

## Section 2: Themes and Strategies for Healthy Apartment Neighbourhoods By Design

### Themes and Strategies

Theme 1: Natural Environment

Theme 2: Built Environment

Theme 3: Transportation

Theme 4: Housing

Theme 5: Employment, Income and Opportunities

Theme 6: Education and Learning

Theme 7: Food Security

Theme 8: Community Health

Health Strategies Summary Chart



# Theme 5: Employment, Income and Opportunities

## How does employment and income opportunities affect health?

While Toronto's apartment neighbourhoods were originally constructed to accommodate middle-income singles, couples and small families, these neighbourhoods currently house close to one half of Toronto's low income households (United Way Toronto, 2011). The United Way report, *Vertical Poverty*, indicates that from 1981 to 2006, incomes among renter household fell by over \$6,000, about double that of all households in Toronto, while average rents increased over the same time (United Way Toronto, 2011).

In 2008, the Toronto Public Health report, *The Unequal City*, demonstrated that those areas of the City that have a greater proportion of people living on low incomes have higher rates of illness, disease, and death at an earlier age, than those areas with a smaller proportion of people living on low incomes (TPH, 2008).

The relationship between income and health in Toronto exists for a wide range of health indicators and is consistent with the trends found in other jurisdictions. People who live on lower incomes have higher rates of lung cancer, higher rates of diabetes, and lower rates of preventive dental care (TPH, 2008). While income is one of the most significant indicators of health, there are other social factors such as race, immigration status, and education, that also contribute to health inequalities in Toronto (TPH, 2008).

These health inequalities are not just about the extremes in wealth and poverty. The Toronto report demonstrates that there is a continuous gradient of health in relation to income with health status improving with increasing levels of income. Toronto residents who live in the high income areas of the City are healthier than those who live in the middle income areas, and those who live in the middle income areas of the City are healthier than those who live in the low income areas (TPH, 2008).

By working to reduce health inequities, to make everyone as healthy as those with the high incomes, significant reductions in a number of negative health impacts can be realized for the population as a whole (TPH, 2008).

Income, employment and business opportunities influence health by:

- **Enabling Access to Resources** -Income and employment have an impact on many elements of life which affect health including access to quality housing, a safe neighbourhood, high quality food, clothing, transportation, higher education and quality childcare (TPH, 2011).
- **Affecting Personal and Social Relationships** - Economic hardships can have a negative impact on family and social relationships, parenting and self-esteem. They can also limit an individual's ability to participate in social, cultural and recreational activities (Kahn & Pearlin, 2006).

## The Opportunity in Apartment Neighbourhoods

Neighbourhoods which provide income opportunities build social cohesion by stimulating participation in social, cultural and recreational activities. Local business activity contributes to the social capital of a neighbourhood, which in turn creates conditions for improved health. Apartment neighbourhoods, with their diverse and dense populations, have great potential to become places that support and attract entrepreneurs and social enterprise. Today however, there are few businesses or services present in Apartment Neighbourhoods because of the zoning by-laws that restrict commercial and institutional activity.

When originally designed, apartment neighbourhoods were conceived primarily as areas for residing, with commercial, entrepreneurial and social activity provided for off-site through local shopping plazas and community centres located within convenient driving distances. As a result, the majority of apartment neighbourhoods are zoned for residential use only with a small number providing for a small local tuck shop.

The more recent demographic changes in these neighbourhoods, and the resulting changes in travel behaviour (see Transportation) and community needs, demonstrate a growing need for neighbourhood shops, services and institutions. The solutions discussed below consider how existing social networks and diverse community needs within apartment neighbourhoods can support local entrepreneurial and social enterprises, increase neighbourhood social capital, support the local economy, and improve general neighbourhood well-being.

**5.1 Introduce outdoor vending in apartment neighbourhood open spaces**

**5.2 Allow for home-based businesses**

**5.3 Incubate local talent through support and training services**

**5.4 Expand or introduce ground floor retail**

### Notes:

A recent report by the Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office, 2009, found “widespread interest in various aspects of self-employment – small business development, social enterprise, training for home workers, ....” Further, the Office noted “a recognition that there are opportunities to form stronger relationships with local businesses to support local hiring and other collaborative initiatives, business development, social enterprise, training for home workers, ...”

## 5.1 Introduce Outdoor Vending in Apartment Neighbourhood Open Space

### Context

Apartment neighbourhoods are home to thousands of Torontonians yet few allow opportunities to sell goods and services. Providing goods and services within apartment neighbourhoods could open up opportunities for local residents who are entrepreneurial and community minded.

### Solution

The large open spaces around apartment towers offer places for temporary or mobile commercial activity such as markets, food trucks and yard sales.

Outdoor vending would allow low-overhead, entry-level opportunities for entrepreneurs while animating open spaces and encouraging social engagement.

One approach would be to establish weekly markets that provide tables available for rent at modest rates. This could encourage the participation of local residents while expanding the range of goods and services available in a neighbourhood.

Another model, developed at the Scadding Court Community Centre, provides modular kiosks to house longer-term operations such as fresh food vendors, and initiatives suited to indoor environments, such as a bicycle repair shop (Scadding Court 2012). Kiosks operate year round. Operating on a timeshare basis, businesses could set up in response to customer needs and preferences while forming a mutually supportive grouping of business.



### Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

#### Official Plan: Supportive

The Toronto Official Plan generally supports neighbourhood-centred activities such as local markets. The Official Plan may require the proponent to show that the market would provide benefits to neighbourhood residents. On the other hand, the Official Plan may be understood as limiting commercial activity in primarily residential areas especially if the activity could draw customers from outside the neighbourhood.

#### Zoning by-laws: Limiting

Outdoor vending would generally be prohibited under zoning by-laws for apartment tower sites. Approval of a market would require either a minor variance to the current zoning or a zoning by-law amendment in many cases.

#### Other considerations

Site Plan Approval and a building permit would be required if the new use involves construction of structures over a certain size.

Outdoor vending would be subject to the same licensing, health and safety inspections as operations elsewhere.

A successful outdoor market venture would require institutional support in the form of a non-profit corporation, agency or other existing organization.



**Images:**

Opposite: Venders kiosk and seating in apartment neighbourhood, Stockholm, Sweden, 2011

Top, left: Market in public space in apartment neighbourhood, Vällingby, Stockholm, Sweden, 2009

Top, right: Market in apartment neighbourhood, Berlin, Germany, 2009

Middle, left: Market, Tower Hamlets, London, UK, 2006

Middle, left: Visualization of shops and markets in typical apartment neighbourhood, Toronto

Bottom, left: Scadding Court Modular Market, Toronto, 2012

Bottom, right: Venders market, Swiss Cottage, London, UK, 2009

## 5.2 Allow for Home Business

### Context

Newcomers with professional training who reside in apartment neighbourhoods can find it a struggle to establish themselves in the local economy. Locating opportunities and leveraging local social and familial connections can be especially difficult when little business or employment occurs in the immediate neighbourhood.

### Solution

Working from home could provide small start-up professionals in apartment neighbourhoods a place to develop local business skills, expand social and business networks, and establish an initial client base. Although there are challenges to operating home offices in apartment buildings, such as matters of noise and access, a number of new economy businesses (such as translating, editing, and web development) and small-scale professional services (such as accounting or legal advising) would cause little adverse effects on neighbours, and are generally considered appropriate home-based business uses in residential areas.

Home-based businesses could operate from a suite anywhere in the building, or in a live-work office of ground floor units. The latter condition could allow clients to visit with minimal disturbance to neighbours.

### Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

#### **Official Plan: Supportive**

The Toronto Official Plan provides little discussion with respect to live-work areas in apartment neighbourhoods. However, the Plan supports a mix of locally focused uses in neighbourhoods and it identifies a trend of live-work spaces becoming more prevalent.

#### **Zoning by-laws: Limiting**

Home-based businesses would generally be prohibited by current zoning by-laws. Commercial activity is commonly restricted on apartment sites to small tuck shops. To permit such uses, a minor variance or zoning by-law amendment would likely be required.

#### **Other considerations**

Any home-based business could be subject to municipal business licensing.

Security, liability and access may be a key consideration if clients are to visit the home office. This would have to be considered in consultation with the building management.

## 5.3 Incubate Local Enterprise

### Context

Residents of apartment neighbourhoods, many of whom are New Canadians, can face a steep learning curve in understanding the procedures, opportunities and challenges for employment or starting an entrepreneurial initiative in Toronto. Both perceived and real barriers can impede potential entrepreneurs from pursuing new businesses or individuals from pursuing employment opportunities. Local employment counselling and business incubation services can help foster and guide nascent initiatives and provide a supportive place for them to grow.

### Solution

Apartment properties include spaces amenable to hosting business incubation services, such as those now operated by agencies and community centres throughout the City. Incubators generally provide communal office spaces, or hot-desks, and shared office equipment and services. Services they offer include employment counselling, accounting expertise, and other business support useful to new entrepreneurs.

A business incubation centre in an apartment building could connect local residents to jobs while also allowing small start-up businesses and non-profits to develop. It could foster opportunities for residents with business and organization acumen to build networks and act as a bridge to resources outside the immediate community. Such a program could introduce greater economic opportunity, wellbeing, and health outcomes.

A small-scale incubator could be inserted in existing space on the ground floor of an apartment tower. Renovating ground floor space or building additions could allow larger scale centres in a tower. Otherwise, a centre could operate from a new infill building developed in an apartment neighbourhood.

### Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

#### **Official Plan: Supportive**

The Official Plan generally supports local business and organizational development in neighbourhoods. There, is however, little recognition of land uses similar to business incubators which blend education, commercial enterprise and community services.

#### **Zoning by-laws: Limiting**

A business incubation centre would generally be prohibited under current zoning by-laws. Such a project would require approval from City Council to amend the zoning by-law to permit the use.



### Images:

**East Scarborough Storefront:** A Multi-purpose service delivery and enterprise incubator in the Kingston-Galloway Neighbourhood in Scarborough, Toronto. Image Courtesy of East Scarborough Storefront

## 5.4 Introduce or Expand Ground Floor Retail

### Context

Retail is largely absent from apartment neighbourhoods. A small number of apartment buildings include small retail spaces that provide tuck-shops on the ground floor. However, they operate under certain constraints. Access is generally only permitted through the apartment building lobby, with no direct external entrance to the store. Store signage and visibility is often restricted, and shopkeepers are typically prohibited from displaying goods outdoors. For example, vegetable stands commonly found in front of neighbourhood corner stores elsewhere, are not permitted.

### Solution

The ground floors of apartment towers provide an opportunity to introduce new commercial enterprises and expand existing tuck shops so they can provide a broader variety of goods and services to serve the needs of the neighbourhood.

Through an addition to the base of an apartment tower, existing or new commercial initiatives could also operate at a larger scale. Such local commercial operations could allow more options for entrepreneurs, local employment, and convenience for the neighbourhood community as a whole.

### Making it Happen

The following describes the extent to which the current planning framework in apartment neighbourhoods would be supportive, limiting, or neutral, should a community or building owner propose solutions such as these at a particular site.

#### Official Plan: Supportive

While the Official Plan provides little discussion specifically about the outdoor sale of goods, the Plan promotes the animation of public spaces and the localization of shopping. Additions to apartment buildings are contemplated by the Plan in apartment neighbourhoods subject to criteria, including “providing ground floor uses that enhance the safety, amenity and animation of adjacent streets and open spaces” (Section 4.2 Policy 2g).

#### Zoning by-laws: Limiting

The introduction or expansion of commercial space, as well as the outdoor display of goods, is currently prohibited under apartment neighbourhood zoning by-laws. A minor variance or zoning by-law amendment would be required.

#### Other considerations

A proposal for greater retail activity would likely require site plan approval and building permits, and would be subject to municipal business licensing, as well as existing health and safety regulations.

Commercial waste collection would need to be accommodated.





#### Images:

Opposite: Ground floor café in apartment block, Berlin, Germany, 2009

Top, left: Ground floor shops in apartment block, Berlin, Germany, 2006

Top, right: New ground floor shop addition to apartment building, Berlin, Germany, 2006

Middle, left: Ground floor shops and services, Crescent Town, Toronto, 2006

Middle, right: Ground floor shops, Moscow, Russia, 2006

Bottom, left: Ground floor shopping arcade at base of apartment block, Stockholm, Sweden, 2011

Bottom, right: Storefront addition to apartment tower, Toronto, 2012

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