the focus of this report are clusters of post-war multi-residential housing that were developed throughout the Toronto region from the 1950s through to the early 1980s. These groupings of buildings are referred to in this report as apartment neighbourhoods. The Toronto region is unique for its proliferation of these apartment neighbourhoods which largely consist of groupings of tower and slab high-rise buildings often arranged in large areas of open space. Home to hundreds of thousands of people, these apartment neighbourhoods define much of Toronto's urban landscape, particularly in the City's inner suburbs [TNRGGH 2010].

These apartment neighbourhoods were originally envisaged as an innovative type of housing planned and designed with a strong emphasis on health.

In contrast to what was felt at the time to be the crowded, virulent, and often deteriorating conditions of 'central city tenement slums', modern apartment blocks were viewed as a modern housing amenity that provided access to light, fresh air, views of nature, and access to open green space [Shaw 1985].

As housing of this type proliferated globally following the Second World War and were adapted to local conditions, many of these original public health intentions remained at the forefront. In the case of Toronto, the widespread adoption of this housing form was based on the belief that it provided a superior housing amenity [Faludi 1963]. Today, Toronto's tower blocks commonly contain the features associated with the original health-oriented focus that inspired their planning and design.

The purpose of this report is to examine these communities, once again through the lens of public health, a half-century following their construction. This report examines the opportunities for improving the health of those who live in Toronto's apartment neighbourhoods by applying the current-day understanding of healthy communities. The Toronto Public Health report, *Healthy Neighbourhood By Design* [2011], forms the starting point for this analysis.

### **Notes:**

#### **Apartment Neighbourhoods Defined**

Throughout this report, the neighbourhoods under study are referred to as apartment neighbourhoods. The term Apartment Neighbourhoods is also referred to in the Toronto Official Plan as a specific land use designation with a series of policies guiding growth and neighbourhood form. While many areas discussed in this report are located within areas designated as Apartment Neighbourhoods in the Official Plan, this is not true in all cases and these terms are not interchangeable. When the specific land-use designation is referred to in this report, capitals will be used. Official Plan policies are discussed further in section 1.2.

# Section 1.2: Context: Challenges and Opportunities in Apartment Neighbourhoods

## Apartment Towers and Neighbourhood Planning

Toronto region's heritage of post-war apartment neighbourhoods are unique to North America. No other city in North America has suburban areas that include such an extensive set of post-war high-rise towers. Located throughout the City and the Greater Toronto Region, these multi-residential buildings make up an important component of the city and region's housing stock [TNRGGH 2010].

Apartment neighbourhoods were planned under the former Metropolitan Toronto urban planning system as a key feature in the formation of new communities. They were planned and built alongside single-family homes, schools, community centres, shopping centres, low-rise apartments, employment industrial zones, and natural and recreation areas typical of suburban development in Toronto of this era. Rather than creating bedroom communities, Toronto's expanding suburbs, particularly in communities north of the 401, were established to facilitate a relative degree of self-sufficiency, and apartment towers were an important part of that planning [North York 1965].

Apartment towers were included in large numbers to provide options for rental housing in new communities. They were also included to help meet density targets proscribed by the Metropolitan Government for new areas in order to optimize public services such as sewage, water and public transport [North York 1959]. As a result, nearly all communities developed in the post-war era in Toronto include large concentrations of apartment housing.

Apartment towers were generally planned as clusters adjacent to arterial roads, ravines, shopping centres or areas of low-rise housing [TNRGGH 2010]. The result is contiguous areas of high-rise towers that collectively are of a distinct character to their immediate surroundings. Apartment clusters were also developed along subway lines in more central parts of the city as part of urban renewal schemes. Clusters at Yonge and Eglinton, High Park, or St. Jamestown are some of the better known examples.

This legacy has provided the city with an urban form unique to the continent; consisting of the widespread distribution of high-density clusters of high-rise housing from the city's centre to its periphery. The result of the high-rise housing boom of this era is roughly 2,000 towers located throughout the region, home to over one million people, the majority of which are located in the City of Toronto [TNRGGH 2010].

*progress continues . . .*



### Post-War High-Rise Housing in the Greater Toronto Area:

A study conducted for the Province of Ontario Ministry of Infrastructure by the Center for Urban Growth and Renewal: *Tower Neighbourhood Renewal in the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (TNRGGH 2010) catalogued multi-residential buildings of similar characteristics to those under study in this report, built between 1945 and 1984. The study found **3,080** buildings of this type five stories and over and **1,925** buildings of this type eight stories and over in the Greater Golden Horseshoe Region; **1,763** five stories and over and **1,189** eight stories and over in the City of Toronto.

#### Image:

Above, advertisement, Thonecliffe Park: shopping, light industrial and residential areas, early 1960

## Opportunities and Advantages

Today, five decades after their formation, Toronto's older apartment neighbourhoods remain a vital aspect of the city's housing stock. They represent half the rental housing in the City of Toronto, and a large part of the City's affordable rental housing for families. Apartment neighbourhoods are a vital assets to the overall health of the city.

As has been discussed above, many of Toronto's older apartment neighbourhoods are facing challenges, in terms of neighbourhood vitality and the health and wellbeing of their residents. However, these neighbourhoods also have specific inherent qualities that could be used to foster and support healthy living. These positive qualities form the basis of the strategies outlined in this report and have been summarized as follows:

- They have **under utilized open spaces** that could accommodate a range of new activities, uses and buildings, that could contribute to healthier lifestyles and improved well-being in apartment neighbourhoods.
- **Apartment neighbourhoods are typically large communities consisting of multiple apartment towers often including a population of thousands people, which makes them comparable to small towns.** These neighbourhoods have a dense population of people with diverse backgrounds who can support, and engage in, local enterprises, services and agencies. They have the population and community diversity needed to foster local economic networks, as happens in a village, a small town, or a well-established urban quarter.
- Today, residents of apartment neighbourhoods **walk, cycle, and take transit more than the average Torontonian**, often due to lower rates of car ownership. Physical improvements to these neighbourhoods can further support this trend toward healthier and more active transportation choices.
- Apartment tower clusters comprise of **robust buildings, which can be adapted, modified or expanded** in a way that better supports health and well-being.
- As they were originally planned, apartment neighbourhoods were designed to provide **rental housing close to open spaces, fresh air, sunlight and often natural landscapes.**
- **There is a strong consensus among health professionals about the importance of enabling neighbourhoods to support and foster healthy living.** This consensus extends to all three levels of government, community health advocates, academic researchers and residents of apartment neighbourhoods in Toronto.
- Lastly, as they are largely situated adjacent to areas of low-density single-detached housing, apartment neighbourhoods could, in the future, be **transformative catalysts for making suburban areas more amenable to healthy living.**

Apartment neighbourhoods provide a solid foundation from which to build more vibrant, diverse and healthy communities. Their specific built form characteristics offer a flexible and resilient framework for positive neighbourhood change. The following sections outline strategies for achieving these goals.

## The Policy Context of Apartment Neighbourhoods

As with any complex area of the city, there are a number of challenges to engaging in the range of public, private and community initiatives to enable apartment neighbourhoods to emerge as healthier, better served and more vibrant communities. These challenges include, but are not limited to access to project capital, facilitating organization among key stakeholders, and building capacity for engaging in economic and social ventures which, to date, have rarely been undertaken in these neighbourhoods.

However, one of the areas the City of Toronto can directly address is the state of the land-use planning framework that is in place in these neighbourhoods. An update to land-use planning practices can remove overt policy barriers as well as directly promote and enable initiatives for more healthy and well-served communities.

Two of the elements of this planning framework are the Official Plan, which sets out the overarching land use and development policies for the entire City, and the Zoning By-law, which establishes permitted land uses on individual properties.

### Official Plan:

The City of Toronto recognizes Apartment Neighbourhoods as distinct areas within the City, and has given them a special designation within the Official Plan. This designation has been developed as a result of the distinct physical characteristics of Apartment Tower sites; where the boundaries of Apartment Neighbourhoods have often been defined by identifying the location of existing clusters of high-rise apartment developments.

According to the Official Plan, Apartment Neighbourhoods are considered primarily residential, low-growth areas of the City, which may contain small-scale institutional, commercial and community uses that directly service the local neighbourhoods.

While most multi-residential housing clusters that are the focus of this report are located in areas designated Apartment Neighbourhoods by the Official Plan, many are also located in areas known as 'Mixed-Use'. Multi-residential housing designated as Mixed-Use are often located along major arterials, with some containing more commercial activity and community services than apartment complexes located in areas designated Apartment Neighbourhoods. While the strategies of this report relate to apartment clusters in both land use designations, the analysis of Official Plan Policies in this report relates specifically to Apartment Neighbourhoods.

### Zoning by-laws:

While the Official Plan supports some mixed-use within Apartment Neighbourhoods, the zoning by-laws are often less flexible. Similar to other forms of housing within post-war suburban areas, apartment buildings clusters were generally conceived as exclusively residential areas. Commercial, social and cultural amenities were located within what was considered convenient driving distance, but were not generally incorporated into these Apartment Neighbourhoods.

This concept of separated land uses was codified in the City's zoning by-laws for apartment properties. As a result, the shape and size of the buildings, the number of units and parking spots, and the allowable land uses have remained largely unchanged for the half century since they were originally designed.

The process of amending zoning by-laws is lengthy and costly (See Below). As a result of these 'legacy regulations', Toronto's Apartment Neighbourhoods have been unable to respond to changing concepts of community development or to the changing needs of their residents. (For more information regarding the policy context and barriers, see the forthcoming United Way apartment neighbourhoods zoning study).

### Images:

Opposite, top: Thorncliffe Park, Toronto, 2009

Opposite, bottom: Don Mills and DVP, 2006, courtesy Brendan Martin

Today Apartment Neighbourhoods present the paradox of having changed remarkably little physically, while at the same time experiencing some of the most significant changes in neighbourhood demographics of any neighbourhood type [United Way 2011]. These neighbourhoods have increasingly become home to a diverse population which includes residents with growing families, the elderly, and new Canadians. Often described as arrival cities [Saunders, 2010], these neighbourhoods are characterized by increasing trends for ethnic diversity, low car ownership [TNRGGH 2010], and demand for a broad range of goods, services and amenities that were not conceived in their original planning or design. This report proposes a series of strategies to bridge these gaps to allow these neighbourhoods to evolve to meet the evolving needs of their resident communities moving forward.



### Policy Evaluation

As part of the analysis for this report, features of a healthy community were assessed relative to current objectives in the Official Plan and the Zoning Bylaw. Features were categorized as “supportive”, “neutral” or “limiting” based on the definitions below. Further details for each theme area are provided in the sections that follow, as well as the Strategies Summary Chart on page 92.

#### Scale: Supportive <-> Neutral <-> Limiting

**Supportive:** The solution is anticipated or permitted, or may be allowed subject to minor conditions.

**Neutral:** The solution is unaffected.

**Limiting:** The solution would face significant regulatory obstacles.



Image:  
Above: Don Mills and Sheppard, Toronto, 2010

## Zoning By-Laws in Apartment Neighbourhoods

### Changing Zoning By-Laws

Zoning by-laws are rules created by the City to control what uses can occur on parcels of land and where and how big buildings can be when constructed. If a landowner wants to do something on the property which is not allowed by the current rules, there are two things that can be done:

1. The owner can ask for a minor exception – called a minor variance – to the zoning bylaw; or
2. The rules can be changed by asking City Council to change, or amend, the zoning bylaw for a specific site to accommodate a proposed project.

A minor variance is reviewed by the Committee of Adjustment, a body appointed by City Council. This process can take up to several months and usually requires drawings of the proposal and may require further information depending on the type of variance requested.

A zoning bylaw amendment requires approval by Toronto City Council that follows a preliminary review by the local Community Council. The process requires the applicant to supply a series of studies about the proposal in addition to architectural drawings. It also involves a public meeting and often additional discussions with stakeholders. This process usually requires a year to complete but often requires an even longer time.

Both processes commonly require the applicant to hire experts, such as a planner, architect or lawyer, which adds substantial costs and delay to the process.

As a result, small-scale projects in apartment neighbourhoods face challenges beyond the usual barriers facing any start-up organizations or business. The effect is seen in how few changes have occurred in apartment neighbourhoods over the last half century.

### Harmonized Zoning By-Law (Forthcoming):

Apartment neighbourhoods today are governed by a patchwork of zoning by-laws that are a pre-amalgamation legacy, when Toronto was made up of several municipalities each having their own zoning code. The City of Toronto is now undergoing the process of harmonizing these legacy zones under a single city-wide zoning code. While the new harmonized zoning bylaw is meant to generally be consistent with the codes it replaces, the draft “Residential Apartment” Zone related to many apartment neighbourhoods does propose to remove some of the barriers discussed in this report.

In addition, work is currently underway by City of Toronto’s City Planning Division and United Way Toronto to address many of the zoning barriers outlined in this report through the creation of a new zoning framework for apartment neighbourhoods. It is anticipated this work will be completed in 2013.

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