



THE STATE OF BUSINESS IN MT. DENNIS

Disinvestment & Gentrification in Toronto's Inner-Suburbs

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1. Introduction



This report documents findings from research on a commercial street in a low-income Priority Neighbourhood in one of Toronto's inner suburbs. Formerly a manufacturing hub and predominantly Anglo working class community, Mt. Dennis is now a disinvested immigrant reception area, experiencing some of the lowest commercial rents in the city, and struggling with high storefront turnover and vacancy rates, low average sales volume of local businesses, and a poor and under-employed residential population.

Like in many North American cities, such inner suburban neighbourhoods form a ring of poverty, particularly working poverty, surrounding the more elite downtown core (Metcalf Foundation 2012). They are also subject to racialized representations of crime and violence so often associated with marginality and precarity, and to the intense police surveillance that commonly results. At the same time, Mt. Dennis is the site of considerable redevelopment pressure related to planned public transit expansion and competing agendas for the former Kodak manufacturing lands adjacent to the neighbourhood.

The research was designed to explore a fundamental challenge facing economic development planning—how to support small businesses providing affordable goods and services in low-income neighbourhoods, including how to furnish protections against the displacement pressures that are likely to accompany redevelopment; how, in other words, to bring improvements geared toward generating a wider social mix without excessively displacing existing businesses and the residents they serve.

That objective requires investigating experiences and perspectives of small businesses, changes in a neighbourhood's commercial structure over time, and the visions and procedures currently pursued in redevelopment planning.

A fundamental point of departure for this work is the premise that low-income commercial streets have key roles to play in sustaining the social and economic life of disinvested, inner-suburban neighbourhoods. By providing affordable goods and services adapted to the needs of new immigrant populations, they help make the city accessible to marginalized groups who, like anyone else, have to buy groceries and medicines, but also require a wider range of personal services—for example laundry and internet—than middle class households where social reproduction is typically handled inside the home (Mazer and Rankin 2010).

But low-income commercial streets in inner suburban neighbourhoods are also sites of risk and vulnerability that raise important questions about racialized aspects of urban spatial inequality. The vulnerabilities become increasingly pronounced in the context of the extraordinary population growth predicted for Toronto (20% by the year 2031, City of Toronto 2010a), creating the conditions where even the under-served and impoverished inner suburbs can anticipate redevelopment pressure. At the same time, discourses of 'multiculturalism' tend to quell public and scholarly deliberation over the relationship between poverty, race and gentrification (Bannerji 2000, Galabuzzi 2007, Gosine and Teelucksingh 2008). Now is thus a crucial time to investigate the planning processes through which visions about suburban futures are being articulated, as well as to think about how to mitigate the inevitable displacement pressures.

Turning to recent urban research offers some helpful analytical tools, but scholarship on the iconic urban form of the commercial street is surprisingly scant. The available literature tends to concentrate on economic revitalization in downtown districts. In planning and policy circles, promotion of vibrant shopping streets is widely understood to be a basic staple of "creative city planning" (Peck 2011, McCann 2007, McLean 2010). By this logic, business associations should be supported in staging festivals, investing in façade improvements, battling graffiti, and marketing a pronounced identity that might attract "creative" people doing innovative work. The expectation is that attracting the "creative class" will in turn reinvigorate neighbourhood-based business, not to mention the local tax base, generating benefits that will trickle-down to others and help build a livable, inclusive urban village (McCann 2007, Barnes et al. 2006, Zukin 2009). This view gets some support from recent sociological studies emphasizing local shops and markets as spaces of social encounter, where people forge connections, differences are mediated and mutual dependencies are established (Watson 2009, Stillerman 2006). And also from the literature on ethnic entrepreneurship, where the old emphasis on insular ethnic enclaves is giving way to work on multicultural districts that are marketed as destinations for leisure and consumption (Shaw, Bagwell and Karmowska 2004, Aytar and Rath 2012).

An extensive literature on gentrification attends to the class dynamics of neighbourhood change, which is missing from most scholarship on shopping streets. A neighbourhood might see changes in the direction of more and more

“gentry”—highly educated, highly skilled, highly paid middle and elite classes—who start to move in, fix it up, drive up property values, making it hard for the people who are already living there—working-class people, low-income people, newly immigrated people—to stay. Reformulating “revitalization” as “gentrification” effectively directs attention to the perspectives of those who are excluded from, or displaced by, such upscaling processes (Slater 2006).

This literature provides some useful analytical tools, like the notion of displacement pressure, which refers to situations where neighborhood upscaling starts to make the places people are used to frequenting cease to be welcoming, meaningful or livable; under these circumstances, people feel pressure to move, rather than wait for the inevitable (Marcuse 1985). But the focus in the gentrification literature has mostly been on residential aspects, as well as on mega projects like waterfront redevelopments that involve major overhaul of entire neighbourhoods by corporate and finance capital (Hackworth and Smith 2001). The commercial street and the experience of business owners have been largely overlooked. Interjecting a class politics is particularly important in the case of commercial streets, which are popularly imagined as the terrain of an abstract, competitive market. Doing so foregrounds the human decision making behind the way markets are organized, thus opening up possibilities to decide what kind of commercial spaces might contribute to forging the “just city.”

Considerations of race are also largely absent in the literatures on both gentrification and shopping streets. Regarding commercial space in particular, urban geographers have shown how celebrations of “diversity” and “multiculturalism” take the form of “ethnic packaging” and neighbourhood branding that work to turn ethno-cultural difference into a commodity (Hackworth and Rekers 2005, Catungal and Leslie 2009, Goonewardena and Kipfer 2005). Such practices are evident in our research, but there are other ways in which structural racism is revealed as crucial to understanding the dynamics of power in competing agendas for Toronto’s inner suburbs—including the stigmatization of commercial spaces oriented toward the needs of low-income, racialized immigrants; histories of investment and disinvestment allowing for the institutionalization of white privilege; and the lack of attention given to implications of redevelopment planning for the racialized poor.

OBJECTIVES

This research explores the challenges and opportunities faced by small, independently owned businesses in Mt. Dennis, and in so doing it probes the relationship of the commercial street to wider dynamics of investment and disinvestment and patterns of spatial inequality. The research has the following specific objectives:

- **to document historical patterns of change in neighbourhood commercial structure;**
- **to investigate the challenges and opportunities that businesses face, and the range of economic and social practices in which they engage;**
- **to identify the strategies for economic development currently pursued by institutionalized stakeholders.**

Through these specific empirical objectives, the study aims to [a] identify the commercial street as a key terrain of disinvestment and gentrification and [b] support the efforts of local collaborators to create opportunities for businesses providing affordable goods and services.



ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

The following section of the report (Section 2) begins with a discussion of the research design—site selection, research methods, and research collaborations. Section 3 provides contextual background on Mt. Dennis, emphasizing how the neighbourhood and commercial street have evolved in relationship to wider-scale political-economic dynamics in Toronto and beyond. Section 4 explores competing visions for the redevelopment of Mt. Dennis and the adjacent Weston neighbourhood, paying particular attention to shared representations of the commercial street as an empty and deficient space, and shared aspirations for gentrification. Section 5 then outlines key themes arising from the qualitative and quantitative research on the Mt. Dennis commercial street—namely, structural

challenges facing small businesses, local assets and vitalities, and vulnerabilities to displacement pressure as and when neighbourhood revitalization proceeds. The report concludes by revisiting the central question—is gentrification of disinvested commercial streets possible without displacement?—and by posing some considerations for mitigating the displacement pressures that are likely to accompany redevelopment.



2. Research Design



The objectives of this research require talking with local business owners. Gaining access to this constituency was not a straightforward proposition given the numbers of new immigrants for whom English is not the first language and a climate of suspicion and apprehensiveness toward institutionalized authority. In order to facilitate access to business owners, as well as to hold the research accountable to local economic development efforts, a collaborative research design was developed involving community-based participation.

Our team formed a collaboration with another university-based research project on “Anti-Poverty, Community Organizing and Learning” (APCOL 2012), which had partnered with the Action for Neighborhood Change office in Mt. Dennis via its trustee organization, Social Planning Toronto. Action for Neighborhood Change is a program developed by the United Way as part of its Priority Neighborhood strategy; the United Way funds local ANC offices for the purpose of developing local capacity for neighborhood revitalization.

APCOL sought to study the conditions in which youth become anti-poverty activists in their neighbourhoods; ANC–Mt. Dennis sought to demystify and strengthen the fraught relationship between youth and businesses in Mt. Dennis; our research helped to broker these goals by

constituting a team of community-based researchers—youth residents of the area’s social housing and low rent apartment buildings.

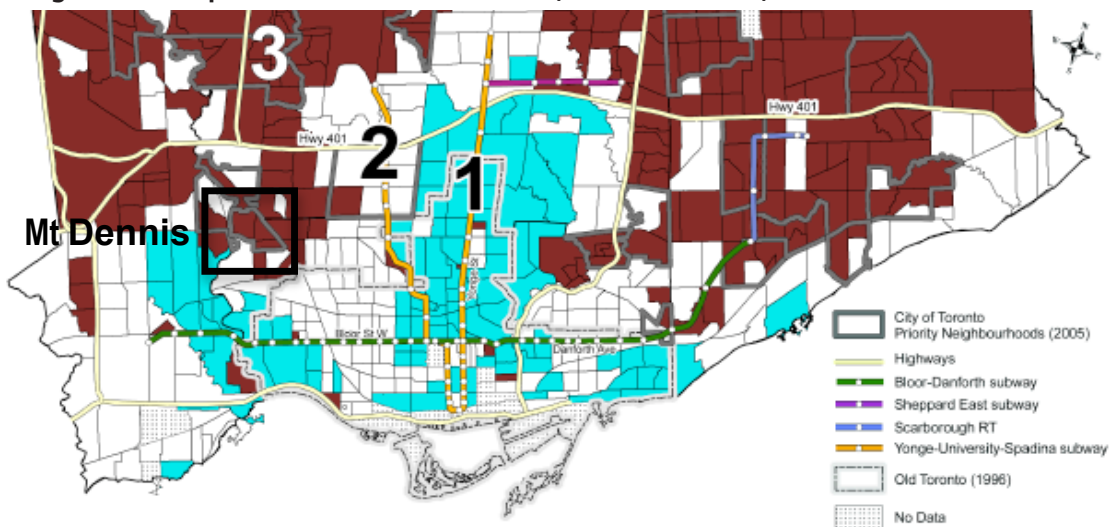
The community-based researchers formed a steering committee to vet research instruments, partner with us to conduct interviews and surveys with business owners, and contribute to analysis and debrief meetings. They also went on to organize local businesses as we discuss later.

In the interviews and surveys, the community-based researchers brokered our access to shopkeepers and helped us ask our questions in a way that did not immediately produce familiar culture-of-poverty tropes. In our analysis, they formed a community of inquiry with us, through which key analytical themes were first articulated in the context of discussions about the interviews. For APCOL the community-based researchers became research subjects informing another set of interviews about what catalyzes youth activism.

SITE SELECTION

The Mt. Dennis neighbourhood was selected for the following reasons. First, most studies of neighbourhood change, redevelopment, and gentrification concentrate in downtown, or City 1 in the now-famous “Three Cities” formulation (Hulchanski 2010, see Figure 1). These studies

Figure 1: A map of Three Cities in Toronto (Hulchanski 2010)



Change in the Census Tract Average Individual Income as a Percentage of the Toronto CMA Average, 1970-2005

City #1
 Increase of 20% or More
 100 Census Tracts, 20% of City

City #2
 Increase or Decrease
 is Less than 20%
 208 Census Tracts, 40% of City

City #3
 Decrease of 20% or More
 206 Census Tracts, 40% of City

commonly take the tastes and desires of the middle class as the primary object of research. Our research took a different approach, aiming to concentrate on areas that have not gentrified, but in which redevelopment planning is well underway, to generate a picture of what forms of small independent retail activities endure or flourish in less affluent areas. Mt. Dennis lies in City 3, an inner-suburban ring surrounding the wealthier and well-served downtown core; it is facing significant revitalization opportunities associated with major transit developments and debates over the future of adjacent, vacant employment lands.

Second, the pre-existing partnership between ANC–Mt. Dennis and the APCOL research project on youth engagement in anti-poverty organizing provided an opportunity to develop a participatory research design that would enhance our access to business owners. This partnership would also create a community of inquiry that would generate better research instruments and more robust results, while also supporting longer-term mobilization for community economic development.

RESEARCH METHODS

The main research method is semi-structured interviews with local business owners in the Mt. Dennis commercial strip—Weston Road bounded by Jane Street to the north and Humber Blvd to the south. The strip, as defined in this report, encompasses but extends beyond the Mt. Dennis BIA, to capture a concentration of businesses north of the BIA boundary but still inside the Mt. Dennis

neighborhood, where vacancy rates are in fact lower than inside the BIA. In Fall 2011, researchers from the University of Toronto and the community-based researchers collaboratively conducted 25 in-depth interviews with business owners. The interview length was 30-60 minutes. Businesses were selected to cover as evenly as possible (given the constraints of recruiting participants) the four sectors that predominate on neighborhood commercial streets: retail and servicing, food retail, personal services, and business and financial services. We also sought variation in ownership structure (aiming to include some franchises and chain stores in addition to independent stores that predominate on the strip); we sought to include long-term business owners (over 10 years in operation), as well as a key "anchor" business that has long-term, city-wide recognition and a trajectory of growth and expansion. Initial selections across the four sectors were made randomly, based on a combination of our quantitative data and an inventory of storefronts conducted by research assistants. In cases where we could not meet the target representation on a random basis (due to challenges of recruitment), we sought input from the ANC-Mt. Dennis office in identifying a suitable substitute; upon considering the quantitative data on distribution of businesses sector-wise (see Figure 16), we also expanded the proportion of interviews in the personal services sector, to reflect its relative predominance on the street today (see Figure 3). The sample strategy was developed based on a target of 20 businesses; an additional five were included in order to expand the sample of immigrant-owned, independent stores whose experience we sought to highlight in the report.

Figure 2: Business interview sample by sector



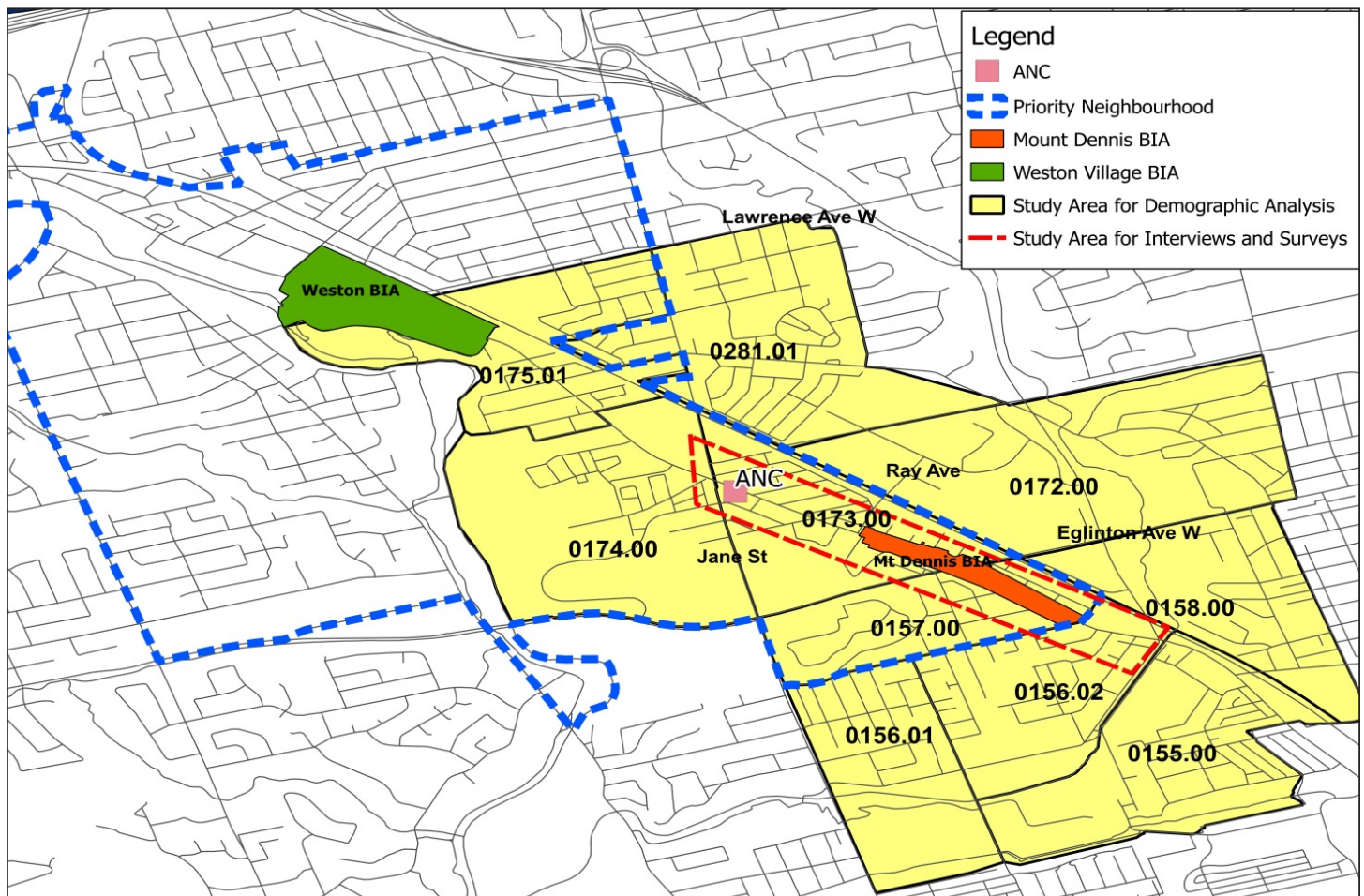
The business interview data was collaboratively analyzed by the full research team, through a series of Thursday evening meetings at the ANC office in Mt. Dennis. Subsequently, the researchers conducted a short survey on demographic and business characteristics with 48 business owners within the same boundary. The business interviews and surveys were bookended with two rounds of “key informant interviews” (18 interviews over summer 2011 and summer 2012) with individuals active in redevelopment planning. The researchers complemented these interviews with media research and policy document reviews. Interview schedules and survey questions can be found in Appendices 1 and 2. In the report we quote excerpts of these interviews; all quoted interviews were recorded and transcribed in full. In order to protect anonymity of research participants, identifying information has been removed.

Commercial structure was assessed through quantitative analysis of the following data: demographic and socio-

economic aspects of Statistics Canada Census Data from 1971 to 2006; property value data from Property Assessment Rolls available at City Hall; and business entries in Might’s Street Directory and Canada Business Data. The codes used to categorize businesses are found in Appendix 3.

For census data, we were aided by ANC-Mt. Dennis in deciding the boundaries of the Mt. Dennis neighbourhood. For this study the boundaries were based on a determination of the residential areas from which people come to shop and socialize on Weston Road, as shown in yellow in Figure 3. The selected census tracts include: 155.00, 156.01, 156.02, 157.00, 158.00, 172.00, 173.00, 174.00, 175.01, and 281.01. This boundary differs from that of the Weston-Mt. Dennis Priority Neighbourhood (bounded with blue dot lines in Figure 3), which only partially overlaps the neighbourhood boundary as defined for this research. For the demographic analysis, we analyzed the census data from 1971 to 2006. Census Data for 2011, the most recent year the census was

Figure 3: Mt. Dennis neighbourhood boundary for study

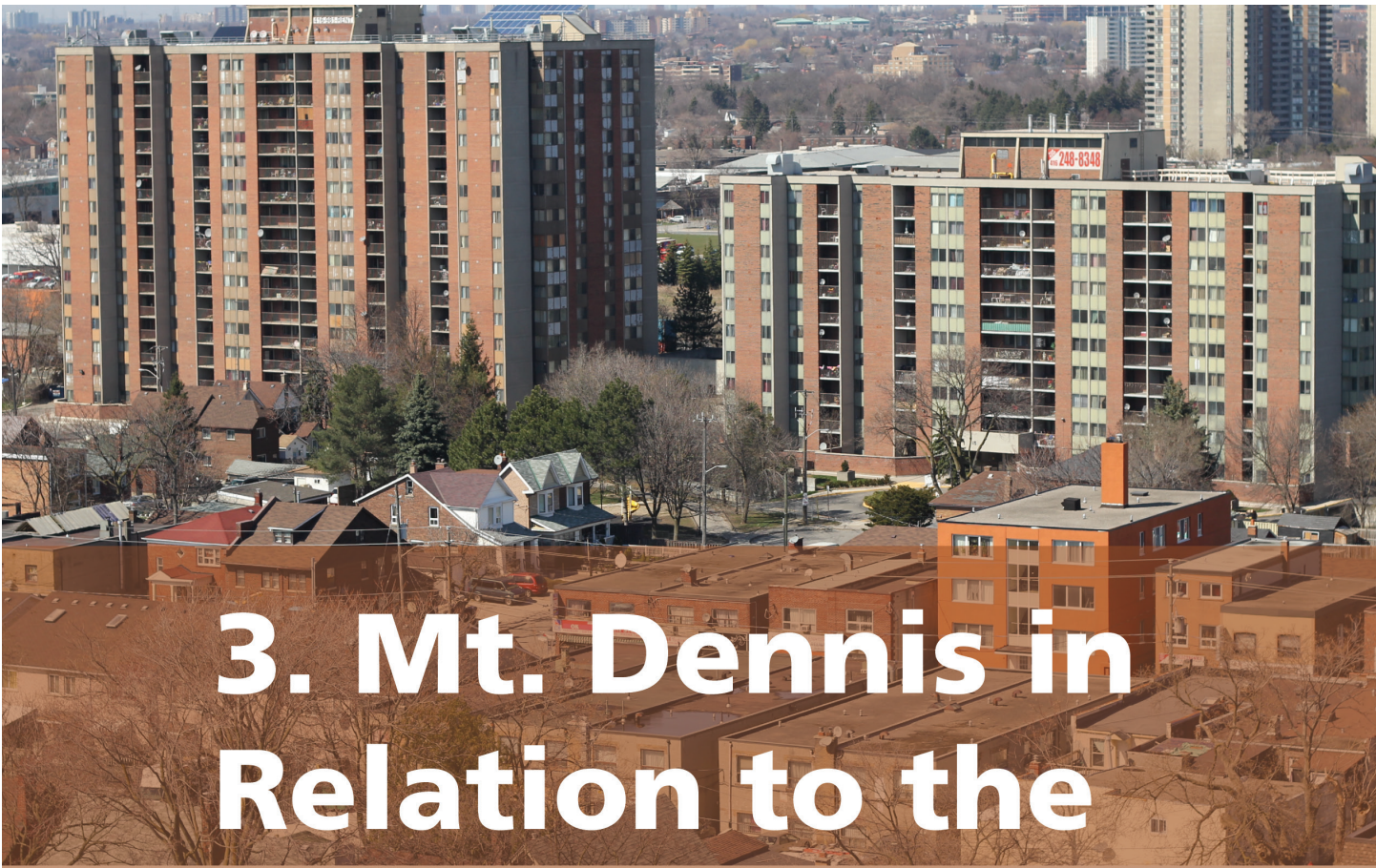


conducted by Statistics Canada, was not publicly available when the demographic analysis was conducted in late 2011. As of summer 2012, some population data have been made available, but the detailed dataset will not be available until 2013. Further, the accuracy and comparability of the 2011 data still remain in question due to the loss of the mandatory long-form census.

Quantitative commercial data was compiled from individual business and property information registered in *Might's Street Directory*, *Canada Business Data*, and *Property Assessment Rolls*. For this purpose, we adopted the boundaries of the Mt. Dennis BIA, from Lambton Avenue to Ray Avenue, also shown in Figure 3. The BIA occupies a smaller section of Weston Road than is popularly understood to constitute “Mt. Dennis”, or, “the West End”, as the neighbourhood is popularly called by new immigrant residents (key informant interview, May 23 2012). Our community-based collaborators urged us to encompass the northern section of Weston Road –the section not covered by the BIA— in our interviews (from Ray Avenue to Jane Street in Figure 3), after the time-consuming data gathering from property assessment rolls had already been completed.

For the property value analysis, the years 2001, 2005 and 2008 were chosen because of the comparability of datasets. The 2008 data is the most current data available, while the 2001 data is the comparable data set compiled after the property tax reform in 1998. For the commercial sector analysis, 10-year intervals were investigated from 1950 to 2010; 2010 was the year for which the most recent data was available from *Canada Business Data*. Taking 10-year intervals from 1950 allowed us to track changes in commercial structure since the days when manufacturing used to thrive in the suburban areas of Toronto.

Undoubtedly, commercial activities in Mt. Dennis (or any other neighbourhood for that matter) occur in a variety of spaces, not only the commercial street itself. Home-based businesses, vending, and social enterprises associated with the activities of the Learning Enrichment Foundation (a non-profit organization located on Weston Road), among others, are important sites of commercial activity that warrant further research but are outside the scope of the present study.



3. Mt. Dennis in Relation to the City & the World



CONTEMPORARY NEIGHBOURHOOD CHARACTERISTICS

Commercial streets flank neighbourhoods throughout the city of Toronto—a spatial pattern that is one of Toronto’s characteristic features (Lorinc 2005). Though big box retailers now pervade the urban fabric (Hernandez and Jones 2005, Parlette and Cowen 2010), commercial streets remain important to the life of neighbourhoods, providing a range of small, often independent stores, public amenities and social services. In the inner suburbs—where new immigrant populations and poverty are concentrated—commercial streets play a key role in “incubating” low-margin, small-scale business start-ups and in providing affordable goods and services. At the same time businesses in these neighbourhoods face significant challenges related to trends that extend far beyond the street itself.

Mt. Dennis lies within the poorest provincial riding in Ontario; 2006 average income was \$23,828, with 28.6% of households falling below the low-income cut off. Fifty-seven percent of the population is foreign-born, and Mt. Dennis is known as an immigrant “landing” area, with well-worn paths from East Africa, Southeast Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America. These paths lead to the notoriously underserved high-rise apartment buildings and illegal storefront conversions, where, according to our community-based collaborators, it is possible to live “off the grid” without proof of residency or credit history.

The incidence of violent crime is high relative to the city average, as is sensationalized media reporting; in 2005 Toronto Police 12 division initiated a practice of “carding” in Mt. Dennis, designed to generate a massive database on area youth for “investigative purposes” (Toronto Star March 2012); the main commercial thoroughfare of Weston Road is the primary site of both the criminal and police activity.

Contemporary neighbourhood characteristics can be further specified as follows:

[a] Prevalence of poverty

The 2006 average individual income of \$24,493 was lower than the average for City #3 in the Three-Cities formulation, that is, lower than the average for the disinvested inner-suburban region of the Toronto Metropolitan area, which was \$26,690 (Hulchanski 2010). The gap between average individual income in Mt. Dennis and the city as a



Photo 1: Neighbourhood diversity reflected in businesses



Photo 2: Businesses catering to immigrant populations

whole has been increasing since 1980 (Figure 4), which is also, not coincidentally, the same period in which the number of manufacturing jobs held by Mt. Dennis residents started to fall significantly (Figure 5).

Seventeen percent of families in Mt. Dennis are relying on government transfer payments (such as social assistance) as a main source of income, compared to 8.6% of families citywide. Low-Income Cut Off (LICO) rates for Mt. Dennis are 28.6% (before-tax) and 21.5% (after-tax); both of these percentages are higher than citywide rates (20.6% and 15.6%). The LICO becomes as high as 57% (before-tax) and 47% (after-tax) for those individuals who do not belong to “economic families” (persons living alone without any family members). The percentage of lone-parent families in Mt. Dennis is 33% (86% of which are female parents), exceeding the city’s average of 20%.

The majority of residents are renters living in apartments (54.6%, which is higher than the city rate of 45.6%); average rent has increased from \$672 in 1996 to \$833 in 2006. An increasing portion of both renters and homeowners are

Figure 5: Mt. Dennis residents in manufacturing jobs

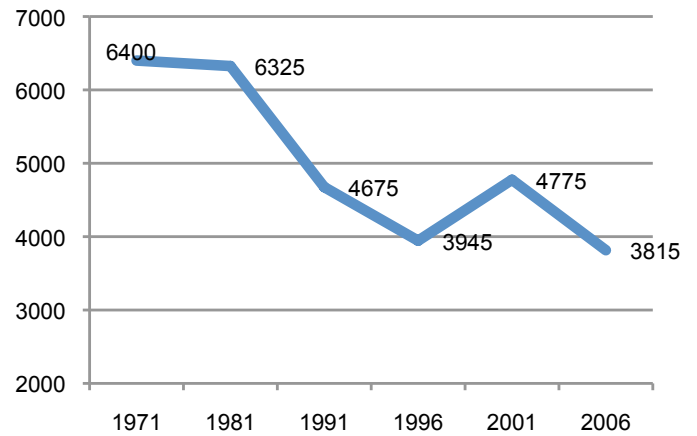


Figure 4: Average individual income

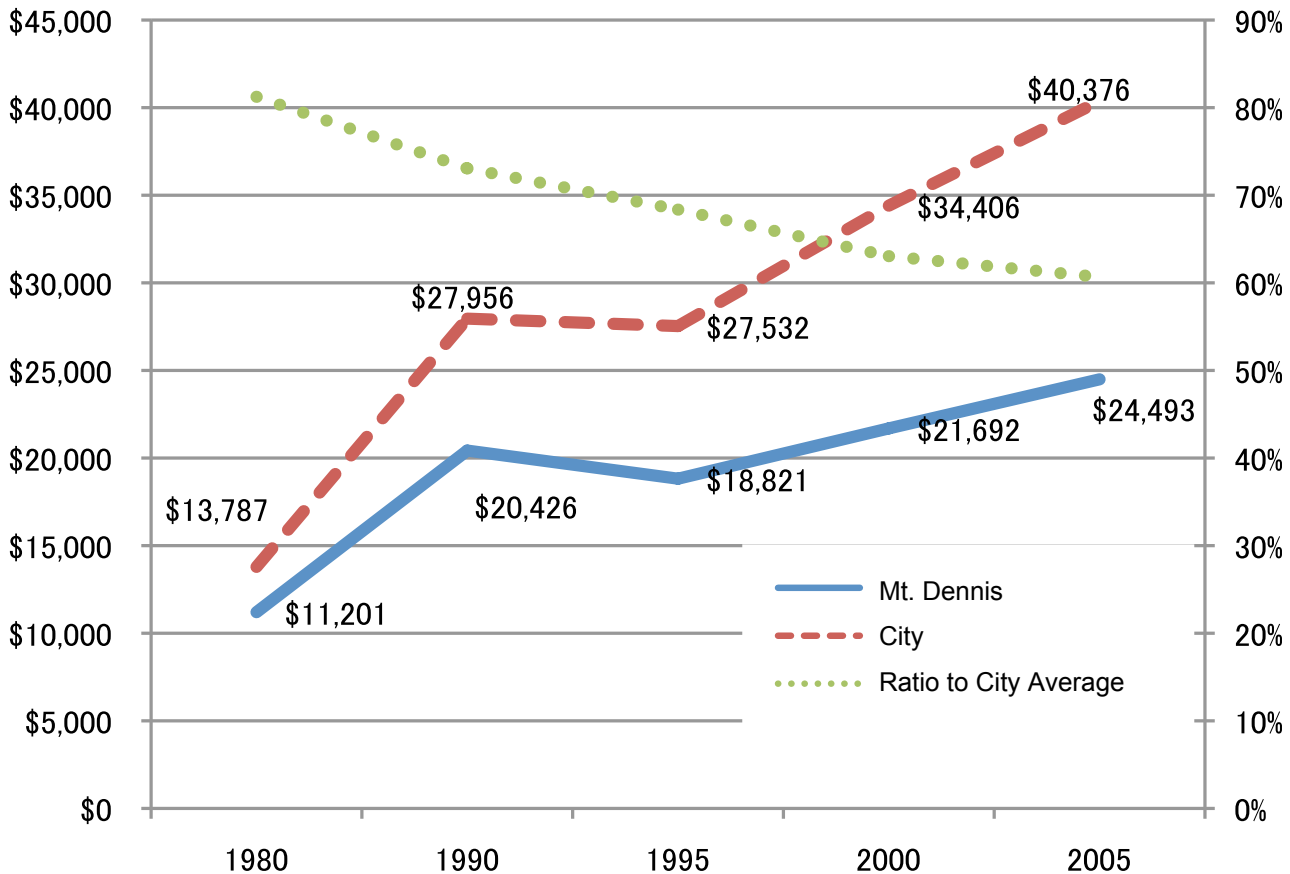
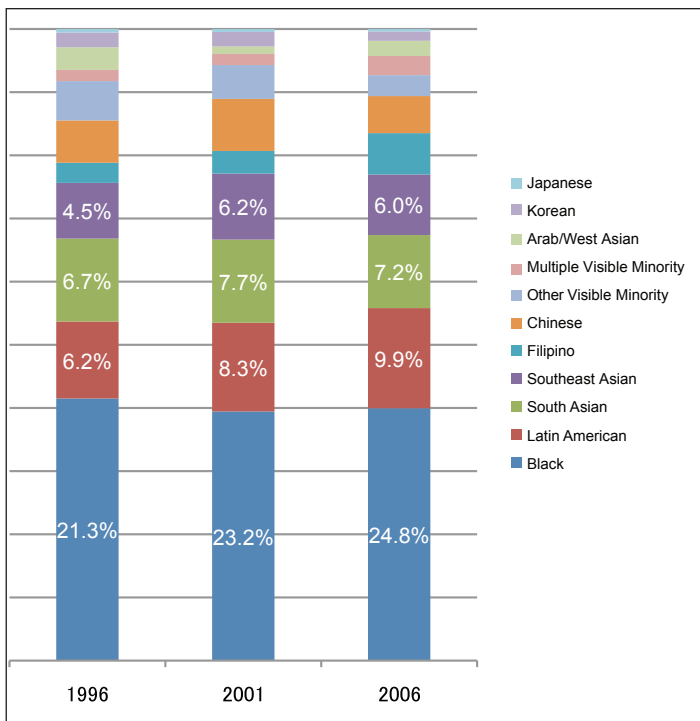


Table 1: Immigration*

Immigrant		Recent immigrant	
1996		1996	
1 Jamaica	11.9%	1 Vietnam	9.9%
2 Vietnam	8.1%	2 Jamaica	9.5%
3 Guyana	7.5%	3 Somalia	9.2%
4 Italy	7.5%	4 Guyana	8.9%
5 Portugal	6.6%	5 El Salvador	5.4%
2006		2006	
1 Jamaica	11.4%	1 Philippines	8.2%
2 Vietnam	9.8%	2 Jamaica	7.7%
3 Portugal	9.6%	3 Vietnam	4.5%
4 Philippines	5.3%	4 Pakistan	4.2%
5 Italy	5.0%	5 Afghanistan	3.7%

*Immigrant denotes all immigrants; recent immigrant denotes those who arrived in Canada less than five years ago (after 2001, in relation to the 2006 data).

Figure 6: Visible minorities in Mt. Dennis



facing housing unaffordability, wherein they spend 30% or more of household income on shelter cost: 47.7% of renter households and 37.5% of homeowner households struggle to pay their housing costs each month. Both figures are higher than the city rates (46.6% and 27.7% for renters and homeowners). The trajectory of rent increases and income declines in Mt. Dennis corresponds to the findings of the United Way’s Vertical Poverty report on Toronto’s inner-suburban neighbourhoods more generally (2011).

Between 2001 and 2006, unemployment rates in Mt. Dennis increased from 9.4% to 10.3%, higher than the city rate of 7.6%. In particular, unemployment rates within the growing youth population (15-25 years old) increased to 18.5% in 2006—higher than the city’s 16.6%. Youth unemployment rates vary widely among the 10 Census Tracts (CTs) that comprise the neighbourhood, from 6.8% to 28.8%.

[b] Prevalence of new immigrants and racialized minorities.

From 1996 to 2006, the immigrant population in Mt. Dennis increased by 11.5% (to 23,405 from 20,995), outpacing the overall neighbourhood population increase of 5%. In 2006, the immigrant population accounted for 57.1% of the total population.

As Table 1 demonstrates, the percentage of Jamaican-, Vietnam- and Philippines-born immigrants has increased from 1996-2006. Of all immigrants in the area, 75% came to Canada after 1981, 24% between 1981 and 1990, and 35% between 1991 and 2000. A majority of those immigrants are first generation (72%). Fifty percent of the total population speaks languages other than English as a mother tongue.

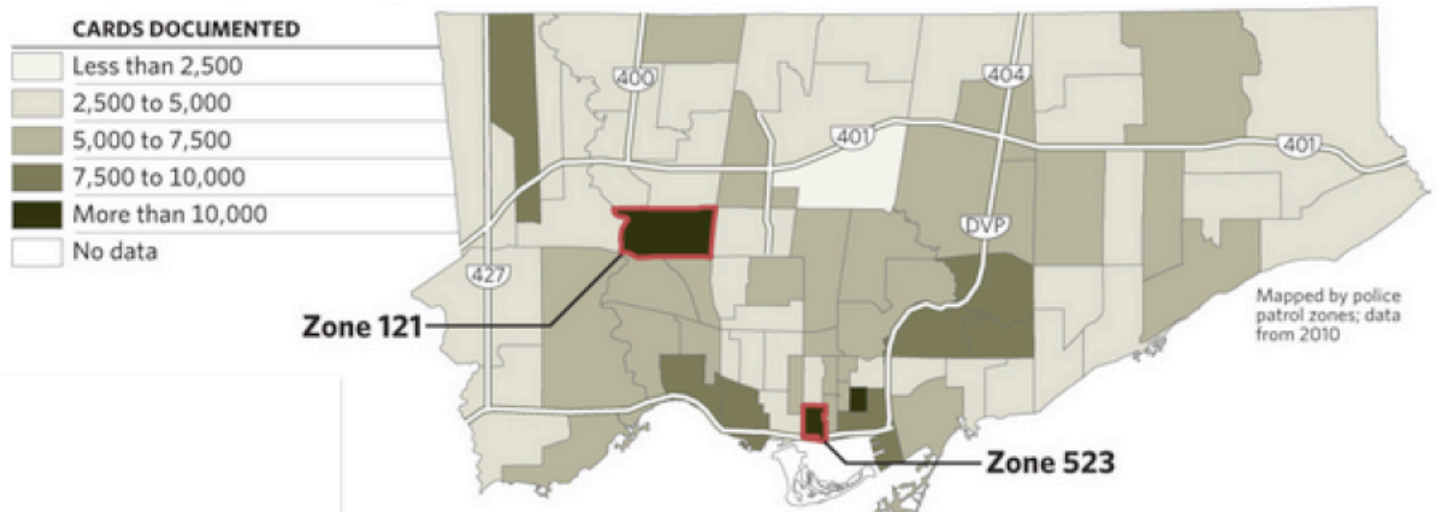
Figure 6 shows the percentage of the population belonging to “visible minority” categories. In Mt. Dennis, 62% of residents (about 3 in 5) belong to visible minority groups; this is higher than the City proportion (47%).

[c] Dual presence of crime and police

Mt. Dennis was the epicenter of the infamous 2006 “summer of the gun” in Toronto; six murders were committed in 6 months, allegedly by gangs and youth on Weston Road.

According to a report released by the Learning Enrichment Foundation (2012), the Toronto Star’s interactive map of police criminal charges in 2009 and 2010 shows Mt. Dennis

Figure 7: The two most carded areas in 2010 (Mt. Dennis falls within Patrol Zone 121, Toronto Star 2012)



and adjacent Weston as having among the highest in city, with a particularly high number of violent crimes. By the Toronto Star’s count, there have been 34 homicides in Mt. Dennis since 2005 and many of the victims have been racialized youth (Toronto Star 2012).

The Toronto Police initiated its Toronto Anti-Violence Intervention Strategy (TAVIS) in Division 12, which encompasses Mt. Dennis and Weston neighborhoods, following the summer murders of 2006. TAVIS has entailed transferring dozens of “borrowed officers” from less crime-intensive divisions and undertaking a practice of intensive “carding”, or filing document cards with information on people stopped and questioned in targeted patrol zones. Mt. Dennis witnessed a 450% increase in the number of cards from 2008 to 2009; its designated zone 121, which includes parts of Mt. Dennis, has been the most heavily carded area in the city (Toronto Star 2012).

MANUFACTURING HISTORY

Mt. Dennis’s current struggle with poverty and crime is connected to a broader history of demographic changes, economic restructuring, and spatial shifts. The original immigrant settlement of Mt. Dennis followed the establishment of a Kodak manufacturing plant in early 1917; ¹Kodak had established a plant in downtown Toronto several years earlier, shifting from the United State to Canada in order to escape the Sherman Anti-Trust Act and its provisions against monopolies (Wash. & Lee L. Rev 1988).

When Kodak moved to the more spacious suburbs, as was the case with other factories at that time, it catalyzed



Photo 3: A combination of low rise commercial and residential, with the Weston road cut shown in the foreground.



Photo 4: Kodak Factory ,1930 (Toronto Archives)

¹As for much of metropolitan Toronto, land in the Mt. Dennis area had been surrendered to the Crown by the Mississauga of the New Credit First Nation in 1806, without a proper treaty.

the development of an unplanned blue-collar suburb comprised of self-built worker housing and a nearby commercial street catering to the needs of resident factory workers (Harris 1999).

Kodak also built homes for 2,500 workers and engaged in paternalist, Fordist modes of employee management: on-site recreational facilities, sports teams, summer jobs for employees' children, and of course middle-income wages (Mount Dennis Community Association 2007). Historical sources and key informant interviews attest to the vitality of the commercial street during this era, especially the lunch-hour traffic that guaranteed patronage of local retail shops and food services. Kodak employed 3,500 people for nearly 90 years before downsizing dramatically to 320 employees in the early 1990s, then closing completely in 2006. Left behind were 53-acres of vacant "employment land" that is now the focus of intensive redevelopment planning.

The Kodak plant closure was connected to globalized flows of capital and technology, most immediately to the emergence of digital photographic technologies. Like the closure of other manufacturing establishments in Toronto's north-western inner suburbs (Canada Cycle & Motor Co. Ltd., Dominion Bridge Company, Moffat Stoves, Conn-Smythe Sand and Gravel, among others), it was also related more generally to the movement of industrial production from cities in advanced capitalist countries to lower-waged regions of the world. The global reorganization of North American-based manufacturing from the 1970s, in turn, contributed to the emergence of a service-oriented economy in Toronto (and other North American cities), characterized by a proliferation of low-wage, low-skilled jobs inadequate to sustain blue-collar, middle-class lifestyles.

These economic transitions manifested in pronounced spatial inequalities, with high-wage professionals concentrating downtown and low-wage, under-employed service workers moving increasingly to the inner suburbs. The spatial polarization reflects long-term city planning decisions, particularly the construction of low-rent apartment towers in the inner suburbs, just as downtown property value increases had started to escalate (Walks 2001, Parlette and Cowe 2011). Shifts in immigration policy have also played a key role in changing the demographic character of Mt. Dennis and other inner-suburban communities in Toronto. Workers settling the area in pursuit of blue collar manufacturing jobs had been primarily British immigrants arriving around the turn of the century, and these families still can be found in the single-family housing on the side

streets of Mt. Dennis. Since the 1960s, the primary source countries for Canadian immigrants shifted from Europe to Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and Central and South America (Toronto received 44% of all arrivals to Canada in 2001 and 45% in 2006; Lo 2009). Racism in labor markets, combined with failure of Canadian employers to recognize foreign credentials, has resulted in a concentration of new immigrants in low-income, often under-the-table service jobs, in low-rent, inner-suburban areas of the city. It is these populations that predominate in the high-rise social housing and low-end apartment towers.

Mt. Dennis, in other words, is not a ghetto, in the American sense; it is not an inner-city zone of extreme racial segregation, marginality and abandonment by state functions. It bears more resemblance to the French Banlieue—the impoverished outskirts of the city where there are high concentrations of social housing, multi-ethnic populations, and a strong state presence, albeit one that, as we discuss in the next section, is oriented to facilitating privatized, market-led interventions as much as providing basic needs (Walks and Borne 2006, Waquant 2007).

STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN RETAIL

Changes on Mt. Dennis's commercial strip are related to the specific loss of the Kodak manufacturing plant and the blue-collar middle-class incomes it guaranteed. These shifts also reflect wider structural changes in the retail sector as a whole, as has been documented by research at Ryerson University's Centre for the Study of Commercial Activity (CSCA; Doucet 2000, Hernandez and Jones 2005). This work documents the phenomenon of "retail suburbanization", where suburban expansion and tax incentives have created the conditions for large-format or big-box retailing. Under these conditions, big box retailers like Walmart can manage logistics, control inventory, target marketing, and organize labor in a manner that dramatically expands the scale of retail operations. We have not witnessed the "death of the commercial street" in Toronto; Doucet (2000) identified 200 commercial strips with 18,000 shops in 2000, and a CSCA study reveals that the retail sector has grown since 2001 by 10% (Simmons 2012). What we have witnessed is the restructuring of commercial strips—a decline in the proportion of occupied stores, a decline in retailing (especially hardware, office products, and general merchandise), and an increase in food, personal and business services. The modest growth in commercial strips is far outpaced by growth of retail power centres (93% since 2001; Sim-

mons 2012). As we investigate the specific dynamics on Weston Road in Mt. Dennis, it is important to keep in mind these changes in the retail structure of the wider Toronto region.

STATE PRESENCE

Shifts in the retail, employment, demographic and spatial structure of Toronto over the late twentieth century have resulted in a spatial mismatch between the need for and availability of social services. The City's social service infrastructure had been developed for the downtown, where poverty was concentrated; few social service agencies were operating in the formerly blue-collar, middle-class and affluent suburbs, where new immigrants and the working poor with high needs for social services currently reside (Lo 2009, Toronto Star 2009). Recognizing this spatial mismatch, the City of Toronto and United Way of Greater Toronto jointly launched the Priority Neighbourhood Strategy in 2005, a place-based approach to poverty alleviation involving all three levels of the Canadian state and numerous nongovernmental agencies. Weston–Mt. Dennis was chosen as one of the 13 Priority Neighbourhoods in 2006, on the basis of its high levels of poverty and lack of access to social services. As in other Priority Neighbourhoods, a community hub was established to coordinate services provided by government and non-governmental agencies in a “one-stop shop” facility. Part of this strategy included

establishing an Action for Neighbourhood Change office, with the goal of enhancing the capacity of area residents to contribute to neighbourhood revitalization. Our community-based research collaboration was organized through the Mt. Dennis Action for Neighbourhood Change office.

There are other ways in which the local state has a direct presence in Mt. Dennis beyond its policing functions. Most significantly for our purposes, part of the neighbourhood forms a Business Improvement Area (BIA), established in 1974 and chaired by the local city councilor and mayor of the former City of York (within whose jurisdiction Mt. Dennis fell before the 2000 amalgamation of five municipalities into the current City of Toronto). A BIA is “a public interest partnership in which business owners work with the municipal government to beautify the streetscape, support neighbourhood celebrations, and generate economic benefits” (Toronto Mayor's Economic Competitiveness Advisory Committee 2008, p.18). A mandatory levy on commercial properties furnishes a budget for neighbourhood business leaders to expend on local improvements, with opportunities for technical and financial support from the City. Most recently, an Integrated Local Labor Market Focused Planning (ILLMFP) initiative targets Mt. Dennis as a site for coordinating Provincial, City, and community agencies, as well as residents and businesses, in a strategy to support neighbourhood-specific workforce and economic development.





4. Suburban Visions & Redevelopment Planning



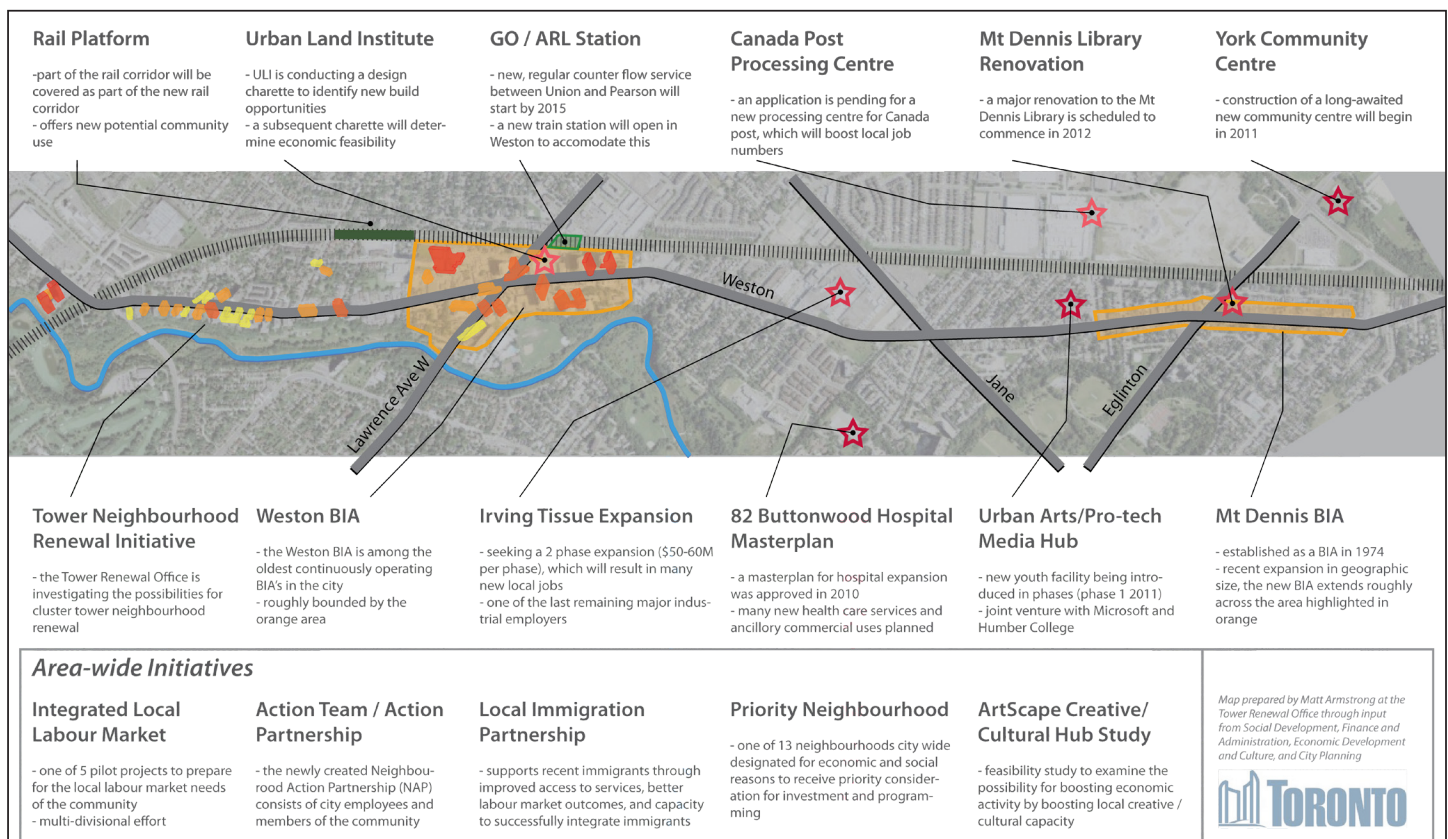
Planners, developers, ratepayers groups and community organizers in Mt. Dennis have been promoting various visions for the neighbourhood, rooted in competing understandings about the city and its inner-suburban spaces. All of these hinge fundamentally around possibilities for redeveloping the adjacent Kodak lands and constructing a “mobility hub” associated with a planned Light Rail Transit expansion along Eglinton Avenue and rail link to Toronto’s Pearson International Airport. Figure 8 depicts the City’s representation of the multiple revitalization initiatives underway in Mt. Dennis and the adjacent neighbourhood of Weston, to the North, where Weston Road continues as the main commercial thoroughfare. We have grouped these areas into the two sets of “suburban visions” discussed below as “real estate

development” and “green/cultural economy”, which denotes a combined “green” and “creative city” agenda; we do not intend to pose these as mutually exclusive and rigidly separate competing camps. Indeed, there is considerable overlap in the actors and ambitions of both, and alliances are constantly shifting. Nonetheless, an attempt at consolidating multiple redevelopment plans into analytical themes helps to extrapolate some fundamental political histories and alignments in Mt. Dennis.

REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT VISION

On the one hand, an assemblage of local city councilors, real estate and development industry experts, ratepayers’ associations, and BIAs have pursued what we call a “real estate development vision” that has had the support of the

Figure 8: Weston–Mt. Dennis revitalization initiatives (City of Toronto 2011a)



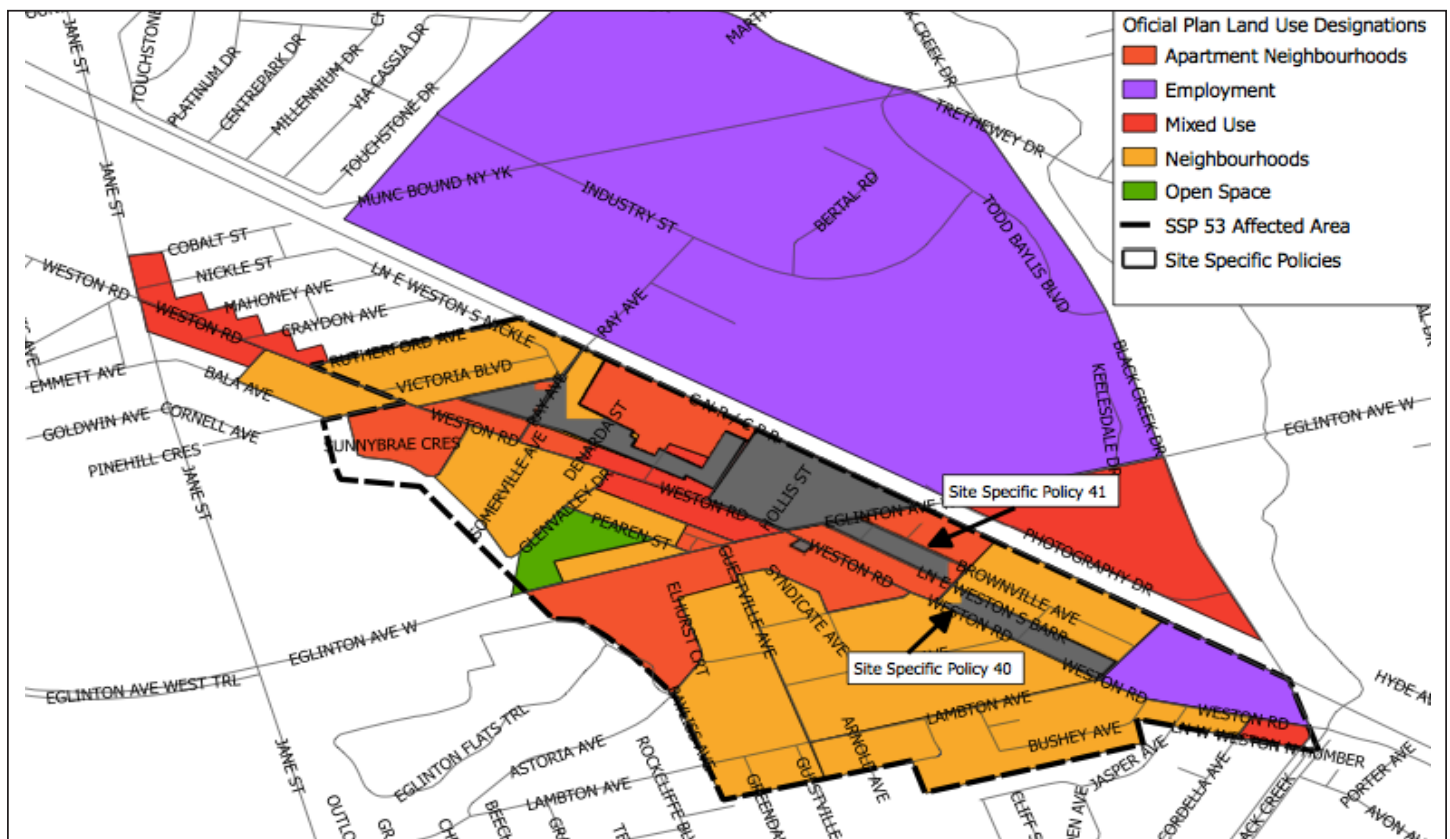
City planning function. This vision rests on the premise that the existing population in the area is inadequate—in terms of population volume and purchasing power—to support a viable commercial street. This vision is also built on the notion that if a more affluent population is attracted to the area, better businesses will follow. Overall, this planning vision promotes the ideal of a naturally evolving market (key Informant interview, July 19, 2011 & June 6, 2012).

The real estate development vision has a long legacy in Mt. Dennis, dating as far back as the early 1990s (around the time the Kodak plant was massively downsized), when the former city of York set in place key land-use designations aimed at supporting high-density residential redevelopment and intensification on Weston Road, in particular for areas south of Eglinton Avenue. The Mt. Dennis Revitalization Study (City of York 1991) and Mt.

Dennis Secondary Plan (City of York 1994) put in place several site-specific policies encouraging land assembly necessary for large-scale residential development. The latter provided the benefit of density bonuses allowing developers to build higher than the maximum allowable density. For example, Site Specific Policy #40 for the lands between Barr Avenue and Lambton Avenue (see Figure 9) allowed densities to a maximum of up to 1.5 times the gross lot area to facilitate the conversion and intensification of existing non-residential structures to residential purposes (City of York 1994, p.18).

The Site-Specific Policies, which are all located on a section of Weston Road centered around Eglinton Avenue (see the land use map, Figure 9; see also Appendix 4), were carried forward into the post-amalgamation City of Toronto Official Plan. The residential development agenda

Figure 9: City of Toronto official plan zoning designations for the Mt. Dennis area



got an additional boost from a rezoning designation of that section of Weston Road as an Apartment Neighbourhood, which permitted larger-scale development in general (not limited to specific sites). Because these sites are still designated as Commercial by the former City of York's zoning bylaw, commercial uses are still allowed, grandfathered in as "non-conforming uses." If the desired residential conversions are achieved, however, the existing planning tools do not explicitly guide or support the retention of commercial uses. To date, residential conversions have occurred only within existing buildings, on a small scale, or the construction of new-built single-family homes; there have been no major high-density residential developments that the site-specific policies were intended to facilitate.

The Site-Specific Policies, which are all located on a section of Weston Road centered around Eglington Avenue (see the land use map, Figure 9), were carried forward into the post-amalgamation City of Toronto Official Plan. The residential development agenda got an additional boost from a rezoning designation of that section of Weston Road as an Apartment Neighbourhood, which permitted larger-scale development in general (not limited to specific sites). Because these sites are still designated as Commercial by the former City of York's zoning bylaw, commercial uses are still allowed, grandfathered in as "non-conforming uses." If the desired residential conversions are achieved, however, the existing planning tools do not explicitly guide or support the retention of commercial uses. To date, residential conversions have occurred only within existing buildings, on a small scale, or the construction of new-built single-family homes; there have been no major high-density residential developments that the site-specific policies were intended to facilitate.

In addition, the Weston 2021 Revitalization Strategy has recently formed around the opportunity to leverage the planned transit infrastructure investments into a broader redevelopment opportunity involving public-, private-, and third-sector actors, including ratepayers' associations and Business Improvement Areas (BIAs). Having constituted as an informal coalition of local politicians, local associations and allies within the City Planning and Tower Renewal offices, Weston 2021 has now garnered official status as a City Revitalization Strategy that coordinates City initiatives in the area and guides public- and private-sector redevelopment and capital improvements. The first phase of this revitalization strategy focuses on the area around Weston Road and Lawrence Avenue West in the Weston neighbourhood; the strategy will expand into



Photo 5: Kodak lands waiting for redevelopment



Photo 6: Image for Metrolinx's Mobility Hub (Metrolinx 2011)



Photo 7: John Street community pilot project (ULI 2012b)

Mt. Dennis where there are also opportunities to leverage redevelopment from new transportation infrastructure and the repurposing of the Kodak lands.

Community consultations and a review by an Urban Land Institute Technical Assistance Panel (ULI TAP) indicate that this strategy's key components will likely include a neighbourhood branding campaign, high-density residential development, new retail and service shops surrounding the transit station on Weston Road, and a signature institutional development such as a local college or YMCA. The major high-density redevelopment is likely still a medium-term proposition, while revitalization proponents have initiated a more immediate place-marketing and branding strategy to redress "negative" perceptions of the neighbourhood that discourage private investment (ULI 2012a). To support the medium-term development, the ULI TAP proposed waivers for development charges as a key enabling condition (ibid 2012a).

Finally, the Kodak lands recently presented an opportunity for real estate development advocates when Metrus properties bought the vacant 57-acre parcel in 2006 for \$19.5 million and subsequently proposed to develop a mix of office, retail, and mixed-use development—75,100 square meters of development, with up to 10,500 square meters of big box retail (City of Toronto 2009; key informant interview, July 19 2011). The proposal claimed to satisfy the "employment" designation of the Kodak lands with low-wage precarious work characteristic of the retail and back office sectors "that would be available to the surrounding community as start-up jobs" (Councillor of neighboring ward as cited in NRU 2012).

GREEN/CULTURAL ECONOMY VISION

The Metrus proposal for the Kodak Lands met considerable opposition from another loose assemblage of advocates for a more Left-oriented vision for Mt. Dennis. Proponents of this vision encompass some of the same actors as the real estate development vision (ratepayers' associations, BIAs), but also some Left-leaning community development advocates and local politicians with deep activist roots in the neighbourhood. The latter mounted a public challenge to the proposal, alleging it had proceeded without proper community consultation and that it contributed to systemic problems already plaguing Toronto—urban sprawl, the proliferation of large-format retail beyond the city's capacity to sustain it, and an excess of low-wage service work with "no future and no security" (NRU 2012,

Toronto Star 2009). Ultimately, a City of Toronto planning staff study concluding that "major retail use is considered non-employment use" required the proposal to undergo an onerous "municipal comprehensive review" (City of Toronto 2009). In response, the developer subsequently sold the land for \$48 million to Metrolinx, the provincial transit authority charged with planning an integrated transit network across the Toronto metropolitan region, which required a facility for vehicle maintenance and storage associated with the Eglington-Scarborough Crosstown LRT.

The "green/cultural economy" vision advocates a blend of "green" and "cultural" planning. The "green" dimension derives from a history of environmental activism in Mt. Dennis and Weston and a recent alliance with Blue Green Canada (<http://bluegreencanada.ca/>) and the Labour Education Centre (<http://www.laboureducation.org/>). The latter spearheaded the "Making Green Work in Mt. Dennis" initiative, which aims to collaborate with Metrolinx to secure "green jobs" and industries—ranging from the jobs that will be generated by transit construction and maintenance, to new green businesses that could be incubated on the Kodak lands. The initiative explicitly blends "green" commitments with a labor union perspective on the need for living wages, capable of sustaining the kind of middle class lifestyles that first underwrote the neighbourhood's development in the early 20th century.

Local actors involved in the green/cultural economy vision are also engaged in plans to establish Weston–Mt. Dennis as a "cultural hub." For this, the Weston 2021 Revitalization Strategy has been the major area of focus, seen as a vehicle for staking out the disinvested inner suburbs as the next frontier of the creative economy. In addition to expanding a local farmers' market, community garden and bike paths, the vision entails luring creative sectors from the downtown to the more affordable inner suburbs. Weston 2021 retained Artscape, Canada's leading developer of tenant space for the arts and culture sector, to conduct a Feasibility Study, which advocates "cluster[ing] creative people and small businesses ... [in] a proven strategy of neighbourhood revitalization" (Artscape 2011, p.17).

Both the "green" and the "cultural" components propose developing post-secondary campuses with specialized R&D functions in Mt. Dennis, and both aim to transfer progressive planning commitments—sustainability and creative economy—to the "underutilized" inner suburbs. Such long-term redevelopment plans have already gained

some immediate traction. Metrolinx has committed \$1.1 million to the development of a green and art corridor featuring a farmer's market, community gardens, and affordable live-work spaces that would "put challenged neighbourhoods on the map for creative people" and "build a coffee culture" (Artscape 2011 p. 41, ULI 2012a). And the Toronto Community Foundation has committed up to \$500,000 toward a Recipe for Community Initiative proposed by the Weston 2021 coalition, for neighbourhood greening, community gardening, and food programming.

SOME COMMON GROUND

It is tempting to tell a story about Mt. Dennis that emphasizes the tensions between these visions, even as they overlap in practice. The real estate development stance hinges around attracting private-sector development that will add density with little regard for environmental or cultural concerns. The green/cultural economy stance aims to link intensification more explicitly with sustainability goals, living wages, and building healthy communities inflected with arts and culture. Both constituencies claim an authentic voice for the neighbourhood on the basis of decades of service and long-term commitment, and they have competed with one another over desired suburban futures for Mt. Dennis. Yet from the perspective of vulnerable businesses and the community-based researchers with whom we collaborated, several commonalities emerge that are significant for assessing whether and how we can ensure that the benefits of redevelopment planning will go in part to the low-income immigrant population that lives and works in Mt. Dennis. In what follows we draw on interviews with protagonists of these visions as well as debriefing sessions with community-based collaborators to consider redevelopment plans from a point of view that would seek to ensure accountability to the marginalized groups that predominate in Mt. Dennis.

Both sets of visions are premised on representations of existing commercial space as empty and deficient. Excerpts from transcripts of separate interviews with key informants advocating one or the other redevelopment vision reveal a common perception that there is "nothing going on" in the commercial space of Mt. Dennis:

People aren't coming to the neighbourhood for anything. Even for locals, I would say that if a local's looking to buy food and milk, you're not doing that on this street. You're not buying ... you know ... there's bars, there's some restaurants, there's some salons, but there's really

nothing (key informant interview, June 24, 2011).

Eighty percent of the businesses are vacant. There is no retail on Weston south of Eglinton. It's been vacant for 20-30 years ... The only active retail is bars, it's unfortunate (key informant interview, July 19 2011).

[O]ur greatest opportunity is it is a blank slate for anybody to come in and create. The community will work with whoever is a positive connection here. We would certainly welcome, roll out the red carpet for, anyone in business or industry that would like to connect here.... Our neighbourhood is—that's what we joke: it's a neighbourhood of variety stores and beauty salons. There's no shopping, per se (key informant interview, July 12 2011).

[S]ometimes, I just want meat and potatoes. ... I like Indian food; you know, I like Chinese food, but sometimes I just want meat and potatoes and we haven't got that type of restaurant. ... And there used to be places where, you know, where you could come and have dinner with your family and stuff like that (key informant interview, June 23, 2011).

The Somalis who have moved in opened variety stores, beauty salons, and go to mosque five times a day, these are the "wedges that drive people away" (key informant interview, June 24, 2011).

These representations of emptiness and deficiency are echoed in media reporting and policy documents. Even the Toronto Star, which to its credit has recently reported critically on debates over the racialized dimensions of police-carding practices in Mt. Dennis, propagates such views:

What was once the manufacturing backbone of Toronto—a thriving working-class hub where everything from bricks and bicycles to stoves and steel was built in local factories—is now an industrial wasteland... Today, the landscape is one of abandoned factories, derelict storefronts and high unemployment. Youth crime is on the rise. The 2005 demise of Kodak Canada's photographic film and paper factory...was the final blow (Toronto Star, 2009).

The City of York 1994 Secondary Plan similarly suggests that Mt. Dennis suffers from a "major image problem"

related to being “run-down and poor” and “an enigma to non-residents.”

Likewise, for the Weston 2021 Revitalization Strategy, ULI TAP concludes that Weston’s negative community image creates obstacles for revitalization and private investment; it suggests that “a series of quick-start initiatives [such as the John Street Community Pilot Project depicted in photo 7] would be a great way to change the way people perceive Weston” (ULI 2012a, p. 33).

What is needed, by all accounts, is to fill the empty space, improve the retail mix, and attract a clientele that will introduce “social mix” into the neighbourhood. According to a local green-economy advocate:

One of the things we need, and it’s crass to say, but we need ... people who are coming in with money. We just need that balance. Sure, we have our community housing, we have our low-income.... You know, we need more of a balance. And that’s what we were really hoping, ... [to] cater to just a little higher end, because whether you’re willing to admit it or not, it’s the higher end that helps support all the services and stuff that we need for everyone else (key informant interview, June 23, 2011).

Those engaged in redevelopment planning in Mt. Dennis routinely express what our community-based collaborators referred to as “downtown envy”—seeking to remake Mt. Dennis in the image of trendy downtown neighbourhoods, with visions of flower stands, fresh fruits and vegetables, bakeries, bicycle repair shops, and a characteristic brand. As one key informant put it, “residents” associations want to see patios, not cash max and dollar stores; this is about changing retail, the main street, to change the neighbourhood” (key informant interview, July 19, 2011).

Reading these oft-repeated aspirations for gentrification against representations of the neighbourhood as empty and deficient highlighted some characteristics common to both the real estate development and the green/cultural economy visions. However much they may regard themselves as competing and even ideologically contrary, both visions are being advanced by relatively privileged agents of city building who have the social and cultural capital to leverage opportunities for pursuing their desired suburban future. Both entail a fundamental shift in the class composition of the neighbourhood, with no explicit regard for displacement pressures that accompany gentrification (though the Making Green Work in Mt. Dennis initiative

must be acknowledged for its intention to promote green industries with well-paying jobs). Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that the full range of perspectives on these issues has been procedurally excluded—such as the practice of holding community meetings in the local Legion Hall where, according to community-based researchers, head scarves are banned. How could such practices assure meaningful participation for all sectors of a multicultural community?

Such questions about the politics of participation and representation haunt planning processes everywhere, and the point of raising them is not to judge intent. It is rather to begin to evoke the intersecting dynamics of race and class as core organizing forces that must be addressed in addition to the economic rationalities of development planning, if there is to be any hope that benefits will accrue to low-income racialized groups.



² The correct number for the area south of Eglington Avenue is 31%, which indeed is high relative to the City average of 9% for commercial strips. See discussion below.

³ This comment is paraphrased from interview notes because the interview recording was damaged.



4. Mt. Dennis Commercial Strip: Structural Challenges, Assets and Vulnerabilities



This section details our findings from quantitative and qualitative research on the Mt. Dennis commercial strip. It is divided into subsections that, first, illustrate how the challenging structural positioning of Mt. Dennis manifests in demographic characteristics, vacancy rates, and the sectoral breakdown of businesses on Weston Road; second, introduce some contradictory indications of vitality and assets; and third, identify indicators of vulnerability to displacement once redevelopment gets underway.

The main Mt. Dennis commercial strip stretches along Weston Road, from Humber Blvd to the south, to Jane Street to the north (Figure 10). The intersection with the East-West arterial Eglington Avenue is considered not only the geographical but also the commercial centre of the strip. The Mt. Dennis Business Improvement Area was formed in 1974 and covers the section running from Lambton Avenue (995 Weston Rd) to Ray Avenue (1263

Weston Road). North of Ray Avenue commercial uses are disrupted by a section of Weston Road where low-rise, new-built residential development predominates; still farther north, street-side storefronts in low-rise, mixed-use buildings resume and in fact demonstrate considerable vitality. As of 2010, there were around 100 businesses operating within the Mt. Dennis BIA, while approximately 60 businesses existed in the area north of Lambton Avenue outside of the BIA boundary.

“Commercial” on Weston Road in Mt. Dennis is comprised of street-side storefronts, interspersed with a few small strip malls and the low-rise residential. As shown in Photo 10, some ground-floor commercial space has been (often illegally) converted to residential uses. High-rise apartment towers (some of which are privately owned, while others are publicly owned social housing) are scattered just behind the commercial strip, predominantly on the east side. And single-family bungalows prevail on the side streets running through the neighbourhood (Photo 8).

Figure 10: Mt. Dennis commercial strip and the study area

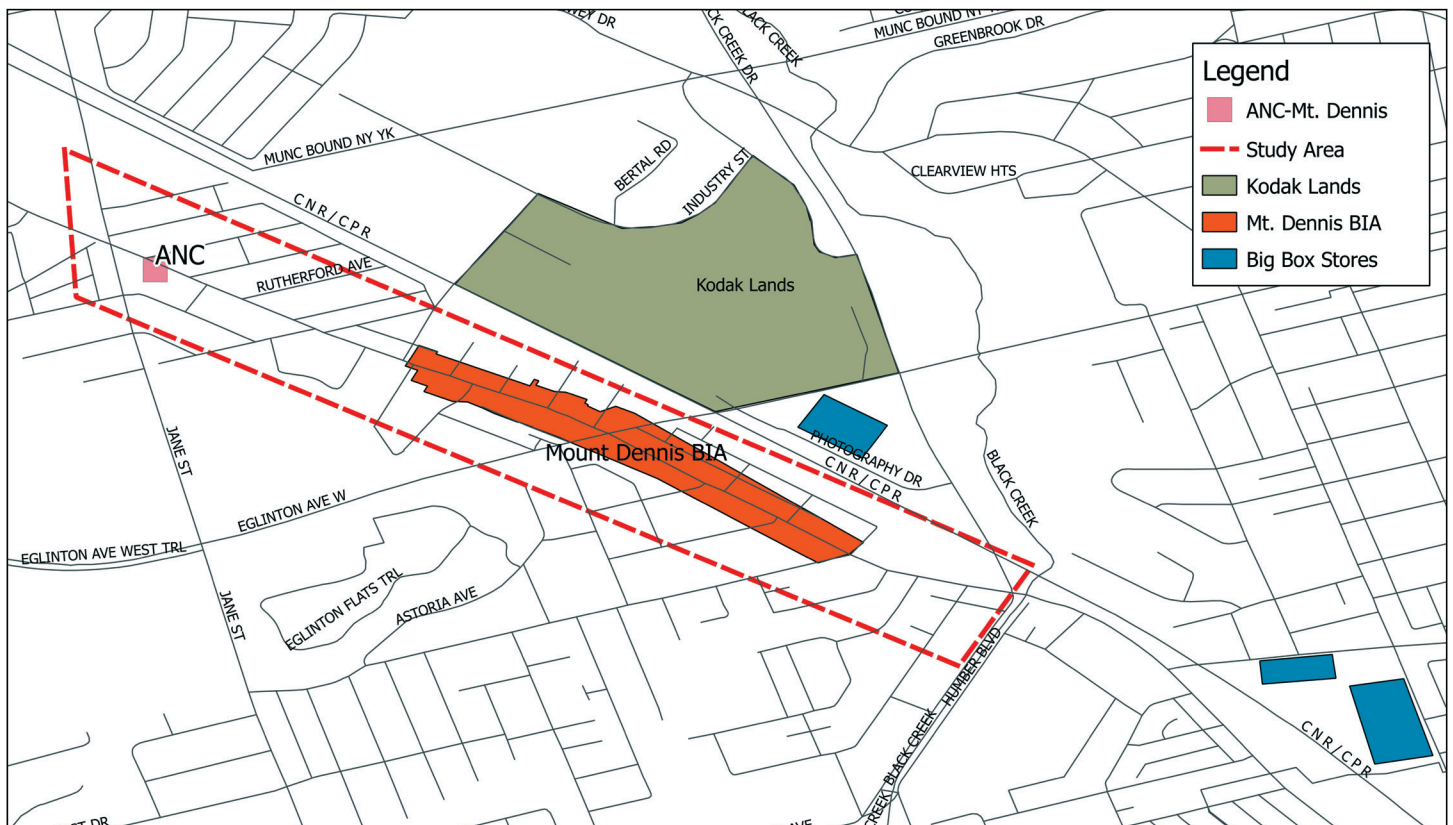




Photo 8: Commercial uses north of Ray Avenue are disrupted by residential buildings



Photo 9: High-rise, low-rent apartment building behind the main commercial strip



Photo 10: Conversions to non-residential uses are found south of Eglinton Avenue

STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES

As noted in Section 3, many of the challenges facing Mt. Dennis derive from its positioning in relation to the City of Toronto and wide-scale political-economic processes, such as deindustrialization, immigration, labor and retail market restructuring, city planning decisions and structural racism. These varied socio-economic challenges are repeatedly raised in media reports and in policy documents. They are also echoed in some of our quantitative data.

Figures 11 and 12, built from our survey data, show that small businesses in Mt. Dennis reflect the ethno-cultural diversity of the neighbourhood. Nearly 90% of businesses are immigrant-owned, while 83% are owned by people of colour. Two groups predominate: East/Southeast Asian (26%) and Afro-Caribbean (23%), followed by Africans and Whites.

As shown in Figure 13, the largest proportion of businesses, around 40%, have been in operation for less than 5 years. Cross-tabulating with the ethno-racial background reveals in Figure 14 that Afro-Caribbean and East/South East Asian business owners predominate in this category of recent ownership. The 30% of businesses that have been in operation over 16 years are predominantly White.

There are many vacant storefronts in Mt. Dennis. The overall vacancy rate for the Mt. Dennis BIA (indicated in blue), as determined by a visual survey, was 27% as of December 2011. This rate is quite high compared to the city average of 9% (Cushman and Wakefield 2011). Disaggregating vacancy yields some interesting patterns. The areas south of Eglinton have a high concentration of vacant storefronts. This is the area within which the site-specific policies (SSPs) are concentrated to allow for high-density residential development. It is also the area into which the BIA expanded in 2010. The area north of Ray Avenue (indicated in yellow) has the lowest vacancy rates, but is not covered by the BIA.

It is puzzling to see the omission from the BIA of the section of Weston Road with the lowest vacancy rates, and indeed the extraordinarily high vacancy rates in the area covered by the very institution that is tasked with promoting the vitality of commercial streets. Based on interviews with business owners and key informants as well as the analysis of land use policy, we know that the businesses in the section of the strip north of Ray Avenue are generally newer and predominantly immigrant-owned.

Figure 11: Ownership characteristics

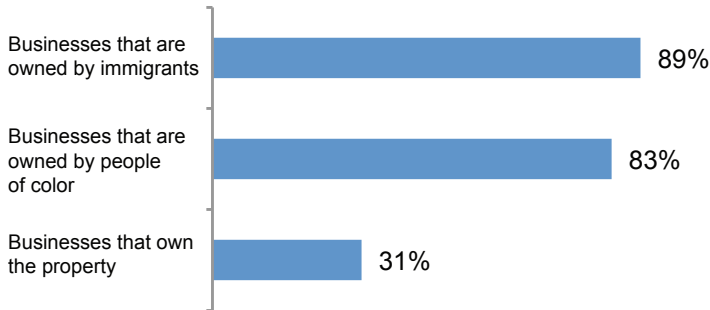


Figure 12: Owners' ethno-racial background

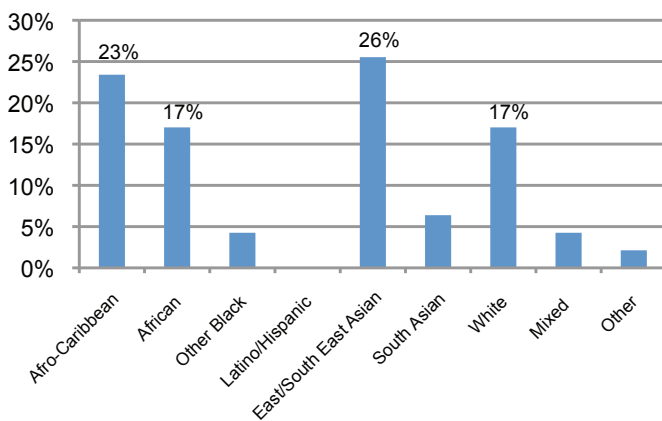
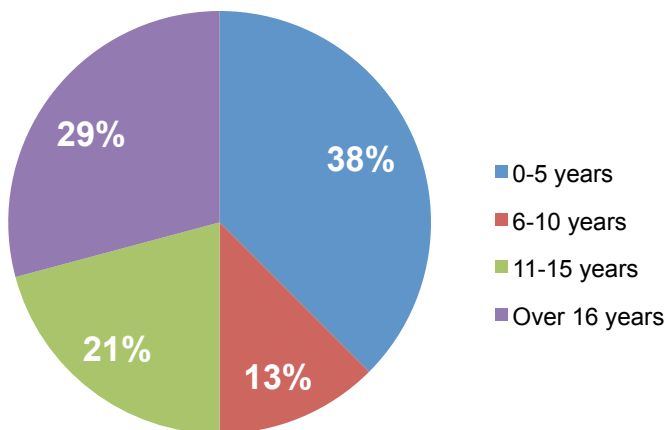


Figure 13: Years in operation



The BIA's positioning around Eglington Avenue dates from the days of Kodak manufacturing (prior to recent immigration flows). The current vacancy rates here can likely be explained by the phenomenon of property owners sitting on their properties waiting for market values to go up in conjunction with the expansion of the Eglington LRT, "mobility hub" planning and predicted redevelopments on Eglington Avenue. Properties south of Eglington Avenue have the added advantage of zoning designations and site-

specific policies supporting residential development. A City commercial tax rebate program, meanwhile, grants 30% tax relief to owners of vacant properties, contributing to the incentive for vacancy.

It is also important to note that we did not count as "vacant" in our visual survey those ground floor storefronts that appeared to have been converted to residential uses (as evidenced by the absence of signage, curtains in the

Figure 14: Business owners' ethno-racial background and length of operation

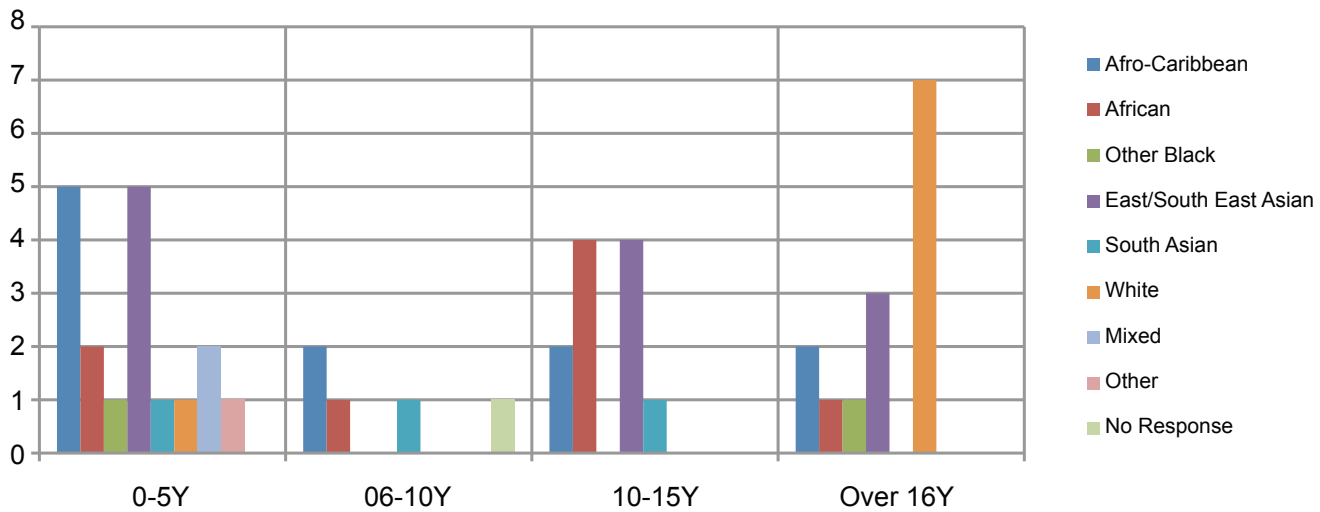


Figure 15: Vacancy rates for Mt Dennis

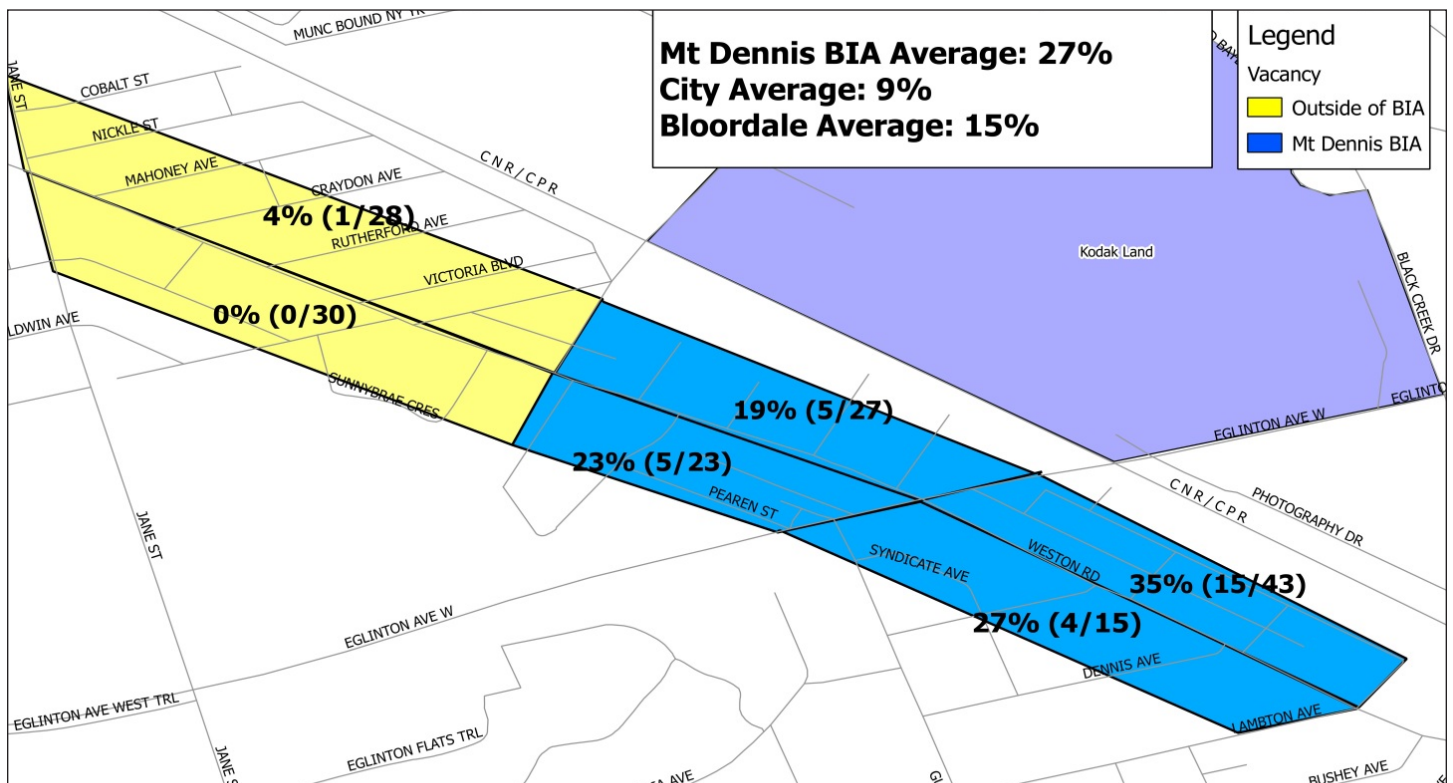


Figure 16: Mt. Dennis BIA sectoral change

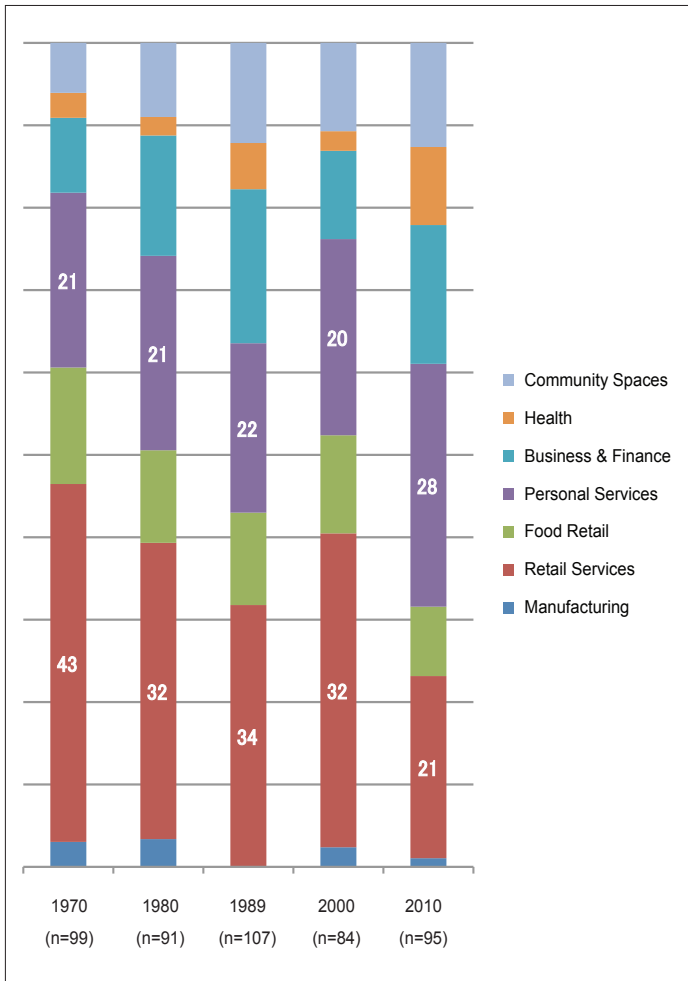
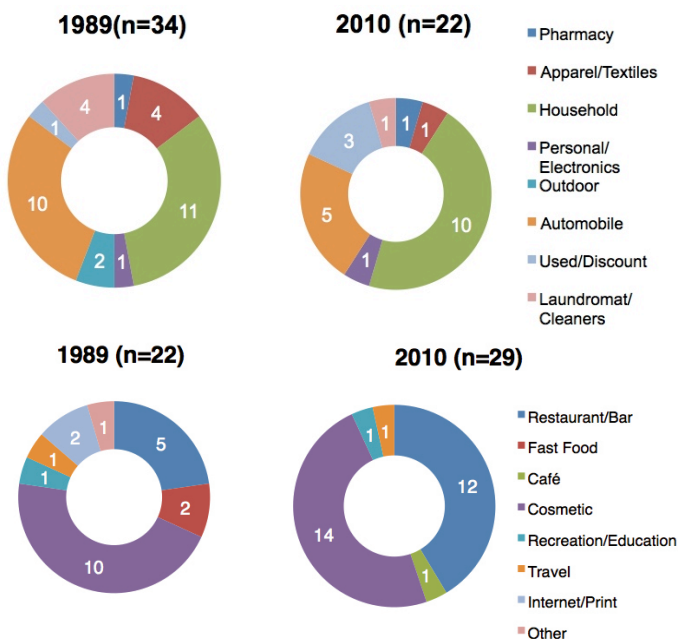


Figure 17: Change in retail services (above) and in personal services (below)



windows, and so on; see Photo 10). On a commercial street facing the kinds of challenges found in Mt. Dennis, property owners may not be able to charge rents sufficient to cover the relatively high (4%) commercial property tax rate, and may opt instead to rent for residential use and subsequently seek a formal residential assessment that would reduce the tax rate. Counting residential conversions would have yielded higher vacancy rates and a more accurate indication of the challenge for commercial revitalization.

The sectoral composition of businesses reflects broader trends in Toronto’s retail market structure. As shown in Figure 16, retail services (red) and personal services (purple) are the sectors that have changed noticeably over time, with the former decreasing and the latter increasing. Retail services predominated up to 2000, but have been replaced by personal services as the predominant business sector in 2010.

The 30% decrease in retail services is largely explained by a loss of automobile related businesses from 10 to 5 establishments (Figure 17). Despite the overall decrease, household businesses—home renovation, furniture and upholstery—have remained in the area.

A more interesting picture comes from the change in personal services. Not only has the number increased, but the type of businesses has become more concentrated in restaurants (blue) and cosmetics, including hair salons and barbershops (purple). These two business types make up almost all businesses in the personal services sector (Figure 17).

On the one hand, some business owners recognize the concentration in these subsectors can be a real problem if there is insufficient demand to sustain them; businesses resort to price competition, exacerbating the challenge of competition from nearby big box outlets. They also recognize the structural constraints facing businesses in Mt. Dennis—particularly poverty and structural racism, lack of good jobs, and deindustrialization. On the other hand, cosmetics and food services are some of the most accessible market sectors for people lacking financial resources and credentials (or facing non-recognition of their credentials). The opportunity to incubate such enterprises plays a key role in the economic integration of new immigrants.

ASSETS AND VITALITIES

The challenges are not the end of the story. There are indications of assets and vitalities on Mt. Dennis that ought to be duly considered in any sincere initiative to pursue inclusive and redistributive modes of redevelopment planning. Through the interview process, the community researchers helped us develop a highly textured profile of the immigrant-owned, small-scale, low-margin businesses predominating in Mt. Dennis (Rankin and McLean under review).

Some Mt. Dennis businesses combine innovative service and retail uses in fusions that expand our notion of the all-in-one convenience store (Hall 2010). A cell phone dealer provides money transfer services, mailboxes with a fixed address, internet access and fax and copy services, for example, and a hair salon operates a house cleaning service from its storefront. These practices reveal modes of innovation and creativity that do not get captured in a survey of business sectors or in typical media glosses of the neighbourhood as empty and deficient. They respond to the specific needs of the immigrant populations living in Mt. Dennis. In fact, their practice inadvertently models some of the recommendations for small scale retail coming out of the Ryerson Centre for the Study of Commercial Activity—for example, that small businesses should respond to the homogenization in Toronto's retail structure with "specialized products, catering to particular customer needs, high quality service and product knowledge" (Jones and Doucet 2000).

We did not collect data on earnings due to the sensitivities surrounding the interview context. Our consultation of data from Canada Business Data (2010), however, suggests that distinctive combinations of service and retail found in Mt. Dennis can yield considerable economic return. Businesses adopting such adaptive strategies that we could track had sales volumes over \$1 million annually, which compare favorably to the majority of businesses that have a sales volume under \$500,000 (48% of businesses) or between \$500,000 and \$1 million (28% of businesses).

Contrary to representations that depict Mt. Dennis as an empty space requiring a meaningful destination for outsiders, it is clear that business services available in Mt. Dennis draw people to the neighbourhood. There are several destination businesses and sectors. The one most commonly acknowledged by our key informants is the appliance dealer who located in Mt. Dennis in 1953. This storefront has expanded in terms of sales volume, floor area and market sector (specializing now in high-

end products), taking advantage of the area's accessibility by major arterials. Refuting the common perception of downtown as centre and suburbs as edge, the proprietor of this business pointed out that Mt. Dennis actually lies in a central location relative to the wider Toronto metropolitan region from which it draws customers. There is also a Korean restaurant that buses in Korean tourists weekly from New York, Niagara Falls and Quebec, a second-hand truck dealer who receives business from all over the province, and a solid furniture upholstery sector as shown in Figure 17. The latter derives from the days when there had been furniture manufacturers in Mt. Dennis (key informant interview, June 24, 2011) and clearly depends on a clientele that extends well beyond the boundaries of the neighbourhood. Looking again at Figure 13, it is worth emphasizing that over a quarter of the businesses we surveyed have been in operation for over 16 years, and some for as long as 35, 55 and even 75 years. These very long-time businesses range from a fish and chips restaurant, an upholstery shop, a Chinese restaurant and an auto shop.

In addition to these specific establishments, a solid majority of the businesses we surveyed—80 percent—indicate that their customers come from both inside and outside the neighbourhood. As an immigrant reception area, residential turnover in Mt. Dennis is high; we heard frequently that those who are able to establish a regular income move out to another neighbourhood. We also learned that it is in part through ties to local small businesses that people retain a relationship to Mt. Dennis. According to business owners, neighbourhood emigrants often return for specific services, like a haircut, from a vendor they know personally and in whose store-front they are likely to see old acquaintances. Thus, particularly immigrant-oriented services draw people to the neighbourhood through social networks linking cycles of immigrant populations who "landed" in Mt. Dennis and then moved out, but continue to come back and patronize a much-valued service provider. In short, Mt. Dennis businesses already are a destination.

Some business owners we interviewed also talked about the lack of opportunities facing youth in the area and about how they see a role for themselves as mentors. They acknowledge that they cannot provide reliable employment. Most businesses have to rely on family labor; few have the capacity to navigate the formal structures of payroll and insurance involved in providing formal employment. But some nonetheless seek to offer mentorship and job training—like the barber who provides off-the-books employment to young men who show an interest in the

Figure 18: Business owners' educational attainment

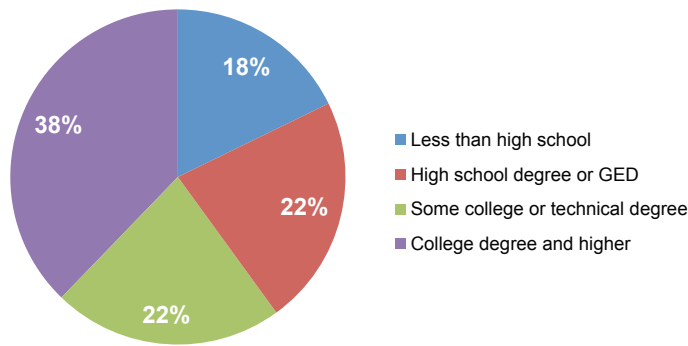
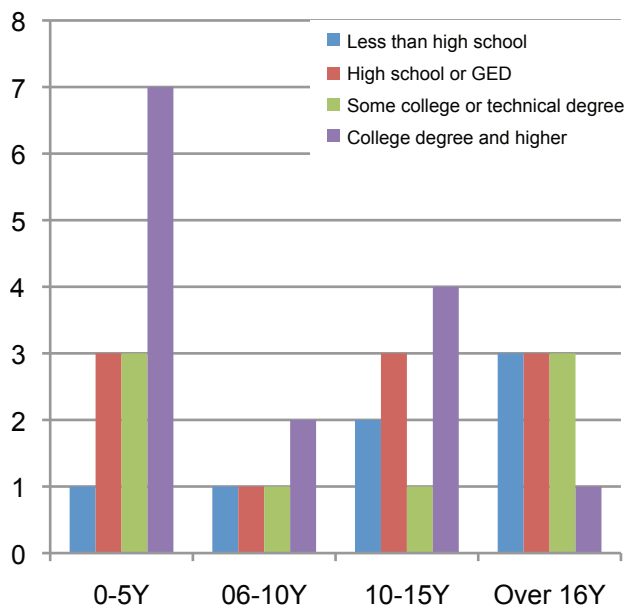


Figure 19: Immigrant business owners' educational attainment and years of operation



trade, trains them technically and in business management, and in this way has helped catalyze several new businesses. A salon owner talked with us about her struggles starting her business, struggles that made her want to share her knowledge and experience to help others attempting to enter the sector. We interviewed a general merchandise trader who aspires to open a gym for youth in the neighbourhood; he is a former Olympic athlete who seeks to provide a structured, supportive environment for area youth to develop an interest in athletics.

While in most cases, these kinds of mentoring practices do not provide or guarantee formal employment, the literature on immigrant integration and entrepreneurship confirms that they play a crucial role in “overcoming the lack of social and professional networks needed to succeed in the business world” (Wayland 2011 p.ii, p.15); the lack of professional and business mentors “who can ‘show the ropes’ to a newcomer” is often identified as an obstacle to starting and sustaining a business (ibid, p.15). In one case, prospects for more immediate employment opportunities became evident; our key informant interviews revealed that one of the area’s major employers seeks to train area youth in technical skills for high paying manufacturing jobs.

Our survey findings indicate that, in fact, Mt. Dennis business owners have a significantly higher educational attainment than the wider residential population (and are thus ideally suited to a mentoring role). As shown in Figure 18, 60% of business owners have at least a technical degree or some college education, which is double the average educational attainment at this level within the Mt. Dennis residential population (31.1%) and higher also than the city average (54%).

Cross tabulating educational background with immigrant status and age of business (Figure 19) reveals that educational qualifications are concentrated among immigrant business owners, particularly recent immigrant business owners operating their business less than 5 years. This trend corresponds to the findings of a recent Metcalf and Maytree Foundation report on immigrant entrepreneurship: recent immigrants generally have high levels of education and experience high levels of involuntary self-employment (Wayland 2011). We encountered people with degrees in political science, engineering, accounting, computer IT, who had resorted to business after facing racism and non-recognition of their credentials in the labor market. As one of our community-based collaborators put it, there is “so much expertise walking around freely” in Mt. Dennis.



Photo 11: Mt. Dennis is already a "destination"

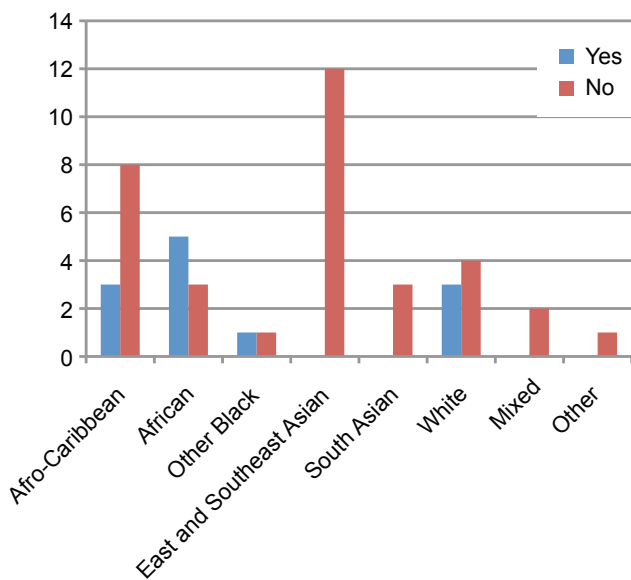
In addition to being sites of mentorship and entrepreneurial innovation, small businesses in Mt. Dennis provide social space in a neighbourhood that lacks an accessible community centre, basketball court, skating rink and other recreational public amenities (see Parlette and Cowen 2011 on a similar role played by suburban malls). For Mt. Dennis, the amalgamation of five former municipalities into a mega City of Toronto in 2000 resulted in a loss of community space. The former City of York had an arrangement with the local school board allowing for community access to school spaces after school hours; the amalgamated Toronto school board discontinued this policy and began charging fees for after school use, sharply diminishing the accessibility of recreational space in the neighborhood. A new community centre under construction just outside the neighbourhood has been sited on the Eglinton LRT line and is intended to service a wide catchment area. The proposed 5,254-square-metre community centre will include a fitness centre/health club, a running track, several multi-purpose rooms, administrative space and an indoor swimming pool (Reason 2012). Our community-based collaborators expressed concern that problems of inaccessibility, in particular for local youth, would be replicated by the new community centre's plan to charge fees. They also raised

concerns about aspects of the community centre design, in particular the open-concept family change room that some community members worry will not provide adequate privacy in a multicultural setting.

Of course, a small business is not a substitute for a community centre, but considerable evidence exists to suggest that local shops do furnish accessible social space in the community. During interviews, it was clear that not everyone was consuming a service in the salons, barber-shops, computing centres and other shops we visited. In a restaurant we might see an old man in a wheel chair, hooked up to a dialysis machine, spending long periods of time, certainly more than it takes to eat a meal, socializing with other seniors, all of them clearly escaping the isolation of their homes. Our community collaborators talked about how, in the absence of after-school programs, youth come to local stores and coffee shops to avoid being stopped by police. In these regards, local stores serve as a safety net and hub for friendship and relationship building.

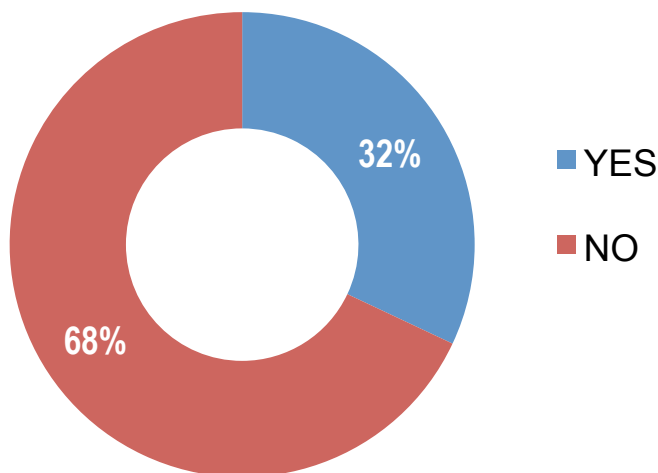
Admittedly, some social space is also asocial space; there are bars in particular that offer places of gathering that support uncivil behaviour. And we find some evidence, based on observations during interviews and conversations with

Figure 20: Participation in planning consultations and community meetings by ethno-racial background



community-based researchers, that a kind of “social tectonics” may be at play in Mt. Dennis (Butler and Robson, 2001)—though it is a remarkably multicultural community, in everyday practice on the commercial street, people seem to patronize businesses run by members of their own ethno-cultural communities. At the same time, the business owners who shared their interest in mentoring were explicit about their desire to steer youth away from asocial forms of social space. And social tectonics has its counterpart in the new forms of “strategic multiculturalism” (Kothari 2008), where new immigrants from all over the world are interacting with one another in a way that begins to build inclusiveness and openness to difference. One Vietnamese variety store owner we interviewed talked about her own system for preventing shoplifting by youth—not by relying on police or technical security systems, but by knowing her clientele personally. She insists on knowing people by name, publicly shames them if she catches acts of petty theft, and allows them to occasionally run a tab when they don’t have enough cash. Personal relationships are the best guarantee against shoplifting, she says, and she claims that theft rates in her store are lower than those in the corporate-owned convenience store across the street that relies on security cameras and police surveillance.

Figure 21: Awareness of the BIA



VULNERABILITIES TO DISPLACEMENT

Evidence of Mt. Dennis businesses innovating distinctive combinations of retail, mentoring area youth, providing social space, and providing a destination for consumers presents some reasons for optimism about the possibilities for supporting and mobilizing local assets in redevelopment planning. At the very least it refutes representations of the commercial street in Mt. Dennis as merely empty space with a deficient retail mix. After several months of interviews with local businesses, our community-based collaborators tell a different story, emphasizing the shopping traffic that the existing stores bring to the neighbourhood; the neighbourhood’s unrecognized prominence as an international destination (e.g., they noted how Flight 13, the first flight from Somalia to Toronto, was always been said to land in Toronto’s West End); the educational and professional backgrounds entrepreneurs bring to their businesses; the extra-economic functions of local establishments; and the “creativity” entailed in some of the services available on Weston Road, such as hair styling, food service, or furniture upholstery (many of these are operations that engage ethno-culturally specific expertise geared to providing everyday, ordinary service, rather than the commodification of difference or the marketing of multiculturalism). Yet vulnerabilities

persist, suggesting that inclusive redevelopment planning will require significant political commitment to retaining storefronts providing affordable goods and services.

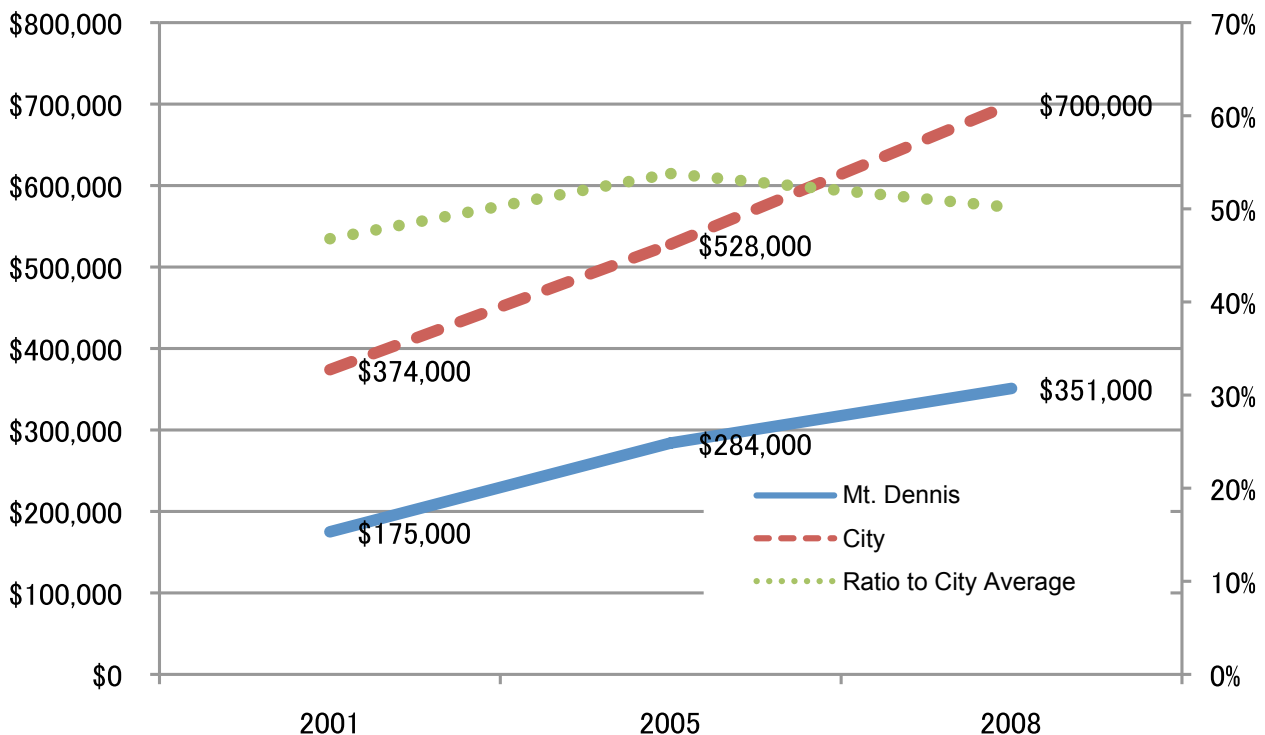
Foremost among these vulnerabilities, in our assessment as much as our collaborators', is structural racism—the ways in which institutionalized modes of economic development in Mt. Dennis, as in planning processes everywhere, inadvertently reinscribe classed and racialized positionings and opportunities. Clearly non-recognition of educational and professional credentials earned outside Euro-America is one significant dimension operating beyond the scale of the neighbourhood itself (see also Wayland 2011), as are the planning decisions and bifurcated labor markets underlying the broader spatial dynamics of urban inequality.

To probe these dynamics within Mt. Dennis, we asked some questions in our interviews and surveys with business owners that aimed to assess to what extent small businesses in Mt. Dennis are informed about planning initiatives underway in the neighbourhood and surrounding areas. Seventy-four percent of business owners had never been involved in planning consultations or community meetings focused on the future of the commercial strip and the neighbourhood. Figure 20 shows that all sampled East/Southeast Asian business owners have never participated,

Table 2: Awareness of BIA among business owners

	YES	NO	TOTAL
0-5 Years	3	15	18
BIA Member	-	6	6
Non-BIA Member	3	9	12
6-10 Years	2	3	5
BIA Member	1	-	1
Non-BIA Member	1	3	4
11-15 Years	4	7	11
BIA Member	3	2	5
Non-BIA Member	1	5	6
Over 16 Years	6	7	14
BIA Member	5	3	8
Non-BIA Member	1	4	6
Total	15	32	47

Figure 22: Commercial property value change



nor have a majority of Afro-Caribbean businesses owners, although a thorough racialized segregation is not evident.

Likewise, shown in Figure 21 almost 70 percent of business owners are not aware of the Mt. Dennis BIA, the very institution charged with representing and supporting local businesses on neighbourhood commercial streets. As Table 2 demonstrates, most of the recent businesses are unaware of the BIA, whether they fall within or outside the BIA boundary. In contrast, those who are aware of the BIA are longer-term BIA member businesses (operating more than 10 years), and predominantly White (see Figure 14-earlier). The Metcalf and Maytree Foundation report on immigrant entrepreneurship confirms these indicators that institutionalized supports for small businesses tend to exclude recent immigrants; bank loans require a two-year untarnished Canadian credit history and training programs such as the Ontario Self Employment Benefit that provides a 42-week training program with income supports, require Canadian work history (Wayland, 2011).

Our research also suggests a need for critically examining the ways in which institutionalized modes of economic development in Mt. Dennis, like planning processes everywhere, may inadvertently entrench classed and racialized positionings and structures of opportunity. It is true that many indicators of non-viability can be found in Mt. Dennis—rents are low, turnover is high, vacancy rates in some sections are high, sales volume is low (half of the businesses in Mt. Dennis have less than \$500,000 per year in gross sales volume and most of these are in the personal services sector). It is also the case that in seeking to enhance the neighbourhood by drawing new uses and new clientele, those involved in redevelopment planning have had to consistently raise a critical voice against mainstream developments that sideline the marginalized inner suburbs.

Yet depictions of the area as deficient and empty, or as overrun with too many barbershops and too many salons, can serve to legitimate exclusions of racialized groups from the redevelopment planning that might ultimately enhance their viability, and they obscure the adaptive strategies and the role of local businesses in providing affordable goods and services. Such representations contribute to racialized characterizations of marginalized people and places. “Is the issue too many barber shops or too many salons? Or the issue is too many black people owning these barber shops and salons?” asked one of the community-based researchers, ... because I used to walk on Eglington and

Yonge [a gentrified downtown neighbourhood], and I've [seen] one barber, one hair salon, right after each other.... And how is it that it's totally fine there ... but not supported here?”

Our collaborators noted the indiscriminate application of liquor licensing restrictions, even for establishments with no record of nuisance. This was one of several issues around which race surfaced as a key fault line: white single-family homeowners issuing regular complaints against new immigrant-owned establishments without regard for precautions they may have taken to control noise for fear of losing their licenses. The storeowners we spoke with felt powerless to convey their experience of harassment to government and law enforcement officials, yet they had a keen analysis of the racialized dynamics.

Ultimately, of course, it is the material outcomes of redevelopment planning, especially the potential displacement pressures, which foremost concern our community-based colleagues. Commercial property values in Mt. Dennis are among the lowest in the City (Mt. Dennis and Dovercourt Village BIAs share this distinction); at \$350,000, average commercial property value in 2008 was half the City average (see Figure 22). The low rents combined with redevelopment planning processes set up conditions for developers to reap the benefits of a “rent gap”, the difference between rents the area can generate now and rents it could generate after redevelopment (Smith 1987). Low rates of building ownership (less than one third of business owners owning their building) and notoriously weak rights of commercial tenants in Ontario indicate that a majority of small business owners in Mt. Dennis may be vulnerable to displacement pressures accompanying redevelopment.

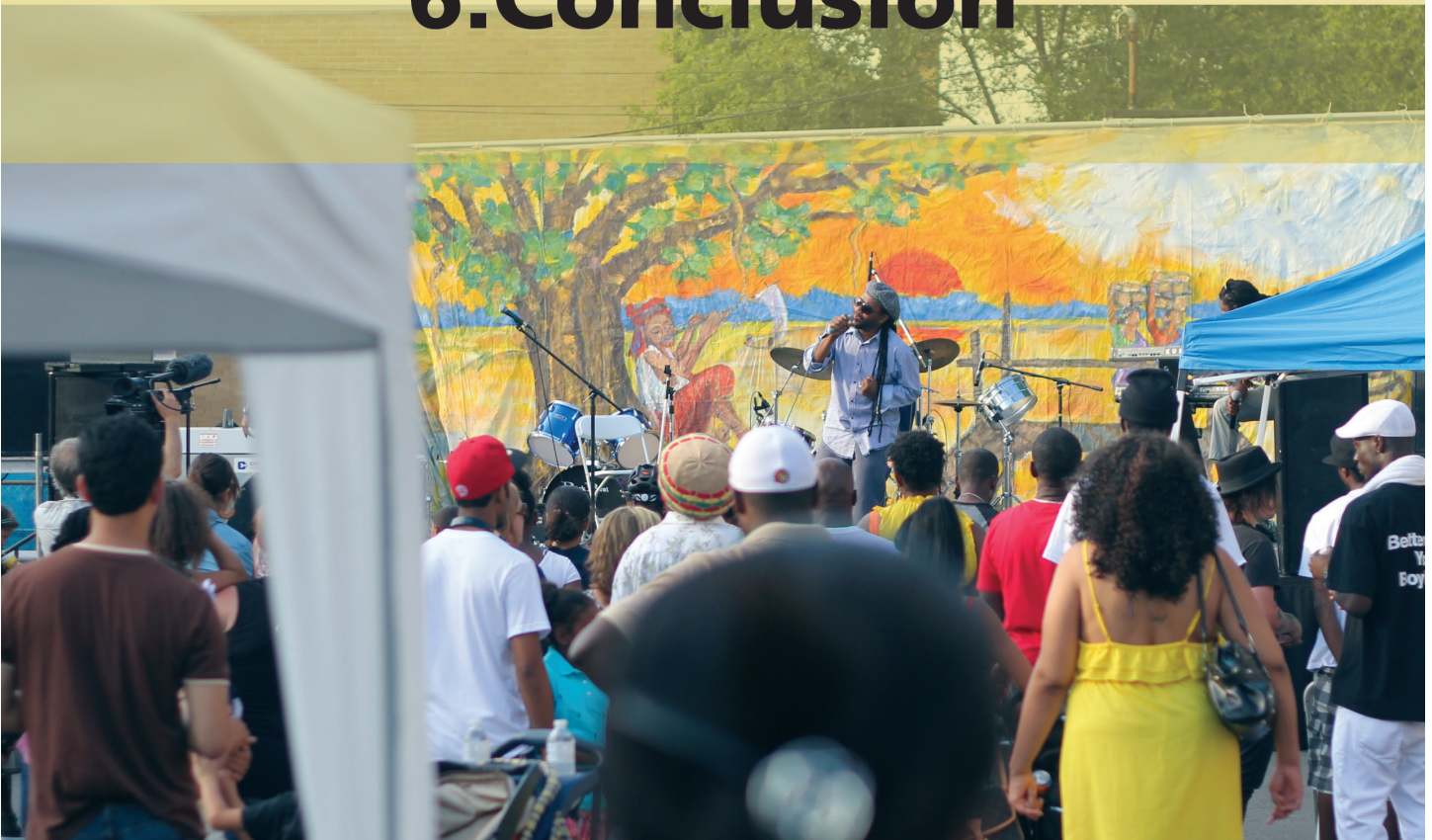
As always, the prevailing expectation is that redevelopment planning will benefit everyone, and the possibilities are not lost on community-based participants in our research. There is support among them for some aspects of the major redevelopment visions for Mt. Dennis, including the principles of sustainability underlying a green-economy vision, for example. Several of them are themselves new immigrants “from economies that are pretty much green... didn't have electricity... used a latrine ... the whole thing”, noted one colleague. But they worry about taking a chance with a green-economy initiative in a neighbourhood with a precarious new immigrant population lacking supports to manage ordinary businesses let alone the possibility of a failed economic experiment. Together we deliberated

whether planning processes underlying redevelopment in Mt. Dennis do not already constitute a form of displacement pressure. The worry comes from a genuine sense of urgency that the livelihoods of small businesses are at risk in Mt. Dennis, as indicated in these reflections from one of the community-based researchers:

A lot of people here...are so used to either being kicked out of [their] neighbourhood, or being moved to somewhere else, or not being part of the change. They are used to it from other areas they had been in and that is how a lot of them ended up here. So a lot of them are reluctant when they hear about the change that is about to come. They are fed up. Their shoulder drops like "not again." So it is stressful to a lot of them to hear it is going to change because their experience with change has never been good for them. They see everybody else around them profit or benefit from change, whereas [change] has ... been negative to them because it moves them out of [their] neighbourhood... I can see [displacement] is not just a big box stores are coming in to push out small stores. It is [also] ... lack of information within those communities, why they lose a lot of what they lose. You are always going to have people pushed out. But you can always keep more people in the community when they have more information they can benefit from... Knowing that they have something or someone to help them, they will actually access and use it. Not all of them will but some of them will do and influence others.



6. Conclusion



Gentrification and displacement are hardly concepts that come to the top of one's mind when working in Mt. Dennis. People who live in the neighbourhood, it is fair to say, would not exactly frame their challenges in terms of displacement pressures resulting from an influx of more and more affluent people. We, and they, and all those involved in redevelopment planning, are focused instead on poverty, development and revitalization. But significant redevelopment planning is underway. While myriad visions for the area can be grouped for analytical purposes into "real estate development" and "green/cultural economy" visions that at times work at cross-purposes to one another, our research suggests that these redevelopment plans share one key feature in common: they tend to overlook the perspectives, knowledge and contributions of small businesses that already occupy commercial space in Mt. Dennis and that might offer some important insights on opportunities and challenges for the neighbourhood.

On that basis, it is reasonable to ask if a gentrification process has not in fact already begun, in the way that planning processes are being carried out. The amalgamation of five former municipalities into a mega City of Toronto in 2000 created the perfect storm for increasingly privatized modes of planning (Kipfer and Keil 2002)—with reduced resources for the municipal planning function at a moment when the demands on municipal planning were growing; bureaucratic silo-ing of planning from economic development and social services; and the resulting empowerment of non-governmental (often private) city builders to wield their political and social capital. We find in Mt. Dennis a series of redevelopment initiatives that are proceeding in a manner that largely excludes those who currently occupy its commercial spaces; that are predicated largely on a vision of making the neighbourhood a destination for outsiders; that depict the commercial street as an empty space, with suboptimal uses, crime-ridden, abandoned, run down; and that apparently give little attention to the implications of redevelopment for existing users or to the manifestations of structural racism as a core organizing principle of our society.

Is gentrification possible without displacement? That is the question (adapted from Vancouver planning-scholar Nathan Edelson's formulation of "revitalization without displacement," Vancouver Agreement 2009) that lies at the heart of our research. It is the burden of this

work to consider how what we learned about businesses in the area can contribute to the efforts of others to undertake redevelopment, generate employment and promote sustainability. Such questions are especially taxing in the case of commercial spaces that are typically regarded the purview of the competitive market. There is, however, considerable variation around the world in the way commercial spaces are regulated; in China the state still plays a major role as owner and developer of commercial property on city streets; in the Netherlands, city governments employ "street managers" to achieve and retain a "desirable" sectoral mix. Here in Toronto, where power is tipped more in favor of private capital, alliances of stakeholders form political coalitions that seek to guide the market through more indirect means, such as the designation of site-specific policies. If we acknowledge the different roles that planning has had in determining the way markets are organized in different times and places, we may find points of intervention and a new sense of possibility to decide what kind of neighbourhood commercial spaces we want to encourage.

Is gentrification of disinvested commercial streets possible without displacement? We are not sure it is, but a first step must surely be to take stock of the views and experiences of small, independently owned businesses that are already there. A second step could involve naming the risks of displacement and the processes of exclusion in well-intentioned attempts to redevelop marginalized neighbourhoods like Mt. Dennis. And a third step might creatively imagine how revitalization could be engaged critically—not as a euphemism for the displacement of economically vulnerable groups—but as an opportunity to improve the livelihoods of all people in a community.

Regarding the first, our research generates some contradictory findings, as shown in Table 3. On the one hand there is clear evidence of structural challenges to economic viability—low property values, high vacancy rates, concentration in a narrow sub-sector of low-margin personal services. On the other hand, there are indications of vitality—adaptive business strategies blending distinctive combinations of retail and services in demand by new immigrant populations, and considerable traffic to the commercial street from outside the neighbourhood. And there are indicators of assets that could be mobilized to the benefit of current users of the commercial street in redevelopment planning—youth mentoring by business owners; interest in organizing a job training program on the part of the area's major employer; relatively high levels of educational attainment and work experience among

business owners; and the important role of businesses in furnishing social space in the neighbourhood.

Second, as with any redevelopment process, there are risks of displacement, which have already begun to manifest. Some of these of course are linked to structural factors leaving businesses in a precarious economic position—deindustrialization, immigration patterns, a segregated service economy, racism in labor markets. These factors are well beyond the scope of neighbourhood planning to address. Yet the evidence of exclusion from planning processes or with tokenistic forms of inclusion, combined with representations of the commercial street by key agents in redevelopment as empty and deficient, suggest that race functions at the local scale as a key vector of power. We are not witnessing physical displacement; rather proponents of redevelopment planning articulate desires for gentrification, in the absence of critical and collective public deliberation about the risks of displacement to low-income and racialized people living and working in Mt. Dennis. What is required is a collective recognition that we live in a social system characterized by white privilege, and that any sincere commitment to redistributive justice requires confronting the way in which redevelopment planning has historically been implicated in structural racism, for the sake of challenging those dynamics in contemporary redevelopment processes.

The third step, offering concrete suggestions about achieving gentrification without displacement, requires foremost a political commitment to retaining storefronts providing affordable goods and services. As suggested in Table 4, supports to individual businesses are an obvious point of departure, as the businesses in Mt. Dennis have the same needs as small businesses that have been the subject of numerous foregoing studies—financing, accounting skills, market analysis, product promotion, interior design and so on. Like social services, business services in Toronto have historically been concentrated downtown, and are currently inaccessible to a new generation of immigrant-owned businesses that have emerged to serve new immigrant populations in the inner suburbs. These services could be included in the community hubs already coordinating the provision of social services in some priority neighbourhoods, or if demand is deemed unsuitable relative to the cost, a mobile suite of business services could travel to the hubs on a regular basis. Beyond counseling, finance is a much-needed service that is likely beyond the scope of business support services, but the latter could establish relationships with

local bank managers to help facilitate the development of business proposals. Financial counseling and linkages with local banks could also be geared toward helping business owners plan to purchase their buildings – the surest protection against displacement by rising property values associated with redevelopment. High levels of educational attainment among business owners suggest there might be considerable demand for these services.

Another set of possibilities lies in harnessing resources from the redevelopment process itself. It may be, as most constituents of redevelopment planning in Mt. Dennis have concluded, that more residential development is necessary to bring population to the area on a scale that can sustain viable levels of commercial activity on Weston Road. At the same time, we know that poverty is one of the biggest challenges facing businesses in Mt. Dennis. A larger inventory of affordable housing, providing security of tenure and allowing people to limit the percentage of income spent on housing, would protect a true socio-economic mix in the neighbourhood, while also creating conditions that would allow low-income and new-immigrant residents to spend more money in the community. Affordable housing requires public investment of course, but it can also be linked to private development through density bonusing—that allows developers to build at higher densities in exchange for contributions to the public realm.

Commercial space has not historically been subject to density bonusing provisions—the case would have to be made that providing affordable space for private businesses serves the public interest (just as furnishing all manner of tax incentives to recruit and retain large-scale businesses has been justified). Planners could explore a range of strategies for harnessing opportunities from redevelopment planning to retain small, affordable, locally-owned business. These strategies might include, but are likely not limited to the following:

- Density bonuses or requirements (e.g., for approval of development on parcels on Weston Road between Barr Avenue and Lambton Avenue, under the purview of SSP 40) that a portion of new commercial space be set aside for the community to manage at discounted rents; the community could identify businesses that are threatened by rising rents and are considered a benefit to the community, for occupying these spaces; and their eligibility for tenancy could be reviewed on a regular basis (Nathan Edelson, person communication).

Table 3: Characteristics of the Mt. Dennis commercial strip

<p>Challenges to Economic Viability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low property values • High vacancy rates • Concentration in a low-margin personal services businesses
<p>Assets and Vitalities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth mentoring by business owners • Manufacturing employer seeks job training program • High levels of educational attainment among business owners • Business establishments as social space • Adaptive business strategies • Commercial strip already a destination
<p>Vulnerabilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structural disadvantages • Exclusion from and tokenistic inclusion in planning processes • Lack of public deliberation about the risks of displacement • Low rates of building ownership by businesses • Weak tenancy rights

Table 4: Policy options and strategies for "gentrification without displacement"

<p>Support Individual Businesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide essential business services at existing community hubs • Institute a regular mobile suite of business services at community hub
<p>Leverage Redevelopment Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize density bonusing to secure affordable commercial as well as residential space • Create incentives for owners of new mid- to high-rise buildings to commit underutilized second and third floor space to social enterprises or private businesses deemed beneficial to the community as above • Limit the width of storefronts in new development
<p>Mobilize Local Assets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the initiative of the West End Local Economic Development (WE-LED) to build linkages between local youth and local businesses • Adjust redevelopment planning timelines to allow for meaningful participation by WE-LED and local businesses • Develop collaborative approaches for assessing structural racism, displacement pressure and enabling conditions for locally owned business.

- Incentives for developers and commercial property owners to recruit commercial tenants whose margin derives from a high volume of affordable services—a small business version of Walmart.
- Incentives for owners of new mid- to high-rise buildings to commit underutilized second and third floor space to social enterprises or private businesses deemed beneficial to the community as above.
- Zoning that limits the width of storefronts in new developments so as to restrict the encroachment of large-footprint corporate retail chains. Such a zoning tool has already been implemented in 30 US cities (e.g., Madison, Wisconsin; Pratt Centre 2009).
- Redesign of the commercial tax structure to remove incentives for vacancies; currently the City's Commercial Property Tax Rebate program provides a vacancy tax rebate for commercial properties that have been vacant or partially vacant for more than 90 consecutive days. This provision results in a situation where property owners who are waiting for the redevelopment boom have little interest in leasing to local businesses (http://www.toronto.ca/taxes/property_tax/rebate_vacant.htm). A commercial property tax that penalizes vacancy would both help to promote small business and furnish additional revenues to the city. For example, the City of Winnipeg has a Vacant and Derelict Buildings Bylaw, which requires property owners of empty buildings to pay for a boarding permit, starting at \$2,000 the first year and up to \$6,500 the fourth year. If owners fail to comply, the city is entitled to seize and sell off non-compliant buildings (City of Winnipeg 2011).

Finally, this research has specified some significant local assets that could be mobilized to hold ongoing redevelopment processes accountable to the needs of local small businesses and new immigrant populations. Foremost among these is an organization formed by our community-based collaborators called West End Local Economic Development (see also Appendix 5). WE-LED aims to develop linkages between local businesses and youth in Mt. Dennis. In so doing it conjoins two legs of the Priority Neighborhood Strategy—Action for Neighborhood Change, which has made capacity building for local business a key focus, and the Neighborhood Action Partnerships that coordinates services and support for youth in the former City of York through the York Youth Coalition. Forming links between businesses and youth in Mt. Dennis, it is hoped, could deepen and begin to institutionalize the informal modes of youth mentoring by Mt. Dennis businesses.

WE-LED also seeks to open lines of communication among businesses in Mt. Dennis, both those within and outside of the local BIA, so that they may become informed about redevelopment planning and stake a claim in its benefits. This work involves a tricky balance of the relatively invisible labor of outreach, education and organizing among the dispersed constituency of businesses in Mt. Dennis and the more public practice of taking a seat at the tables of redevelopment planning. More privileged stakeholders of redevelopment planning in Mt. Dennis can support WE-LED by adjusting planning timelines to allow for meaningful participation by WE-LED and its members. There are specific opportunities for WE-LED to play a key role in brokering economic development opportunities geared to benefiting local businesses and populations—such as by coordinating a job training program with a local manufacturer who needs technically-trained workers; or by creating linkages among the local youth organization, small business mentors, and labor market planning initiatives at the City; or coordinating with local property owners to create short-term opportunities for start-up businesses in vacant storefronts (see the initiative underway in East Danforth, Toronto, to support 'pop up shops'; <http://resilienteconomies.ca/2013/01/16/cindy-rozeboom-on-renew-east-danforth-and-pop-up-shops/>).

The many capable agents of economic development planning in Mt. Dennis can recognize this unique role for WE-LED and collaborate accordingly, so that development can proceed in the most inclusive manner possible. WE-LED is uniquely positioned to broker relationships with immigrant-owned and low-income businesses and to raise vexing but important questions about the nature of exclusion and inclusion. The emergence of WE-LED could become an occasion to galvanize communication among the redevelopment agendas already mobilized in Mt. Dennis. Particularly pressing are questions about how to create enabling conditions for locally owned business, how to develop meaningful processes for assessing structural racism and displacement pressure, and how to support efforts to confront city-wide patterns of social polarization and economic inequality. A collaborative approach that builds explicit linkages between youth and local businesses can keep in view the central question: who are we planning for? The full range of people who live, work and shop in a neighbourhood now, or the more affluent people vested with revitalizing a neighborhood once it is "cleaned up?"



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Appendix 1: Interview Schedule

1. Can you tell us the story of how you started this business? [prompts: Did you start this business from scratch? Did you inherit it? What made you want to start this business? What struggles did you face starting this business?]
2. How long have you been serving this neighborhood?
3. How would you describe your business?
4. Who owns this business? (e.g. sole proprietorship, partnership, cooperative, franchise, chain)
- If franchise, please describe the nature of the agreement. (e.g., degree of autonomy in business planning, access to financial and other resources)
5. What about the building, who owns the building? Does the owner live in the neighborhood? Where does the owner live?
6. Do you hire any staff? How do you decide who you will hire? [prompts: family only; local youth; ppl from ethnic communities]
7. Do you target or cater to a particular type of customer? (e.g., age, ethnicity, socio-economic status).
8. Do your customers tend to come from outside or within the neighbourhood?
9. Further probing: Who is coming to your business from outside the neighbourhood? Where are they coming from? Why is that? What is drawing them here?

ABOUT THE COMMERCIAL STRIP:

1. How would you describe this commercial strip? [prompts: is there anything unique about it? Is it lively or dead, thriving or struggling, friendly neighborhood feel or full of social tensions? How does it compare to other strips, in the downtown, in the suburbs? How do you feel about the area being labeled a “priority neighbourhood”?
2. Why did you choose this location? [prompt: of course one of the stereotypes that is circulated about this neighborhood is that there is a lot of crime and gang activity. At the same time, images and stereotypes do not always reflect reality. How secure do you feel in this location? How do you feel about these stereotypes?
3. How long do you think you will stay in this location?
4. What changes have you noticed in this commercial strip since opening your business here? [prompts: increase in corporate chains/franchise? Certain business sectors gaining or losing? Change in demographics? In the kinds of people who shop on the strip?]
Further probing:
- Have these changes influenced the products or services you offer, or the types of customers you serve?
- What role do you think businesses have been playing in these changes?
5. How do you feel about these changes? Do you like them? Do they make you feel uncomfortable? Why do you have these feelings?
6. How would you describe your relationship with other businesses or organizations on the strip?
7. What role has the BIA played on this strip? What has your relationship or involvement been with the BIA?
8. Are there particular recent events or issues related to the commercial strip that are a common focus of attention or conversation, e.g. a festival (West-Won Community Festival), an economic development initiative, a dispute/controversy, annoyance or criminal activity? It would be great if you could capture the discussion/debate about that event/issue for us and what your views about it are.

COMMUNITY ECONOMY

1. How do you see your business being part of this community, beyond just the marketing of your product/service?
 - Do you see your business as providing an important space for specific groups of people (e.g. a specific ethnic group or an economically marginal group that does not have access to other social spaces).
 - Do you run any part of your business in a way that allows transactions to happen without money. [Prompts: allow customers to run a tab, exchange goods and services with you, swap child or senior care].
 - Are there situations where you find regulations over business activity too restrictive for you to be able to serve the people in your community, and you have to find ways around them [prompts: Hiring under the table, brokering overseas remittance transfers; making loans to people]
 - Do you contribute time or expertise to local organizations? Are you active in local organizations?
2. How have these community contributions helped your business, if at all? How have they harmed your business, if at all?

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

1. What challenges do you face as a business operator in this location?

Prompts: Competitors – malls; Rent is getting more expensive; Clientele in neighborhood is shifting; Taxes; Discrimination; Trouble with landlord; Crime, gangs (Note: Can start general, but get them to focus on location-specific challenges.)

Further probing: Do you have any ideas about how these challenges could be overcome? (target particular, relevant challenges mentioned previously) (individual strategies or wider scale interventions by the state, other agencies)

2. Have you drawn on any programs or services offered by the City, the BIA or other Toronto organizations that are aimed at supporting local businesses? Which ones? What was your experience accessing these services? (e.g storefront renovation program, graffiti abatement, immigration settlement services, etc?)

3. What opportunities do you see as a business operator in this location? [prompts: TTC, pedestrian traffic, residents who shop on the strip, businesses supporting one another]

4. How could these opportunities be supported better? (Prompts: policy, organizing, etc)

Further probing: Do you know some of the economic development plans in this area such as redevelopment of Kodak Lands? (a proposed green transit-oriented development project vs. big-box suburban style of development). What do you think about these?

5. Do you see a lot of business closing down on this strip? What are the main reasons for this? [prompts: relocating to a more desirable location; can't afford the rent].

6. Do you know any of these business owners personally and could you help us get in touch with them. [prompt: we just want a name, phone no, email address]

Appendix 2: Small Business Survey

1. How many years has the business been in operation? _____ years

2. How many employees do you have? _____

3. How many family members are involved in the business? _____

4. Type of business: _____

If multiple services are provided, please specify (e.g., cell phones + mailboxes + internet)

5. Who makes up a significant part of your customer base in your business? (Check all that apply)

From within the neighbourhood

From outside the neighbourhood

6. Do you own building/property? _____

7. If no, do you rent the space? _____ Total square footage: _____

How much is your rent now?: _____

How much was it 5 yrs ago or when you started renting: _____

8. Where do you live?

In the neighborhood

Elsewhere in Toronto

Other

9. Were you aware of the BIA (Business Improvement Area) before we first talked to you? _____

10. Have you ever participated in a community meeting, events or planning charrette about the commercial street and neighbourhood development? _____

11. Were you born in Canada or abroad? _____

- If abroad, where were you born? _____

- What year did you come to reside in Canada? _____

- What was your area of employment before coming to Canada? _____

12. Education

Less than high school

Some college or technical degree

High school degree or GED

College Degree and higher

- What was the major area of study of your highest degree? _____

13. Race: (Check only one)

Afro-Caribbean East and Southeast Asian (Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Philippine)

African South Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Nepali) Other black

White Latino/Hispanic

Mixed race (please specify) _____

Other (please specify) _____

14. Gender: Male Female

Appendix 3: Business Codes

MANUFACTURING, CONSTRUCTION & TRANSPORTATION (MCT)

- no subcategories; includes millinery (hats) or shoe-makers, transmith, transportation related (taxi, train, bus), freight forwarding

RETAIL & SERVICING (RS)

- Pharmacy
- Apparel/Textiles - clothing, shoes, jewelry (not pawn shops!), including repairs (shoe repair, etc), dry goods, hand bags, leather goods
- Household – appliances, hardware, furniture, carpets/flooring, antique stores, cleaning supplies, kitchen & bath, including cleaning and repairs (carpet cleaning, furniture repairs),
- Personal Goods/Electronics – bookstores, office supplies, stationary, computers, cell phones, cameras, and including REPAIRS (computer repair, etc.), florist, video rental
- Outdoor – bicycle shops, sporting goods, etc.
- Automobile – car dealerships and auto shops, service/gas station, garage
- Used/Discount – including pawn shops, thrift stores, bargain or discount stores
- Laundromat/Dry Cleaners

FOOD RETAIL (FR)

- Supermarket including wholesale, warehouse, food broker
- Small grocer/Convenience: fruit and vegetable markets, 7-11, Mac's, variety store, etc.
- Health Food: organic/farm product,
- Specialty: Bakery, Butcher, Liquor, Confectionary, Tobacco/Cigar shop, etc, Delicatessen

PERSONAL SERVICES (PS)

- Restaurant/Bar: where restaurant means sit-down, full-service; also includes strip club, comedy bar,
- Fast Food: including pizza, falafel, roti, Jamaican patties, etc. (anything you take out to go), donut
- Cafe: not sure if Coffee Time/Tim Hortons fits in this category or "Fast Food"
- Cosmetic: beauty salons, hair salons, barbers, spas
- Recreation/Education: dance studios, yoga studios, martial arts, theatre, billiards, private educational institutions
- Travel: travel agents, hotels, hostels, Bed and Breakfast
- Internet/Print: internet café, photocopy, print shop
- Other: psychic, funeral, animal (veterinarian), private social club, artist, gallery, moving

BUSINESS & FINANCIAL SERVICES (BFS)

- Legal
- Bank: commercial bank, credit union
- Financing/Cash Advance: tax service, finance, investment, money exchange cheque cashing Accounting, bookkeeping,

- Real Estate/Insurance: broker, mortgage, insurance, property management,
- Other: advertising services, telecommunication, media (TV/Radio/Newspaper), graphic design, photography, security, Storage service, personal agencies, administration, union, courier, consultant

HEALTH (H)

- Professional: including Dentist/Orthodontist, Physician, Optometrist/Optician, Health Centre
- Naturopathic: chiropractors, massage, acupuncture, etc

COMMUNITY SPACES (CS)

- School/Library (Public only)
- Government: government offices, government services, Post Office,
- Religious: church, mosque, synagogue, etc.
- Community Centre: recreation centre, drop-in, daycare/child care, emergency shelter, service agency, civic association

Appendix 4: Site and Area Specific Policies applicable to the area south of Eglinton (All excerpts from Toronto Official Plan, City of Toronto 2010a)

SITE SPECIFIC POLICY 53: MOUNT DENNIS AREA

- a. A development concept plan for an entire redevelopment block (or block face) may be required to assess comprehensive projects.
- b. A development concept plan may also be required for a property assembly of a portion of a block. The assembly will be comprehensive enough to allow for a distribution of density, uses and massing that is both internally functional and externally compatible, and does not preclude workable and compatible redevelopment of the rest of the block or block face intended for redevelopment. The development concept plan may include preliminary built-form envelopes, to show the distribution of proposed land uses and densities; on-site vehicular circulation, parking arrangements and external access; preliminary location and treatment of on-site amenity areas; pedestrian entrances and circulation, and linkages to public sidewalks; and, a preliminary architectural concept.

SITE SPECIFIC POLICY 40: WESTON ROAD BETWEEN BARR AVENUE AND LAMBTON AVENUE

- Building up to approximately 5 storeys will be permitted provided larger redevelopment parcels are created through land assembly. Zoning By-laws may permit a density of up to 1.5 times the lot area to enable existing non-residential buildings to be converted to residential use and intensified through the construction of additions or extra storeys.

SITE SPECIFIC POLICY 41: EAST OF BROWNVILLE AVENUE BETWEEN EGLINGTON AVENUE AND BARR AVENUE

- a) The lands may be redeveloped independent of the larger neighbouring block to the west, but a comprehensive assembly and development scheme for part or all of these blocks is the objective.
- b) The adjoining section of Brownville Avenue may be closed and included within the comprehensive redevelopment scheme,

provided that a substantial portion of blocks is involved. If substantial lands to the west are assembled comprehensively and Brownville Avenue is closed, the maximum density will be 3.5 times the lot area.”

SITE SPECIFIC POLICY 320: 1120-1132 WESTON ROAD

- a) Retail, office, and design centre uses are permitted.
- b) A surface parking lot containing 8 parking spaces is permitted in conjunction with the appliance store located at 1111 Weston Road.

Appendix 5: About West-End Local Economic Development (WE-LED)

WHAT IS WEST END LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ABOUT?

Improving the economic conditions of youth, residents and businesses in the Mount Dennis area has been a priority for Action for Neighbourhood Change -Mt. Dennis. This project aims to develop a solid local economic development strategy based on community research involving local business owner, residents and community organizations. It is a collaborative effort to learn how to improve the economic conditions of the area with a focus on strengthening local assets while also building links to city wide movements focused on the systemic roots of poverty. Our goal is to bring about long lasting and positive changes in the Weston-Mount Dennis area of Toronto.

Our local economic development strategy is as follows:

- Engage with marginalized groups, including local business owners, to develop a collective approach to neighbourhood economic development
- Identify local economic development priorities and strategies
- Explore ways to support small and medium size businesses in the neighbourhood to make them more sustainable, successfully with a stronger sense of community
- Pursue economic opportunities for local youth and residents, including supports for self-employment and entrepreneurship, as well as links with potential employers.

To undertake these strategies Action for Neighbourhood Change-Mt. Dennis will collaborate with local stakeholders such as, City of Toronto and other government bodies, Social Planning Toronto, Anti-Poverty Community Organizing and Learning, U of T Commercial Gentrification research, and York Youth Coalition.

(Excerpt from WE-LED website: <http://www.weled.ca/>)



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WHEEL CLEANER
REMOVES BRUISES AND STAINS FROM WHEELS

WAX
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