

# \*Id8 downsvew fieldnotes

## SUMMARY REPORT

By designing the Downsview lands in ways that honour local experience and intentions, the team can alleviate some struggle while still making space for the creativity, spontaneity, determination, and investment that characterize the spirit of Downsview.



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary.....	1
What are the Downsview Fieldnotes?.....	2
Why Downsview Fieldnotes?.....	2
Who was involved?.....	4
Where did we go?.....	4
What about COVID-19?.....	4
What did we learn?.....	5
Downsview Fieldnote #1:	
Where there’s a will, there’s a way around.....	6
Downsview Fieldnote #2:	
People recognize & want to connect with the diversity of Downsview.....	10
Downsview Fieldnote #3:	
People have to work to be together & do so with a generosity of spirit.....	13
Downsview Fieldnote #4:	
People invest deeply in the Downsview community & want a future here.....	16
Downsview Fieldnote #5:	
People make the most of flexible urban spaces.....	19



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Downsview Fieldnotes project set out to observe and understand how the people of Downsview experience, use, and move around their neighbourhoods. We sought input from people in parks, at bus stops, on street corners, in plazas, and on bike rides, to uncover what makes Downsview tick and what irks. Our granular findings about everyday community connections, challenges, patterns, and perceptions will help the id8 Downsview design team amplify what's working and learn from local challenges as they develop a Framework Plan for 520 acres of local land.

Most people we spoke with shared the feeling that Downsview can be a challenging place to live: connections are missing, streets are hard to cross, biking can be dangerous, social spaces can be hard to find. The public realm is at times sub-optimal. Many of these conditions relate to the area's sheer size and early development as a place for the aerospace industry and for cars. Despite these challenges, many creative and determined residents of Downsview persist in walking, cycling, and otherwise getting around without cars and in forging social connections with each other. Five Downsview Fieldnotes aggregate these observations and conversations with resourceful locals:

- Fieldnote 1: Where there's a will, there's a way around and locals forge new routes and strategies to get moving;
- Fieldnote 2: People recognize and want to connect with the diversity of Downsview and find ways to overcome barriers;
- Fieldnote 3: People have to work to be together and do so with a generosity of spirit and by reimagining spaces;
- Fieldnote 4: People invest deeply in the Downsview community, take pride, and want a future here;
- Fieldnote 5: People make the most of flexible urban spaces, creatively and spontaneously.

Many local adaptations demonstrate investments of time and creativity. The on-going work to make Downsview more liveable—this labour of love—has deepened many people's connection to this place, challenges and all.

The design team can learn from the way locals move around, get things done, connect with each other, and reconfigure their physical environments. These insights show what people value and how they want to live. By designing the Downsview lands in ways that honour local experience and intentions, the team can alleviate some struggle while still making space for the creativity, spontaneity, determination, and investment that characterize the spirit of Downsview.





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# WHAT ARE THE DOWNSVIEW FIELDNOTES?

The Downsview Fieldnotes project is part of id8 Downsview, a multi-faceted engagement process to develop a Framework Plan for 520 acres of land owned by Northcrest Developments and Canada Lands Company. Since spring 2020, the id8 Downsview team has employed a wide range of methods to engage a wide range of people.

In Round Two of the process, Fieldnotes hit the streets to explore how the people who live and work around Downsview experience, use, and move around their neighbourhoods. Acknowledging that some people or communities are often absent from engagement processes, we focussed on getting input from these underrepresented voices.

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# WHY DOWNSVIEW FIELDNOTES?

We wanted to understand, on a granular level, what factors impact local mobility and contribute to a sense of belonging and connection. The id8 Downsview design team has told us how important it is to see the area at this scale. They wanted to see through local eyes to learn what life in Downsview is like, so they can enhance what's working for people and propose long-term solutions to things that aren't. While the future plans focus on a particular area, the team wants to design these lands in ways that contribute and connect to surrounding neighbourhoods.



Fieldnotes staffer Sneha talks to a Downsview local in the field



Local cycling advocate Danny led a tour of cycling conditions



Fieldnotes staffer Felicia chats with a resident in a local park





By being there, we also saw it for ourselves. Our on-site explorations included photo and video documentation of existing conditions, challenges, and people using different kinds of spaces. Some of these photos are included here.

Finally, Downsview Fieldnotes grew from Downsview Stories, an online collection of events and memories that explored how Downsview sees itself, what people and events have shaped it, and what stories might be integral to its identity and future. They differ in that Downsview Stories explores local memories and meaning, whereas Downsview Fieldnotes explores local experience.

So, our team masked up and set out to uncover:

- how Downsview locals interact with public space to get things done;
- what works and what doesn't work for people in the public realm;
- how Downsview locals have adapted their behaviour—and adapted their space—to connect with each other and make things work; and
- how and if people feel connected to this area of the city.

“As a design team, we need to see and understand the local conditions people are encountering now, how they're negotiating walking, cycling and transit. It's clear that people are very resourceful and persistent in finding safe and enjoyable routes—to shops, work, parks, and transit—and we know that these routes should be much better. We're hearing that walking is an important part of many people's daily lives in the area and we want to honour that with a great public realm, a connected network of sidewalks, trails, and bike infrastructure. The Fieldnotes show us how much people here want this as well.

— Michael Sørensen, lead id8 downsview designer

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## WHO WAS INVOLVED?

We connected with a diverse group of locals to gather their unique perspectives on getting around, enjoying parks, doing errands, and meeting people. In particular, we engaged with those who don't rely much on cars—including youth, single parents, cyclists, seniors, and essential workers.

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## WHERE DID WE GO?

Fieldnotes met people where they're at. We talked to people in parks, on street corners, in plazas, and at bus stops. Local cyclists also took the id8 Downsview team on rides—observing COVID protocols—to see local challenges, gaps, and opportunities in cycling infrastructure. Finally, we connected with some people on the phone, especially those who we couldn't find in public space, like seniors and essential workers. All told, between August and October 2020, we heard from over 70 people.

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## WHAT ABOUT COVID-19?

The safety of our participants and staff was paramount. We met locals in-person in August and September 2020. The weather was good, people were outside, and the second wave of COVID-19 hadn't yet hit. In terms of physical distancing and protective gear, the pandemic brought some constraints for outreach, but it also enhanced what we saw in surprising ways. By limiting social interaction inside—in homes and in workplaces—COVID-19 forced people to be more creative in how they connect outside. People miss people, and we saw Downsview locals find new ways of coming together and heard of increasing neighbourhood friendliness. All this resourcefulness and ingenuity unfolded against the very concerning incidence of COVID-19 infections in this northwestern quadrant of Toronto.

With Toronto's return to phase two of the Province's pandemic reopening plan in October 2020, we stopped meeting people in person. We kept talking to targeted contacts on the phone, however, to make sure we got the perspectives we needed.



# WHAT DID WE LEARN?

As a research approach, Downsview Fieldnotes favours depth over breadth. This is not a quantitative assessment—it was never intended to be. It helped confirm things that we heard in other public engagement activities, like workshops and town halls. It's also an exploratory starting point; the findings here can be tested more widely through future engagement. The people we engaged provided qualitative feedback about their local experience. And despite the lack of statistical significance, a number of strong themes emerged.

During the semi-structured conversations, we asked how people travelled to places like grocery stores, greenspaces, places of worship, and workplaces, and where they go to connect with nature, be entertained, meet neighbours, have fun in the winter, enjoy meals outside the home, work out, people watch, and read a book, for example. We asked how long it took to get to these places and if the trip was enjoyable or felt safe. Our team is interested in the 15-minute city—the idea that you could meet your daily needs within a quarter hour walk or bike ride from your home. This idea helped structure our discussions.

The findings and participant quotes presented here represent the views of the 70+ people we spoke to. We acknowledge that other perspectives exist in the Downsview community and look forward to learning more. Still, during this engagement we heard and saw a lot that helped us understand what makes Downsview tick and what irks. Here are five standout themes and some early responses from the id8 Downsview design team on what these themes mean for the future.

## DOWNSVIEW FIELDNOTE #1:

Where there's a will, there's a way around

## DOWNSVIEW FIELDNOTE #2:

People recognize & want to connect with the diversity of Downsview

## DOWNSVIEW FIELDNOTE #3:

People have to work to be together & do so with a generosity of spirit

## DOWNSVIEW FIELDNOTE #4:

People invest deeply in the Downsview community & want a future here

## DOWNSVIEW FIELDNOTE #5:

People make the most of flexible urban spaces



# DOWNSVIEW FIELDNOTE

## 1

## WHERE THERE'S A WILL, THERE'S A WAY AROUND

“Bicycles can make the city smaller, if you know the routes.

“I come from Cameroon in Africa and we love to walk. The winter is difficult here but summer is very nice. I mostly walk and take the bus. I have no car or licence.

On foot, on bike, and by creatively combining modes, people find inventive ways to get around. We found travel choices were related to, and constrained by, Downsview's public realm—by disconnections and barriers posed by the runway, highway 401, the GO transit corridor, fencing, and wide arterial streets. Locals resourcefully navigate these challenges to make new connections and to keep themselves safe.

People walk in Downsview and many love to do it. Locals told us they walk for exercise, to get their errands done, as a social activity, and to get to work or transit. Walking is not always a choice, however. Many people in Downsview walk because they need to—because they don't own cars or because it feels safer than cycling.

Sometimes walking in Downsview leaves a lot to be loved. We witnessed multiple challenges and barriers in the walking environment, from narrow sidewalks beside 6 or 7 lane arterial roads with fast-moving traffic to circuitous routes created by major barriers to unsafe crossings. People told us that conditions feel more daunting when they're with children, when it's dark, and in the winter months when surfaces are snowy or icy. This keeps some people at home. Others were more uninspired than frightened and told us the walking environment was just “boring” and that there was “nowhere to go”.

Those on two wheels also navigate Downsview with care and creativity. We learned that people mostly bike on residential streets and don't cycle for daily commutes because safe bike routes and parking are missing. To navigate challenges,





cycling may become part of multi-mode trips. People told us about walking long distances, and taking bikes on buses to get to recreational trails, and multi-stage trip chains to get to buses, to get to subways, to get to streetcars, to get to work. These complicated paths aren't without historical precedents and echo Downsview Stories comments we received about local kids riding their bikes to get to the Downsview military base where they could ride "Amigo" the horse recreationally.

Although transit use is higher in the east likely due to the proximity of subway stations, we found transit uptake was limited overall because of a lack of direct routes and stops. Some who take transit to work characterized this mode of travel as onerous and a "last resort" as it involved transfers and could take one to two hours each way.

However they get around, many locals have a deep understanding of informal routes through the neighbourhood to get their needs met. This included informal pathways, the hydro corridor, or parks. For some, this changed how they see the area. We heard that Downsview can feel central and connected if you know the right ways through the neighbourhood, but these insider routes are not signposted. A sense of centrality is also enhanced by personal perceptions and daily patterns of accessing shops, friends, and family.

"I take the bus to the greenbelt with my bike on the bus carrier. I'm not that experienced with cycling and it's safer on the trails. I had to 'YouTube' how to get my bike on the bus. Once you get the hang of it, okay, but it takes a bit of nerve."

"I like this neighbourhood. I can easily walk to stores. I consider this area central, you can get downtown in 25 minutes and Brampton in 25 minutes."

"The 401 is like the Berlin wall of cycling up here. It's really difficult to cross safely or know where the best routes are."





“I walk, but it’s not easy, especially with a child. There are several big intersections where drivers are aggressive with left turns. You have to look out and make sure they see you and walk really fast. The speed limit is 60 on Sheppard which is too fast.”



We heard that crossing six lanes of traffic is challenging and that wide radius corners are hazardous, as cars take them at high speeds and drivers don’t look both ways.



Long waits at crossings are confusing and dangerous. Signals don’t give the “go” unless the button is pushed, leading to delayed starts, missed crossings, and crossing against the light.



Multi-use paths and trails in the ravines and corridors are great, but not wide enough for everyone who wants to use them

“When my friends visit, they have to take a long subway ride and then walk for over 20 minutes—and that’s only because they know the right route through the park, otherwise it would be much longer.”



## WHY IT MATTERS TO THE DESIGN TEAM

The design team knows that Downsview is big and disconnected. They are inspired by local notions that it can also feel smaller and more connected via creative, multi-use pathways. The team wants to make it connected for everyone, not just those with an intimate knowledge of the place.

Locals work hard to overcome barriers in the public realm. Future decommissioning of the runway and removal of fencing provides a huge opportunity to reconnect this area to other parts of Downsview and the city and to improve the way people get around. In addition to removing barriers, the design team is cognizant that barriers shouldn't be put there in the first place. They are designing strategies to reduce the daily frustrations of getting around so that people feel safer, more relaxed, and happier as they get where they need to go.

Downsview residents have shown that they want to walk and cycle. The design team believes that walking and biking are essential parts of a healthy, dynamic, and safe environment and wants to honour local intentions. The team plans to encourage walking, biking, scooting, and transit by making sustainable choices safer, more accessible, appealing, and comfortable.

This will take many forms. Walking, for example, will be supported as a way to get places, to serve daily needs, and as a leisure activity. The team is determined to build on a 15-minute neighbourhood concept with a mixed-used urban fabric that will keep daily needs nearby. They also want to create a network of green, vibrant pathways that keep people safe and away from fast-moving traffic. Finally, the team understands that wayfinding is important so people can plan their routes and feel safe and confident in their choices.



Pedestrian and cyclist memorials are not uncommon in the area. Fear and anxiety about high volumes of fast moving traffic on the arterials and internal streets were a frequent topic of conversation with the people we met.

## DOWNSVIEW FIELDNOTE

# 2

## PEOPLE RECOGNIZE & WANT TO CONNECT WITH THE DIVERSITY OF DOWNSVIEW

“It’s friendly. It’s multi-... I don’t know every country! Everyone says “hi”. Everyone is nicer in COVID time. And I don’t have to feel homesick.

Downsview has a long history of both close-knit communities and ethnocultural diversity. As we saw in Downsview Stories, the demographic composition of Downsview has changed through time—from early Irish settlements, to Jewish life at Bathurst Manor, to Black community roots, to Italian family homes, to the current Filipino cultural hub, to the Downsview military base residents. Downsview has seen concentrations of communities with shared experiences and cross-community interaction. We found that neighbourhood, connections, and diversity still contribute to the area’s community spirit.

Through Downsview Fieldnotes we aimed to speak to people from different backgrounds, from different countries, and from different family compositions. And we did just that. We found that people from all backgrounds value the area’s diversity. And locals said people were friendly and neighbourly no matter where they were from.

We heard that many social interactions with neighbours were cursory and brief, sometimes due to language barriers or differences in age or family composition. That said, something as small as a wave or nod could help generate a valuable sense of social connection across distance—and across difference—that made their neighbourhood feel more welcoming and safe.

People told us they want more opportunities to connect across cultures and across generations to create strong neighbourhood bonds and mutual understanding. It seems Downsview locals are yearning for the sort of close-knit connections that have been traditionally associated with ethnicity or shared life experience, but need not be. We were told that Downsview needs more places to make connections easier. Some told us the public realm doesn’t support



interactions between neighbours or the demographic changes currently taking place in the neighbourhood. New people come, but there are few new places outside of the parks to meet them.

“The apartment building where I live is multicultural, I know lots of people and they know me. It’s really social and friendly there.”

“The demographics are changing a lot. It used to be a lot of Italian families, but with the older generation scaling down, houses are selling and older neighbours are moving out. It’s a new neighborhood. There’s a lot of new immigrant families who are just settling in. People are still trying to find their way and their place.”



“I really appreciate the friendliness of my neighbours who always smile at me. I don’t know them or where they’re from, really, but it helps me feel safe and just feels good.”

“The churches have been closed or at low capacity. That’s part of the community aspect that’s lacking. A lot of people walk to that church. Our church has a Sunday mass and socializing events after mass. They do Easter. They’ll do a New Year’s party. They do an interfaith event during Passover. We invite people of Jewish faith. It’s a bit more of a creative approach than some other churches.”



“I moved to Bathurst and Wilson in 1960. The diversity was present on my street, at Faywood Public School, Wilson Heights Junior High, Sir Sandford Fleming, York U. What a respectable and accepting time.”

“There are lots of old, Italian people in the neighbourhood. Lots of people from different ages and backgrounds who are all super friendly. There is programming at the community centre for the elderly as well.”

“The Manor was a wonderful place to grow up in. Everyone knew everyone. Indeed, it took a village and there wasn’t a door that wouldn’t welcome you in.”

## WHY IT MATTERS TO THE DESIGN TEAM

The id8 Downsview design team recognizes the need for places to connect across difference. They are thinking about both destinations where people might gather, but also about comfortable and attractive paths through neighbourhoods that encourage interaction as people move through their day. If people feel safer and more comfortable outside and moving about, there will be more chances for interaction, even if it’s just a smile and a nod in in-between spaces.

Their thinking is inspired and guided by urbanists like Charles Montgomery who studies the science of well-being and sociability related to urban design. In his book “Happy City”, Montgomery describes how a well-designed neighbourhood promotes a higher quality of life with greater social cohesion and mental and physical health. The more small or incidental interaction people experience moving around their neighbourhood, the more socially connected and less isolated they feel.

The team is looking at ways to foster different identities on the site that build on, and contribute to, what currently surrounds these lands. They are also thinking about providing a diversity of housing options on the site and the need to support intergenerational households. Finally, they know that diverse, local, independent retail is key to the success of the connected and social 15-minute neighbourhood and are working through challenges to specifically design this into the plans.

# DOWNSVIEW FIELDNOTE

## 3

## PEOPLE HAVE TO WORK TO BE TOGETHER & DO SO WITH A GENEROSITY OF SPIRIT



People in Downsview work hard to connect and they share space in a spirit of generosity. We witnessed locals finding creative solutions to be together in the face of challenges, including those presented by the built form and by COVID-19. For example, people sat together on curbs or patches of grass when benches were missing, they pulled chairs into parking lots, they brought their own lawn furniture and shade awnings to parks. As well as connecting with friends, locals consistently expressed a desire to get to know other local people better.

We found that people in Downsview look out for each other. They do so for all sorts of reasons and in all sorts of ways, but we were particularly struck by how kindness is used to compensate for shortfalls in the public realm. For example, we found that cyclists and pedestrians were resigned to people biking on Downsview's sidewalks. They accommodate each other to keep each other safe. It's not ideal, but people told us that the stakes are too high on the road. Drivers speed and don't always pay attention to cyclists on the road. We saw and heard cyclists and pedestrians on sidewalks politely give each other space without complaint. People in Downsview



understand the challenging conditions faced by one another and seem to cut each other slack as a result.

Although people felt connected to and kinship with neighbours, we also heard that some people leave Downsview to connect with their friends because there just aren't enough comfortable places to be together. Locals pointed to a lack of public library branches and community centres. They told us they want more small businesses spread out through the area, including a greater diversity of restaurants and coffee shops where they could enjoy different food and connect casually with neighbours. We heard that most people who play sports with friends had to travel more than 15 minutes from their homes, and that this was a particular issue for youth. Locals also want opportunities to connect in all seasons, so they don't have to leave the area in winter for programming.

“There are not enough places and programs to welcome people. The community spaces are missing. There's the park, but other than that, there are not a lot of places for the community to come together.”

“I am looking forward to using this area [in the future] so that those of us connected and not connected can feel there is a safe place to gather and be a community.”



Cyclists are frequently on the sidewalk because it's safer than the road. Everyone accommodates each other in face of the conditions.

“We see neighbours when they're mowing their lawn or maybe at the church. It's part of the community aspect. We need more spaces to connect.”

“There are no coffee shops or restaurants—no places to hang out—which takes away from the community feel of the area.”



Young women seeking conversation and shade on a hot day are relegated to sitting on a concrete curb.

“I mostly bump into my neighbours on walks.”

“I used to live downtown where I used to walk or bike everywhere. I tried cycling here but drivers on Sheppard are not used to cyclists. I had to cycle on the sidewalk or on residential streets.”

## WHY IT MATTERS TO THE DESIGN TEAM

The design team experienced the social chemistry of this place firsthand. They recognize both the strong desire for places to socialize and current barriers that make connections difficult. The team understands that Downsview needs places to build a sense of community, especially with changing demographics and the future influx of new residents that the id8 Downsview development will bring. The area needs both destinations—like cafés and community spaces—and also a built form that provides for everyday social interaction. A mixed-used development framework will support and enable the sort of critical animation and interaction that locals are asking for—the sort lauded by urbanist Charles Montgomery.

The design team also witnessed the sidewalk generosity and civility firsthand on local bike rides. Human kindness is beautiful, and, in the case of cycling on the sidewalk, keeps everyone safe, but it should never be a substitute for appropriate infrastructure. The team recognizes that Downsview needs safe, direct, and appealing bike routes that are separated from vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Beyond these dedicated lanes, they believe that the whole system should be bike-friendly, including vehicular roads. Improvements in cycling infrastructure will be a focus in future plans so that riding a bike becomes a viable option for transportation and recreation.



# DOWNSVIEW FIELDNOTE

4

## PEOPLE INVEST DEEPLY IN THE DOWNSVIEW COMMUNITY & WANT A FUTURE HERE

“Where I live—and I live more on the back of the main roads—everyone is friendly. We have thought about downsizing, to a place where we don’t have to shovel. Our neighbours said don’t leave, we will shovel the snow for you.”

People like living in Downsview. Despite its many challenges, we found that people are invested in this community. They value their deep local connections and exude a sense of neighbourhood pride. It seems people come to Downsview and they stay. While some were newcomers, we also spoke with many people who have lived in the neighbourhood for 25 years. They value the community connections, friendly neighbours, and distinctive neighbourhoods. Locals identified strongly with their own local areas within Downsview—the little villages that dot this place. They took pride in their specific neighbourhoods.

We found that people want more reason to stay close to home. They want more options for groceries, restaurants, services, and leisure in the area, so they can stay more rooted in place. This includes options that are affordable and diverse, and cater to different family structures. Although we found that people can typically get to places like grocery stores and restaurants within 15 minutes, they often do so by car and the services nearby are often too expensive or not culturally relevant to their needs.

Locals also shared their fears about housing affordability. They want to stay local and want their kids to keep close as they age, but many are not optimistic in the current real estate climate. We heard many tell of friends leaving for more affordable options elsewhere.



“It’s an inter-generational community. My mother has her own social friends and I have my own. That’s one of the good things, there are other grandparents and parents and children. It’s social. My mom walks in the morning with my daughter. She knows other grandmothers in the area with grandchildren.”

“The people, the events at Downsview Park. I know lots of people and there’s good vibes around them. I like this neighbourhood.”



“The rents are increasing, some people had to leave. I would like to buy a place for myself and my daughter but it’s too expensive.”

“Our family’s three generations lived in this home. My parents, the four children and my children after I purchased my parent’s home when they moved to a condo. Many homes changed hands to the second generation or they bought homes here.”

“Parks, the foodbank at the greenhouse... it’s “pay what you can”—it’s all good for community spirit.”

“I go for Halal food 30 minutes away. There’s not many in my area.”

“The neighbourhood here is very family-oriented—like a little village—which is especially great for children.”





“The Manor was such a special place to grow up in. It was a special, tight-knit community filled with children. We had all the conveniences of kosher grocery shopping, a convenience store, pharmacy, bank, park, skating rink and much more. It was our own little bubble.”

“Metro is a higher price point so to get affordable groceries I have to drive to No Frills or Superstore.”



#### WHY IT MATTERS TO THE DESIGN TEAM

We heard it in other engagement activities too: affordable housing is important. The design team is aware that a range of housing policies is needed to achieve affordable options, so people who live in and around Downsview can stay in Downsview... and so their kids can too. This honours the multi-generational roots that many families have put down in this part of the city.

The team is intrigued that people don't necessarily connect with the wider area of Downsview as much as they do with their own neighbourhood within it. This makes sense considering the disconnected nature of the street network and the busyness of the arterials between neighbourhoods. In response, the design team plans to create a series of smaller neighbourhoods within the Downsview lands. These distinct neighbourhoods would be connected but have their own centre and services within 15-minutes of travel on bike or on foot. This will also serve people wanting services closer to their home so they could stay more local.

## DOWNSVIEW FIELDNOTE

5

## PEOPLE MAKE THE MOST OF FLEXIBLE URBAN SPACES

“ I come here after school to hang out with my friends on the benches and meet up with my boyfriend. We all come to Grand Ravine Park, it’s where everyone else is and it doesn’t cost money to be here.

“ [In my youth] my sister and I spent a lot of time in the forests and Downsview Dells, picking raspberries, climbing, balancing on the logs across the streams. Amazing!

Greenspace as living space, urban space as every space—Downsview gets creative with the space it has. We found that parks and greenways, both large and small, are not only places to enjoy nature, exercise, play, and relax, but are places where locals hold family gatherings, plan playdates, celebrate birthdays, tend to guerilla gardens, improvise cricket pitches, meet other parents, and gather with groups of friends. Beyond greenspaces, we saw this in parking lots, on street corners and sidewalks, and around local businesses.

Spontaneous and unplanned uses in green and urban space show resourcefulness and stewardship. We found that these uses are possible because so much of Downsview’s urban space is undefined and are prompted because there are few other places in Downsview to do things and get together. We found that locals were more likely to use outside space in new ways because COVID-19 restricts their use of indoor space. Importantly, these spaces are open, flexible, and free—which is especially important to youth. Whatever the reason for the creative use, the unprogrammed nature of Downsview’s public realm has seen people adopt a sense of ownership and craft space to make it work, often in unintended ways.





People make the most of local greenspace, like the hydro fields: a spectacular space for spontaneous use. Cricket anyone?

“Grand Ravine Park allows for a lot of interaction. People are always using the sports facilities, kids are always playing, starting early in the morning so it feels safe. Or you can read a book on the bench and nobody bothers you.”

“There is a park right in front of my home. We often go to the park. There is a splash pad, bench where I can sit. My husband and I go for walks.”

“Not everything with COVID has been bad. I like having a little bonfire in the ravine or park or a beer or glass of wine with friends in the park.”

“I use the field in Balmoral Park and schedule playdates there with other moms.”



COVID has brought new ways to use outdoor spaces and parking lots. We saw lots of tents and shade coverings and people experiencing new ways to eat the local food they love.

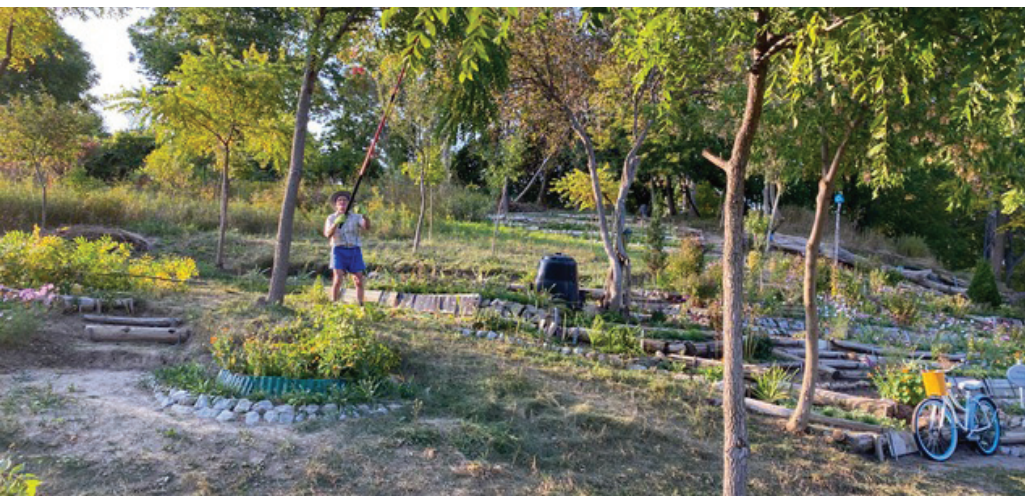


A busy bakery and a couple of trees offering shade on Wilson Avenue attracts other vendors—here, selling squash flowers—and provides a place for community connections.



Resourceful locals make their own shade and social spaces in beloved local parks. We saw birthday parties, picnics, BBQs, and family get-togethers in the parks and ravines.





This Downsview local tends to trees in the ravine. After many years as a guerilla gardener, the City has granted him permission to maintain this much-loved garden.

“I meet my friends at the corner store or at Walmart or the basketball court. It’s not much but there is a bench at the side of the centre where we sit.”

## WHY IT MATTERS TO THE DESIGN TEAM

Creative Downsview locals have shown the design team what can happen when space is left open for spontaneous activities that serve local needs. The design team wants to honour this innovation and creativity, make space for things to happen, and then get out of the way! They want to introduce a flexible framework that will allow for a range of activities.

The design team was particularly impressed by the range of activities happening in parks and the creativity and determination of locals to use local greenspace. This is something they want to celebrate and encourage. The team knows it needs to create a variety of greenspaces that can be used in a variety of ways. This would include not only large concentrations of greenspace, but also green pathways and smaller green areas throughout the development. Green spaces will also serve a biodiversity function to maintain the existing habitats and species on site.

More generally, they are thinking about flexible approaches to design that allow change through time, incorporate interim uses, and invite community contributions. And they are reimagining ways to conceive of indoor and outdoor space as less of a binary, but as a spectrum, so traditional indoor activities can take place in public, supporting community interaction and neighbourhood vibrancy.

And finally, it’s clear that local investment in spontaneous use makes people feel connected to their neighbourhoods—something the team wants to foster.