



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



Reimagining
Recovery

Retrofitting Our Urban Region

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The pandemic has accentuated racial, economic, and geographic disparities in the ability to access healthcare and social services, travel safely and efficiently to workplaces, and learn or work remotely.

Introduction

The Toronto Region has demonstrated a remarkable ability to weather crises and emerge stronger on the other side. This resilience is apparent with the rebound of tourism and economic growth after the SARS crisis of 2003 and the region's financial sector climbing global rankings following the 2008 Great Recession. This optimistic approach to addressing the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic served as the foundation of the Reimagining Recovery Retrofitting Our Urban Region symposium, co-led by the Toronto Region Board of Trade (the Board) and the Urban Land Institute Toronto (ULI) Toronto.

Through this symposium, nine separate multidisciplinary tables of urban professionals were established to explore distinct challenges facing the region from the perspective of the "physical realm" – the buildings, transportation systems and public spaces that we share. The observations and recommendations that emerged considered different phases of economic recovery, from the immediate Managed Return to the Pre-Vaccine Return and Post-Vaccine Return.

An April webcast with Richard Florida on the measures needed to reopen Toronto was the starting point for this process. The following two months of effort involved several rounds of discussion, beginning with the establishment of the nine separate working group tables:

- Civic Assets;
- Commercial;
- Culture;
- Education;
- Public Realm;
- Residential;
- Retail;
- Social Purpose; and
- Transportation.

From these initial meetings, several dominant themes emerged that formed the basis of eight cross-cutting discussions involving additional participants:

- Social Equity;
- Re-imagining Space;
- Managing Access;
- Public Confidence in Shared Spaces;
- Civic Joy and Communal Experiences;
- Community Hubs;
- Regulatory Flexibility and Risk Management; and
- Innovation, Resilience and Transformation.

EMERGING IDEAS

These discussions surfaced many important lines of inquiry. While most are not new, COVID-19 has created new urgency and opportunity to prioritize these efforts, including:



CLIMATE & RESILIENCY

How can we leverage opportunities as we emerge from COVID-19 to reset the climate and urban resiliency agenda?



SOCIAL EQUITY

How can we chart a land use strategy that addresses systemic racism and actively builds more equal cities?



DECENTRALIZED 15 MINUTE COMMUNITIES

How can we develop the "complete community" idea in decentralized urban geographies?



COMMUNITY HUBS

How must we better use both public and private assets to give more access to social purpose enterprises, including "shoulder lands" (unused residual lands) or "in between spaces"?

Finally, the original nine tables reconvened a second time and produced rich observations and recommendations that were presented during a June 23rd webcast. This report provides more detail on the recommendations, while noting that this represents views as of the end of June and may not reflect the rapidly-shifting current environment.

This output, along with the process itself, reflects the unhesitating willingness of over 170 city-building professionals to engage many hours and days of volunteer time to collaboratively think through the implications of the unprecedented social and economic challenges presented by COVID-19, and how the broader Toronto Region can best position itself toward the future. We are grateful for their generous leadership in this process and their contribution to the collective good.

Throughout this process, three key principles resonated strongly that can help guide the region as we plan for better, more inclusive and resilient shared public spaces:

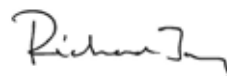
- 1. Flexibility:** The rapid closure of schools, workplaces and institutions has demonstrated the value of both resiliency and flexibility. In the near term, more flexible regulations and processes can help with the creative reuse of public space – such as rapidly introducing bike lanes and outdoor space for restaurants. In the longer term, buildings should be designed to accommodate a range of potential uses, including those not yet envisioned.
- 2. Access:** The pandemic has accentuated racial, economic, and geographic disparities in the ability to access healthcare and social services, travel safely and efficiently to workplaces, and learn or work remotely. In the near term,

more efforts must be made to improve travel corridors and reduce barriers to internet access. In the longer term, a more decentralized model could help ensure that people in all communities have access to the services and opportunities they need to thrive.

- 3. Collaboration:** Participants emphasized that these challenges are too great for any one actor to tackle alone. There is an increased opportunity for businesses and organizations across sectors to work together to find creative solutions – such as hiring artists to redesign commercial spaces, or pairing landlords who have vacant space with social purpose organizations. Strengthening a culture of collaboration could serve as a competitive advantage for our region into the future.

This report will feed into the Board’s Reimagining Recovery initiative as well as the evolving work of ULI Toronto. While our organizations will build on some of the ideas contained in this report, it is our hope that governments, associations, companies and communities can use this report to spark their own efforts to retrofit, redesign, and reimagine our region.

COVID-19 has challenged our ability to gather in person, but this report demonstrates that it has not dampened our vision of a stronger and more innovative region. As with previous crises, the Toronto region can pull together and emerge stronger on the other side of this pandemic.



Richard Joy
Co-Chair



Craig Ruttan
Co-Chair



MATCH-MAKING

How can we better connect those with excess or vacant space to those who could make use of it, and what resources would be required to support this?



WINTER PREPAREDNESS

How can we mitigate winter climate issues while offering physical distancing for everything from retail and public services to healthcare and shelters?



TIME SHIFTING

How can we stagger our daily return to normalcy to reduce peak demands on public and private infrastructure and reduce crowding of public spaces?



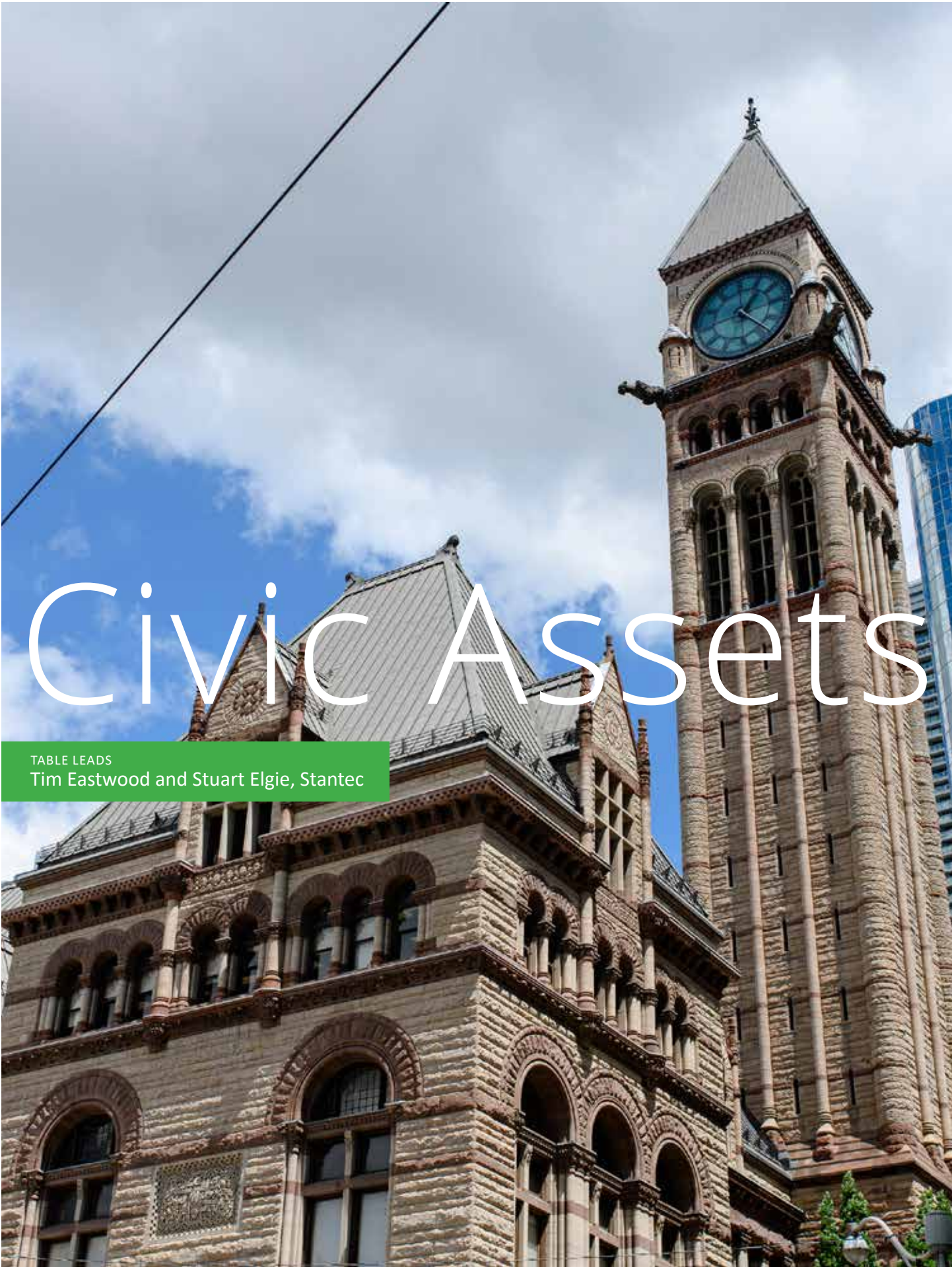
BOLDNESS

What can we do with a bolder approach to public policy tools to advance progressive urban development objectives more quickly?



CULTURE

How can we find new ways to deploy art and culture to support the industry & the economy?



Civic Assets

TABLE LEADS

Tim Eastwood and Stuart Elgie, Stantec

Photo: Connor Dudgeon

Proper recovery for our region needs to ensure that spaces where services are delivered (e.g., hospitals, court houses, libraries, municipal facilities) remain open, functional, and safe. This will require the trust of employees and users that they are in a safe environment and know how to operate safely in what can be high-user volume environments.

A common approach to signage and wayfinding will be required to help people navigate safely and to help ensure civic assets are functional and accessible. This will help individual institutions address their specific operations and situations with an overarching common standard.

Design and engineering will provide solutions to aid in the reopening of the civic assets. We can learn from healthcare design standards to design for flexibility, create separate ventilation zones and manage entrances, exits and flow of people. Careful selection of materials that are inherently anti-microbial, or other evidence-based choices, will become more important.

Ultimately it will involve changes in how we use public spaces and places for leisure and work. Changes will involve not only behaviours, but changes to protocols and culture.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Rebalance the city by dispersing appropriate civic assets into the community

Civic assets need to be available and accessible to residents of the region. Services need to be located where people live. A change is needed to the concentration of civic assets like courthouses and municipal services from being in one specific place to being decentralized and spread out throughout the city.

The experience of COVID has shown us that as urban environments close down to protect the residents, access to important services can be unintentionally restricted. Different population groups have different needs depending on demographics. Service providers will need to partner with communities to determine the unique set of needs in different areas.

This concept aligns with the idea of the “15-minute community.” In this scenario, it is the goal to locate all assets within a 15-minute walk of each community member’s residence.

All civic assets should be required to be built to a specific standard that will ensure the best possible outcome for the users of these facilities.

2 Design flexible civic assets that can provide different levels of physical access

The recovery of the region from COVID is not expected to be linear. Civic assets like hospitals, libraries, municipal facilities, and courthouses will need to be able to restrict or close access on a rapid-cycle basis. Civic assets need to be designed to be resilient. Pre-planning will allow facilities to avoid panicked reactions and respond in a measured and understandable way. Some examples include:

- Spaces that can be shut off or reconfigured to allow a portion of the facility to remain open while other spaces close.
- Multiple entrances that can switch to a “one-way flow” model to control physical distancing.
- Sufficient interior space to allow for queuing or screening of visitors.
- Staff that are trained on how to respond to various scenarios.
- Flexible uses and resource sharing.

3 Expand the civic assets mandate to provide a hybrid experience

The rapid adoption during COVID of virtual communication and networking tools will result in more services being shifted to online platforms. Civic assets should adapt to provide a hybrid experience for the consumer – the choice of either an online service or a physical service. This would involve expanding assets to provide the hybrid experience, make permanent ones that have started, and provide equal opportunity access to technology. For example, this could range from city services like building permits or parking permits to medical or court appointments. This change will result in more physical space within existing buildings that can be used to allow for physical distancing measures, or other physical modifications as needed.

4 Undertake and communicate simple, immediate physical interventions to instill immediate consumer confidence

The reopening of the urban region will only be successful if people feel comfortable and safe at the most basic level. There needs to be a consistency of approach to safety measures used in all civic assets. This should be done immediately with simple basic interventions like signage and queuing. Evidence of cleaning of high touch surfaces, and physical barriers to limit airborne transmission, should be present.

Interventions for specific assets (such as hospitals) may need to be different than other services, based on who is using the assets and how they’re interacting with them. Consistency will be essential to building and maintaining public confidence.

5 Develop physical design standards to retrofit existing assets and guide new construction

With the awareness of the risk imposed by COVID-19 or a future pandemic event, standards should be developed and enforced for all future renovations of existing assets, or new construction projects. While the standards will be different for various types of assets, it is evident that specific engineering and design features like ventilation and entrances will provide a level of safety and resiliency required in our civic assets. During COVID, hospitals managed to control the spread of infection within their facilities through various factors, including the specific design standards that govern their construction. Unfortunately, other assets were not as effective in controlling the spread of infection.

All civic assets should be required to be built to a specific standard that will ensure the best possible outcome for the users of these facilities. An interdisciplinary committee of design professionals, operators, owners and the community should be formed to develop a region-specific design standard to help build in an appropriate level of resiliency and safety in all of our civic assets.



Emerging from the course of the work of the Civic Assets table were a number of items that, while not forming part of specific recommendation, were considered important. Some were overarching themes that cut across all recommendations and some were beyond the mandate of the table.

Access

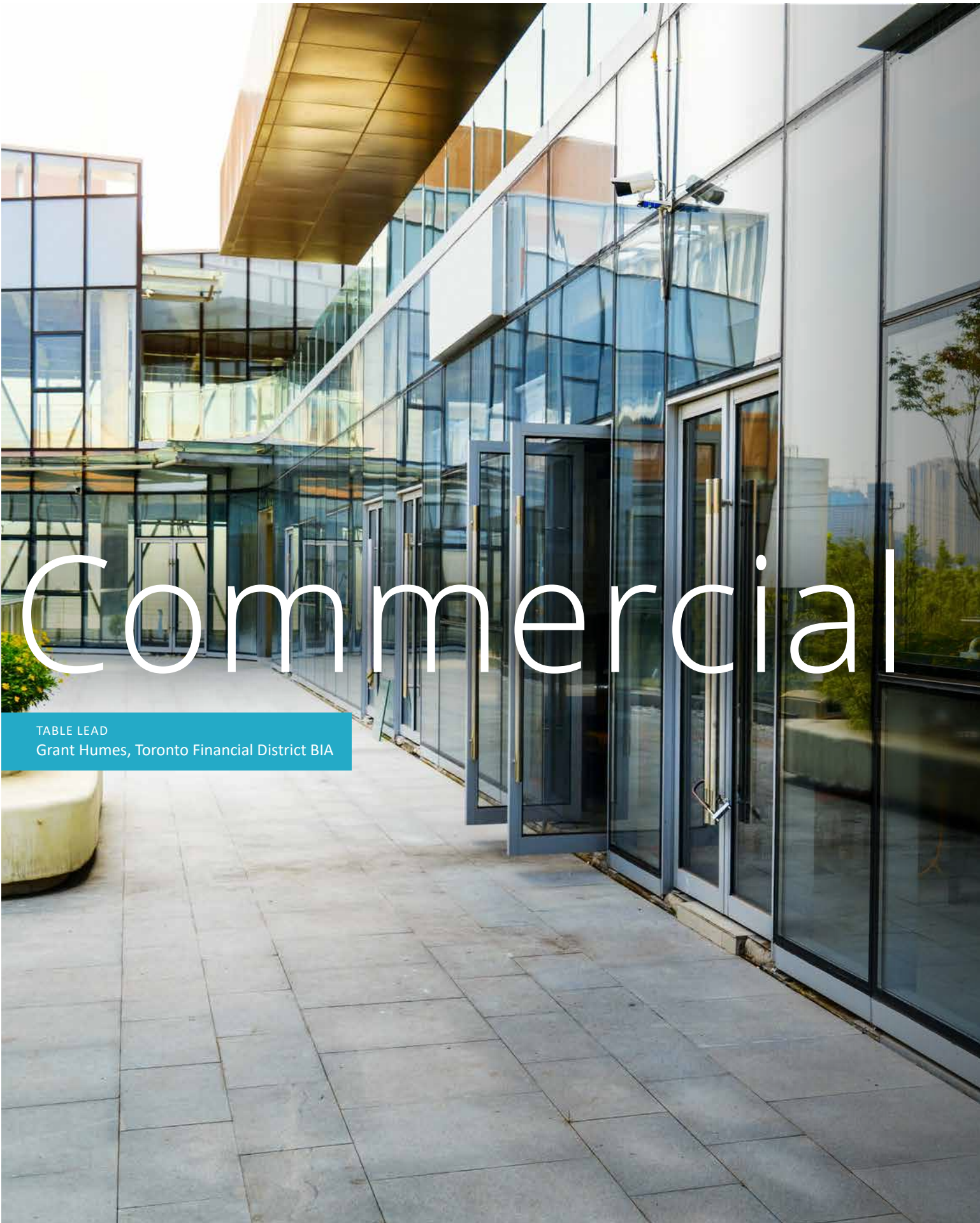
Civic assets are an important part of an urban region. They are a collection of various types of buildings that provide important, and often crucial, services and resources to citizens. COVID has shone a light on some inequity in access to civic assets. It is critical that the city provides equal, equitable access for all to physical assets and technology (for example, free Wi-Fi).

Urban future

Cities are vital areas for the collision of people and ideas that fuel innovation, cultural production and economic growth – but COVID has undermined much of this activity, at least in the short term. How can the benefits of an urban environment be maintained in a post-COVID environment?

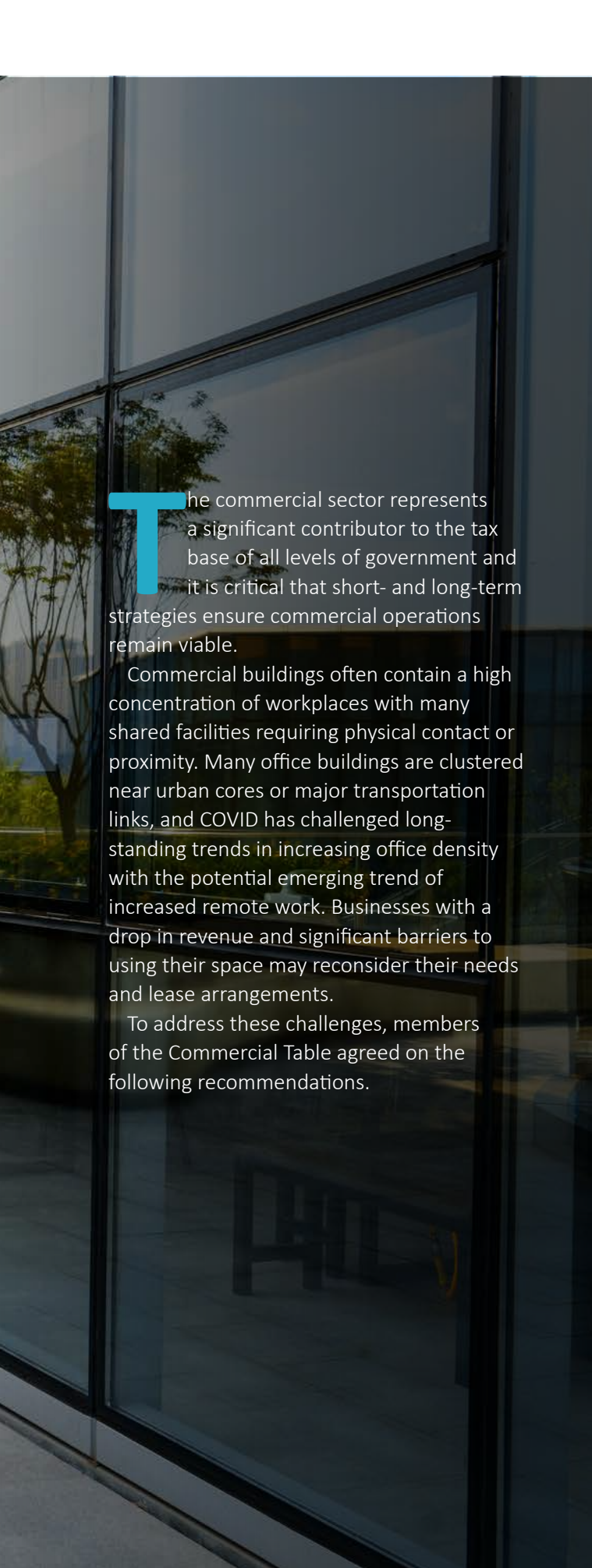
Interdependency of the urban network

So much of the urban experience, lifestyle and support is connected via an intricate network. A pressure of one part of the system has an impact on another. For example, when childcare closes down, parents need to stay home. If a hospital is closed, elective surgeries, or other treatments are no longer available. Recovery needs to be thought of on a system level.



Commercial

TABLE LEAD
Grant Humes, Toronto Financial District BIA



The commercial sector represents a significant contributor to the tax base of all levels of government and it is critical that short- and long-term strategies ensure commercial operations remain viable.

Commercial buildings often contain a high concentration of workplaces with many shared facilities requiring physical contact or proximity. Many office buildings are clustered near urban cores or major transportation links, and COVID has challenged long-standing trends in increasing office density with the potential emerging trend of increased remote work. Businesses with a drop in revenue and significant barriers to using their space may reconsider their needs and lease arrangements.

To address these challenges, members of the Commercial Table agreed on the following recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Commit to POST Promise as a minimum standard and continue to innovate as more evidence becomes available

Ensuring returning workers have a high level of comfort in their workspaces and building common areas will be critical to the commercial sector. POST Promise (People Outside Together Safely) is a training and education platform which includes a voluntary declaration from a business to its customers and employees. It is led by senior level business leaders and public health experts from organizations such as The Business Council of Canada, Retail Council of Canada, Canadian Global Cities Council, Canadian Federation of Independent Business, Building Owners and Managers Association of Canada, Salt XC, and Medcan. The POST Promise signifies a commitment to implement and practice the five key steps to workplace safety, helping to prevent the spread of COVID-19. By participating, businesses inform customers, and the employees of a business, that they are taking part in a collective solution designed to help Canadians confidently and safely take the first steps back into public spaces and the workplace.

The five key steps to workplace safety businesses are asked to commit to include:

- Maintain physical distancing;
- Stay home if unwell;
- Practice respiratory etiquette;
- Clean and disinfect regularly; and
- Wash and sanitize hands.

All Toronto businesses should commit to POST Promise as a minimum standard and clearly communicate their commitment to providing a safer workspace for employees and customers. We strongly recommend continued innovation around this commitment to incorporate additional best practices.



2 Accelerate the retrofit agenda, incorporating technologies and services that provide health protection benefits

While the COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented emergency for this generation, climate change remains the biggest overall threat to world health and economic stability. Addressing this challenge must remain the top priority. Retrofit of properties to improve energy efficiency and sustainability must be accelerated and retrofit plans should include a comprehensive review of technologies and services to provide health protection benefits. Pandemic planning should be integrated with resiliency planning to ensure the overall long-term economic competitiveness of Toronto as it prepares to meet the challenges of the future.

3 The Toronto Region Board of Trade should create a forum for collaboration and evaluation of technologies to provide a multi-solving approach to challenges

While most property owners have deemed it too early for significant investment in new technology to directly address COVID-19 challenges, it is critical that a high-level collaboration and evaluation of multi-solving technologies continue. Numerous technologies related to time and space management provide overall improvements regarding energy savings, property management and tenant amenities, and should be reviewed with an eye toward alleviating short-term, COVID-related challenges as well as delivering overall long-term benefits. With its ability to bring diverse players together, the Toronto Region Board of Trade should establish a forum to match challenges with solutions to take advantage of this opportunity. Such a forum may monitor implementation of evidence-based strategies to create safer workplaces, evaluate the success of these strategies and technologies and provide a clearinghouse for information.

4 Determine support for contact tracing technology among customers and tenants

A top-of-mind issue for employers and property managers is the potential use of contact tracing technology. Property managers should actively engage customers to determine support for contact tracing applications within properties. The commercial real estate community should evaluate available technologies and their relative success at providing accurate results, as well as ensure they are aware of concerns related to privacy and other related issues.

5 Guarantee the continued viability of public transit and active transportation options, without reducing service and with clear, consistent protocols and messaging

Allowing transit to fail would be a catastrophe for Toronto, both economically and environmentally. All levels of government must guarantee the continued viability of public transit to ensure Toronto's, and therefore Canada's, continued economic competitiveness. Government must provide funding support to ensure transit service levels are maintained.

Workers must be able to access their workplaces in a safe, convenient, and affordable manner. Commercial employment centres cannot survive without transit, and Toronto's road network cannot support a significant percentage of transit riders permanently switching to commuting via automobile.

It is critical to regain the trust of commuters. Clear, consistent protocols and public messaging must be employed to make transit riders feel safe.

6 Regulatory authorities must provide more consistent, specific guidance related to face coverings, including a requirement for face coverings on elevators and public transportation

We must work together to ensure that all appropriate measures are implemented to prevent a second wave of COVID-19 and a subsequent lockdown. Evidence strongly suggests that face coverings significantly reduce the spread of COVID-19. However, face coverings are only effective in reducing the spread of COVID-19 if a significant portion of the population uses them. The business community is supportive of a requirement for face coverings on elevators and public transportation.

It is time for the City and Province to implement mandatory face coverings in enclosed spaces when physical distancing is not possible, at a minimum on any form of transportation, including elevators.

Note: On June 30, Toronto City Council passed a temporary bylaw to make face coverings mandatory for indoor public spaces effective July 7. TTC made face coverings mandatory on July 2 and Metrolinx made them mandatory on July 21.

Commercial employment centres cannot survive without transit, and Toronto's road network cannot support a significant percentage of transit riders permanently switching to commuting via automobile.



TABLE LEAD
Antonio Gómez-Palacio, DIALOG

Photo: Connor Dudgeon

Cultural and recreational activities were some of the first to be curtailed during the pandemic. Yet, we have seen artists and cultural groups offer unique perspectives and energy, even through the onset of social distancing measures. During moments of despair, communities have been turning to their writers, musicians, comedians, and video makers. Many of us have found inspiration and solace through this crisis in cultural expressions – music, dance, poetry, comedy, banging pots – which help us interpret and share our current plight. As part of the recovery, artists and athletes are uniquely positioned to help us craft out-of-the-box solutions for the out-of-the-box challenges we now face. However, sustaining cultural vitality presents a unique challenge to the economic and social wellbeing of cities, including:

- The **direct economic activity** generated by cultural institutions such as galleries, museums, sports facilities, parks for passive and active recreation, and cultural venues and programming.
- The **indirect economic activity** generated by the cultural sector, supporting artists, performers, athletes, event organizers, curators, etc.
- The **further indirect economic activity** that cultural destinations generate in parallel retail, transport, and hospitality businesses: restaurants, markets, memorabilia, etc.
- The **ability to attract external funding** (for capital and operations) from other levels of government, grants, or international investments.
- The **public benefits** that cultural and recreational facilities and programming offer communities, building **social capital**, and supporting community wellbeing (both physical and mental health).
- The **sense of morale**, boosting optimism locally and the city's appeal and competitiveness externally.

We must think beyond redesigning theatres and galleries – instead reimagining how culture can define and improve a city. The following recommendations aim to leverage the region's cultural assets and talent to secure our long-term success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Support citizen-led initiatives that amplify and build the resilience of the cultural and recreation sector (including financial models)

Since the onset of the pandemic we have seen numerous organizations and individuals step up and provide a response to the crisis. Within many communities, the acts of ordinary citizens have proved to be instrumental to both the early phases as well as the recovery. They have included practical activities such as producing face masks or delivering food to the elderly. They have also included emotionally supportive acts such as banging pots and pans in recognition of first responders.

In many instances, citizens were able to mobilize and organize faster than over-stretched government workers. They were also able to recognize the most vulnerable members of a community and provide immediate and lasting support. They were able to make minimal resources go a long way and be extremely targeted with their activities.

This idea recognizes that we have learned that we (civil society) can move faster than what we thought, and that people have agency to be part of the solution. This has been empowering, and it should be capitalized upon.

In order to build greater resilience within our communities to future events, we should reinforce the community structures that enable a rapid response. Community-based organizations and spaces require minimal infrastructure and can go a long way.

Now is the time to invest in social capital, allowing it to grow and strengthen. Additionally, we should prepare in the advent of a stress/shock to be able to rapidly mobilize financial support to community organizations that can leverage small amounts to great effect.

While many mechanisms are needed for the resilience of creative enterprises, part of that resilience requires housing security for individuals within the cultural sector, as well as space security for cultural sector enterprises and organizations

2 Develop policy and institutional capacity that elevates beauty and activity as integral to city-building

Through the pandemic people have come to realize that the quality of their environments can have a great impact on their ability to withstand a stressful situation, be it the need to quarantine in confined quarters, or the need to set up a home office which is also a family space, or the need for fresh air and sunlight. This has been especially true in how people experience their homes and neighbourhoods. Having a balcony, backyard or even a view of green space can make a big difference. Similarly, having a park within walking distance or tree-lined streets with ample sidewalks adds enormous to our quality of life. Through the pandemic, many people have discovered the value of design in their everyday life and the importance of beauty to their recovery and wellbeing.

We need mechanisms that elevate the quality of our environments. We recommend that the City explore changes to the development approvals process (e.g. a Development Permits System), which may include an enhanced role for Design Review Panels. The end objective is increasing the quality of architecture, landscape architecture, urban design, urban planning, and interior design, as an essential element of community wellbeing and resilience.

3 Seize permanent, affordable spaces for artists and organizations to live and work in - by embedding this goal in the development process

While the virus may not discriminate over whom it infects, the effects of the pandemic have disproportionately impacted vulnerable demographics. People with limited access to affordable housing have had reduced opportunities to self-isolate and establish a healthy and productive work-from-home environment. This scenario is compounded for individuals who have limited financial resources and for whom the pandemic may have reduced their ability to generate an income.

Unfortunately, many cultural workers face these compounding factors and are increasingly in a precarious position. The community's ability to recover economically and socially will depend on a strong culture sector, which in turn relies on these workers to survive in an increasingly precarious position.

While many mechanisms are needed for the resilience of creative enterprises, part of that resilience requires housing security for individuals within the cultural sector, as well as space security for cultural sector enterprises and organizations. Achieving this security will require the goals to be embedded in the development process from the outset.

4 Establish an Incubator that works to forge links between cultural and tech sectors

A shift from consuming (and producing) culture in physical environments to digital ones has been long in the making. The pandemic, however, has accelerated this process. And while many cultural offerings have shifted online, they have rarely resulted in sustainable revenue-models for cultural producers.

Today, many cultural organizations, artists, and athletes struggle to identify revenue models whereby they can sustain their chosen careers.

Similarly, the tech sector, ideally positioned to digitize and convey content, is struggling to satisfy the increasing demand for such content in a highly competitive environment.

We believe there is an opportunity to aid in the recovery of multiple sectors by leveraging the strengths of each other for benefit of all (i.e. multi-solving). By pairing the tech sector's ability to convey content through digital platforms with the cultural sector's ability to generate content, new solutions can be realized.

This pairing can take place through a variety of mechanisms, such as an incubator or hackathons, a technique often used in the tech sector.

5 Encourage commercial and retail entities to work with the cultural sector to develop new business partnerships

Two of the hardest hit industries during the pandemic have been the cultural and the retail sectors. It stands to reason that there may be opportunities during the recovery to work in partnership.

Cultural events (concerts, sport events, festivals) have seen audiences disappear along with revenue. While much has moved online, this has not always resulted in a mechanism to monetize cultural consumption and sustain the cultural sector.

Similarly, brick-and-mortar commercial entities have seen their foot-traffic dwindle or disappear altogether. They also struggle to capture the attention (and wallets) of consumers in both the physical and digital environments.

This idea recognizes that revenue models for cultural sector are often based on personal attendance, and we need to develop new models. Similarly, commercial and retail entities are challenged by needing to draw people into physical settings. By working together, mutually beneficial solutions may be available.



PARKING LOT IDEA

Bring a culture lens to international and cross-border cooperation and agreements

The pandemic has caused countries around the world to turn inward. This shift towards a more insular localism is contrary to the experience of many individuals and organizations in the cultural sector, who often have connections and interactions at a global scale. By limiting the movement of people as well as by adopting uncoordinated policies between isolated geographies, we have seen a significant disruption in previous cross-border dynamic.

We recognize that culture is a global tapestry, where people, ideas, and cultural expressions are intricately intertwined, regardless of borders. Post-pandemic solutions will need to be coordinated across jurisdictions, while maintaining public safety and consumer confidence. One possible approach may be to designate the culture/recreational sector as an essential service for the purpose of border crossing. Another may be to enable cross-border access to markets and supply chains for cultural productions.

Establishing these mechanisms now will enable the cultural sector to be better positioned, and resilient, to future shocks and stresses.



Education

TABLE LEAD
Nic de Salaberry, Ryerson University

Education is intricately linked with a city's international competitiveness. Primary (and to some extent, secondary) education support parents' workforce participation, while post-secondary institutions are cornerstones of the region's research and development ecosystem and workforce development system.

Educational facilities also provide public space benefits and other amenities to the communities they are in. The transition to virtual educational environments has introduced new challenges of access and raised questions around whether underused facilities could serve other purposes.

The recommendations below range from measures to enable the safe reopening of institutions to the opportunities for change that could strengthen communities' resilience and vibrancy.

Finding space for contemplation, reading or writing or other such focused efforts is simply not realistic for many in smaller or more dense homes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Identify "quick wins" in educational and "shoulder" spaces that can be repurposed for essential community uses

Opening educational spaces to alternative uses could alleviate near-term pressures when communities attempt to arrange important gatherings while ensuring the safety of those involved. We recommend offering schools as a meeting place for family or community events and considering making schools that have air conditioning a place for respite for those without climate-controlled spaces in their homes.

Internet connectivity is another possible community benefit that educational facilities could provide in the near-term, particularly when public libraries remain closed or with limited capacities. Areas within schools could be arranged with safe distancing between "workstations" where community members could come to work, learn or browse.

In some communities, such opening of spaces to community uses would also be an important step to recognizing how the pandemic has had disproportionately adverse impacts on people living in small homes, especially where there are multiple residents in one home. Finding space for contemplation, reading or writing or other such focused efforts is simply not realistic for many in smaller or more dense homes.

In addition to their facilities, most educational properties also feature "shoulder lands" – a term coined by working group member Richard Sommer from the University of Toronto to refer to both green and paved spaces that are leftover or unassigned in use. These spaces could provide value by providing additional options to meet community needs. Low cost tents, heaters and other lightweight temporary structures could help extend the use of these spaces into the winter months. These spaces may not be identifiably education-related but are clearly part of a school's lands.



PARKING LOT ITEM

Social Partnerships – pairing students with other community services and teachers to help with digital literacy issues

The Educational Working Group identified the talents of students as a potential untapped resource for helping teachers improve their digital literacy.

Institutions are possibly the best-suited to arrange these partnerships. Pairing the skills of students who could be seeking work experience with teachers serving the full spectrum of learning is bound to have challenges. Considerations would need to include oversight, compensation and the identification of best practices.

2 Transform underutilized school spaces into neighbourhood hubs

Schools are known to carry large deferred maintenance backlogs, and many have underutilized space that could be adapted with some investment of funds and effort. Adding new community-related uses to the schools could respond to the challenges presented by COVID while meeting local needs and addressing needed maintenance-related improvements to educational properties.

The range of community uses for unused school-spaces is broad. Some uses that the group discussed included creating learning hubs where students attending various higher-learning institutions might forego transit and meet at a community learning hub building. In this way, the students who might not have adequate internet or learning spaces in their residences would still benefit from learning. Similar spaces could be developed for people seeking employment counselling and resources, or other such needs.

3 Harness the power of the “pilot” to fast-track decisions

Decision-making in large organizations, especially in a time of crisis, can be challenging. The effort to achieve perfect outcomes and include all voices typically adds considerable time to achieving decisions. Using a pilot project allows for decision makers to forego the search for the perfect partnership and instead focus on quick implementation, real-time analysis and on-the-fly adjustment.

Allowing certain types of decisions to happen as pilot efforts, making them subject to review and appraisal at some point in the future, could bolster the ways that educational facilities respond to local needs.

The creation of temporary community hubs might be the best and most urgent example of how locally tailored piloting could be an effective contribution to communities near educational facilities.

4 Create long-term development goals that prioritize new spaces’ flexibility and adaptability – steps towards “complete communities”

This idea builds on the existing and well-known occasional uses that many schools have (for example, as voting stations or for club meetings) and expands on the temporary nature of community hubs noted above, to design and build new spaces that are easily adaptable in a year-round and permanent manner to community uses when educational activities are not underway.

Each community will have different needs that will evolve over time. Incorporating adaptable spaces into all new construction projects can help ensure that the facility will be adaptable to meeting these needs as they change.



5 Stagger start times to relieve pressure on overcrowded public transit

Not all learning and research efforts can easily be adapted to an online forum. Laboratories and hands-on applied learning modules are a key part of some programs. Education providers who will continue with in-person learning could improve the safety of their students' commute by staggering start times to align with low-intensity transit times.

While far from perfect, transit authorities have reliable and up-to-date data showing the intensity of system use and could provide guidance to educational institutions for setting class times.

This effort could also help inform transit authorities' planning for when or if to add trips to existing schedules in certain parts of the GTHA, by providing the aggregated travel plans (routes and times) of students for their use to develop schedules.

For elementary and secondary schools, priority should be put on a walk to school strategy to ease demand on transit and prevent a sharp increase in vehicle traffic. A network of closed traffic streets and separated bike lanes within school neighborhoods would bring a heightened level of pedestrian safety while leaving room to practice safe social distancing.

Each community will have different needs that will evolve over time. Incorporating adaptable spaces into all new construction projects can help ensure that the facility will be adaptable to meeting these needs as they change.



Public Realm

TABLE LEADS
Warren Price and Michel Trocmé, Urban Strategies Inc.



Photo: Connor Dudgeon

The public realm is the key place for diverse communities to come together to move, recreate, and enjoy amenities. It is a place of representation, reflecting the identity and character of these communities. It is also a place of social discourse, supporting celebration, protest and economic activity.

Broadly, the public realm encompasses public streets and parks as well as privately-owned, publicly-accessible spaces (POPS) and may include interior publicly-accessible spaces such as covered or enclosed gallerias.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, communities have had to retreat from the public realm to limit the spread of disease. Looking forward, our challenge is to ensure that we can continue to engage in the public realm in a way that is safe and socially sustainable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Lead with a culture of yes – be nimble and advance projects quickly

Public space is fundamental in our economic and social recovery. COVID-19 has resulted in new demands on the public realm to support recreation, health, mobility, and the economy throughout the phases of recovery. The design and programming of public space needs to be flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances. There is an importance of being nimble, having the ability to advance projects quickly and test new ideas. The bureaucratic red tape that is involved in the design and programming of the public realm is often overwhelming and those barriers need to be overcome to address the changing role of the public realm. We can begin by identifying what policies need to be changed or loosened to allow quick and creative ways to change the public realm in ways that will support recovery.



2 Test and rapidly prototype – create a think tank and laboratory for testing design ideas and piloting projects with community input

The public realm will need to be repurposed and reprogrammed to address emerging needs and changing priorities. Every effort should be made to enable these changes to happen quickly. By allowing for more experimentation in the design and programming of the public realm we can test ideas to see what works and what doesn't, in the hopes that some might eventually become permanent fixtures. An urban laboratory could be established as a place to experiment with public space, propose solutions, and quickly test and verify ideas.

In advancing these public realm changes there must be quick, robust and innovative forms of engagement to understand community priorities in public space retrofits and new investments. Some ideas that may result from community-led public realm interventions could include the expansion of bike lanes and slow streets, repurposing laneways and parkettes to support shopping and dining, as well as transforming parking spaces into patios for community uses and services.

3 Utilize public space as a resource – develop a matchmaking tool to facilitate partnerships and mapping of spaces

Public space is in demand now more than ever. Allowing more people to access, design and program public spaces will support our recovery and improve our city and neighbourhoods. There are many underutilized spaces that can be repurposed and programmed for public space. These places need to be identified and mapped in order to understand the opportunity to maximize the use of public spaces.

The development of a matchmaking tool would support partnerships and create synergies between users and much-needed space. The tool would include an inventory of underutilized spaces such as vacant lots or parking areas. For example, the tool can be used to connect someone who wants to create a community garden with someone who has appropriate space. Users may be community groups, institutions, social services, businesses and others who are limited in their use of indoor spaces. The tool should focus on identifying opportunities to expand the public realm in places that are underserved by public space.

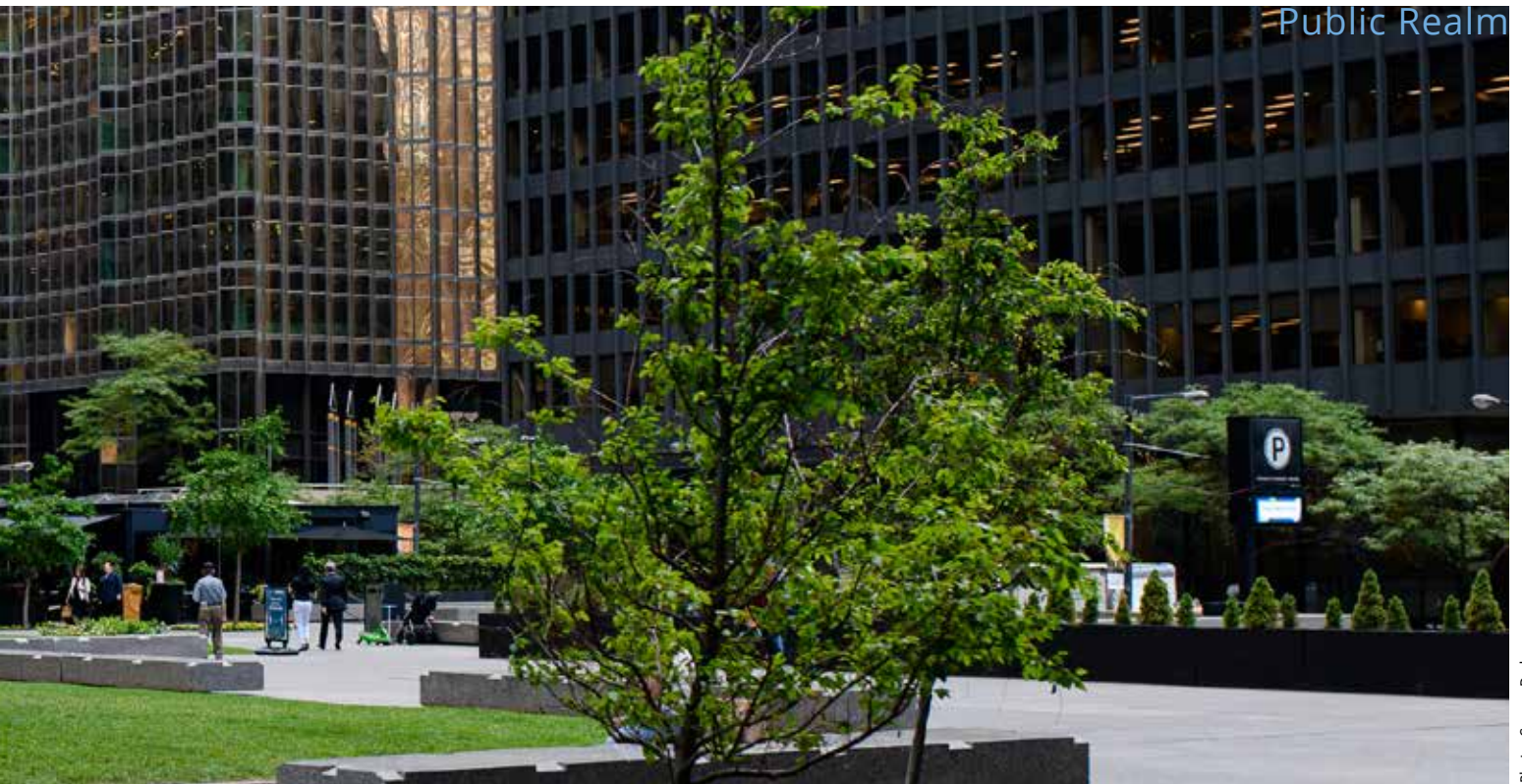


Photo: Connor Dudgeon

4 Create more robust public spaces – infrastructure to support a variety of uses

In order to maximize the use of public space we need basic infrastructure that can support a range of recreational and commercial activities. Providing Wi-Fi, electric outlets, lighting, furniture, washrooms and hand sanitizing stations will allow people to stay longer and use the space for multiple activities. Places with a single function can be retrofitted and adapted to serve multiple uses – including tennis courts, baseball diamonds and golf courses, as well as parking lots, sidewalks, parkettes and laneways. Public spaces should be usable in all four seasons, by different groups at different times, and by people with different abilities. During the shoulder seasons and winter, comfortable public spaces will become even more important and should be retrofitted to incorporate wind screens, outdoor lights and warming stations to support more outdoor activity.

5 Invest in a commons for each neighbourhood – with expanded connections between them

Each neighbourhood should have a commons, which could be a marketplace or community hub, as a multifunctional space for social, economic and community uses throughout the year. These places are often thought of as destination spaces within centre cities, but as we are now spending much more time close to home, creating new or reinforcing existing neighbourhood commons would be an invaluable investment. Connections between neighbourhoods should be improved through linkages such as slow streets and expanded active streets.

There are many underutilized spaces that can be repurposed and programmed for public space. These places need to be identified and mapped in order to understand the opportunity to maximize the use of public spaces.



TABLE LEADS
Tyler Grinyer and Emma West, Bousfields Inc.

There could be opportunities to activate underutilized spaces, either on a temporary basis or perhaps on a permanent basis if the temporary use is successful.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 **Develop a framework to connect operators with underutilized spaces to be repurposed for alternative temporary uses**

Since the beginning of COVID-19, spaces in the base of mixed-use buildings have become either vacant or remain underutilized. In contrast, there are groups looking for space, some even more so during the pandemic.

There could be opportunities to activate these underutilized spaces, either on a temporary basis until retail returns or perhaps on a permanent basis if the temporary use is successful. A framework should be established to help connect those who may be looking for space for alternative temporary uses, including temporary housing, temporary school space, temporary daycare space, pop-up retail or community space. This framework could expand beyond non-residential spaces by matching up providers and users in residential buildings with vacant spaces, including those slated for redevelopment. For example, vacant residential spaces could be temporarily occupied prior to demolition. This framework should leverage partnerships to ensure that space is best used to serve the entire community.

In order for this framework to be most effective, usage regulations may need to be relaxed to permit a greater range of uses on a site. A landlord or developer may also be able to get some form of a credit or subsidized rent if underutilized space is used for community purposes.

C COVID-19 has thrown our thinking about urbanism on its head, and with it introduced new challenges to the residential sector. Everything has changed overnight, from how we use our homes to work remotely, to how we safely access apartment units through shared common spaces, to how we provide equitable access to public amenities. The Residential Table identified a number of concerns with how we might adapt to living in an urban environment both during and post-COVID-19. There are questions around the possibility of a rush to the suburbs, especially if the urban amenities we pay a premium for (such as parks, restaurants, and safe public transit) are no longer as accessible.

While the group did not believe that COVID-19 would result in a mass urban exodus, there was recognition that our neighbourhoods lack housing diversity and, as a result, do not make the broadest range of housing choices available to all demographics. Ultimately, there was clear recognition that COVID-19 has shined a bright light on the inequality of our residential and mixed-use neighbourhoods around affordability, safety, and access to public services and amenities. These issues were the basis for the Table recommendations described below.



PARKING LOT IDEAS

In addition to the top five recommendations, the group discussed additional recommendations, including:

- Exploration of quick investments that could create affordable housing to help serve front line workers (for example, the city operating as a landlord by purchasing individual condo units);
- Creating new open spaces through the purchase of smaller lots in neighbourhoods with low levels of public space and high-density housing;
- A recommendation that neighbourhood nests – amenities which serve the daily needs of residents – should be within 10-15 minutes of a residential home, and which would help to ensure neighbourhoods are more equitable across the city and the region; and
- Leveraging technology to improve HVAC systems in new and existing buildings to allow for a greater number of people to safely use shared spaces including lobbies, elevators, corridors and amenity spaces.

The Table also discussed a number of matters that were beyond the scope of the residential focus, including:

- Continuing to promote a complete streets approach in the long-term so that the right-of-way width remains available for a range of users (as is being encouraged in the interim condition), not just cars;
- Developing a short-term and long-term plan to accommodate students based on capacity constraints related to residential catchment areas to help increase workforce participation and equitable job access; and
- Creating a decentralized network for daycare and daycare alternatives in existing spaces.

2 Establish incentives and share best practices to leverage technology and innovation in new multi-unit buildings

Innovative technology should be employed as we move forward through the pre-vaccine and into the post-vaccine world in order to improve our shared spaces and the functionality of buildings. Technology can improve everything from how we call our elevators, how we use amenity spaces in multi-unit residential buildings, to how the HVAC systems operate. The residential industry should take an innovative role in sharing best practices and helping encourage developers and property managers to best use technology for the optimized use of multi-unit buildings.

3 Develop a toolkit for condominium corporations and property managers to safely re-open and re-use shared space in existing buildings

The loss of shared amenity space in mid and high-rise buildings has been a challenge for residents of multi-unit dwellings during the pandemic. This amenity space and other shared space throughout the building (including elevators and lobby areas) are an extension of a unit, but present an inevitable risk given the intermingling of residents. It is important to ensure that these spaces can safely operate in the Managed Return and Pre-Vaccine context.

The industry can take on a leadership role in providing education, guidelines, protocols, and possibly grants to support a safe re-opening process. Rather than focusing only on the building design, strategies and protocols (for example, messaging, signage and wayfinding) can be used to support effective and safe movement within shared spaces to allow for continued vibrancy within these buildings.



4 Implement changes to the regulatory framework to increase housing diversification in our low-rise and mid-rise communities through more flexible policy

While the pandemic will not put an end to density, it may cause increased demand for density in mid-rise and low-rise buildings. Toronto is largely made up of low-rise detached dwellings and high-rise towers, without much in between. Existing policy makes it incredibly challenging to diversify the housing stock in established low-rise neighbourhoods, and guidelines make it challenging to bring forward financially feasible mid-rise housing along major avenues. The need for the “missing middle” and infill intensification has been studied and supported in the city and region, and the merit of bridging this density divide is relatively unquestioned within the planning community. Moving forward, policy changes should be implemented to ensure that this type of housing can move forward more easily and more quickly to provide more options for Torontonians.

5 Commit to distributing affordable and attainable housing across the Region to ensure a diverse population can live and prosper equitably in all communities

COVID-19 has exposed significant inequities in our city, and the geographic nature of that inequality. Access to affordable and attainable housing across our region, regardless of income level, demographic or occupation, is essential to ensuring that our diverse population prospers. While all levels of government have made efforts to bring affordable housing forward, the supply and availability of affordable housing needs to increase to ensure housing is developed and secured in all communities, and in all forms.

In direct response to COVID-19, opportunities should be explored for “quick” investments to create affordable housing. This would address the immediate needs of frontline workers, but ultimately affordable housing should be decentralized and distributed across the entire region and made much more broadly available.

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a brown paper bag over a wooden counter. In the foreground, a black payment terminal is visible, displaying a screen with the text "SALE" and "Enter Sale Amount" above a green button with a dollar sign and "0.00". The terminal has a numeric keypad and a few colored function buttons (red, yellow, green). The background is blurred, showing a person's arm and a dark surface.

Retail

TABLE LEAD
Katarzyna Sliwa, Dentons



Retail is a critical component of a strong economy and has been one of the worst hit areas during the COVID-19 crisis. It is important to deploy both short- and long-term strategies that will enable the retail sector to survive and flourish. To that end, the Retail Table grappled with the following problem statement:

The retail experience has already changed in response to COVID 19. Some of these changes and challenges will remain even after the vaccine. How does the industry adapt its physical space to provide a safe and inviting experience for shoppers, while ensuring it survives and thrives?

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Clear, mandated safety requirements for public and shared spaces from the provincial government

Overall there is a concern with the lack of consistent public messaging and the challenges of managing customers' expectations and confidence level in the safety of the retail experience. In addition to the government-released guidelines for various industries, there is a need for clear and consistent mandated requirements for public and shared spaces (whether they be facemasks, behaviour or process).

The direction from the government and public health authorities needs to be strong and consistent for public and shared spaces such as transit, shopping malls, and stores. Mandated requirements would take the burden off the business and level the playing field because the expectations are consistent throughout and for all. The Province should provide a one-page overview of the mandated requirements, which could be posted in retail spaces and used to educate staff and patrons.

Since our meetings concluded, the City of Toronto and several regional governments have made face masks in public spaces mandatory.

Customers should know what is required of them and what they can expect so they feel comfortable shopping. The retail industry needs to maintain and revive the entertainment value of shopping to keep customers and maintain foot-traffic.

2 Clear and consistent industry specific guidelines from the retail association or BIA

Industry specific guidelines are required to address various situations. They may come from the Retail Council of Canada, the industry, business improvement areas (BIAs) or a collaborative effort among these entities. Consistency is needed among retailers so that customers are provided with clear expectations and not left guessing about different safety protocols in different stores or spaces.

Customers should know what is required of them and what they can expect so they feel comfortable shopping. The retail industry needs to maintain and revive the entertainment value of shopping to keep customers and maintain foot-traffic. These guidelines can address things such as how to screen customers, the types of questions to ask, crowd management, and customer service during this time (monitoring customers while avoiding alienating them and balancing good customer service).

The guidelines may also consider policies related to limiting customers touching product, the customer service concierge experience and return policies.

3 Terms of reference for retail outlining clear mitigation measures for all spaces

Retailers are making considerations and decisions about whether and how to reconfigure space, including the interior and exterior layout of retail spaces, to allow for social distancing. This may result in changes to store layout starting outside the store, to entry, flow-through and layout of products, cash registers, change rooms, and so on.

Table participants identified some specific examples of how this might influence the shopping experience. For example, many stores have switched to one-way aisles. The average amount of purchases has also increased as trips have become more infrequent. This may affect how retailers stock their products, as customers are not as likely to return to the store for any items that are missed.

As well, the retail experience now begins outside of the store with sidewalk lineups and curbside pickup. With colder weather approaching, the need to move sidewalk lineups inside will need to be considered. Indoor space may need to be reconfigured to accommodate shoppers waiting to shop, making front-end retail space even more important for product placement as shoppers will be spending more time viewing these products. Stocked items may need to be moved off the floor and accommodated in the back of stores. Finally, curbside pickup may need to be rebranded to sidewalk pickup to ensure that it is more inclusive of consumers without cars.

4 Implementation of technology/apps to improve customer experience and manage time

Shopping is experiential, and shoppers need to feel safe and comfortable. Additional technology can improve the customer shopping experience and allow for time management. Contact-tracing phone applications have become increasingly common during this time. Phone applications that advise customers about store lineups, occupied washrooms, food court capacity, and traffic flow can bring a level of predictability to the shopping experience. Applications such as these can help maintain the entertainment value of shopping while managing customer expectations.

There is opportunity to share and utilize existing technology and apps such as these for digital queuing. Customers can make an appointment using their phone and then arrive at the store as they reach the front of the line. Similarly, washrooms can have occupancy indicators that ensure that people do not crowd washroom areas. Mall owners are also encouraging customers to text any questions and concerns to guest services and have guest services respond in real time. This is a safer alternative to approaching staff in person and may provide additional comfort for consumers. Some stores are implementing timed entries where customers book a specific time through the store website to prevent overcrowding.

Time management may be particularly important for vulnerable populations. Some grocery stores have established “senior hours” to ensure that seniors are protected and that this customer base is well served.

5 Partnership with municipalities on opportunity and flexibility in utilizing outdoor space for dining, retailing, pop-ups, etc.

Businesses are generally looking for support and flexibility from their municipal governments during this time. Municipalities have a role to partner with businesses and provide flexibility around the use of outdoor areas. As eating in restaurants or food courts remains restricted, outdoor spaces need to be considered and rearranged in order to provide seating areas and patios for restaurants and fast-food operators. For future development, mall owners may consider building multiple areas within the mall that will allow the food court to be spread out as opposed to concentrated in a single area.



PARKING LOT IDEAS

The table identified several other ideas that merit further exploration, including:

- **Community hub space:** As transit use has seen a rapid decline during this crisis, utilizing unused community space and creating the 15-minute neighbourhood experience has become even more important. Part of this entails using space flexibly so that it can pivot to serve community needs. Unoccupied schools and community centres are prime real estate that can be utilized for a host of community events such as farmers markets and pop-ups.
- **Pop-up space:** Strip malls and shopping malls also have plenty of areas that can be used creatively. These spaces may present opportunities for community organizations and smaller retailers to create pop-up spaces. Even parking lots can be utilized for various community-building activities. Such pop-ups can be sponsored by community businesses.
- **Digital transition:** Various business improvement areas have assisted smaller retailers in transitioning to an online platform. Encouraging entities with digital knowledge to partner and collaborate with smaller retailers will ensure that these retailers are making use of untapped potential within the delivery market.



Social Purpose Real Estate

TABLE LEAD
Remo Agostino, Daniels Corporation

Resilient communities require a social infrastructure that addresses the needs of residents, especially the most vulnerable. Over the past months we have seen not-for-profits (NFPs), agencies, community organizations and others pivot and respond to community needs. This includes everything from food banks working tirelessly to reach people in need to artists engaging with audiences, even if it is done virtually.

Many of the recommendations around social purpose real estate acknowledge that recovery cannot happen in isolation and requires continued collaboration between multiple sectors. While continued discussions with various stakeholders are necessary, we also need action now. We must also ensure that in all our decision-making, we are reaching those communities that are lacking the social services and infrastructure they need to become more resilient.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Create a physical space database that can match organizations to space

Organizations and groups may need to spread beyond the confines of current physical space in order to continue to deliver the services they provide and to also improve access to neighbourhoods in need. Additional space may be needed to implement appropriate physical distancing to deliver social services. Underutilized space, both public and private, can help meet this need.

This database can be far reaching and include spaces such as underutilized schools, community centres, retail store fronts, underutilized employment lands and buildings, and more. This could allow social service agencies to access space in vulnerable and/or underserved communities. This can also have the benefit of providing activity in areas that may have experienced the loss of businesses. The database can also be organized to identify spaces that could meet short-term, medium-term and long-term needs. Some spaces may be able to function as pop-up shops for multiple organizations that may not be able to afford an

ongoing presence, but who in a shared space could find an innovative way of delivering social services.

Some of the challenges that require further investigation includes:

- Who prepares and implements this database system? Should this be the local municipality or a community group?
- How can this database protect privacy while being accessible to a wide range of groups and organizations?
- How can we promote flexibility and ensure that regulations and by-laws remain flexible to allow these diverse services to be delivered in these different spaces? Municipalities should investigate how reduce red tape associated with the short- or long-term use of these spaces; and
- Can municipalities provide incentives to private landowners to help with the creation of social purpose real estate, such as waiving of fees or a reduction in property taxes?

While there will not be one solution for all sites and buildings, there needs to be political will to make the decision around the importance of social value and social return on investment, rather than just the monetary value of a sale or disposition.

2 Toolkit for organizations to facilitate access to space & service delivery

Groups that deliver social services and programs vary in their knowledge of real estate and space planning. Notwithstanding this, we do know that there are a number of social agencies and groups that have developed innovative partnerships and programs to create the space they need to deliver services. The development of a real estate and space toolkit that is accessible to all organizations can facilitate knowledge development while allowing organizations and groups to focus their resources on service delivery.

The development of this toolkit and sharing of institutional knowledge can further engage the private sector as a partner in the delivery of social purpose real estate. These partnerships can be immediate and involve underutilized buildings and spaces, or more long term where organizations can be a partner in a larger development.

This toolkit can be far reaching and include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Standard lease forms;
- Examples of legal agreements for partnership/service delivery models with the private sector;
- Sample architectural layouts for different types of service delivery; and,
- Sample space planning and implementation strategies for physical distancing, ventilation improvements or other COVID-19 design standards.

Similar to Recommendation #1, challenges that require further investigation includes:

- Who prepares and administers the toolkit?
- How is access to the toolkit delivered to a wide range of groups and organizations?

3 Priority given to social purpose real estate on publicly owned land

While the concept of repurposing existing publicly owned land and buildings for social purpose real estate is not new, it needs to become the first option when reviewing publicly owned assets. This can include the reuse or development of publicly owned lands and buildings for dedicated social purpose real estate or by incorporating social purpose as part of their redevelopment. These can be short-term goals such as using publicly owned land to develop modular housing for those most in need, to using publicly owned lands to help deliver long-term solutions to community needs such as community hubs and affordable housing.

Making social purpose real estate on publicly owned land a priority takes public sector support. While there will not be one solution for all sites and buildings, there needs to be political will to make the decision around the importance of social value and social return on investment, rather than just the monetary value of a sale or disposition.

Challenges that require further investigation includes:

- What social purpose priorities are of greatest importance and need to be included as part of the development or redevelopment of publicly owned lands? (For example, affordable housing, community hubs, food security, or unemployment and training services); and
- Where does the funding come from in order to develop or redevelop publicly owned lands? Are private partners required and if so, what is the structure of the transaction to ensure that social purpose real estate is a meaningful part of the development?



4 Use planning toolkit to embed social purpose real estate in communities

Governments should demonstrate their commitment to social purpose projects by using tools such as Minister's Zoning Orders (MZOs) or zoning requirements for Major Transit Station Areas (MTSAs) to support their development. This recommendation is also a very intentional political action: it sends a clear message from political leaders that social purpose real estate is an important part of creating complete and resilient communities.

Taking such actions requires thoughtful community engagement and technical studies. Notwithstanding this, there are many places where a framework and supporting work to implement these projects are already in place. Using a bold tool such as an MZO can prevent lengthy appeals, accelerating the development and ultimate delivery of social purpose real estate. Because of its exceptional power, MZOs are not being recommended to be a normal occurrence, rather something that can spearhead the delivery of social purpose real estate in a key area or community.

It is critical that these tools are only used when the plan is comprehensive and can successfully deliver social purpose real estate. Failure to deliver social purpose real estate would eliminate trust from the community and would question the recognition of the importance of social purpose real estate.

5 Engage with social purpose groups to beautify and animate our spaces

This pandemic has showed the importance of public spaces near home. Relief for people over the past months has primarily come from walks in their communities. Having these safe spaces that people can walk to and where they can engage with others helps in creating a more resilient community.

An immediate action we can take is engage with arts and culture groups to enhance the real estate (both public and private) in our neighbourhoods. These groups, organizations and the creative class can beautify and animate our communities, creating a sense of place. Most importantly we need to reach out to our most vulnerable communities and take the opportunity to commission local artists in the redesign of these public spaces. Generally, these are simple initiatives that do not require a lot of investment and produce many returns.



Transportation

TABLE LEAD
Daniel Haufschild, ARUP



Members of the Transportation Table emphasized that transportation and global connectivity is essential to the social, civic and economic health of the region. The term essential was central to our discussions, as the table explored whether transportation, and transit in particular, should be considered an essential service.

COVID has revealed problems that, in many cases, pre-date the pandemic. COVID also brings unique challenges. Solutions to many of them are already known to us, but we have not had the will, imagination or ambition to implement them in the past.

The table agreed on the following recommendations as they see an opportunity for a step-change that builds on the planning we have done.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Strengthen planning and decision-making for social equity and climate justice including action-oriented and measurable goals

Sustainability and social equity have often been seen as two additional areas to be considered during the planning process, and not always perceived as having the same importance as service performance, cost, or other metrics. COVID was seen by the table as a dress rehearsal for addressing climate change, and the pressures we now face will continue after COVID. There is an opportunity to incorporate meaningful actions and measurable goals into our planning frameworks that move beyond the status quo and truly embed social equity issues and climate action into our processes in a more consistent way across the region.

The transportation table would like to see government at all levels working together to review planning and approval frameworks with the goal of strengthening the tools and monitoring practices to ensure issues of social equity and climate justice are given the prominence they warrant.

While a seamless user experience has long been a goal, health concerns underline the need for a consistent approach across the full journey.

2 Embrace a new investment strategy to fund and manage the system, with federal engagement

COVID has placed an enormous strain on our public transit system and it is likely to persist for some time. Allowing transit to fail would be a catastrophe for Toronto, both economically and environmentally. The table would like to see all levels of government continue to work together to ensure the viability of public transit going forward, with strong and sustained federal participation.

Climate change remains our greatest long-term challenge and addressing it should remain a top priority when making long-term funding and planning decisions. Stimulus funding should support transit recovery while also advancing electrification and decarbonization of the wider transportation system.

We have made incremental progress in advancing new tools for how we fund and manage our transportation system, and the stress of COVID on our transportation finances represents an opportunity to consider a variety of approaches, including road pricing.

3 Transform fare and service integration across transit networks and private operators for a seamless experience

As a region, we have made incremental progress toward fare and service integration across transit operators. Our current context is an opportunity to accelerate this integration and strengthen the public private collaboration and the seamlessness of the user experience.

A barrier to broader fare integration has been the

funding required, which may be a less formidable restraint when considering the wider financial support and restructuring needed to maintain and expand the system. Private operators can also play an important role in filling gaps as transit refocuses on critical elements of the network.

While a seamless user experience has long been a goal, health concerns underline the need for a consistent approach across the full journey. Trust and confidence in the system cannot fail at jurisdictional borders or across public-private divides, especially as it relates to public safety and confidence.

4 Pursue solution-oriented public-public and public-private collaboration on freight and delivery

Collaboration around freight and delivery issues have progressed in the region, notably with Metrolinx and Peel Region leading in this area. COVID again presents an opportunity to consider initiatives and measures that may have been difficult to enact pre-COVID and to leverage the public and private work that is already occurring.

The sudden rise in work-from-home and the closure of most commercial businesses has led to spike in home deliveries for essential and non-essential goods. Pre-pandemic there were already pressures being felt on curbside operations, particularly within the downtown core, but with such high demand for home deliveries across low-density areas of the region, there are new pressures and challenges to respond to.

Toronto has been nimble in enacting temporary measures allowing off-peak delivery and there is an opportunity to consider planned initiatives and measures that could be permanent.

5 Be courageous and evidence-based in accelerating delivery of highest and best use of right of way space that is sensitive to context (civic, commercial, mobility, curb, HOV)

Creative ideas on the use of our public rights of way abound. To ensure we have the courage and ambition to implement the best solutions, we must strengthen evidence-based planning and make deliberate choices that respect context.

The competing uses of our rights of way should not be “balanced” but should reflect the priority in any given context. For example, in more urban retail streets we have already seen a shift to use the right of way for restaurant patios to support business and the movement of people. The next major opportunity the transportation table saw was to prioritize bus access to High-Occupancy Vehicles lanes on suburban streets. Bus ridership saw a lower drop in ridership compared to rail as they often serve priority neighbourhoods with captive riders working essential frontline jobs. HOVs would greatly improve bus service performance while addressing this inequity.

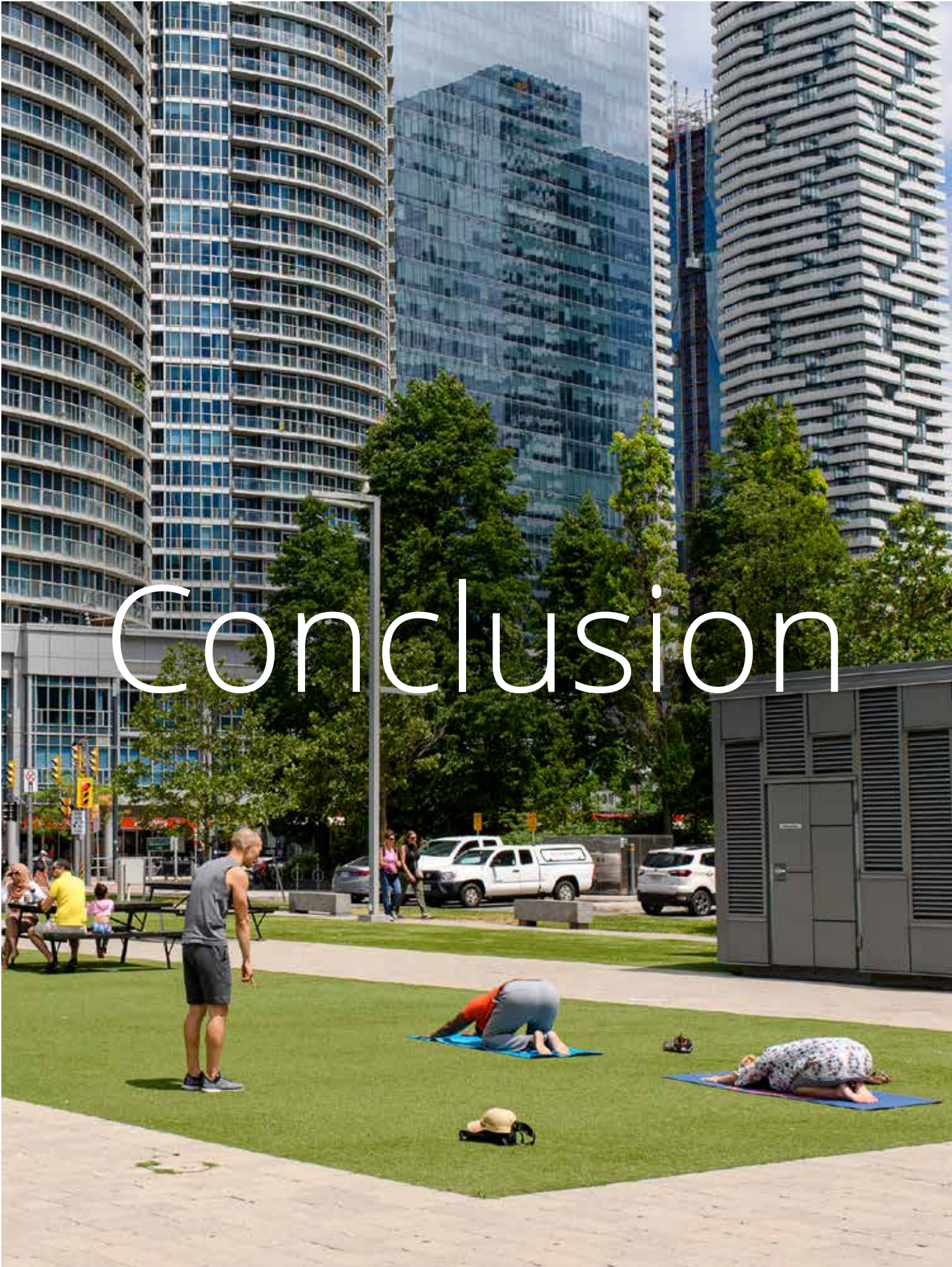
The pandemic has demonstrated that local government can move quickly and nimbly when the situation allows for it. From special powers to mandate new health and safety protocols, to fast-tracking cycling lanes and other initiatives that provide space for physical distancing and exercise, the agility of governments’ response should not diminish as COVID-19 abates.



Photo: Connor Dudgeon

6 Support the shift to complete communities that promote active transportation including legislation to enable for more flexibility in land uses

Suburban areas have seen a sudden and unplanned shift to work-from-home for a large percentage of residents. This new live-work community is poorly supported by the typical facilities and businesses that traditionally have supported the downtown office culture. Existing and new legislation can be leveraged to strengthen the development of complete communities in these areas.



Conclusion

Photo: Connor Dudgeon

As the dozens of recommendations in this report demonstrate, COVID-19 presents a sizable and multi-faceted challenge to the way we work, learn, play, gather and travel. Throughout this process, it became apparent how much the spaces we occupy influence the way we relate to each other. With more than 80% of Canadians living in cities, we must act quickly to retrofit existing spaces and reimagine how they function and whom they will serve in the future.

It is up to us collectively to determine what this future looks like – and that requires not more words, but action. ULI Toronto and the Board are both committed to using the findings from this process to fuel our own work on behalf of our members and the broader region. While many of these ideas will influence our ongoing activities, we wish to highlight one commitment each, as well as offer one idea as a challenge to another community organization to pick up.

The Board is actively developing the Technology Marketplace idea that emerged from the Commercial table. Technology can provide rapidly implementable solutions to many of the challenges posed by COVID, such as managing wait times and queues for elevators, monitoring air quality, and automating doors. The Board is well-placed to connect those with technological solutions to the building owners and employers in need of them.

ULI Toronto intends to set up several Initiatives to explore some of these issues in greater depth and develop actionable recommendations that can be implemented in the region. The prime areas for investigation would be:

- 1. Education:** transforming underutilized school spaces into neighbourhood hubs.
- 2. Residential:** distributing affordable and attainable housing across the region to ensure a diverse population can live and prosper equitably in all communities.
- 3. Social Purpose:** leveraging affordable real estate for not for profit and charitable organizations, and other social enterprises.
- 4. Transportation:** supporting the shift to complete communities that promote active transportation, including legislation to enable for more flexibility in land uses.

An idea that was recommended by the Public Realm, Residential and Social Purpose tables was the creation of a physical space database and match-making tool to address the disconnects between those who have (or will have) surplus and vacant space, and those who want to use those spaces to expand access, start businesses or offer services. The tool could include an inventory of underutilized spaces, including vacant storefronts, residential spaces slated for redevelopment, or parking lots. A set of resources to help guide organizations through the real estate leasing process would assist smaller entities to participate in this program. Given the significant value that this idea represents, we are calling for an organization with the right capacity to carry it forward.

Now let's get to work – together.

Membership of Retrofitting Our Urban Region Symposium

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Craig Ruttan, Toronto Region Board of Trade and
Richard Joy, Urban Land Institute Toronto

STEERING COMMITTEE

Craig Ruttan (Toronto Region Board of Trade), **Richard Joy** and **Alexandra Rybak** (Urban Land Institute Toronto)

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ARUP

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Greater Toronto Airports
Authority

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Dillon

LESLIE WOO
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and Stuart Elgie, Stantec

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BDO

GREGORY BOURIS
Stantec

ROBYN BROWN
IBI Group

BRENDA BUSH-MOLINE
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JAY DESHMUKH
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View

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Ryerson University

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Tridel

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Urban Strategies

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The Museum (Kitchener)

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DREAM, Board Chair of MOCA

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MOLLY ANTHONY
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PINO DI MASCIO
Sidewalk Labs

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Partisans

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CUI

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Canadian Urban Institute

MONIKA JAROSZONEK
Ratio City

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Lemay

ALISON LUMBY
WSP

TUNDE PACZAI
WSP

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8 80 Cities

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Davies Howe

ANDREW TOTH
Urban Strategies

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BOMA

BARRY CHARNISH
Entuitive

ROCCO DELVECCHIO
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TAF

ASHLEY LAWRENCE
Brookfield

LACHLAN MACQUIRRE
Oxford Properties

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Gensler

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Dentons

SUPREET BARHAYA
WZMH

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HELEN FOTINOS
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BROOKS BARNETT
REALpac

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Cadillac Fairview

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Tate Research

CARY ULSTER
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WZMH

MICHELLE ACKERMAN
Kilmer

CAITLIN ALLEN
Bousfields

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Cricket Energy

CHRISTINE CHEA
Graywood Group

BADER ELKHATIB
CentreCourt

ANDREW JOYNER
Tricon

LES KLEIN
Quadrangle

SUE MACKAY
Empire Communities

ANNE MORASH
GWL Realty

MARK NOSKIEWICZ
Goodmans

MICHAEL OLIN
Mattamy

KRISTY SHORTALL
NorthCrest Development

VINCENT TONG
Toronto Housing

CAITLIN WILLCOCKS
Diamond Corp.

AGNIESZKA WLOCH
Minto

MIKE YORKE
The Carpenters Union

JASMINE YOUNG
N Barry Lyon

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CPA Ontario

NATION CHEONG
United Way Greater Toronto

ALEX DOW
United Way Greater Toronto

SHONA FULCHER
CSI

LORIANN GIRVAN
Artscape

DANIEL GRANDILLI
Daniels Corp

MARGARET HANCOCK
Family Service Toronto

KEGAN HARRIS
The Neighbourhood Group

MATTHEW JOHNSON
Colliers

SEAN MEAGHER
Convvene Toronto

HEELA OMARKHAIL
Daniels Corp

OLIVER PAUK
Akin

CAROLINE RAUHALA
Vancity

LAURA SELLORS
ENTRO

DEVIKA SHAH
Social Planning Toronto

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SVN

ENE UNDERWOOD
Habitat for Humanity

MICHAEL VICKERS
AKIN

SHONDA WANG
SVN

ASSAF WEISZ
Artscape

VICTOR WILLIS
PARC

Reimagining
Recovery

Retrofitting Our Urban Region



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