

Connecting Opportunities

Reimagining Mount Dennis

**Curtner Leadership Program 2019
A Presentation to the Mount
Dennis Community**

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Introduction



Mount Dennis was once a key link from rural farming areas to downtown Toronto. Demographic and development trends have resulted in Mount Dennis becoming a more isolated community in recent years due to employment losses and a lack of effective transit options.

That is about to change quickly.

With the completion of the Mount Dennis Station, that will connect residents to the Eglinton Crosstown LRT, The UP Express and the Kitchener GO line, this

community is positioned to become one of Toronto's next urban destinations.

Mount Dennis is poised to improve its connectivity both within the community and to key employment and cultural hubs across the city like Union Station, Pearson Airport and Yonge and Eglinton. Combined with new urban manufacturing opportunities and green housing development opportunities at many scales, Mount Dennis can become a more vibrant Toronto neighbourhood.

Our Vision

“ To create a culturally rich, well connected, innovative and eco-conscious community that respects the history of the area and the needs and desires of the current residents, while positioning the community for success in an evolving urban region. ”

Respecting the History of Mount Dennis



Figure 1: The Kodak Campus circa 1917 (City of Toronto Archives)

Like many neighbourhoods in Toronto, Mount Dennis started as farm land. By the late 1800's, there were brickyards, aggregate pits and market gardens providing somewhat diverse employment for the local community.¹ By the 1920's Kodak had moved into the area and become the largest local employer. CCM, Heintzman and Willys, among others, also offered employment opportunities to local residents. While there were a number of these light manufacturing employers, the community was mostly dependant on

Kodak. This dependency was clearly demonstrated in the 1970's when Kodak's decision to reduce the lunch break to 30 minutes effectively decimated the local street merchant economy.²

Despite Kodak's tumultuous tenure as Mount Dennis' main employer, the company still holds an endearing mark on the community for which it provided livelihood to multiple generations of families over 90 years. When the designs for the new Eglinton Crosstown station were proposed, the community insisted that the Kodak "Building 9" be preserved and be renovated to form part of the station, as well as a community gathering space.

Because of its prominent location on the hill north of Eglinton, we believe that this monument will be visible and serve as a centrepiece for the entire neighbourhood, not just a feature of the station. As such, we suggest that certain architectural guidelines be imposed on the various areas of change noted below in order to maintain sightlines and connection to this important historical feature.

1. <http://www.torontoneighbourhoods.net/neighbourhoods/york/mount-dennis/history> - History of Mount Dennis

2. https://www.blogto.com/city/2009/07/the_end_of_kodachrome_and_the_death_of_kodak_heights/ - The End of Kodachrome and the Death of Kodak Heights

Social Context

Toronto is the CMA with the highest level of people in core housing need in Canada (19.1% in 2016)³. Our study area has a median household income of approximately \$47,000, compared to a \$66,000 median in the City of Toronto. There is a higher prevalence of low income residents (26.85%) compared to the city (20.2%). Approximately 29% of residents have no certificate, degree or diploma, which is 13% more than the city average. Finally, the unemployment rate is 2.5% more than the city average.

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core housing
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\$47,000

Median household income

2.5%

unemployment
rate more than
the city average

26.85%

low income
residents

29%

residents have
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3 .StatsCan, Table 3: Top-10 Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) with the highest proportion of core housing need in 2016, by tenure

Education



the Dennis Avenue Community School (TDSB)



Our Lady of Victory School (TCDSB),



Bala Avenue Community School (TDSB).

Currently, the Mount Dennis Study Area is home to three schools, including: the Dennis Avenue Community School (TDSB), Our Lady of Victory School (TCDSB), and Bala Avenue Community School (TDSB).

The TDSB schools in Mount Dennis have some of the lowest enrollment rates in the City, and were subject to a recent Pupil Accommodation Review Process which included the Dennis Avenue Community School. With enrollment figures as low as 59%, these existing community assets are significantly underutilized.

Mount Dennis Study Area Stats (based on compiled census data)

~ 11,699

Total Population

10.16%

(4.5% growth in Toronto)
Population Growth (2011-2016)

\$60,939

(\$102,721 in Toronto)
Average Household Income

Mount Dennis Study Area Stats (based on compiled census data)

~40.2 people per hectare

Population density

~14.2 jobs per hectare

Employment density

\$537,474

(\$754,015 in Toronto)
Average value of dwellings

\$899

(\$1,242 in Toronto)
Average monthly shelter costs for
rented dwellings

Driving/passenger **48.46%** Transit **47.1%**
Walking **2.8%** Bicycle **0.77%** Other **0.68%**

Main mode of commuting

Policy Context

Mount Dennis is characterized by outdated zoning and planning policies, originally adopted in the 1980s, which prevent it from evolving to meet the challenges of anticipated population growth. For instance, the Weston Road corridor is designated Neighbourhoods in the Official Plan, which specifies low-rise residential buildings and prohibits investment in mixed use buildings with retail at grade. In addition, more than one zoning by-law is currently in-force in the Study Area, resulting in inconsistencies and regulatory challenges.

Recently, the provincial government has introduced Bill 108, omnibus legislation that would amend the Planning Act and a host of other pieces of legislation with the intent of increasing housing supply. While the full impact of this legislation is not yet known, certain provisions may be harnessed to help steer the anticipated growth to help achieve the community's vision for an eco-neighbourhood.

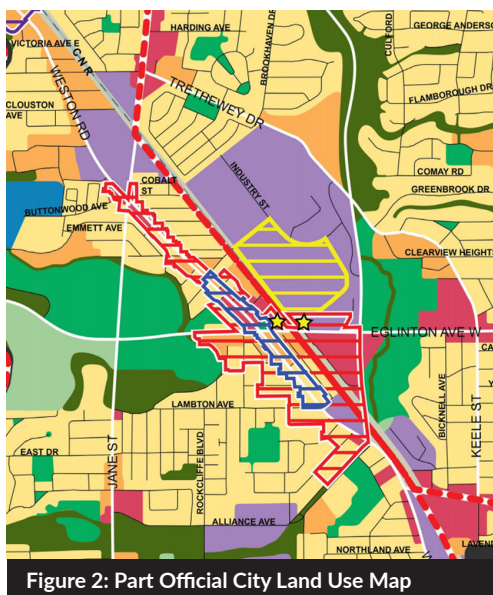


Figure 2: Part Official City Land Use Map



The Humber River Valley

Public Realm Context

Mount Dennis is focused along the structural backbone of Weston Road, which provides a natural focal point for daily activities and an identity for the neighbourhood. However, Weston Road has suffered from disinvestment from both the public and private sector. In addition, there are a number of significant barriers within the broader neighbourhood, including:

- Metrolinx/UP train corridor divides the east and west portions of the neighbourhood
- The Humber River Valley and Black Creek River Valley separate Mount Dennis from adjacent neighbourhoods
- The parcels occupied by the Metrolinx Storage and Maintenance Facility and the adjacent employment lands create a large impermeable area that lacks a fine-grain street pattern and consistent public realm.

Investment Context

The Mount Dennis Mobility Hub is an integral component of the \$5.3 billion (2010 dollars) provincial investment in the Eglinton-Scarborough Crosstown Project. The unique situation where the hub will have service from Go Transit, UP Express and the Crosstown, will make the neighbourhood desirable from an investment context. In fact, there are investors already securing development parcels with a medium to long term vision, based on the opening of the hub.

This generational investment possesses the opportunity to serve as a catalyst for revitalization and realization of the community's eco-neighbourhood goals.



The Mount Dennis Mobility Hub

Proposed interventions

The recommended interventions are based on the priorities identified by the Mount Dennis Residents Association through previous visioning processes. The interventions presented below organize those ideas under five primary axis of change:

- Embracing Changing Mobility Patterns
- Residential Intensification & Affordable Housing
- Weston Road as the Cultural Spine
- Fostering an Eco-opportunity Employment Zone
- Creating and Enhancing an Active & Green Public Realm



Changing Mobility Patterns

The Mount Dennis Eglinton LRT station will be coming online at the same time as the Mount Dennis UP Express and GO station. These facilities will make the Mount Dennis Transit Hub second in area only to Union Station. These facilities will transform Mount Dennis into a viable commuter neighbourhood for thousands of employees working downtown, at Yonge and Eglinton or the Pearson Airport Employment Area.

This will serve as a catalyst to enabling a significant shift towards greener mobility modes, including transit, cycling, and walking.

Transit

Currently, 45% of residents use public transit for home to work trips. Through new public transit investments, an improved public realm for walking, bike routes, and bike share stations, a mode share of 75% will be targeted. A great benefit to the site is that there is strong transit connectivity to the Airport Employment Zone in addition to the downtown core.



Cycling



Cycling

Mount Dennis lacks sufficient cycling infrastructure. Improved cycling connections within Mount Dennis could be added to Toronto's 10 year cycling plan. The following cycling network changes are recommended:

- The Inclusion of cycling infrastructure on Weston Road with connections to Lambton Road and Rockcliffe Boulevard (already partially included in the City plan) could provide real cycling options to residents both within the neighbourhood and by connecting to other key city cycling routes
- As shown in Figure 3, a newly proposed Employment Zone right-of-way can accommodate new cycling infrastructure with slow speed mixed traffic from the Maple Creek Condominiums, through Ray Avenue, connecting to Weston Road.
- New cycling infrastructure on Eglinton Avenue West (included in the City Plan)
- Longer-term expansions to the Bike Share network, centred on providing a last-mile solution for commuters from the Mount Dennis Station to the Black Creek Employment Area. To be fully effective as a multi-modal solution, the Bike Share network should be integrated with Metrolinx's Presto Card system. This will allow a free transfer from the transit network (TTC or GO) to the Bike Share network.
- Extensive, free and secure bicycle parking facilities at the Mount Dennis Transit Hub.

Walking

The walking experience can also be enhanced through improvements to existing pedestrian infrastructure, as well as investments in new links and connections. Key recommended interventions are:

- Building pedestrian bridges linking streets near the Weston Road corridor to the UP/GO station platform, and to intensification sites to the east.
- Working with local artists to include murals and enhanced lighting along the Eglinton and Ray Avenue rail underpasses.

As the focal point of the mobility hub, the former Kodak Building will be repurposed to serve a community hub, hosting local organizations such as the Learning Enrichment Foundation, community events and cultural performances. This building may even be used as an iconic structure, animated with a distinctive lighting scheme and including uses like an observation deck overlooking the surrounding areas.

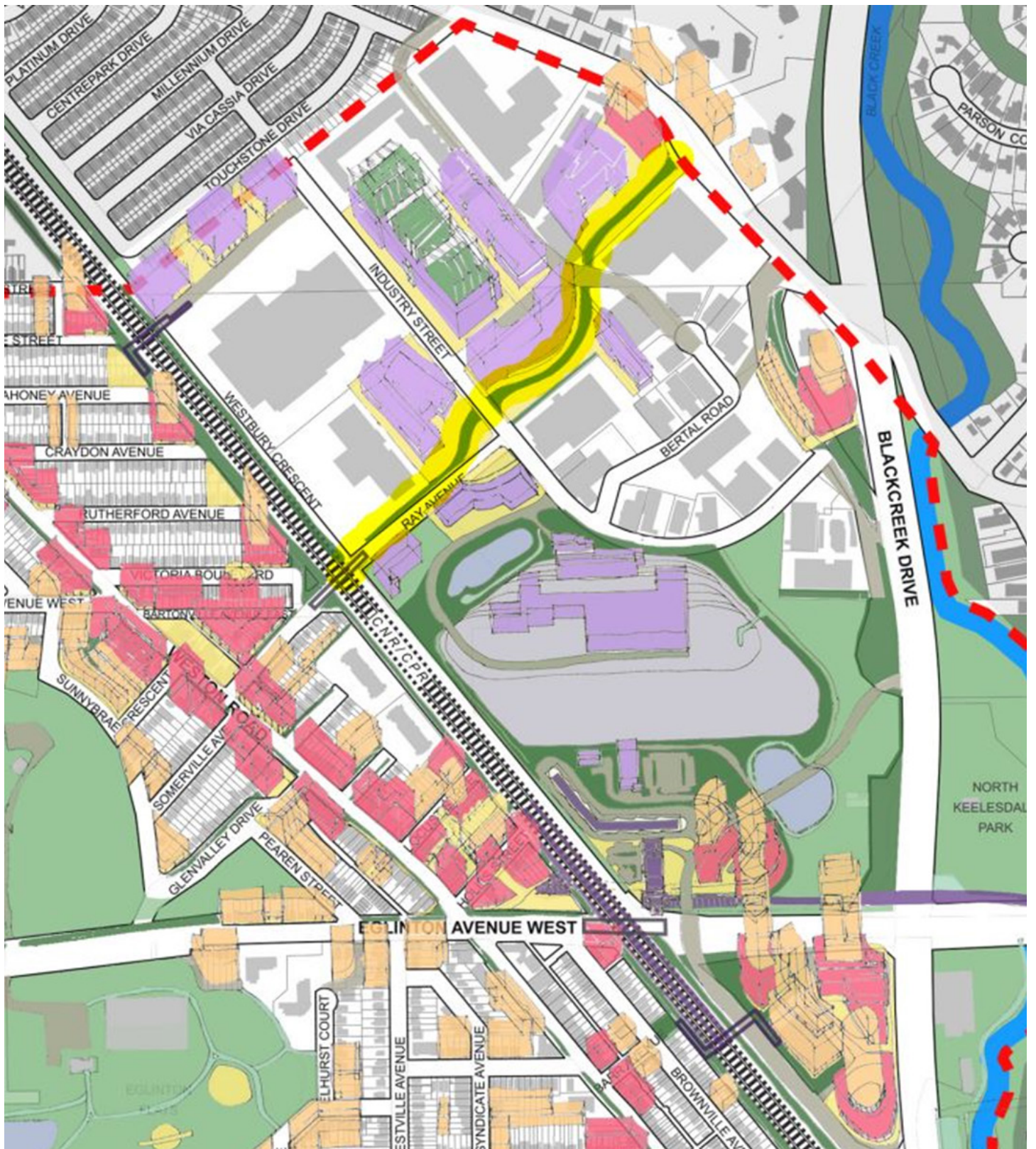


Figure 3 - New Employment Zone Pedestrian/Cycling Slow Speed Mixed Traffic Right-of-Way

Residential Intensification and Affordable Housing



Figure 4: Precedent Image - Proposed Oakridge Centre Development. Source: <https://vancouver.ca/parks-recreation-culture/new-park-at-oakridge-centre.aspx>

Mount Dennis meets provincial criteria as a Major Transit Station Area, and is well-positioned to absorb considerable mixed-use growth. As stated in the Growth Plan (2017), a Major Transit Station Area on a transit corridor served by light rail transit will be planned to accommodate 160 combined residents and jobs per hectare within a 500 m radius. Recently finalized changes to the Growth Plan would increase this area up to an 800 metre radius.

While a greater supply of housing in the Mount Dennis area will increase the range of housing options available, additional efforts will be required to protect and promote existing and intended affordable housing. Recently announced changes to inclusionary zoning regulations link the use of this planning tool with the creation of community planning permit system areas, a tool aimed to expedite the planning process.

The recommended approach is to designate the following key growth and revitalization areas as community planning permit system areas. This tool provides greater certainty in the development process for both the community and developer, and will be a requirement for the application of inclusionary zoning for residential development.

The No Frills Site

Located at the southwest corner of Black Creek Drive and Eglinton Avenue West, and directly across from the Mount Dennis Crosstown terminus, this is

a natural location for high density, transit-oriented housing, accompanied by a mix of commercial uses to create an animated streetscape.

A series four to five of towers atop podium buildings, connected by a local network of pedestrian-oriented streets. Located at a lower elevation than the Mount Dennis community, this site provides the opportunity for considerable density with minimal visual impact. Heights ranging between 30 and 50 storeys are envisioned, providing approximately 2,500 housing units, of which 500 may be affordable.

This site could be planned for inclusionary zoning provisions, which may incorporate both a deep affordability option, requiring a smaller proportion of units with rents limited to 40% of the city wide average market rent, as well as a workforce housing option, requiring a larger proportion of units at rents limited to 100% of the city wide average market rent.

Weston Road

Weston Road is envisioned as a corridor for intensification in the form of mixed use, mid-rise buildings. Heights of 5-8 storeys are envisioned, with active commercial and retail uses at grade to provide an animated streetscape.

Opportunities for 10-25 mid-rise buildings are envisioned in the fully implemented intensification of Weston Road, representing 300-750 units.

Gentle Neighbourhood Density

Weston Road is envisioned as a corridor for Additional opportunities for gentle residential intensification are possible within Neighbourhood designated areas of Mount Dennis. As-of-right laneway and secondary suites, consolidation of adjacent lots for small apartment buildings (4-6 units), and other forms of incremental infill provide new housing opportunities while integrating into the fabric of the neighbourhood.

This form of intensification represents the smallest net increase in dwelling units at approximately 100

units of individual residences/lots. This represents an opportunity for “missing-middle” housing that is family-friendly and ground-related.

An overall target for affordable housing of 20% is recommended overall for new residential development in the study area. These affordability targets could be achieved by a combination of mandatory inclusionary zoning on high density sites, deepened with supports from other levels of government, and facilitated through the proposed Community Planning Permit System.



Figure 5: Existing walk-up rental apartment buildings in Mount Dennis

Preserving & Enhancing Existing Affordable Housing Supply

Mount Dennis currently benefits from an existing supply of neighbourhood-scale, walk-up rental apartment buildings.

These buildings often provide affordable rents in a dense, pedestrian-friendly formats. The preservation and enhancement of these assets are important in preventing the displacement of existing residents of Mount Dennis as a result of increasing property and land values.

The City of Toronto has existing tools at its disposal to protect such assets, including Rental Housing Demolition Control policies. Additional tools should be investigated to incentivize capital repairs to these private assets, while ensuring they remain affordable. Retrofitting such buildings for increased

energy efficiency and reduced stormwater runoff will contribute to the eco-objectives of Mount Dennis.

Mount Dennis also has existing affordable housing in the form of rent geared to income (RGI) units in the buildings located at 30 Denarda Street and 15 Oxford Drive. These buildings sit on underutilized land that could be leveraged for redevelopment and reinvestment. Proceeds could be invested into the long-term capital maintenance of the buildings and the long-term maintenance of existing RGI units. Alternatively, a phased redevelopment of these lands can be pursued with the basic principles of:

- No displacement of residents; and,
- No loss of RGI units.

Weston Road: A Vibrant, Complete Main Street

The vision for a walkable, animated Weston Road with a mixture of uses was developed by the local residents' association and is supported by our findings. This can be achieved through land use reforms, and improvements to the public realm.

We propose changing the land use designation from Neighbourhoods to Mixed Use, along with a community planning permit system, in order to encourage active retail, service industries, and other contemporary commercial uses at grade, such as pick-up shops for online orders. As of right, five to eight storeys are recommended, with additional height up to twelve storeys recommended at key intersections such as Eglinton Avenue West and Weston Road.

Mixed use designation and midrise form will be encouraged, with no residential uses permitted on the

ground floor and built form guidelines put in place to encourage grade-related retail, sidewalk cafes and seating at key locations.

To further improve the public realm along Weston Road, we are proposing a shift of non-local through traffic away from Weston Road via traffic calming measures, such as bump-outs or a 'road diet' to help reduce driving speed. Using a complete streets approach, through-traffic can be rerouted away from Weston Road to create a safe, vibrant main street.

Further, to catalyze excitement and investment in the street, an activity node such as a farmers market is recommended. A well-located parcel of land for this use has been identified on the City land parcel at Weston Road near Locust Street (Figure 7).



Figure 7: Potential public market space

Fostering An Eco-Opportunity Employment Zone



Figure 8: Flexible commercial spaces

Meaningful, local employment is an important part of an eco-neighbourhood.

We propose creating a unique opportunity to allow small and medium sized businesses to take ownership within an emerging neighbourhood in a business “campus”, a series of low and mid-rise units with higher ceilings to allow flexible industrial/commercial uses and start up businesses. This could create new employment opportunities in the creative sector, design industry, professional services, education and research, digital media, and tech manufacturing within an identified prime employment precinct for the City of Toronto. Permitted uses would be vast, with the flexibility to allow for a variety of businesses that could create a vibrant employment node. This would include providing internships for students looking for a career path, in turn providing a cost-effective labour resource for employers.

The flex commercial spaces would be developed and unitized in a condominium model. This allows for business operators to have the opportunity to own work spaces and build equity while building their business.

Additionally, the potential to build a “vertical farm” on currently undeveloped land would provide both an employment source and a sustainable, local and fresh food source for local residents which could integrate

with the existing food share operation.

To align with the eco-conscious desires of the community, the new buildings in the employment area will be net zero using the following potential building systems:

- Providing district energy/heating and cooling via a central geo-thermal plant.
- Carbon sequestering building materials such as mass timber in all new construction.
- Existing industrial buildings could be retrofitted and repurposed to connect to and take advantage of these new centralized building systems.

As properties redevelop, additional roads will help to improve the pedestrian realm and attract more start-up businesses like breweries and architectural fabrication studios. We envision the sounds of creative industries spilling out from open garage bay doors. Opportunities for live-work spaces may be explored.

Public incentives and grants, such as Toronto’s Imagination, Manufacturing, Innovation and Technology (IMIT) business incentive could help to reduce business costs and stimulate creative industries, start ups, and other businesses that would help to revitalize this employment zone.

Public Realm

Specific Interventions in the Black Creek Employment Area

As previously stated, the Mount Dennis neighbourhood is fragmented by a number of natural and man-made barriers, including:

- Metrolinx/UP train corridor;
- The Humber River Valley and Black Creek River Valley; and,
- The Metrolinx Storage and Maintenance Facility.

As the focal point of the mobility hub, the former Kodak Building will be repurposed to serve as a community hub, hosting local organizations such as the Learning Enrichment Foundation, community events and cultural performances. This building may even be used as an iconic structure, animated with a distinctive lighting scheme and including uses like an observation deck overlooking the surrounding areas.

The lack of a fine-grain street pattern in the Black Creek Employment Area, coupled with the existing barriers, discourages through travel in Mount Dennis. This lack of connectivity may be a contributing factor in limiting the types of employers that would choose to develop and intensify in the area to meet the job-growth objectives presented herein. The lack of a consistent and connected public realm may also contribute in attracting the types of employers that would choose to locate here.

The newly proposed public rights-of-way in the Black Creek Employment Area can include the following streetscape elements to enhance the public realm:

- Consistent decorative or permeable pavers (to enhance stormwater management)
- Resilient street trees
- Appropriate pedestrian lighting
- Consistent bicycle rings, waste receptacles and street furniture

Such public realm improvements can also contribute to enhanced community safety by increasing connectivity

between residential areas to the east of Trethewey to Weston Road.

Specific Interventions on Weston Road

Weston Road, as the main spine of Mount Dennis, has a number of unique qualities that should be celebrated and enhanced as part of public realm improvements, including:

- The non-grid layout of Weston Road creates interesting lot patterns and “kinks” at key intersections, including Eglinton Avenue. Architectural guidelines and streetscape interventions should be sympathetic to existing lot patterns.
- Weston Road has significant topography changes which provide a viewing corridor towards the CN Tower and City Centre. This viewing corridor should be preserved in the development of architectural guidelines and streetscape interventions along Weston Road.

West Toronto Railpath Northern Extension

The Mount Dennis community would be well-served by a northern extension of the West Toronto Railpath, providing a new green corridor for active and passive recreation. Due to space constraints within the rail corridor, opportunities to transform public roads into multi-use facilities, and acquire lands immediately abutting the rail corridor, may be explored (Figure 9).



Figure 9 - A view of Nickle Street immediately abutting the Metrolinx Kitchener Corridor

Implementation Considerations

The transformations envisioned for Mount Dennis are significant, and begin with celebrating and enhancing existing strengths while anticipating and planning for multiple phases of change. Our interventions are grouped into short, medium, and long-term changes.



Figure 10 - Three implementation phases - 5 years, 10 years, and 20 years

Policy Tools

Objective	Fee/Subsidy/Incentive
Affordable Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusionary zoning requirements for developments comprised of greater than 100 units • City incentives (fees and charges waivers, tax exemptions) for new rental housing and affordable ownership units that meet affordability requirements • In areas well-served by community amenities, residential building amenity requirements may be relaxed to reduce maintenance fees
Major Public Realm Improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Benefits Charge allocation from development at No Frills site directed to a public plaza/market • A rotating fund for Weston Road streetscaping, seeded by a one-time tax levy, and replenished by a portion of the Community Benefits Charge from area redevelopments
Eco-Opportunity Employment Zone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovation Manufacturing Imagination & Technology (IMIT) tax incentives for small to medium sized employment condominiums • Tax incentives for solar power generation to feed into the existing Metrolinx battery storage facility
Green and Open Space Improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion of Metrolinx rail corridor ROW for multi-use path development
Weston Road: A Vibrant, Complete Main Street	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible zoning to allow for a variety of retail and commercial uses • City support in expediting patio and signage permit applications • Improvements of laneways to allow for more visitor parking to support the businesses • Improved streetscaping, placement of street furniture • Support of special events and allowing for road closures for special events and festivals.

Financial Considerations

A high level financial analysis was completed for the residential components. Utilizing data from Urbanation for average sales and the Altus Cost Guide for average costing, an initial feasibility financial analysis was completed. Given current market rates and costing, residential developments are financially viable for a private sector developer to implement.

Property Statistics

Property Type	Gross Floor Area	Saleable/Rentable Area	Efficiency	# of Units	1 Bedroom (Average Size 650 sf)	2 Bedroom (Average Size 905sf)	3+ Bedroom (Average size 1,200 sf)	Number of Residents (Assume 1.75 per Unit)
High Rise Condo	3,000,000	2,400,000	0.8	3,057	1,846	1,011	200	5,349
Mid Rise Condo	1,500,000	1,125,000	0.75	1,433	865	474	94	2,507
High Rise Rental	1,000,000	800,000	0.8	1,019	615	337	67	1,783
Mid Rise Rental	600,000	450,000	0.75	573	346	189	38	1,003
Total	6,100,000	4,775,000		6,082	3,673	2,011	398	10,643

Costing Statistics

Property Type	Hard Cost Per Square Foot	Soft Costs (50% of Hard Assumed)	Land Value (\$/Gross Floor Area)	Total Project Costs (\$ per Gross Floor Area)	Total Project Costs
High Rise Condo	260	130	80	470	1,410,000,000
Mid Rise Condo	250	125	80	455	682,500,000
High Rise Rental	250	125	80	455	455,000,000
Mid Rise Rental	240	120	80	440	264,000,000
Total					2,811,500,000

Returns Summary

Property Type	Blended Sales Price (\$ psf)	Blended 'Rents (\$ psf Monthly)	Market Value	Profit	Return on Total Costs
High Rise Condo	675		1,620,000,000	210,000,000	15%
Mid Rise Condo	700		787,500,000	105,000,000	15%
High Rise Rental		3	480,000,000	25,000,000	5%
Mid Rise Rental		3	270,000,000	6,000,000	2%
Total			3,157,500,000	346,000,000	12%

Conclusion

The Mount Dennis community is going to welcome change over the coming years. Major transit expansions coupled with demographic and living choices that are increasing pressure on housing supply close to the downtown Toronto employment hub will make Mount Dennis an attractive community for more Torontonians. We think these 'pressures' should provide more hope than concern.

By providing this report to the community, our hope is that we have presented some tools and knowledge to help define this change. Local residents can use the ideas in the report to advocate for change to their city councillor, local city planners and property owners.

Mount Dennis can be a greener, more vibrant, more inclusive community that more people can be proud to call home.

