



# The Exiled Spaces of the City

## Transforming Laneways into Community Spaces

Natalia Dmuchowska  
major research project



## Acknowledgements

Thank you to Professor Zhuang who dedicated so much time and resources to this project. Thank you for your patience and guidance throughout.

Thank you to Michelle Senayah and The Laneway Project for showing me the true potential of laneways and community-driven initiatives. Thank you for allowing me to learn from your wisdom, experience, and knowledge.

Thank you to all my classmates, faculty, and staff at the School of Urban and Regional Planning. Your tireless support, enthusiasm, and efforts were not wasted on me.

Thank you to my family for not thinking I'm crazy for going back to school, again. And thank to Jacek for keeping me sane, fed, and level-headed throughout this process.

## Image Sourcing

All images used in this major research project are referenced on pages 117-119

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# Exiled Spaces of the City: Transforming Laneways into Community Spaces

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A Major Research Project  
presented to Ryerson University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Planning in Urban Development  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2017

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# 01 Introduction





This goal of this project is to re-imagine a derelict, underutilized, and exiled laneway in the Roncesvalles Village neighbourhood (alternatively known as 'Roncy'), into a place that can be celebrated and used by the community. I imagine it to be a project that expands the street level excitement into the laneways. This project is heavily grounded in the practical. The idea for it flourished while standing on a rooftop of a building during a festival in the 'Roncy' neighbourhood. After spending the afternoon on the ground we retreated from the busy street to a private rooftop. From here, I was able to watch as people squeezed by each other enjoying street vendors and local artisans and music. But I could also see the intricate network of laneways that stood vacant and still amidst the heavy traffic on the street below. Since then I've spent countless hours wandering through the laneways in Roncy hoping to see activity, kids playing, informal economies, or seniors sitting and reading books. But alas, the only people I've come across are those looking through garbage and recycle bins in search of bottles to return for a few cents.

According to the organization The Laneway Project, the City of Toronto has more than "2400 publicly owned laneways, covering more than 250 linear kilometers of public space (2016)." At this time there is no laneway planning policy in the City of Toronto meaning that many of these public spaces are left in an underutilized state. Laneways are embedded in the culture and history of places and have served in many capacities. We are now in a unique position to begin to reclaim these underused spaces as ones of the public realm. In a city as dense and concentrated as Toronto, these spaces seem to be ones of immense potential and capacity (Rossi, 2008). As we bring these spaces into the light we can also begin to imagine their further potential as spaces of play, spaces for experimentation with new technology, and spaces where we can create more homes. Using laneways in the City of Toronto as spaces for its citizens further assures that these service lanes become more than devotions to "the messy realities of parking, trash collection, and loading and unloading (Soules, 2011, p. 29)." Rather, these phantom networks of narrow streets should be "increasingly considered ripe for dual duty, [and] asked to emerge from [their] singular role as service spaces...(Soules, 2011, p.29)."

As you wander up and down Roncesvalles Avenue it is easy to see the appeal of the community. You pass by delis, mom-and-pop shops, cafes, dog walkers, children, and seniors. Planters guard pedestrians from the vehicular traffic, and bike lanes encourage active transportation. The streetcar adds to the uncanny character of the neighbourhood. But this is only one street – one very busy street in a much larger neighbourhood. This neighbourhood was chosen as a study area because it has a diverse population, a wide age range, limited open spaces, and a unique cultural history. Transitioning from 'cottage country' to a suburb of Toronto, to an immigrant landing pad, a Polish haven, and now a hip inner-city neighbourhood, this area is a great testing ground for this type of project. It also has over 100 underutilized laneways that are essential to the cultural, economic, social, health, and environmental well-being of communities (The Laneway Project, 2016).

Every community is a little bit different. Every neighbourhood identity is encased in its physical history, in the stories of the people who shaped it, and in the experiences of those who currently reside there. The Roncesvalles Village neighbourhood is one whose legacy is steeped in Polish culture, delicious food, community interactions, local art and roots dating back to the beginning of Toronto's history. What follows next is a glance into this history; an homage to the forces that helped shape this unique part of the City of Toronto. This work will layer placemaking tools to create a community space by activating a laneway, ensuring that the area's story can be celebrated daily by the citizens of the Roncesvalles Village neighbourhood. The methodology used included a literature review, case & precedent study, site analysis, and design intervention. This research is truly looking to re-imagine an underutilized laneway in the Roncesvalles Village neighbourhood in Toronto, as a vibrant public space that celebrates the history and heritage of the neighbourhood while providing a new arena for interaction on a local scale. The final intention of this work is to inform a design intervention to activate a laneway in the Roncesvalles Village neighbourhood. It is a work that will take an exiled space and transform it into a community space.



# 02 Literature Review





Laneways, alleyways, service alleys, exiled spaces, regardless of which term is used, have often been associated with “blight and crime” (Seymour et al, 2010, p.380). Traditionally these spaces emerged or were designed with little thought about effect on the urban form (Liu, 2016, p.3). Hierarchically, laneways are at the bottom of the street network. In Toronto, public laneways are owned by the City of Toronto. This means that the City bears all responsibility regarding their maintenance and ensuring that they remain in a state of good repair (The Laneway Project, 2016, p.1). These laneways are public rights-of-way and the City mandates emergency access requirements of these spaces (The Laneway Project, 2016, p.1). When considering a laneway revitalization project it is imperative to also consider the several City divisions that have minimum requirements for laneway widths such as solid waste management and fire services (McKeough, 2015, p.42). Additionally, it is important to maintain and continually improve service functionality especially as populations grow and neighbourhoods intensify (Senayah, 2017). But there is a potential for a new life for laneways in dense cities such as Toronto!

Many cities are proving that these can be “sites for alternative transportation networks, storm water treatment, habitat restoration, and neighbourhood social life” (Seymour et al, 2010, p.380). The popularization of revitalized laneways or “cracks in the city” (Seymour et al, 2010, p.380) can be attributed to a larger complete streets movement. It is an attempt to facilitate neighbourhood social life and sense of ownership of the previously derelict spaces of the city (Seymour et al, 2010, p.280). Alleys or laneways are a “valuable social resource especially in dense urban areas with limited space for public life” (Liu, 2016, p.2). Furthermore, laneways can be recognized as “interior neighbourhood open space” (Martin, 2002), allowing them to be more intimate and the setting for more informal social connections. Laneways are places of potential vibrancy and can be “spaces for community

gathering, celebration, and interactions, as well as places for artistic expression (City of Vancouver, 2016).” Perth’s laneway revitalization strategy outlines a number of positive consequences of activating laneways including promoting them as public space, improving neighbourhood connectivity, increasing the diversity of businesses and activities, they can create more affordable commercial spaces, and can build strong partnerships to help remain competitive with the City’s suburbs (City of Perth, 2016, p.1). Perth’s document states that “regardless of their historic or current functions or locations, laneways share one common asset: they offer human scale experiences (City of Perth, 2016, p.1).”

Toronto itself has more than 2400 publicly-owned laneways (The Laneway Project, 2016) that are underutilized and underappreciated. The Laneway Project has outlined a number of positive consequences that can emerge from a well-executed laneway revitalization initiative:

- Increased walkability and connection
- Increased public space and greenery
- A new venue for community events
- New space for informal physical activity
- A display arena for public art and performance
- A new space for seating and street furniture
- A venue for informal economies and pop-up shops

(The Laneway Project, 2016).



The Laneway Project Map of Laneways in Toronto



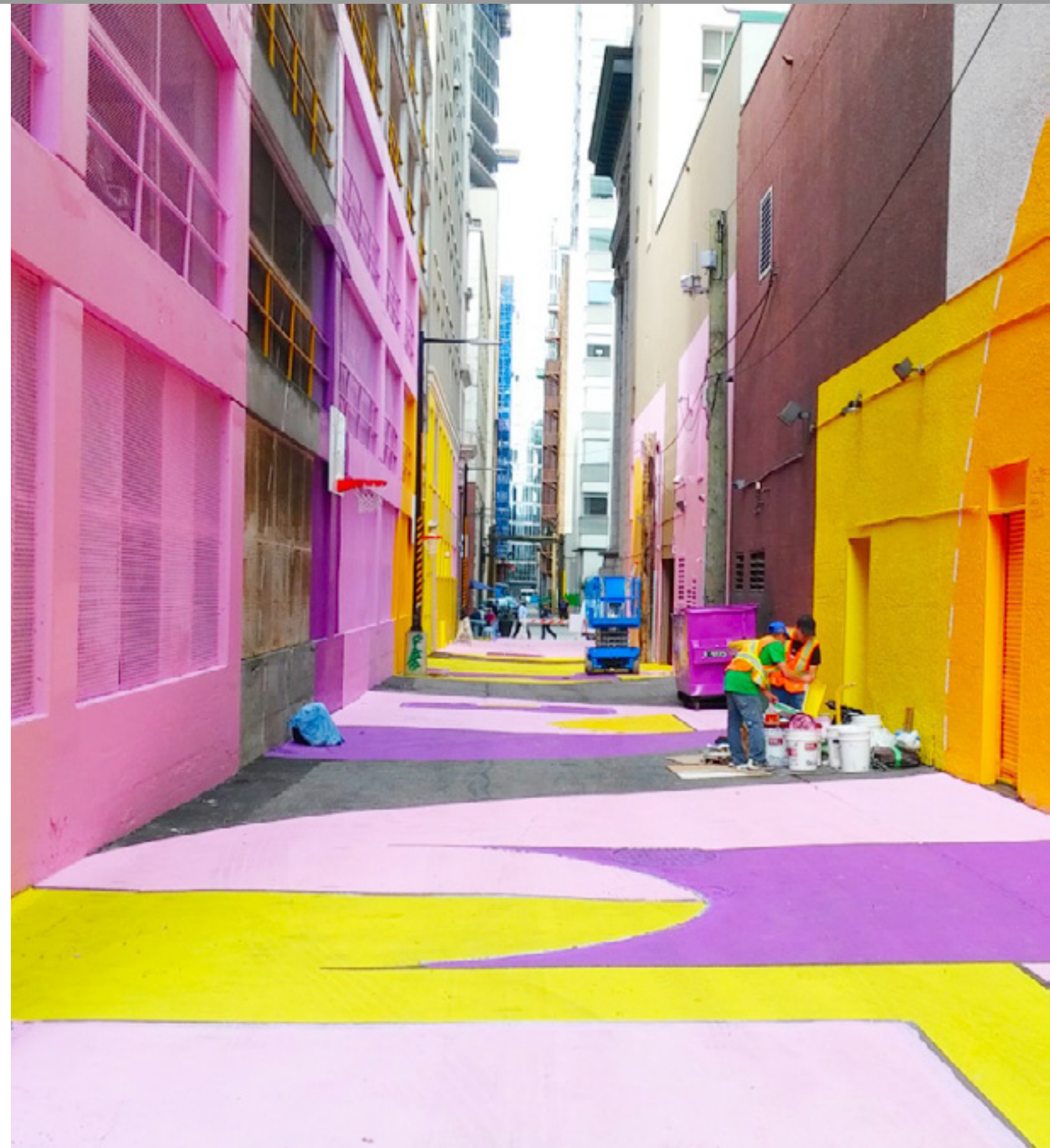


Temporary events and festivals bring attention to public spaces and laneways, Aurora Art Festival, Aurora, Canada



When laneways act as public space rather than service alleys we see an improvement in connectivity. By improving connectivity to and through laneways, the quality of the entire space will also see enhancements (McKeough, 2015, p.41). Connectivity between existing infrastructure and services, and pedestrian access can assist in creating quality public spaces (McKeough, 2015, p.41). Jane Jacobs advocated Eyes on the Streets, a theory that suggests that the more people on the ground, the safer our neighbourhoods will feel (Jacobs, 2002 p.32). Activated and well-designed and functioning laneways can decrease the feeling of sketchy alleyways and can create a sense of safety and security in underutilized areas. Toronto's neighbourhoods are rated on many factors including walkability (Walk Score, 2016). By decreasing use of vehicles in laneways, it is possible to encourage more pedestrian use. This in turn can improve the quality of life for the residents that already live in the neighbourhood as well as for the ones who will live there in the future. Laneways can provide a unique mix of eclectic and flexible uses in neighbourhoods. It can also offer the opportunity for small, local, and macro businesses to prosper with an increased social infrastructure (McKeough, 2015, p.42). It is easy to see the value in creating better and more social laneways in neighbourhoods. A successfully revitalized laneway can attract pedestrians via interventions and simultaneously connect members of the community regardless of their ethnic groups, age, or profession (Liu, 2016, p.5). They have the potential to create diverse spaces for use by neighbourhood members.

Many criteria exist that determine whether or not a laneway project is successful – one important measure is its ability to create a sense of place and whether it can continually attract people to linger and stay (Liu, 2016, p.6). The laneway should be safe, inviting, and clean; this is accomplished through placemaking efforts. Laneway projects, as described above, are intended to create community spaces at a human scale that add to the vibrancy of

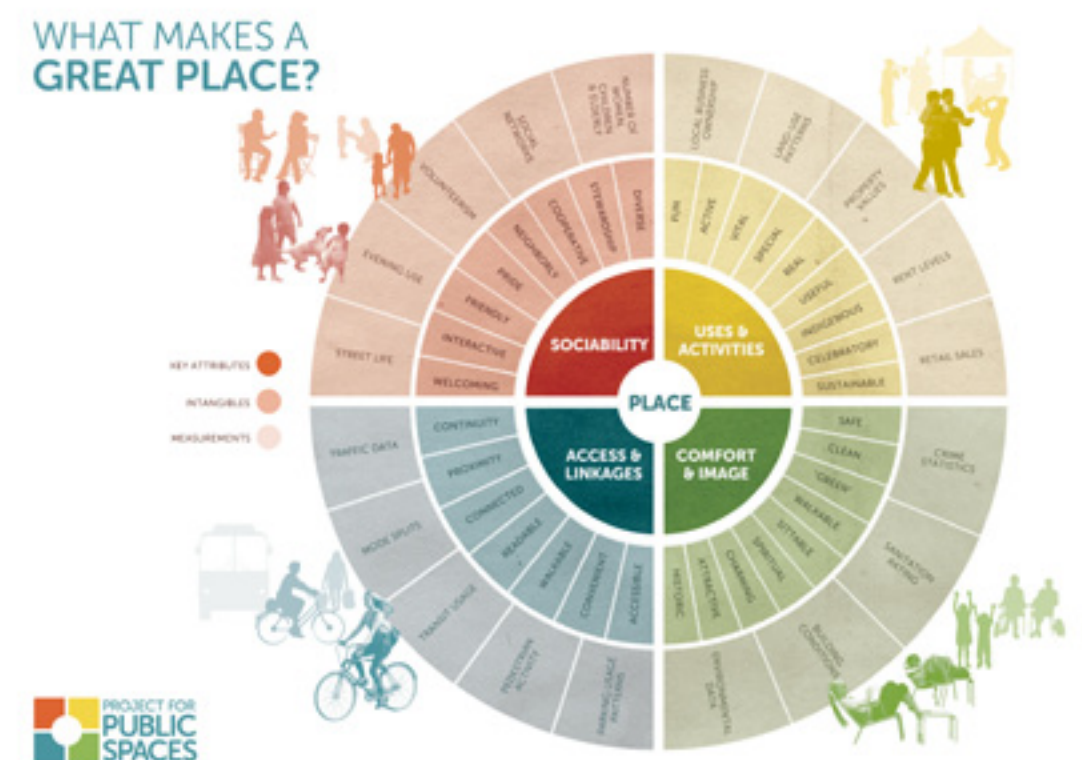






Seating areas and planters are indicators of good public spaces, East Lansing, Michigan, USA

neighbourhoods. While thinking about these types of projects it is important to consider the process used to achieve a successful result. Incorporating principles of diversity can help to ensure that the activated laneway can celebrate community members with different backgrounds, the history and heritage of the neighbourhood, and be inclusive of all cultures (Szewczyk, 2014, p.43). The Project for Public Spaces defines placemaking as an “overarching idea and a hands-on approach for improving a neighbourhood, city, or region (2016).” It is a method that inspires people to “collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community...[to strengthen] the connection between people and the places they share...and to maximize shared value” (Project for Public Spaces, 2016). In this definition, making great spaces incorporates many different aspects but at the core is the community where spaces need to be sociable, there must be many uses and activities, it must be connected and accessible, and it must be comfortable and inspire a collective image of the neighbourhood (Project for Public Spaces, 2016). The image below shows some of the key attributes that contribute to creating great places.





When a laneway project is undertaken it must improve the space to have the ability to “produce daily activities and adapt to multiple uses... a shared living room for users from the block, a gathering place for neighbourhood activities, a destination for curious tourists and visitors, and a place to encounter unexpected experience for city wanderers” (Liu, 2016, p.6). These spaces have the potential Jacobs’ eight qualities that foster public life on streets: safe, comfortable, should have well-defined edges, is visually pleasing and engages the eye, is transparent, has access to storefronts, is complementary, and is well constructed and maintained (1985). Further, if well imagined and designed, revitalized laneway spaces provide the opportunity for diverse uses and users (Szewczyk, 2014).

Although I have outlined multiple reasons why laneway revitalizations are not only possible, but should be encouraged in order to create new community spaces, this does not mean that they do not come without problems or considerations. It is easy to imagine visitors and community members packing into laneway spaces when a program has been organized such as an event, however one concern is how to prolong this use (Liu, 2016, p.10). How can we ensure that these spaces are useful through non-programmed times as well? Further, the City only plows laneways when there’s garbage to pick up and laneways are not treated as main streets (Senayah, 2017). Laneways need to be well lit in order to ensure safety and crime prevention through environmental design (Bain et al, 2012). Other things to consider include mobility challenges and visual impairments. In many spaces pedestrians will still have to make way for vehicles and in narrow spaces this can cause a dangerous situation (Bain et al, 2012). Therefore, it is important to properly plan for the duality of laneways as service infrastructure and public spaces for community members.

As outlined in numerous examples above, laneway revitalization projects are great ways to increase public space in communities. There are also many methods to approaching such initiatives and of course problems that must be resolved. In order to better understand the various methodologies and approaches to laneway projects I have conducted case studies of three cities: Montréal, Canada, Melbourne, Australia, and Chicago, USA. All three examples are very different and will inform the final design exercise, and will be presented in a later section of this project.



Communities can participate in art exhibits in public laneways to provide a sense of ownership, Melbourne, Australia



# 03 Methods





This project is profoundly grounded in the practical and the experienced. From its conception, to the research conducted, right through to the final design intervention. This also means that much of the methodology is structured similarly. This project ventures through a series of sections starting with an introduction and literature review, in which the findings were fairly scarce. Laneway revitalization is a fairly new phenomenon and a very bottom-up rather than top-down topic and process. I was highly influenced and inspired by Toronto's own Laneway Project. The Laneway Project is an organization with a mandate to change the stigma and relationship between laneways and the citizens of Toronto (The Laneway Project, 2016). This group sees the largely untapped potential of these exiled spaces in our city and work with community members, neighbourhood organizations, and even private firms, to change the way we see and use these spaces.

Taking initial stimulus from The Laneway Project I delved into a deeper literature review. The literature review was conducted as a scan of pertinent information from secondary sources via academic literature to more informed master plans and revitalization strategies. The literature review has been monumental in grounding this project in substantial validity. A secondary part of the literature review was a review of case studies and the extraction of information that would be most pertinent to my own work. European countries have taken advantage of small laneway or alley spaces for a long time since their older city centers tend to be more crowded and condensed. From former trips to Venice, Italy, Kotor, Montenegro, Split, Croatia, and countless others, I know that it is possible to wander the back streets of cities that have been adapted as café and restaurant seating. It seems like these spaces have always been considered useful and places of gathering and vibrancy. Although this might not actually be the case, I chose to examine precedents from cities and countries that are more

similar economically, socially, and in planning practice, to Toronto and Canada. The three selected case studies include Montreal, Canada, Melbourne, Australia, and Chicago, Illinois. Each case study brings a different perspective to the topic of laneways. Montreal's Ruelle Verte is a grass-roots initiative that empowers local neighbourhoods in turning their 'narrow streets' into green spaces and gardens (DeWolf, 2010). Melbourne's alleyways are much more planned and programmed. These exiled spaces were used as a catalyst for redevelopment and growth of the downtown core of the city (Oberklaid, 2015). Encouraging growth through business development and relaxed liquor laws for cafés in the alleys ensured that people came back to the downtown core (Oberklaid, 2015). The final case study focuses on temporary events in Chicago's laneways in a series titled 'Activate Chicago' and organized by the 'Chicago Loop Alliance'. Chicago's laneways act as a stage for performance and art, as an area for art and festivals, and temporary transformations of space. I selectively choose these examples because they showcase the vast potential of the exiled spaces in our cities.

Since Roncesvalles Village was selected as the study area I completed a historical and urban review of the neighbourhood. This part of my research consisted of combing through documents at the local library to inform about the heritage and history of the area. 'Roncey' has undergone interesting changes and continues to be a vibrant community. This makes it the perfect neighbourhood for this type of project. After wandering through the, close to 100, laneways in the area, I selected one area that I believed had the most potential to be transformed into vibrant alleyway. The selection process included creating criteria for selecting an appropriate laneway. The criteria included that it was close to transit, was accessible, could be made safe for pedestrians, provided many "canvases" that could be decorated with appropriate murals, had nooks that could provide spaces for seating and lingering, was close



enough to the main retail area in order to act as a spillover space, and provide access to retail and restaurants. The criteria was established based on lessons learned from the case studies and literature review. The selected laneway runs parallel to Roncesvalles Avenue to its east. At this point I conducted site analysis and observation exercises documenting my findings in notes, sketches, mapping, and photographs.

The final step in this project was the actual transformation of the exiled space into a community one. The design intervention, or proposed laneway revitalization combines findings from the literature review, takes precedent from the case studies, combines the story of 'Roncey', and layers it all onto the site analysis. The resulting proposal will be showcased in the final section of this project.



Example of Laneway in Europe showing a restaurant in old castle ruins, Split, Croatia



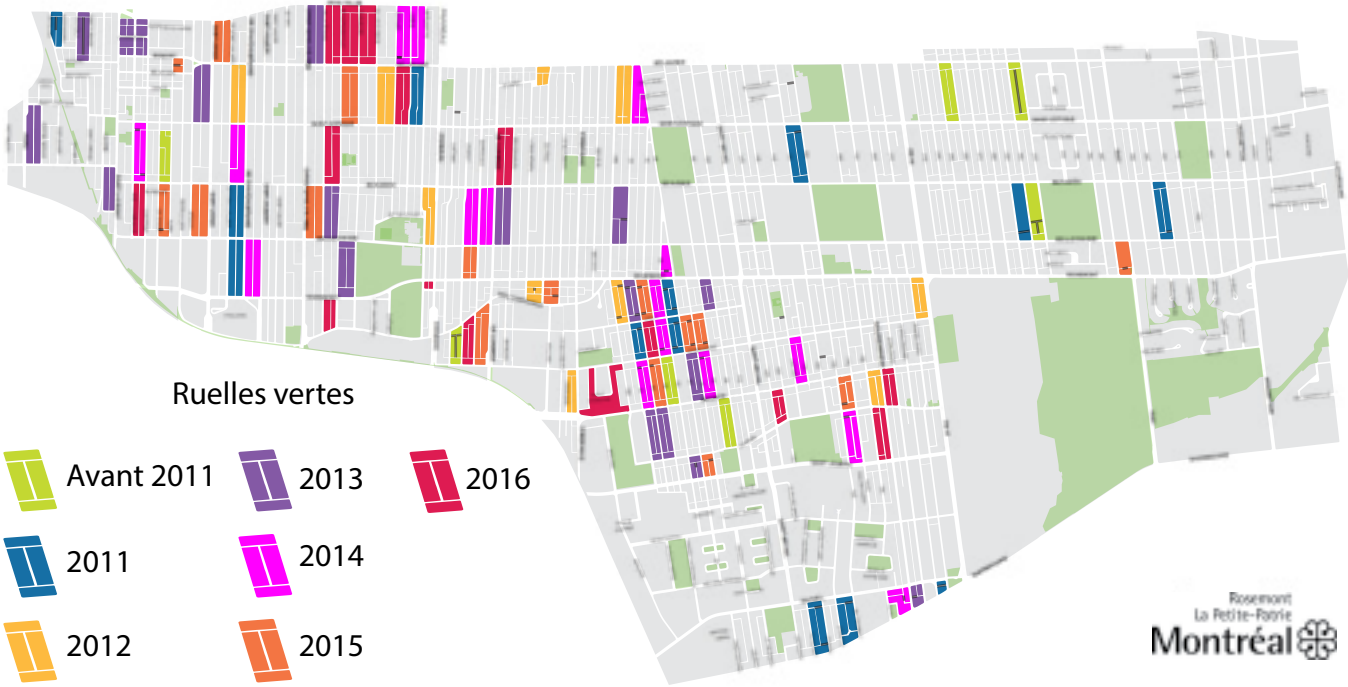
# 04 Case Studies





# Montréal, Canada

Montréal’s Ruelles Vertes, or green lanes, is a community run initiative prompted by residents who seek to beautify their small streets. This is part of a larger project, an environmental awareness program run by the City of Montréal for the borough of Rosemont-La Petite Patrie, known as Eco-Quartier. This organization manages “environmental projects with a strong social dimension, particularly promoting the employability of young people” (Eco-Quartier, 2016). Eco-Quartier has supported 98 green lanes to date and continues to provide assistance to residents who want to continue this work (Eco-Quartier, 2016). Since 2011 over 3,000m2 of asphalt have been greened and over 11,350 plants and shrubs have been handed over to citizens and planted (Ville De Montréal, 2017). 54 colorful murals have brightened these back and exiled spaces, and 23 park benches and 72 flower beds have been re-purposed by citizens and utilized in these spaces (Ville De Montréal, 2017).



Map of Greening Projects in Borough of Rosemont-La Petite Patrie



The Ruelles Vertes project is a great example of a revitalization project and most importantly seeks to make laneways spaces for people to play in, to use, to enjoy. Furthermore, these projects are started and realized by community members themselves. The organization encourages citizens to be involved in the greening of alleys by providing resources and funding for eligible projects. Eco-Quartier and the Ruelles Vertes organization have created guides for easing the process of greening a laneway that include steps on starting the project with a collaboration between a lane committee and Eco-Quartier, the project development including approval of designs and issuance of permits, and the execution of the project including inspections and installation of official green lane signage (Ville De Montréal, 2017). Greening projects in the Rosemont-La Petite Patrie borough has many benefits including: improving the quality of the living environment, creating links with members of the community, calming traffic and creating a more pedestrian friendly environment, and contributing to the reduction of urban heat islands in the summer (Ville De Montréal, 2017). These are important “voluntary citizen projects” (Fortier, 2013) and are dependent on community participation and approval. Possible community interventions can include adding flower boxes, installing street furniture, adding a mural, traffic calming through appropriate measures, or closing off car access and replacing asphalt with vegetation (Ville De Montreal, 2016). Projects are often supported with financial assistance and are maintained by citizens and Eco-Quartier.



Before & After, Laneway in Montréal, Canada



Mural in laneway, Montreal, Canada



Signage for Ruelles Vertes, Montreal, Canada



## Key Lessons

- Community is key
- Must be a neighbourhood initiative
- Run by the members of the community
- Support provided by the organization & the municipal government
- Goal is to 'green' the laneways
- Seating and Flowerbeds are important
- Shrubs & plants are invaluable

*"Voluntary Citizen Projects"*

- Vincent Fortier



# Melbourne, Australia

Melbourne's laneway renewal projects spawned a brand new excitement about the city's downtown core. The intricate network of laneways in Melbourne were carved out largely by property owners to increase accessibility, and to run sewers and waste disposal (Oberklaid, 2015). Today, these formerly derelict alleys are much more than waste disposal sites – they are now transformed passages with unique names and histories, small eateries and bars, boutiques, and outdoor displays for art and creativity. These now world-renowned slim streets generate an extra 10% connectivity in the downtown area, and an additional \$2.1 billion in local revenue (Oberklaid, 2015). In 1994 the City of Melbourne was only using 300 meters of its laneways for secondary activities, but by 2003 that number increased to 3km (Oberklaid, 2015). These little forgotten spaces have been transformed into a community space, a tourist destination, and a local economic driver. The most important factor in all these laneway revitalization projects is that they operate on a human scale.

The revitalization of Melbourne's laneways was a result of a drastic change in the economy. In the 1970s, the central business district was in decline as residents moved to the suburbs. By the 1980s the population of the downtown area decreased to just 2000 residents due to a changing economic landscape. This shift prompted the City of Melbourne to develop strategies to improve the state of the business district and the public realm. In 1987 the City's Grids and Greenery Strategy encouraged the improvement of the pedestrian experience by widening sidewalks, increasing plant life, replacing asphalt with greenery, and installing more lighting (Oberklaid, 2015). These changes resulted in a slow reversal of downtown population trends increasing the population to close to 30,000 in 2011. Furthermore state liquor laws were relaxed making it easier and more affordable to obtain a license to sell. These changes meant significant increases in smaller independent businesses being able to afford to set up niche establishments with street side dining areas. Today visitors and residents can take advantage of over 500 outdoor cafes in the central area of Melbourne.

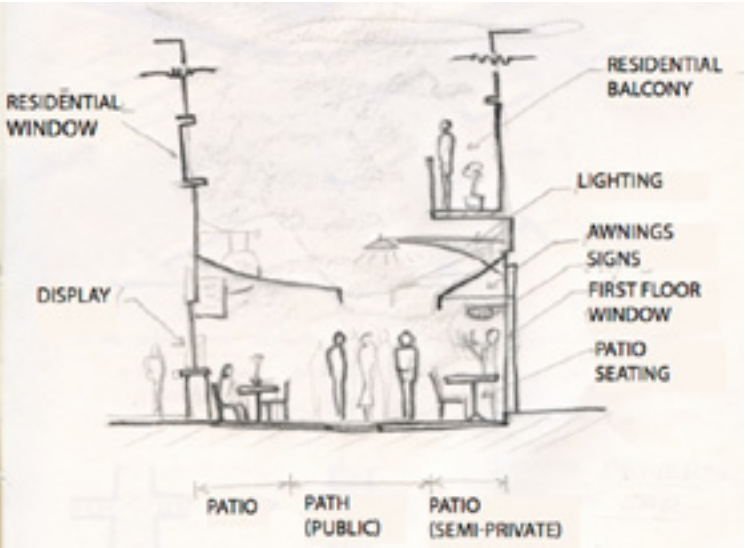


Laneway in Melbourne, Australia



The vast changes in policy and strict legislation attracted people back to Melbourne’s central business district and have allowed laneways to flourish as successful and interesting public spaces. Public art projects are promoted in order to beautify the laneways even more. This is an important aspect of laneway revitalization because art has the potential to anchor the laneway in the specific community or history of the space. There is an estimated 844,000 people who visit central Melbourne daily (Oberklaid, 2015). This means that the laneways have played a vital role in the revitalization of the downtown area.

Melbourne’s central area now has over 230 distinct laneways each with a unique name and story (City of Melbourne, 2004). For instance, ACDC Lane, named after the renowned band, is home to beautiful graffiti and street art. Hosier lane is known for it’s authentic urban art and colorful references to popular culture and youth subcultures. Literature Lane is located near the State Library and was re-imagined in celebration of Melbourne’s City of Literature status (Only Melbourne, 2015). Degraeves Street is a revitalized laneway suited for lunch dates, while Centre Lane is a popular shopping destination (Ferreter, Lewis, Pickford, 2008).



### Notable Design Features

- Graffiti & Murals
- Small Cafes and Seating Areas
- Interesting & Unique Names
- Organized Events
- Connections
- Ornate Gateways
- Human Scale
- Materials & Grade Changes

(Ferreter, Lewis, Pickford, 2008)





## Key Lessons

- Graffiti & art is important
- Seating areas attract people
- Relax liquor laws
- Stage events and festivals
- Focus on human scale
- Creative names for laneways
- Variety of food vendors



*"As well as bars, cafes, retailers and galleries, our laneways have become forums for artistic expression, offering unique, challenging and fascinating artworks to captivate and surprise visitors."*

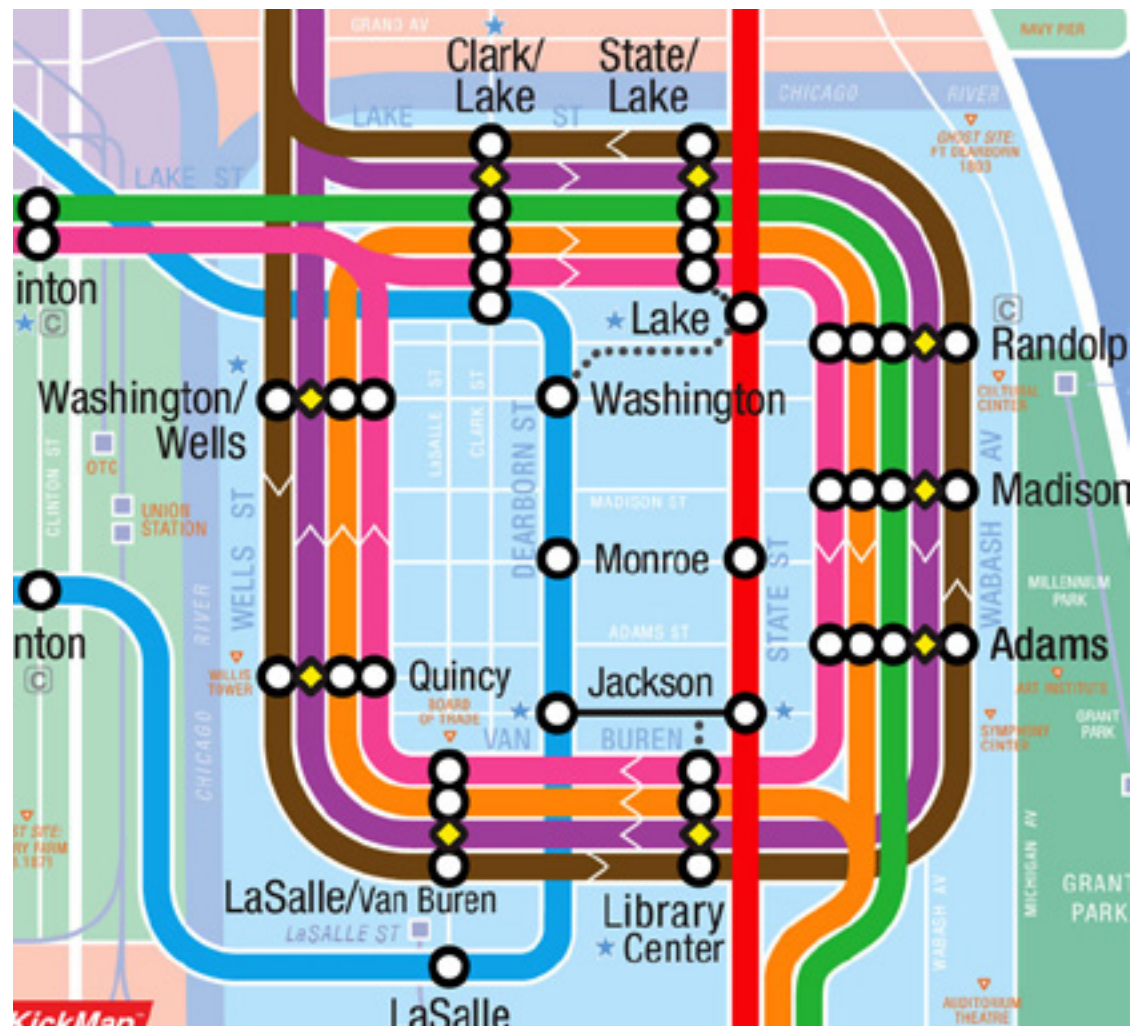
*- Lord Mayor John So*



# Chicago, USA

The Loop is an area of downtown Chicago that is outlined by one of the City's metro lines that travel above the main street. For tourists, this is the prime destination. For residents this seems to be the place where they come to work and leave after business is closed for the day. The Chicago Loop Alliance "creates, manages, and promotes high-performing urban experiences, attracting people and investment to the Loop" (CLA, 2017). They are responsible for encouraging economic prosperity in this area of the city and consist of 250 businesses, organizations, and individuals (CLA, 2017). CLA President, Michael Edwards, shares that "we have a great deal of internationally recognized, high-performing public spaces that attract millions to the city every year, however, in the Loop, there is a lack of accessible and engaging public spaces" (Chicago Splash, 2015). This was the motivation behind starting the Activate event series.

Activate transforms iconic alleys in the Loop area in Chicago into pop-up urban experiences. With



Map of Chicago's Metro Loop



Activate Performance, Chicago, USA





Activate Light Installation Chicago, USA

Activate transforms iconic alleys in the Loop area in Chicago into pop-up urban experiences. With a focus on temporary events, Activate Chicago offers a unique perspective into the potential of transforming laneways into spaces of play and fun. The major focus of this organization is on four core components including: art, music, people, and alleyways (Activate, 2016). ‘Activate’ events occur over separate evenings throughout the summer months in Chicago’s Loop area, but aren’t grouped into a festival. Location of the event is announced two weeks prior to it occurring adding a sense of excitement and spontaneity. Participants are actively encouraged to participate in art showcases and demonstrations. Activate events have relaxed liquor laws allowing people to move through the designated spaces with their beverages, and unlike with major events, the cost of alcohol is on par with local bars and pubs (Activate, 2016). Other interesting features include food trucks and pop-up shops (Activate, 2016).

The 2016 series had an estimated 65,000 attendees, showcased 386 artists, and had an estimated economic impact of over \$1,000,000 (Activate, 2016). The purpose of these events is to get people wandering in areas where they wouldn’t usually go – the laneways. But the impacts of these events and urban experiences can positively impact downtown centers into spaces where people can imagine living and playing, and not just working. The exiled spaces of Chicago’s Loop neighbourhood are being given new life through art and music. These events are all about the “diversity that fuels new ideas and conversations” (Splash Chicago, 2015).



Activate Performance, Chicago, USA



*"Placemaking projects and events support economic development, improve street safety, and promote walkable communities. "*

- Gabe Klein

## Key Lessons

- Temporary events work
- Shouldn't make everything into festivals
- Relaxed setting is favourable
- Fair pricing is necessary
- Art and music attracts people
- Public participation is key
- Accessibility is important





# Summary of Key Findings

Many lessons and best practices can be taken from the examples of Montréal, Melbourne, and Chicago. All three case studies present vastly different initiatives as well. Montréal showcases a community driven initiative that is supported by a local organization and the municipal government. They insist that their greening efforts must be initiated and executed by members of the community. In this example the goal is to make the dark asphalted laneways ones that are decorated with plants, shrubs, and flowers to encourage people to stay and use these otherwise exiled spaces. Melbourne's laneway project was the answer to a much larger problem – a depleted downtown core. By painting the laneways with graffiti and art, and focusing on the human scale, the City of Melbourne was able to reverse the effects of suburbanization. Other lessons to consider are the importance of seating areas, relaxed liquor laws and atmosphere, the value of events, festivals, and food vendors. Finally, the Chicago Loop 'Activate' series have taken yet another approach to revamping their laneways. They have focused on temporary events that encourage spontaneity and participation in art. They also suggest that relaxed seating is favourable, the importance of music and art, accessibility, and emphasizing that not every event needs to be a festival with expensive food and liquor. Although these three case studies present very different interventions in laneways many themes overlap such as seating, availability of food, and that art attracts people to spaces. These are all important lessons to consider in the design exercise that will follow in later sections of this project.





# 05 Roncesvalles Village



Roncesvalles Village, Toronto, Canada

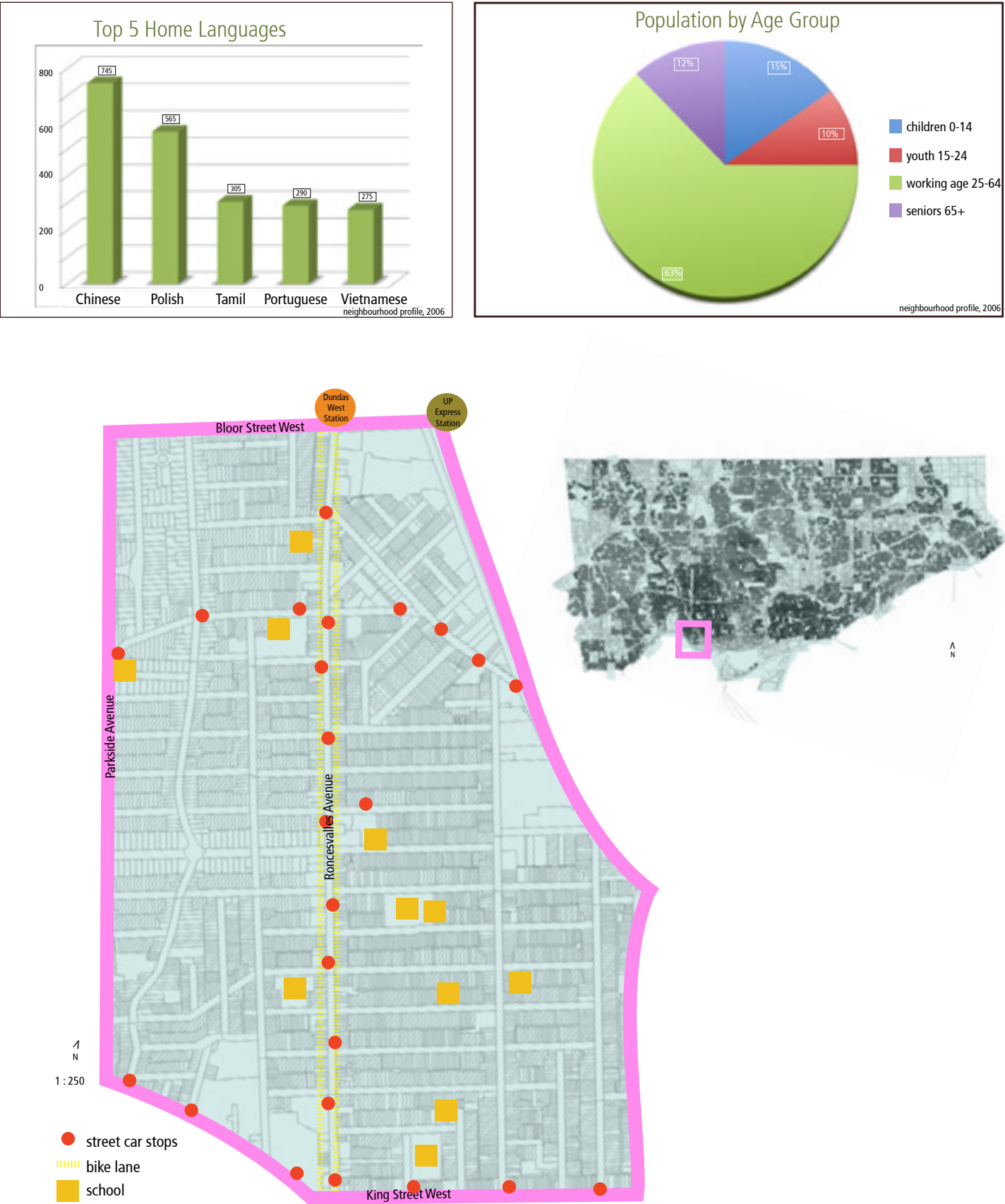


Roncesvalles Village Laneway, Toronto, Canada



Roncesvalles Village is located near the western border of the City of Toronto on the traditional territory of the Mississauga of the Credit New Valley. It is a vibrant and exciting neighbourhood decorated with rich culture, community, a large park, transportation, local markets and restaurants. It is a neighbourhood bordered by Bloor Street West to the north, the neighbourhood of Parkdale to the east, Lake Ontario to the south, and High Park to the west, and is a part of Ward 14. Roncesvalles Avenue is a main corridor connecting King and Queen Street at it's south corner with Dundas Street at the intersection of Bloor Street West. This area is a major transportation hub. It includes the termination point for the streetcar line, the Dundas Street West Metro station, the Bloor UP Express station, and a Metrolinx GO stop. The main street has two shared vehicle and streetcar lanes, and designated bicycle lanes. The community has access to all main transportation modes, as well as a pedestrian friendly streetscape. The wide sidewalks, storefronts that spill into the public realm as well as seating areas and tree lined streets ensure that this corridor is a successful and safe place for public transit, cyclists, vehicles, and pedestrians.

As of 2006, 63% of people living in the area were working age (25-64 years old), 25% are between the ages of 0-24, and 12% are senior citizens over the age of 65 (City of Toronto, 2006). In the same year the top home languages were Chinese, Polish, and Tamil (City of Toronto, 2006). Overall, in the City of Toronto the top languages are Chinese, Italian, and Punjabi (City of Toronto, 2016). The Roncesvalles Village neighbourhood has an almost equal split of renters to owners, and an average family income of \$82,000, compared to the remainder of the city that sits at \$72,830 (City of Toronto, 2006). The Roncy neighbourhood is an attractive one for families because it houses eleven primary schools (Roncesvalles Village, 2014), has a walkability score of 91 A walk score is a number between 0 and 100 that "measures the walkability of any address" and assists in finding a walkable place to live that tends to be attractive for families with children, for youth and adults, as well as seniors because it indicates the convenience of neighbourhood facility and store locations (Walk Score, 2016). This neighbourhood has easy access to three streetcar lines and a subway stop at Dundas West station. Further, the Roncesvalles BIA and Ward 14 Council are very visible and active in this community that can be seen through the organization of community events and meetings.





Roncesvalles Village was once part of a large farm owned by John George Howard – the City of Toronto’s first surveyor, an engineer and architect. Prior to his death in the late 1800s, John and his wife Jemima donated the majority of their land that is now High Park. Roncesvalles got its name from Colonel Walter O’Hara who named it after the gorge where he fought at the Battle of the Pyrenees in 1813 (Toronto Neighbourhoods, 2016). Many of the streets in this area are named to commemorate his wife, daughter and homeland in Ireland. It wasn’t until the 1900s, as Toronto was experiencing a building boom, that this area became more residential (Toronto Neighbourhoods, 2016). During the post WWII years a large number of Polish immigrants settled in this area and their presence is still the most prominent today and is visible.



Painting of John George Howard's home in the Roncesvalles area

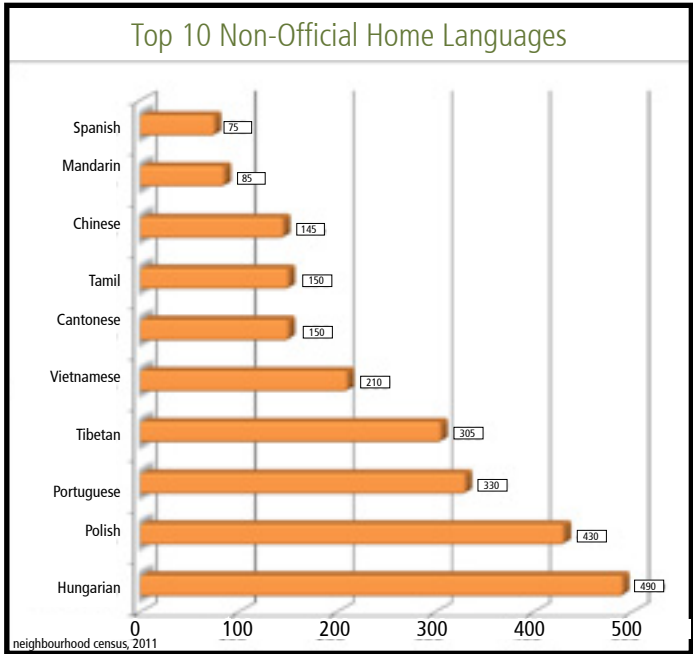
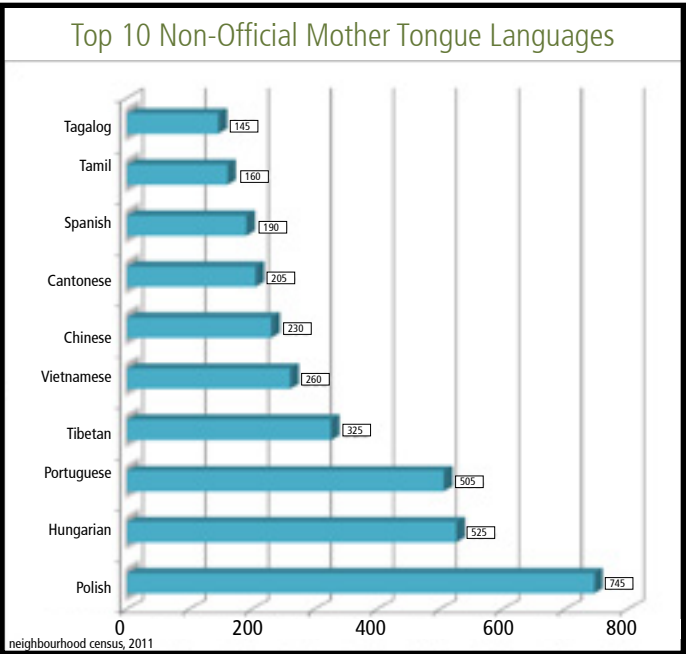
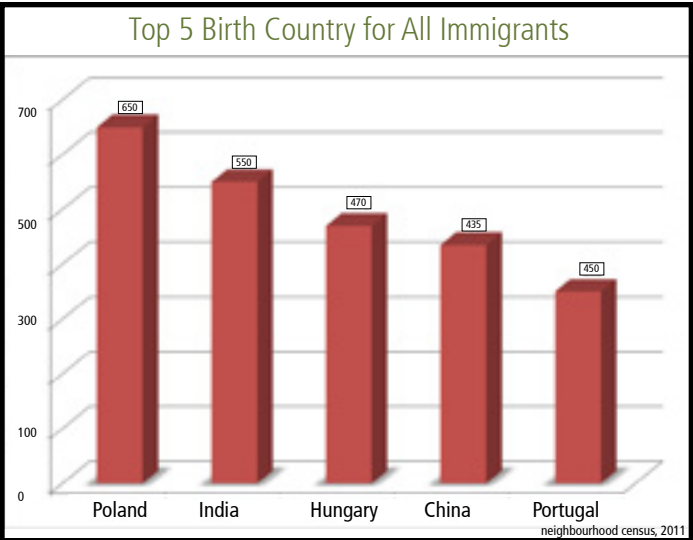
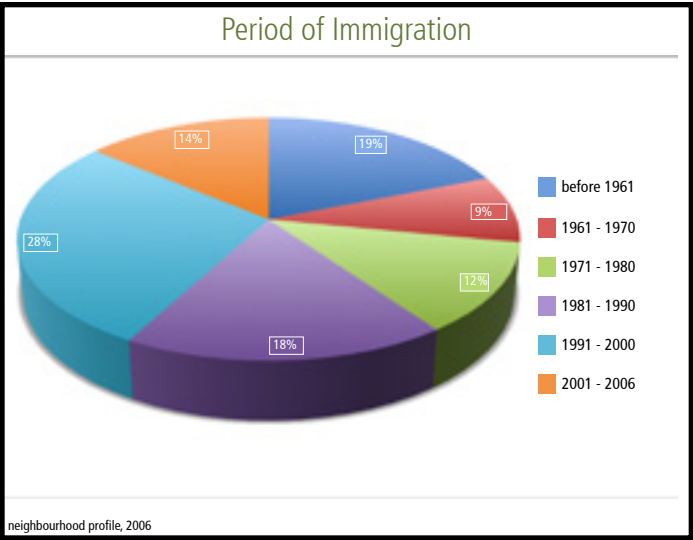


Roncy Rocks Festival



Between 1951 and 1961 Toronto was home to the largest proportion of Poles in Canada. In 1931 only 8,483 Poles resided in Toronto and by 1966 that number had risen to 68,000, ranking fifth largest ethnic group in Toronto. By 1954 St. Casimir’s Church was established in the Roncesvalles area that attracted hundreds of Polish families. The Polish population increased from less than a hundred Polish families to over a thousand in less than two decades. According to the 2011 Census for Ward 14, 58.8% of residents living in the Parkdale-High Park area consider Polish as their mother tongue (Statistics Canada, 2006). Polish is the third most common home language, however English is now the most common (Statistics Canada, 2006). The population by immigrant status places Poland in the number two spot second to India showing that a high amount of Polish immigrants continue to choose this area as a landing pad in Canada. Although the Roncesvalles area has a diminishing and changing Polish population it is evident that this ethnic group has shaped its cultural and economic landscape.

It is interesting to note that none of the street names had been changed to commemorate famous Polish figures or places. However, two major commemorations exist: the statue of Saint Pope John Paul II, and the Katyn Massacre Memorial. The Polish residents who continue to live and work here maintain the Polish identity of Roncesvalles Village by supporting the local Polish economy, church and credit union. The High Park library boasts an impressive section of Polish language books and support materials, as well as a local Polish history portfolio, publications and inventory of cultural organizations. Each September Roncesvalles Avenue is closed for a weekend to host North America’s largest Polish Festival. This area is a living testament to Toronto’s multicultural nature, a street level community and a thriving local economy. Roncesvalles remains a little Polish haven in our great multicultural city.







Katyn Memorial at Queen Street and Roncesvalles Avenue



Statue of Saint Pope John Paul II on Roncesvalles Avenue







# 06 Design Exercise





# Site Analysis



Study Laneway, Howard Park Avenue looking South, Roncesvalles Village Neighbourhood, Toronto

From site observations and analysis it is evident that laneways in the Roncesvalles Village neighbourhood are most commonly used as right of ways, places to store trash bins, and as delivery entrances for local restaurants and shops. Similarly as in other cities internationally, due to a “lack of surveillance and permeability from nearby streets some laneways become refuges for less hospitable purposes. Tagging, drug use and dumping of illegal rubbish...(City of Perth, 2016, p.7).” This is definitely the case for Roncesvalles Village as well.

The selected study area is the unnamed laneway that runs parallel to Roncesvalles Avenue to its east with Howard Park Avenue at its North, and Westminster Avenue to its South. It connects and branches off into other laneways acting mostly as a service lane and area for cars to move from residential parking areas to the main roads. Throughout the course of three different site observation days I was struck by the minimal movement in this laneway. In those three days I counted a total of 7 people using the back alley space and only to walk through it. Otherwise activity consisted of shop and restaurant workers coming out to dispose of garbage, a few deliveries, cars moving through, and squirrels scrounging for food. Much of the area also provides parking spots and glimpses into terraces for restaurants and private residences. There is much graffiti and tagging present in the alleyway, roads that are not well maintained with many potholes, fences that segregate the private from the public, and close to zero night time lighting. This laneway also has no name making it an exiled space that can be easily forgotten or written off as a garbage dump or parking lot. There is no connection to the active street next to this laneway or the bicycle lanes or transit stops.

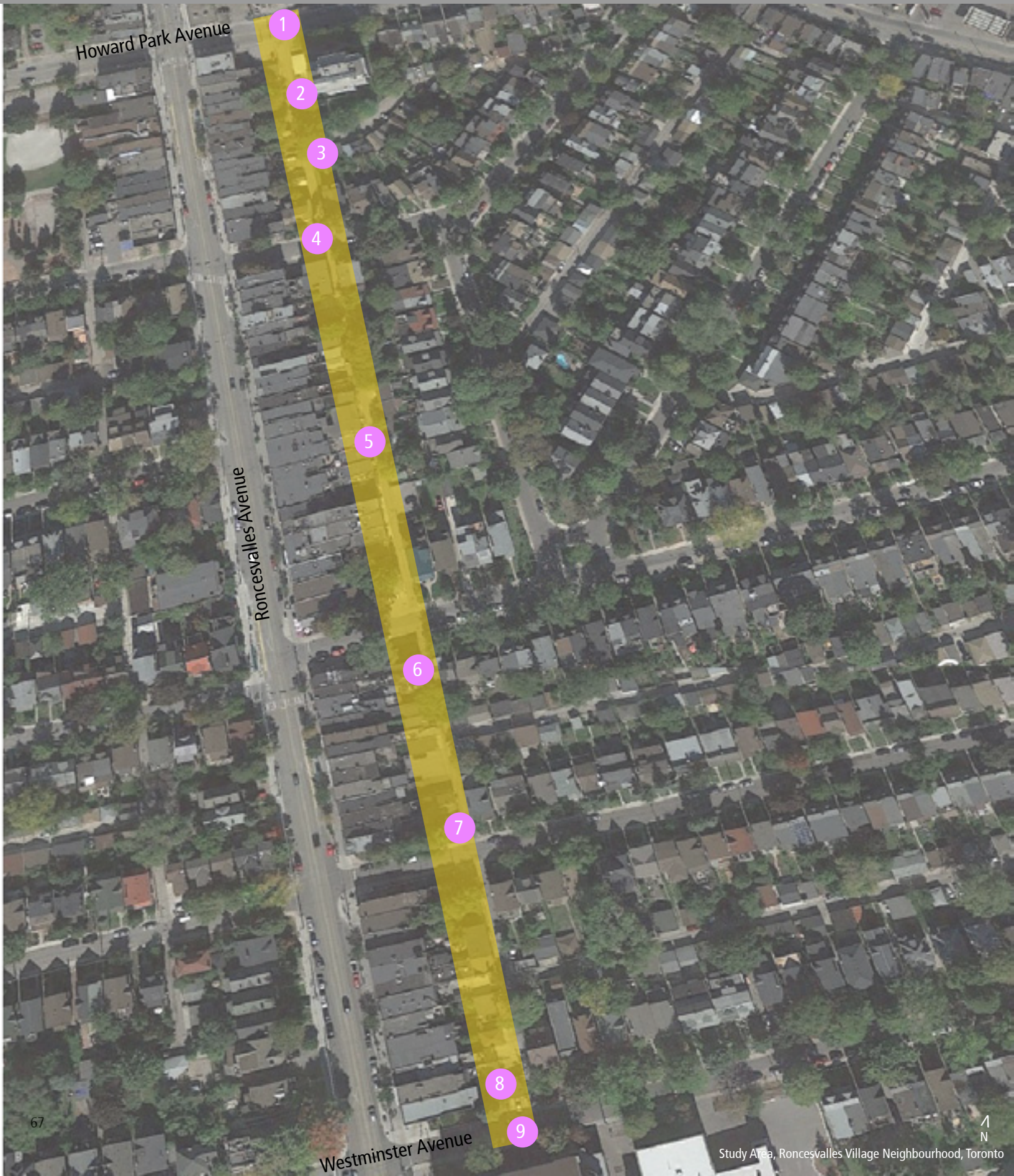
But, when wandering through these spaces on multiple occasions I discovered that these are also spaces that can act as people’s backyards, a place to showcase local talent and to celebrate history. The study laneway holds immense potential, as a gathering place that is accessible, can be the platform for various uses and activities, it can prompt sociability and comfort, lingering, and spontaneity. The untapped potential of the back spaces of Roncesvalles Avenue can add significant depth to the neighbourhood’s public spaces and character. What follows is a site analysis based on site visits and observations from three days in January and February 2017. It is important to note that these were fairly warm months and that the main Avenue was busy with pedestrians and cyclists as could be seen in the fall and spring months.





SITE ANALYSIS	1	2	3
Month	January	February	February
Day	Saturday	Monday	Friday
Time	12PM	2PM	6PM
Length	1 hour	2 hours	1 hour
Weather	Sunny	Sunny	Cloudy

Study Area, Roncesvalles Village Neighbourhood, Toronto



Study Area, Roncesvalles Village Neighbourhood, Toronto





1



3



2



4













- study area
- commercial residential with some site specific exceptions
- residential
- transit stops

Zoning Map for Area Adjacent to Study Area



- study area
- vehicle paths
- transit paths
- Bicycle paths
- Landmark
- Node

Lynchian Analysis for Area Adjacent to Study Area



From the site analysis exercise it is possible to see the differences between Roncesvalles Avenue and the unnamed laneway right behind it. Although it is exciting that the avenue is continually buzzing, there are few places to stop, sit, linger, or enjoy nature. This is where the opportunity for an intervention becomes apparent. This is especially important since the neighbourhood is already a community drive one, where the BIA and Ward councilor are highly involved. It is a neighbourhood that supports local shops and character, where you can find unique gifts and knick-knacks. And a neighbourhood that is definitely proud of its place in the City of Toronto, where you can get I HEART RONCY gear in many stores. Compounding all the literature review, lessons from case studies, and key observations from the study area, I can decipher that any new public space must be: inviting, social, artistic, celebrate history, include green space, have plants and shrubs, should be well-lit and connected, be properly acknowledged, have movable furniture, and overall must be flexible. The following intervention attempts at bringing all the lessons learned into a proposed laneway intervention in the Roncesvalles Village Neighbourhood.







RONCESVALLES AVENUE

BACK LANEWAYS





# Intervention - Roncy Lane



The proposed intervention suggests a space dedicated to bringing together the community to share in stories, experiences, art, food and fun. Roncy Lane runs from Howard Park Avenue at its North entrance all the way down to Westminster Avenue, spanning a whole four blocks. Each block celebrates a part of the history of Roncesvalles while simultaneously providing spaces for new memories to be formulated. The new Roncy Lane will introduce new paving to fix the status of the current roads in order to improve not only pedestrian access but also make the space accessible for all needs. Between each block the street crossing will be painted with ground murals to signify a continuing of the laneway space. There are secondary spaces just beyond Roncy Lane that can act as places for pop-ups and food-trucks. These are mainly parking lots that can serve several purposes during different times of day. The entire lane can showcase flexible and moveable furniture to ensure access for garbage pickup, delivery services, and snow removal. It could be beneficial to alter the existing schedule of pick-up/delivery through the laneway and control vehicular access via electric bollards. Individuals dependent on access to the laneway in order to reach their homes will have access to the bollards via access cards. Large garbage bins can be set in new boxes or fences that will hide the undesirable sights. Roncy Lane can be further beautified via curated murals showcasing a point in time in the neighbourhood's history. Certain areas in the laneway space can be used as temporary exhibits that can be curated by community members. New planters can create spaces for community members to start gardens and grow herbs. New lights can ensure that Roncy Laneway is safe in the evenings when it is dark outside. Finally, each block of Roncy Lane can be signified with new signage celebrating the space. Roncy Lane will create favourable conditions to enable community members to enjoy the space as they see most fit. This one version of Roncy Lane can show how urban design can provide new spaces of play and rest, spontaneity, art, celebration, and activity. Each block showcases it's own character\*: Mississauga Way, John George Way, Nature Way, and Warsaw Way.

\*in practice the community should organically determine activities and characteristics of the spaces; this is one version created for the purposes of this major research project.

## Roncy Lane Guiding Principles

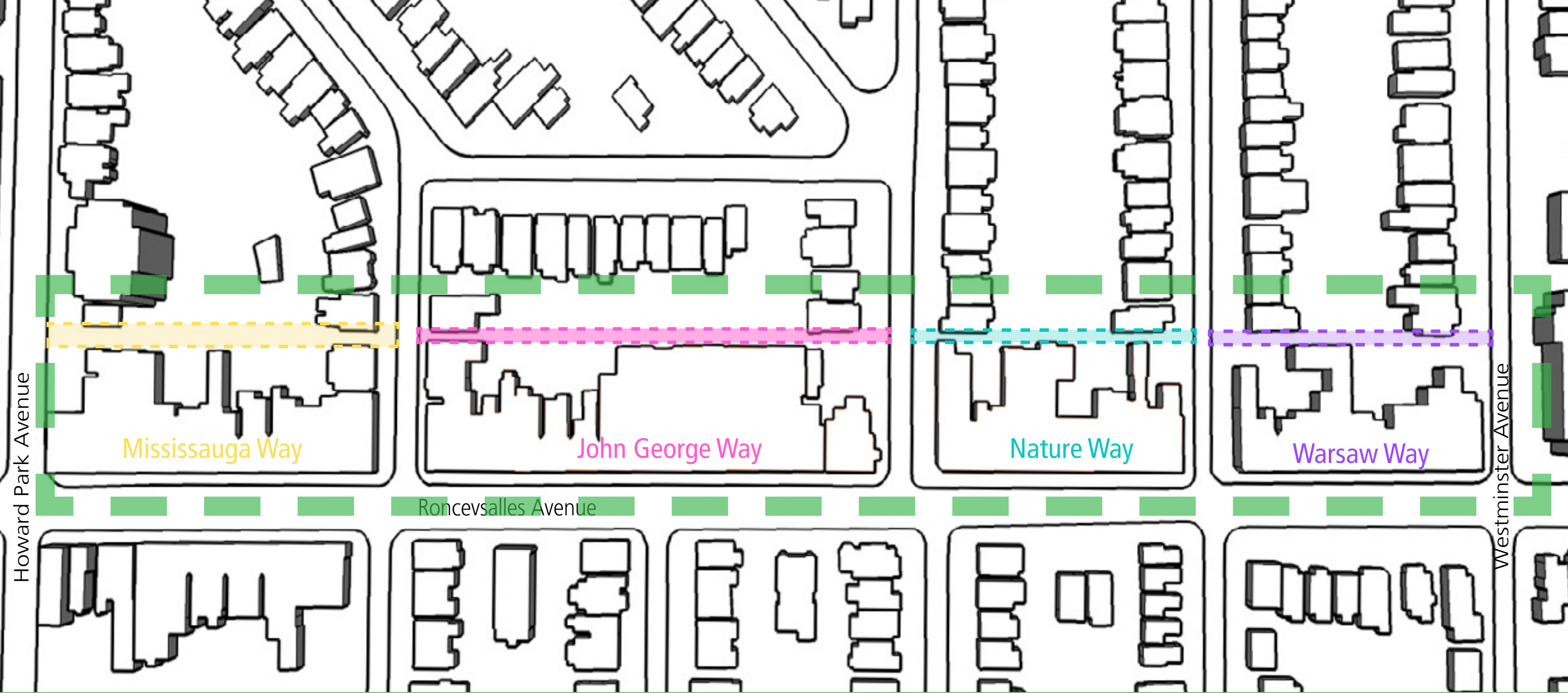
**Roncy Lane is a beautiful space for all to create and enjoy**

**Roncy Lane celebrates the neighbourhood's history and heritage**

**Roncy Lane is a multi-purpose space**

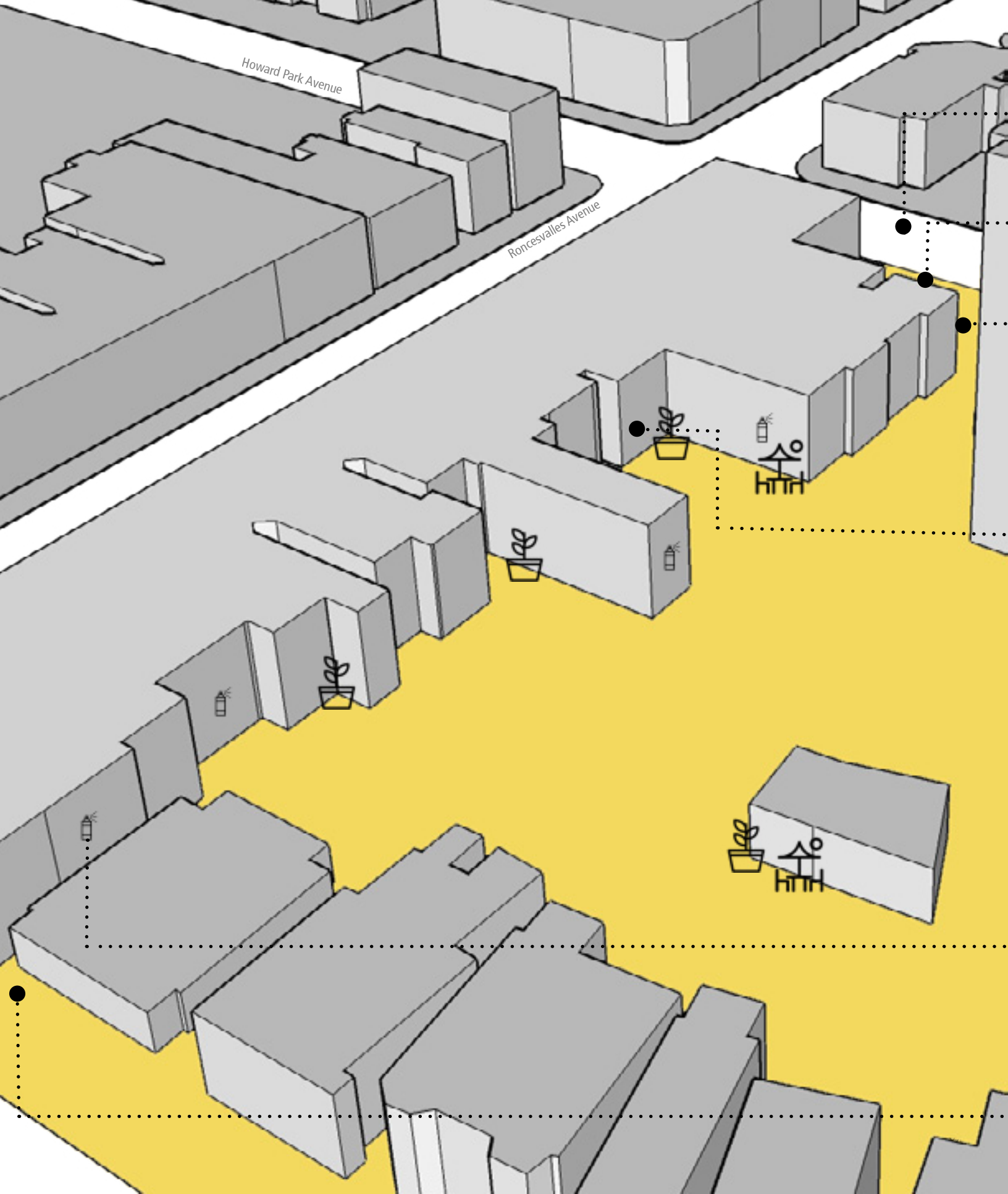
**Roncy Lane is an accessible, shared, and safe place**



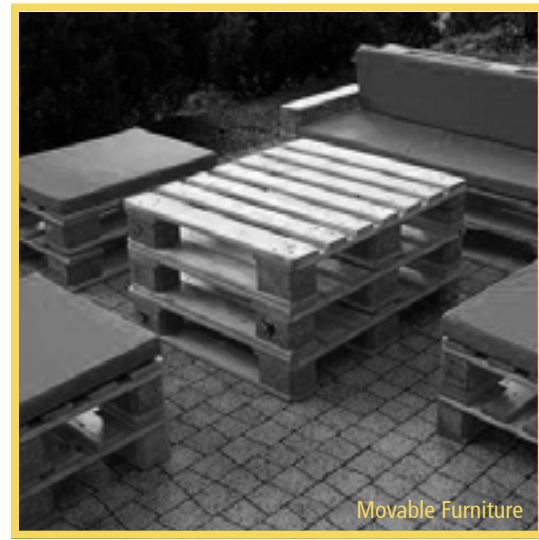




# Mississauga Way



Mississauga Way runs from Howard Park to Neepawa Avenue. It is a space that celebrates the original inhabitants of these lands – the Mississauga’s of the Credit River. Murals and art will celebrate this part of Roncesvalles’ history and heritage. Planters and flexible seating will be tucked into corners to allow for serene reflection. Electronic bollards will prevent vehicular traffic unless it is at services times. Areas where furniture is set up can also be used as performance space. The walls that frame Mississauga Way can also be used as temporary art space. Where the road interrupts the lane it will be painted with colorful murals to ensure safe passage. The parking lot at the north end of the space can also host food trucks or pop-up shops. Mississauga Way is a space of contemplation and thanks, for gathering and relaxation.







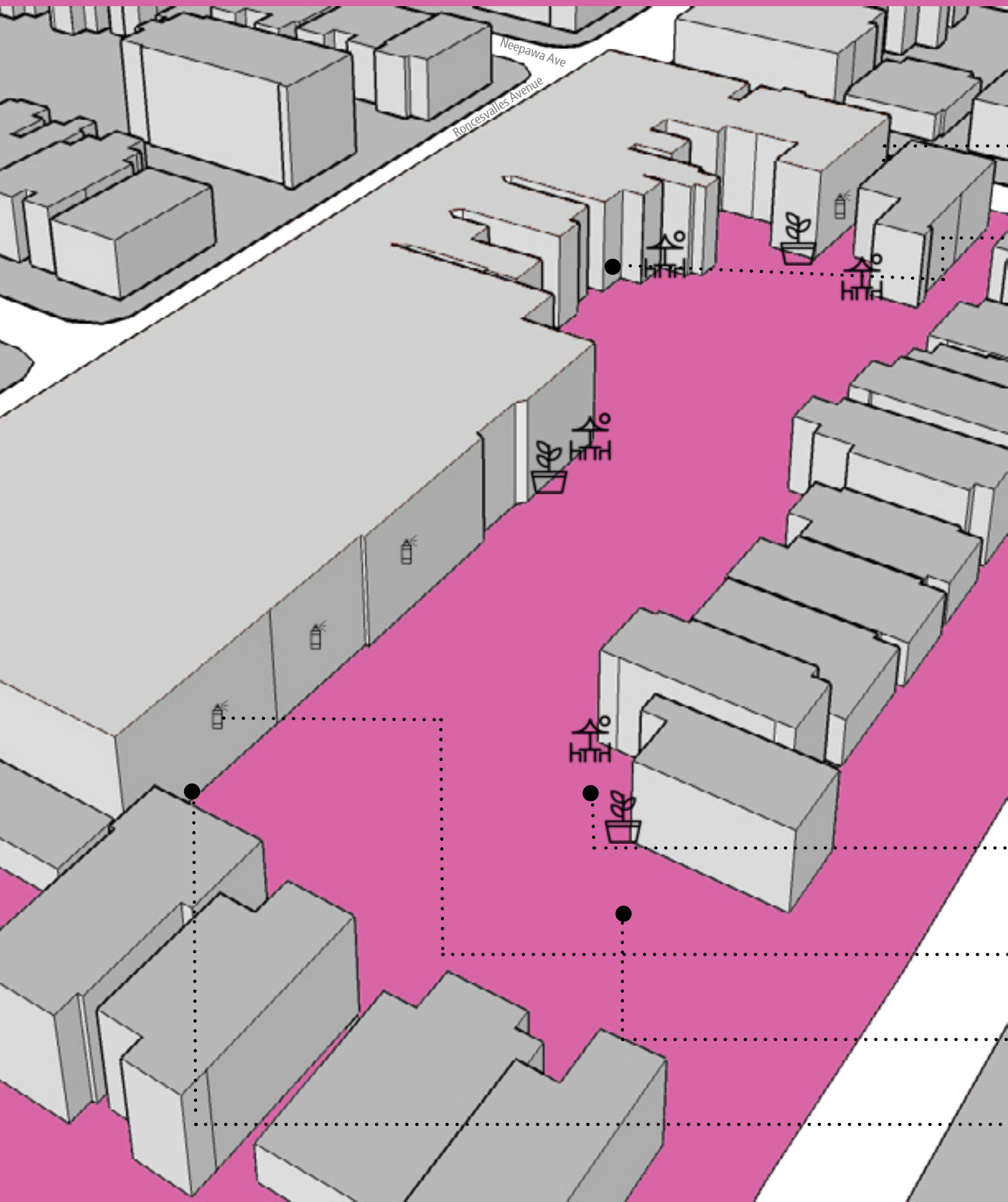
Mississauga Way BEFORE



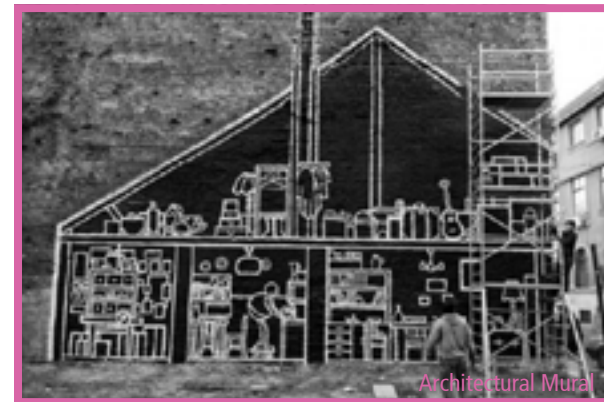




# John George Way



John George Way runs from Neepawa Avenue to Grenadier Road. It is the longest portion of the Roncy Lane and is used primarily as an exhibit space that will show tribute to the area and City of Toronto. John George Howard was the City's first surveyor and architect and once owned what is now High Park before donating it to the City. Murals and art exhibits will be dedicated to showcasing what the area looked like in the past. Planters and flexible seating will be spread across this area that will also have space for activities and sports such as basketball. This same space can act as a venue for performance, or a space for food trucks and pop-up shops. The restaurants and cafes will spillover into their currently unused backspaces. John George Way is a space for celebrating architecture and the City of Toronto.



Architectural Mural



Walk-Up Restaurant Window



Movable Furniture



Community Art Exhibit



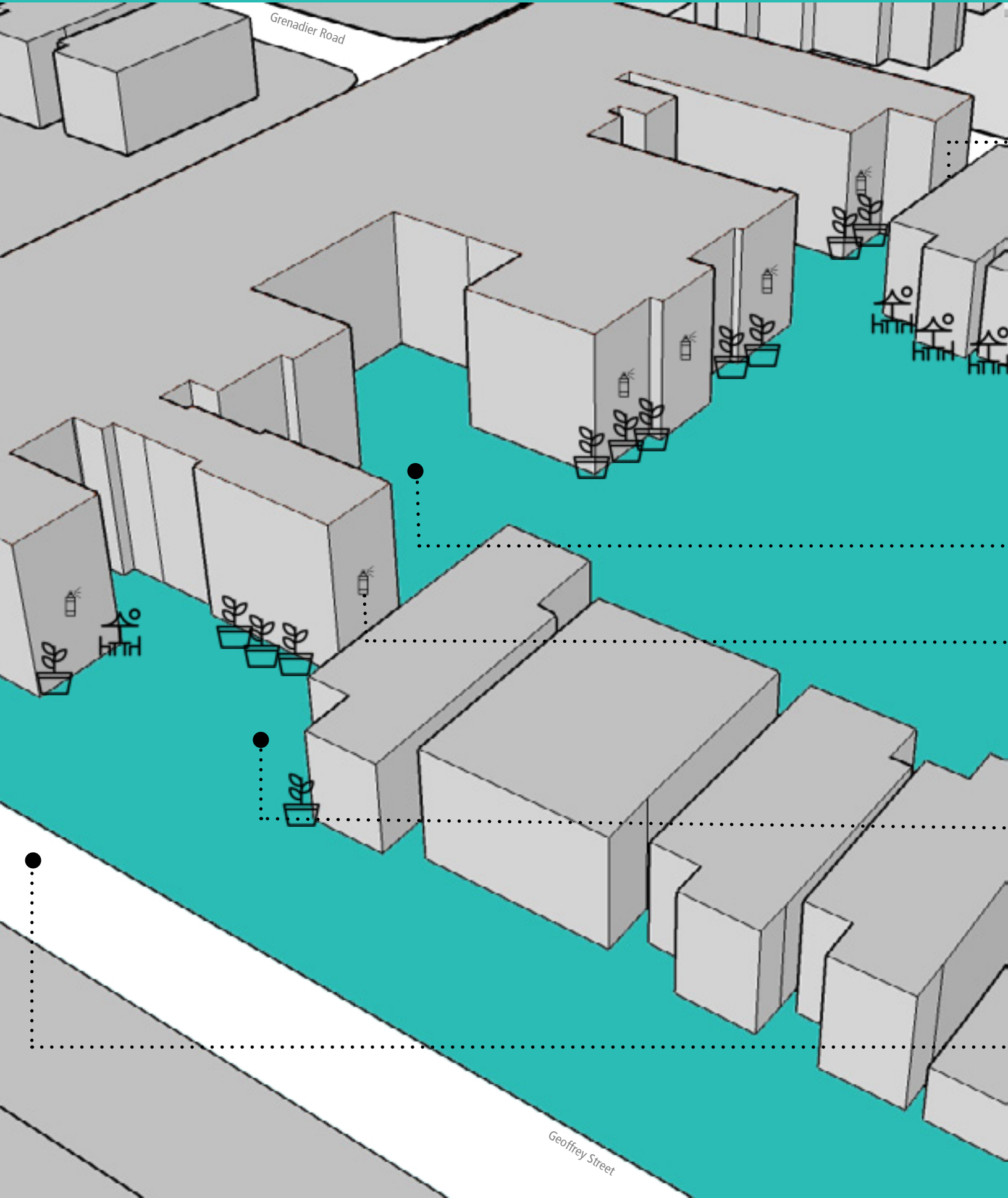


John George Way BEFORE









Nature way runs from Grenadier Road down to Geoffrey Street. Nature Way continues the celebration of John George Howard's contribution of High Park to this area. It is also a tribute to what used to be here – a vacation place for people to escape from the city. NatureWay is filled with planters and a community garden to reflect the importance of nature in our lives. The murals here will showcase natural and serene scenes. A walk through NatureWay should leave users feeling calm and relaxed. However, flexible seating also means that this can be a space where we get together and share the experience. Electronic bollards will prevent vehicular traffic unless it is at services times. Areas where furniture is set up can also be used as performance space. Again, where the road interrupts the lane it will be painted with colorful murals to ensure safe passage.



Tree Planters



Fenced In Garbage Bins



Laneway Basketball



Herb Planters



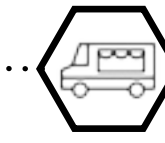








# Warsaw Way



Warsaw Way begins at Geoffrey Street and ends at Westminister Avenue. Warsaw Way is a tribute to the large Polish population who lived here in the post-WWII years. The Polish community is still a prominent one in Roncevalles Village and this space will celebrate important Poles and Polish-Canadians. The flexible seating is intended to encourage gathering to share stories and experiences on sunny afternoons. The murals and art will show scenes and landscapes of beautiful areas in Poland. Planters will be used to encourage community efforts and interaction. A dedicated space for play will also be included. Electronic bollards will prevent vehicular traffic unless it is at services times. Again, where the road interrupts the lane it will be painted with colorful murals to ensure safe passage. Ronce Lane ends with Warsaw Way and opens onto an open area at St. Paul's Church.



Herb Planter



Patterned Crosswalk



Fenced in Garbage



Street Furniture











# 07 Conclusions





Roncy Lane is a response to this major research project. It is a call to action to take note of the exiled spaces of the Roncesvalles Village neighbourhood and to take advantage of the back alleys. Although Roncesvalles Avenue is vibrant the remainder of the area is lacking in green spaces, parks, open spaces, or places to gather and reflect. Re-imagining an underutilized laneway in this area of Toronto creates potential for interaction on a local scale. The Laneway Project has already identified 2400 publicly owned laneways in the City of Toronto (2016), and has proven that a successfully revitalized space can have tremendous benefits for the community. Laneways are more than dumpsters and service docks. If creatively re-imagined, they can be community hubs that celebrate history, heritage, diversity, culture, and citizens.

Roncy Lane is only one potential re-design of a laneway. But in this rendition we can see how a back space can be transformed into a place of play, reflection, art, celebration, and diversity. Roncy Lane can celebrate the Mississauga of the Credit River, John George Howard and the pioneers who built this city, nature and its importance to us in the hustle-and-bustle of the everyday, and the Polish community that caused Roncesvalles to thrive. By taking precedent from academic literature as well as case studies from Montreal, Melbourne, and Chicago, we can begin to envision how Roncy Lane can be used and how it can impact the greater community. Roncy Lane can add value and character to an already distinct neighbourhood. It is important to note that in reality a laneway revitalization project should be a community initiative that includes public consultation and participation. Unfortunately, due to the nature of a major research project, this was not possible.

In attempting to create a new vision of Roncesvalles Village neighbourhood laneways it is also important to consider the future possibilities of these spaces. They can be used as extracurricular space for schools, as secondary playgrounds and places for sports. They can be places that encourage active transportation, or collective group exercising and lessons. But further, as we bring attention to these exiled spaces in our cities we can begin to see the potential of future technology, for example the use of Augmented Reality to make these even more playful or educational places. Or perhaps these can be spaces where people can live, in secondary suites and laneway homes that can help alleviate the housing crisis by providing affordable housing. The potential for laneways is vast and this one render of the Roncy Lane is just one step towards realizing it.





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