

LESSONS LEARNED

from Regent Park Residents About Building a Successful, Cohesive and Inclusive Community

May 10, 2017

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I. BACKGROUND & METHODOLOGY

Background

The Social Development Plan (2007)

The 2007 Social Development Plan is the road map for building a successful, cohesive and inclusive community in Regent Park.

The redevelopment of Regent Park is designed to build “a diverse, mixed income community in an open and integrated neighbourhood”. This is a major change from the low-income community of social housing physically separated from the communities around it that had existed for 50 years. With the introduction of new income groups and housing tenures, building social cohesion and social inclusion is seen to be central to the mission of renewing Regent Park. The Social Development Plan (SDP) was developed by residents and stakeholders in 2007 to guide social development and promote social inclusion. The SDP contained three components:

- A context section to provide an understanding of the Regent Park Community before redevelopment. It included how the history of Regent Park shaped the community; the role of the SDP in redevelopment; the demographic mix in Regent Park, the likely impact of redevelopment on neighbourhood demographics and the implications of demographic change.
- A research section reviewing best practices in social development and social inclusion to guide appropriate practice in developing mixed income communities, and
- A section outlining eight key strategies, options and opportunities for a successful transition to a revitalized Regent Park. These focused on building social inclusion and social development throughout the process of redevelopment and included chapters on promoting informal social connections; governance models; the role community services and facilities; the role of schools; the importance of employment and economic development and the role of change management.

The SDP noted that “from the beginning, improving social conditions has been as critical to the redevelopment as the physical reconstruction.”¹

Methodology of this Report

On December 9 & 10, 2016, Regent Park residents came together for a workshop to reflect on their experiences living in Regent Park ten years into the redevelopment process. Those experiences are detailed in Part 1 - a summary report of what we heard from residents in the workshops².

¹ Regent Park Social Development Plan, Toronto Community Housing, 2007 pg.1

² Feedback from Residents at Regent Park Reflections Workshop, Dec. 9 & 10, 2016

This Lessons Learned Report takes those lived experiences as indicators³ to assess if the redevelopment process has worked to build a successful, cohesive and inclusive community in Regent Park.

The SDP lists 75 strategies or opportunities for building social inclusion in Regent Park. In the lessons learned report they are grouped into four strategic themes. They are:

- informal connections and activities
- building community associations & governance
- the role of community services and facilities in building social inclusion
- employment opportunities created by redevelopment

To develop the lessons learned we used residents' reflections on their lived experience to identify what has been successful or could be improved. Suggestions for improvement and/or next steps moving forward are numbered and in *italics*. These suggestions are grouped and listed in Section III of this report.

II. WHY SOCIAL INCLUSION IS IMPORTANT

The Social Development Plan focused on social inclusion because it is recognized as an “almost indispensable mechanism for ensuring the benefits of revitalization and the success of a mixed-income community”.

“A community that values and respects the needs and priorities of all its members is considered “inclusive.” **Social inclusion** contributes to the quality of life of individuals and improves the health of the population by ensuring that the full range of needs in the community get attention.” *Regent Park Social Development Plan 2007*

Social cohesion is one of the key contributors to a community's capacity for social inclusion.

“**Social cohesion** is developed when community members from different backgrounds get to know each other through informal social contact. Social cohesion creates opportunities for different groups to relate, engage and communicate.”
Regent Park Social Development Plan 2007

For 50 years Regent Park was a low-income community comprised entirely of social housing physically separated from the neighbourhoods around it. This physical separation was

³ An indicator is “an instrument or tool for evaluation, a yardstick to measure results and to assess realization of desired levels of performance in a sustained and objective way. Indicators help provide the evidence you need to support the story you want to tell or the recommendations you want to make.

matched by low social impacts such as success in education, access to employment, good affordable food choices and recreational opportunities. Prospects for social and economic advancement were limited.

To change these physical and social conditions, residents and stakeholders organized to rebuild their community as “a diverse, mixed income community in an open and integrated neighbourhood.”⁴

The **physical** development plan called for adding new streets and parks and building additional new market housing to attract “a wider range of incomes, professions, skills, relationships and backgrounds to Regent Park.”⁵

The **social** development plan noted that “research shows that mixed-income communities can have a positive impact on opportunities and outcomes for residents from all backgrounds. It also shows that successfully achieving that goal depends on *a commitment to building social cohesion and social inclusion.*”

The strategies and opportunities for building social cohesion and social inclusion are detailed in the 75 recommendations in the Social Development Plan. They provide a roadmap for developing the social conditions necessary for transitioning Regent Park to a successful mixed-use community.

In the next four sections we will use the lived experiences that Regent Park residents contributed at the December 9th & 10th workshops to and the opportunities and strategies identified in the SDP to identify what has been learned and what adjustments might be considered moving forward as revitalization continues in Regent Park.

⁴ Regent Park Social Development Plan, Toronto Community Housing, 2007 pg.1

⁵ IBID pg.1

III. LESSONS LEARNED

A. Informal Connections and Activities

What the SDP Says

As a result of the revitalization process, people with a wider range of incomes, professions, skills, relationships and backgrounds have been attracted to Regent Park. People from adjoining neighbourhoods and across the City are coming into the Regent Park neighbourhood to access goods, services and amenities like market housing, new facilities (Aquatic Centre and Daniels Spectrum), cultural events and other amenities. Many of these new residents attended the Dec. 10th workshop, in addition to the original Regent Park residents.

The SDP said that “informal activities, such as community events and casual gatherings that attract residents from all socio-economic backgrounds, are among the most effective tools in knitting a diverse community together and building bridges to neighbouring communities.”⁶ It suggests using cultural assets to “bring people from all backgrounds and from adjoining neighbourhoods together in Regent Park to build a less isolated, more inclusive community”.

It suggested strategies such as:

- Developing activities that appeal to a broad range of residents across income, tenure and ethnicity.
- Promoting those activities broadly across the East Downtown to encourage participation from and integration with neighbouring communities
- Identifying and supporting the acquisition of the new resources needed to support this programming wherever possible.

Specific opportunities identified in the SDP were:

- Community gardens and local food production
- Tenant-driven grassroots projects to develop organizational capacity
- Affordable, accessible space where informal, casual interactions can occur
- Using design to:
 - provide safe, pedestrian-friendly environments, including spaces for cultural and recreational interaction.
 - Ensure that community space operated by the City of Toronto considers the cultural values of faith groups and ethnocultural groups.
 - Ensure that the revitalized community looks and feels integrated
 - Ensure that streets and public spaces are designed with safety in mind
- Positive and engaged relations between police and the community

⁶ IBID pg.6

Lessons Learned

Creating or preserving spaces, like large scale community gardening plots that create opportunities for people of all cultural groups and incomes to be visible to one another whether it is to actively engage or just to be seen have been very successful in Regent Park. These spaces include the new central park the bake oven, greenhouses, farmers market, dog areas and the running track as well as benches and other places to sit throughout the neighbourhood.

1. *The design of the complete hierarchy of public spaces in Regent Park from the large park to community garden plots to the placement of benches needs to be continuously assessed to build on the success these components have had at contributing to social inclusion*

Tenant driven grass roots programs are, and will continue to be an important generator of informal connections and activities. Affordable, accessible space is essential the success of these programs - **places people can gather spontaneously, hang out, and use for a range of activities, whether that be a seniors dance troupe or a group of young adults relaxing on shared TCHC property rather than in fast food places.** Much of this space is adjacent to buildings slated for demolition in Phase 5.

2. *Investigate opportunities to make affordable, accessible space available for grass-roots programs prior to the demolition of buildings currently being used and redevelopment of Phase 5.*

Regent Park's public realm is generally perceived to be pedestrian friendly. Some people did not feel safe after dark but for most, walking with children or for exercise or enjoyment was seen to be a pleasant activity in Regent Park.

3. *As walking is a key factor in promoting casual interactions, special attention should be paid to promoting and enhancing pedestrian (including children's) comfort and safety – speed limits on Dundas, safe crossings, the placement of hoarding and construction equipment, interactions between cyclists and pedestrians, street trees for shade, publicly accessible washrooms, benches to rest as well as safety on streets and in public spaces.*

Dog walking areas are an important generator of social interaction.

4. *More attention needs to be paid to the allocation of space for dogs and their owners and the interaction between dogs (especially larger dogs) and humans.*

Retail operations like FreshCo, Wendy's, Tim Hortons, PaintBox, the Wednesday market (Taste of Regent Park) have been successful in attracting Regent Park residents and residents from adjoining communities. Many people feel there is a need for more retail activity and more animation along the street in Regent Park. Condo residents were

shocked to learn that their boards had no say in the retail mix in their buildings or the neighbourhood.

5. *Because shopping is an important activity for promoting social interaction and inclusion, more attention should be paid to the allocation of commercial retail leases in future phases of redevelopment. For instance, an additional, cost competitive food store or a small mall as well as a variety of smaller, local retail shops at grade in residential buildings have been suggested.*

B. Building Community Associations & Governance

What the SDP Says

The SDP said that “Community associations and other governance mechanisms play a critical role in the success of mixed-income communities and should be supported by all stakeholders.”⁷ The SDP recommended that governance models for Regent Park should engage new homeowners and that the development of this next generation of governance should involve existing governance systems.

The SDP recommended that the new governance systems should:

- reflect the priorities, goals, practices and issues of Regent Park tenants and homeowners
- be flexible enough to adjust to the changing roles and changing relationships within Regent Park.
- bring together the whole neighbourhood but should also enable individual buildings to make independent choices.
- have the ability to set rules and resolve conflicts
- support tenants’ engagement by providing skills-development opportunities for tenants
- provide opportunities to tenants and other marginalized groups to develop new skills and supports to enable them to play their role in a governance mechanism on a level playing field

The Regent Park Neighbourhood Association (RPNA) information sheet distributed in September 2016 claimed that:

“by Spring 2017, RPNA (Regent Park Neighbourhood Association) will be representative of every building in Regent Park, and the RPNA Leadership Team will be made up 50% of TCH Delegates and 50% condo Delegates. This structure will ensure broad representation, so that RPNA will be able to play a powerful advocacy role on behalf of the entire community. Also, with a Leadership Team made up 50% of TCH Delegates, RPNA can benefit from Regent Park’s past experiences of grassroots initiatives, self-help ventures, and networks of friendship.

⁷ IBID pg. 12

During 2016, each residential building or townhouse group will elect 1-3 RPNA Delegates, depending on the number of units in the building or group. RPNA Delegate elections are expected to take place at the same time as Building Committee Elections for TCH buildings or Annual General Meetings for condo buildings. Once all buildings hold RPNA Delegate elections, probably by late 2016, elected Delegates will meet to elect a 10-member Leadership Team, with 5 TCH Delegates and 5 condo Delegates”⁸.
(See Appendix A for full information sheet)

Lessons Learned

TCH indicates that the community’s need for better and easier access to community information will be met by the Regent Park Neighbourhood Association website that will provide links to all the different agencies, services and events in Regent Park.

People want to be involved in decision-making. Public workshops for information-sharing and co-operative deliberation are a good opportunity for residents to “get to know each other, talk to government and decision-makers and be a part of the decision-making process”.

6. *Ensure opportunities for discussions in which residents can affect positive change in the community*

People enjoy working as part of Regent Park Neighbourhood Association, Building Councils and condo boards.

7. *Improve opportunities for engagement between TCH tenants and condo residents.*

C. The Role of Community Services and Facilities in Building Social Inclusion

What the SDP Says

The SDP says that institutions and agencies can play a key role in promoting social inclusion. Currently, however, building social cohesion and social inclusion is not a prominent objective of service providers. Locally based agencies focus on delivering direct service to low-income residents and providing immediate supports to people in distressed circumstances.

The SDP indicates that if social cohesion and social inclusion were to be an objective of service providers it would require:

- a broadened scope of work, including activities specifically designed to connect tenants with homeowners and give marginalized people an equitable place within new social networks.

⁸ From RPNA Info Sheet, September 2016

- a significant adjustment, including a careful review of mandates, operating styles, locations, structures and coordination
- broader outreach and an expansion of the scope of community activities and specific programs and activities to attract a variety of income groups.
- creating and coordinating programming for popular facilities that attract a broad range of diverse users (such as service hubs, an arts and cultural centre, the aquatic centre, the community centre or childcare spaces) at the earliest opportunity, in order **to maximize the ability of new residents to develop attachments to local services** from the beginning of their stay in the neighbourhood.
- **service planning** that balances the effort to engage new, middle-income residents with the need to ensure that access to service within mixed-income programs is available for lower income families
- Regent Park service providers to find ways to ensure that services are **appropriately distributed** by reserving spaces in services for low-income, vulnerable or marginalized participants as necessary and appropriate.

Facilities Space

SDP says “Space is difficult to acquire in Regent Park and has been one of the factors limiting the growth of services.”⁹ The capacity of local service providers to play their role in fostering social inclusion is in part dependent on their access to facilities in which they can play that role.

A number of programs have been developed to ensure the availability of space in Regent Park.

Toronto Community Housing has provided facilities as was required by the Community Services and Facilities Implementation Plan. Additionally, Toronto Community Housing has developed a process enabling agencies that wish to deliver service in newly constructed buildings in Regent Park to gain access to those facilities on a phase-by-phase basis.

- top priority for new space is given to any service provider that is displaced by the reconstruction of their current facilities.

Toronto Community Housing’s Use of Common Space Policy - permits the rental of amenity space-subject to approval by Toronto Community Housing staff-at rental rates that are at the discretion of the Tenant Council, provided that basic assurances such as insurance are in place and that the programs continue to meet with the approval of the Tenant Council.

Below Market Rent Policy: The below market rent policy establishes a framework for the leasing of City owned space to non-profit community organizations at below market rent where these organizations further the delivery of council priorities.

The SDP also notes that:

⁹ Regent Park Social Development Plan, Toronto Community Housing, 2007 pg.20

- Local drugstores, banking services, dry cleaners and other widely used services are facilities that are also useful in developing social cohesion; and
- Ethno-specific shopping opportunities can also serve this function

Lessons Learned - Services and Activities

People like the fact that many services and facilities in the community are tailored for the residents, for example:

- The new aquatics centre offers women only swim times.
- The local grocery store, FreshCo, offers various discounts on some of the food items during Ramadan.
- The central park accommodates big community prayers twice a year.
- the Community Health Centre (CHC) offers services regardless of status
- Regent Park Athletic Field and park are open and can be used day and night without bookings

8. *The City should consider offering more swimming programs (including separate times for Muslim men and women).*

The quality of Regent Park facilities and free programming means Regent Park residents are competing with other residents across the city to use their facilities. It's increasingly hard for local residents to access programs in the Aquatic Centre.

9. *Investigate ways to ensure that program activities are fairly distributed to Regent Park residents, possibly by reserving spaces for low income, vulnerable or marginalized participants.*

The cost of events can limit participation and opportunities for social inclusion. Although there are many events and festivals in the neighbourhood many local residents are not always able to participate due to fees.

10. *Investigate a method for offering local resident discounts on tickets for events in the neighbourhood*

Providing food contributes to social inclusion – lunch programs at the Christian Resource Centre and pot luck meals at the Centre for Social Innovation (CSI) are identified as great ways to meet neighbours.

Special efforts are needed to include seniors. The senior's building communal space at 246 Sackville has been closed off to residents for a year; home care access is not yet available; yoga for seniors is inconveniently offered at suppertime.

11. *Investigate restoring communal space in the seniors' building providing access to home care, and scheduling activities at times more convenient to seniors.*

Daniels Spectrum is accessible to people with different incomes and has become the heart of the community.

12. *Investigate using Daniels Spectrum to host BIG EVENTS - community gatherings for events like the Euro Cup, World Cup, TFC Raptors.*

Lessons Learned – Space

Affordable, accessible space is essential to the success of grass root programs where informal, casual interactions can occur in Regent Park. Much of this space is adjacent to buildings slated for demolition in Phase 5.

13. *Investigate opportunities to make affordable, accessible space available for grass root programs prior to the demolition of buildings currently being used and redevelopment of Phase 5.*

There is no place for youth to socialize late at night on weekends.

14. *Investigate fast tracking the Regent Park Children and Youth Hub.*

There are sentiments of discrimination against women's sports and activities.

15. *Investigate how community rec centres can respond to space needs for women's sports and activities*

D. Employment Opportunities Created by Redevelopment

What the SDP Says

The SDP says the current provision of employment and training services in Regent Park is characterized by

- fragmentation and a lack of coordination
- few opportunities for tenants to develop locally-based business opportunities and
- low-paying, precarious jobs despite the fact that many work,
- comparatively high receipt of social assistance and other income supports.
- a lack of information about employment and other services

the SDP proposed an **Employment Services Plan to:**

- enhance services to individuals and employers and over-time develop a more accessible and better coordinated delivery system; and
- connect unemployed and underemployed residents with employment and training opportunities in Regent Park.

Lessons Learned

Despite doubling staff, the employment centre does not offer basic services such as computer software and resume workshops.

16. *Investigate*

- *more local jobs and skills training for youth, particularly for new community facilities*
- Improving employment services (adult employment opportunities, eligibility, follow ups, inter-agency collaboration for job creation)

Participants indicated that their condo corporations do not appear to have control over commercial and retail space at grade in their buildings. Residents feel that there are limited opportunities for small scale entrepreneurial activity along Dundas and Gerrard and job opportunities in the community.

17. Investigate how to give residents a say in what new businesses come into Regent Park.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MOVING FORWARD

This is what we heard in the workshops and emerging analysis to suggest changes that could be considered in next phases of redevelopment.

- 1. The design of the complete hierarchy of public spaces in Regent Park from the large park to community garden plots to the placement of benches needs to be continuously assessed to build on the success these components have had at contributing to social inclusion.*
- 2. Investigate opportunities to make affordable, accessible space available for grass root programs prior to the demolition of buildings currently being used and redevelopment of Phase 5.*
- 3. As walking is a key factor in promoting casual interactions, special attention should be paid to promoting and enhancing pedestrian (including children's) comfort and safety – speed limits on Dundas, safe crossings, the placement of hoarding and construction equipment interactions between cyclists and pedestrians, street trees for shade, publicly accessible washrooms, benches to rest as well as safety on streets and in public spaces.*
- 4. More attention needs to be paid to the allocation of space for dogs and their owners and the interaction between dogs (especially larger dogs) and humans.*
- 5. Because shopping is an important activity for promoting social interaction and inclusion, more attention should be paid to the allocation of commercial retail leases in future phases of redevelopment. For instance, an additional, cost competitive food store or a small mall as well as a variety of smaller, local retail shops at grade in residential buildings have been suggested.*
- 6. Ensure opportunities for discussions in which residents can affect positive change in the community*
- 7. Improve opportunities for engagement between TCH tenants and condo residents.*
- 8. The City should consider offering more swimming programs (including separate times for Muslim men and women).*
- 9. Investigate ways to ensure that program activities are fairly distributed to Regent Park residents by reserving spaces for low income, vulnerable or marginalized participants.*
- 10. Investigate a method for offering local resident discounts on tickets for events in the neighbourhood.*

11. *Investigate restoring communal space in Seniors' Building providing access to home care, and scheduling activities at times more convenient to seniors.*
12. *Investigate using Daniels Spectrum to host BIG EVENTS - community gatherings for events like the Euro Cup, World Cup, TFC Raptors.*
13. *Investigate opportunities to make affordable, accessible space available for grass root programs prior to the demolition of buildings currently being used and redevelopment of Phase 5.*
14. *Investigate fast tracking the Regent Park Children and Youth Hub.*
15. *Investigate how community rec centres can respond to space needs for women's sports and activities.*
16. *Investigate*
 - *more local jobs and skills training for youth, particularly for new community facilities*
 - *Improving employment services (adult employment opportunities, eligibility, follow ups, inter-agency collaboration for job creation)*
17. *Investigate how to give residents a say in what new businesses come into Regent Park.*



To All Residents...

Get involved in the new **Regent Park Neighbourhood Association (RPNA)** and help build our vibrant community!

We need you. And Regent Park needs you.

With a strong neighbourhood association, residents will have a powerful voice – and no one has a greater stake in the future of our neighbourhood than we do, the people who live here.

Joining RPNA is an easy way to make a big difference while getting to know amazing neighbours who share your passion for Regent Park, one of the most dynamic and diverse communities in Canada.

Get involved!

- Help spread the word about the RPNA in your building and at community events, or run for the RPNA Delegate Election in your building! Interested? Please email us at: rpna.info@gmail.com
- Learn more about the RPNA on our website: www.RPNA.info
- Meet your neighbours by joining the conversation online:

Facebook: www.facebook.com/groups/regentparkna

Twitter: [@regentparkna](https://twitter.com/regentparkna)

FAQs

Q: What does RPNA do and what are its goals?

A: The purpose of RPNA is to build an inclusive and thriving community through...

- **Advocacy** – providing a strong voice for residents on issues that will benefit the entire community such as improving safety and encouraging more opportunities for our youth.
- **Community-Building** – bringing our culturally diverse and mixed-income neighbourhood together through events such as Spring Cleanup, or the CSI Potluck that we co-hosted on April 12.
- **Communication** – developing an information hub for this busy community through our new website, our new Facebook group, and possibly a newsletter.

Q: How will RPNA be structured?

A: RPNA will be representative of every building in Regent Park, and the RPNA Leadership Team will be made up 50% of TCH Delegates and 50% condo Delegates. This structure will ensure broad representation, so that RPNA will be able to play a powerful advocacy role on behalf of the entire community. Also, with a Leadership Team made up 50% of TCH Delegates, RPNA can benefit from Regent Park's past experiences of grassroots initiatives, self-help ventures, and networks of friendship.

During 2016, each residential building or townhouse group will elect 1-3 RPNA Delegates, depending on the number of units in the building or group. RPNA Delegate elections are expected to take place at the same time as Building Committee Elections for TCH buildings or Annual General Meetings for condo buildings. Once all buildings hold RPNA Delegate elections, probably by late 2016, elected Delegates will meet to elect a 10-member Leadership Team, with 5 TCH Delegates and 5 condo Delegates.

Q: What buildings will be considered to be within the boundaries of Regent Park?

A: RPNA will include all residential buildings within the following proposed boundaries:



Q: What are the responsibilities of an RPNA Delegate?

A: RPNA Delegates will attend RPNA Assembly meetings four times a year to vote on key issues, to provide input into current concerns, and to stay informed about the work of RPNA. Delegates will also provide a two-way information channel between the association and the residents in their building or townhouses.

Q: How much work is involved?

A: RPNA Delegates will attend four 2-hour meetings each year and participate in email discussions for an additional 2-3 hours per month. Delegates may also get involved in one of RPNA's committees and/or run to be a member of the Leadership Team, which will probably meet monthly.

Q: If I'm not an elected RPNA Delegate, can I still participate in the RPNA?

A: Yes, RPNA's three committees – Advocacy, Community-Building, and Communication – will always be looking for volunteers who can bring creative ideas and a willingness to help. And right now we need lots of help running elections and making our neighbourhood aware of the new RPNA.

Q: How do I sign up to run for the RPNA election in my building or to volunteer?

A: We'd love to hear from you! Please email us at: rpna.info@gmail.com

For more information, visit our website at: www.RPNA.info

Or join in the conversation online:

Facebook: www.facebook.com/groups/regentparkna / Twitter: [@regentparkna](https://twitter.com/regentparkna)