

1-1-2012

Building Cities for Families: Attracting and Retaining Households

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BUILDING CITIES FOR FAMILIES:
ATTRACTING AND RETAINING HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN IN THE
DOWNTOWN CORE

by

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Bachelor of Arts (Honours), York University, 2010

A Major Research Project

Presented to Ryerson University

In partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Planning

in the Program of

Urban Development

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2012

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ABSTRACT

Planning for sustainable cities means creating complete communities with increased residential densities, housing choices, and services that attract a diversity of populations at all stages of their life. This exploratory study identifies the challenges that discourage households with children from moving to the downtown area and explores the public and private initiatives and strategies that can be used to attract and retain such families in downtown neighbourhoods by providing required infrastructure, amenities, and services. Data shows that households with children are underrepresented in downtown Toronto compared to the rest of the city. This exploratory study identifies the factors that the downtown area needs to provide long-term options for households with children, such as affordable and suitable housing, accessible schools and play spaces, and an overall attitude shift about the place of families in downtown Toronto.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my parents and family, who have supported me at every step of the way in this project and program. Without them, I never would have had this incredible learning experience.

I would also like to thank my supervisor, Professor Steven Webber, who helped me sort through a tangle of ideas and provided guidance and positive feedback at every step of the way, as well as everyone else who gave me support and assistance.

And finally, I would like to thank every parent with child I have seen on the streets and streetcars of downtown Toronto.

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Preamble

May 2008. The *Toronto Life* magazine reported on tensions in the city as more and more families with young children moved into the downtown core, with focuses on emerging areas such as Leslieville, West Queen West, and Parkdale. The article talked about how new parents, especially those in their early 30s with more money to spend, are choosing to remain downtown with their new families because of the diversity and vibrancy of downtown living. They “want to make Toronto a city that fits them with kids like it fit them before kids” (Onstad 2008). The author reported on the many amenities that downtown neighbourhoods offer to families with children as well as parents who feel their neighbourhoods have failed to accommodate their families. Though the mixed reactions about raising a family in the city are indicated, the overall feel is positive about downtown living and talks of the opportunities that exist for raising children in the city.

September 2011. A *Toronto Life* article reported on how families are moving out of the downtown and into suburban or exurban areas. The author argues that ‘diehard downtowners’ have become attracted to the space available outside of the city and feel that the city is becoming less and less liveable, especially for those with children (Preville 2011). The overarching position is that the city is no place to raise a family, in part due to lack of space and lack of services. What has changed? What can be done to keep families in the downtown core?



1.0 Introduction

Across North America, single-family dwellings appear to be the most desired type of housing, especially for families with children (Appold and Yuen 2007). However, in response to previously unchecked sprawl, rising commuting times and costs, and an increasingly constrained land supply, other housing options and development forms must be considered. Part of the response to the need for alternate living styles is the movement of families back into the central areas of the city.

This research report will address the following main research questions:

- How do the needs of children and families manifest themselves on the built form and at the neighbourhood level?
- What are the issues and challenges that discourage families with children from moving to, and remaining in, the downtown area?
- How does the City of Toronto currently plan for households with children downtown? What further planning steps can be taken?
- What initiatives can be taken to develop strategies to attract and retain more households with children into downtown neighbourhoods through both private and public investments?
- How can the public and non-profit sector proactively lead and shape family-oriented development through housing investment?

This study will look at the issues and challenges that discourage families with children from moving to, and remaining in, the downtown area. The research will identify the initiatives that can be taken to develop strategies to bring and retain more households with children into downtown neighbourhoods by providing required and desired infrastructure, amenities, and services. The above questions are relevant and important to the discipline of planning because we must plan for different types of communities within our cities in order to reduce sprawl and increase residential densities. Part of the movement towards complete communities is attracting families to move to more central and dense areas as an alternative to the sprawling, unsustainable suburban living that typically attracts families.

While the focus area of this study is on downtown Toronto, this report will not provide details of where and what development should specifically be built in downtown Toronto. Rather, it comes to provide an overview of the issues involved and provide information and ideas that can be used to guide future family-friendly development in downtown Toronto.

2.0 Research Approach

This research report is an exploratory study of the issues that parents face in the downtown and the challenges of planning family-friendly downtowns. The factors that attract and retain families to the downtown are identified through a background literature review. A policy review then places the literature within the policy context of the City of Toronto and Province of Ontario. In order to delve deeper into the Toronto context and possible strategies that can be used to plan family-friendly communities, a section entitled 'Focus on Toronto' will look specifically at Toronto, the demographics of downtown residents, types of development, and how the development industry and the planning process impacts the movement of families to the downtown. Finally, to answer the research questions, an analysis of the literature, policies, and Toronto case studies identifies strategies that can be developed through both private and public investment to provide the housing and amenities needed to bring and keep more households with children into downtown neighbourhoods.

The research approach and paper organization are as follows:

Background Information

A background section will introduce the issue of family-friendly downtowns, explain its importance and relevancy to planning, and provide definitions of important terms and concepts.

Academic Literature and Policy Review

The research for this study consists of a literature and policy review to categorize the factors identified as essential to families with children downtown. Relevant literature includes neighbourhood satisfaction studies, studies on children and the built environment, literature on residents living downtown, background research on complete communities and intensification, and academic sources on how to plan a city that accommodates the needs of children. The policy analysis includes provincial legislation such as the Places to Grow Act, the City of Toronto Official Plan, city staff reports, and development industry reports on housing for families downtown.

Focus on Toronto

The following section will look at Toronto as a case study of what a downtown area can provide to its resident families in terms of housing and amenities. This focus section will examine the current position of families and children living downtown, look at how the demographics of families living downtown have changed over time, and how families with children are provided with housing and amenities that suit their needs. Case study initiatives will also be examined to look at best practices of how the public,

private, and non-profit sectors work to provide amenities such as affordable housing for families downtown.

This section will incorporate the findings of interviews with key informants who work in planning and the development industry as it relates to creating family-friendly downtowns. These interviews were done to focus on the policy framework in which key decision makers, planners, and developers work, and to gain an understanding of the challenges the public, private, and non-profit sectors face in providing the housing and amenities needed to attract and retain families with children to the downtown area. The key informants include City of Toronto planning staff, Toronto District School Board planners, and representatives of the private and non-profit housing sectors. Participants were recruited by emailing the potential interviewees, who were identified through internet searches on downtown developers and marketing agencies and by referrals. The participants were asked a series of open-ended questions over a period of 30-60 minutes. These questions were designed specifically for each participant depending on their position and field of expertise. These questions involved their planning knowledge of the issues facing households with children in the downtown core and how their work sector can potentially address these issues.

The focus on Toronto also includes an analysis of Statistics Canada census data and City of Toronto survey data, as well as case studies of downtown housing developments. This data analysis identifies trends in demographic changes and development patterns.

Analysis

The final sections of this report analyze the current situation of planning for families with children in the downtown area of Toronto and provide recommendations of how planning initiatives and investments can proceed in the future. Recommendations based on the research identify the factors that are needed to be addressed in order to attract and retain households with children to the downtown. The proposed strategies will create a framework for a family-friendly city and a welcoming environment, benefiting households with children living downtown and the city as a whole.

3.0 Background: Families with Children Downtown

“Contemporary strategic planning has almost become child-blind, with the new higher density centres being built essentially for the childless in mind. The talk is of ‘vibrant’ and ‘liveable’ mixed use town centres, characterised by pavement cafes, restaurant and entertainment precincts, shopping and office jobs. However, these are a long way from the traditional family-centric suburbs of the past, with a noticeable absence of natural play spaces” (Woolcock et al 2010, 183).

Large metropolitan areas are quickly approaching build-out. While greenfield development still accounts for a large percentage of growth in outer areas, land conservation plans and increased commute times, congestion, and gas prices are driving people to live closer to their workplace and have led to a call for a more dense form of living and prompted renewed consideration of vertical living (Kreisler, 2006). In built-up areas, this takes the form of multi-unit, high-density structures built on infill sites and reclaimed brownfield land.

In many cities, there has been a shift towards denser forms of living and the intensification of already development areas. In Toronto and other major cities, new development in already built-up areas has largely taken the form of condominium construction in central areas and along major transportation corridors. Due to the high cost of land in these areas, the developers of these projects are constructing units that are becoming increasingly smaller and more expensive. Families with children thus have difficulty finding affordable units that are large enough to suit their needs. Especially in a period of aging populations and lowered birth rates, new developments are planned to accommodate singles, couples, and retirees (Woolcock et al 2010). Churchman (2003) asserts that the fact that people ask if there is a place for children in the city is an indication that a problem exists and that the needs of children and families are not adequately considered by planning and design in cities.

Children have many unique needs, such as schools and safe places to play, and these needs manifest themselves in the built environment at the neighbourhood level. The needs of children are often specific to their development (both physically and psychologically) and to their age and level of independent mobility. The needs of families relate to providing shelter, support, and other broader developmental assistance, and the parents act as decision-makers for the household. While the two are separate, there is a strong connection between the needs of children and the needs of families, especially with regards to planning issues. Planning for the needs of families with children downtown often comes down to the balance between the need for suitable housing and targeted amenities. For any area of a city to be suitable for families, there needs to be affordable and adequate housing and nearby amenities such as

schools and play spaces. A main factor in how to plan for families downtown is housing provision, and planners must create a diverse housing market and provide choice for different people in various stages of their lives.

3.1 Current Planning Models

Former planning models from the post-World War II period depicted a house in the suburbs as the dominant housing type for families. Classic urban theory went so far as to suggest that “living in highly urbanized areas of the city results in social isolation, social disorganization, and psychological problems [and that] living in the suburbs, however, is thought to be much more conducive to happiness, because suburban areas have a lower population density, lower crime, and a more stable population when compared to urban areas” (Adams 1992). While many still prefer suburban living, planning models and the idea of acceptable housing forms and locations are changing. Also changing are planning policies and what is considered good planning practice.

As greenfield development remains a cheap option, suburban development will continue and will remain the dominant housing choice for many. However, the trend towards suburban living is slowly changing as external costs and lifestyle choices are pushing people away from lower density suburbs. Downtown residential revitalization and the growth of inner-city high-rise living is rooted in rising transport costs and traffic congestion that makes commuting less desirable and inner-city living more attractive for those working in the downtown area (Carroll et al 2011). Other factors such as employment opportunities, cultural facilities, historic buildings, and new amenities such as waterfront areas have led to a renewed interest in downtown living (Birch 2005b). Planning theories have also recognized that in order for urbanized areas to be economically sustainable and to limit environmental impacts and conserve resources, steps must be taken to reduce urban sprawl and the unchecked outwards growth of urban areas. One of the commonly accepted ways of reducing sprawl and reversing the trend of people moving outwards to auto-driven suburban areas is through urban intensification. Through intensification, urban growth takes a more vertical form and densities are increased through development occurring in built up areas rather than in a sprawling low-density manner on greenfield land.

Toronto, through the Provincial *Places to Grow Act* (2005), must reach certain intensification targets to reduce outward sprawl. As well, much of future development will occur in already built up areas because of land constraints in the city. When increasing residential densities it is important to ensure

that care is taken to create a range of housing options for people of all age ranges and stages of life. Along with keeping downtown housing affordable, one of the challenges to continued downtown revitalization is making downtown home to families (Moulton 1999). From the amount of literature that revolves around asking what the best housing model is, we can see how prevalent the attitude is that suitable family housing is the detached single-family home. To reach the targets set out above, incentives must be provided to attract and retain families to more compact forms of living.

3.2 Key Definitions: Terms and Concepts

Many terms and concepts repeatedly arise in the research on household location decisions and planning for cities that meet the needs of families. Many of the terms and concepts have various meanings depending on the focus of the academic work, and so it is important to provide a consistent frame of reference for the reader by setting out from the outset what is meant by each of the following:

Complete Community

Complete communities offer housing choices, transportation options, and services that meet the needs of people in all stages of life – including young families, students, and older residents. A complete community integrates a mix of housing, jobs, open spaces, services, and other amenities in close proximity to one another (Ontario Growth Secretariat 2012). Complete communities frame city building models at the community level. This allows for more contextually appropriate plans to be created, and ultimately carried through by the community themselves.

Complete communities create livable cities that are sustainable and resilient in the long-term through the diversity of the social and built environments. Creating a complete community in the downtown area is about creating a downtown with a sense of community. Instead of a downtown where people work and play, going home at night, the aim is to create a neighbourhood with a communal vibe, diverse and evolving. Bringing greater numbers of families and children into such communities will increase the age diversity of residents and will bring new and differing opinions into community decision making. A community can only be truly complete if it incorporates the needs and opinions of people at all stages of life – including children.

Intensification and Higher Density Living

Metropolitan areas across North America and Europe have created strategies that promote higher density living in order to reduce urban sprawl. This report comes under the framework of creating dense, livable cities, as higher density housing – such as that usually found in downtown areas – creates

a more compact and sustainable city, and higher residential density is at least implicitly correlated with less traffic, lower emissions, and a more walkable and vibrant city centre (Costello 2005). In existing urban areas, one of the main ways to achieve higher densities is through urban intensification – using urban land more efficiently and intensifying development and activity so that more people, jobs, and activity take place on the same amount of land (Williams et al 2000, 242). Intensification usually takes the form of redeveloping existing buildings at higher densities, conversions, and new builds (which in North American downtowns are often condominium developments). Intensification is often seen in land use planning policy as a way of reducing sprawl by requiring a percentage of all new development to be on land in built-up areas. Along with reducing people’s reliance on the automobile, intensification also reduces greenfield expansion, preserving farmland.

In downtown areas, intensification in built-up areas and increased densities often come in the form of high-density, multi-unit development. While these buildings create more compact cities, they are often marketed towards young professionals and empty-nesters. As will be seen in the review of academic literature, the place of families and children in such dense living environments has been contested.

Vibrant and 24-Hour Downtowns

City policy makers and residents value a downtown with a diversity of housing and people. This diversity is beneficial to child development, as children need opportunities to interact with people of different social and cultural backgrounds to learn how to cooperate and integrate in a heterogeneous society. This diversity is also very much in contrast to the stereotypical homogenous suburb. When children of all backgrounds play together and form groups to engage in different activities, they are shaping culture and building communities (Hart 2002). Families with children and the potential they have at integrating with each other at the school and neighbourhood level work to increase the vibrancy of community life.

Vibrant downtowns are those that attract a diverse and complementary mix of uses and have an attractive, comfortable, and secure physical environment that acts as a magnet for economic development, attracting people to live, work, and visit (Paumier 2004). The presence of children often acts to create a comfortable space for others where they feel welcomed, as spaces that are welcoming to children are usually inclusive and open to all. Families with children also attract other families and the general population to the city. As Hur and Morrow-Jones (2008) identified in their study on neighbourhood satisfaction in Franklin County, Ohio, the only neighbourhood demographic characteristic that had a significant positive relationship with overall neighbourhood satisfaction was the presence of children under 18.

24-hour downtowns are city centres that do not empty out after business hours, contain residents, are diverse, and active. A discussion paper prepared for the Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy, entitled ‘Ten Steps to a Living Downtown’, outlined the steps city officials can take to create 24-hour downtowns, which include defining downtown as a special, attractive neighborhood; addressing zoning restrictions; reconciling the many commercial, entertainment and residential uses of downtown; and grappling with parking (Moulton 1999). Creating 24-hour downtowns are about inhabiting the downtown core and Central Business District so that places with office towers do not empty out at night when the workers go home, and such efforts have focused primarily on those who work in those offices and have typically excluded families and children.

Family-Friendly City

“For downtowns to reach their full potential as vibrant, enriching places, families must be present to contribute to its life” (Moulton 1999, 20).

In cities, creating a welcoming environment for children can be a challenge. Changing forms of living have led to questions about how to make these new environments, which are often much more dense, welcoming and supportive for all populations. The wellbeing of children is a benchmark to the general wellbeing of the population and so many initiatives have been taken to create family-friendly cities.

Many academics and organizations raise the question of how to create accommodating environments for people outside of the 20-65 age range. Anderson (2006), for example, advocates a ‘community for all ages’ approach, which promotes a collective responsibility for the wellbeing of all residents, regardless of age, addressing critical needs of groups rather than having them compete for services. UNICEF, the United Nations Children’s Fund, completed a project on Child-Friendly Cities and Communities, which improved policy development for children at the local level by promoting awareness of children’s rights among stakeholders, mobilized communities and children, and generated data on the situation of children in participating cities and communities. The project defined child-friendly cities as those that are committed, at community and municipal levels, to the fulfillment of children’s rights (UNICEF 2008). This initiative, as well as the United Nations Human Rights of the Child, acknowledges the important role children play in communities and the importance of their voices being heard at the policy level.

There are important differences between *child-friendly* and *family-friendly*. Anderson (2006) differentiates between the two terms, as the unique needs of children can be different than those of families. This report studies the needs of families in the general sense, as they are the ones that make

the household decisions about where to live and can more directly influence planning policy (rather than the children themselves dictating their needs).

Family-friendly cities are those that provide for the unique needs of households with children. This means there is housing suitable for larger households, with multiple bedrooms to prevent overcrowding, and adequate storage. A safe and accessible place for children to play is also required in a family-friendly city. Aside from dedicated play spaces, public spaces of the city must be designed so that children feel welcomed in all places (Carmona et al, 2010). A family-friendly city also has the amenities and facilities that children need in close

The components of family-friendly communities are as follows:

- Affordable housing options
- Transportation options and walkable neighborhoods with convenient services
- Safe neighborhoods
- Quality schools
- Child care
- Parks

Source: (EFCL 2011)

proximity to one another. This means that there are schools within walking distance, daycares near both the home and the workplace, and community services and activities that cater to the needs of families with children (Whitzman and Mizrachi 2009).

Attracting households with children to live in the downtown area will add to the diversity and vitality of downtown neighbourhoods and will help foster the sense of community. Though Toronto already has a relatively large number of downtown residents, most new developments are targeted towards young professionals and couples without children. Thus, the city should focus on attracting and retaining households with children to diversify the age ranges and needs of downtown residents. In order for downtowns to be truly sustainable, consideration must be taken to plan for the needs of children and families (Carroll et al 2011). Planning family-friendly cities means implementing policies and practices in areas such as childcare, parks and recreation, housing, and transportation that are aimed at involving families in fuller participation with their communities, while designing public spaces that address their needs and desires (Gutierrez et al 2009).

3.3 Importance of Family-Friendly Cities

Creating a city that is welcoming and suitable for children is beneficial to all other urban residents and to the overall sustainability of a city. Cities that plan for the needs of children must take into account many urban issues, from safety to infrastructure development to affordability. Creating family-friendly cities increases the age diversity of the city, making the downtown not just a place where people go for work

and the nightlife. There is an identified connection between a family-friendly city and positive psychological benefits to children and youth. Safe and welcoming cities have been identified as good for children's development overall and contribute to their feelings of community engagement (Freeman 2006; Whitzman & Mizrachi 2009).

When a city has families living downtown, it is evidence that the neighbourhood is truly liveable, and that the city has become competitive and attractive enough to lure residents away from the nearby suburbs. Research has shown that the more stable the neighborhood and the longer people live there, the more likely they will develop locally based social networks, be satisfied with their neighborhood, and positively evaluate the quality of their lives (Adams 1992; Fischer, 1982). Therefore, length of residency positively influences the stability of a neighbourhood. Thus, in order to encourage stable downtown neighbourhoods, there must be options for people at all stages of their lives, from young children to older adults. Affordability is a large issue and there is a need to cater to a diverse range of households. Downtown living should not only be for higher-income households and planning for affordable housing for families will create affordable options for others as well.

Larger numbers of downtown residents means that people are moving closer to their jobs, resulting in less commuting, less congestion, and more economic productivity. Many parents live closer to their workplace to reduce commuting distances and increase the time they can spend with their families. Increased proximity of home and employment creates a more sustainable environment, as compact living works to combat sprawl, as well as reducing overall car use. With growth boundaries and intensification targets set for Toronto, new higher-density residential options must be developed.

3.4 Relevance to Planning

"The city is appreciated for its qualities of proximity, the neighbourhood for its ethnically mixed children's domains, the street as an urban haven and the house as the place that accommodates private life for each member of the family (Karsten 2009, 317).

Providing strategies and initiatives that attract and retain families with children to live in the downtown area is relevant and important to planning because planners must plan for different types of communities within our cities. Planners have a responsibility to ensure communities have integrated services that respond to the needs of all people by coordinating input from a broad range of society, including families and potential downtown residents. A nationwide survey conducted by the American Planning Association and Cornell University found that a large majority of planners believe that families are important components of community diversity and sustainability, that families have a large potential

for community reinvestment, are a valuable consumer population, and that communities planned for the entire life cycle are more vibrant (Israel and Warner, 2008). Planners have a role in developing family-friendly amenities in their communities. Transportation planning can consider trip-chaining for the needs of parents and their children, which means reducing the number of trips a household needs to make by incorporating safe routes to school on the way to work or to buy groceries or other daily needs. Housing policies can focus on affordability and variety, ensuring a diversity of size and tenure options and design that facilitate neighborhood interaction. Parks and open space can promote socialization and neighborhood interaction, as well as a healthy lifestyle for both parents and children (Gutierrez et al 2009). Planning policies must be put into place to create affordable and suitable family housing, to provide downtown schools, daycares, and amenities for children, and to provide adequate play spaces.

3.5 Living in Downtown Toronto: An Introduction

Downtown Area and Downtown Core: It is important, especially in Toronto, to differentiate between the downtown area and the downtown core. The downtown core, which is included inside the downtown area, usually contains the Central Business District and has generally not been envisioned as a place where anyone would live. In the Toronto case, it was seen as the place of business and emptied out after business hours. The greater downtown area has always been home to people and contains many stable residential neighbourhoods. Much of the new development is happening in and close to the downtown core, places which have not generally seen residential development. Development in the

downtown area usually takes the form of intensification projects happening on a site-by-site basis. Figure 1, from the City of Toronto Planning Division, shows the boundaries of Toronto’s downtown area in orange, and the boundaries of the downtown core and Central Business District

Figure 1: City of Toronto Downtown Boundaries



in blue (See Appendix A for a larger map, City of Toronto OP, 2010). The downtown area covers a large part of central Toronto, reaching from Lake Ontario to Dupont Street, and from the Don Valley Parkway in the east to Bathurst Street in the west, as well as the Don Lands along the east waterfront and the area south of the Gardiner Expressway to the west (which includes the Fort York lands). This area encompasses Toronto's Central Business District, which has only recently seen residential development, and many surrounding established, stable residential neighbourhoods.

While the downtown area has always contained many residential neighbourhoods, especially at the outer edges, the first time the City of Toronto actively encouraged residential development in the downtown area through policies and zoning was in 1976, with the approval of the Central Area Plan. In the 30 years that followed, from 1976 to 2006, the residential population of Toronto's downtown area increased by 65%, to reach approximately 169,000 people living downtown in 2006 (City of Toronto 2007). In comparison, the population within the current boundaries of the City of Toronto grew by 18% between 1976 and 2006 (Statistics Canada 1976 and 2006). Residential development in the downtown area does not seem to be slowing down and studies such as the Living Downtown Toronto Survey conducted by the City Planning Division in December 2006 highlight the changing demographics and the need to study the shift of people into the downtown core. The Living Downtown Survey was done to develop a clearer picture of the impact that new residential developments will have on both emerging and existing downtown neighbourhoods. While this paper will take a closer look at the Living Downtown Toronto Survey findings in Section 6.0, which focuses on Toronto case studies, some highlights of the study are important to set out from the outset, as they frame the context within which we understand the changes that are occurring in Toronto's downtown area:

- High rise buildings represent the majority of new residential developments built downtown since 2001, almost one-third of which are 30 storeys or taller.
- Between 2001 and 2006, the downtown population grew by 10% as 14,800 new residents moved into the area—the largest 5-year population increase in downtown from 1976 to 2006. This rate of growth was much higher than that in the City of Toronto overall and slightly higher than that of the entire GTA between 2001 and 2006.
- People moving into new downtown housing tend to be young, single, or couples without children. They tend to be well educated, most are employed full-time within the downtown area, and household incomes among this group tend to be relatively high.

- Between 2001 and 2006, 17,000 residential units were built and occupied downtown. Another 155 residential projects were under development in 2006, representing more than 39,000 units, and the addition of new projects being developed since then has not slowed down (City of Toronto 2007). In 2011, 5,000 new condominium units were expected to be built in the downtown core, indicating that the trend of high-rise development is continuing (Wintrob 2011)

The Living Downtown Survey data showed that growth in the downtown core mostly represents certain segments of the population, as downtown residents tend to be between the ages of 20 and 40 years of age, with fewer children under 19 and fewer older adults of 65 than seen across Toronto as a whole (City of Toronto 2007). With continued residential development, the opportunity is still there to make downtown Toronto more family-friendly and to bring more age diversity into the area.

4.0 Literature Review

To date, much of the literature about residential downtowns has been about how to re-inhabit the downtown core as a general strategy of urban revitalization (Fennell 2003; Beauregard 2005; Birch 2002; Moulton 1999; Voith and Wachter 2009). Despite the differing historical and cultural contexts in Canada, where most large downtowns have retained a residential population and employment, the same basic issues of urban revitalization and redevelopment have emerged. Recent literature suggests that though there has been an increase in the number of people living downtown, recent development is generally targeted towards young singles and urban professionals (Birch 2002; Birch 2005; Fincher 2007). Surveys show that most people moving to the downtown core are young professionals and empty-nesters, and that the majority of downtown residences are home to households without children (City of Toronto 2007; Moulton 1999). A new body of literature (Christensen and O'Brien 2003; Churchman 2003; Gleeson and Sipe 2006; Karsten 2003; Karsten 2009; Woolcock et al 2010) recognizes that cities are growing in importance as places for families to live and that measures must be taken to create downtowns that are more child-friendly. Such research identifies attracting families with children to the downtown as a strategy for adding vitality to a neighbourhood and as a way of creating cities where people want to settle for the course of their lifetime.

The following review will provide an overview of relevant academic literature and introduce the policy framework that must be planned for when looking at Toronto in the context of creating a child-friendly city.

4.1 Academic Research on Children and the Built Environment

Across North America, Western Europe, and Australia, there has been a shift in the revitalization of downtowns and an increase in the residential populations in the downtown area. However, new residential development and downtown housing is often seen as appropriate only for households without children and downtown planning policies tend not to take into account the specific needs of families and children (Carroll 2011; Costello 2005; Gleeson & Sipe 2006; Whitzman & Mizrachi 2009; Woolcock et al 2010). While the city has advantages and disadvantages for all age groups, the needs of children are the least considered by planners and in the design of cities (Churchman 2003). This view is reinforced by unit sizes that are becoming consistently smaller and that do not provide for a range of living arrangements and family types, and by policy that separates children from the public sphere. Nonetheless, research has shown that children like to be part of the city life. Rather than be isolated

away in playgrounds, they want to have closer, interactive relationships with family, friends, and neighbours in their community, something that is possible in a child-friendly city (Hart 2002).

Children in the city are often studied from a social science perspective that looks at child mobility and independence, and often from a health perspective, which looks at how the built environment affects child obesity levels. Children in the city are often not studied from the perspective this report takes, that of land use planning, and academics have identified the lack of study about the importance of neighbourhood attributes, including physical distance and isolation, on children's sense of wellbeing (Ellen and Turner 1997; Gleeson and Sipe 2006; Woolcock 2010). More recently, academic literature on childhood development has begun to understand that the environments that children live in strongly influence their development and learning and contributes to their self-identity (Christensen and O'Brien 2003; Churchman 2003; Freeman 1995; Hart 2002). Childhood experts show increasing recognition of, and interest in, the ways in which built environments both reflect and condition the key environmental and behavioural dynamics that shape the wellbeing of children (Woolcock et al 2010, 178). In order for city policy to fully incorporate the daily needs of households with children, especially in a context where city plans promote higher density housing in city centres to create more compact communities, there must be a new way of looking at and interpreting city life. Karsten (2009) aims to create an alternative urban discourse, one which takes the daily life of families in cities into account. Her view is that current urban discourses systematically ignore the daily life of families at the city and neighbourhood level, such as Richard Florida's idea of the 'creative city' (Florida 2005), which talks only of the creative production of capital through the lens of workers who have leisure time to spend after the workday has ended – rather than parents who rush home at the end of the day to pick their children up from daycare. Thus, there is a need for a “new inclusive urban discourse rooted in the daily experience of residential families” (Karsten 2009, 318).

Planning Family-Friendly Cities

“The neighbourhood remains the most basic environmental unit in which our social lives occur, and it necessarily affects the quality of life of residents” (Hur and Morrow-Jones 2008, 620).

Children experience the city through the built form at the neighbourhood level, but cities are most often not planned and managed with children in mind. While there have been studies on neighbourhood design and children's levels of play, these generally do not focus on downtown or higher density areas (Handy et al 2008). Academics agree that generally cities do not provide sufficient places that adequately meet the developmental needs of children, nor do they facilitate and encourage the

independent use of the city by children and families (Churchman 2003; Handy et al 2008; Whitzman and Mizrachi 2009). In a study of residential perceptions of inner suburban neighbourhoods in Newcastle, Australia, high- and mid-density apartment living was seen as inadequate for the needs of households with children. Downtown neighbourhoods were identified as inappropriate for children due to heavy traffic and proximity to bars (Mee 2010). As well, there has been previous background research on the limited access to safe outdoor play spaces for children in apartments (van Vliet 1983; Gifford 2007). Therefore, researchers such as Whitzman and Mizrachi (2009) and Christensen and O'Brien (2003) show that neighbourhood design can be used as a strategy to increase the physical activity of children and influence their interactions with the city.

The needs of families in the downtown can be narrowed down two major areas: amenities and housing. These needs are circular, as family housing attracts family-oriented amenities, and vice versa. Households with children want to live in an area with amenities such as schools and daycares, and these amenities often only come to a neighbourhood once there is a visible demand. Therefore, in order to encourage a family-friendly city, there needs to be concurrent development of housing suitable for families and amenities intended to serve families and children.

Facilities and Amenities

In order to conduct their daily activities, households with children (as well as the general population) are attracted to neighbourhoods where they can easily access local amenities within a short walking distance. There is also the general need for certain community service amenities and facilities such as schools, daycares, and recreation centres. Some of the most common amenities that impact quality of life and urban sustainability are supermarkets and green space (Burton 2000). Access to such amenities enables families to do all their shopping and community activities in one neighbourhood, all within walking distance of the home, which is one of the indicators of a complete community. This reduces the number of trips a household will have to make and provides community connections to other families living in the neighbourhood.

Easy access to neighbourhood amenities is especially important in high-density areas, where unit sizes are typically small. Studies have found that there is insufficient indoor and outdoor play space for children in high-density housing (Fincher 2004; Mee 2010). In such cases, local amenities such as coffee shops and libraries can act as informal 'living rooms' outside of the home. They provide a place to gather when there is not enough room in the home, and provide an opportunity for people to meet others in the community. As well, parks and indoor play areas in community centres can provide children with a

place to play and run around when apartments or condominium units are too small or when outdoor play is desired.

Places to Play:

Churchman (2003), in his study of the place for children in the city, identifies two major neighbourhood and environmental characteristics that are critical throughout childhood and that affect children's use and enjoyment of the city: the degree to which children are able to go to places on their own; and the degree to which children are able to play outside in a safe and challenging environment. Churchman (2003) and Whitzman and Mizrachi (2009) have studied these two factors to see if they influence whether or not children can take advantage of what the city has to offer. They found that safe places and spaces to play independently are vital for children. In looking at how children interact with the city and their neighbourhoods, we need to look at whether or not children are able to function on their own within the city or whether they are completely or relatively dependant on adults.

Studies have shown that children like to play on streets rather than playgrounds, as public street play is more challenging, adaptable, and suitable for a range of ages (Churchman 2003; Freeman 1995; Hart 2002). Churchman (2003) gathered all the relevant literature and identified a list of environmental characteristics important for outdoor play spaces. These characteristics have implications on how downtown development should occur and the design of the urban built environment. Some of the important characteristics of play spaces are as follows:

- The spaces are close to home and close to the entrance that is used by adults;
- There are plenty of other children within walking distance;
- The spaces are easily accessible, both visually and physically, and have sufficient open space for activities;
- They are close to other activities happening in the city – children want to feel part of the daily life of their community;
- They offer a variety of opportunities for different types of play to accommodate diverse interests, ages, and abilities; and,
- The area is safe in terms of traffic safety and of the equipment and ground surfaces, and in terms of safety from adults (Churchman 2003, 108).

Therefore, rather than more separate playgrounds, there needs to be a greater attempt to make neighbourhoods, especially high-density ones, safe and welcoming for children to play close to home.

Housing

The attainment and retention of households with children in the downtown area depends greatly upon the presence of both housing and amenities. Access to suitable and affordable housing is a core need of every household, including those with children, and housing is an important determinant of health and wellbeing.

No matter where people fall on the housing continuum and what their level of housing need is, they all require shelter. Those who choose to live in the downtown core will

ensure that they have enough income to support that move, but others have less choice and need to live downtown to be near their job or downtown services. Regardless, creating affordable housing strategies for households with children will benefit all households and will attract a diversity of people to live in the downtown area.

A household is in core housing need if they live in housing that falls below at least one of the following standards and they would have to spend 30% or more of total income to pay the median rent of alternative local housing that is acceptable:

1. **Adequate** – no need of major repairs; or
2. **Suitable** – has enough bedrooms for the size and make-up of their households; or
3. **Affordable** - costs less than 30% of before-tax household income.

Most people who are in core housing need are there because they cannot meet the affordability standard (CMHC 2011).

4.2 Downtown Housing for Families

“The city is again growing in popularity even, and in particular, among people who can afford to buy a house at the top end of the housing market. To live in the central areas of the city has become part of a positive choice for the urban way of life, despite the fact that the cost of living there may be much higher than in the suburbs and the quality of housing stock much lower” (Karsten 2003, 2573).

There is an overall trend in developed cities towards inner city growth and repopulating the downtown core. While this movement cannot always be compared to the Toronto case due to different city trajectories across contexts, nonetheless it shows a general shift towards residential downtowns. For example, as seen in a study on residential trajectories in Amsterdam by Karsten (2003), suburban living is still the dominant living type for families but a small shift of families can be seen following the general residential move to central areas of the city. The neighbourhood thus acts as a factor in bringing together work, living, family, and other pursuits.

The current demand for high-rise high-density housing in the centre city is being driven by young professionals and empty nesters who are attracted to the central location and close proximity of amenities, workplaces, and educational institutions (Birch, 2006; Fincher 2007; Karsten, 2003, 2007; Moulton, 1999). In their research on the social sustainability of medium density housing in New Zealand, Ancell and Thompson (2008) identified the submarkets that developers are building for: empty nesters who want theatre and restaurants; young professionals who want bars and cycling space; those who want to live close to the city for accessibility reason (traffic); and investors who see the units as easy investments in the property market. Only a narrow range of people are provided for within their development marketing, and the housing needs of families are not even included in the list of groups that are being left out.

Inner-city high-rise apartments are often perceived as unsuitable for children. There is a large body of research on the psychological effects of high-rise living, some of which focuses on families with children. These include Appold and Yuen (2007), who chose to focus on families in their study of Singapore high-rises because while this form of housing has long been seen as inappropriate for such households, there has been a growth in the number of tall housing blocks built and they wanted to understand the impact of this type of housing on the conduct of residents' lives. However, others such as Costello (2005) and Fincher (2007) point out that though the longstanding view is that apartments are not suitable places for children to grow up, this view was developed in the context of the marginalized occupants of public housing for whom "any housing, high-rise or not, was unlikely to remedy their disadvantage" (Fincher 2007, 647). Nonetheless, there are still many negative stereotypes surrounding high-rise living – many of them associating high-rise living with social housing and poverty. There are also functional challenges to family life that are typically associated with high-rise dwellings. Apartments tend to be significantly smaller than single-family dwellings, which can result in crowding and lack of privacy that lead to emotional stress (Appold and Yuen 2007). Therefore, in order to be socially sustainable cities must provide for the wellbeing of the children that live in them (Carroll et al 2011).

Downtown housing for families is also seen as temporary and high-density living is often only viewed as transitional housing for families before they can move to a larger house in the suburbs. In the 2011 study done by Carroll et al, 8 out of the 10 interviewed households saw their apartment living as temporary and one day wanted to move into a house with a backyard. Thus, in some cases, while for young families living in a condo or apartment downtown is seen as convenient and meeting their needs

'for now', they can be seen as far from ideal for family living and do not meet the specific needs of households with children (Carroll et al 2011; Dixon and Dupuis 2003; Gifford 2007).

Families value certain housing, neighbourhood, and environmental characteristics. While some have been identified above, Karsten (2009) identifies the ideal characteristics desired by families residing in the downtown area:

- Centrality of housing location. Many families living downtown are employed in the city and they want to be within walking or cycling distance of amenities;
- Urban culture and diversity;
- Schools, daycares, and other children's activities to be located in the vicinity of the home;
- Low-traffic street with greenery;
- Playable spaces;
- Other families and children nearby, which creates a social network; and,
- Appropriate housing – both spacious and affordable. While families value private access to the street and a small front garden, these are not possible in a high-rise environment. Instead, the research shows that families also favour communal green spaces in combination with a private place where they can sit outdoors.

Together, these factors work to attract households to live in downtown areas.

Household Location Decisions

In contexts outside of Canada (such as in the United States, where much of the locational decision factor literature is from), downtowns have weaker real estate markets than elsewhere in the city, and so people choose to move downtown because of the affordability, to lessen their reliance on cars, and because of the convenience of the central location (Carroll et al 2011; Karsten 2003).

However, regardless on context, there are various factors that act to attract people to live in the downtown area:

Reduced commuting times: Those with a preference for downtown living often do so to live in proximity to their work (often in new segments of the labour market such as information technology and the cultural and media sectors), are attracted to the urban lifestyle, and are usually without children. Carroll et al (2011) identified that families living in the downtown core saw cheaper suburban rents as being offset by high transportation costs, influencing their decision to live in the downtown core, where their

minimal transportation costs made inner-city living either cheaper or no more expensive than previous suburban living situations.

In contexts where downtown housing is more expensive than a home in suburban areas, people who work in central areas of the city make the decision to live downtown in order to offset the higher commuting times and the price of driving longer distances. They also found that a main driver for deciding to live downtown is the shorter commuting distances, allowing parents to spend more time with their children and less time in their cars (Carroll et al 2011). Families dependant on the urban labour market make the strategic choice to reside in the city to overcome time and space constraints and to minimize the costs and difficulties of long-distance commuting (Karsten 2003).

Access to amenities: Families choose to reside in the central city because of the close proximity to urban amenities. These households wish to be able to walk or cycle to work and their child's school, which often also reduces the number of automobiles a household will require. Families also value communal child-specific facilities, such as play areas and swimming pools, especially in high-rise living where there might not be adequate space inside the home for rambunctious play, as these allow for easy peer interaction.

However, because high-density downtown housing is often built for childless residents, incoming concentrations of young children in higher density housing can result in increased pressure on day care facilities for very young children and after-school care for older children, as well as pressure on services for youth, family, and general community support services. Social services and amenities that do not anticipate such rises in populations end up playing catch-up and scrambling to provide services and create school and daycare spaces (Woolcock et al 2010). Thus, when there is a stated initiative to attract families to live in downtown areas, cities must ensure that services have the capacity to deal with the increased demand.

Urban Lifestyle: Many households with children downtown are made up of parents who lived in the central city as young professionals and who do not want to give up their cultural lives for their children (Karsten 2003). As well, Karsten (2009) found in a study of middle-class urban families in the Netherlands that people who move to the city centre when they are young, either for school or work, become acquainted with city life and decide not to change their living patterns when they have children, choosing to remain in the downtown area. While some of the people studied had reservations about

raising children in the city because of issues of safety, only a few expressed a desire to move to the suburbs.

Affordability: American downtowns are newly viable, due in part to the creative knowledge economy and the desire of employers to set up in cities where their workforce lives (Voith and Wachter 2009). In Canada as well, there is increasing residential development in the downtown. However, the increased attraction towards downtown living and constraints on the land supply because of legislation against sprawl has had implications on the housing market and affordability. House and condominium prices in the city have increased dramatically, making it harder for young families to afford a home in the inner city. Rents have also been rising, as there is high demand and little new rental housing being built. As well, the high value of land has led to ever shrinking condominium sizes, minimizing the ability of families to find suitable housing downtown. In other contexts, such as in New Zealand, studies show that people move to inner-city apartments as they are more affordable than in outer areas (Carroll et al 2011). This pattern is not applicable in the Toronto case, where condos large enough for families cost about the same as a comparable house in the downtown area, and where there are limited options in the rental market. Therefore, the issue of affordability and the search for suitable, affordable housing directs the locational choices of households with children.

The Perceived Ideal Place for Families

While the academic literature is generally in favour of creating vibrant, dense downtowns, research studies show that parents often perceive detached homes as the best place for raising children (Karsten 2009; Mee 2010). Neighbourhood satisfaction studies also put forward a case against family living in the downtown core. Neighbourhood and housing satisfaction studies have shown that drawbacks to central city family living include poor quality apartment design in older units, which do not address the storage needs of families, the lack of indoor and outdoor play space for children, and safety fears, especially in elevators and stairwells (Carroll et al 2011).

Hur and Morrow-Jones, in their 2008 study on homeowners' satisfaction with their neighbourhoods in Franklin County, Ohio (the central county of the Columbus, Ohio metropolitan area, which includes both downtown and outer areas), used variables such as tenure, perceptions of safety, and social and demographic factors to identify what influences neighbourhood satisfaction. They found that social factors (such as interactions with the community) are usually more important than physical appearance and that people's satisfaction with their neighbourhood goes up the longer they have lived in the neighbourhood. Their study also showed that the importance and influence of factors differs depending

on overall satisfaction of the specific neighbourhoods. Thus, safety and social problems have a more significant impact than physical factors on neighbourhood satisfaction in unsatisfactory areas.

Studies have shown that households with children want space – a larger house with more bedrooms and storage, as well as a yard for their children to play in. Thus, the ideal home for households with children is often perceived as detached homes with large yards (Mee 2010). Parents in the study done by Carroll et al (2011) identified a backyard to be part of the ‘ideal’ family spaces and the major reason why they would eventually move from their apartment. Handy et al (2008) studied the associations between the built and social environments of neighbourhoods and children’s outdoor play within the neighbourhood. They found that parents are more likely to promote and support play in typical suburban environments due to the presence of large yards, cul-de-sacs, and open spaces, all of which increase parents’ perceptions of safety.

4.3 Criteria for a Family-Friendly Downtown

While the factors that create family-friendly cities can be gleaned from the literature and Toronto case study, one can also look at other Canadian cities for examples of guidelines that can be used to create family-friendly downtowns. The current Official Plan 5-year review process provides a timely opportunity for the City of Toronto to create a more in-depth and articulate set of guidelines of how to plan a family-friendly city. Different cities around the world have taken such initiatives to help develop cities that are more welcoming to families. Cities such as Vancouver have created a stand-alone document outlining guidelines for the development of family-friendly high-density housing, while others such as Seattle have incorporated such principles throughout their general land-use planning documents.

The following list of neighbourhood design guidelines can be applied to downtown Toronto and were adapted from the City of Vancouver’s ‘High-Density Housing for Families with Children Guidelines’ (1992) and the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues’ ‘Recommendations for Child/Family-Friendly Multi-Unit Housing’ (2011).

Family-Friendly Neighbourhood and Housing Guidelines:¹

Guidelines for Family-Friendly Neighbourhoods must provide a range of amenities, services, and infrastructure needed to attract and retain families in cities. Some guidelines that the public and private sectors must follow to provide for the needs of families living in high-rise units downtown are as follows:

1. Family housing should be located within a safe and reasonable walking distance to amenities including schools, parks, play spaces, community centers, and commercial areas which contain grocery stores, cleaners, and other services that families need.
2. There must be sufficient family-oriented housing to support neighbourhood family amenities.
3. Schools are integral within the neighbourhood to create a welcoming community with support for families and children.
4. Children need easy, casual access to other children without a formal invitation to play, and need safe, uninhibited outdoor play.
5. Family units should have visual and if possible direct physical access to common play areas for small children and developers should consider an indoor children's play space when individual unit sizes are not suited for children's play. This visual and direct access to common play areas can be incorporated into design features, such as an open play area on the roof of the building podium with family units having direct access to the space.
6. Buildings should be suitable and accommodating to families with children. Units should include an adequate number of bedrooms and sufficient bulk storage space, and corridors and elevators should be wide enough for strollers.

4.4 Limitations of the Academic Research

Various limitations arise from the academic research when searching for studies on children and the built environment of the central city. A large amount of the literature looks at the American city, which in most cases differs from the Canadian city. The American context differs because of the trajectory of their downtowns and cities, history of racialized neighbourhoods and public housing, and how the downtowns of many American cities had been abandoned in previous decades. While the American literature does talk about the return of residents to the downtown core, the revitalization of America's downtowns often consists mainly of employment and entertainment centres. However, the findings can still apply to Toronto as they talk about the opportunities that cities currently have to bring residents back to the downtowns and it looks at the steps that can be taken to create successful residential life in

¹ These guidelines are adapted from the Family-Friendly City guidelines of Vancouver and Edmonton.

central business districts. As well, in the Toronto case, while there have always been residential neighbourhoods in the downtown area, the central business district has only recently seen residential development. Consequently, many areas of the downtown core are only currently creating residential communities, and so there exists a similar desire to create a vibrant, livable, 24-hour downtown, one that is home to a diverse community.

More comparisons can be made from the European and Australian literature, but many Western European cities have a different way of building for density, particularly with their mid-rise cities, and they also come from a greater cultural acceptance of families living in higher density living in the downtown area. As Toronto is a city with a diverse population from all over the world, the hope is that this culture of acceptance can be brought to Toronto from other places where higher density living is the norm. From this greater acceptance come greater opportunities for family-friendly development, and these opportunities will be further explored in later sections. Nonetheless, cities such as New York and Paris, with sizeable downtown populations, are also struggling to provide affordable housing units suitable for families in central areas.

5.0 Policy Review

“Public policy cannot by itself create demand for housing anywhere, especially downtown. However, in conjunction with private business initiatives, local government can help accelerate potential into action by educating, providing incentives and removing regulatory obstacles” (Moulton 1999, 9).

Planning policy can be used to create conditions that are favourable to the development of family-friendly cities and can be used to provide incentives to attract and retain families with children to the downtown core. Cities can use public policy to enliven the housing market by creating two conditions:

- The physical environment must be of a character and quality that people will want to live there; and,
- Downtown residences must offer an investment motive for home ownership (Moulton 1999, 10).

The Province of Ontario and the City of Toronto have instituted a number of policies and strategies that impact the growth of Toronto. The following policy review identifies the policies and strategies that influence, shape, and direct the residential growth of Toronto’s downtown core. The visions of the future outlined below provide policies regarding how to reach the desired outcome regarding the settlement of growing populations, and the following analysis will identify to what extent they meet the needs of families living in the downtown core.

Policies such as the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* attempt to forecast future growth and direct population to certain areas of the city. They also provide a vision for the future— how Toronto will look and what will be provided for its residents – through the City of Toronto Official Plan vision for neighbourhoods, which pertain to developing an attractive and vibrant downtown by creating a diversity of housing and amenities. The policy review will introduce relevant provincial policies and City of Toronto plans and planning documents.

5.1 Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshow and the Places to Grow Act (2006)

The policies in the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* set out growth targets for the City of Toronto’s population and employment. The Plan is about reducing sprawl and planning for future growth in a measured manner. The *Places to Grow Act* restricts development in Ontario’s greenbelt, and so in order to meet growth targets intensification is needed. As well, the Growth Plan sets out policies stating that 40% of all growth must be on already built up areas. Due to the nature of the city, most of the area is already built up, with little greenfield or empty land available. Thus, most residential

development in the City of Toronto will be through intensification in already built up areas, conversions of other types of building to housing, or development on brownfield lands.

As seen in the discussion of complete communities in Section 3.2 above, the *Places to Grow Act* demonstrates the province's commitment to complete communities, which favours families in the city by providing housing choices and services that meet the needs of people in all stages of life. This report aims to ensure that the intensification required through Ontario legislation is welcoming and inviting for a diversity of people and age groups, particularly households with children, by creating complete communities in downtown areas that allow for a diversity of uses and people.

5.2 City of Toronto Official Plan 2002: Office Consolidation 2010

"Our choice is not whether we grow, but how well we grow" (City of Toronto 2010).

The *City of Toronto Official Plan* sets forward a vision for shaping Toronto's future. The vision presented is about creating an attractive and safe city where people of all ages and abilities can enjoy a good quality of life. The Official Plan puts forward policies to create a city with:

- Vibrant neighbourhoods that are part of complete communities;
- Affordable housing choices that meet the needs of everyone throughout their life;
- A strong and competitive economy with a vital downtown that creates and sustains well-paid, stable, safe and fulfilling employment opportunities for all Torontonians.

The vision for the future includes one where housing choices are available for all people in their communities at all stages of their lives. This vision is one where well-being is measured by how well we provide for our children and the most disadvantaged among us. The successful future of Toronto is one where children and youth find their surroundings safe, stimulating, and inviting.

Sections within the Official Plan focus on the development of downtown in general, how to plan for residential development in the downtown area so that it contains a diversity of housing types, tenures, and affordability, how to create healthy neighbourhoods that fit within the complete community framework, and the community services and facilities that should be provided to improve the quality of life, health, and wellbeing of Toronto's residents.

The Official Plan also contains a sidebar about the *Toronto Children's Charter*, which summarizes the rights and freedoms to which all Toronto children are entitled, and the City's responsibility to ensure

that its most vulnerable residents have access to a fair share of society's resources (City of Toronto 2010, 3-18). The Charter states that all Toronto children are entitled to a standard of living that is adequate to ensure their healthy physical, intellectual, emotional, and social development, wellbeing, and a good quality of life. It also states that children are entitled to child care programs, to participate in recreational activities such as play, and are entitled to receive education to enable them to reach their full potential (The Toronto Children's Charter can be found in full in Appendix B).

5.3 Official Plan Review

The City of Toronto Official Plan is currently undergoing a 5-year review in which proposed Official Plan Amendments are considered. An important policy under review is the proposed Official Plan Amendment to Encourage the Development of Units for Households with Children, which arose out of concern that there was not enough family housing being developed in downtown Toronto. This Official Plan Amendment would provide policies where a certain percentage of all new development would have to contain units suitable for households with children – namely, three-bedroom units. It would direct the construction of a greater variety of unit types and more flexibility in design to ensure a range of housing opportunities is provided for Toronto's current and future households.

The proposals put forward in this Official Plan Amendment are similar to inclusionary zoning as it would require developers to build 10% of all new units to be 3-bedroom units. Section 6.0 of this report will go into more detail about the potential benefits and problems of this plan, and how it can be used to provide family-sized condominium units in the downtown area.

5.4 Section 37 of the Planning Act

Section 37 of the Planning Act permits the City to authorize increases in height and/or density permitted through the zoning bylaw in return for community benefits, provided that there are related Official Plan policies in place. The 'Implementation Guidelines for Section 37 of the Planning Act and Protocol for Negotiating Section 37 Community Benefits' document (2007) outlines the specifics about what is permitted under Section 37 and the specific community benefits that may be contributed in lieu of density allowances, which could be used to provide amenities required by downtown families. Such benefits include improvements to school board playgrounds, community services and facilities space, and non-profit childcare facilities. The Implementation Guidelines outlines in what cases the developer must build such facilities or the cases in which they may make cash contributions towards the capital costs.

6.0 Case Study: Focus on Toronto

City neighbourhoods should be planned for a diverse community, for a variety of ages, from childhood to old age. Many people in downtown Toronto are committed urbanites who do not want to leave their vibrant downtown neighbourhoods, but data shows that households with children make up a smaller than average proportion of downtown households when compared to the city as a whole. In Toronto, children aged 0-14 make up 16.4% percent of the population. In the downtown area, they make up only 4.4% of the population. As well, in the City of Toronto as a whole, households with children make up almost 34% of all households. In the downtown area, households with children constitute only 10.5% of all households, a significant difference (Statistics Canada 2007).

This section of the report will profile the downtown area and identify what a downtown area can provide to its resident families in terms of housing and amenities. This focus section will examine the current position of families and children living downtown, look at how the demographics of families living downtown have changed over time, and how families with children are provided with housing and amenities that suites their needs. Case study initiatives will also be examined to look at best practices of how the public, private, and non-profit sectors work to provide amenities such as affordable housing for families downtown.

Much of the current information regarding specifics about the demographics and built form of the downtown area come from the Living Downtown Toronto Survey, conducted in December 2006 by the City Planning Division of the City of Toronto. The results of the Living Downtown Survey present a clearer picture of the impact that new residential developments will have on both new and existing downtown neighbourhoods. The study of

this research paper aligns with the same city downtown boundaries as the survey due to the large variety of data available through the survey and for the ease of data analysis and for consistency. The downtown area as delineated in the Living Downtown Survey is seen in Figure 2 and encompasses

Figure 2: Downtown Toronto Boundaries



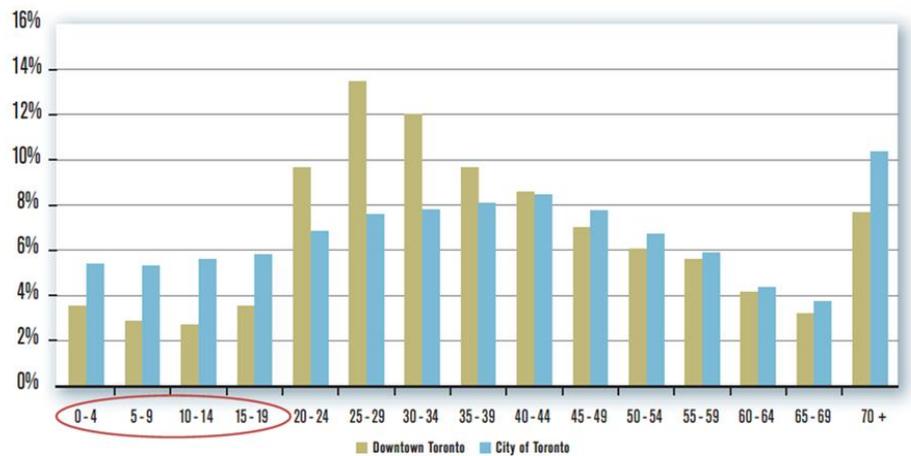
Toronto’s Central Business District, which has only recently seen residential development, many surrounding established, stable residential neighbourhoods, and areas of new development south of King Street and west of Spadina Avenue.²

These downtown boundaries were first identified in the 1976 City of Toronto Central Area Plan (City of Toronto 1976). This plan was the first instance where zoning called for mixed-uses in the downtown area. The 1976 plan also recognized the importance of providing family housing options throughout the city and introduced policies and zoning designations to encourage residential development in the downtown area.

Downtown Demographics

The report put out by the City Planning Division in 2007 presented the results of the survey and gives a clear look at how children and families are represented in the downtown area. While the data outlined below was collected in December 2006, the trajectory of these results has continued to the present, as can be seen from current development patterns. The results show that people moving into new downtown housing tend to be young singles or couples without children. Downtown residents tend to be younger than those living in the rest of the city, mostly between 20 and 40 years of age. As seen in Figure 3, there are fewer children under the age of 19 living downtown than in the rest of the city (City of Toronto 2007).

Figure 3: Population by Age, 2006 Census



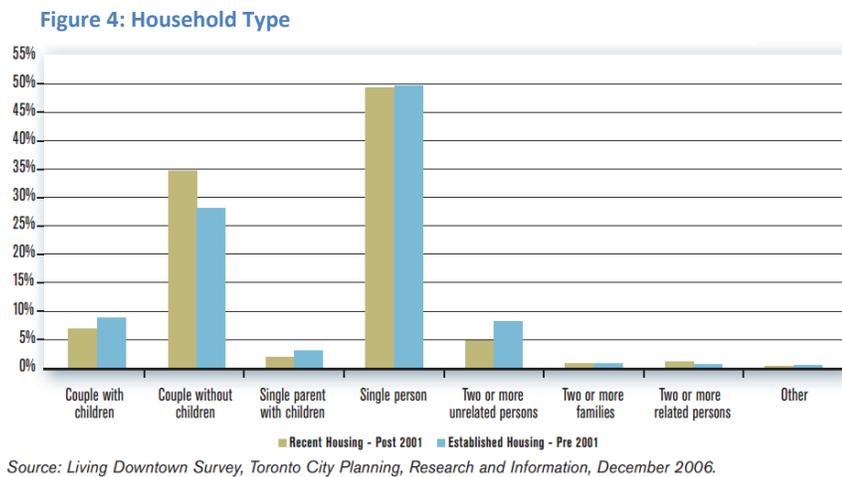
(Source: City of Toronto, 2007, with data from Statistics Canada, Census of Canada)

² The downtown area as defined by the Living Downtown Survey does not include the two outer strips that are included in the City of Toronto Official Plan designation of the downtown – that is, the Don Lands and the area west of the Fort York area. These areas are generally not as developed residentially or have different characteristics than the rest of the area, and so they are considered outside of the downtown area.

The age distribution is especially distinct when looking at families living in housing built before and after 2001. Only 4.3% of households in newer units contain pre-school aged children (under 5 years old) or school age children between the ages of 5 and 19. This compares to people living in established (pre-2001) housing, where 7.7% of residents are between the ages of 0 and 19 (City of Toronto 2007). However, the overall percentage of children living in the downtown area pales in comparison to the City as a whole, where 22.2% of residents are between the ages of 0 and 19 (Statistics Canada 2007). In addition, only 5.6% of post-2001 housing is occupied by adults over the age of 65 (City of Toronto 2007), compared to 11.1% in the City overall (Statistics Canada 2007). However, in existing housing built before 2001, adults over the age of 65 make up 15.9% of the population, a figure that shows the large demographic differences between existing households and newer condominium development³ (City of Toronto 2007).

The dominance of younger childless households reflects the global trend of downtown residential growth, which attracts

young urban professionals and not households with children. Perhaps most tellingly, the Living Downtown Survey looked at the household types in the downtown area. As seen in Figure 4, households in

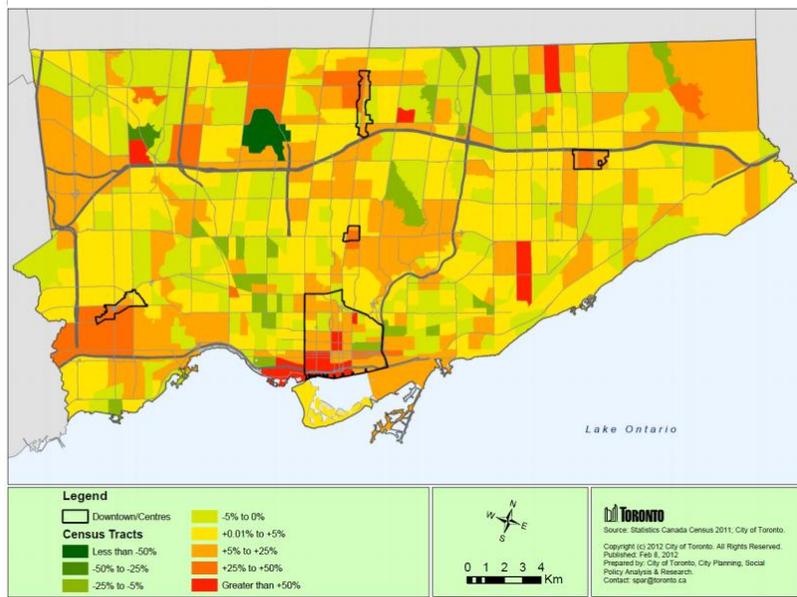


both recent and established housing are comprised mainly of singles and couples without children. The survey found that 49.5% of all downtown residents were single-person households and 31.4% were couples without children (City of Toronto 2007). In comparison, in the City of Toronto as a whole 30.2% of households were single-person households and 23.9% of all households were couples without children (Statistics Canada 2007).

³ Though this larger percentage of older adults (of which two thirds are between the ages of 65 and 75) may include retirees and empty-nesters who moved to the downtown area prior to 2001, as well as people who have lived in the downtown area for many years.

The downtown area contains some of the fastest growing census tracts in Toronto. Preliminary 2011 Census data shows that from 2006 to 2011, the population in the southern areas of the downtown increased at a massive rate. As Figure 5 shows, those census tracts where much of the recent condominium development is taking place has seen population increases of over 50% (City of Toronto 2012; the downtown area is outlined on the map in black; the southern census tracts are red, showing the largest percentage increases. A larger map can be found in Appendix C).

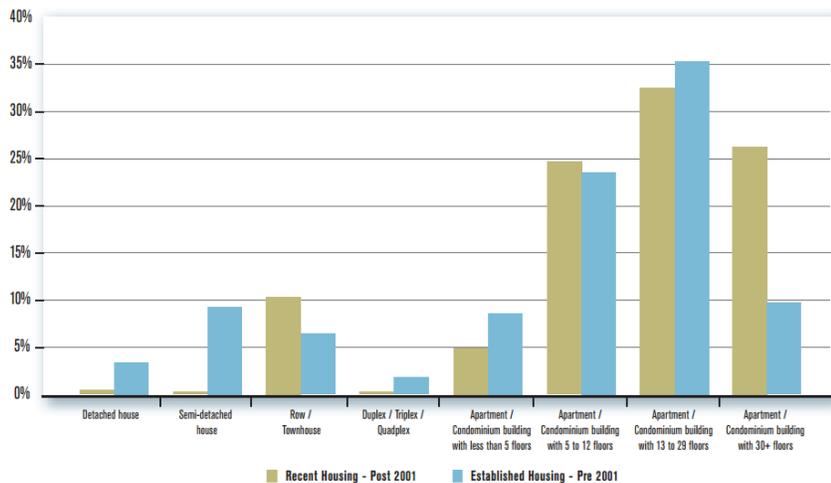
Figure 5: City of Toronto Population Change 2006-2011



Downtown Development

Much of the recent downtown development has been high-rise condominium development along the waterfront, at the southern end of the downtown core, and in the area surrounding Yonge Street. As can be seen from Figure 6, new detached and semi-detached housing development has been virtually non-existent in the downtown area since 2001. Most new development is high-density apartment and condominium buildings over 5 storeys, with buildings over 30 storeys making up a large bulk of new housing development.

Figure 6: Downtown Structure Type



Source: Living Downtown Survey, Toronto City Planning, Research and Information, December 2006.

Though the Living Downtown Survey was done in 2006, the findings still resonate today, as the current patterns of development continue to primarily take the form of high-rise condominium development. According to Urbanation, a downtown condo market research firm, 5000 new condominium units were expected to be built in the downtown core in 2011 (Wintrob 2011). The breakdown in residents owning versus renting their dwelling also makes the case for most new development being in the form of condominiums. In the downtown area, 76.2% of recent post-2001 dwellings are owned and only 23.8% rented, compared to 46.3% owned and 53.1% rented in pre-2001 housing. For contrast, 54.4% of dwellings are owned and 45.6% are rented in the City of Toronto as a whole. With both a very large percentage of owned dwellings and a large number of multi-storey building constructions seen in post-2001 housing, we can safely assume that most new housing is condominium development.

These new and existing developments and the planning process behind them will provide positive and negative examples of city-building for households with children, as well as give examples of the factors that attract and retain families with children in the downtown area. Linked to this continued development of condominium towers and the intensification of existing built-up areas are the amenities and facilities that service them.

Amenities for Children and Families

One of the important components in attracting and retaining families with children to the downtown is providing amenities required by families through both public and private investment. The City of Seattle, in its 2009 Livable South Downtown Planning Study, stated that “While housing units with multiple bedrooms that are affordable to families is important, research indicates that a range of amenities is necessary to create an environment which supports families in dense, urban settings. Family housing should be located near services including schools, open space, safe streetscapes, community centers and commercial areas which contain grocery stores, cleaners and other services that families need” (City of Seattle 2009, 102). Seattle has identified that while housing is an essential aspect of creating livable downtown communities, it must come in conjunction with family amenities.

There are many open and green spaces in downtown Toronto within walking distance of most residential addresses. While they may not all have playgrounds, the literature shows that children need to be able to make up their own play in unstructured ways. Thus, open squares or small parkettes can also be suitable play spaces for older children, who do not need constant supervision, and they would ideally be located close to the housing units and with direct visual access. For parents who may not want

to always accompany their children to a nearby play area, developers should be encouraged to put play areas on top of condo podiums or provide play spaces within the building itself, using design features to provide family-friendly amenities.

Daycare centres are dispersed throughout downtown area (See Figure 7), with some near more residential areas and other near the

business core. Access to daycares is especially important for families when they are found in proximity to either work, the home, or the local school. This allows the parent to join the trip to the daycare with another trip, such as going to work or dropping another child off at school. Daycares have recognized this need, and many daycares are located within elementary schools. In high-density living environments, having child care located

Figure 7: Distribution of Licensed Daycares in Downtown Toronto



within the building itself is a good way to integrate family-friendly amenities into developments. However, a local daycare is not enough in a neighbourhood – there must be enough space to accommodate incoming children and there must be affordable or subsidized options.

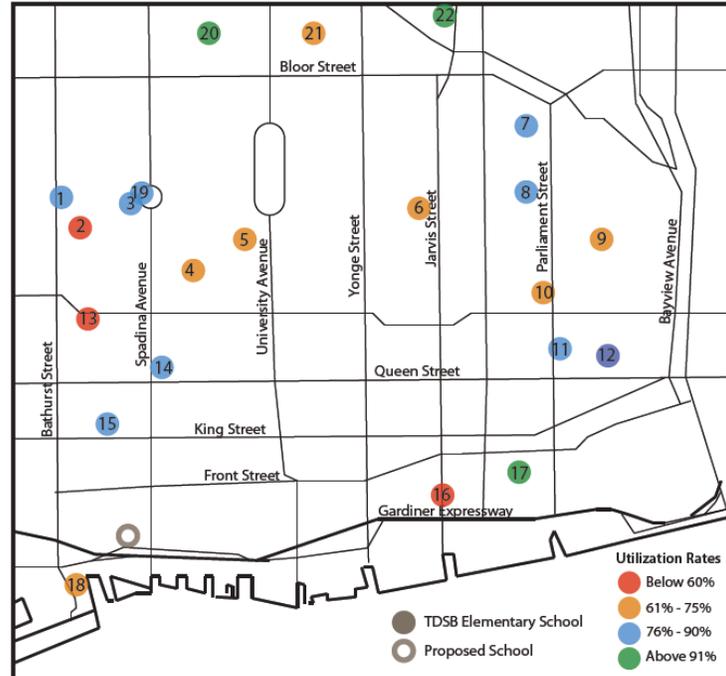
Parents with children have many responsibilities throughout the day, and so one factor that attracts parents to a neighbourhood is the proximity of services in one area, which reduces the number of trips needed. They do not want to have to walk ten minutes in one direction from their home to pick up their child from day-care only to have to walk ten minutes in the other direction to the grocery store. One way in which planning can enable this proximity – and thus attract households with children to a downtown neighbourhood – is by planning facilities in close proximity to one another and by ensuring existing services have enough capacity to serve new development. One way this is done in many communities is by providing day-care and community drop-in services at local elementary schools. These services act as community draws, and the local elementary school becomes the centre of the family's community.

Downtown Schools

Schools act to both attract and retain families with children to a neighbourhood. Research shows that schools are one of the most important factors families use when deciding where to live.

Figure 8 shows the distribution of the Toronto District School Board (TDSB)⁴ elementary schools throughout the downtown area and the utilization rates of each school (for a full list of schools downtown see Appendix D). The schools are distributed in the

Figure 8: Elementary Schools in Downtown Toronto



more residential parts of the downtown area and except for a few exceptions in the St. Lawrence area, there are no elementary schools located in the heart of the downtown core. The utilization rates are also shown on the map, which are a ratio of the actual number of students enrolled in the school compared to the school capacity. Schools with a utilization rate below 60% are underutilized, with not enough students to fill the school, and schools with utilization rates above 90% are overenrolled, with inadequate space to properly serve the students and without the capacity to serve incoming student populations. These utilization rates vary by area, and show no discernible differences between areas of the downtown, most of which have school with low-to-stable utilization rates. Therefore, there is no correlation between the location of the school and whether the school is fully utilized or not. In order to truly analyze the differences between downtown schools and their impact on the levels of families in the surrounding neighbourhood, one would need to look deeper at the neighbourhood characteristics and the programs offered by the schools. If looking solely at attendance boundaries, the schools with higher

⁴ Only TDSB schools have been used in this analysis. The author recognizes that there are other schools in the downtown area, including schools run by the Toronto Catholic District School Board or others that are privately run. However, these alternate schools do not have the same neighbourhood requirements as the TDSB does, and so it is possible that their students come from all over the city. Therefore, the enrolment rates at these schools cannot be used to identify the number of children living downtown. The Toronto District School Board, on the other hand, does have a requirement to provide an elementary school within 1.6km of every residential address. Therefore, the presence of a public school is more representative of the number of children living in an area.

utilization rates show the areas downtown which are attracting households with children, as well as the capacity of the other schools to accommodate increased residential levels. However, there are various alternative elementary schools downtown, which attract students from all over the city, and other students may be attending schools outside of their attendance area.

Nonetheless, the size, number, and distribution of elementary schools through the downtown area is indicative of the places downtown which have the highest concentration of students – and therefore families. Many of the elementary schools downtown are located in older residential neighbourhoods, but new schools have been built downtown in the past 15-20 years, such as The Waterfront School and Market Lane Junior and Senior Public School, which may represent newer areas of family housing. This research focuses on elementary schools as parents are more likely send their children to a school in their home neighbourhood because at the elementary school level parents need to accompany their children when traveling to and from the school (as opposed to high school students, who can travel alone to schools farther away and are more likely to use the Toronto District School Board’s optional attendance policy to attend schools outside of their home attendance area). Elementary schools are therefore more representative of the demographic characteristics of particular neighbourhoods. For that reason, households with children are attracted to neighbourhoods with locally accessible schools, which are seen as one of the fundamental amenities required by families.

As mentioned in the above section, amenities located within schools can act to retain families to a neighbourhood and can act to help create a complete community. An interview with a Toronto District School Board planner pointed out how families are attracted to schools with a range of services, rather than just the basic educational provision, which exemplifies how services within schools can act to keep families living downtown. The interviewee was of the opinion that if downtown schools offer a high level of education and provide other services that a family might need, the family would have less reason to move out of the neighbourhood in search of other schools.

Amenities provided out of some TDSB elementary schools that attract households with children include daycares and parenting centres. The daycares provide a convenient location to leave younger children during the day, especially when the school/daycare is located near the home, and especially when there are older children from the same family already attending the school. This reduces the number of trips the parents need to make at the beginning and end of each day. Parenting centres, which are provincially funded locations where parents and babies can drop-in and socialize, act as community

gathering places. These centers offer information about other amenities located in the area and are a way downtown schools can be supportive to the community they are located in.

Community outreach done in schools is about giving choice and providing opportunities for community members to come together. This provides support and a chance to interact with other parents. Other examples of community services some schools provide include evening classes for parents, reading and writing programs, and before and after school programs for the children that are unique to the schools and to the neighbourhood. This outreach also makes it easier for the school to find out the specific needs of the community and respond to them.

New School Development in South Downtown

The Toronto District School Board provides new school facilities in conjunction with City planning based on an identified need in an area. As can be seen on Figure 8 on Page 35, most of the downtown area elementary schools are located within existing older stable neighbourhood areas, which contain many single family homes. The southern areas of the downtown have only recently experienced residential development, and as such do not have many school facilities.

Only a few schools are located south of King Street. However, there is significant new development south of Front Street and the railway lines in areas that currently are not directly served by elementary schools. The area south of Front Street from

York Street to Bathurst, where many new condominium towers are being built, is served by the Ogden Junior Public School, located off of Spadina Avenue north of Queen Street (See Figure 9 for location of Ogden Jr. PS relative to railway lands development). This can act as a deterrent for families who wish to buy condominiums in many of these new buildings, as they would have to drive or use transit to



Figure 9: TDSB Enrolment Boundary for Ogden Junior Public School

take their children to school. An elementary school has been proposed for the area at the south end of Spadina Avenue, where many new condominium towers have been built and many more are in the works.

However, the circumstances surrounding the development and construction of the Railway Lands School are indicative of the characteristics of condominium development. As the literature review showed, families are less likely to be attracted to high-density condominium living, and current developments are not built with unit sizes conducive to family living. An interview with a Toronto District School Board land use planner identified the yields used to anticipate demand upon public schools by calculating the number of students each housing type brings to the school system in a specific area. The only reason there would be enough students to require the construction of a new elementary school in the area of new constructions around Front Street and Spadina and in the former railway lands is because of the proposed affordable housing development that would be built on the site. The current yield for the market housing (condominiums) in the area, which contains about 12,000 units, is 0.01, meaning that for each unit the TDSB projects 0.01 students. This works out to 120 elementary aged students in the catchment area for the future Railway school, which are not enough students to justify building a new facility. However, the lands set aside for the TDSB also include Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) lands, upon which they intend to build approximately 400 units of affordable housing. This type of housing has a higher yield of about 0.5 students per unit, which would bring the number of students to the proposed elementary school to be over 300.



Schematic of Block 31 by architects Alliance. Though the planning application is currently on hold, the project aspires to set new precedents in family-friendly urban development.

The new elementary school, which according to the TDSB planner needs to be built soon because of time restrictions on funding, is located in Block 31 of the Railway Lands. This development would contain TCHC affordable housing, two schools (TDSB and the Toronto District Catholic School Board), a community centre, and a daycare centre, with a library to be incorporated into another building nearby (City of Toronto 2009). However, the development application from the TCHC is currently on hold as other redevelopment plans are considered. These

alternative plans would change the facility options of the TDSB, as more development would mean TDSB's share of the Block would be smaller. However, as the potential additional development would be market housing, its impact on the future capacity of the school to be built would not be that large. The TDSB has secured the right to build a school within Block 31, which would serve the needs of the

community of the southern edge of the downtown, including many new condominium units and the Concord CityPlace development. All that remains to be decided is the size and design of the facility, as the scale and accommodations of the school will depend on final decisions about the other buildings on the site

As seen from the above case study, schools are not built as an amenity to attract families to an area but rather in response to an existing and planned demand and as a reaction to current market trends in housing forms. They are built when current construction and approved development plans show there will be an upcoming need for additional facilities. This is because the school board needs to work with existing yields in their planning, which dictates how many students will come out of different forms of housing in different areas of the city. The Railway Lands School is to be built using yields that identify a certain number of children who would attend that school. The TDSB does not want to overbuild the school, and so the site and facility will not be larger in hopes of future increased demand. As well, the demand for the surrounding development is currently driven by single young professionals, and so in the near future new development will not greatly impact the school capacity. As identified earlier, the driver for the Railway Lands School is the proposed affordable housing development⁵, which shows that the current patterns of downtown development do not attract households with children.

Proving Family Housing Downtown

The current local councillor for much of the downtown area, Adam Vaughan, has been active in trying to provide more housing options for families downtown, encouraging developers to build larger units to create a more family-friendly downtown, which is in line with his vision of planning for the long-term residential needs of the downtown area. While he has been instrumental in getting developers to build units with more bedrooms in the past, he is looking for formalize the piecemeal process and make policies to build units with three or more bedroom official. While now part of the 5-year Official Plan Review, this proposed Official Plan Amendment to Encourage the Development of Units for Households with Children would see 10% of units in all new condominium development family-friendly.

This draft amendment proposed changes to the Official Plan Housing Policies, suggesting that the term “dwelling units suitable for households with children” be added as part of a full range of housing. The

⁵ Those who require affordable housing, and who have made it to the front of TCHC’s very long waiting list, do not have the luxury of being picky about their location. Therefore, these people are moving to this location downtown because of the affordability they have been offered and the larger units available, rather than available amenities. However, these units and the families they will bring will hopefully drive forward family-friendly initiatives, and create a critical mass that will attract other households with children to the area.

other change proposed is to the Site and Area Specific Policies of the Official Plan to require that 10% of all dwelling units in larger developments in the downtown area be built with either three or more bedrooms or with the potential to be easily converted to contain three or more bedrooms (City of Toronto 2009b)⁶. The community was then consulted on this issue, and the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD) subsequently held two focus group sessions and provided a report on their recommendations and findings for future action (BILD 2010). A revised Official Plan Amendment was then presented in the spring of 2010 for consideration by the Planning and Growth Management Committee. The Revised Official Plan Amendment to Encourage the Development of Units for Households with Children was then deferred for further consideration and consultation with stakeholders (including the school boards) and to become part of the 5-year Official Plan review, where it currently is being considered as part of general modifications to the Official Plan.

While overall this proposed Official Plan Amendment is on the right track in promoting family-friendly development and responding to the lack of housing being developed for families with children downtown, the Building Industry and Land Development Association (as well as other stakeholders) have identified some issues with its implementation and effectiveness. One major criticism from the development industry is that it reduces the ability of developers to make profits by making them construct units that are hard to sell, because there is a lack of market demand for three bedroom units (BILD 2010). City staff have taken this into consideration and have proposed the use of convertible units, such as two-bedroom plus dens and adjacent units with knockout panels, to fulfill the requirements and plan for future need. As well, another problem of this Official Plan Amendment identified by the building industry is that by increasing the number of bedrooms required, developers and market analysts have noticed that the sizes of these required units are becoming smaller – the condo real estate research firm has seen 700 square foot 3 bedroom units, which not suitable at all for a family, or really anyone other than renters. Therefore, the OPA would not address the underlying factor discouraging families from moving to condominiums downtown – that is, the constantly decreasing unit sizes.

Critics of the plan says that although the OPA has good intentions, the prices of these three bedroom units would be extremely high, largely due to the high cost of square footage in the downtown area. Roundtables done by BILD with families, city staff, and developers found that the minimum unit size for a household with children to be 900 square feet. Conservative estimates by BILD place the price per

⁶ The 2010 revised OPA reduces this percentage to 5%, and proposes that 10% be achieved when using the option of knockout panels and convertible units. This reduction in the number of larger units required has been criticized as being insufficient.

square foot of a unit at around \$650, which would bring a unit at the minimum size required by a family to be over half a million dollars (BILD 2010). A quick newspaper scan shows that more sizeable units often are advertized for over \$800,000. Therefore, many young families will not be able to afford these larger units (as well as the higher maintenance fees associated with them), or if they can, they will often be attracted to other home-buying options in the downtown area. Thus, why the supply of units suitable for young families will be provided for, the people who will be buying them will be primarily empty nesters and groups of young professionals or students who share the unit. Because the city can only regulate the building type and not the users, there must also be a way to provide *affordable* units that will attract households with children.

In August 2008, Urbanation released a report providing data for new condominiums sold from 2002 to 2007. The report indicated that, excluding penthouses, three bedroom units comprised of less than 2% of all unit sales (City of Toronto 2010a).

The Importance of Affordable Housing

The literature shows that affordability and suitability are the most important elements needed in family housing. Many proposals for the development of such housing have been put forward, some with more success than others. Housing providers and developers see development charges as one of the most obvious costs that drive up unit prices. However, reducing these development charges for anything other than purpose-built affordable housing will be hard to implement as they are an important revenue source for the city and provide funding for infrastructure and services that are especially needed when intensifying and increasing urban densities, putting more strain on existing functions. With the downloading of affordable housing to the city and the reduction of higher-level funding from Federal and Provincial sources, large scale affordable housing starts are few, and so other more innovative approaches to affordable housing provision must be taken.

The provision of affordable housing in Toronto can happen as a collaboration between the city, the developer, and non-profit housing providers. In case studies throughout the downtown area, there have been collaborations between the city, the private sector, and non-profit housing providers to create a new supply of affordable housing units. Such partnerships emerged through different circumstances, but are all examples of using creativity and innovative financing to supply affordable family housing. Examples of providing affordable family housing include government revitalization initiatives, non-profit rental units obtained through density agreements, and innovative financing and building models.

The *Regent Park Redevelopment* is an example of a partnership between a public housing agency and a private developer to revitalize an existing social housing neighbourhood by updating the existing rental housing and constructing market-based units. Part of the partnership agreement states that all existing rental units must be replaced to ensure the supply of rent-geared to income housing. Importantly, as part of the redevelopment agreement with the developer, Daniels Corporation, the affordable housing units had to rebuild at the same size as the previous stock, which ensured a supply of family-sized, 3+ bedroom apartments.

The *Kehilla Residential Programme* is a non-profit housing provider which provides affordable housing primarily in North York but recognizes the importance of having families and a mixed population downtown for the vibrancy and health of the city. In 2010 they partnered with the City of Toronto and with a private developer to trade increased building density for affordable housing units downtown. In a form of inclusionary housing provision, the developer applied to the City of Toronto's Committee of Adjustment for permission to donate four condominium units in lieu of a financial contribution for community benefits, in exchange for extra density. The Committee of Adjustment application was approved, and the Kehilla Residential Programme was able to receive four condominium units in a new downtown development for ten dollars each (together the units are valued at \$1.2 million). The housing provider entered into an agreement with the city to always keep those units affordable, charging reasonable rents for each unit to cover maintenance fees and upkeep costs.

This exchange could not be completed as part of a regular Section 37 benefits negotiation because the Official Plan stipulates that affordable housing could only be purpose built rental, and condominium units were not identified as possible affordable housing options in Section 37 documents. While this case was settled outside of Section 37 negotiations, the Kehilla Residential Programme wanted to ease the process of developers donating units to affordable rental housing and so this issue has been taken to the Official Plan 5-year review for consideration.

As seen with this project, one of the main barriers to creating affordable housing is the planning process itself, which limited the options of what could be considered affordable housing. As well, the partnership demonstrates the need for willing developers, as well as politicians and housing providers, who are prepared to put in the extra work needed to provide affordable housing options.

Options for Homes is a non-profit developer that provides multi-unit housing for lower costs by funding the unit mortgage, and only requires payment when the home is sold (from the equity increase). The

Options for Homes model also works by acting as its own developer. Once they have gathered enough interested home-buyers (typically by word-of-mouth), they develop the building at a lower cost by staying away from trendy neighbourhoods, buying low-cost land, and through a no-frills style of building, where they do not provide any extra amenities such as a pool or exercise room. As a non-profit agency, Options for Homes also then sells the units at cost price, rather than market price, making them more affordable options. Resale conditions are put in place to ensure that subsequent homebuyers are also able to buy the units at cost price. This makes homeownership available to people who might not otherwise have the opportunity.

With the continued lack of funding for affordable housing from provincial and federal sources, it is especially important for the city to step up and help provide affordable rental housing for families downtown.

7.0 Analysis

As seen from the survey data in the previous section, there is an obvious difference between the demographic patterns in the city overall and in the downtown area. While the downtown area does contain many low-density residential neighbourhoods, most new development is high-rise, and the Living Downtown Survey shows that this type of building form attracts certain demographics, primarily younger singles and couples without children (City of Toronto 2007). Thus, in asking what are the factors that can be created to attract and retain families with children to the downtown area, we must be asking how affordable and suitable housing units can be built, and how to create needed amenities such as daycares, schools, and parks in high-rise developments. The barriers that limit the opportunities for families to move or remain downtown must also be addressed.

7.1 Barriers to Family Living Downtown

The lack of amenities directed at families is a large barrier to families living downtown, such as new buildings being constructed in areas without neighbourhood schools, but the largest barrier is the lack of suitable and affordable housing. Typically, the new development going up downtown is made up of small condominium units, marketed towards the young urban professional. The size of most of the units are unsuitable to families because they are too small and do not have enough bedrooms. Those units which are suitably sized are usually only affordable for upper-income households. The lack of affordable three-bedroom units thus pushes most households with children away from living in the downtown core. For the price of a three-bedroom condo unit, plus the monthly maintenance fees, a family can buy a house outside or on the fringes of the downtown core (Moloney & Spears 2009; City of Toronto 2009b). Most of the families who choose to live downtown choose to do so because of the city lifestyle and desire to be close to urban amenities. These are typically young families, who perhaps previously rented downtown and are looking to purchase their first home. For most young families, sizeable homes and condominium units are out of their price range.

Market Mismatch

When comparing the cost of downtown housing to that in the suburbs, there are opinions that a similarly valued home in the suburbs will end up costing more to run. While homes in the suburbs tend to be larger, the utilities and maintenance costs are also larger (Eric Miller, in Wong 2011). As well, people in suburban areas often commute to other suburbs or to the downtown for work. Most people living downtown also work in the downtown area, reducing the household's reliance of automobiles for long-distance commuting (City of Toronto 2007). As commuting costs are reduced or eliminated, the

purchase of a downtown home becomes more affordable. However, the trade-off for families often comes down to having adequate space for their children, and as downtown unit sizes keep getting smaller, this mismatch between needs get larger.

One of the main barriers to households with children in the downtown area is the mismatch between the types of housing they need and current development patterns. The media regularly profiles people's interest in condominium housing and how people are attracted to downtown living due to the proximity to work, amenities, restaurants, nightlife, and other appeals of the downtown lifestyle. However, unless the focus of the article is specifically on families (such as Newman 2008; and Alcoba 2010, who highlight how families are in fact able to live downtown when there is intervention on their behalf), the articles on downtown condominium living profile singles and couples, young professionals without children (for example, see the Winter 2012 National

Post condo neighbourhood profiles in Winter 2012 by Suzanne Wintrob). The questions therefore asked are such – if these people choose to have children, what will be their residential locational decision? Will their one- or two-bedroom condo have sufficient space for children? How will their needs and values change, once easy access to daycare becomes more important than easy access to restaurants and bars? Will these people move somewhere else within the downtown area, or will they decide that the only affordable option for them is in the suburbs?

These locational decisions in Toronto can somewhat be answered through the Living Downtown Survey. Currently,

being close to schools, daycares, and public parks have not even made it into the top 10 reasons for choosing residences, indicators that the current residents are not looking at their decision-making

Some Facts about Downtown Condominiums:

- Condo developer Tridel Group says 25% of its buyers are empty nesters and while it does build some larger units, its biggest market is first-time buyers for whom affordability is more important than unit size (Pigg 2011).
- New units used to sell for about \$550-650 per square foot, with monthly maintenance fees of about \$600, but in some areas prices per square foot for larger units have risen to \$900 (interview with condo market research firm)
- In a 2010 analysis of condominium costs, the Building Industry and Land Development Association calculated that a 900 square foot condominium unit would require an annual household salary of at least \$132,000 to gain mortgage approval (BILD 2010). As housing prices, land prices, and city development charges have only increased since then, the minimum annual household salary needed to afford a larger condominium unit has increased beyond the minimum income point identified above.

choices through the lens of parents. On the other hand, the top reason respondents chose as a reason why they would move from their current residence was the need for more space, including more bedrooms and a larger kitchen (City of Toronto 2007). This is one indication of the lack of suitability of current condominium development for households with children.

While there are families who want to move downtown and are attracted to the lifestyle, the lack of affordable housing options limits the potential to create a family-friendly downtown. The lack of suitable and affordable family-sized units is thus identified as a barrier to families living downtown. The largest challenge that families who wish to live downtown with children face is the prohibitive prices of three-bedroom condominium units, as well as the scarcity of such units to begin with. The Living Downtown Survey showed that in 2006, only 11.6% of all downtown housing had 3 or more bedrooms (City of Toronto 2007). An interview with a condominium market research firm found that developers are unwilling to construct larger units, as they do not believe there is a demand. Such 3 bedroom units often do not sell quickly in pre-construction sales, as households with children often require units that are immediately ready to move in. The consequence of this is that developers are reluctant to develop 3-bedroom units as they are not able to get the financing they need from these units to construct the building.

Vertical Ghettos?

There has been concern in the media that new high-density residential condominium development, regardless of the size of the units, is not being constructed in a way that creates or contributes to a sense of community. The condominium boom occurring in downtown Toronto is creating housing, but is not creating complete communities.

In media outlets such as the *Toronto Star* and *The Grid*, one can find opinions about how recent condominium developments, such as the CityPlace condominium development on the former railway lands (which extend west from the Rogers Centre to Bathurst Street), are bedroom communities for young professionals with few services and amenities. These newspaper articles state that without better planning and change, these developments will become vertical ghettos with few community amenities. Hume (2012), in the *Toronto Star*, identifies the potential problem in these developments as the tiny size of the new units, which are not large enough to accommodate families, and the transience of the existing residents, whose average stay is less than 2.5 years. He argues that without this essential population diversity and residential stability, the developments will have a hard time becoming genuine neighbourhoods.

The large number of condominium units that are bought by investors and rented out, as well as young people who buy condo units as transitional housing, have negatively impacted the sense of community in many new high-rise developments. The large numbers of investors who own units and rent them out have become a concern in the CityPlace development and in many condominiums downtown. Some estimate that half of all downtown condo units are owned by investors who rent them out (Wintrob 2011). Keenan (2011) wrote in *The Grid* how this proliferation of investor condo units discourage a sense of community from forming, homeowners are more likely to get involved in community affairs as they have a large investment at stake. Without this pride of ownership, renters and investors do not devote equal amounts of time, money, and labour into unit upkeep and into community involvement.

7.2 Attitudinal Shift about High-Rise Family Living

In Canada and in most North American cities, people are less inclined towards accepting that households with children can live in dense areas. Other large cities, such as New York and cities in Europe, have an attitude more in favour of it, with large numbers of families living downtown, but larger dwelling units are also unaffordable in most areas of the central city. Both government policies and personal biases have created the perception that families can only live in low-density single detached homes in the suburbs. The development industry and market forces have both created and reproduced this ideal, marketing suburban developments for families and downtown high-rise developments for young single professionals.

In order to create family-friendly cities, there must be a general attitudinal shift towards accepting the ability of families to live and thrive in higher-density housing. Many inner-city public spaces are coded as adult spaces, with children not welcomed within (Fincher 2004; Mee 2010). In interviews with developers in Melbourne, Australia, the researcher found that many developers viewed high-rise living as being the appropriate form for people ‘without families’ – one thing new developments have in common is their lack of children. They found the perception amongst developers is that high-rise living is not really a ‘family thing’ (Fincher 2007, 646).

In Toronto, there needs to be a culture of acceptance surrounding children and their play in high-rise buildings⁷. This attitudinal shift needs to come from families themselves, who must see possibilities

⁷ To get an idea of this lack of acceptance of children in high-rises, read the comments section on any online article about families living in condos. The lack of acceptance shown by some anonymous responders is astonishing, and if they had it their way the downtown area, and all transit, restaurants, and services, would be purged of families and children.

beyond a home in the suburbs; from other downtown residents, who need to be accepting and welcoming of children; from retail and services providers, who must cater to the needs of families; and from planners and developers, who must alter planning and building practices to make developments more suitable for families. Some of the ways developers can do this is by building larger units that are not luxury units, thereby making them more affordable to families, by soundproofing units to enable children to make noise in their units without disturbing others, and by allowing children to play in common areas or providing open play space atop the podiums

This attitude shift is slowly starting in Toronto, as seen through initiatives such as the proposed Official Plan Amendment to Encourage the Development of Units for Households with Children and efforts by Adam Vaughan and other city councillors to push developers to build units suitable for families. The issue of constrained land supply and the need for a diverse downtown population are slowly coming to the forefront and in the future will hopefully correspond to an increase in the desirability of the downtown area as a place to raise a family

7.3 What Toronto's Downtown Needs

In order to achieve these goals and create supportive high-rise communities, there needs to be a shift towards the development of communities, rather than just housing. From the literature and policy review, and the focus on Downtown Toronto, there are certain factors that can be identified as the major forces that attract and retain families with children to the downtown. These factors include affordable and suitable housing, nearby schools, parks and play spaces.

The role of schools to retain downtown families

Schools play a large role in creating a sense of community that retains households with children in the downtown. As seen in the Toronto focus section, local schools can act as community connectors which connect parents to each other. This fosters a sense of community in a neighbourhood, which in turn gives the parents a reason to invest their time and energy into the community.

While access to schools does help to retain the population of households with children, city staff argue that although an area near a school may have ample housing suitable for families, this does not always translate into large numbers of children living in those homes. Therefore, when talking about changing the policies of the Official Plan to incorporate requirements for larger units, city staff do not recommend tying housing size targets to areas of declining enrolment (City of Toronto 2010a).

Accessible play spaces

Cities need to contain places where children can play safely and enjoyably. These spaces must be planned with the needs of children in mind. Through the design and planning done by cities, and through the attitudes and behaviours of adults, a message should be transmitted to children that they are a welcome and equal part of society (Churchman 2003). These places can be in local parks and squares, but also in new areas dedicated to children's play.

Section 37 of the Planning Act is one way in which play spaces for children can be created. In such cases, developers would receive extra density allowances in exchange for providing community benefits. If there is sufficient strength in the wording of the Official Plan that call for adequate play spaces for children, the negotiations of benefits can push for the developer to include play space for children within the building itself. One way of doing so is by providing a playground or open space on the top of the podium of the building. Creative applications of Section 37 funds can also be used to provide amenity and facility space within the building itself. While it would be optimal if schools, daycares, and other services could be provided in the building in which families live, these uses often create a problem in that once the space has been provided, the operational and maintenance costs must come from somewhere. As well, developers are reluctant to provide community benefit and amenity space at the ground level of the building, as that is the space that typically is used for retail space, which provides the developer with revenue.

Critical Mass of Families

"It became clear that urban conditions were not considered to be static; families were actively working on making the city more suitable for family life. In this sense, these families are not only consuming the city or just complaining about restrictions; they are also actively engaged in moving the city in a more favourable direction for family life" (Karsten 2009, 322).

Studies have shown that families are attracted to neighbourhoods where there are already a number of children, which provides for immediate playmates and shared experiences. Families also work to make the city and urban experience more welcoming for children, as parents often become engaged in the community through their child's school or activities.

A Variety of Housing Options

As identified in the City of Toronto Official Plan, the downtown requires a variety and diversity of housing options. Higher income households will be able to afford units at the size required for their families, as larger condo units are usually top of the range, marketed as penthouses, or to just buy a \$1-

2 million house in the downtown area. This means that most of the activity around creating family-housing needs to make sure that such units are affordable. There needs to be collaboration between the different sectors to provide affordable family housing downtown – including rental housing. This is especially important for lower-income service workers who work downtown and wish to live in the area closer to their work. There are currently little affordable rental options for families.

Variety in design features are also important to attract families to condo living. The literature shows that families are attracted to ground-level housing, which can be incorporated into condo developments through attached townhomes, such as the Bstreet condos at Bathurst Street and Bloor Street, where there will be townhouses at the back alleyway of the development. Therefore, not all new family housing development in the downtown area has to be the existing condo unit model. Other options for similar high-density living exist, such as attached townhouses or split-level condominium units.

8.0 Discussion

In response to an increasingly constrained land supply and rising commuting costs, cities must focus on creating complete communities that offer housing choices, transportation options, and services to meet the needs of a diversity of people in all stages of life. Increasing residential densities in the downtown area to increase proximity between homes and jobs is one way to create a more sustainable urban environment, but planners must ensure that such intensification takes into account the needs of all populations, including households with children. Development in downtown Toronto has typically been targeted towards young professionals, and demographics show that the percentage of children aged 0-14 in the downtown area is about a quarter of that in the city as a whole (City of Toronto 2007). A review of literature has shown the importance of age diversity in creating complete communities and vibrant cities, as desired by the Ontario Places to Grow Act and the City of Toronto Official Plan. Family-friendly downtown housing is also a solution for families who work in the downtown area and wish to reduce commuting times, as well reducing the number of automobiles needed by the household. Households with children are also attracted to downtown living as a lifestyle choice, as access to amenities, culture, and diversity are always nearby. Cities with children lead to greater overall neighbourhood satisfaction and build greater social cohesion.

In order to create complete communities, steps must be taken, such as the ones identified in this report, to create downtowns that attract and retain households with children by providing a range of housing options and amenities. The city needs to place emphasis on city services and facilities that cater to children, including schools and parks. A strong school community plays a large role in retaining households with children as the children grow older, and schools can thus act as community hubs to connect parents to the wider community.

In order to provide housing suitable for households with children, the municipal, development, and non-profit sectors should work to foster relationships that can lead to creative and innovative affordable housing solutions. There needs to be more incentives for developers and the non-profit sector to be able to afford to provide affordable family units. In most cases, the market seems to not be prepared to build three bedroom units, nor will these units be affordable to many families. The industry has no fundamental problems with providing family units, as long as it is profitable for them to sell such units. Official Plan language should be revised to place more emphasis on the needs of households with children. Currently, Policy 4 of the Living Downtown section of the Official Plan calls for a “full range of housing opportunities to be encouraged” (City of Toronto 2010b). This leads to some ambiguity in what

is meant by a 'full range'. If the Official Plan calls specifically for housing for families to be encouraged, or if it encourages larger unit sizes, it would give strength to planners and others when they attempt to provide such housing through section 37 negotiations.

Along with affordable housing, other key issues that lead to the inclusion of families in the downtown are nearby grocery stores, good schools, and outdoor play spaces. Due to the compact nature of the downtown area, where services and amenities are located in close proximity to the home, parents and children can increase their walkability and community connections. The diversity of downtown residents enhances opportunities for children to become part of heterogeneous communities, building social cohesion and increasing the sense of community.

The policies created in the attempt to develop a family-friendly city can be used to inform policies regarding affordable housing and service provision elsewhere in the city as well. Together with downtown specific policies that promote and encourage the development of housing and amenities for families living downtown, we will be able to create a downtown that is truly a complete community, with a diversity of people at all stages of their life, and one that provides opportunities for households with children to come and stay downtown.

Appendix A: Map of Downtown Toronto Boundaries



Appendix B: TORONTO CHILDREN'S CHARTER

Children, like other human beings, are entitled to fundamental rights and freedoms but because of their unique vulnerability, it is incumbent upon adults to ensure not only that children are safe from exploitation and neglect, but that they have access to a fair share of the society's resources. While parents have the primary responsibility for their children's care and upbringing, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child makes it clear that governments have a duty to help families fulfil their responsibilities and to protect the rights of children. The Toronto Children's Charter situates the provisions of the Convention in a local context.

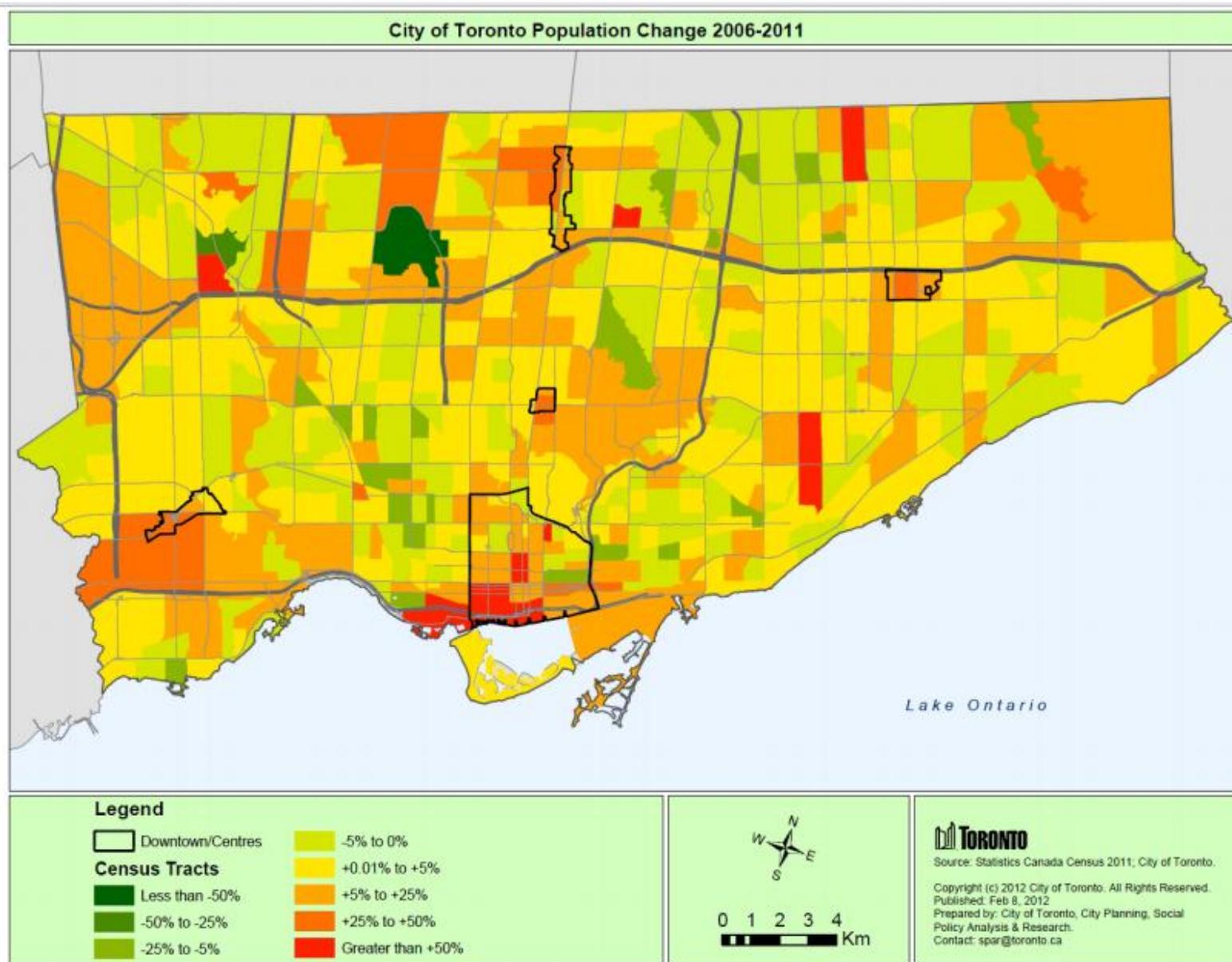
- ❖ All Toronto children shall be entitled to a standard of living adequate to ensure healthy physical, intellectual, emotional, and social development, well-being, and a good quality of life.
- ❖ All Toronto children shall be entitled to adequate nutrition on a consistent basis.
- ❖ All Toronto children shall be entitled to be housed in dwellings that reflect the normal standard of their community.
- ❖ All Toronto children shall be entitled to spend sufficient time with their families throughout their childhood.
- ❖ All Toronto children shall be entitled, if their parents so choose, to participate in high quality child care/early education programs designed to meet the best interests of the child.
- ❖ All Toronto children shall be entitled to participate in recreational and leisure activities, in the form of play, creative expression, and skill development opportunities.
- ❖ All Toronto children shall be entitled to receive primary, secondary and higher education to enable them to reach their full potential.
- ❖ All Toronto children shall be entitled to the highest attainable level of health and the assurance that the resources necessary to ensure life-long good health are available.
- ❖ All Toronto children have the right to be served by governments which acknowledge their responsibility to improve the health and well-being of children and work cooperatively to ensure adequate and equitable funding for children's programs.
- ❖ All Toronto children have the right to be protected from physical, psychological and sexual abuse both in and out of the home.

The foregoing rights shall apply to all Toronto children without discrimination according to race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, ability/disability, ethnic origin, language, region, property or class, religion, or any other distinction. This may entail the use of affirmative action or equity programs in order to redress situations of special individual, community or regional disadvantage.

February 1999



Appendix C: City of Toronto Population Change 2006-2011



Appendix D: List of Downtown Elementary Schools

School Name	Grade Range	Student Capacity	Building Age	2011	Surplus Spaces	UTZ Rate	2015	Surplus Spaces	UTZ Rate	2020	Surplus Spaces	UTZ Rate
1 King Edward Junior and Senior Public School	JK-8	570	53	470	100	82%	436	134	76%	469	101	82%
2 Horizon Alternative Senior School	7-8	138		72	66	52%	72	66	52%	72	66	52%
2 Kensington Community School	JK-6	348	39	120	228	34%	115	233	33%	119	229	34%
3 Lord Lansdowne Junior and Senior Public School	JK-8	394	51	316	78	80%	277	117	70%	242	152	61%
4 Beverley School	JK-8	126	61	91	35	72%	92	34	73%	92	34	73%
5 Orde Street Junior Public School	JK-6	443	97	277	166	63%	278	165	63%	261	182	59%
6 Church Street Junior Public School	JK-6	420	55	271	149	65%	303	117	72%	289	131	69%
7 Rose Avenue Junior Public School	JK-6	733	90	649	84	89%	661	72	90%	668	65	91%
8 Winchester Junior and Senior Public School	JK-8	533	113	430	103	81%	476	57	89%	500	33	94%
9 Sprucecourt Junior Public School	JK-6	452	54	330	122	73%	338	114	75%	455	0	101%
10 Lord Dufferin Junior and Senior Public School	JK-8	703	12	514	189	73%	394	309	56%	438	265	62%
11 Regent Park/Duke of York Junior Public School	JK-6	604	53	518	86	86%	546	58	90%	578	26	96%
12 Nelson Mandela Park Public School	JK-8	690	96	0	690	0%	401	289	58%	463	227	67%
13 Ryerson Community School	JK-8	735	97	311	424	42%	339	396	46%	312	423	42%
14 Ogden Junior Public School	JK-6	259	55	203	56	78%	434	0	168%	418	0	161%
15 ALPHA Alternative Junior School	JK-6	89	85	73	16	82%	70	19	79%	73	16	82%
16 Downtown Alternative School	JK-6	172	32	85	87	49%	104	68	60%	116	56	67%
17 Market Lane Junior and Senior Public School	JK-8	458	19	421	37	92%	561	0	122%	708	0	155%
18 The Waterfront School	JK-8	279	14	204	75	73%	262	17	94%	306	0	110%

School Name	Grade Range	Student Capacity	Building Age	2011	Surplus Spaces	UTZ Rate	2015	Surplus Spaces	UTZ Rate	2020	Surplus Spaces	UTZ Rate
19 da Vinci School	JK-6	115		101	14	88%	149	0	130%	160	0	139%
20 Huron Street Junior Public School	JK-6	443	97	421	22	95%	405	38	91%	425	18	96%
21 Jesse Ketchum Junior and Senior Public School	JK-8	627	96	400	227	64%	452	175	72%	475	152	76%
22 Rosedale Junior Public School	JK-6	190	54	239	0	126%	212	0	112%	198	0	104%

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